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Chair

Mr. Pierre Lemieux

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• (1835)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC)): Colleagues, I'd like to welcome you to the sixth meeting of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan.

For those of you in our viewing audience, we are fortunate to have with us today Lieutenant-General Michel Gauthier, who is currently the commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, known as CEFCOM. General Gauthier also served in Bosnia, and he commanded the Joint Task Force South West Asia in 2002, which included Afghanistan.

General, it's a pleasure to have you with us this evening. I thank you for taking time out of your schedule.

I would ask that you open the meeting with a preliminary statement, and then we'll move to rounds of questioning.

Colleagues, I'm going to suggest tonight that we have two rounds of questioning, one round of seven minutes and a second round of five minutes, as we have committee business to conduct once we're done hearing the testimony of General Gauthier.

On that note, General, please go ahead.

[Translation]

Lieutenant-General Michel Gauthier (Commander, Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Canadian Forces contribution to the government's mission in Afghanistan.

Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, or CEFCOM as we call it, has been the national focal point for this mission for the Canadian Forces since the command first came into being on the first of February 2006.

CEFCOM was created as one outcome of a broad transformational process for the Canadian Forces, designed in part to improve the way operations are conceived, led, and supported.

My role and CEFCOM's role is threefold: first of all, to exercise effective command oversight over our operations around the globe; second, to shape and guide the conduct of the mission over time, consistent with stated government objectives and strategic guidance from the Chief of the Defence Staff and working closely with our

whole of government partners; and third, to work closely with force generators—the army, the navy, the air force—to do everything I can to set the conditions for our men and women deployed in harm's way to succeed in what Canada is asking them to do.

Essentially my role is to provide clear guidance and then to orchestrate support to the mission, leaving the task force commanders, such as David Fraser, Tim Grant, Guy Laroche, and, more recently, Denis Thompson, the freedom to execute their mission in a flexible manner and in a way most responsive to changing circumstances on the ground.

[Translation]

In broad terms, The Canadian Forces mission in Afghanistan is founded on three pillars or main areas of effort. These are to conduct security operations; to build Afghan security force capacity, which will ultimately allow them to assume full responsibility for their own security; and to enable and support the efforts of our whole of government partners to contribute to reconstruction, development and government capacity-building efforts in support of the Afghan people. Our men and women are engaged in all three of these efforts concurrently, but the relative emphasis and concentration of resources among them has clearly evolved since the early days in the south and will continue to as progress is achieved, geographically and seasonally.

[English]

I'll now say a few words about our progress over the past 22 months. Many of you have had the opportunity to hear General Hillier make observations about this in the past month or so, and far more eloquently than I ever could. But I can say that I've personally been involved in and focused on the Afghanistan challenge virtually continuously for the past six and a half years.

I was named to this position almost three years ago. Before this, as chief of defence intelligence for three years, Afghanistan was a major focus for me. Of course, before that, as the chairman mentioned, I commanded the national joint task force that included the 3 PPCLI deployment into Kandahar back in 2002, as well as a number of ships and air units deployed to the region in the aftermath of 9/11.

I've had dozens of opportunities to visit our troops in Afghanistan over this period, particularly in the south, and I can say unequivocally that with the Afghans, the international community, and our whole of government partners, we are making progress, though at times it's slower and more uneven than many would wish or expect.

We're under no illusions about the toughness of this mission. The geography is often inhospitable and challenging for operations. Complicated historical and cultural factors need to be understood and accommodated. We've learned that the annual extremes of climate and harvesting periods lead to cycles of intensity in insurgent activity. When the fighting tempo predictably increases after a winter lull, as we're seeing today in the south, this sometimes creates a perception of a setback or of a mission that's not accomplishing what it should be.

I think you'll understand that Afghanistan is one heck of a complex challenge. In our world of 15-second sound bites, it's far easier to bring attention to what's not going well in the mission, because there simply will not be any instantaneous results readily reportable in that 15-second sound bite.

From a Canadian Forces perspective, as successive rotations of our men and women return to Canada, they bring with them a seasoned understanding of the mission's dynamics and help to set internal expectations at the right level. We also have a very successful lessons-learned framework that ensures that we're able to adapt quickly in this very dynamic environment. I can assure you that every new element deploying is better trained and better equipped than the last to understand mission dynamics and to respond to the conditions they will face at the time of their deployment.

We are making a difference. Recall that in the late summer of 2006, in the Zhari and Panjwai districts west of Kandahar, we were facing a determined, well-organized force numbering upwards of 1,000 insurgents who were determined to cut off the major highway in the south to isolate Kandahar City and, ultimately, to make NATO and the Afghan government look weak and powerless to stop them. Civilians had fled the area, and fighting over the subsequent months devastated this key agricultural area. That was 20 months ago.

Today, in an area where we then had the better part of a battle group holding a ribbon of land protected under millions of sandbags for several months, we now have tens of thousands of civilians who have returned and resumed their farming. We've assisted with their agricultural infrastructure. We're building roads and causeways, and creating employment for hundreds of Afghans.

Beyond these signs of qualified progress, I believe our greatest success story of the past two years has been the advances we've made with the Afghan National Army and, to a lesser extent, the Afghan National Police. It's crystal clear to us that the military end-state in Afghanistan will be founded on the Afghan National Army, the police, and other security forces being able to protect and defend Afghan citizens without outside assistance.

Where the ANA, in particular, is concerned, we've witnessed a progression from having no formed units to work with two years ago, to one infantry battalion, or *kandak*, as we call them in Afghanistan, 18 months ago, to a full brigade of three infantry battalions, a combat support battalion, and a combat service support battalion.

We've adjusted our own force structure over the course of the past 18 months from having only 15 or so personnel involved in training and mentoring to the roughly 220 Canadian men and women who

are now engaged full time in training and mentoring ANA and Afghan National Police elements. Our forces now regularly conduct partnered operations side by side with Afghan units and, increasingly, they are leading and we are enabling and supporting their efforts. By western standards their numbers are still small. They aren't as well equipped as they need to be, and it will clearly be some time before they are a self-sustaining force, but they are growing steadily. They're absolutely committed to the defence of their nation. They are tough—as tough and as fearless as any soldiers we've worked with—and most important they're eager to step up and assume responsibility for security, with our help.

● (1840)

[Translation]

Policing has proven to be a more complex challenge, as a rule of law environment is slower to take hold. It is more difficult to mentor these much more widely dispersed forces, which are also more vulnerable to insurgent targeting. Nevertheless, government of Afghanistan initiatives such as the Focus District Development Program, where police training and administration have been revamped, are showing signs of progress.

Through our own Police Operational Mentoring Liaison Teams CIVPOL efforts, we are working hard to reduce police vulnerabilities and help them along the path to thorough and much needed community policing.

[English]

All of this is to say that I'm satisfied that our men and women are accomplishing at least as much, if not much more, than we can reasonably ask of them in Afghanistan, keeping in mind that progress, as we define it, will naturally ebb and flow over time. Just over the past weeks, as the poppy harvest has come to an end, the insurgents have resumed their disruptive terrorizing activities. We aren't seeing hundreds of them in one place, as we did two years ago, but we are certainly seeing them in groups of 5, 10, and 15 or so.

It's not completely safe by any stretch of the imagination, and it won't be any time soon. Some parts of Kandahar province are safer than others, and we have been focused on the key districts where a majority of the population of Kandahar lives. Kandahar City, with its large urban setting, will inevitably be vulnerable to indiscriminate suicide attacks for a long time, but by and large it's a busy, bustling city, where people are getting on with their lives despite what is perhaps an undercurrent of fear.

In outlying districts, such as Zhari and Panjwai, the insurgents have most often resorted to indiscriminate IED attacks, as you well know. From time to time, particularly during this time of the year, they will target our forces more directly, sometimes with the tragic consequences we've seen over the past 24 hours. But the pattern of the past months has much more frequently been for them to focus on softer targets, such as the Afghan National Police, who are less able to defend themselves, and to intimidate and prey on more vulnerable civilians, all of this aimed at undermining confidence in and support for the democratically elected Government of Afghanistan. This, of course, is why we all need to continue to confront this challenge squarely and help consolidate the government's presence, along with our Afghan brothers in arms.

• (1845)

[Translation]

As the M. Manley's Panel has recognized, reconstruction and development both depend on security and contribute to it. Certain initiatives can be progressed in the presence of security threats, while others must await a level of confidence by non-military contributors, particularly international organizations and NGOs, that they can operate within their risk tolerances.

On the other hand, projects that meet the daily needs of Afghans engender their confidence in government and reduce their support for and tolerance of insurgents, and an insurgency without local support is ultimately destined to fail.

[English]

The government's decision to extend the mission until 2011 has all of us seized with the need to do everything we can at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels to set the conditions for our whole of government efforts to succeed. The increasing Canadian civilian presence in theatre, the numerous impending capability enhancements for our forces to improve security and force protection, and the declared plan to augment our forces in Kandahar province with allies, together will help shape the mission as we move forward. In a general sense, the Canadian Forces will continue to carefully adjust and adapt our approach to the mission, according to Government of Canada policy priorities and emerging programming plans, and consistent with the conditions on the ground as they evolve.

I returned from my last trip to Afghanistan less than three weeks ago, where I joined the Clerk of Privy Council, and David Mulrone, and Rob Fonberg for a portion of their visit. Increasingly what I am seeing over my many visits is the capacity amongst the civilian military team over there to speak the same language and to have a shared view of what needs to be done and what's achievable where and when. After each visit, I walk away inspired by the resilience, dedication, commitment, and professionalism of all mission participants, whether civilian or military, even in the face of adversity and, occasionally, tragedy.

This is a tough challenge for the military and for Canada, but collectively we're absolutely up to it. I think it's safe to say that we've all taken the Manley panel's very sensible work to heart, and much good work is going on here in Ottawa and overseas to give effect to the government's renewed commitment to this mission.

Thank you.

The Chair: I thank you very much, General Gauthier.

You had mentioned that you were just in Afghanistan. You're probably aware that members of our defence committee travelled to Afghanistan approximately a week and a half ago, and three members from this committee travelled with them. That is just for your information.

I will turn to the Liberals for the first round of questioning.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be splitting my time with Mr. Ignatieff.

First of all, General, it is good to see you. It's been a little while, but I am delighted to see you before us.

As one of those who returned from Afghanistan, I have three quick questions. Then Mr. Ignatieff will put his questions on the table and we'll go from there.

Why are we finding more IEDs lately? How much is the success in southern Afghanistan based on eliminating the insurgent leadership cadre? And finally, as long as the FATA region of Pakistan is open to the insurgents as a sanctuary, is it realistic to expect any real progress in eliminating the insurgency threat in the Kandahar region?

And now, Mr. Chair, I will go to Mr. Ignatieff for his questions.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): My questions relate to the training of the Afghan National Army. When I was in FO Base Wilson at the end of January, I saw some impressive work. I want to get a sense of benchmarks going forward: the number of Afghan National Army you expect to train, over what period; your estimate going forward of how soon they will be able to step up and take active combat roles; and the sense in which they will be able to stand up and we will be able to stand back. I am really looking for a sense of benchmarks in that process, a sense of how you see that stepping up over the next years.

The motion that commanded the support of Parliament put a very large amount of emphasis on this point. That is to say, it said the focus of our military presence in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2011 should be heavily focused on essentially finding a replacement for us after 2011. I want to be clear on whether the Canadian Forces understand the motion to mean that and whether they are focusing military effort on the training process with a sense that this is what Parliament wants you to do; this is where we want the military effort to focus, on the training piece of the army.

• (1850)

The Chair: General Gauthier.

LGen Michel Gauthier: I have challenges with both short- and long-term memory. I actually missed the very first question, Mr. Wilfert. I did not hear it.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: The first question was why are we finding more IEDs lately. Why are we finding more of them now? This seems to be the major problem obviously in terms of our ability to combat the battle there.

LGen Michel Gauthier: On the first question, to be as brief and succinct as I can, this is not to make light of your question, but actually the more IEDs we find, the better. If we're finding them rather than detonating them, then we're saving lives. Actually, I'm not sure that you meant the question that way, but a part of the answer is that we actually are finding more by virtue of the equipment capabilities, by virtue of our tactics, by virtue also of support from the local population. The number of IEDs that are reported to us by the locals is on the rise. So in that sense, finding more IEDs is a good thing. Not finding more IEDs, but striking more IEDs, is a bad thing.

There is a dynamic between opposing forces where there's action, reaction, counteraction, adaptation, back and forth, and of course we have done that both with our tactics and with our equipment. The insurgents have done the same thing. There are periods—depending on where they are in their adaptive cycle and where we are in our adaptive cycle—where there will be more or less IEDs. I would actually say that, frankly, over the last two, three, or four weeks, there have been quite a few less IEDs. But in the previous period—if you look at the month of April of this past year and compare it to the month of April last year—there were more.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Those are other elements of what I was looking for, so you've answered that part.

LGen Michel Gauthier: Your second question was to do with the importance of success in eliminating the leadership cadre of the insurgents. That's just one element. There is so much more to this because what we have seen over time is that as you eliminate whatever level of leadership, the effect you have is relatively short term. In some cases it's longer lasting if you have a particularly effective individual who gets replaced by a lesser individual, or you have someone who's particularly key in the chain of command. He might not be a leader, he might be an IED facilitator or a financier or a logistics supporter or whatever. That's just one piece of this. We clearly recognize that this enables success, but it's by no means the be-all and end-all.

The be-all and end-all to winning the counter-insurgency and nation-building effort is to have a capable Afghan government, with effective national institutions, that has and sustains the confidence of its people. That's job one for us in terms of what we need to be supporting, and an element of that is the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army. As I'm sure you've heard, our soldiers over there do get that. They understand that clearly.

The third question was about Pakistan. Tough challenge; there are policy dimensions, political dimensions, development dimensions, and to a lesser extent, military dimensions to the solution to the problem. They involve the international community working with Pakistan, facilitating relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. They also involve what we are engaged in, which is direct engagement with both at the tactical level and at the operational level to try to facilitate meetings. And that occurs on the ground in Spin Boldak where you have Afghans, Pakistan military, and international officers brought together.

Can I keep on going with the answers to the other questions? Do we have time?

•(1855)

The Chair: We're a bit over time, so we should move on to the next questioner.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Can I ask, Mr. Chairman, to get in writing any answers that are not addressed?

The Chair: Yes. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Barbot, you have the floor.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with Mr. Bachand.

You told us that progress has been made, in particular in the Zhari and Panjwahi districts, but it is difficult to determine what that means exactly. You referred to people who had left those districts and who have since returned.

What proportion does that represent in comparison to all of the provinces that are not safe?

LGen Michel Gauthier: Do you mean the population that has returned to Zhari and Panjwahi?

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Yes.

LGen Michel Gauthier: I am not sure. I would say perhaps about 5 to 10 per cent of the population, no more. These are two out of seventeen districts.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Are the other districts safe?

LGen Michel Gauthier: I discussed that a bit. They are not completely safe. Some areas are safer than others. That is the nature of the environment. We do what we can with the Afghan army, police and local chiefs, both on the civilian and military side, to try to ensure their protection and encourage them to take responsibility for their own safety, up to a certain point. We are getting there, but the situation varies from village to village.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: So there are encouraging signs, but no major progress.

LGen Michel Gauthier: Everything is relative, Madam.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: That's what I'm trying to figure out.

LGen Michel Gauthier: Given the challenges we face in Afghanistan, I think that progress has continued and is stable. However, things are moving forward very slowly, and it's clear that it will take some time.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Could you give us an assessment of where we will be in 2011?

LGen Michel Gauthier: Unfortunately, my crystal ball isn't terribly clear on that subject. I would not even want to try to make a prediction. Will there be progress? Will we see progress within the population? Will districts become safer than they are today? Absolutely. Will we see functional progress with regard to the capacity of the police, the army, the governance of villages, districts and provinces? Yes, once again. To what extent? I couldn't tell you today.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Okay.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Good day, Mr. Gauthier.

LGen Michel Gauthier: Good day, Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand: How are you?

LGen Michel Gauthier: Quite well, thank you.

Mr. Claude Bachand: I have two questions for you.

Robert Gates deployed 3,000 American soldiers in southern Afghanistan. I'd like to know whether there are any changes. Are those American soldiers completely under the jurisdiction of Brigadier-General Thompson at present? You will recall that Robert Gates had said that the Canadian soldiers were taking part in a much more vigorous mission. What this involves isn't necessarily consistent with the Canadian approach. I'd like to know how this integration is working at present.

I have just come back from Valcartier today. No doubt, you have read the Auditor General's report on the supply chain. A number of people there have told me that this was starting to create a significant problem. Soldiers are even cannibalizing other trucks, meaning they are taking parts to use them where they are needed elsewhere. Have you talked with General Benjamin about this? The problem seems to be getting worse, in my opinion, and this is endangering Canada's intervention in Afghanistan.

● (1900)

LGen Michel Gauthier: In answer to your first question, I can give you a very clear answer, Mr. Bachand. In fact, there are slightly fewer than 3,000 soldiers. There are two US Marine Corps groups. One is working training the Afghan police and army, and the other, which is a battalion, is working under Major General Lessard. This is regional command south, in Afghanistan. These soldiers are under his orders. They are therefore following his orders. He decides, in cooperation with the commander of ISAF, obviously, what duties they will be assigned. It is clear that they come under the orders of the ISAF chain of command.

With regard to supplies, I don't want to minimize this, but I must say that it is quite challenging. A supply chain that extends 17,000 to 20,000 kilometres is not an easy thing, given all the equipment on the ground in Afghanistan. Every time I go there, and I've been more than 20 times, I ask those questions. In talking with soldiers, I get a very clear picture of their concerns. Every time I come back, I consult my staff—sometimes it's more than consulting—and General Benjamin does the same with his staff, since we work in close collaboration.

We recognize, clearly, that there are challenges, and we do everything we can to overcome them. General Benjamin, who has just come back from Afghanistan, sent me a report on his trip. I saw it this afternoon, but I haven't had the opportunity to read it. The report talks about these problems and the way in which they are being addressed.

Mr. Claude Bachand: *[Editor's Note: Inaudible]*

LGen Michel Gauthier: No, it is a classified document.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Unfortunately.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Ms. Black.

[English]

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

Thank you for coming to our committee.

I want to ask you about the evolution of the mission. In 2005, under the previous administration, under Prime Minister Paul Martin, we started under Operation Enduring Freedom before it changed over into the ISAF mission. So it seems to me we've had, since 2005, quite a few years to assess how the mission has evolved.

I wondered if you could talk about that. What changes have you seen in the direction, and what changes have there been to our mission there?

LGen Michel Gauthier: That's a really good question. It's a difficult one to answer in a couple of minutes, but I'll do my best.

Back in 2005, of course there were no Canadians in the south of Afghanistan. There was an Operation Enduring Freedom mission, and there were provincial reconstruction teams that were led by Americans in four of the provinces, and there were, essentially, two battalions' worth of troops, one in Zabul province and one in Kandahar province, operating throughout the area together with special forces. Their presence was obviously much less than it is today.

How much they were aware of what was actually happening across the south of Afghanistan back then is not obvious to me, because you don't know what you don't know.

The mission has evolved since then. We've had many, many forces deploying to the south of Afghanistan. NATO assumed command on the 31st of July, 2006. Our engagement was predicated on that, on the fact that there would be a transition to NATO command and that it would be a NATO mission. All we did prior to that was to try to set the conditions for that to happen.

I would say, over time, the larger number of international forces coming into the area, into areas where, quite frankly, there was no presence previously, has certainly attracted the attention of those who oppose the government of Afghanistan, Helman in particular. We call them insurgents, we call them Taliban, but it's more complicated than that. Of course there's a connection to narcotics and a number of other things; it's criminality as well as insurgency.

I referred to the progress as I see it in terms of evolution. I'm not sure if the question was about progress so much as the military footprint on the ground. The military footprint has grown. I would say that governance capacity at the district level and even down to the community level—you may have had a chance to see some of that in Afghanistan during your visits—is much more robust and organized than it was previously, with community development councils and district development assemblies. In some cases, not across the board but in some cases, there is more effective leadership at the district level, more effective leadership at the governance level.

But we still have a tough security environment underlying all the other efforts we're engaged in. The challenge, of course, is to be able to focus sufficiently in those areas where there are greatest prospects of success, so you get synergy between what we're doing on the security front and what we're doing with governance and with development. That's what we will see, I'm pretty confident, in Kandahar province relatively soon.

● (1905)

Ms. Dawn Black: My second question deals with a follow-up to Mr. Bachand. The Americans are there now in kind of a surge, similar to what took place in Iraq; that was the idea behind it. Also, there's a lot of speculation about Americans really increasing their involvement in southern Afghanistan. At this point it's just speculation about the long term, because I think the marines who are there now are only guaranteed for seven months or something. It's not for a long time.

From your perspective, if the Americans become much more heavily involved with the ISAF mission in the south, how will that play out with Canada's participation under the NATO banner if the Americans have a much, much larger participation?

The second question is around the surge that's taking place now. What do you think the effect of the surge will be in the long term, not the short term?

LGen Michel Gauthier: On the first count, of course, you understand that in Regional Command-East there are large numbers of Americans under ISAF command. There is some interesting reporting that's come out relatively recently. *The Economist*, I think, this week makes reference to the success of their approach in the east. Of course, there has been some controversy about some public remarks made about some nations versus other nations. I'm certainly not going to go there in terms of responding to that.

Frankly, I look at this incredibly positively. We have objectives. There is some military component to the objectives. There is a broader civilian effect, if I can use that term, to our focus over the next three years. And if we can get more security forces into Kandahar province, that certainly will not be a bad thing. It will be an absolutely positive thing.

• (1910)

Ms. Dawn Black: I'm more interested in your opinion on a massive amount of American participation. For NATO, as for any other organization, the numbers, to some extent, give the power. So I'm wondering what your opinion is on the rotation of leadership and how that will affect Canada's mission in Afghanistan, if that should happen.

LGen Michel Gauthier: We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. It's all speculation at this stage. I'm certainly not concerned about it, I will tell you, as the guy who is overseeing this mission right now. I see only positives in having more troops, more capable troops, deploying.

Ms. Dawn Black: What about the surge in the long term?

LGen Michel Gauthier: Right. The challenge with the surge is that it needs to be followed up. I think, by and large, when you surge forces in, they're able to disrupt, which doesn't necessarily have a lasting effect. They're able to clear, which doesn't necessarily have a lasting effect, unless you're able to follow it up with a holding capability. Clearly it will be important to get that effect following from whatever it is the marines do, wherever they do it. And that's well understood by commanders on the ground.

It's a matter of picking the right player off the bench to serve the right purposes and to sequence those in the right way to get an enduring effect, as opposed to a temporary effect.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

We will go over to Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, General, for being here.

I'm going to ask three or four quick questions that I'd like fairly quick answers to, if possible, and then I'll turn it over to Mr. Ohbhai.

First of all, just following up on Ms. Black's question on the Canadian Forces working with the U.S., how comfortable are you that at the operational level it's pretty seamless? Is that fair to say?

LGen Michel Gauthier: It is absolutely seamless, without question. This will be a success story. I can tell you that up and down the chain of command, the prospect—if there is a prospect—of partnering with the U.S. forces.... We're very familiar with them, very interoperable, and like-minded in many ways from a military perspective. It will be good news for Canada and it will be good news for Afghans.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: This goes to a question Mr. Ignatieff asked that you didn't get a chance to answer. You mentioned that our exit strategy is the OMLTs and POMLTs. Is it fair to say that if all that works, the ANSF, the Afghan National Security Forces, will be our replacement in 2011, whether they're quite there or not?

LGen Michel Gauthier: Clearly that would be the objective. The ISAF commander, I think, has gone on record as saying that he foresees success in that sense, in that timeframe. I think that will depend. Different formations will be ready at different times. But that clearly is our end state. What we're focused on is building this capability. There's a relatively structured approach to this from a United States perspective, with different capability milestones—to get back to Mr. Ignatieff's question—that you can associate with benchmarks: capability at the company level, capability at the battalion level, capability at the brigade level, numbers, self-sufficiency, and being able to lead operations. These are all things we are tracking now. And we're seeing progress.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: What we saw in the last week and a half, when we were there, was that across the board, from top to bottom, from Karzai to the Afghan military, from top to bottom on our side, there is a similar assessment and acknowledgement of the challenges, but there is also progress. What struck us, or certainly me, was what I call the maturation of the whole of government approach.

Is it fair to say that this has been the objective of the mission all along, notwithstanding the timing of the Manley report? Really, that's the direction you were trying to get to, notwithstanding anything else, and it's accelerating, obviously, because of the recent successes. Is that a fair statement?

LGen Michel Gauthier: From a military perspective, that has been our view all along. I've been briefing these three lines of operation for the last two and a half years. We have a leadership role in security, but securing is the foundation for governance and development for which other government departments are the lead.

The challenge over the last two and a half years has been that we've not had quite the critical mass of civilians required to deliver that civilian effect. That's coming. Remember, this is all relatively new.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: The Afghans are going to have an election in September 2009. What can you tell us about your expectation of increased insurgent activity relative to that, as they try to make whatever point they're trying to make? Can we expect that?

•(1915)

LGen Michel Gauthier: I think they'll do whatever they can at the time most suited to their capabilities. In our opinion, that time is now and over the next couple of months. Then we'll see a repeat in a more concerted way in the time leading up to the election through May and June of next year.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): General, our mission to Afghanistan is supposed to include development as a key component. Security is one of the major components in the umbrella of this thing. I think Canadians are interested in knowing how the development is progressing in the regions in which Canada is providing the security.

Sometimes we hear that the security is very tight, the situation is very bad, there's been devastation. Next we hear that we are building schools, or that we have all of these civilians moving in and then moving out. This leaves Canadians with a muddled picture of the overall development of the region. Perhaps you could enlighten us on whether there has been solid development progress. This would be opposed to the perception that we build and then it's broken away because of the tough and violent situation. Perhaps you could enlighten us on this.

LGen Michel Gauthier: In classic counter-insurgency operational theory, the challenge is to gain traction on a bottom-up basis. In talking about traction, we use the notion of ink spots that spread over time while we're building national institutions.

We are more focused on the bottom-up piece of this: districts, villages. Back in 2006, I would say we were more focused on Kandahar as a province. We're still looking provincially at what assistance is required for governance. At the same time, though, we have to prioritize. We have to focus. We have to focus functionally and we have to focus geographically. What we have seen increasingly over the last year or so is a district- and community-level focus to try to create stabilization zones that we can expand upon.

In each of those stabilization zones, we need to superimpose a number of different effects. One is our own security effect, using our own forces. Another is a security effect achieved by Afghan National Security Forces. Superimposed on that, once there's a level of confidence from IOs, NGOs, and so on, we use CIDA funds to bring in contractors who are able to deliver concrete effects that include the building of governance capacity. This way the locals have confidence in the guy or the *shura* who has a responsibility for helping and protecting them.

That's why the whole-of-government approach that we refer to is so important—a single effect won't last. We can apply it, but it fizzles. The spark goes out relatively quickly unless we're able to superimpose something else on top.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Patry, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gauthier, I'd like to continue along the same lines as my colleague Mr. Ignatieff. You will probably be able to answer his question at the same time as mine.

You talked to us about training and mentorship of the ANA and the ANP, which I feel is essential if we want this mission to be successful.

How is this being done? Are you training the ANA and the ANP at the same time? Are you training only one of them? How long is the training? What is the success rate?

Once they're trained, do members of the Afghan army remain in the Kandahar region? Are they going out on patrol alone or do they have to patrol with you? I'd like to know a little more.

Are you also training officers? It's good to have soldiers, but if there are no officers, it won't work.

We have been told that there is a great deal of corruption within the Afghan police, particularly since police officers are not well paid. If they are not well paid, are they leaving the police force to go and work in the private sector?

What kinds of performance tests do you run? What is your aim in this regard, particularly with the Afghan army?

•(1920)

LGen Michel Gauthier: Those are complex questions. Training isn't strictly physical training or instruction, it really is training. We establish a relationship with sub-units, units, a formation and a brigade which is affiliated with the Canadian formation.

Each Afghan infantry battalion has 500 to 600 soldiers. We have a team of mentors who work with them 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and each of those units follows a cycle. I can't go into too much detail because this is a security issue. The battalions follow cycles. They are operational and follow a training program for a certain period of time. They are on holiday for another period of time. Various units within the brigade follow those cycles, but we ensure that, on the ground, we have the personnel needed to ensure security.

Our mentors provide training, physical training and instruction during instruction and physical training periods. At the same time, they are deployed with units on the ground in the Zhari and Panjwaii districts. They provide mentoring and planning services. They help with planning so that the Afghan people can draw up operational plans so that the battalion commander can design, develop and communicate a plan and follow that plan on the ground with the assistance of Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Ignatieff would like to follow up.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: Thank you.

Very quickly, when I look at your statement you say we have moved from only 15 or so personnel involved in training and mentoring to roughly 220 Canadian men and women. That's obviously progress, but we have 2,500 troops in theatre. Are you saying to me that basically 10% of your military force is engaged in training? Do you envisage scaling up that number? Am I right to infer that only 10% of your effort is on training, because that strikes me as surprisingly low, worryingly low, and then the question is, are you going to scale it up?

LGen Michel Gauthier: With all due respect, sir, looking purely at numbers is a little bit of a mug's game. Of course, what's not reflected in the numbers is that most of those folks are leaders. So in terms of leadership, we have more leadership capability or capacity invested in the OMLT component of our force structure than we do in our battle group, in the fighting element of our force structure. And the commanding officer of the OMLT organization is a full colonel, whereas the commanding officers of the other units are lieutenant-colonels. So intellectually, and from a leadership perspective, that investment is there.

I also need to add, of course, that an awful lot of what the rest of the joint task force does is in support of the Afghans. We conduct partner operations with them. We support them logistically. We support them from a communications standpoint, and so on. Increasingly, as I said in my statement, our expectation is that they will lead and we will support and enable. And that supporting and enabling is not just about the mentoring part of the structure; it's about the whole joint task force.

So I can assure you that we are already where you are suggesting we need to be, and we'll continue to move in that direction. One of the challenges, of course, is that we have a fixed number of Afghans to work with. The Afghan National Army is only of a certain size, and what we actually need is to see more Afghan National Army in the south and in Kandahar province. At that point we will find a way to provide more mentors to assist with that particular process.

But this is a positive story. It's important. We get it, and we will continue to put all possible emphasis in this area.

• (1925)

The Chair: Thanks very much, General.

Madame Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Gauthier.

I will be splitting my time with my friend Mr. Gerald Keddy.

Mr. Gauthier, I am pleased to hear you speak. I am new to this committee. I am fascinated with Afghanistan, and I want to understand what's happening over there.

We have been in Afghanistan since 2002. There has been a great deal of progress achieved. Unfortunately, many people still think that success is instantaneous, that we need only snap our fingers to fix everything. On the other hand, we are told that the conflict in Afghanistan is different from other conflicts because this conflict is asymmetrical.

I am new to this field and I would like to know what the major difference between the conflict in Afghanistan and the other conflicts is. Are the strategies and the tactics being used in Afghanistan different from those we used during other conflicts? Are we on the right track with regard to this new strategy?

LGen Michel Gauthier: As to the differences between conflicts, it all depends on which ones you are talking about. From a Canadian perspective, if we draw a comparison with the Second World War, the Korean War or the First World War, we realize that they are completely different. Even during the Cold War, we were dealing with a military adversary with whom we were very familiar, who was very well structured and who employed conventional methods. In that context, what is asymmetrical is the opposite of what is conventional.

What we are doing in Afghanistan cannot be summarized as putting down insurgents. We are talking about rebuilding or building a country, institutions, Afghan armed forces, and working in close collaboration with our partners within a coalition. This is an interesting situation and one that poses various challenges. We are making decisions not only in a military context but also a pan-governmental context. Today, on the ground in Kandahar, there are important Canadian leaders, including Brigadier-General Denis Thompson, who is a military leader, and a civilian leader, Ms. Elissa Goldberg, who represents Canada in Kandahar. These two leaders quite often make decisions together. They are not strictly military decisions. For all those reasons, the situation is completely different from that during the good old days of the Cold War or conflicts that preceded the Cold War.

This is much more complex and intense. Consequently, the way forward is less obvious to us. Instead of basing ourselves on old doctrine, we have to write a new one as we move forward, since this is a new situation. We are learning and adapting. We learn lessons every hour, every day or week. As I said in my opening remarks, we are applying those lessons to how we conduct our operations or arm ourselves in particular.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Keddy, you have about a minute and a half.

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

Welcome, General Gauthier.

In the training of the Afghan forces, what have we done to encourage, within that Afghan force, an elite squad, a group that the rest of the Afghan army can look toward so that when you have a difficult situation, you can put that force in there on the ground, almost like special forces? It will certainly be required when the NATO forces withdraw. Have we looked at that, and looked at developing an esprit de corps for the Afghan army and forces?

• (1930)

LGen Michel Gauthier: We are absolutely on track for that and engaged to some degree. In addition to the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team force structure, we have a number of Canadians who are part of the U.S. command team building the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. Brigadier-General Al Howard is playing a key leadership role in building the ANA from Kabul.

In addition to the troops that we work with, a brigade of the Afghan National Army, Commando *Kandaks*, as they're called, have been in development. They have been deployed and are operational. There's one in the south of Afghanistan, and we are playing a role in mentoring them also. In the short time they've existed, which is a matter of months, they have done some pretty remarkable things. It's very positive.

We of course are encouraging capable units. There are a number of different arrows in the quiver you need to be able to apply to the right target, and they're going in a very positive direction.

The Chair: Thanks very much, General.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Barbot, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gauthier, I am a little concerned. You said that the army is not only there to conduct military operations, but that it is also rebuilding a country. Yet, when we considered the new motion with regard to refocusing the mission in Afghanistan, we were told that the army was ensuring a certain amount of security, but as time passed, civilians, CIDA or development organizations would be taking over.

I am having trouble understanding your remark.

LGen Michel Gauthier: I have not necessarily properly understood your question, but I am going to try to respond all the same.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I can repeat it.

LGen Michel Gauthier: I think that I have understood the important part of your question.

When civilian entrepreneurs, international organizations and NGOs can set up shop because there is an acceptable level of security, our role is not as important. If we cannot convince them to be the first to go to a sector of interest, we have discovered, over the past few months, that we need to spend some money and put our military engineers on the ground, who will be able to supervise and provide the necessary materials for building roads. That is what we will have to do for as long as the situation is not safe enough for our friends to be able to work there.

It is a question of sequence and progression on the ground. We will continue to take part in those kinds of activities, just like the

Americans, until our colleagues are able to go there with the needed resources.

Mr. Claude Bachand: I would like to speak to you about the Strategic Advisory Team, the SAT. You have a worthy objective, but the SAT also has its say and it has the ear of the President Karzai. Canada wants to rebuild the country, but sooner or later, the fact that the president is advised by a military team will create a democratic inconsistency, even if it could be justified at the outset due to the fact that we could count almost only on the military for restoring the country. That being said, I place my trust in you.

Are we creating a democratic inconsistency? Are you thinking of asking that the president be surrounded by a team of Canadian civilians rather than by a military team? Perhaps the time has come to look closely at this question.

●(1935)

LGen Michel Gauthier: I am not authorized to put any questions, but have you had an opportunity to discuss things with the Strategic Advisory Team?

Mr. Claude Bachand: No, because they reopened the Collège militaire de Saint-Jean, and we are very happy. Therefore, I chose to join the college festivities rather than to go to Kandahar.

LGen Michel Gauthier: I understand the principle that you are invoking, but I am not really in a position to discuss it. However, as you said, circumstances in 2005 made it difficult to do exactly what we had intended to do with our military strategic planning ability, because of the difficult and demanding circumstances with regard to security.

As the situation on the ground improves, especially in Kabul, these people must be replaced by civilians. This is the direction in which we are heading.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General Gauthier. As the chair of the committee and on behalf of my colleagues, I want to thank you for being here this evening. You are busy, but you took the time to come to discuss Afghanistan with us. Thank you once again.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we will move in camera to conduct committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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