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## Standing Committee on National Defence

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EVIDENCE

**Monday, December 4, 2006**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Rick Casson**

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• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)):** We'll call the meeting to order.

This is meeting 26. Today we have our regularly scheduled briefing from the Department of National Defence. General Howard is with us again.

Sir, welcome. We look forward to your comments on what's been happening in Afghanistan since the last time we met with you.

The floor is yours.

**BGen A. J. Howard (Director General, Operations, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence):** Mr. Chairman, honourable members of Parliament, good afternoon.

I am here this afternoon to provide you with a short update on Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan over the period November 21 to December 4, 2006. As always, my presentation will focus on CF activities. I'm certainly prepared to provide clarification on my presentation at its completion.

Over the past several weeks, and certainly over the last two weeks, abnormally high rains and cold weather have had some impact on Taliban operations. In Kandahar's Zhari district, the Taliban have continued to harass Canadian troops with indirect fire from mortars and rockets. They've launched several suicide bomber attacks, as you've no doubt seen in the press. In this area, the Taliban's principal aim seems to be to prevent any meaningful reconstruction.

South of this, in the Panjwai district, the Taliban is actively defending areas that it controls against ISAF patrols, and it has stepped up its efforts to isolate ISAF troops by placing numerous IEDs, or improvised explosive devices, along commonly used routes. This IED campaign is also hitting local workers who are helping in reconstruction. Several of the gravel trucks we're using on Route Summit have been struck by IEDs as well.

[Translation]

Toward the end of November, the Taliban resumed their suicide bombing campaign. Their main targets continue to be members of the ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force, and Afghan security forces. However, the Taliban are becoming more tolerant of civilian casualties resulting from these bombings. Furthermore, the Taliban are continuing their attacks on Afghan government officials. Last week, an improvised explosive device was detonated. The target of the attack was the police chief of Arghandab. Since

September, the Taliban have launched attacks on three political figures in Kandahar.

[English]

This next slide specifically shows the insurgent-related attacks against Joint Task Force Afghanistan over the past two weeks. As you know, last week was extremely difficult for Canadian Forces personnel operating in Afghanistan, with the deaths of two soldiers as a direct result of a vehicle-borne suicide using an IED. Early on November 27, that IED struck a Canadian Bison armoured vehicle just east of Kandahar city. The strike resulted in two Canadian soldiers being killed in action, with some damage to the vehicle. The Bison was en route to the Pashmul area of operations, where most of the battle group is currently located.

In a separate earlier incident on November 21, two Canadian soldiers were injured following a mine strike two kilometres south of Zhari district centre. One soldier unfortunately lost his foot, and the other suffered eye and head injuries. They are both being taken care of as we speak by the Canadian Forces health support services. The member who lost his foot has returned here to Canada, and the other soldier returned to duty after a short stay in the Landstuhl medical centre in Germany.

Despite this difficult news, the soldiers of Joint Task Force Afghanistan continued to press ahead with their efforts to help the people of Afghanistan and to support and defend the elected government. We can all be proud of their dedicated work under very difficult conditions and their enthusiasm to do their best. It is their patient but determined approach that I think, and we all believe, is making a difference in Afghanistan.

Through my next slide I wanted to give you a sense of the recent flooding. This is a photo of the Helmand River valley, which is near the province of Kandahar. It offers an apt description of most of the southern regions and gives you a sense of the flooding that has occurred.

As I indicated in my last update to you, the dramatic change in the weather resulted in heavy and prolonged rains in many areas of Afghanistan, in particular in the Canadian area of operations. Kandahar province normally gets one inch of rain in November. This year it received a significantly higher amount, which led to flooding and damaged roads and infrastructure throughout the province. Temperatures averaged eight degrees lower than normal, hindering the drying out process.

As you will recall from my last briefing, this has caused us difficulties in the Route Summit construction. As you can see, it would be virtually impossible to be working on that road in these conditions. It has hampered our mobility and challenged us logistically in terms of resupply.

• (1540)

[Translation]

There was no improvement in the weather last week, and construction and repair work on Route Summit has only just resumed. While it is generally easier to get around now, some areas are still not easily accessible because of water levels.

As part of a project to contain water that may accumulate in future along Route Summit, the 23rd Field Engineer Squadron has dug irrigation ditches and installed culverts to facilitate mobility along the route. On a positive note, in so far as the rural economy is concerned, the rains are a boon to a country experiencing a seven-year-long drought. One rainy season will help to replenish reservoirs, thereby improving rural prosperity, particularly if groundwater levels rise and wells become operational once again.

[English]

There is a positive side to the rain that has come, and it will make a big difference in the reservoirs.

As I always try to depict going from big to small, this is the current ISAF situation. Commander ISAF's priority over the past two weeks has been Afghan-led, ISAF-supported operations focused on increasing security on main arteries, such as Highway 1 and Highway 4, for all the convoys that move up and down those roads; assistance to non-governmental organizations and international organizations; establishing and expanding the Afghanistan development zones; and improving border security.

Regional Command North has continued to focus on relief operations in the flooded areas of Badghis province, which I have highlighted in green. A broad array of humanitarian supplies, including food, water, blankets, and medical supplies, has been deployed to the PRT in that particular area. The Norwegian PRT in that area was extremely hard hit by some of the flooding.

In Regional Command Central, surrounding Kabul, the focus is on interdiction of the movement of insurgents into Kabul in the coming months. We want to maintain that as a very secure area.

In Regional Command East, the focus continues to be on reconstruction and development and successfully extending Government of Afghanistan influence at the district level.

In Regional Command West, the focus is on maintaining freedom of movement on the main arteries.

Finally, in Regional Command South, the military focus has been on maintaining security of main highways and minimizing Taliban movement and their ability to hide stores and arms in sanctuary areas.

Within Regional Command South, efforts continue to improve the security and level of confidence in Kandahar city. Kandahar city remains a bustling Afghan metropolis. There are many folks there, some 400,000 people. The streets are bustling with commerce, and

constant traffic jams point to the expanding nature of the city. For those of you who travel, you'll see that. It's not all doom and gloom there. It is a rather interesting town that has a lot going on.

In Task Force Uruzgan, with the Dutch-Australian team, framework operations, base construction, and security operations continue. The Taliban activity remained rather low in this province due to the unseasonably wet weather.

In Task Force Helmand, where the British are, operations continue throughout the province to prevent insurgent infiltration. There has been no significant change in the reporting period since the last time I was here.

In Task Force Zabul, the U.S.- and Romanian-led area, framework patrols and convoy escorts continue. As I mentioned to you last time, Qalat has formally been declared an Afghan development zone.

There has been no significant change to the 1 RCR Battle Group force disposition over the last two weeks. The 1 RCR Battle Group's efforts continue to be the provision of security, with their Afghan national security partners, throughout the Zhari-Panjwai area. In particular, operations in the area of Route Summit continue to dominate the immediate efforts of the entire battle group. The Canadian tank squadron has been used to beef up security in this area so that Route Summit construction can accelerate, hopefully enable more Afghans to return home, and allow commerce to begin.

Three new DND-funded projects have been initiated, and I will highlight those shortly. Almost one-half of the infantry company dispatched from Valcartier has arrived and will be a very welcome addition to the effort of enhancing security to allow more reconstruction.

The civil-military cooperation element of the PRT is coordinating and has coordinated a number of small cash-for-work projects in the vicinity of our forward operating bases, and I'll describe those in more detail as we progress.

• (1545)

In response to some initial concerns over the quality of the Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police recruits, the PRT has been cooperating with the provincial chief of police to conduct recruitment through local shuras. As part of this process at district shuras, a meeting of the elders, the assembled elders are asked to put forward good local candidates for the Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police, the argument being that there will be no security unless the community participates in finding a solution. This is the opportunity to ensure that the people who are charged with policing their villages are people they can trust: don't nominate somebody you don't want to have as an auxiliary policeman in your local town. That, I think, will pay us dividends to ensure that we're screening to the best of our ability the folks who are coming into the auxiliary police.

The observer-mentor liaison teams continue their work with the Afghan National Army, embedded with the 300 or 400 Afghan soldiers we work with on a day-to-day basis in Kandahar province, which is a very good trend. They have established a good rapport with many of the local population because they are embedded with the ANA and are out in the communities. This is good confidence-building for the local population when they see not only the Afghan National Army there, but our soldiers working with them and supporting them.

You can see on the next slide—and I have submitted this to the committee—the projects that DND has been working on, 39 of them. Additional new DND-funded projects are noted on this slide and are examples of the PRT helping and supporting the governor and local Afghans.

At the tactical level, quick impact projects were launched into Zhari and Panjwai districts, including winterizing Afghan National Police checkpoints, clearing waterways, refurbishing the wiring in local mosques, repairing plumbing, bathrooms, and septic systems, and winterizing the Zhari district centre. This gives you a sense of the smaller projects we do to make a quick impact, and they are part of the cash-for-work programs to help in the local communities, right here and now. They don't take a long time to plan. If we need this fixed, the workforce shows up and some quick efforts can be made in that regard.

The longer-term, more expansive projects being worked on by CIDA, Foreign Affairs, and the international community are also encouraging. The committee might benefit from having those departments explain them, in order to better appreciate the full Canadian effort. Clearly, I talk just about the DND piece here, but there are many bigger issues under way. Certainly, again, when the committee visits Afghanistan, you'll see a sampling and get a good sense for how many projects are under way.

The next slide, which I keep bringing back, just gives you a sense of what's been accomplished over the last two weeks. There's NFTR—nothing further to report, in good old military jargon—but I did want to just spend a couple of minutes describing to you a village medical outreach so that you get a sense of that activity, which is great stuff.

The Kandahar-based provincial reconstruction team conducted an Afghan village medical outreach patrol on Sunday, November 19, at Forward Operating Base Martello, which is in the Sha Wali Kot district of Kandahar province, just to the north of Kandahar city.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Three Afghan doctors and one Afghan dentist treated 137 patients. The provincial reconstruction team, or PRT, supplied medical equipment and escorted doctors during a two-and-a-half day patrol in the region. In addition to providing medical care, the PRT also distributed firewood, generators and gas-powered water pumps, as well as dolls to the children. Plans are to dispatch additional medical patrols to villages in the Sha Wali Kot district in the near future.

[*English*]

On the next slide, the strategic advisory team, our 14-person CF team, assisted the Government of Afghanistan in the development of

a cohesive humanitarian assistance plan in the wake of the recent flooding. We've assisted the federal authorities to try to help out at the provincial level. This included facilitating government officials' movements to visit flood-damaged areas across the country for damage assessments.

A second example of what the strategic assessment team achieved during this period was supporting meetings that were held with eight provincial councillors to discuss disparity and support with respect to national, provincial, and local initiatives.

The SAT provided support to Minister Zia, the Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, in preparation for his visit to Canada this past week that was sponsored by CIDA. During a speech at the national press centre in Ottawa on Friday, the minister stated—let me quote a short part of his speech:

Today in Kandahar in terms of development...we have an outreach to 495 villages.... And the same number is our achievement in the province of Helman. And of course security has slowed down our activities in the south but it's not totally suspended.

The significance of Canadian development aid has been to effect and consolidate a stability in the country.

He mentioned a number of things, but I thought that was worth flagging for your attention.

Finally, a fourth example of what the SAT has been up to is helping with the preparation of provincial development plans. Really, we're looking to coordinate efforts between provinces, ISAF, and the UN mission in Afghanistan. If this is accepted by all parties, this document will form the basis for an Afghan national development strategy working group. The efforts will lead to a development forum scheduled for February 2007. We don't try to do these ourselves obviously; the team is trying to support the government officials as they work through it. But it gives you a sense of what that team is accomplishing.

Based on a question that was posed last time I was here, I thought I'd dwell on food packages and their distribution. The Kandahar provincial reconstruction team is helping to coordinate and provide security in the distribution of food packages provided by both the world food program and to a lesser extent the U.S. Department of Defense. In all cases, the food distributed is culturally sensitive.

The world food program distribution has been in the form of family packages. The packages take into account cultural sensitivities in the region. They consist of a variety of rice, oils, peas, and beans. Each package weighs approximately 95 kilograms, so it takes a couple of them to lift that. These packages are designed to provide enough food to feed a family of six for a period of one month.

To a lesser extent, Canadian Forces personnel have also distributed humanitarian daily ration packages as provided by the U.S. Department of Defense. These packages come as pouched meals, and they are also culturally sensitive for the Afghan population. These daily rations contain no animal products or animal byproducts, except the minimal amounts of dairy products that are permitted. Alcohol and alcohol-based ingredients are also banned.

The meal bag contains graphics demonstrating how to open each bag and how the contents should be eaten. Each meal is designed to provide a full day's supply of food and consists of not less than 2,000 calories. Again, to reassure the committee that there is some sensitivity applied, it's a similar type of meal, consisting of vegetables, beans, rice, biscuits, pastries, and condiment packages. These aren't Canadian Forces packages; we're just helping to provide the security and delivery thereof.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my update.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll start our round of questions with the official opposition.

If we go five minutes for each party, I think that will about do up our time for the witness.

Mr. Dosanjh.

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.):** Thank you once again for being with us. That was a very good presentation.

I'm going to ask you a question that doesn't really relate to the presentation, but perhaps you can shed some light on it. If you can or if you can't, that's fine.

An article in Saturday's *Globe and Mail* compares our approach in Kandahar to the Dutch approach in Uruzgan, and it talks about the Dutch going in, expecting the same kind of violence in Uruzgan we are now experiencing in Kandahar, but it didn't happen. There was violence, but on a much smaller scale.

The article states the difference was that when we went in, we sent patrols to assert Canadian presence far and wide and immediately came up against some resistance and had gun battles. But when the Dutch went in, they sent messages saying they were coming in without fighting and they wanted to talk. So the rumours spread that those guys were different from the U.S., and they wanted to talk and not fight. And in fact they engaged the Taliban. They now have, as security guards in their operations, some of the people who fought on the side of the Taliban.

I don't say this critically. Our own journalist is doing the comparative analysis. I'm wondering if you could shed some light on what you know about Uruzgan, if anything, and what you think of the observations made in that article.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Sir, I understand that's somewhat outside the mandate you've been given to bring a briefing to us on what's happened there in the last two weeks.

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh:** I already prefaced my remarks by saying so.

**The Chair:** I know you did.

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh:** He doesn't have to answer it. I just thought I'd—

**The Chair:** But I'll leave it to you to respond if you wish.

• (1600)

**BGen A. J. Howard:** I'm certainly happy to address this issue, because I think it's fundamental to the team effort that's ongoing within Regional Command South, which is commanded by a Dutch general.

We are all working to the same framework. We all have the same relative campaign plan, a three-pillared plan based on security, development, and governance, as you're well aware.

We all share the same risks in Regional Command South and we have the same aspirations and the same approach.

You can look at the composition. Each country has sent a fighting battle group and a provincial reconstruction team. That construct is the same in all the provinces.

The challenge we have in Kandahar is that we're operating in the historic heartland of the Taliban, and the region's most important town in the area is Kandahar city, where we operate.

So we have little control over where the Taliban might choose to attack ISAF and local Afghans. The Taliban have the ability to shift their operations. We're facing a determined foe there who looks to disrupt our efforts.

Certainly our activities for Operation Medusa were at the request of the Afghan government, and the British and the Dutch are also poised to do the same thing, if they're requested. And if the Taliban choose to engage in combat in a similar way that we would where we are, I think the British and Dutch would face the same challenge.

But let me reassure you that we're all trying to maximize the same thing, which is development in that country. We all want to see an improvement in the development and the governance. We are in a different area, a different tribal structure, and, as I've mentioned, in the heartland of the Taliban. And the Taliban have chosen to engage us and engage local Afghans in that particular area.

Sir, that would be my response to your question.

**The Chair:** You have a minute.

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh:** One minute?

I have a very brief question. The government came away from the NATO Riga meeting with some concessions. Do you know what impact, if any, those concessions have had, or might have, on the ground?

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Certainly the minister announced in the House today the addition of the Poles and the two American battle groups that will assist the Commander ISAF with his reserve.

Certainly I think the issue in Regional Command South is assistance from NATO partners, but it's also capacity-building. And the work the Canadian Forces are doing, not only in the Kabul training centre, where we're trying to expand the size of the Afghan National Army and helping with that, but the work we do in capacity-building down in Regional Command South is also a plank we need to follow.

I'll shut up because the buzzer went.

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

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

You spoke very briefly about tanks in your presentation. You used the expression "to beef up security". I was under the impression that tanks were used to counter pitched battles between the Taliban and security forces. To my knowledge, we're no longer witnessing attacks involving hundreds of Taliban. What we're seeing instead are attacks in which improvised explosive devices or some other weapon are used.

I have to wonder about how useful tanks are in this instance. I have some reservations about this since for some time now, the call has been going out for this mission to focus more on reconstruction and humanitarian aid. Tanks are not used to distribute food or medical supplies. They are used to kill people.

What's happening with the tanks? Are all of them now in Kandahar? What exactly are they being used for?

[*English*]

**BGen A. J. Howard:** That's a great question.

As was seen on television over the last weekend, they've actually been deployed. They are currently deployed with the battle group up in the Zhari-Panjwai area assisting with Route Summit. I have to tell you that the soldiers in the battle group are attacked each and every day by the Taliban. They are attacking them with indirect fire, mortar rounds, small arms fire, and the like. It's a very dangerous environment up there.

I'll give you one example, but I could give you many. The defence with the tanks along Route Summit will allow for a beefing up of the security that will actually enable the reconstruction to occur. The Taliban attack the gravel trucks that are trying to make their way up to dump the gravel down to build the road. These tanks aren't out chasing folks, but they have been brought in. A tank provides much better protection for our soldiers. Instead of Canadian soldiers having to stand out by themselves, dismounted on the ground, there are tanks that can actually protect them.

When the Taliban attack us and those trying to construct the route, we now have a very precise way to engage the Taliban and to lessen the possibility of harm to civilians. If you have a weapon that can fire very precisely, you're not likely to cause collateral damage. You can keep it to a minimum, as opposed to what would perhaps happen with an aircraft bomb, for example.

The tanks, in a way, are there to help us push forward with the development. You need the security to do the development. With a little better security, troops are better protected, and Route Summit is an example. What I would hope to see—and I know it's the commanders' hope on the ground—is that reconstruction of Route Summit will progress even more quickly now that the tanks have been deployed.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Regarding the Route Summit, is there a plan or timetable in place? Given their rate of progress, do military engineers have an idea of when the work will be completed?

[*English*]

**BGen A. J. Howard:** The reconstruction of the route is actually being handled by international donors. The Germans, Canadians, and Americans are involved in funding the route. For the route itself, I understand we are using local companies, probably aided a little by our own engineers, in the design, for example. The bulk of the funding comes from other nations, and local companies have been contracted to help provide the construction of the route, and the paving, for example, that will go over the top.

Thousands of kilometres of asphalt road have been laid in Afghanistan. Highway 1 and Highway 4 are excellent examples of that. The Canadians are not in charge of the actual construction. We're trying to ensure the security of those local Afghans who come up in their trucks with gravel and the like.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Black.

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

Again, welcome to the defence committee.

You mentioned some process that's going through the shuras to recruit Afghan auxiliary police. I know I asked some questions about this when you were here last. There was a report by the Pentagon and the U.S. State Department this last week that found they don't know where about 50% of the police who have been trained there are right now or whom they're with, and they don't know where a lot of the trucks are that I think the Americans bought for the Afghan police, where they've gone, or which side they might be with at this point. I've had some real concerns about the idea of the Afghan auxiliary police only having ten days of training. I think the report from the State Department and the Pentagon exacerbates the concerns I articulated before.

I'm wondering whether our department has looked at that report. Have they incorporated any of the recommendations from the Pentagon? It might be too soon to have done that, but will they? What are your opinions around this whole issue of equipment?

I note on the lists you gave us about the PRTs that more than 12 of them I think are dealing with the Afghan police. I think the concerns I've articulated are legitimate, and they are now backed up by this report from the Pentagon and the State Department in the U.S.

•(1610)

**BGen A. J. Howard:** As I indicated at previous sessions, this growing of a police force from scratch—absolute scratch—is definitely a challenge. We're measuring it in very small steps. Do we have a long way to go? We sure do.

I'm aware of the U.S. report. It will take everybody a couple of days to read it.

But certainly I take great comfort in the idea that we need to redouble our efforts in this area, to ensure we're putting enough focus on it. The issues of corruption as well as the issues of the Taliban attacking these poor policemen and trying to disrupt them are making things challenging.

You have to start somewhere. I think progress is slow; it's certainly measured. When we run into difficulties, we certainly need to analyze them. Overall, I would say the international community is certainly seized and focused on the auxiliary police. There are many different levels looking at it. Certainly within the PRT, our RCMP team and military police team are doing the best they can with the conditions we have. I think this will take a number of years to grow correctly.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** So when we supply cars—because we have supplied cars—to the Afghan police, do we keep a check, or do we pass them off and hope they're used how they're supposed to be? What's the process of ensuring that the aid and support we're giving really stays with the legitimate authority of the Afghan government? Obviously it hasn't with the equipment that was supplied by the U.S. to the police in Afghanistan.

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Right.

One of the challenges the PRT has, globally, is the capacity of the local officials to govern and to run a police department and the like. Things do occur at what we call the “Afghan pace”. If you want to have an Afghan face on issues, then you will go at their particular pace. We don't want to introduce too much at the start. Certainly, as I mentioned, we try to take fairly straightforward steps. We are trying to do this, though, through the local officials themselves. If we just race out the front gate and do it ourselves, that won't help Afghanistan in the longer term.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** I guess I'm worried that we know the Americans were supplying the Mujahideen years back, and then some of the Mujahideen went off to the Taliban. With all of these shifting alliances, I worry about us supplying equipment that may in fact be used against our own people. I'm sure that's a concern you share.

The other question I have is about rotations—

**BGen A. J. Howard:** I must address that issue. I don't think that's a big concern. The PRT is a professional force. They're watching closely what's going on. We'll go at the Afghans' pace. I'd have to check further to see the specifics of it.

I don't know whether you will be visiting Afghanistan, but you'll certainly be able to look at that issue when you go there. Ask them on the ground. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised by what they're doing. You'll see the frustration they have with the slowness by which this is occurring.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mrs. Gallant.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Norlock.

It's well known to the Taliban that our troops are very much committed to their mission, which is to secure and provide stability for Afghanistan, creating an environment conducive to reconstruction and development. Recognizing that the Taliban know they won't cut and run on their own, and that the only way to get rid of our soldiers and the sense of security so they can take over is to provide false information to the public, so the public applies pressure to the politicians, so we are pressured into calling back our troops.... That's their plan.

Recognizing that, there is also a report, which I'm going to read to you, and I'll have the question at the end. This is extracted from an interview with the Taliban from a Canadian reporter. He says it was confirmed that ammunition shipped by the government to Ghorak, a remote district northwest of Kandahar, regularly ends up in the hands of Taliban. Many low-level administrators are willing to trade bullets for guarantees of protection against the insurgents, he said, and this is the quote:

The government officials give us ammunition and money (...)

Without them, the fight is not possible for us. They help us carry our wounded men back to Pakistan. They give us their own vehicles and uniforms. Nobody can catch us.

My question, General, is, does the Canadian military provide ammunition to the Afghan army? I want to know whether or not it's possible that our soldiers are being shot with our own ammunition.

•(1615)

**BGen A. J. Howard:** On the issue of Canada providing any equipment or ammunition to the Afghan National Army, the answer to that is no. They use different weapons; they use different calibres of ammunition to ours.

Where we do interact with the Afghan National Army is in their training. We work in Kabul to professionalize them, and we're also working with them in the field every day when they're operating in Kandahar province; 300 or 400 operate there. It's leadership by example, if I can use that term. They watch closely the professionalism of the Canadian soldiers operating there and they try to emulate that.

Our experience so far over the last few months is, when we're with them, that they can be quite a credible force. We have no concerns in Kandahar province. I don't think there are any concerns throughout the region, but I'll just stick to the Canadian piece. We don't supply them with any arms at this particular junction.

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** I have two quick questions, and I'll lead off with the first.

My background is in a uniform, but it was in policing in Ontario. One of the issues that followed me throughout my 30-year career, quite frankly, was one of morale. I've often said that more than pay and benefits, morale is affected by the quality of the equipment one uses. I was particularly...I'll leave my feelings out of it.



People use the word “tanks”. A tank is a mobile platform to which you attach different sizes of artillery and/or arms. I'm more interested in the morale effect—the morale effect not only on the men and women who serve with our forces, but if we have any knowledge of how it's affecting our enemy, and also the morale effect on the local citizenry. Can you address that?

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Certainly. Let me address the Canadian soldier, whom I know best. The improvement in his quality of personal equipment and the technology he has in his hands to prosecute the mission in Afghanistan is some of the best that can be had. One of the best equipped forces, bar none, is the Canadian Forces, with the light armoured vehicle, with the recent introduction of the Nyala mine-proof vehicle, the helmet, flap jacket, weaponry that the Canadian soldier has. We do as much as we possibly can to equip them.

Again, I encourage you to ask troops when you go on the visit. I think you'll get a sense of their confidence in the equipment. We're always listening to their feedback. Commanders have asked for different types of equipment. They asked for an additional infantry company to help with the reconstruction effort of the PRT, they asked for the tank, and the Canadian Forces were able to provide that to them, which really serves them well, and will in the future.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

I have one question, if I can. We have just about a minute or two left. When we were in Edmonton and we had a lunch with some of the troops who'd been and come back, one of the issues they talked about was the slowness to respond to simple requests about infrastructure damage, that type of thing.

You mentioned today something about a quick response or quick-impact program. It was a simple thing. It was in a village where a culvert had been damaged. It was necessary for irrigation or drainage or whatever, and it was quite an issue to the locals. It took some time to replace that, and then it kind of soured the relationship.

Is this the type of thing that this quick-impact team is designed to do, to go and fix those types of issues?

• (1620)

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Yes. We have to respect the regulations that govern this type of activity, but this is exactly the type of thing we want to do. We've had a couple of examples where explosives have gone off in Kandahar city—IED and the like—taking out a shop, for example, and we've been quick to come in and help repair that particular shop.

I think we'll see more of this. We're trying to enable the soldiers operating within the field. They probably feel sometimes that they could use more, and perhaps over time we'll be able to see how that situation improves. But I think this is exactly the type of thing the quick-impact projects will be able to help with.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That concludes our time with you. We appreciate again your being here. We probably won't see you now for a while, because we have only a couple of weeks left.

We appreciate the information you've been able to bring us, and your answers to the questions—some of them a little loosely worded, but just the same you were able to answer them, and we appreciate that.

Thank you.

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Committee, just before we adjourn, I'd like to bring you up to speed. We did have some other business scheduled for today, and it couldn't take place because the witness wasn't available.

There are two things we're trying to accomplish, which were asked in the steering committee. One was a debriefing by CIDA, and we're still pushing hard for that to happen in the next two weeks. The other was to deal with the women's issues in Afghanistan. We're trying to make that happen.

We do have a briefing by DND on Wednesday, and I think it will be important for you all to be here. We can't say who it is, but it might have to do with future travel.

Then next week we have the prisoner transfer agreement on Monday, with people from Foreign Affairs.

I'd like to call a steering committee meeting for Tuesday, if we can, and if I'd known this was going to happen, we could have scheduled it for right now. But I'd like to do that on Tuesday, so we can report back to the main committee on Wednesday and deal with future business, which will probably be the last meeting before the break and before any potential travel.

I'd like to ask the members on that steering committee to come to the meeting prepared to talk about the timing of the report that will come out of this series of meetings we've had, and then what we're going to move onto after we're finished with this Afghanistan report.

So if you can be thinking about those things, we'll be preparing ourselves and the staff to work over the time we're not here so that we can move forward come February and March.

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Do you mean tomorrow, Mr. Chairman?

**The Chair:** I apologize. It's Tuesday of next week. So it'll be Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Tuesday will just be the steering committee for future business, so it won't involve us all, but we'll have everybody back on Wednesday to talk about what we want to do. Is that okay?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.





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