



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 026 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

—
Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

• (1705)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Order, please.

We're going to proceed now with committee business, and we're going to go to Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I'd like to put forward a motion to ask the foreign affairs minister to come to committee. I'd ask for that motion to be dealt with first and then to deal with the motion if that is accepted.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have put a motion that is far more important. It's the one where the Minister of Foreign Affairs is going to come based upon the Standing Order 81 (4). He has to come in front of the committee before May 31 to talk on the estimates. That's already written into the Standing Orders. And the minister is very keen to come in front of us to talk about that.

I suggest that my motion, which is there, be moved first so we can meet the deadline of the Standing Orders for the estimates. At that time, should Mr. Dewar like to talk about his motion, he can address it. The main point is to have the Minister of Foreign Affairs come in front of the committee, and during the estimates members will have an opportunity to ask their questions of interest. We need to fulfill that.

You can't have the Minister of Foreign Affairs come here at every drop of a coin. Everybody wants to call him, as there are so many motions. Considering his own time—

The Chair: One moment, Mr. Obhrai. We already have a motion on the floor.

Now, the reason I'm listening to Mr. Obhrai is that he is saying that the estimates—the timelines—make it time sensitive as well.

We can't move your motion forward now.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I am putting an argument against his motion by saying that this motion topples that, so when I'm talking, I would appreciate it if you would let me do it.

I'm saying to the committee, and hopefully there's some sense on the committee to do this.... The Minister of Foreign Affairs has to come in front of this committee. The Minister of Foreign Affairs will be here, and he does want to talk. We have to fulfill that requirement.

Then I'm saying that Mr. Dewar can do whatever he wants with his little political game that he wants to play at that given time. He can ask those questions that he wants to of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

But there are two things. It is not possible for the Minister of Foreign Affairs to come for everything. This is within that period of time. The Minister of Foreign Affairs may not be able to schedule an appearance with that motion, but the Standing Orders commit him to come by May 31. By May 31 he has to appear in front of the committee, by request. That is there. So he will come. He has to come.

I am saying—and the foreign affairs minister has indicated this to me very clearly—that he's very amicable to come in front of the committee. He wants to talk about issues, and he has nothing to hide. He is more than happy to come here.

The Chair: Okay, we'll go back to Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I'm not finished.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I think I've been recognized by the chairman. Thank you.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: But I am not finished.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I think Mr. Obhrai has actually provided all of us with the arguments for my motion—the need and the cooperation that we'll receive. I simply wanted to make sure that we could get to both my motion and Mr. Obhrai's, which I see follows mine. We can coordinate this in terms of calendars and schedules with the minister. These are two separate requests, but I think we need to at least pass the motion so that both of them can be considered. Notwithstanding the calendar concerns that Mr. Obhrai has put forward on the estimates—we all agree—we still have to pass the motion to bring these motions to the committee.

I think we are all interested in hearing from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, obviously on the estimates, but there is also expressed interest, as I'm putting forward in a motion, in recent concerns with the minister. We'll have a debate, I'm sure, about the motion, but we believe it's the role of the committee to have the minister here to talk about his role in Foreign Affairs. That's separate from the estimates process.

Actually, I'd like to get to the vote on bringing those two motions forward, both mine and Mr. Obhrai's, so that we could actually schedule the minister to appear before committee.

The Chair: Madame Barbot is up next. I'll let her speak, and then—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: You cut me short.

The Chair: No, I didn't cut you short. I'll let you back on.

Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): I concur with Mr. Dewar. These are two completely different issues and the availability of the minister has nothing to do with the tabling of motions. So then, I would like us to deal with Mr. Dewar's motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right, let me just ask Mr. Dewar first. Because it sounds as if the minister is willing to come on the estimates, does this mean that if we submitted a request for both appearances, he could choose the estimates first? Are we limiting him to come on the estimates, based on his appearance for you first?

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, I won't get ahead of the game here. My motion has a date on it so that we can report back to the House. So no, it's about bringing him forward, and let's deal with the motion. Let's get to the vote and then we can decide that. I think the committee has to give him direction.

The Chair: On this point, let me tell you this. My intentions are that we will shut off committee business at 5:15. There are no votes after that. These are motions where there's unlimited debate, just so we're aware of that.

All right, Mr. Obhrai on a point of order.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Can I have confirmation from the clerk that this motion—talking about confidence in a minister from a committee—is in order to report it back to the House? Does that follow any standing orders? Is this in order or not?

• (1710)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): Sure, it's in order.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: It's in order. Are you sure?

The Clerk: The committee reports on the mandate of the department. The minister is part of the department, and his performance is something the committee looks at. The committee is the master of its own decisions, so if it decides to report on something, then it can report on it.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: All right. I'll carry on with my questions. Who's next in the speaking order?

The Chair: Mr. Khan and Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm a little dismayed that there are motions, and one of mine—and this is in response to my colleague there—has been languishing. It is of a very significant nature. We talk about security in relation to Afghanistan—my colleague wants the foreign minister to come here—yet the most important and significant and major change that has taken place in that region has been the February 18 election in Pakistan. There are issues of FATA that will be discussed there. There will be issues as to how the current government is going to handle the circumstances going forward with the domestic fundamentalism or terrorism, how they're going to react to the changes we bring about—

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Paul Dewar: On a point of order, we seem to be getting into debate around the motion as opposed to whether or not we're going to bring this motion forward.

Mr. Wajid Khan: I think the motion is not of such a critical nature that it has to jump ahead of every other motion.

Mr. Paul Dewar: But we're debating motions. That's my point of order.

Mr. Wajid Khan: I'm answering your question.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm sorry, the way parliamentary procedure works—

Mr. Wajid Khan: The motion is not of such special importance—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Chair, I'm asking you to rule on my point of order. It's simple.

The Chair: Mr. Khan, I'll encourage you to stay to the substance.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you. That's all I'm asking.

The Chair: Is this motion worthy of leapfrogging to the front of the—

Mr. Wajid Khan: I'm just trying to tell you why it is not, Mr. Chair. I'm trying to tell you about the significance—

The Chair: Okay, without getting into the substance of the motion.

Mr. Wajid Khan: No, I'm saying this motion of mine is far more significant and important to issues relating to our country, our deployment in Afghanistan, and the region. So this is a motion that I do not want to have leapfrogged by another motion.

The Chair: You'll bring your motion—

Mr. Wajid Khan: Yes, that's right, sir. Just to bring the foreign minister to ask a question, which he's made a public statement about on Afghanistan—which is answered—that can be done at a later date. The question is, why are we not going to this motion? Everybody on this committee recognizes the importance of Canadian deployment and the changes that have occurred in the region and to our national security, which is being impacted. I can tell you, sir, there have been huge changes, and there's lots going on. We need to discuss that here. Bring in the departmental people.

If you read the motion and look at the intent of it, even Mr. Dewar and Mr. Rae would agree that this is so significant, so important to our security, to our deployment, to our mission in Afghanistan and how the engagement is going to continue, how we're going to stop the terrorism. I can tell you that all those banned organizations are now opening their doors to terrorism because they know that there's been a change from military rule to civilian rule, and they're having serious difficulties. I'd like to see the departmental people come here and tell us what is going on. Are they engaged? What is our high commission doing over there? I can tell you that this is so significant and so important that this must be the first motion of this committee that we deal with.

I'd like to urge and request the engagement of all of my colleagues on this committee: let's address the issue. We have now formed an Afghanistan committee, and Mr. Rae is a member of that. That is an important committee, and that committee needs to hear this. He's a member of that foreign affairs committee and he needs to be engaged in that, and we must bring the departmental people here so we can hear them, listen to them, and move forward on the agenda, which is significant to our country. It's not just political games within the parties. The foreign minister made a statement to clarify....

You want the foreign minister here? By all means, but let's not leapfrog over such important issues of national interest and national security and our mission in Afghanistan, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Yes, Mr. Chairman, I tend to agree with the comments that have been made, and particularly comparing the two. If we're going to be leapfrogging one ahead of it or moving one up the line, I think there should be significant capacity, significant meaning to it. When we look at the reasoning for the second motion, if there was time to do it for the main estimates and to have a more overall engaged and more comprehensive discussion on the issue.... We did just set up the Afghanistan committee. That is under way now. It would be good for us to have an update and understanding of what happened on that committee.

We also have, of course, many other initiatives ongoing there. Minister Oda went over to Afghanistan recently as well. It would be good to have, from the foreign affairs perspective, a complete update and statements from the foreign affairs minister in relation to the main estimates committee and comparing what could possibly be brought forward and what should be brought forward. I would certainly think that one is far more comprehensive in its character and nature, and I think that motion itself would be far more important.

These issues and discussions could all be part of the main reason for the minister to be brought forward on the main estimates. It doesn't have to wait. It could include that, whereas the discussion just on the narrowly focused aspect of the motion that's being put forward does not really allow for that form of discussion too.

So we have a timing element here. What are we best doing? What are we best to plan for the remainder of this session and period of time that we have? I think the meeting with the foreign affairs minister and having him appear here for a discussion on the estimates would be far more important, far more comprehensive, and of much greater value to this overall committee and the work we've been doing.

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

• (1715)

The Chair: All right. The bells have started, so in order to continue with this motion we have to have unanimous consent to continue to sit.

Do we have unanimous consent? We don't.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. The next time we return to business, we'll continue the debate on this motion?

The Chair: When we return to committee business, yes.

We are adjourned—

Mr. Paul Dewar: This is for all the committee members. I think on Thursday we're supposed to be meeting at 3:30. I know there is an event for the Holocaust remembrance, and many of us, I think, would want to be in attendance for that. I believe it would take us to four o'clock, for those attending, and I'm just wondering if, through the clerk, we could see if there's a consensus to start a bit later that day.

The Chair: What do we need for that?

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): We won't finish at 5:30.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): I have no problem starting at four o'clock.

The Chair: Okay, let's wait. I'm not going to make that decision right here, right now. We're aware of it. I am getting the drift from most of the committee on where you'd like to be, and I don't blame you. So we'll see if we're going to start at four o'clock or 4:15, or whatever. We may cut out committee business on Thursday.

This meeting is adjourned.

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

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

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.