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Chair

Mr. Pierre Lemieux

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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC)): Colleagues, perhaps I could have your attention. I would like to welcome you to the ninth meeting of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan.

In keeping with our mandate to have good communication with the Canadian public, of course, this meeting, like all of our other meetings, is televised.

This evening we have the great honour of having General Hillier in front of us as the Chief of the Defence Staff.

For our viewing audience, General Hillier has been the Chief of the Defence Staff over the past three and a half years and he'll be retiring at the beginning of July, after 35 years of service.

General, it's a great honour to have you here with us tonight. I would ask that you start with an opening statement.

Then we'll proceed with two rounds of questioning, colleagues—a seven-minute round followed by a five-minute round.

With that, General, I turn the microphone over to you.

[Translation]

General Rick Hillier (Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be able to speak to you today. This is my last opportunity to do so.

As Chief of the Defence Staff, the Canadian mission in Afghanistan is one of my main responsibilities. Over the past few years, not a single day has gone by—and that is the truth—without my thinking about various issues related to that mission.

[English]

I'll concentrate this evening on the military perspective on our role in Canada's mission in Afghanistan, and that is our responsibility for security, with an increasing focus on building and enabling the Afghan national security forces to, themselves, build and sustain a more secure environment in Kandahar and, therefore, for the country.

[Translation]

In order to assess the current situation in Kandahar, we must remember that the education of units is a long-term enterprise, and that the province of Kandahar is a Taliban stronghold. It is truly the centre of gravity of Afghanistan. So said President Karzai.

The situation in Kandahar is slowly and painfully changing, but progress is nonetheless occurring. We are far from September 2006 and operation Medusa, when Kandahar was essentially a war zone.

[English]

Our operations in Afghanistan are carefully laid out and conducted to help achieve one overall effect, which is, within a Canadian mission, to help Afghans secure and rebuild their country, focusing in particular on Kandahar province, where we are the lead nation for the NATO mission.

Those operations have three focal points or three strategic thrusts, if you will, to get that one effect.

First, we conduct security operations, including combat, in partnership with Afghan and allied forces, to force the Taliban onto their back foot and to allow building, in the most general sense of that word, to continue and accelerate. These operations are the most valuable part of our contribution to development and governance-building and to enabling those efforts to be successful. They are a direct contribution to the building and rebuilding in that country.

Second, we support directly the building of the Afghan National Army and also the Afghan National Police. We have made great strides in the former, with Afghan National Army leadership taking ever-growing responsibility for their own security, particularly over the last months and even more particularly over these last days. There is a complete brigade from the Afghan National Army on the ground in Kandahar province now. And there is a demonstrated ability over these last few days to surge in another Afghan National Army brigade and plan and conduct operations, and conduct them with ever-improving equipment, some of which, like the C7 rifles, came from Canada.

We have made less progress with the police, but we have seen some recent positive implications as a result of the recent massive international investment in building the Afghan police forces.

Third, while working to set conditions for better security in those first two strategic thrust lines, we work directly with and support our Team Canada—CIDA, DFAIT, and the RCMP—to implement, or enable to be implemented, specific initiatives. We know those efforts are essential to long-term stability, and we will do all we can to ensure their success. We all think alike in this regard.

I'll close by saying that there are about five things we should keep in mind in our mission in Afghanistan and in our approach to it.

First of all, containing the Taliban in the south, the centre of gravity, as I mentioned, directly permits the rest of Afghanistan, the majority of the country, to develop without anything but minor interference. Kabul, the northeast provinces, Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province in the north, and the complete west of the country are all far more stable and have developed or are developing much more quickly than in the south. It is a huge plus, and incredibly positive, and sometimes when you go into a city like Kabul, you actually wonder why there's any focus there now by the international community. That focus now needs to be increasingly in the south.

Second, despite all the progress around the rest of the country and the difficult progress, but still progress, in the south, the enemy has a vote and is completely unconstrained in the tactics they will use. They ignore the laws of war. They ignore the Geneva conventions at all times. And we must always remember that they do have a vote.

Third, there have been and there will be setbacks to the mission. The Taliban is not 10 feet tall, but it is capable and does learn and can both surprise and kill.

Fourth, development is absolutely critical as a visible and tangible sign of positive change and as a sign that there is an alternative to the desperate life guaranteed by the Taliban. And with that development, jobs become all-important. The roads we are helping them build—Route Foster and others—and the Canadian commitment to build schools, to rebuild the Dahla Dam, and to carry out things like a massive inoculation program for the children, who have the highest child mortality rate in the world, are powerful things for that population.

I've just referred to a conversation I had four years ago with President Karzai, when I was the commander of ISAF. We were talking about the desperate need for jobs in that country to keep people away from the Taliban and from being enticed by them and the offer of \$10 a day or so to pick up a weapon and shoot at us or the Afghan security forces. There is a desperate need to give them jobs, to give them hope for the future. I had a discussion with him about the program Canada ran way back, immediately following World War I, leading into the Great Depression, when hundreds of thousands of young men came home from the army and were without jobs, without hope. We established a construction program in this country that actually helped, I think, build the country we have today. It gave people hope for the future and a way to survive the present.

• (1835)

The last point I'd make before I sum up here is that governance is perhaps the most critical pillar of a country. This remains a personal concern of mine, and I know the concern is shared: how to help the Afghans build an effective government structure nationally and provincially and then deliver the things their population needs and be able to do it over the longer term.

I constantly remind folks that a lot of building went on in Afghanistan before, but when all the troubles took place in the early nineties, it wasn't the army that fell apart, it wasn't the security forces that fell apart; it was the government that fell apart and that then caused those security forces to break up and go to work for the warlords around the country and that led directly to the situation in which we now find ourselves.

In closing, I'll say just a few words about our young men and women in uniform, whose dedication and courage have been instrumental in bringing the progress we are starting to see show up in Kandahar today, and around the rest of Afghanistan, in great strides. They are incredible young Canadians. They are ordinary young men and women who do extraordinary work because of their great dedication. They are professional, they're highly motivated, they're robust in their approach, and they deliver effectively. They wear our nation's flag on their shoulders, much to our pride, and they represent you, me, and Canada in a massively great way.

I want to publicly say thanks to them and their families for the work they do, the stress they endure, and the sacrifices they make.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am prepared to take any questions you might want to ask me.

The Chair: Thank you very much for the opening statement, General.

I'll now turn to the Liberal Party and Monsieur Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): *Merci beaucoup.*

I will share my time with some of my colleagues. I just have one question for the general.

Last Monday the Taliban captured 10 villages. Up to now, the Afghan army has, with ISAF, counterattacked and recaptured four of the villages.

Today there was a press conference by L'Agence France-Presse, and a Taliban spokesman, Yousuf Ahmadi, spoke from Arghandab, declaring that ISAF and the Afghan army didn't get one inch and one fighter into Kandahar.

My question is, if a small force of 400 Taliban can have this effect, where are we heading, for the moment? What's going to happen?

• (1840)

Gen Rick Hillier: Sir, thank you for the question.

Mr. Chair, what I would say is this: I would take anything the Taliban say with an enormous grain of salt. As I have said to you, they are unconstrained by the law of war, they're unconstrained by the Geneva Convention, and they certainly are unconstrained by the truth.

They obviously inflate their numbers. We don't believe there are 400 warriors in that entire district. They have obviously inflated the number of villages in which they have some control or some presence on the ground. I think some of the TV photographs that have shown families going about their normal lives in those supposedly captured Taliban villages actually put the lie to their words.

The Afghan forces have demonstrated to us this time that out of any dark cloud, there is always a silver lining. What we've seen in these last days are Afghan forces surging into Kandahar province, another entire brigade on top of the one that's there. Last fall, as we worked with them to do operations against the Taliban, the most they could manage were basic operations for one battalion at a time.

Now they're running operations at the brigade and corps level and they have taken on an increasing responsibility that is very positive over these last several days—not perfect, but very positive—to bring in the forces, move them to the Arghandab district, restabilize the area, and ensure that the Taliban in fact do not control the villages there.

Those operations are progressing. The Taliban spokesperson, whoever he is, can stay on TV and talk about it all he wishes. At the end of the day, the Afghan National Army forces, supported by us but also by other allied forces, will ensure the security of Kandahar City, which is where the Taliban would like to go; and secondly, will re-establish the stability and security in that Arghandab district. We'll do this over the next days, and the Taliban will be pushed from that area, and hopefully we, with the Afghan security forces, will have such a significantly robust footprint that the Taliban will not be able to come back into it in the very near future.

So I would take everything he says with a grain of salt. We're conducting operations. Those operations will be successful, and we'll help re-establish security in the few villages where the Taliban are right now.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you for these specifics.

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you.

And thank you, General Hillier, for being here. For the record, I want to publicly thank you for your service to our men and women in uniform—you did a superb job—and also for our country. So I thank you.

And to reiterate, I add our thanks to our men and women in uniform for the service they are committing to our country and committing with excellence.

I want to pose a couple of things to you, General.

A Pentagon report recently indicated that in May the Americans lost more people in Afghanistan than they did in Iraq. I want to juxtapose that with what happened with the Sarposha prison break. If we're winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan civilian population, then presumably we would have the intelligence that would enable us to prevent such a thing from recurring.

Can you tell us whether we're winning the hearts and minds in that area? And if we are, how could such a break have happened, if we are being successful? If we're not being successful at winning the hearts and minds of the people in the area, what do we need to do to be able to accomplish that objective?

Gen Rick Hillier: Thank you for the question, sir.

First of all, in any counter-insurgency campaign where there's a rudimentary infrastructure—that is to say, in terms of telephone communications and Internet-based communications—and a large number of people such as the huge number who live in southern Afghanistan, it is incredibly difficult to know what is occurring in many of the little villages and towns and the locations of valleys around Kandahar itself.

With respect to the Sarposha prison, for example, we work not by ourselves but with our allies within NATO and the Afghans themselves to build a fairly complex, robust intelligence collection system. We do the analysis of all the information we get, working with all those different partners, and we try to predict exactly where people are going to be so we can proactively conduct our operations and not be caught by surprise. But when you have that rudimentary infrastructure and when you have a Taliban that can actually move in from an area and execute an operation without talking on cellphones or without telling folks around them that they're going to do that, occasionally they will achieve surprise. You cannot know everything all the time, and it is an extremely difficult culture in which to get information.

We get information all the time. Every hour of every day of every week we get thousands of pieces of information, and we try to balance that each against the other to see if there's a picture emerging. But sometimes there are just thousands of pieces of information and they're meaningless to us, or they're lies, or they've been deliberately injected by the Taliban, or something happens where they've decided to do something and the information gets to us and then they can't do it.

I'll give you the example of how some of these things work. When I was there myself as commander of ISAF, we were out on an operation, and we found ourselves in the middle of a city in the most godawful traffic jam with my small security convoy. We were absolutely tied up, could not move, with literally hundreds of vehicles, trucks and cars, mules and camels, and all those three-wheel bikes and motorcycles around us, and we were actually stationary. Over our secure radio we got a warning that there was a suicide bomber in that city, that it was directed at the commander of ISAF, that this was the target, and that we should be aware of the suicide bomber. Further, the intelligence was that the suicide bomber was in a yellow taxicab. We looked around and counted 72 yellow taxicabs within our field of view, and so the intelligence automatically became meaningless. But at the same time, if I'd been blown up with my convoy, I'm sure somebody would have walked backwards from there and said, "Well, you should have known, because somebody said it was a yellow taxi."

It is extremely difficult to parse out from the huge amount of information we get, the huge number of facts we receive, and put that together and get a very clear picture and not be surprised. Most of the time we get it right, and we proactively then take action to preempt something or to go after their leaders, or to achieve certain things that we believe are right. So the vast majority of the time we get it right, but occasionally, over a period of time, with enough of that information floating around and enough of it hidden from us, and with good operational security on the Taliban side—and they do have good operational security, which is how some of their leaders have survived for years without being targeted or without being taken out either by NATO or by other forces here—sometimes they can achieve surprise. In the case of the Sarposha prison, they did.

● (1845)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

Mrs. Barbot, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to be sharing my time with Mr. Bachand.

Good evening, General.

I would like you to tell us about security in Afghan prisons. This week, we were concerned by what happened at the prison that, without maligning the work done by our troops, enabled so many Taliban to escape. In answer to a question in the House, the minister said that it was not possible to ensure security in the prison and to avoid suicide attacks.

What are we to understand from this? Are Afghan prisons so lacking in security? Should we expect to see this happen again? What exactly is the situation?

[English]

Gen Rick Hillier: First of all, madame, I don't think we will see repeated events like that, because the Afghans, and in this case the Ministry of Justice, which had responsibility for that prison and the security of it, are learning some very painful lessons and have already learned some very painful lessons. They are taking measures to ensure that at other places around the country this kind of thing cannot occur or would be much more difficult to implement.

Secondly, it is their responsibility to secure their prisons. We will work with them over these next days and weeks to ensure that security is at the right level for anything in Kandahar province and to help ensure that this kind of thing doesn't occur again. They've learned a lot of lessons already. As we go through these next days and weeks and do the complete analysis of the kind of attack that took place, we'll help them learn some more lessons.

The one thing we know is that it was a massive truck-borne bomb that hit the wall of that prison and blew it open. That would have caused shock and dismay and destruction and death for a large area around it. It certainly helped create the conditions for many of those prisoners to escape.

We'll go through it with them. We'll support the Afghans as they learn the lessons on how to prevent this kind of thing from occurring again. We'll support them in improving the security of the prisons for which they have responsibility. That specifically is not our responsibility, but we want to work with them in the immediate area around there to make sure we can help them improve it.

Again, I would say we're not perfect. The enemy does have a vote. At times, they can achieve some surprise and get an attack through, as they clearly did in this case. We'll simply work with the Afghans that much harder to make sure the chances of it occurring again are reduced.

I come back to that same point. We used to have a rule in the units where I worked. Rule one was to focus on the enemy, and we do. The enemy has a vote; we want to make sure that vote can't be exercised very often.

•(1850)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Bachand, you have the floor.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Good evening, General.

I was listening closely to your arguments with regard to the Sarposa prison. Numerous observers feel that this is a monumental failure for intelligence services. You seem to be saying that they were lucky, to some extent, but it seems to me that we did not help ourselves. I am having difficulty understanding, because there was a massive assault on the prison. Not only was there a truck, but approximately 50 insurgents took part in the operation. It seems almost inexplicable that there were no warning signs. I would question the idea that you cannot predict everything, that we cannot ensure that there are no attacks against us. Instead, I agree with observers who said that this was a failure.

I would like to hear your comments regarding the fact that when people from Corrections Canada went there last year, the first thing they said was that the prison perimeter had to be secured. That was a year ago, and this was not done. Does this not prove that the various departments are working a little too much in isolation? Were the recommendations of Corrections Canada given to the Canadian armed forces? Did you provide your support to the Afghans in order to secure the perimeter?

Securing perimeters is a Canadian armed forces specialty. I am having trouble following you when you say that it was just random and that it could not have been avoided. I think that intelligence services failed to do their job. You should simply admit it and say that those flaws will now be fixed. Did the people from Corrections Canada tell the Canadian armed forces that the security perimeter absolutely had to be consolidated?

[English]

Gen Rick Hillier: Mr. Chairman and Mr. Bachand, thank you. *Merci beaucoup de la question.*

First of all, it was a significant attack, but I'm not sure that 50 fighters were involved in it. I would wait until we get the details for what the exact number was.

But yes, I don't deny that it was a significantly large attack, and it did achieve surprise and obviously achieved their objective. Therefore they can crow about it, because it was one of their successful attacks. But to say that we absolutely therefore should have known about that one is to not show an understanding of the complexity of the situation on the ground. To be able to move, in that large area teeming with people, numbers of men with weapons in small vehicles and to show up in an area is actually relatively easy to do. The fact that most of the time—in fact, the majority of the time—we can proactively preempt that kind of movement is, I think, a testament to the incredible hard work and the success we already have.

Once in a while they'll get it through. We still have a lot of analysis to go through with the Ministry of Justice folks who were doing the security of that prison. That was their responsibility, not ours. We are working in the general context of conducting security operations, not focused on each key piece of infrastructure in and around Kandahar City itself, because we wouldn't have nearly enough troops if we were doing that.

We'll do the analysis with them. We're most interested ourselves in how the attack took place, and we'll learn some lessons from it that will simply make us more capable in the future.

I don't know, but I anticipate that CSC passed us some of the details about the need for security. But we would have started to work with the MOJ, as a Team Canada, to get that security in place as opposed to doing it specifically ourselves. That's not what we do—look at each piece of infrastructure there.

So yes, it was a significant attack. Yes, they did have some success. And guess what? We'll carry on the normal operations. We'll pay attention to that ourselves. I know the Afghans are going inside-out to make sure they learn the lessons and take corrective measures, and we'll simply be better off as we go forward in the future—although we wish it had not occurred, obviously.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

Mr. Dewar, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you.

And thank you, General, for being here yet again. I guess this is the last time.

Gen Rick Hillier: It is.

Mr. Paul Dewar: July 1 is coming soon, so—

Gen Rick Hillier: It's July 2, sir.

Mr. Paul Dewar: July 2? All right. We have you for Canada Day. Good.

I want to start off by asking questions around the most recent events.

I think people have acknowledged, and you have tonight, that this is a bit of a setback, and that's the reality. The Minister of Foreign Affairs acknowledged that there are some things we need to know more about; for instance, in intelligence. Was there any collusion on the inside? How is it that they were able to strike so quickly and have such an effect, emptying a prison and setting us back?

My question is about who we are working with on the ground. Are we working with contractors who have been contracted for security as well as—and now I'm speaking of the prison—with the Afghans who are responsible for security in the prison? In other words, are there companies or contractors that we work in tandem with there?

• (1855)

Gen Rick Hillier: Mr. Chairman, no. To my knowledge—and my knowledge is perhaps not complete, but I'm pretty certain it is in this case—we are not working with any contractors for Sarposa prison, for example, who are working to provide security to that prison. It is the Ministry of Justice and Afghan national security forces who do that job and have responsibility for it.

Mr. Paul Dewar: So if there were any breakdown, it would be within those two groups? In other words—what the minister was musing about the other day—if there was collusion or there was someone on the inside, it would be someone from either of those two groups: the Ministry of Justice or the other?

Gen Rick Hillier: I have all kinds of personal thoughts and processes about what occurred, how it occurred, and how effective it was. But I prefer to wait until we get an opportunity to walk through the analysis with the Afghan security officials themselves, with the Ministry of Justice particularly, just to make sure we can learn as much as we can without my speculating on what might have

occurred. There are all kinds of possibilities, and it would be nice to be able to put some of them concretely to bed.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Absolutely, and I think that's a fair point.

I'd like to know a little more about how you see the.... I heard you say earlier that we're going to carry on what we're doing, that we're going to keep focused on some of the goals that have been set out, both through the work that you have been doing previously and, I guess, what the government is giving some direction on.

One of the things I'd like to ask a bit more about is the whole-of-government approach, as you understand it. What we've heard from the government is that it includes DFAIT, CIDA, and the military. A little bit of a surprise to me is that the team also includes the U.S. State Department and members from the U.S. police mentoring teams, as well as USAID. How long has that team approach, as far as you know, existed—in other words, having those other component parts, from the U.S. State Department, from U.S. mentoring teams, as well as from USAID, which, for those who don't know, is like our CIDA?

Gen Rick Hillier: I think there are two separate components here, Mr. Dewar.

First of all, of course, as you are aware, before the NATO mission assumed responsibility for region command in south Kandahar province in August 2006, it was Operation Enduring Freedom, which was the American-run mission. So on the ground you had the U.S. State Department, USAID, the U.S. embedded training teams with the Afghan battalion, and if I recall correctly, some police trainers who are there. Many of those folks then moved out as battalions changed and as NATO took over and more Canadians arrived on the ground. But as Afghan army units and police move in, for example, we have actually seen embedded training teams and trainers and mentors from many nations on the ground. So we work with units that have British training teams, we work with units with French training teams, and equally, we work with units that have U.S. embedded training teams in them.

The massive investment into the police that I spoke about is coming in a huge way from the United States of America, so we are seeing more in the way of police training teams trying to build them—even though we're seeing them from other countries also.

That complex international team has been on the ground for quite a while. The Team Canada part, which really works well together, in my view, actually then functions within that and sometimes gets great support from USAID dollars that actually fund the road or the training teams that are building the police that we need to be able to help the security in Kandahar province.

Mr. Paul Dewar: One of the things I found interesting and surprising was that in Kandahar, in the PRT that we visited most recently, the team did consist of the component parts I mentioned. I think most people weren't aware of that. I certainly wasn't, as a member of Parliament. The team, as was illustrated to me, was the State Department, USAID, and police mentoring teams.

The other part I found interesting, and you've touched on it, is that the funding for a lot of the police training is actually from the Operation Enduring Freedom, to the tune of \$8 billion that the Americans are providing for training.

My point in illustrating this is just to lay it out for people, that this is how things are working on the ground. I understood OEF as a separate parallel mission, but I see integration in terms of the training, at least with police.

Do you have any concerns about that? Because some of us do, simply because we believed that the ISAF was doing its job, and that OEF—I have problems with it, but we'll agree to disagree on that—was separate. What I'm seeing, certainly in the organizational charts and the funding, is that there actually is integration of those two.

Does that concern you at all?

• (1900)

Gen Rick Hillier: In fact, no, it doesn't, Mr. Dewar. I think we have the most positive of both sides of the fence with the least risk. ISAF-NATO has taken on the mission for the security in Afghanistan itself. OEF continues to keep the mission for building the police of Afghanistan under their mandate. NATO has refused to take it. And the United States of America, of course, ends up then funding to the tune, as you mentioned, of billions of dollars, and equally importantly, of hundreds moving to thousands of police mentors that no other country has been able to provide at this point in time.

So we, working in NATO in the ISAF mission, have exactly the right set-up, where we work for the institution that we belong to, and then we actually get to take advantage of that OEF investment into the police building, because without it we wouldn't see any positive implications for years.

That's essentially the extent of OEF operations there.

The Chair: Thanks very much, General.

We'll go over to Mr. Hawn.

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

Thank you, General, for coming, and thank you again for your many years of dedicated service—I didn't say decades this time.

General, just to follow up on a question from before, is the reason for the American losses in the month of May in Afghanistan being more than in Iraq because their losses increased dramatically in Afghanistan or because they decreased dramatically in Iraq?

Gen Rick Hillier: In fact, it's largely the latter. I don't follow Iraq in great detail. That's not my part of ship. I have sufficient to occupy my every waking hour, all the time.

What I have been able to assess myself is that they've had some progress in Iraq that is actually fairly significant, from their view, and as a result the level of violence has in many cases diminished. As a result of that—obviously very important for them—they have had significantly fewer losses. It has actually fallen below what is a consistent level of losses in Afghanistan.

Now, I wouldn't underestimate, though. At this point in time we have been expecting, and we are seeing, up in the Arghandab area—and perhaps it's part of the Sarposa thing—that in that normal campaign season in southern Afghanistan there has been an increase from January, February, and March in fighting and operations and attacks by the Taliban. This started early in May, just as the poppy harvest season was ending and all those young men were deciding to pick up a gun for \$10 a day or so.

So we get an increase right at this point in time that carries on through the summer, which is exactly what we've been expecting, and we've been conducting operations to make sure we can mitigate as much as possible and then take advantage to further accelerate the progress.

So there might have been a tiny bit of that. But they've had success in Iraq. They've reduced their losses there because they've reduced the violence there. That is the basis of that difference and change.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So it is not a condemnation of the lack of progress in Afghanistan.

Gen Rick Hillier: No, not at all.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Many Canadians think the mission has changed post-Manley, that now all of a sudden we're concentrating on development, governance, and reconstruction—as if we weren't doing it before. Can you comment on that, or is this just a continuation of what's been the mission all along?

Gen Rick Hillier: I think there's been a great realization that we've been doing this all along and that now we're doing it much, much better. The Canadian Forces have been doing much of the reconstruction outside Kandahar City. In many cases, we're using money provided and generally overseen by CIDA. We think this has worked well in risky areas, where civilians do not yet fit. But as a result of the Manley report, an immense amount of work has gone on amongst all the departments, with Foreign Affairs in the lead. They are focusing better and getting a greater effect.

I'll tell you from the heart that we're very excited about some of our recent commitments. There is one for 50 schools. There is the Dahla Dam, which is massive in its potential positive implications. This dam could end up changing the lives of tens of thousands of people in the Arghandab district right down to Kandahar City, to Pashmul. There is also the program to inoculate some seven million children against polio.

We are talking about a country with one of the highest child mortality rates in the world, and I think these programs are absolutely exciting. They will provide jobs for the boys, which is key right now. But there will also be things that show every Afghan in the south that there is hope—a different life from what the Taliban is planning. We in the Canadian Forces are absolutely delighted with this commitment, and we're going to bend our backs to make sure we can enable it to be as effective as possible.

• (1905)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Some commentators have suggested that what happened recently and what we are facing now is another Operation Medusa. How would you characterize those comments?

Gen Rick Hillier: I would say it's anything but. First, I'd look at it from the friendly forces side. When we were in Operation Medusa, we had no Afghan forces with us whatsoever. They simply weren't available, and those that were available around the north or near Kabul were not capable of coming in and conducting operations of the nature that we faced in Operation Medusa. Their leadership was not capable of planning and then commanding and conducting those operations, and they weren't equipped, trained, or ready. Now we have six Afghan National Army kandaks, or battalions, moved in. So we have two full brigades with a core commander exercising command and control, with the senior commander of the Afghan National Army on the ground in Kandahar. They are doing the planning for operations to restabilize the Arghandab district. They've already started these operations. What we see there is night and day compared with 18 or 20 months ago.

From the enemy perspective, in Medusa they put a lot of fighters in the field and managed to keep them there. They dug into one area and determined that they would own it. They were ready for a conventional, almost World War I kind of fight, and they paid a tremendous price. They will not do that in Arghandab. They don't have the number of warriors that their spokesmen like to claim they have. They don't have the number of villages. When they get into a firefight, they'll try to disappear as quickly as possible. Our aim is to make sure they can't just melt away and come back to fight another day.

We'll support the Afghans. The Taliban cannot conduct the kind of operations they did during Medusa. Conversely, the Afghan army can conduct the kind of operations they had no possibility of conducting just 18 to 20 months ago. So I think the difference is phenomenally greater right now.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: The ANA and ANP have been called our exit plan. With what you've seen of their training and what you've learned in the last few days, where do you think they might be by the end of 2011?

Gen Rick Hillier: As for their tactical capabilities, I'm focused on building an Afghan National Army brigade in Kandahar province, with all the supporting pieces. If we accomplish this, we will have made significant progress. Three years from now, we will have a robust brigade that will be well trained, well led—we have to work with the leaders that the Afghan army puts in—and well equipped. Of course, the continuity of the program to equip the Afghan army, funded mainly by the United States of America, continues at the pace we see. They'll be a well-prepared brigade.

There will be setbacks. It's two steps forward, one step back. Occasionally it's two steps back, but mostly we're going forward. We will have a solid brigade there. They will have an immense capability to conduct security operations and help stabilize Kandahar province, so we'll have done our piece. In line with our commitment, if they station more Afghan battalions in Kandahar province, we will free up the training teams to work with them. We're doing this now with the commando battalion that just showed up in Kandahar province.

So we'll have a robust Afghan National Army brigade. There will be less progress, though, with the police.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

Colleagues, we're now moving into a five-minute round, and we go to Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to share my time with Mr. Dosanjh. And I'll try to be quick.

General, welcome. There are a number of things that interest me, but two areas in particular.

One is the ability to sustain peace, given what is going on with Pakistan and the constant border situation. It seems, from what I read and what a lot of people are saying, that with the most recent agreements of the current government with the Taliban in Pakistan and with the soft touch, we're going to constantly be seeing insurgents coming across.

To what extent do you think this is going to cause instability? It seems to me we have an unending situation with that kind of problem across the border. I would like your thoughts on that.

The other area is the issue of development. I know we have beefed it up; you have just mentioned a number of projects and very major construction. But I'm wondering about the extent to which the whole area of development in Afghanistan, not just by us but others, is leading now. It seems to me that if we don't win the hearts and minds of people in terms of their income and addressing poverty, we probably won't succeed.

And there is the issue of poppies. Are we able to eradicate the poppies? Is there a major program to diversify, to move the people away from that? Do we buy them?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Maria Minna: I don't mean to use; they need money. Can we get the farmers to switch? They have to sell their product, so instead of their selling it on the illegal market, maybe we take the poppies away from them.

I'm just asking whether there are any really innovative ideas out there to try to deal with some of these problems.

• (1910)

Gen Rick Hillier: Thank you for the question.

I'll just start at the third point and work backwards. I'm a Newfoundlander, so my mind works in mysterious ways, even to me at times.

On the poppies and the drug issue, this is a massive problem. Nobody minimizes it and I certainly would not. I've seen it first-hand. You see fields, acres, and valleys covered in poppies, and you know what's coming from that: 95% of the world's production of opium, 5% to 10% of which is flowing into North America itself. That's a direct threat to us.

Let me offer you General Hillier's assessment, based on what I know about this mission and what I've seen in the country.

There is no short-term solution. You almost have to build the country around the problem and eradicate it that way. The United Nations drug prevention programs say that any country that has a per capita income of more than \$1,000 per year will not be a drug-exporting country. Afghanistan right now stands somewhere in the \$450 range of per capita income. You have to help build an economy, a rule of law, and a government structure that can maintain both those things to finally, fully, and effectively get rid of the drug problem—certainly reduce it significantly, but get rid of it completely.

In the shorter term, various programs inside the country, Afghan-led and funded by many different nations, have had varying degrees of success. But that success has not yet been able to change the fundamental scope of the amount produced, although there's been lots of determination for it. It's a long-term solution, I believe.

Secondly, on the development side and whether we are winning the hearts and minds, what I suggest to you is what I alluded to in my opening remarks. If you draw a line around Helmand, Kandahar, and perhaps a couple of other provinces in the south, in the rest of Afghanistan in that great arc—including Kabul and Badakhshan province, Mazar, Balkh, and Herat—the development has been absolutely phenomenal. There are basic medical services, roads, transportation networks, and those kinds of things. Those are very basic but are still going in. People have been able to go back to farming, move back to their homes, and have some security. Even though we continue to question and be concerned about the capacity of the police, we actually think that around the rest of Afghanistan the development is phenomenal.

If you go to Kabul after you've been to the provinces, you kind of say, "Why are we wasting our time here? We should be putting the effort out there because the development is so far ahead." But that development, particularly on the transportation side, relates to problem three. You can offer farmers an opportunity to plant something else. They're world famous for watermelons and fruits and vegetables, which they used to provide to Pakistan. They used to supply all of India's demand for figs, but all that disappeared when their basic transportation systems were destroyed. As an opium farmer, you can take a \$10 million crop out on a mule train, but if you want a \$10 million crop of watermelons, etc., you need to have a road network with a transportation system to move it to market.

So the development part is fundamental to it. We see it right around the country. It's more difficult in the south because of the greater risk and lack of security, or the instability.

Leading to the issue of sustaining the peace, there's no question there are two pieces to helping Afghanistan become a stable country.

First is helping them build their own structures, including the security structures to look after their own businesses.

Second is helping Pakistan resolve the issues on the federally administered tribal area provinces and being able to improve the lives of people there. We have great concerns about some of the things that have happened on the frontier and the easy flow of people back and forth with weapons at places. We think Pakistan has done a lot—and I'm speaking from the military perspective—in the past several years, and in the past months particularly. It needs to do

much more and will need some help, there's no question about it. The solution is equally in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the challenges are immense.

• (1915)

The Chair: Thanks very much, General.

We'll go to Mr. Khan for five minutes.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, General Hillier. It's always a pleasure to have you as a witness. It's too bad we won't be having you for a long time.

Thank you again for your service to the country.

Whenever something happens that is not good—a little surprise, or a security situation such as the break-in at the prison, the focus is immediately on whether we are failing. I understand there should be concern, but at the same time, I would like you to tell us in your own words what has happened since the break-in. How have the NATO forces combated the Taliban, and what are the latest results?

There's always a silver lining in every cloud, and I'm trying to find a silver lining in this one.

Gen Rick Hillier: Sir, I could come back and just mention that I always believe that in a dark cloud there's a silver lining, and if you work hard enough, in a silver cloud you can find a dark lining. There are obviously lots of folks who always want to do that.

From our perspective militarily, we've been watching the Afghan National Army security forces. We've been working now for these last two or two and a half years, specifically from the Canadian perspective, to produce and develop their units and develop their leaders and get them to take responsibility for security operations, and then actually not only take responsibility but be able to deliver. The silver lining, the positive thing here, is that all of a sudden we've seen that—yes, with massive challenges and problems, but still able to deliver. We've seen that.

When we conducted operations with one of their battalions last November and October up in roughly that same area, they had difficulty running a battalion, a small battalion, and we had actually a significant Canadian Forces unit with them to make sure we could backstop them and support them. Now they've got a full-up brigade operating up near the Arghandab. They've done all the planning for it themselves and putting it in place, and they appear to be relatively successful in being able to implement those operations.

We've turned from a joint partnership in working through those operations to taking very much a supporting role, even though our platoons are with their companies helping them conduct the operations themselves. What we have seen here is a very positive thing, and what we want to be able to do is build up on it.

They've also taken responsibility to bring a sense of calm and stability and psychological security, if you will, to Kandahar City itself, after the Sarposha prison break and after all the discussion from the Taliban spokesmen about what they were going to try to do in the Arghandab. They've had extra police come in, some of the ANCOP battalion, and they have actually been very visible and, we believe, very effective in helping restabilize Kandahar City itself in a certain sense, so that people are comfortable that the Taliban aren't going to end up there. We think that's a very positive thing. They simply weren't capable of it even six months ago, let alone 12 months ago.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Has there been any combat right after the break-in?

Gen Rick Hillier: I'm sorry, sir?

Mr. Wajid Khan: Has there been any combat today, or right after these people escaped? Has there been any combat with NATO forces?

Gen Rick Hillier: We weren't involved in combat operations right after they escaped. Certainly there has been combat up in the Arghandab district today. There are Taliban around there, and the Afghan forces and our troops are in contact with the Taliban up in that area. And we continue, by the way, to carry on operations in the Pashmul area and the Panjwai districts, where we've made some great progress.

For example, we are helping the Afghans build what we call Route Foster, and we've got perhaps 450 young Afghan men out there who every day, despite being threatened by the Taliban, come to work for a very small salary. They are building that road and actually paving that road. We continue those operations.

There is some combat up in the Arghandab district, but we have troops in contact with the Taliban just about every day in Kandahar province.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Since the last elections in Pakistan, all the hierarchy—the government, the foreign minister, everybody—has acknowledged that this is not an American war; it is actually for the survival of Pakistan itself, and it's a very complex situation within. What is encouraging is that there have been 12 elected members from the FATA and eight senators. There are 20 of them there.

I have spoken to some of them, and also the military. They believe there has to be a political, socio-economic, and definitely a military solution. The military aspect is not being diminished.

Do you agree with their views?

Gen Rick Hillier: In fact I do, and I've had some significant discussions with their chief of general staff, General Kayani, about the challenge. The challenge is really almost the same, if not absolutely the same, as the challenge inside Afghanistan.

The military will bring about a temporary absence of offensive operations and warfighting, and then you build a nation underneath that, but you've got to do it with development and offer them a hope for the future, and you've got to do it with some infrastructure and jobs. In the FATA, up on that frontier, that's exactly what's needed, in General Kayani's view. He was trying to shape the Pakistani army towards being a significant part of that, and certainly in my view seemed focused on doing much more in the FATA, more quickly and more effectively.

Obviously we measure from the other side of the frontier, somewhat, to see what the results will be.

• (1920)

The Chair: Thanks very much, General.

Monsieur Bachand, vous avez cinq minutes, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: General, during our committee's meeting yesterday, I questioned you about sexual assaults by the Afghan forces. You said that you had ordered your commanders to not turn their backs and do nothing if they became aware of sexual assaults being committed, and that you were encouraging them to send the message down the chain of command that those assaults had to be stopped and condemned. I believed you and I still believe you. Even if there is a chance that this will no longer happen, things have happened in the past. I questioned the minister about this the day before yesterday and his answer to me and other members was that there would be a full criminal investigation.

Have you been ordered by the Department of National Defence to investigate the Afghan forces' involvement in sexual assaults? When do you intend to begin that investigation?

The Bloc Québécois announced today that it was tabling a motion in the Standing Committee on National Defence asking that the two chaplains and Canadian officers who witnessed those events be asked to appear.

Do you agree that these individuals should appear before this committee in order to get to the bottom of this extremely delicate issue?

[English]

Gen Rick Hillier: Sir, thank you very much for the question.

I'd hesitate before I would say "things committed by" as in determination that, yes, they were. As far as I know, any of the things that we have heard have not been in direct witness of any actions, so I think we want to be very careful.

Yes, we are going to investigate. The minister and I have one view on this and we're going to investigate, and if there's any substance to what we have heard some soldiers say, we will try to get to the bottom of it.

What I did yesterday with my chain of command was simply reaffirm what my expectations are. But I go back and say we actually want to put a question mark over this, to start with. To my knowledge, from what I have heard so far, nobody is saying they have directly witnessed any kind of assault, etc. I wasn't only referring to potential sexual assaults yesterday; what I talked about was serious abuse. If our soldiers see it, as they saw in Bosnia, as they saw in Croatia, nobody is going to stand by. We're there to help Afghans, and if we are witness to serious abuse and anybody sees it, they immediately alert the chain of command, immediately take action, and then, supported by that chain of command, hand it to the Afghans to make sure they resolve it, with our assistance.

So I would repeat, yes, we're going to investigate it, and if there's any substance to it, we'll lay out whatever we find.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: If parliamentarians wanted to conduct their own investigation by calling before the committee the two chaplains and a Canadian officer who said that Canadian officers ordered soldiers to ignore cases of sexual assault, to just turn away and look elsewhere, would you be in agreement? Would you allow the chaplains and Canadian officers who are prepared to do so to testify before the committee? Could you confirm that you will not pressure them any way whatsoever to prevent them from coming?

[English]

Gen Rick Hillier: Sir, if you want my honest opinion, I think it would be a total waste of time right now. I tell you that. I think you would be chasing a little wisp of fog, thinking it was smoke, without determining first of all if there's a fire there. I think that's what we should first do, determine if there's something there that we missed, or something there that people heard about. If we go from there and find that yes, there was, we'll lay that out, and then you could determine whether you want to do something within Parliament or not. But I would say that at this stage that would be premature in the extreme. That's only my personal opinion, because I think you're chasing a will-o'-the-wisp.

• (1925)

Mr. Claude Bachand: And you wouldn't permit them to come and testify in front of the committee if it started next week or the week after.

Gen Rick Hillier: I'm not sure what my authorities are in forbidding people from coming to testify in front of Parliament. I'd have to walk through that, sir.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

This brings us to the end of the second round, colleagues.

As chair, General, on behalf of this Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, I'd like to take this last opportunity to thank you for your outstanding service to Canada. As I mentioned before, it has lasted more than 35 years. You've been an exceptional Chief of the Defence Staff, and you've consistently championed the men and women who serve in our Canadian Forces. They've performed as well as they do because of their training, but also in great part because of your leadership.

So on behalf of my colleagues, I wish you all the best on your retirement. I suspect that you will remain busy. Once again, I'd like to thank you for taking time out of your schedule to be with us tonight.

Gen Rick Hillier: Sir, thank you very much for that.

Can I just say, not only was it my job during these past three and a half years, it was my passion. What am I going to do in my retirement? I am going to run in Saint-Jean and I'm going to beat Mr. Bachand a hundred to nothing in the election.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

Colleagues, I'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

• (1925)

(Pause)

• (1930)

The Chair: Colleagues, the meeting is resumed.

In this second hour of our committee meeting, I'd like to welcome Yves Brodeur, who is the assistant deputy minister of the Afghanistan Task Force for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade; and Stephen Wallace, the vice-president of the Afghanistan Task Force for the Canadian International Development Agency.

I'll ask Mr. Brodeur to give us an opening statement, followed by Mr. Wallace, and then, colleagues, we'll move through two rounds of questioning. One round will be seven minutes, followed by a five-minute round.

With that, *Monsieur Brodeur, le micro est à vous.*

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Brodeur (Assistant Deputy Minister, Afghanistan Task Force, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for giving me and my colleague from CIDA, Stephen Wallace, this opportunity to brief you on the Paris conference.

On June 12, the governments of France and Afghanistan, alongside the UN, co-hosted a high-level conference on Afghanistan. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, the Honourable David Emerson, attended the conference, along with representatives of 85 states and organizations, including all major troop and development assistance contributors, the World Bank, the IMF, NATO, as well as regional states, including Pakistan and Iran.

President Sarkozy, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and President Karzai opened the event, which was presided over by French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner and Afghan foreign minister Spanta.

The conference was a seminal event in the international community relationship with Afghanistan. It wasn't, of course, easy to brief international partners on Canada's approach to Afghanistan. It was also a valuable occasion for advocacy on several issues of importance to Canada.

In my short presentation today I will discuss how the conference fits into the current situation of Afghanistan, outline Canadian objectives for the conference, and explain how Canada's main objectives of the conference were met.

Mr. Chair, allow me to begin by providing a bit of context on the situation in Afghanistan leading up to the Paris conference.

First, it is important to remember that nearly seven years have passed since the ouster of the Taliban.

Second, the Afghanistan Compact was signed at a similar conference that took place in London two and half years ago. We're now at the halfway point of the compact's five-year framework for international cooperation with Afghanistan. The compact remains the shared foundation for engagement between Afghanistan and the international community. It contains a series of benchmarks focused on security, governance, and social and economic development.

Third, in March 2008 the Security Council adopted a more focused mandate for the UN assistance mission in Afghanistan, the UNAMA. It also endorsed the appointment of Kai Eide, a distinguished and respected Norwegian diplomat, as the new top UN official in the country.

Fourth, in April 2008 NATO allies reaffirmed their joint commitment to Afghanistan at the Bucharest Summit. NATO partners jointly agreed on the following principles to guide the Afghan mission: a firm and shared long-term commitment; support for enhanced Afghan leadership and responsibility; a comprehensive approach by the international community, bringing together civilian and military efforts; and increased cooperation and engagement with Afghanistan's neighbours, especially Pakistan.

The Paris conference was an opportunity to reflect on accomplishments achieved over the first half of the Afghanistan Compact term, but also on the challenges to be faced in the second half—and there are many, as the events of the last weekend demonstrated. It was also an opportunity for the Afghan government to launch the Afghanistan national development strategy, ANDS, a long-term plan for social and economic recovery of the country.

This important document reflects more than two years of rigorous consultations, a process that the World Bank and IMF have lauded. It is intended to outline an in-depth, multi-faceted strategy across all sectors of development in Afghanistan.

• (1935)

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I will now turn to Canada's objectives at the conference. First, let me just say that, from Canada's perspective, the Paris Conference was a success. First and foremost, given the current situation, the Canadian government wanted to ensure that the major international and Afghan actors accept the need for a focused, prioritized approach.

In that context, Paris was a perfect opportunity for the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to communicate Canada's six priorities, as laid out in the first quarterly report tabled in Parliament on June 10. Minister Emerson was able to communicate the priorities in his speech to the assembly, as well as during bilateral meetings and to the international media. Canada's approach received praise from Afghans as well as from our international partners.

A second objective at the conference was to confirm our position as one of the top bilateral donors overall. In that report, Canada does pledge a contribution of \$600 million—aligned with our priorities and the ANDS—which brings our 10-year total up to \$1.9 billion.

Canadian spending in the next three years will, among other things: build the capacity of the Afghan national security forces; strengthen the government's ability to deliver basic water, education and job-oriented economic growth services; support efforts to enhance Afghan-Pakistani dialogue and border management; and support the urgent rehabilitation of Kandahar's main water source—the Dalah Dam—and its irrigation and canal system.

My CIDA colleague Stephen Wallace can speak to our development programming in more detail.

Our third objective was to clearly express our strong support for the newly appointed Special Representative to Afghanistan of the UN Secretary General, Mr. Kai Eide, as the lead international actor in Afghanistan. It is important to note that all the participants, including President Karzaï, expressed their clear and strong support to him.

Minister Emerson also reiterated Canada's support for the key role the United Nations must play in Afghanistan. The minister also used the opportunity to communicate a number of additional messages to the Government of Afghanistan and the international community.

In conclusion, the Paris Conference marked a turning point in the international community's relationship with Afghanistan. Mr. Chair, Canada played an important role at the conference, as it is doing in Afghanistan.

[English]

I'd like to thank you once again for this opportunity to brief you on the Paris conference. I look forward to answering your questions.

I will leave the floor to my colleague from CIDA.

Merci.

The Chair: Very good. *Merci beaucoup, monsieur Brodeur.*

We go to you, Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Stephen Wallace (Vice-President, Afghanistan Task Force, Canadian International Development Agency): Thank you very much, Chair. It's a real pleasure to be here this evening.

[Translation]

Thank you very much for this opportunity. It is an honour to be here this evening.

[English]

Let me just take this opportunity to expand on some of my colleagues' remarks, as well as those of Mr. David Mulroney in connection with his recent appearance before this committee, to give you some details on Canada's approach in relation to the six priorities that have already been discussed.

First let me touch on the issue of alignment of these six priorities with discussions in Paris and with specified local Afghan needs.

The first thing I would say on this is that we've taken great care to ensure that these six priorities are fully consistent with those of the Government of Afghanistan. These priorities are clearly articulated in the Afghanistan Compact and also the Afghanistan national development strategy, which was discussed in detail in Paris. There the government underlined their need to achieve greater prioritization within that development strategy and to be able to provide some focus, which we thought was very important and which we support. We are trying to demonstrate this commitment in earnest by working to focus our programming in turn around a very targeted set of objectives.

In Paris, the Afghan government emphasized the importance of having the international community increase its support for two elements of that development strategy in particular: infrastructure and rural development in Afghanistan, with a view to providing direct, enhanced well-being of Afghans and their access to economic opportunity.

Canada's initiative to rehabilitate the Dahla Dam will help to address this need in Kandahar province in a tangible way by providing a secure water supply of benefit to the majority of the population of the province, by generating over 10,000 seasonal jobs in relation to the rehabilitation effort, and by ensuring adequate irrigation for at least 10,000 hectares of productive land on an ongoing basis.

In addition, the development strategy highlights the need to strengthen the education sector. In recent months, the Afghan government has asked Canada to take a leadership role in this sector, a role that we have readily accepted. We are now the top contributor to EQUIP, the national program that aims to build schools, improve teacher training, gain better access for girls, and enhance the educational system as a whole. We plan to increase our support to EQUIP both in Kandahar and nationally and to complement this support with specific programs to strengthen capacity and innovation.

Canada is also mindful that to Afghans good governance, in the end, means a capable government that delivers basic services. Our program will help to support national elections and build institutions at a sub-national level, with the focus on Kandahar. A more secure and better-governed Kandahar is very much key to ensuring a viable Afghan state at the national level, so Canada is increasing its support for Kandahar programs from the current level of 17% to 50% by next year to support this overall aim.

Allow me to say a few words about security in the context of aid delivery in Kandahar.

While we have been delivering concrete development programs in Kandahar for some time—and thanks to your offices, Mr. Chair, and that of the clerk, we have just distributed our June 2008 update of our programming results for both Kandahar province and nationwide—we also want to do much more, and we recognize that security remains and will remain a challenge for Canada's overall mission.

The report to Parliament that was recently tabled stated that “security situations are expected to remain stable at best, and might grow worse in coming months in some provinces”. Security has always been, and will continue to be, a key consideration in the planning and delivery of projects undertaken by CIDA. It is one reason we have focused so explicitly and so much on ensuring full community participation, on ensuring that there is a strong leadership role for local government, and that we focus on development priorities that mobilize broad public support. Our approach to implementation will be flexible. It needs to be flexible and iterative in keeping with evolving local conditions.

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, please allow me to spend a few minutes talking about aid effectiveness, a subject that was addressed in Paris and discussed at length.

The international community and the Afghan government have recognized that it is critical to work better together to improve the delivery of assistance in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Compact and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy have done a clear job of establishing the basic principles of aid effectiveness, and Canada's aid program is based on these tenets:

—first, our assistance is directly aligned with Afghan government priorities and taken fully into account by Afghan planning processes;

—second, we will work closely with the Afghan government and the donor community to ensure that assistance is transparent, accountable and focused on results.

Canada has therefore been actively engaged in various sectoral working groups to improve the coordination of initiatives in Afghanistan, including a leadership role in revitalizing the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board that oversees the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact.

We believe, as my colleague Mr. Brodeur mentioned, that the Special Representative to Afghanistan of the UN Secretary General, Mr. Kai Eide, has an instrumental role to play in improving the coordination of development assistance initiatives in Afghanistan. He will have Canada's full support.

● (1945)

[*English*]

Let me conclude, Mr. Chairman, by talking a little bit about accountability for results. We are now the third largest national donor in Afghanistan and we do have an important contribution to make in this area. At the Paris conference, the Afghan government committed itself to ensuring full transparency in how aid is received from the international community, how it is utilized, and to improve its own capacity for domestic revenue generation.

International donors, including Canada, also have the responsibility to demonstrate accountability for results. Oversight of CIDA's development program, therefore, is a key and essential element of our work, and one through which we have a comprehensive verification process. We have now completed with our key partners over 150 audits, evaluations, reviews, and assessments of our major programs over the course of the past five years. We'll continue to measure and communicate project level results, such as the ones you see in front of you, on a regular basis and we will be contributing directly to the benchmarks that will form part of our quarterly reporting to Parliament.

We're conscious of the challenges that we face in Afghanistan. This is one of the most difficult environments we've faced in Canada's aid program. But with our new priorities as a guide, backed by a stronger field presence, very clear objectives, and the devolution of authorities, we believe that our efforts in Afghanistan will have a sharper focus, strong accountability, and with coherent planning, will bring a more effective approach to our mission from now until 2011.

Monsieur le président, I would like to thank you very much for this opportunity to brief you on the Paris conference and issues related to the long-term success of Afghanistan's development. I look forward to answering questions from committee members.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wallace.

We'll now move to our first round of seven minutes, with Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin: Thank you very much, *monsieur le président*.

Thank you both for being here.

I especially want to thank you, Mr. Wallace, for being here while you are injured. So thank you for coming here.

Mr. Stephen Wallace: I won't be playing squash for a while.

Hon. Keith Martin: I have a couple of questions, and I will be sharing my time with Ms. Minna.

We know that corruption, conflict, and lack of capacity are three areas that erode any ability for development to occur in a long-term sustainable fashion. So I'd like to focus on two parts of that.

On the corruption side, perhaps you could tell us what is being done to remove or prevent corrupt officials from gaining access to election and getting positions in Mr. Karzai's government. We are undermining our ability to win the hearts and minds of the people if we stand by or allow corrupt officials who are destructive to the future of the country to gain access and be elected to the government or to gain non-elected positions within the government.

My second question deals with the security aspect. We know there are really four pillars of Afghanistan's security: the army, police, corrections, and the judiciary. The army is being dealt with fairly effectively. But I'd like to ask, Mr. Wallace, about your very pressing comment that, at best, we're seeing stability on the security side. What is being done to improve and address our ability to train Afghan police, the Afghan corrections service, and a competent judiciary, which I think are critical to the long-term stability and security of the country?

Thank you.

Mr. Stephen Wallace: Thank you very much. I think those are two key questions.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to share my response with my colleague Mr. Brodeur on both the corruption and the police and judiciary sides. There was an overall context in Paris on corruption that Mr. Brodeur can give, and then I'll come right down into how this relates to the development programming.

Mr. Yves Brodeur: Thank you, Stephen.

That's a very important question. It was really at the centre of the discussions and the preoccupation of several delegations in Paris. Corruption is an issue that was raised with President Karzai in unequivocal terms, both during bilaterals as well as during the plenary by, I would say, most if not all the delegations that were around that table.

The message was actually quite clear, I think, that Afghanistan has to actually assume responsibility and make sure that measures are being implemented to reduce corruption, as you say, to make sure that corrupted officials are essentially fired and that proper measures are also put in place to account for the assistance that is being provided.

President Karzai actually made it clear also in his statement that Afghanistan took that issue very seriously, that he intended to put in place a number of measures to address the issue. Also, I think the message was, although not said in so many words, that he understood the link established between the need for Afghanistan to demonstrate progress on that front and the capacity or the will of countries to proceed and provide assistance.

There is work being done. In the case of Canada, we've been insisting a lot with Afghan officials for the need to actually put in place a system under which they can vet appointments and make sure that people who are being appointed are clean and will do their job in a way that's compatible with international standards.

• (1950)

Mr. Stephen Wallace: If I may, Mr. Chair, I'd like to bring this down to a very practical level. Clearly, corruption is always a risk. That importance is recognized, and the need for both immediate action and the understanding that this is a long-term issue to turn around, I think, is clearly shared more broadly. The question is, what do you do about it? I believe that is going to be the focus of what we need to intensify an effort on.

What we're doing right now are three essential things. One is that we have had a focus on building local financial management and accountability capacity within government. There was a recent assessment, completed only one month ago, by the World Bank that tracked the progress within the Government of Afghanistan on its public expenditure and financial accountability system from 2005 to December 2007. They've made progress. There are indicators of improvement on things like procurement and transparent planning, budget control. These are fundamentals of good governance.

So they have been on an improving line, but they have a way to go, and our focus on building that capacity on accountability and capability, on sound public administration, we think, is the right way to go.

We also believe it's going to be really critical that we continue to choose the right kinds of programs and the right kinds of partners that both have a track record of competence and also have the right kind of oversight functions attached to them. One good example is the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which works with the Ministry of Finance but is a trust fund that is managed with the bank and is audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers. So we need to look at these kinds of programs that build capacity but also have very strong oversight and a track record.

Last, you need to follow through. When I was mentioning in my opening remarks, Mr. Chair, that we must have a rigorous system of evaluations and audits and monitoring reviews and assessments, it's to be able to get enough information to follow up, and to follow up with those programs that are weak, to build that capacity or, frankly, to reduce or stop them when they're not performing.

Those are the kinds of things, from a practical point of view, that we need to work on, that address the issue in the short term on corruption but also build capacity over the longer term at the same time.

The second question, Mr. Chair, had to do with the work on policing and the justice sector. There again, the lead has been with Foreign Affairs, so perhaps my colleague Mr. Brodeur could deal with that one as well.

Mr. Yves Brodeur: There again, police training is an issue that is coming up regularly at international meetings, one that is really critical. We all understand that the Afghans also understand the importance of training a competent and professional police force.

It's progressing. It's not progressing as fast as we would wish and it's not progressing as well as we would wish. It is an issue we're working very hard on, together with partners: the RCMP and Correctional Service Canada. We trained last year more than 600 National Police officials at the PRT in Kandahar.

The problem we have right now is that essentially training police really means training them for basic survival skills. The police are seen by the Taliban as being the weak link in the security system, and therefore they're targeted more than the ANA, for instance; therefore, their rate of casualty is much higher. So you have to start from far away.

Many of the recruits are illiterate, so that is an impediment to their training, and you have to address it. Many of them are also people who come from very poor families, so corruption is an issue too. We've been working very hard to try to provide funding to pay salaries, to equip them, to recruit good people, to screen them, and to train them.

We've worked together with other partners. EUPOL, for instance, is about to launch a big mission in Afghanistan to support our training efforts; the United States is engaged in that effort, as General Hillier explained; and we're pressing forward. It will take some time before we actually reach the level we want to see.

• (1955)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brodeur.

Mrs. Barbot, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Thank you, gentlemen, for coming to meet with us this evening. I have briefly glanced at the document which I believe comes from the department. I am not sure exactly where it came from.

One of this committee's objectives is to get real answers and clear information. The words "Canada directly supports" appear throughout the document. The figures in the document are mind-boggling. For example, under "Education", it states that "close to 6 million children (one third of them girls) are enrolled in school in 2007-2008". A little lower down one reads that 9,000 teachers were trained.

What exactly is Canada doing and what results have been achieved? This question can be answered with simple figures or simple objectives—in some cases, it is not possible to provide figures—so that we can provide this information to the people in our ridings.

I am sorry to say that a brochure like this is of no use to me whatsoever. The information is lost in I don't know what context. I don't know who is involved and I am unable to say what Canada is doing. I know that one of the objectives was to better inform the public as to exactly which projects Canada was responsible for, the role our country is playing, the objectives and the results.

Last week, Mr. Maloney told the committee that 50 schools would soon be built. I asked him what we had built to date. I am still waiting for an answer. In order to understand what it means to build 50 schools in Afghanistan, I need to know our capacity. If we are building 50 schools in I don't know how much time, in addition to what we have already... In short, we are talking about simple things like that. However, that is not what I see in this document. Listening to you, I don't get the feeling either that we will get this information. This is all starting to sound rather obscure to me. I don't mean to undermine your presentation, but you are saying things that don't appeal to our intelligence or our ability to understand.

I don't know if I am the one who has misguided expectations, but is it possible to get specific figures or clear information on what is happening there?

Mr. Stephen Wallace: Thank you for your question.

Madam, Mr. Chair, allow me to clarify the results document before you.

For example, there are references to various program results in education, as you mentioned, and the economy. With regard to both those programs, Canada provided direct support to Afghan activities which a number of countries were supporting, but in which Canada played a lead role. As I mentioned previously, we are the main donor country for the national education program. This program has allowed the number of students to increase from 700,000 to 6 million, and we are now going far beyond that.

As the main donor country, Canada is devoting its efforts to expanding the school system, including within Kandahar. I can tell you that there are exactly 337 schools in Kandahar at present. In districts where the new Canadian priorities are being applied, we will build some 50 schools, in addition to the 337 already there. This work has already begun. We have very concrete data in this regard.

Microcredit is another example. The results summary will allow you to see that under microfinancing programs, we now have nearly 500,000 clients, two-thirds of whom are women. Canada is the top microfinance program donor. In other words, we are able to describe the problem in very concrete terms. We are talking here about a dollar or a dollar and a half per day per person. Through this program, small projects worth \$100 or \$150 are able to go ahead, which means that a domestic or community economic activity can go forward. This is a very concrete Canadian success story and the success rate in terms of repaid loans is 96%.

We keep close tabs to ensure that the amounts invested and the results obtained correspond. The June update that we have provided will be presented to Parliament along with our quarterly report. This is a concern that we share fully and we wish to be very clear, not only at the national level, but also in Kandahar itself, where we are obtaining very clear and detailed results. Thank you.

• (2000)

The Chair: Mrs. Barbot, you have less than one minute.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: That is all, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dewar, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

Thank you to our guests for appearing this evening.

I want to touch on the numbers that you put forward about the change in the focus on Kandahar. You said the focus changed from 17% to 50%. Who made that decision to shift from 17% to 50% in the aid focus?

Mr. Stephen Wallace: This is part of Canada's new engagement strategy for Afghanistan that was tabled in Parliament on June 10. That is a government decision taken in full consultation with Government of Afghanistan authorities and others.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I find it surprising that my notes show us to have had roughly \$180 million tagged for Kandahar that we weren't able to spend there. At least that's the information I received from CIDA officials when I was in Kandahar. My question is, if we're not able to spend the money that was already tagged for Kandahar, if we can't get other partners to engage with us in development projects in Kandahar, and if security is still an issue, how is it that we're going to be able to go from 17% to 50%?

Mr. Stephen Wallace: We've actually never had a target for Kandahar. What we have been able to accomplish in Kandahar at this point with the 17% of our resources, for example, from last year, you see in the results profile on that Kandahar map before you.

What we have now for the first time is—

Mr. Paul Dewar: I don't mean to be impolite, but you said you've never targeted. I have here what I was briefed with, that CIDA has committed \$180 million in Kandahar. Is that not the case?

Mr. Stephen Wallace: No. I don't know where that figure comes from, but it may be a cumulative figure since our overall engagement in Kandahar began. In my view, that would not have been either a target or an annual figure.

Mr. Paul Dewar: These are documents that I received from CIDA when I was there. So you can understand where my question is coming from.

• (2005)

Mr. Stephen Wallace: Yes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: If you want to commit more money and we haven't been able to invest the money there, there is a dilemma.

Mr. Stephen Wallace: I quite understand the question. My sense is that it's probably a cumulative figure.

Here's what we have that is different, going forward.

One, we have a very focused set of priorities for Kandahar in areas that deal with things such as the delivery of basic services by public institutions to citizens, basic services in education, basic services in infrastructure, basic services in economic growth, and a clear focus on meeting humanitarian needs of refugees, of displaced persons, of the most vulnerable populations with respect to medical services. So we have a very clear set of focused priorities.

Two, we have a number of signature initiatives that are at scale, are visible, are direct, and in the case of the Dahla Dam, for example, will involve a three-year effort, probably somewhere in the range of \$50 million. The issue with respect to the building of the 50 schools is another initiative where the investment is at scale, direct, and visible, in the range of \$10 million plus.

Polio, and being able to finish the job on polio and work towards the eradication of polio, where the majority of cases in Afghanistan are in the south, is actually a \$60 million program that will reach seven million children, 350,000 in Kandahar.

So these signature projects come with an investment program and a sense of scale and a direct effort, alongside our targeted priorities, that we believe actually constitutes the basis for being able to deliver on that target.

That said, this is an ambitious target and it's a target that is not without risk. It is a target that is being conducted in a security environment that is shifting as well. In order to be successful here, we will have to stay very focused on this one. We will have to be able to deliver very particularly and in a flexible way on these objectives and stay the course, including things such as devolving to local authorities and strengthening people on the ground.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you for your answer. I only have seven minutes.

Mr. Stephen Wallace: Thank you very much. I've finished that answer.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I know you're very enthused about what you do and I appreciate the work you do. I honestly do. I just want to get back to my concern about the commitment and the shift. It's a political decision, so maybe I should be asking the folks across the table, at least the people they work with.

My concern is that when I was in Afghanistan, the MPs were very explicit with us about making sure that more of the aid was going to Afghans. The MPs were also concerned that we not pick winners and losers. The MPs were concerned about the message it sends to other people in the country if there is a shift of aid to the south—because there are challenges, no question, in the south.

I'd like to turn to what has been mentioned in your brief, the ANDS. I was surprised when I talked to the MPs, when they told me—and this goes to governance and the buy-in from Afghans—that the Parliament and members of Parliament had never seen the ANDS and didn't have any input to the ANDS.

Mr. Stephen Wallace: Thank you very much. I'll ask my colleague to follow through. Those are really pertinent questions.

I think what is very clear that needs to be said right at the outset is that what we are doing in Kandahar and our effort in Kandahar is thoroughly rooted in Kandahar priorities that are explicitly part of the process within the Afghan government, both nationally and locally, at determining what they believe is most important. What we are responding to is directly related to those priorities.

Water security, basic education, services for citizens, the opportunity for jobs and growth through local infrastructure—these are the kinds of things, time and again, that have come out as Afghan priorities, to which we are responding.

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's quite surprising that you've mentioned in your brief that were using the ANDS as well as the compact—

The Chair: Mr. Dewar, I'm sorry, you're out of time.

We will move over to Mr. MacKenzie, for seven minutes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

And thank you to the members for being here.

The irony is that my friend talks about the Afghani MPs not knowing what was going on. We've had 28 technical briefings in this place, which MPs are welcome to attend, and they can ask questions. Regarding some of the questions that are being asked here, I think the people watching at home should know that we do have the opportunity, as members of Parliament in this House, to get a great deal of that information.

When I looked at your sheet—and my colleague mentioned something about the information not being there—I thought Canadians don't necessarily know the good things that Canada is doing in Afghanistan. My initial thought was that this would make a great placemat in a lot of restaurants in Canada, because I think it does give us a great deal of information.

The other thing I think you can probably tell us a great deal about are issues of governance and so on in Pakistan. If you look at it, they started at zero in 2000 or 2001. For them to be where we are as a western democracy or where many other parts of the world are is a big move from where they've been. What can we do in those areas to help them and help Canadians understand where the Afghans need to come up to a higher level than they are at? They are probably years away from being a western-style democracy, if they ever get to be one, but I think it's only fair to give credit to the Afghans, as they've come a long way.

What can we do to assist them?

• (2010)

Mr. Stephen Wallace: Thank you very much.

Everyone is impatient. We want to make as much progress as possible. Afghans are impatient at all levels as well.

I think it is really important to know that in 2001 Afghanistan, in many respects, was worse than poor. When you are one of the poorest countries on the planet in per capita income terms and you have gone through 30 years of conflict and oppression that have destroyed all of your assets, then you have a triple jeopardy that you're coming back from. You're coming back from poverty, conflict, and destruction at the same time.

We have seen some very good progress in some areas. We talked a little about education, about some of the health programs in which basic coverage has gone from 8% to over 80%, and about micro-financing reaching half a million Afghans. This has been a phenomenal story.

There is so much more to be done and so far still to go, given the starting point, that we have to be very clear about what we can and cannot accomplish. This is where I believe the six priorities we've talked about come into play. They focus on the fundamentals: stronger security, basic services to citizens, humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, building national institutions, Afghan-Pakistan border relations, and political reconciliation. By providing a direct and sharp focus on the priorities that matter going forward and enabling Canada to concentrate its efforts across military, civilian, government, and Canadian partner alliances to be able to make further progress in the areas that need to be looked at, we believe we can make further progress building on what's been done so far.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Keddy.

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

Again, I welcome our witnesses.

There's a clear message that came through from Mr. Brodeur, Mr. Wallace, and also from General Hillier, who was our first witness, and that is that developmental progress and security are interconnected. I think you used the term "security and aid delivery", actually, with a sharper, stronger focus on accountability. I think we're all cognizant of the huge challenges that CIDA faces on the ground with aid delivery, but obviously that can't happen at all without security.

I'm interested particularly in accountability and corruption and how we can work with the Afghan government in that non-military role, to which CIDA is well suited, to work against that.

Mr. Stephen Wallace: Thank you.

Let me start. I'm just conscious of crowding my partner here.

There are some things we know we can do that are just fundamental to sound public administration. It's helping them have a budget process, making that budget process transparent, helping Parliament deal with the budget process, having a procurement system that is fair, having a procurement system that is overseen, and having a procurement system that can meet an international standard. There are direct things that deal with how you can build capacity at an individual level.

We see some interesting progress happening. Some ministries—Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education—have done very well and are starting to meet really strong standards here of accountability and transparency. But it requires a continuous focus of Afghan leadership, and also continuous support from the international community and Canada in building the technical, managerial, and leadership capacity to be able to keep this push forward.

So, one, we need to focus on fundamentals both at the national level and in Kandahar, the sub-national level. Two, as I mentioned, we have to be very careful in being able to select the areas, the programs, and the ministries and institutions where you can make progress and you can demonstrate that results can happen, and then you can show those results. It tends to have a snowball effect on how you build it. So being able to be clear about building capacity, being able to be clear about demonstrating results, being able to be clear about focusing on those things that really matter to make further progress—I think those are the basic elements of what we need to focus on regarding corruption accountability as we go forward. We can see noteworthy progress being made in some areas, but we also know that it is a long-term effort and that we're going to need to stick with it for quite some time.

• (2015)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wallace.

I'm sorry, we're out of time. Colleagues, I was hoping to be able to have a second round of five minutes, but we actually have some important committee business we need to conduct. I would like to suspend the meeting.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Can I just ask a question for one minute and ask Mr. Brodeur and Mr. Wallace to give us the answer?

The Chair: Colleagues?

Mr. Bernard Patry: You said in the beginning we'd have two rounds. It's just a question. I'll just ask a question.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you, Mr. Wallace. I want to thank you very much for those updates. My colleague didn't have them at the beginning. That's probably why...

Let's talk about good governance. I'm delighted to see that the Afghan people are represented within the development councils. You say over 700 community projects have been successfully completed. Is Canada the only donor country for those community projects in the province of Kandahar? Are there other partners? If so, who are they? Does Canada have a veto right with regard to those community projects? How is the funding allocated? Who controls the community project funding? Those are my questions, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's three questions, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, it's one question. But I'd like one minute.

The Chair: One minute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stephen Wallace: I will be as brief as possible. Thank you for your question. In fact, this program has allowed 700 projects in more than 500 communities to be successfully completed.

Within the province of Kandahar alone, Canada is the main donor country, but it is not the only one. This is a national program funded through international contributions to a trust fund administered by the Department of Finance and the World Bank. It is called the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, a portion of which is for community programming. Canada is the main donor country for projects in Kandahar. We do not have a veto right with regard to those programs, but the community has a veto right over those projects. The community, elected officials, men and women, determine priorities. The community participates, sometimes by providing funds, but also as volunteers in order to ensure the completion of those projects. We have had a lot of success in those districts where the program has been implemented.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wallace, and thank you very much, Monsieur Brodeur, for your appearance in front of the committee tonight. I'm sorry about the second round of questioning, but unfortunately we do have some important committee business we'd like to wrap up, using the back end of the meeting.

Colleagues, I'll suspend the meeting for just a few moments. We'll then move in camera to conclude our committee business. Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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