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**Chair**

**Mr. Rick Casson**

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• (0905)

[English]

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

We have a number of new faces around the table this morning—I welcome you all—filling in, I guess, for people who are otherwise busy.

We have two items on the agenda today. One is some committee business—a notice of motion from the Honourable Joe McGuire—and then moving into an in camera session to deal with our Afghanistan report. I'd like to start, if we can, on the notice of motion.

Mr. McGuire, I'll give you an opportunity to outline what you have in your mind here.

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

The motion, as you know, deals with the invitation to General Raymond Henault to appear in front of the committee. I think it was an oversight that he wasn't invited before this, seeing that he is a Canadian and he's been the chair of the top military committee in NATO for the past two years, ever since he was replaced by General Hillier. He was elected to that spot by other NATO members, so he's in a position, really, to give us a tremendous insight from the NATO point of view about how well we're doing, how well NATO is doing in Afghanistan, or not doing, whatever.

I think he would really help the report, in that he could give a point of view from a broader perspective than some of the other witnesses we have had. This is a NATO operation. We are an integral part of the military operation, the military side there. I think his testimony would be invaluable to our committee, so I move that we invite him and incur the necessary expenses in so doing.

**The Chair:** Okay. Does anyone else have any comment?

Mr. Hawn.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** I would support that. I know General Henault personally. I've known him for a very long time. He's very articulate and thoughtful. He has seen a broad perspective of what's going on over various iterations, so I think it would be worthwhile.

**The Chair:** Is there anyone else?

Okay, Mr. Bachand.

[Translation]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Chair, I wonder if my colleague would consider a broadening of the mandate so we could have other witnesses to appear, and other ways for them to appear before the committee. I was thinking about the chairman of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, but I would like to have new procedures so these appearances are not too costly for the Treasury. We could have video conferences instead of having these people come over from Europe or Afghanistan. We often forget about video conferencing. With this technology, we could discuss with witnesses as efficiently as if they were here.

First, I would like to ask my colleague, Mr. McGuire, whether he would accept this amendment. If not, I could simply present another motion the next time. But I would like the clerk to look into the possibility of video conferences. We could save public money and at the same time have a better access to people who are not in Canada or near Ottawa. Mr. Hénault would probably have to travel from Brussels. And if we invite the chairman of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, Mr. Noorzai, who is in Afghanistan, it would be even more complicated.

I wonder what is Mr. McGuire's reaction is to my suggestion to invite Mr. Noorzai. If he does not agree, let him say so quite freely, and if my other colleagues are opposed, it would not be a problem. We could eventually have a separate motion.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Tonks.

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Mr. Chairman, first of all, I'm not on this committee, obviously, but I am interested, on behalf of Canadians who have a concern, based on my perception on reading the media and so on. The concern that has come through the media and through pronouncements that have been made is that the countries of NATO are not pulling their weight and the heavy-lifting is being left to the British and the Canadians.

I don't know the details, but when we were in England a few months ago this was the prevailing sentiment that was expressed by all parties we met with on the foreign affairs committee. It was indicated in top-level pronouncements with respect to reminding the NATO countries under the articles of engagement in Afghanistan that the spirit was not being maintained. The all-party sentiment that I inferred from what was said was that they would look forward to very strong statements coming from Canada.

I wonder, if I am right on that particular perception, whether this motion could be expanded a little. I don't know who it was who said that wars are too important simply to be left to generals. There are political decisions that generals act on. If that is an accurate perception, and I do believe it is one that is felt by Canadians, would it not then be an opportunity, at some point, to expand the terms of reference of this motion?

I'm sorry if I'm overstepping my knowledge barrier, but to have those who give the political direction, from whom the NATO command takes its direction.... Somehow, somewhere, someone has to put pressure on with respect to whether the spirit of engagement and principles are still valid in Afghanistan. I believe they are. I believe we have to take leadership to make sure that it's very clear in terms of what our understanding is of how and why we went in there. It has to be made very clear that everyone else is operating under the same assumption.

My suggestion would be that somehow, whether through this motion or another motion or at another time, if you haven't done this already, that you do it, perhaps in the context of your report. I suggest that the committee take that particular view.

Thank you.

• (0910)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Hiebert.

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

I'm wondering if Mr. McGuire could give us some idea as to whether or not he would want this testimony to be part of the current Afghanistan report that we're discussing. I wasn't sure if that was part of his intention.

**Hon. Joe McGuire:** That would be the intention, to have his testimony incorporated into this report.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Okay.

**Hon. Joe McGuire:** I don't know how far adrift we can get from the motion here. I guess it's up to the committee to decide, but we could keep taking in witnesses forever. I felt and members felt that General Henault would give invaluable information on the report.

Whether or not that can be done by video conferencing is something the clerk could investigate—what his schedule is and how soon he could appear. We're going to be sitting for the next three weeks, so we do have time. Whether it's possible to set up a video conference, and then on Claude's suggestion, whether it's both General Henault and Mr. Noorzai, whether that is possible or not.... It's always better to have somebody in person, but if it's impossible to get General Henault here in person, I think that's a good alternative.

**The Chair:** Video conferencing is something we can look into.

Mr. Hiebert, you weren't quite finished your comments, and then I have Hawn and Gallant.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** I also want to say that I don't think it's necessarily appropriate or even wise for this committee to start opening up the report, since we've now started to go through it step

by step. This could really muddle the waters in terms of the conclusions we've come to and the progress we've made. If we start introducing new testimony, there might be no limit to what could be introduced and to how long this is going to take.

I have no problem hearing the testimony from the general, but I think it should be in addition to, or above and beyond what we've currently concluded. I would actually prefer to see us wrap up the work we've started. The sense I was getting from the members of this committee, even at the last meeting, was that this is taking too long. So let's continue to make progress on this and get it behind us.

In terms of introducing new testimony that might start this process all over again, I'm not really that interested. In terms of video conferencing, I have no problem with that. I think it's a good suggestion.

**The Chair:** It certainly may make the possibility of having him as a witness a bit easier.

Claude.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** I am going—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Oh, sorry, Claude, I have a list here. I apologize.

Mr. Hawn, Ms. Gallant, and then Mr. Bachand.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** I have just a short point to follow up with Mr. Tonks. Even though he's called the chairman of the NATO Military Committee, his job is essentially political. He's more politician than general, so he would cover—

**Mr. Alan Tonks:** Good.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** —the political aspect of it quite well.

**Mr. Alan Tonks:** Thank you for that.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Mrs. Gallant.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Chairman, my comment is directed towards Mr. Tonks as well.

While we were in Afghanistan, we did have the privilege of speaking to General van Loon. He addressed our committee when we visited, so we have had input from NATO.

Further to your concern, NATO plays a role in our continental defence, so perhaps in our overall study of continental defence—which is our next project once we're complete here—we could bring these witnesses in and have these discussions within that context, so we can finish up the work we've started and have been working on for months.

• (0915)

**The Chair:** Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** I think we should leave Mr. McGuire's motion as it is.

But if General Hénault cannot travel to Canada, I would like us to set up a video conference with him.

I would need an interpretation, Mr. Chair. The minister will also appear before the committee on May 15, will he not?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's the indication that was offered to us, I believe, yes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Fine. The Minister of National Defence will be talking about war prisoners in Afghanistan. Is that right?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Will this appearance of the general, like Mr. Hiebert said, have the effect of postponing the report on Afghanistan? Or is this something apart from the report?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** My preference would be that it be separate. My concern is similar to, I think, all of our concerns, that we're getting this thing and it's just rolling out and rolling out, and there's no end in sight. We have committed to supplying a report. If we were just having hearings, fine, we could just continue, and then the information. I understand that we can conclude this report but then also prepare a supplement or an addendum or just a separate report on what we heard on those days, or just consider it a hearing and hear the witness.

I think it's valuable information, particularly what we could hear from General Henault, and that we should have some written report on it, whether it's the full-body context of this report or not.

I'm trying desperately to get this.... If we can get to the report today and the recommendations, and get them concluded, that would bring everything back to us next week, on Tuesday, and then we finish up on Thursday with the report and we're done with it. But these other issues keep coming forward. I won't argue that they're not important and that these are critical witnesses, but particularly waiting till May 15.... It's a committee decision, but if we wait till May 15, and then we continue on, we will probably not get this done by summer break. That's my concern.

**Hon. Joe McGuire:** I think General Henault's testimony will have to be incorporated somehow, whether it's an addendum or not. There's not much point in getting him here if we're not going to pay any attention to what he's going to say.

**The Chair:** Well, I'm hopeful that if we offer the video conference, and then we don't have to make travel arrangements, that could be done fairly quickly here. But May 15 is a whole different thing.

I know it's a critical issue and it's a topic of debate these days, and we want to hear from the minister on it, but do we have to hold up the entire report to hear that, or do we just offer a separate submission?

Mr. Hiebert.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** As I recall, the request for the minister's attendance was not meant to provide further information for the report, it was just an ongoing visit by the minister. I know we've had discussions around this table before about the complexity of the mission and the fact that if we were to incorporate every ongoing change we would never finish this report, because it's an ongoing mission.

In that context, I agree with your suggestion that we proceed, as we have been, to wrap things up. Whether General Henault comes as part of just a general observation of what's going on, as we receive from the Department of National Defence, or if he's part of our discussion on continental defence, I think we can find a place for the testimony to fit and to put it in context.

**The Chair:** We could do that. We can have a report on one meeting, if we wish. Prepare, table it—if that's the wish. But the first thing is to deal with the motion to get him to bear witness, and then we can move on from there.

I'm getting a feeling from members that we do want to proceed with getting this report finished and getting the recommendations moved forward.

Jim has made a couple of suggestions for fallback if General Henault is unavailable. One is Major-General Fenton. He has been assistant director of operations on the NATO international military staff. He might be easier to get hold of. There's also Major-General Angus Watt. He was the deputy commander, ISAF, air. So there are other alternatives if General Henault is unavailable, and we can fall back on those. But the initial motion.... Claude has backed off on his suggestion, but we will include video conferencing as an alternative, just as an instruction to the clerk.

Are you ready for the question on the motion that the committee invite General Raymond Henault in his capacity as chairman of the NATO Military Committee to appear at his earliest convenience to provide an update on the Afghanistan mission?

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

● (0920)

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

We'll just suspend for a second while we move in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]





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