



House of Commons  
CANADA

# Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan

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AFGH • NUMBER 002 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, May 1, 2008**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux**

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Thursday, May 1, 2008

•(1330)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC)):** We will begin the meeting.

Mr. Eide, as the president of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, I'd like to say it's an honour to have you here in Canada and to have you here in front of our committee. In fact you're our first witness, so this is very good.

For the benefit of the viewing audience, Mr. Eide is the special representative for Afghanistan and the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Mr. Eide received that post on March 10.

I congratulate you on these great responsibilities and on your experience and your credibility, because of which you have earned these appointments. Congratulations.

I'll also just take a moment to acknowledge, again for our viewing audience, that our previous Canadian ambassador to Afghanistan, Chris Alexander, is of course the deputy special representative who works very closely with Mr. Eide. So we, as Canadians, certainly have a role to play.

Our time is limited, Mr. Eide, so I'll ask you to make an opening presentation and then we will do one round of approximately six to seven minutes each, in order to be able to ask questions of you.

On that note, sir, I would ask you to please commence your presentation.

**Mr. Kai Eide (United Nations Special Representative for Afghanistan):** Thank you very much, sir, and thank you for the privilege of being able to be here.

As you said, I'm very pleased to be able to work with Chris Alexander, who is an outstanding diplomat, and also with your ambassador in Kabul. We work very closely with them and also with your mission at the United Nations. We will see them tomorrow.

As you said, I in fact took my duties up on March 28, and I've been travelling for two weeks, so my experience on the ground is, as you understand, limited, but I've been there many times in my former capacities as NATO ambassador and also as political director of our ministry.

If I may, I'll say a few words about what I see as being the immediate challenges.

We had the Bucharest meeting in April. That was a great success. I think the Afghan president came back with a strong commitment

from the international community, and we have also seen that there's been an increase in troop levels, which is important. It's important to ISAF; it's important to you and to all of us.

There will be a conference in Paris on June 12, which will concentrate on other aspects of our entire efforts in Afghanistan. That means, in particular, the development aspects and also on some political topics. At that juncture, the Afghans will be able to present what is called the Afghan national development strategy, which is a strategy that covers the next five years and lays out what they see as the basis for their work and our work over that period. It's a very important document and it deserves our full support and commitment when we come to Paris in June.

In addition to that document, we'll also review the so-called Afghanistan Compact, which was agreed in London on February 1. There's no doubt that when we review that document we can see that very significant progress has been made in some aspects, and we all know them: within education, within health, with the Afghan National Army, and also some other areas.

At the same time, there are shortfalls. What are the major shortfalls? I think within the police and justice system, certainly, and within governance you will find—to my mind—the most important areas where we need to make progress fast. I think we're making some progress on the police, on the justice system, and on the governance issue. We still need to make a lot of effort.

Why I'd like to highlight those particular issues is because we put a lot of effort into security, and you, Canada, certainly do, and we all appreciate your tremendous effort in that respect. You put an effort, and the national community puts another effort into the development side, and we're making progress. You also contribute generously.

But for what we do on the security side and on the development side—in order to enable us to make that sustainable—we will have to have a state administration in place, a set of law enforcements and institutions, ministries, sub-national governance, etc., which will enable us to allow the Afghans to increasingly take that over in the years to come. It is extremely important—from my point of view—to put extra emphasis on areas having to do with governance and law enforcement.

In addition to that, we also have to look at the economy, and see how we can stimulate economic growth, because what we have to seek is of course that not only is there this pillar, this basis underneath our institutions, but also see to it that the economy grows. There was, of course, a growth of about 13% last year, 8% this year, but that is from a very, very small base, and we also know that much of this stems from the fact that international aid is flowing in the way it is.

We need to stimulate the Afghan economy. I believe that the basis of this is agriculture. Afghanistan will remain an agricultural society for a long, long time to come, and we have to see to it that that sector can expand. That means investing in the modernization of their agriculture, reforming agriculture, and also putting in place the infrastructure required to enable that to happen. That means that irrigation projects are of critical importance.

●(1335)

These are some areas that I believe are priorities in the years to come:

Let me mention that in Paris I hope we will all commit ourselves to ensuring that the right resources are there. I would certainly like to see countries that do not donate so much today becoming more generously involved on the financial side.

Second is aid effectiveness. We do not spend our resources as effectively as we should, and we are all aware of it. There was a report that came out only a few weeks ago from a group of NGOs. We may question some of the figures in that report, but the basic arguments are right. We have to take them seriously and try to address them.

May I again say that the way you in Canada spend your resources is a way that I would see as an example for many other countries. You use channels that give the Afghans as much ownership as they can possibly absorb at the moment. We have to continue in that direction, because building Afghan capacity is the only way to move forward. That is, the right amount of money, the right aid effectiveness, and coordination.

Today we have a situation where a fragmented international community that is strong meets a fragmented Afghan administration that is weak. This is not the way we can proceed. Therefore, one of my most important tasks, according to the new mandate, is to ensure better international cooperation and coordination. That is hard, because we've spoken about coordination for quite a long time, but what I sense now is more of a readiness to be coordinated. When I travel, I always say to my interlocutors that coordination means being ready to be coordinated, and readiness to be coordinated means asking yourself what you can do differently from what you've done in the past. That is the question I want everybody to ask themselves.

I do perceive a greater readiness today among major donors to do precisely that, and I look forward to seeing if that will lead us somewhere with regard to spending our resources better.

Let me finally mention two or three other topics that I believe would have to be at the top of our agenda as we move forward.

One issue is certainly elections. There will be elections in September 2009, presidential and provincial elections, and then we have parliamentary elections in 2010. We had successful elections in 2004 and 2005. The international community and the Afghan people must be able to see that in 2009 and 2010 we are able to conduct equally successful elections. If we are not, you as politicians understand the impact that may have both inside Afghanistan and in the international community. So elections are important.

The regional dimension—we all know that a stable Afghanistan is important to a stable region. So the regions I mention are also put on my agenda as one of the priority areas. We intend to go both to Islamabad and Tehran over the next few weeks in order to start conducting such a dialogue with these two countries and with other countries in the region.

Finally, one issue that I see today mentioned in the *Globe and Mail* is the reconciliation effort. I have always said that, yes, we need military forces there, and only NATO and ISAF can provide that kind of framework in the foreseeable future. But it is important to underline that the solution to Afghanistan's problem is not a military solution; it is a political solution. Therefore, we have to give the political aspects of what we're doing greater prominence. Reconciliation certainly will be one of those elements, but I would like to underscore two or three things that are important here.

First, a reconciliation process, when it comes about, must be a process led by the Afghan government with the support of the international community. It must be coordinated and led by the Afghan government.

Second, it must be a political process, not a security process or intelligence process.

●(1340)

Third, it must be based on the Afghanistan Constitution and on what we have achieved over the last few years. And the achievements are important. Look at education. Look at how girls can take part in society in a different way from what they did before. There are about 300 newspapers and periodicals in Afghanistan, 14 television stations, and so on. That's dramatically different from what we had before. Those achievements have to be protected and preserved. No political process should take place at the cost of these achievements.

Finally, it must be a process that is conducted on the basis of strength and not as a replacement for our military operations.

Mr. Chair, I think that concludes my introductory remarks.

**The Chair:** I thank you very much for your introductory remarks, Mr. Eide.

What I would like to do now is offer the opportunity to our parliamentarians to pose questions to you

I will start with the Liberal Party and Mr. Rae. It will be a five-minute round, Mr. Rae.

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Eide.

I want to just come back to you on this. I am sorry I can't go through the niceties, but we have a very short period of time, so I'm just going to get right at the questions.

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I'm Norwegian and I'm used to being brief.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** We have great respect for your country and for your leadership. I worked with many of your leaders in Sri Lanka for many years, so I'm glad to be in your presence.

**Mr. Kai Eide:** Thank you, sir.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** I want to come back to the last point you made, because it is obviously a subject of great concern to us. You referred to reconciliation within the Constitution. I guess that is a very direct question. I know it is a sensitive subject, and the international community can't talk about the Afghanistan Constitution, but I take it that any discussion would include the possibility of changes in governance.

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I do not want to comment on how the process of reconciliation should move forward and what the outcome could be politically. That is up to the Afghan government to decide. We would discuss it with them and support them. But I think it's premature to comment on specifics related to that process.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** What would your comment be about the fact that troops on the ground, it would appear, from reports today and earlier—the Dutch troops and the Canadian and British troops—are engaging in tactical discussions with the Taliban?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I think, in general, both on the military and civilian sides, that outreach efforts being conducted are quite in order. This is something we should do. We should reach out to the communities in which we are engaged. But when it comes to a wider reconciliation process, I would say that it is tremendously important that it is owned by the Afghans and is well coordinated so that we do not go in many different directions.

• (1345)

**Hon. Bob Rae:** What about cross-border discussions with the *loya jirga*? There is some reference to reactivating that process between Pakistan and Afghanistan among the Pashtun leadership. Do you see an opportunity for that?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I think that was a very promising process when it started last summer. It is our view that if we can revive and strengthen that kind of process, it would be to the benefit of the entire region.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** Mr. Chair, Mr. Wilfert has a question.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming.

On the issue of capacity-building at the village level, I would suggest that it is critical to ensuring the successful development and empowerment of the Afghan people. I realize that it's early, but do you see an opportunity where there would be the political will and a better coordination of dollars, where the government currently is not spending at least 45% of the aid money that's gone to them to ensure that the roots of governance at the village level take place?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I think what we see from the Afghan government now is rather encouraging. As you will know, the President of Afghanistan just established something called an independent

directorate for local government. What the leader of that directorate is trying to do is look at leadership at the provincial level, the district level, and below that to try to improve the competence of the leadership at these various levels and tie them to local structures on the ground.

I think that's the only way to go. And that effort has been appreciated by the entire international community.

I will add that I believe it is important that the governance issue be addressed not only at the provincial, district, and local levels but also vigorously addressed at the central level. This is, of course, an item we discuss regularly with the Afghan authorities.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** There's some reference in the Secretary General's report to the possibility of having the elections brought together in either 2009 or 2010. Are you aware of any of those discussions, or of where that stands now? Is it possible that we'll have just one election in either 2009 or 2010?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** That discussion has not been concluded. We will have, as I said, elections at the presidential and provincial levels in 2009, and the other elections in 2010. That is a consensus decision that the Afghan leadership has reached, and I think it's very important that they reached that decision, that they came to that conclusion. This is their common view at the moment, and on that basis the decisions have been made.

It will mean, of course, that both they and the international community will face challenges with regard to the organization and the funding of those elections. However, I think that's the price we have to pay in order to see to it that the democratic processes in Afghanistan are brought forward and solidified.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** I'm sure the government will want to lend the services of Elections Canada for that purpose, so we look forward to that.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much, Mr. Rae.

Madame Barbot.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good day, Mr. Eide.

You talked about activities that were productive, such as education. You also said that health conditions were improving. However, you did not say anything about corruption.

To what extent is corruption impeding good governance and major progress? What do we need to do? What steps do we need to take, in your opinion, to put an end to corruption?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** Corruption is a very important consideration. It is an issue that frequently comes up in our discussions with the Afghan government and the Afghan president.

At a time when we are trying to mobilize resources and improve the way they are used, it is important to show the Afghan people that resource utilization implies some measure of accountability. In the course of our discussions last week, I sensed that the Afghans also demonstrated the will to implement mechanisms to help us help them achieve better results.

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Can you give us some examples of organizations?

[English]

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I think I should switch to English.

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** You're doing well in French.

**Mr. Kai Eide:** Thank you very much, but....

I am in the early days of this, and in the early days also of discussing how we can put that into place. We certainly say to the Afghans, yes, there are more resources required, and a better use of resources is required, but there is another side to that; it has to do with accountability and the fight against corruption. These two go hand in hand. As we demonstrate our commitment to them, we would like to see them demonstrate their commitment to us.

This is a constant discussion. I hope that we will soon see progress that will reassure you and other donors that we're heading in the right direction.

•(1350)

[Translation]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** May I use my colleague's remaining time?

You have been given a new mandate by the secretary general. You talk about better coordinating international efforts. Here in this country, we apply the 3D policy approach, that is defence, diplomacy and development. Often we are tempted to add governance to the list.

Mr. Eide, do you get to have your say on defence matters, or is the focus of your mandate strictly development and diplomacy?

[English]

**Mr. Kai Eide:** My mandate also includes an improved civil-military relationship, and I do take that seriously. Also, since I've spent, altogether, eleven years at NATO, I believe I do have a certain basis for working on these particular issues.

We are also in discussions or have entered into discussions with ISAF in order to see how we can improve civil-military coordination at the central level, at the regional level, and also more locally.

I'd like to say one thing in that respect. Our UN mandate is a UN mandate. It is distinct and very different from the military mandate of ISAF. I will move into closer coordination with the military, but always protecting the integrity of the UN's political mandate. I think that's very important, for the UN to play the role that we have now been given and for which we've been given great support by the Canadian government.

I will do that also for other reasons. We have to demonstrate that what I would like to call our "project Afghanistan" in support of the people of that country is not, first of all, a security or military project. It's a political project where the military, development, and governance elements have to play together in a better way.

I have another reason for insisting on that distinct mandate, and that is our relationship to the development agencies and the humanitarian community—NGOs, etc. They must feel confident

that the UN, with which they work, has that independent mandate and protects its integrity.

Let me also say that if we are to, at one stage, play a role in the political process, I do want to make sure that all our interlocutors know who we are. We are the United Nations. We are the representatives of the global community, not of any region or organization or any specific group of countries.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Eide.

Ms. Black.

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

Welcome to our committee. It's a pleasure to have you here.

In my party we have been very supportive of the UN taking a greater role in Afghanistan, so we're pleased to have you there. We believe it's the appropriate organization to lead the efforts in Afghanistan.

I want to congratulate you on your appointment. It is a huge challenge that you've undertaken, and certainly all of us here wish you well in it.

With UNAMA, I think you have about 1,300 people working with you now in Afghanistan, and about 1,000 of those are local Afghans. I understand there are about 40,000 military troops from different countries in Afghanistan. Are my numbers correct?

•(1355)

**Mr. Kai Eide:** Even more.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Are you looking to expand the number of people who work under the UNAMA banner?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** Yes. For the UN to be able to play the role that many countries want us to play, I believe we need greater resources. We need greater financial resources, and we need more manpower to be able to do the job in Kabul, but also to be able to do our job in the regions and expand the number of offices that we have in provinces.

We do have a plan on how to go about that, and I hope to be able to start implementing it.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Perhaps you could share that with the committee at a later date, when you have that plan in place.

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I'm glad that you said "at a later date".

**Ms. Dawn Black:** I appreciate that. We understand that you have been there a very short time.

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I can assure you that we need resources, but I'm pleased to see that your country, the one I originate from, and many others believe that the United Nations is the only legitimate organization to play that coordinating role in Afghanistan. I think there is today broad support for that kind of approach.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** I agree with you.

There is a story in today's Associated Press. I don't know if you had a chance to see it. It talks about the United States mulling over military control in southern Afghanistan. It says that military planners in the U.S. are concerned that the rotations that the other countries take into the south are not long enough. There has been a lot of speculation and there have been a lot of articles in the press saying that the U.S. would prefer a more aggressive approach by Canadian, Dutch, and British troops in southern Afghanistan.

I know you have just returned from Washington, and I'm wondering whether you had discussions about these media reports and reports of American military officers saying that they may wish to take over control of the military operations in the south of Afghanistan. Is that something you discussed at all with Washington or something you heard about while you were there?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** This was not a discussion during my meetings with the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, or other ministers. I've also read the media reports.

Since I have been involved in the development of ISAF from a previous capacity, I would like to underline one thing. It's essential to us all—I think it's essential to you—that this operation has its basis in the United Nations mandate. It must remain that way. And it will remain that way. In addition to that, ISAF bases its operations on an operational plan that has been adopted by the NATO Council with the approval of all countries. I think that is the basis on which we proceed.

Also, Canada deserves great praise for all the efforts it has undertaken in so many ways. I just saw the new allocation of resources with regard to the food crisis that Afghanistan is facing. I think the Afghan people are grateful for what you're doing in order to bring their country forward. It's hard, and it has costs, but it is important.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Eide.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Hawn.

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

Thank you for coming, sir.

With respect to Afghanistan, in the broad sense our mission will be successful, I think, when Afghanistan is secure, prosperous, and stable. That will always be a relative assessment compared to countries like Canada and Norway.

You talked about the effectiveness of aid, in particular the Canadian example. Is it fair to say that the more effective the aid is, the more effectively we can get at the locals to improve governance, and the more outreach we can do to the Taliban who may not be hard-core Taliban but maybe Taliban by convenience?

The south is a difficult environment for this to take place; it's probably the most difficult in the country. How do you see the UN increasing its presence in the south to help the Afghans and the rest of the folks there deliver the aid more effectively, which leads to better local governance, which leads to more reconciliation?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** We already have offices in the south; Kandahar is where we are strongly represented. When we look at where we want to be represented in the future, as I see it now, that certainly will

include an expansion in the south. We have to not only expand in the south, but we have to look very carefully at how we can be most useful in the outreach context, for instance, together with our other organizations, development agencies, NGOs, and not least the Afghan government.

I mentioned the establishment of this new directorate, whose intention and task is to improve the governance at various levels and bring modern and traditional structures together to enable the Afghan government to make decisions and priorities based on the needs on the ground. I see it as one of our tasks to try to reinforce and complement that effort.

You mentioned aid effectiveness. Much has been done, and we can see visible results in many, many places in the country. Nevertheless, there's no doubt that there is a duplication of effort. That has to be avoided; we have to stop it.

There is also a tendency to spend too much money inside the donor country and not inside the receiving country. That also has a very negative effect of not building Afghan capacity as soon as we can. Therefore, I think we are conducting capacity substitution instead of capacity building. That is an attitude we have to get away from, and it will require all of us to look very carefully at how we spend. But I also do see a trend in the right direction over the last few weeks. I look forward to seeing that materialize.

● (1400)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** *Mange Takk.*

I'll turn it over to Mr. Keddy.

**The Chair:** You have time for one question—about a minute and half.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank our witness.

You moved directly to where I was headed, to capacity-building and how capacity-building leads to prosperity. In your opening remarks you talked about Afghanistan being primarily an agrarian society that has a definite need to modernize. And of course it needs irrigation. We all understand that.

Could you branch out on that a little more? It's one thing to modernize agriculture, but it's another if you simply have a couple of large farms and you don't have independence of that small agrarian movement, or the individual. We may look at it as primitive, but the other possibility is manufacturing, even on a small scale. What level are we at there?

**Mr. Kai Eide:** I'm not able after such a short time—after all, 15 working days on the ground, plus all the travelling—to express myself on the agriculture manufacturing industry in Afghanistan.

**Mr. Gerald Keddy:** I appreciate that.

**Mr. Kai Eide:** What I see as most important is to enable the Afghan people to feed themselves. We see now what is happening as part of a more global food shortage and food problems. The Afghan people are hit hard by that.

I think we have to be able to develop agriculture in such a way that they can first of all feed themselves, and then also create the basis for industries emanating from that. Some of this is going to take time, but some of it does not need to take all that long. And I think this is something Afghan authorities see, that they do have to develop their agriculture sector.

Let me just mention that there are other elements also, resources inside Afghanistan that they can make better use of and that they can develop. Within the mining industry there are resources. There are also resources within oil and gas, which can at least satisfy a significant portion of their own domestic requirements. That will also take time, but there are efforts under way, for instance, to adopt a new hydrocarbon law and regulations. These will enable them to have a tender round with regard to gas fields and an oil field up in the north. There are processes under way, but I point out the agriculture because it is really at the base of where we are today.

●(1405)

**The Chair:** Very good.

Mr. Eide, I realize you have a very busy schedule, and I think it makes us even more appreciative that you took time out of your schedule to meet with us today. I and my fellow committee members appreciate your having shared your views with us. We wish you all the best in the future of your appointment. And because we'll be focusing on the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, I think it's all of our hopes that we'll have the chance to meet again.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Kai Eide:** Thank you very much, and thank you for the support Canada is giving.

**The Chair:** It's my pleasure.

The meeting is adjourned.

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**Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons**

**Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes**

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