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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, March 22, 2007**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Rick Casson**

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• (0905)

[English]

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

I'm here once again to provide you with a short update on Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan. I will be referring to the slides that we have on the screen.

I might just pause to say that I do hope your recent visit to see the joint task force in Afghanistan was profitable, and I'm sure you left with a positive impression of the hard work being undertaken by the troops to contribute to a brighter future in Afghanistan. I know they appreciate your coming. I mean that genuinely. Canadians who come and look and then communicate back to the country mean a lot to the troops. They said that to the Governor General, who I had the good fortune to accompany two weeks ago into the country. It does mean that. So I want to pass that sentiment along, because we do ask the troops, and they roll their eyeballs a bit, but they do appreciate people who come and want to have a look at what they're doing, that part for sure.

**The Chair:** General, I'd just like to say that when I got back I put together a PowerPoint presentation. The last two weeks I was home, I showed it eight times, at legions and to cadets and at seniors homes and schools, and wherever anybody would look at it. The interest was very high.

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Yes.

[Translation]

My presentation will focus mainly on the security issues mentioned over the last several weeks. After my presentation, I will be glad to clarify these issues for you.

[English]

To confirm with the committee, my mandate this morning is to provide an unclassified operational update on Afghanistan, highlighting past joint task force activities over the last several weeks, since you've last been in theatre, and trying my best to clarify any questions you may have about my briefing.

While there are always three lines of operation for the UN-sanctioned, NATO-led ISAF mission and all three of those lines are intertwined, I'm here to focus primarily on the security pillar that tries to support and enhance the other two that are growing the Afghan capacity to overcome difficulties and rebuild the country.

For the benefit of new members on the committee, I want to talk about what constitutes Joint Task Force Afghanistan, the 2,500 CF personnel we have there.

Mr. Chairman, I won't dwell on this if you want me to continue to move along. If there's a reason to stay, I will.

I have a quick weather update. As previously mentioned in previous briefings, this winter has been comparatively harsh in Afghanistan when compared to an unseasonably mild winter the year before. The chart shows Afghanistan in December, with the very high rains in the fall period that I was talking to you about. It has not been common in Afghanistan over the last several years, as there's a very dry desert. It was a welcome relief, but it slowed down some of the activities we were trying to accomplish. After Christmas things certainly dried out a bit.

The Route Summit that we've been busily beavering away on and were having all kinds of difficulties with in the fall has progressed quite nicely. What's left to do?

This route is more or less paved and goes through the Zhari-Panjwai region, where Canadians conducted Operations Medusa and Baaz Tsuka. We certainly have an obligation to help the local community rebuild after those two operations. The road centres prominently in this, allowing commerce to move, police to move up and down the road, and the locals themselves to move.

Most of the road is now paved. What's left to do is the bridge over the Arghandab River in that general area. It will connect the southern portions of Panjwai and will allow folks to get to Kandahar City.

For this bridge that will span the river, we have pre-negotiated a contract that was signed on February 26. In fact, a Turkish company will build it. The bad news in all of this is it's a contract that will be over 690 days. December 2008 is when we will finally have the bridge completed and finished, for your information, but the rest of the route is more or less done.

Let me now provide a short review on the surge in activity over the last few months.

Overall, as you've seen in the press, Helmand province has been the most active area for the Taliban in Afghanistan over the winter. This is due in part to the continuous and ongoing aggressive United Kingdom task force operations along the Helmand River valley in order to secure freedom of movement in and around the Kajaki Dam so that a major refurbishment of the dam can be accomplished, thus significantly increasing the amount of electrical power available throughout southern Afghanistan.

Another complicating factor in Helmand is that over 50% of the Afghan poppy is cultivated in Helmand province. With the NATO forces that have arrived and have been there about a year and a half, there's no doubt that it has put the Taliban back on its heels, and it has certainly been the most active area over the last few months.

• (0910)

[Translation]

But in the province of Kandahar, the Taliban had a serious setback in the districts of Panjwayi and Zhari due to the continuing ISAF operations. The government's position has been strengthened and the Taliban influence in the area has been reduced.

In the province of Kandahar, the Taliban kept targeting the national Afghan security forces. Last week, they had two suicide car-bombing attacks, and 11 members of the national security forces were killed.

[English]

The Taliban continue to target local Afghan forces, and that's certainly something that we've experienced over the last several months. We're certainly taking steps to assist our partners there, the Afghan partners, to diminish some of their vulnerabilities. I'll talk about that a bit further in a minute.

Due to the combined elements of the mountainous terrain and extreme weather, Taliban efforts in Oruzgan and Zabol have been capable of little more than attempting to restrict ISAF mobility. So if you ask me for a snapshot of Regional Command South, where we operate down in the south, all the action really has been in Helmand province. It's certainly where it has been quite tense over the last several weeks.

We now turn to the ISAF level. I'll try to start at the very highest level and then come right down into the joint task force itself.

On February 4, 2007, U.S. General Dan McNeill assumed command of some 31,000 ISAF troops from British General David Richards. General Richards, as you'll recall, took over on May 4, 2006, with some 9,000 troops under his command. It's about 31,000 now; he started with 9,000. With an International Security Assistance Force, it was simply responsible for Kabul and the relative peaceful regions of northern and western Afghanistan. He took ISAF into the challenging southern region, with Canadian and coalition forces for the first time, and assumed command of many of the American forces that were in the eastern sector of the country.

This presence, which as been in effect for just over a year, represents a major accomplishment, and it should be viewed as a very positive step forward to security in Afghanistan. General Richards completed his command in February 2007.

• (0915)

[Translation]

General Richards, whom I heard during a recent workshop in England on Afghanistan under the sponsorship of the Senlis Council, thinks ISAF has taken a great deal of importance in Afghanistan.

I am not sitting here today to tell you the UN-sanctioned NATO mission does not involve any challenge, but I can tell you, from a military perspective, that there are promising indications.

[English]

I'd like to give you the point of view of General Richards—I think it's important to bring this international perspective to you—on the success he feels he achieved during his command. The first thing he points to is that Afghanistan is now under a single international community security focus. It's very important for the Afghan government to be able to deal with one individual running ISAF, and he certainly accomplished that. ISAF was able to spread out throughout the country.

The second point he makes is that the insurgents were dealt a significant tactical defeat in the summer by ISAF. He refers here to the coalition's success during Operation Medusa, which was spearheaded by Afghan and Canadian troops but supported by many key enablers from our partners in the south. Canadians made a real difference there, working with the Afghans, enabled by NATO. That's had quite a ringing effect down, certainly in Kandahar province.

From his point of view, ISAF has the initiative. He explains that by saying that insurgents over the last several months have failed to do what they said they would do. They said they would take back Kandahar and the city. They didn't do that. They said they would remove the British from Helmand. They did not accomplish that. They said they would continue a strong offensive throughout the winter. Again, that was not achieved.

In three of the five regions, there were over 40% fewer incidents in December 2006 than in December 2005. So comparing it to the year before, there were a lot less incidents against Afghan and NATO forces that were initiated by the Taliban. Incidents, as in attacks against ISAF and NATO, have reduced from a peak of 913 in August down to 342 by December 2006.

General Richards had a large role to play in the President's advisory group, which was established to help with stronger governance and to try to bring a lot of the partners together in Kabul, to work with the President to deal with the outside districts throughout the country.

Finally, the Afghan national army is stronger and better trained. It certainly gives some reason to be optimistic about what's going on in Afghanistan.

As I mentioned, there are many challenges there. You could point to many challenges, and you read about many challenges, but there is certainly progress being made in Afghanistan.

What I'd like to do now is focus on the region in which we operate, Regional Command South, talk quickly about what's going on in the other provinces, and then focus right in on our Canadians in Kandahar province.

In Regional Command South, the main effort over the last several weeks has continued to be the provision of security in the region by disrupting the Taliban and setting the conditions for further development, particularly in the Kandahar city Afghan development zone. In task force Helmand, northern Helmand has remained an operational focus for the Taliban and therefore for Regional Command South as well. There continues to be a high level of troops in contact across the province. Unfortunately the ceasefire that was orchestrated in the Musa Qala region did not hold.

We've also seen, and the British have seen, new weapons being introduced. Surface-to-air missiles are a key concern right now, as are other nasty sorts of weapons. That does complicate our operations in the area. It doesn't prevent us from operating, it just means we need to be a little bit more cautious in what we're doing.

As discussed earlier in this update, U.K. forces are determined to improve and refurbish the Kajaki dam, and have conducted operations aimed at establishing the necessary security around this dam to permit that. I'm actually going to discuss that one in a further slide, in a little more detail, so that you understand the Canadian role in that and what ISAF is doing.

• (0920)

[Translation]

From the operational forces standpoint in the province of Zaboul, others are still focussing on security operations on road 1, conducting security operations in the Afghan defence zone and to disrupt Taliban activities in the Mizan district. Further north, operational forces in the Ourouzgan sector are still focussing on security in the Dihrawud and Tirin Kot regions.

The relative freedom of movement the Taliban still have is even more restricted near Tirin Kot.

[English]

The next slide is a very busy slide, which I'm going to refer to several times.

From a Joint Task Force Afghanistan perspective, the last several weeks have been extremely busy. Let me start with the first bullet there, our highly successful and recent rotation of troops—in army speak, relief in place. We just finished up rotating most of the soldiers who came from Petawawa and replaced them with troops predominantly based in eastern Canada. The returning personnel, based on the 1 RCR Battle Group, the PRT that was led by Simon Heatherington, who you will have met during your trip, and the national command and support elements, Fred Lewis and team, moved from Kandahar, over three or four weeks, to a decompression centre in Cyprus, where they had a chance to unwind for a few days and then return back to Canada. They are all currently back, safe and sound, and on their pre-deployment leave.

Certainly from a Canadian Forces perspective the accomplishments of Rotation 2, the team that has just come back, are numerous. Let me list a few of them. They dealt the insurgents a significant blow during Operation Medusa, thus paving the way for the Kandahar City Afghan Development Zone. And I would argue that many other ISAF activities within the southern region have been able to flourish because the Taliban were sent a strong message that we were going to stand firm with local Afghans to facilitate their

security and stand with them. You will recall the long September weekend when we suffered many casualties during Operation Medusa. It remains a tragedy for those we lost, but it certainly accomplished what it set out to do.

They established a more secure framework around the Zhari and Panjwaii region and have overlaid a rudimentary framework for Afghan security forces to cover that region, the second big accomplishment. They provided mentoring and assistance to the Afghan governments at all levels—the provincial level and the national level. They commenced the Route Summit construction and also facilitated the growth of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police within the Kandahar province from almost negligible numbers to hundreds. There are now hundreds of police and Afghan army troops operating in the Kandahar province thanks to the hard work of Roto 2.

I'd now like to deal with the second bullet that deals with the 2nd Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group, the one that is in place right now, and some of the activities they've been up to. Certainly their main effort right now is focused on maintaining the security, reconstruction, and development in the Panjwaii and Zhari area of operations. I put that area of operations up to remind you; you have Route Summit that's on the right and this entire region that we have been operating in over the last several months.

The 2nd RCR Battle Group, from CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick, has seized the reins and continued with the provision of security with our Afghan national security partners throughout this area. As I described earlier, the progress along Route Summit has continued and the battle group continues to provide security up and down that route. Both Operation Medusa and Operation Baaz Tsouka—Operation Baaz Tsouka recently concluded—took us from Route Summit eastward to Howz-e Madad, Sangsar, clearing that area of Taliban, thus allowing the local population to return. In both of those operations, before they occurred, many Afghans had fled this region, and when the Taliban engaged Afghan forces and our troops, obviously the pattern of life throughout was disrupted. Towards the latter stages of Operation Baaz Tsouka, we've seen over 2,500 Afghan families return to their homes, and with the aid of the Afghanistan national security forces we're now trying to provide security through that region. Certainly the battle group remains very focused on this.

• (0925)

The difference between the fall and the spring period: Last fall, if you had walked through this area, you would have not seen any markets operating, you would have not seen many families, you would not see kids at night, there would be no lights on. It was quite sparsely inhabited. The locals had left. As recently as two weeks ago, if you were to walk through this area, you would have seen a thriving community. Families have returned. The markets are open. We find the local village elders are communicating well with the security forces there and with our own troops, trying to point out where the Taliban are, where arms caches are. We see lights on at night, we see kids playing—all sorts of things you would see in Kabul—a very positive outcome throughout that region.

[Translation]

In the last several weeks, the national Afghan security forces have supported the battle group to patrol this area and prevent any return of the Taliban.

Several munition caches have been discovered and destroyed. Our goal in this region was to set up local Afghan security forces, including the national Afghan army and police. We would like to have more than 700 police officers deployed in this area.

[English]

The legitimacy and local confidence in the Government of Afghanistan is increasing in this region because of this operation. The Kandahar governor's involvement in Operation Baaz Tsuka has been very encouraging. His provincial staff was heavily involved in influencing tribal leaders to facilitate local nationals to return to their home, and points to our critical approach, which is to get Afghans to help other Afghans, with us leading from behind and providing assistance to their efforts. CIMIC teams continue to operate throughout this region, identifying quick impact projects and cash for work.

Referring back to this slide, I spoke about the main effort here. I've talked about Route Summit. I would like to just turn to the operations that we are supporting in Helmand province.

You will have perhaps seen in the press a reference to Operation Achilles. What I've tried to do in the next slide is put together just a quick map, focused on Helmand province, with a few arrows. I have pointed at the Kajaki Dam, and here are pictures of it, U.K. and coalition forces operating in the Helmand province. I will be referring to the Maywand district, where we have some Canadians operating. Operation Achilles is the Regional Command South U.K.-led operation currently under way, focused on Helmand province. Its aim is to disrupt insurgent activities in the Sangin river valley, thereby creating the conditions that will provide long-term support to the Kajaki Dam.

Joint Task Force Afghanistan participation in this operation is a supporting effort. We are conducting interdiction and disruption tasks in the Maywand district along the border between Kandahar and Helmand provinces. We have dispatched a Canadian combat team, about 200 soldiers, deployed in Maywand district supporting Operation Achilles. The team consists of an infantry company, some tanks, artillery, and engineer assets. This operation started on March 5 and will continue for the foreseeable future.

The Kajaki Dam, which is located in the northern Helmand province, is the largest in Afghanistan. It encapsulates the essence of the comprehensive approach with security, reconstruction, and development working hard, hand in hand, to deliver the promise of significant economic benefits. We are conducting military operations in this region so that we can effect repairs on this dam. Unfortunately, what has occurred is that the Taliban are preventing our freedom of movement to get to that dam and are not allowing local Afghans to repair the dam. The dam needs to be repaired to provide electricity throughout the southern region. We were concerned a couple of weeks back that the power would actually be turned off, and that would affect things like Kandahar City. So in

an effort to simply clear the route and secure the dam, U.K. forces are operating in Helmand. We are assisting with that.

There's a reason we're conducting that particular military operation, and we're already seeing positive results. It is going to be a difficult challenge. It is going to take weeks and months to square this away. But the positive aspect is that the lights are still on in Kandahar City. That's the first positive aspect to that. So I thought I would just bring that to you. That's the purpose of Operation Achilles. It's not solely focused on securing the dam, but that's certainly a major part of this endeavour to win back that province for local Afghans.

Finally, then, just dealing with the rest of the battle group, is the ongoing construction and siting of permanent vehicle checkpoints in and around Kandahar City. This will make it more difficult for the insurgents to bring weapons and supplies in and through Kandahar City. We want to help protect the local Afghan security forces a little bit better as well, so we are assisting in providing them with some secure checkpoints that they can use so the Taliban can't just pick them off. That's certainly how we're trying to help our partners in that regard.

● (0930)

The provincial reconstruction team continues with its outstanding work. The addition of the infantry company last fall—you'll recall the enhancement—has allowed the PRT to conduct twice as many secure meetings and patrols as was previously possible. Our providing that extra protection element is paying great dividends.

Minister Zia, who is the Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development for the Government of Afghanistan, as you all know, recently announced 38 new subprojects in Kandahar province, of which 34 can be attributed back to Canada. These projects will include building drinking wells—300 or 400 drinking wells will be built throughout the province—three or four water networks that are going to be established, and the construction of two health clinics. This is indeed positive and shows a great focus on trying to bring along development in a very security-challenged region in a security-challenged province. This will really help, I think, with our overall reconstruction efforts.

I will give you a quick word about the Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan that is working with the Government of Afghanistan in a supporting role. Over the last few weeks they have been assisting by bringing their strategic planning capabilities—we have a CIDA officer with us—and lawyers and communications experts to help local Afghan bureaucrats deal with some of the very important reconstruction activities from a national level, assisting with initiatives into agriculture and trade, and assisting the ministry on visits and the like. You get a sense of some of the work they do, and they deserve great credit for that.

I should at this point complete my short update. Mr. Chairman, I'd be happy to try to provide any points of clarification to the brief if I could.

● (0935)

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

In the past we have opened it up for one round of questions, a five-minute round, so there will be twenty minutes of questions.

We'll start with the official opposition.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** I have one small question, and my colleague will have another one. It's regarding a SAT.... I am just trying to understand. We have a team of 15 or 16 men in uniform under Colonel Labbé. Is that who is in charge of the group that is there to advise the government on governance and similar matters? Is that it?

**BGen A. J. Howard:** The Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan is a 15-person team. We have had it in the country for a couple of years. It's currently led by Colonel Dixon. Colonel Labbé will take the team this summer.

This team was offered to assist at just below the ministerial level with strategic planning to try to bring some expertise to help with planning. It's just trying to assist the bureaucrats within that ministry. This is how you organize if you want to write a paper or try to organize an activity.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Why is it not under the Department of Foreign Affairs? Just for my own—Why is the Department of Foreign Affairs not taking care of that? Why is it from DND? Is that from Operation Argus? Is that how it started?

**BGen A. J. Howard:** It is an offer that was made from General Hillier to the president himself, and we created and started down that route. There is no reason other Canadians from other government departments couldn't be doing that.

What is important to note here is that because we're used to deploying groups of people around the world, it was just a natural fit at that particular point. As to the specific reason now, the assessment could be looking perhaps at whether we want to include other team members from other government departments. It might be a good question.

There really was a need. We had the capability to help out. We are a little bit out of normal lanes, but the officers we provide tend to be senior ones, and a lot of them have specialties in the sense that they're a lawyer or a communications expert, and that's really helped. We have embraced the CIDA officer who joined us. Perhaps over time we need to transition to other experts.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** They're related to the CDS. My only question is that—Thanks to the capacity, you have a lot of expertise there, and of course you're the cement between what we're doing in the government, but when I saw the report on the CBC, they were saying that even CIDA and the Department of Foreign Affairs need to have permission from General Hillier before having any issues or answers, because it's not from Foreign Affairs. Is that the case?

**BGen A. J. Howard:** I can't really comment from that perspective, from a Foreign Affairs and CIDA perspective. Let me simply state from a military perspective that somebody asked us if we could help provide some strategic planners to help. I don't want to give you the sense that they're there trying to control anything. They really are just trying to assist with some rudimentary planning

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** You're not a double D. There's only one D: it's defence; it's not.... Okay.

You have a question?

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, General Howard.

I'll use Operation Achilles as an example, because trying to build the infrastructure is one thing and trying to maintain it for use and development is another. You talked about the Afghan National Army. They're getting better and stronger, which is vitally important, but what is preventing us from equipping them with the right type of equipment, whether it be vehicles to get around—? We all have read and have heard they are being adequately trained, but they don't have the means and ways. I don't know if you could answer or just comment.

I was really concerned when you mentioned the new weapons, surface-to-air missiles. The question is, how are they getting these weapons and how do we prevent them from getting these weapons? Where are they coming from? If they didn't have the weapons, then how can the good work you described here be sustained, maintained, and how can we secure the areas, as we're all attempting to do? How do we address that? In my humble opinion, that really is the issue. How do we stop them from getting these weapons so you and our men and women and all the players involved can carry out their work?

• (0940)

**BGen A. J. Howard:** I'll take the second question first. Let there be no doubt that the military forces deployed in Afghanistan are well superior to the Taliban. We have excellently well-led, well-trained troops that have great equipment. We want to ensure the security of all individuals who are there. I would simply say we're working hard with our partners. We're working with other international partners. Certainly from a Canadian perspective, working with Pakistan is showing some promise, and certainly we need to continue that. We don't want to see more foreign arms go into Afghanistan.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

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

The best exit strategy from Afghanistan for Canadian and international troops is for the National Afghan Army, ANA, and the Afghan police to take control of the whole territory.

I am surprised that you did not report that in Geresk, the ANA and Afghan police were involved in a battle in which 40 Taliban were killed.

Where is Geresk on your map? It is in the province of Helmand. Are you aware of that skirmish? How well trained and self-sufficient are the Afghan forces? Is this type of operation planned, and was it authorized through the normal chain of command?

[*English*]

**BGen A. J. Howard:** On the specifics of the specific location in Afghanistan, in the specific instance you talk about, I don't have the detail with me. I'm happy to bring that next time, so I commit to bringing that back to look at next time.

In general, then, from a capacity-building point of view and how we help Afghans create their own country, clearly there's a security pillar, and clearly the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police are important elements of that.

The Afghanistan Compact talks about the Afghan National Army trying to reach 70,000 personnel within the next couple of years, and I think that is an important milestone. What has changed in the last few months is our interaction with the ANA down at the very local level. During your visit, you will have been briefed on the observer-mentor liaison team, the fine work being done by the soldiers from the battalion in Quebec City. Working alongside them is paying huge dividends.

Certainly what we are trying to do is enable them to take over security for themselves, with us standing in the background helping them. For example, in the Zhari-Panjwairi area, we will not leave that region until the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police are able to handle that on their own, because we don't want it to fall back.

We are working jointly—I can't comment, really, on what's going on in Helmand province. I'd have to look at that more closely, at the interaction that is occurring. But the same thing is occurring, Brits and Afghans working together through that particular region.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** General, you also said that Canadian soldiers were moving from Kandahar to the neighbouring province to support British troops.

[*English*]

**BGen A. J. Howard:** We're right on the border between Kandahar province and Helmand province. I'd have to go back to check. The bulk of what we have sent is a Canadian combat team. I would hazard a guess, though I have to check, that they are working with local Afghan forces. They probably came with us from Kandahar province.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Are you aware of the incident I mentioned in Geresk?

[*English*]

**BGen A. J. Howard:** I am not, so I would have to take a closer look at this.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** When the Afghan army and police conduct an operation, I presume it has been approved through the usual chain of command.

• (0945)

[*English*]

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Most certainly, we do work in parallel.

For example, in Kandahar province there's a fledgling army being built. We communicate at various levels, from a Joint Task Force Afghanistan level to their senior military official level, all the way down the chain at lower levels. We do this together to conduct operations.

Now, the Afghans don't need to ask us to do operations in their area, but we have commenced now. There are certain occasions when activities are going on that we may not necessarily want to talk about, but in the main, I would say in the majority of cases there is good interaction between the two of us and both chains of command are very aware of what's going on.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Is one chain of command superior to the other? Can the Afghan army conduct operations with the Afghan police on its own without informing the chain of command?

[*English*]

**BGen A. J. Howard:** They could if they wanted to; it's their country.

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

Ms. Black.

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

Thank you very much for coming back. It's nice to see you again and to get the update from you.

I want to follow up on Mr. Cannis's question about the surface-to-air missiles and where the weapons are coming from. I think it leads into your mentioning briefly that you thought we were making minor inroads or some inroads with the Pakistan situation.

I want to ask you about the cross-border activity. Has that improved, or is it still a situation where the Taliban are able to flow back and forth across the border relatively easily? Is that how you feel the surface-to-air missiles are entering the country? Please clarify the whole issue of this new turn of events with the weaponry the Taliban are using.

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Most certainly. One of the big challenges we have anywhere in the world where we're operating is the movement of illegal arms. This is not a new, unique problem in Afghanistan. It is everywhere.

Through the intelligence forces of most NATO nations and certainly within region south, we are working together tightly to understand when and where these weapons will come in. So we have to remain vigilant, and we have remained extremely vigilant.

I really can't get into the specifics of some of the successes we've had in preventing other arms from coming. I think this would be a great question when General Hillier comes. He's just recently returned from a trip to Afghanistan and he was in Pakistan and met all his counterparts over there. They had a very good dialogue by trying to say okay, let's stop yelling at one another and let's work together to solve this problem.

Certainly from our perspective we are a lot more upbeat on what's occurring up and down that border. Both from a partnership with Pakistan and our own ISAF forces, there is more effort being applied to understand what is going on in the border region.



For example, a minor example, the Americans have helped the Pakistanis build some fencing in certain areas, in really known routes, so that we can have better control and see what's going on. Over time, certainly if you'd asked me six months or seven months ago—We have made progress in that area, but we need to remain vigilant.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** So many analysts—and Gordon Smith recently, who is a former deputy minister—have written that if that issue with Pakistan is not resolved, then it's impossible to really solve the security situation in Afghanistan.

I also want to ask you about the IDP camps, the internally displaced persons camps. Have you any information on that? I don't remember if it was General Howard or another one of our witnesses who told us there were 10,000 families in one IDP camp just outside Kandahar. I'm wondering if you have any information on the success of people being able to return to their homes and leave these IDP camps.

**BGen A. J. Howard:** What I'd like to do, if you don't mind, is the next time I come back I will address that issue specifically for you.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Yes, I'd appreciate that.

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Because they need to do a bit of analysis. We know there are refugee camps throughout the region. This has to be a key bit, to get them to come back.

Let me go and get a bit of a snapshot and bring that back for you.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** We were told there were 10,000 families just outside of Kandahar and that there were more IDP camps in the province, so I'd really like to get some kind of sense about how large that is. We were also told that there wasn't enough food getting in.

When you talked about the ANA and the ANP, we also had information when we were in Afghanistan about the ANP being about seven to eight years behind in the development that was planned after the Bonn Agreement in terms of developing an Afghan national police force. Have you seen substantial progress?

When we were there, we saw that not only were Canadians working with the ANP, but the Americans were there as well in Kandahar, and also private contractors. How does that work with the ISAF people working on developing the ANA and ANP? With the American forces, I know that comes under the NATO banner, but how do the private contractors fit into the picture?

• (0950)

**BGen A. J. Howard:** The private contractors I cannot address specifically because I don't know. But certainly within the constructs within Afghanistan, there is a headquarters called the Combined Security Transition Command. It's U.S.-led, but we have Canadians in there. We actually have a brigadier-general. They're responsible for the army and the police development. So again, how about I bring that one back next time with a little bit more detail on that issue?

**Ms. Dawn Black:** I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Black.

You're going to have a full briefcase when you come back next time, sir.

**BGen A. J. Howard:** At least I'll be able to provide the committee something they want, so I'll certainly address that.

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll finish up with the questions with the government.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, General, for coming here today.

It's kind of delicate, but when the last rotation was happening in the fall of 2006, we had witnesses who came before the committee and testified that there were some elements of psychological warfare that the Taliban was employing through our media and so on insofar as the timing of their attacks right around when the rotation was happening, trying to discourage the new troops who were coming in, and trying to send the ones coming back home feeling a little bit down as well.

I notice that this most recent rotation has probably gone a lot more smoothly than the last one insofar as attacks are concerned. I'm wondering, is this indicative of the progress that is being made against the Taliban, or is this a seasonal type of thing? What would you attribute the seemingly fewer number of incidents to, which your slide had indicated? What would that be attributed to? Would it be the timing of the year, or would it be the progress that's being made?

**BGen A. J. Howard:** Thank you for your question.

Predicting what the Taliban is doing and attributing that is a bit like guessing what the weather is up to. It's multi-faceted and sometimes almost impossible to predict.

Traditionally what has occurred in Afghanistan is what I would call a winter lull. Some people like to use the word "spring offensive". I call it a winter lull. You think things have gone a little bit quiet, and then they tend to sometimes ratchet up again.

What I think you are seeing is ISAF success in disrupting Taliban activity.

They like to make lots of claims in the newspaper, and I don't wish to demean them or anything like that, but we certainly are very happy with the deployment rotation that just occurred. It's great to be able to do the rotation without a lot of military activity occurring, so we have considered that a great success.

The success that we have enjoyed outside of Kandahar City in the Zhari-Panjwai area points to the work that the troops have done, the soldiers from Canada, if I can trumpet them. The hard work that they've done to establish contacts with the locals have made that whole region just a little bit safer now.

We're encouraging our British colleagues, who will attempt to do the same in Helmand.

As peace breaks out in this southern province, as we can establish more and pile on more of the development work, we need to see this trend move forward.

I would be a fool to sit in front of you here today and suggest to you that all of the challenges are done, but there is certainly reason for optimism—and you need to have optimism in looking at this, but it is tracking the right way. What it needs is a lot of time. To stick in with the Afghans and to try to get this one in the end zone, if you will, is going to be a matter of time. But specifically right now, we are quite content with what's going on in Kandahar province.

• (0955)

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Without being terribly specific, when you talk about the ability of the ISAF forces to disrupt the Taliban, that would indicate we are in some way winning some of the hearts and minds in Afghanistan, because you wouldn't be able to do that without some intelligence. You would obviously get this intelligence from communicating with a lot of the local people and various other sources. Would you say that the battle for the hearts and minds is going a lot better?

**BGen A. J. Howard:** In Operation Baaz Tsuka, we asked a governor in Kandahar province to get more involved. We said,

“Please speak with the local elders. We need to understand what their needs are. We also need to understand if they know where weapons caches and the like are.” We're seeing a lot better communication. I think local Afghans now understand what Canadians are here to do and help with. It's something that moves along every day for gaining trust.

The Taliban will do everything they can to disrupt that. But we have certainly seen the return of families to the Zhari–Panjwai area. With the governor's involvement and our ability to bring international partners to help with reconstruction, I don't want to be over the top here, but I think there is some optimism. We are succeeding on that path.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir. We look forward to your next visits.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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