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## Standing Committee on National Defence

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, June 10, 2008**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Rick Casson**

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Tuesday, June 10, 2008

• (1540)

[*English*]

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

This is our regular briefing on Canada's involvement in Afghanistan.

It's good to see you, General. We spent some time with you in Afghanistan a couple of weeks ago. It's good to have you back to bring us up to speed.

To the committee members, the general has a prior commitment; he has to leave here at 4:30.

Sir, the floor is yours.

**Brigadier-General Peter Atkinson (Director General of Operations, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence):** Thank you very much.

Actually, I'd also like to thank the committee. I thought your visit to Afghanistan was at the right time. I very much enjoyed your company and the opportunity to be with you as we visited both our soldiers on the ground and those parliamentarians, both in Kabul and in Kandahar. Each time I go to the theatre, I learn, as we all do, and that was a very worthwhile engagement.

This will be my last time before the committee, unless you call me back next week. Two weeks from now I will be on my way to Texas.

Sitting behind me in disguise, in a suit, is General Christian Barabé. Christian will be my relief as of this summer. In all likelihood, the next time you ask for an update, it will be Christian who comes and provides that for you.

**An hon. member:** Did you say colonel or general?

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** General.

**An hon. member:** Thank you.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** I hope I did.

**The Chair:** Yes, you did.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** In today's update, there are two parts. First I want to give you a quick update on things that have happened in Afghanistan, some of which you will be aware of, but there is some detail that has happened since I gave you your last comprehensive update here. But more importantly, in the second part, I want to do what you asked and give you a full and comprehensive update on the ANP and the significant progress that has happened in that space.

The insurgents' kinetic activity has remained low due to the reorganization required following the winter and, more importantly, the poppy harvest and its protection. You can tell when it's poppy season around Kandahar province because the roads are crowded with pickup trucks, and the pickup trucks are crowded with young men going back and forth to work in the fields.

In Afghanistan the poppy harvest is like the autumn grape harvest in France. Large numbers of unemployed workers make their way to the fields, where they can pick up a couple of weeks of steady employment. For many Afghan families, it's a vital part of their yearly income. The going rate of pay is about \$10 a day, almost four times their regular pay. So you can see why it is important to them, but also why we would like to replace that type of activity with something more germane and supportive of the long-term view of where we want Afghanistan to go.

The job comes with a built-in desperation for work. When the harvest is over, the Taliban will start recruiting those people who are out harvesting poppies. Some will end up as fighters and others as couriers—driving explosives into Kandahar City for use against our troops.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Coalition forces and the Taliban get their workers from the same place. The coalition uses Afghans to dig ditches or to build schools or roads. The more Afghans we use, the more we reduce the possibility of enemy fire or roadside bombs. This is why development projects like Foster Road are so important. Generally, the insurgents are unwilling to engage coalition forces conventionally. Insurgent activity remains confined to the use of improvised explosive devices, intimidation and attempts to restrict the freedom of movement of coalition forces along major lines of communication.

[*English*]

As the poppy harvest draws to an end, insurgent forces have attempted to regain the local initiative. Therefore, continued aggressive actions along all of our lines of operation have further reduced the insurgents' capability and have denied them the ability to regain momentum.

[Translation]

During Operation Rolling Thunder, members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, entered the Zhari district, a long-time Taliban stronghold. There was an exchange of fire with the Taliban, but no Canadian casualties. One soldier from the Afghan National Army was slightly wounded. The goal of the mission was to catch the Taliban off guard in order to prevent them from employing their usual methods and from laying improvised explosive devices.

[English]

The loss of senior Taliban leaders over the past few months has disrupted the insurgency, but it has not stopped it or completely undermined it. The Taliban insurgency remains resilient and has demonstrated a capacity to quickly recover from any setbacks we give them. Unfortunately, our successes in Afghanistan over the last two months have come with a price of three Canadian soldiers killed and a number of soldiers seriously wounded. We'll remember those courageous soldiers and we send our deepest regrets to their families and friends.

Finally, General McKiernan assumed command of ISAF from U. S. General Dan McNeill during a handover ceremony that was held on June 3 in Kabul.

Our Canadian soldiers have a new initiative. Canadian soldiers who mentor their Afghan counterparts—these are the soldiers in the OMLT, the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team—came up with the idea to help the school whose students are the children of soldiers in the new Afghan National Army. The soldiers are asking their families at home to add some school supplies to the care packages they send to Kandahar. Already some shipments are ready to be mailed from Canada, and the soldiers hope to deliver these school supplies later this summer. The students and their families live in an old Soviet air barracks, which is shown in this slide. As you can see, it's not the best place, but it's a place, and it's one they're working on.

I'd like to go back to the theme I come back to each time I'm here—that the enemy does have a vote in what's going on in Afghanistan. Eight people were killed and 22 others wounded after a NATO convoy was struck by a suicide car bomb in southern Afghanistan on April 9. The eight killed were all civilians. That powerful blast occurred in Kandahar City and damaged several shops. Taliban militants regularly launch suicide bombings against Afghan and foreign troops in the country, but most of the victims in these attacks end up being civilians.

In the attempted assassination, President Karzai escaped unharmed, but three other people, including an Afghan politician, were killed. Several foreign diplomats, including our Canadian ambassador, Arif Lalani, had to take cover to avoid being hit by the machine-gun fire. Canada condemned the attack, and it won't affect our commitment to the people, to the government, and to the mission. Afghanistan has determined enemies who will do anything to disrupt the democratic process the Afghan people have chosen.

[Translation]

The Taliban are now using children to conduct their suicide attacks. The bomb that wounded two Canadians near Kandahar on Friday, May 16 was carried by a very young boy of fourteen. It was

detonated remotely, killing the boy instantly. The two Canadian soldiers were not seriously wounded, but the explosion killed one of the Afghan soldiers with whom they were on patrol.

This kind of attack has revealed a weakness in the insurgency and has not shaken the determination of those who are trying to bring back security and stability to Kandahar province. In another attack that did not involve NATO forces, a suicide bomber in a burka struck a police station in Farah province, in the west of the country, killing 12 and wounding 27. The initial report was that the bomb was carried by a woman, but the Taliban who claimed responsibility for the attack said that the bomber was a man named Mullah Khalid, dressed in a burka.

● (1550)

[English]

After a year's respite, the Taliban has returned to attacking schools and intimidating teachers across much of the south and east of the country. School books, regarded as a threat to the Taliban's grip on the minds of young Afghans, are a particular target. Since the beginning of the new school year on March 23, there have been 36 such attacks. Empty buildings have been set on fire or hand grenades thrown into them. Teachers have been kidnapped, and in most cases they've actually later been released.

I'd now like to turn to the update on the Afghan National Police.

Reformation of the Afghan National Police officially began in 2003 when Germany was identified as the lead nation for the police training. On July 12, 2005, the Combined Security Transition Command for Afghanistan, whose nickname is CSTC-A, officially assumed the lead role on behalf of the U.S. government in the reformation of the Afghan National Police.

The concept of an international police coordination board, with the purpose of coordinating the efforts of all countries contributing to the reformation of the Ministry of the Interior and the Afghan National Police, was developed in 2006 and implemented in early 2007.

In June 2007, the European Union began their European Union police mission. The intent of EUPOL, as it's called, is to work collaboratively on police reform under the auspices of the International Police Coordination Board, with the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan and the Afghan National Police. The goal of the reformation is to develop an effective, well-organized, multi-ethnic, and professional police force that provides the people of Afghanistan a stable rule of law, obviously a laudable goal.

During the spring of 2007, a joint coordination and monitoring board representing the international community and in partnership with the Government of Afghanistan approved increasing the Afghan National Police end strength to 82,000 from the projected 62,000. As of February 1, 2008, 76,410 positions, or 93% of their authorized strength, have been filled. They're not all trained, but they've been recruited and those positions have been filled. The Ministry of the Interior expects to reach that goal of 82,000 by December of this year.

[Translation]

Towards the end of 2007, the Ministry of the Interior began a program called Focused District Development. The goal is to reform the Afghan uniform police as well as to improve local governance, public works and aspects of the rule of law.

Focused District Development allows the Ministry of the Interior to take a more targeted approach to evaluation, instruction, mentoring and recognition of the uniform police in each area. Focused District Development is in full operation and is the main objective of the CSTC-A in police matters. The ANP consists of the following organizations: the civil order police, the border police, the counter-narcotics police, the auxiliary police, the criminal investigation police, the counter-terrorism police and the uniform police.

[English]

The Afghan National Civil Order Police, or ANPOP, as they've become known, is a new police force that was conceived in mid-2006, after the Afghan Uniformed Police's ineffective response to the May 2006 riots in Kabul. The civil order police are responsible for responding to civil disturbances in large urban areas and patrolling in high-threat areas. The civil order police, when fully manned, will have 5,000 police assigned to their force. This highly trained police unit will be a cornerstone of the Afghan security architecture.

On May 15 of this year, the fourth group of some 200 recruits and 28 officers complete their training in Mazar-e Sharif. With this capable force, the Afghan government will be better positioned to take responsibility for the security into their own hands.

The presidential elections, which are planned for the coming year, will be a major test for this new civil order police. They have strong leadership, better training, and better equipment than the Afghan Uniformed Police and the Afghan National Auxiliary Police. The expectation is that the force will be able to respond effectively to urban unrest and rioting when that occurs.

The civil order police are being trained to manage demonstrations and large-scale social and political events peacefully. The members of the force are given 12 to 14 weeks of training, provided in coordination with the EU and the United States. New instructors are trained as a part of each course. The idea is they, thereafter, will teach the courses themselves. All Afghan National Civil Order Police officers have already completed their general training at the Police Academy in Kabul, which was built by Germany. To date, some 1,300 members of the civil order police have completed their training.

The CSTC-A objective for 2008 is to have 2,000 members of the Afghan National Civil Order Police fully trained by the end of the year. In 2009 its numbers should reach 3,000, which would double the figure that was trained in 2007.

•(1555)

[Translation]

The Afghan National Border Police, with an authorized strength of 18,000, is responsible for patrolling the borders of Afghanistan, conducting anti-smuggling operations and dealing with immigration. It protects the borders of Afghanistan against criminal offenders by

providing a law enforcement capability at international borders. It controls pedestrian and vehicular traffic at border crossing points and at international airports, and is also responsible for aviation security. Only 9,000 of the authorized 18,000 positions are currently filled.

[English]

Now, as you can see on the map, the Afghan Border Police are responsible for basically 5,500 kilometres of border, 14 border crossings, and four international airports, one each at Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-e Sharif.

The Ministry of the Interior's Counter Narcotics Police are the lead law enforcement agency charged with reducing narcotics production and distribution in Afghanistan. They employ a multi-faceted approach to counter-narcotics operations, incorporating public information, intelligence, interdiction, and eradication. They enforce the law nation-wide in narcotic-related matters through the training and equipping of their national interdiction unit, regional interdiction units—and one specifically for Kabul—mobile detection units, and eradication teams in seven key provinces. Of their 3,000 authorized strength, 70% have been filled by Afghan officers.

The auxiliary police—and this is a name you will recognize—were born out of the frustration and the aftermath of Operation Medusa in 2006, a Canadian-led successful offensive. They were meant to provide security in those remote villages, much like a neighbourhood watch. As you'll recall, NATO did not have enough troops to hold the ground it had captured from the Taliban militants, and the auxiliary police were recruited to do that. The ISAF commander at the time had ordered auxiliary units to be created to prevent territory from falling back into the insurgents' hands.

They were more than 11,000 strong when they were stood up. They were responsible for providing a police presence at checkpoints and other static positions in order to bolster areas with significant security concerns. They were also supposed to serve as a backup to full-time Afghan National Police officers in major centres such as Kandahar. We all know a lot of the complaints about corruption and the issues that we've wanted to come to address were embedded in that auxiliary police unit that was stood up, largely because they didn't have the training, the background, and the mentoring that was necessary for them to be an effective force. That was recognized, and NATO has now been quietly disbanding that auxiliary police force of part-time police, who are believed to have contributed to more of the insurgency and tribal tensions than they actually were able to take away.

•(1600)

[Translation]

Some of the 11,000 members of the Auxiliary Police in the six southern provinces receive \$70 per month. They will be absorbed into the national police force, which is a little better trained and equipped. The remainder will be sent home.

Auxiliary Police units in cities have been phased out, but, possibly, some remain in rural areas. In the six southern provinces, they will be gradually phased out by October 2008.

There are three smaller police organizations engaged in more specialized missions. The counter-narcotics police is charged with reducing narcotics production and trafficking; the criminal investigation police investigates a wide range of criminal offences; and the counter-terrorist police conducts counter-insurgency operations.

[*English*]

The Uniformed Police—and they embody the ANP—are the single largest police element, with more than 34,000 policemen. That number is expected to grow when the 2008 manning document is approved later this year. They are responsible for general law enforcement, public safety, and internal security throughout the provinces and districts of Afghanistan. The Uniformed Police are deployed throughout the Kandahar district. Those located in our area of operations are being mentored by the police operational mentoring and liaison teams. The mentoring teams are responsible for training, mentoring, and professionalizing the Afghan Uniformed Police in the southern Kandahar province. They work in small teams made up of a mix of military police and infantry who live and work with the ANP detachments in the police substations. There are currently ten female ANP officers employed in Kandahar City.

I wanted to try to get a breakdown of how many female officers were across all of the ANP. I was not able to get that yet. When we get it, I'll forward the number. But we do have ten female police officers working in Kandahar City. We know that because we work with them.

Why did we create the POMLT?

Before September 2007, when the police mentoring began, the largely untrained Afghan National Police in Kandahar province carried dated and malfunctioning equipment. They lacked a command structure that worked. They had no professional ethos. Some Afghan National Police checkpoints were abandoned, others were overrun by insurgents, and others were being used to fleece the local population. The Afghan National Police was also plagued by widespread corruption at all levels. Many police officers did not receive their pay regularly, and when they did, their chain in command helped themselves to a portion of it, skimming it off the top. This situation led to officers on the street stealing from people and Taliban fighters bribing their way out of police custody. In response, Canada decided to put an increased effort into this key area, because we could. Joint Task Force Afghanistan established police mentoring liaison teams in the fall. Today we have 60 people—a mixture of soldiers and police—who are doing that task, organized in six police elements.

The intent of that mentoring operation is to help the Afghan government create an effective and organized professional national police force that is committed to the rule of law. If the ANP is to ever provide a safe and secure environment for the people of Afghanistan, it must be well led, it must be paid regularly, and it must be trained and equipped to a high standard. The end state of the police mentoring operation is a police force capable of carrying out its security and law and order mandates autonomously while attracting qualified recruits and retaining those people they've trained and put into business.

[*Translation*]

In the current operational climate in Afghanistan, the uniform police is a paramilitary force, not a civilian police service as we know it in the west. But that situation may change as security improves. At the moment, however, the uniform police has to deal with an insurgency as well as the normal policing challenges of public order and security. This is why the mentoring teams include infantry soldiers to teach security and combat, and military police for police tactics, techniques and procedures.

• (1605)

[*English*]

The basic skills that our OMLTs are teaching are detainee handling; handcuffing techniques—things we probably take for granted—search techniques and procedure; the use of weapons, including rifle range handling; conduct of patrols; basic IED and mine training; reaction to enemy fire; basic principles of a defensive position. I described them to you, when we were over in Kandahar, as survival skills. If these ANP officers can't survive when they come under contact, then we will never be able to move ahead.

Day-to-day life in the police substation includes static security for those people there in the substation, security patrols, patrols, vehicle checkpoints, and both formal and informal training activities. We saw firsthand from our RCMP superintendent, when they took us around to see what they were doing hands on, right at the PRT, and the theme continued right on out through our POMLTs, out in the police substations in the field.

I mentioned earlier the focus district development program. Currently, several reform and restructuring initiatives are under way for the ANP in Kandahar province. One of the most important is an intensive eight-week professional police training course delivered at the regional training centres in Herat and Kandahar City, which more than 400 Afghan uniformed police have completed to date. During the focus district development, the police are taken from their district as a group, are trained and in some cases retrained, re-equipped, and then they're returned. While they're at the Regional Training Centre, they are replaced by the ANCOP, the Afghan National Civil Order Police, which I talked about earlier.

Training in that regional centre is only eight weeks long, and one of those is a week in which administrative tasks are set up, such as policemen's pay accounts and issuing them with new ID cards, so that we know exactly who they are.

On April 24, the Afghan Uniformed Police from Zhari and Panjwai districts graduated from their course. They received their new weapons, their vehicles, their communications gear, and other personal equipment. They have now reintegrated into their policing duties in Zhari and Panjwai and they're on a six-week period of focused mentorship validation, validating what they have done, with mentors living and working full-time with them. It will be up to the mentoring teams to continue developing and honing these police officers' skills and their professionalism on a day-to-day basis. The Afghan Uniformed Police are already viewed as a more professional force by the Afghans from the Zhari district.

I'll give you a second to look at this next slide. It's broken into two parts. On the left-hand side of the slide, you see the rank reform. When you look at the examples here, you'll see that they used to have 319 generals, and they're now down to 120; they had 2,400 colonels, and they're down to 235; 1,800 lieutenant colonels, down to 305. You see a theme there, that there were more chiefs than Indians in this organization, and certainly more generals than soldiers. Look across; their strength of patrolmen is the key thing there. It's up over almost 46,000.

In pay reform, if you flip to the other side, the monthly rate of pay of a lieutenant-general, who was making \$100 a month—you can see perhaps why they were susceptible to some influence—is now up to \$750. Then you get down to the lowest patrolman on the beat, making \$70. There was very little delineation between the patrolman at \$70 and the lieutenant-general at \$107 before they did their pay reform, so it is very critical.

I mentioned the ID cards, the electronic funds transfer, and the bank account set-ups. This is the way of the future. These officers now have the confidence that they will be paid. When this money goes into the bank and they have their ID card, they can go and withdraw that money, and no one has an opportunity to skim it off or take any graft. This is a huge step forward and one of which they are immensely proud.

On the next slide is a snapshot of the geographical representation of all the training centres in Afghanistan. On the left-hand side, you have a list of the various training that is being delivered.

The bullets in red indicate the training that's being given at the Regional Training Centre in Kandahar, which we visited at Camp Hero. You can see the basic eight-week course for the Uniformed Police, a basic course for the Border Police, a transition program, the ANCOF course, sustainment training, advanced leadership and management, and then you can see a table on the side with the other courses, showing where training is being conducted in the other areas.

• (1610)

They're making huge progress, but they're not there yet. As I mentioned when I talked about the Afghan National Security Forces, the ANA has progressed very well. The ANA started off behind; it is moving in the right direction, and we've seen absolute improvement, but it is a work in progress and it will take time to get to the state it needs to be in.

The Afghan National Security Forces are becoming stronger, more capable, more professional, and more dedicated to providing security to their people. The transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan police forces and the Afghan National Army, in Zhari, was an important step towards the complete transfer of responsibility for maintaining public order to the Afghan authorities. As I said before, the last thing the local person wants to see is a soldier with a machine gun, a tank, and an armoured vehicle. They want to see a local policeman, a beat cop with whom they can develop a relationship, in whom they can have confidence, and who's going to ensure the rule of law is being followed.

Other examples of the growing proficiency are their ability to plan and execute security operations on their own and take on other

security duties from ISAF, such as maintaining security during the construction of the causeway over the Arghandab late last fall and the road construction that is ongoing on Route Fosters in Panjwai. We are making progress in our efforts to assist the Government of Afghanistan in building the capacity it needs to ensure lasting security in the country and to provide its people with a renewed sense of security. A competent force capable of providing the local population with efficient police services is instrumental in maintaining order and stability. Building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces with the help of contributing ISAF nations, the international community, and other non-governmental organizations is key to ensuring the security of Afghanistan; it will further ensure the continued progress and development of good governance.

Thank you. I'd be happy to take any questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir. We have time for the usual one five-minute round.

Mr. Wilfert, you have five minutes.

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

General, it's nice to see you. Certainly we'd like to wish you the very best in your new assignment as of July 1. Hopefully you'll get a summer uniform by then.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** Down there I'll be wearing one that's a little cooler, I think.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** That'll be good.

General, the minister for CIDA announced today that the government will be providing \$120 million to the Dahla Dam to improve the irrigation situation in Arghandab Valley. This has certainly been talked about for a while. I just wondered, from a security standpoint and given the British situation in the past in Helmand, if you can tell us what role the Canadian Forces would be playing, both from a security standpoint and from an engineering standpoint. I know fortified outposts have been created.

Finally, what kind of interaction is already, or may be, taking place with regard to the local population to help secure the facility, given the economic benefits of such an improvement?

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** You have hit on a very key point. I believe the minister of CIDA described that as a signature project, one that would be very important for Canada to put a lot of effort into, obviously, in terms of the money that is being dedicated to it.

The role of the Canadian Forces in this case would be simply to provide the necessary security. Work needs to be done on the infrastructure of the Dahla Dam, which we know is in a deplorable state and will require significant engineering work to bring it up to a level so that it can provide the type of power, irrigation, etc., that will be the positive outcome from there.

We are part of the whole government approach, and our role is simple: it is to ensure the security, so that all those activities can be carried out. We have been working and will continue to work with CIDA, the Afghan government, and our other partners to be able to do this. The planning obviously is under way. We have been up in the area of the dam already and will continue to be there, and it will be a significant focus of effort if we're going to be successful.

•(1615)

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** Regarding our resources on the ground, I presume what it will require has been taken into account in terms of this whole government approach.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** Yes, sir. The planning is ongoing. It's not something that's going to occur overnight. You will recall we were speaking to Minister Wardak when we were in Afghanistan. He asked that when there are big projects to be done, we not bring our big western machines to do all the work. He asked us to provide the ways and means, but to make sure it is an Afghan workforce. That will be an important part of this, our enabling that to occur. The biggest thing we'll be able to do is provide a security envelope to allow that to occur.

That will not be an easy task and it will not be without risk. As we've found on every one of the big projects we've been involved in, the Taliban do take a dim view of progress, and as I said, they've had a vote and they have continued to try to inhibit that kind of progress.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** Thank you for that.

I'd like to share my time with Mr. Rota.

**The Chair:** Okay. You have a minute and a half.

**Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.):** Great.

I'm just looking at the discrepancy in the salaries—from \$750 for the generals, down to \$70 for the foot patrol. I guess I'm looking at it relatively speaking. In the Canadian Forces, as a comment, that would seem quite a disparity between the low end and the high end. It seems quite a gap, considering what's out there.

What would a normal family make, and is \$70 a month sufficient as an average income for someone to raise a family? And is \$750...I don't want to use the word "extravagant", but relatively speaking, it's more than 10 times what the foot patrol person is making. I'm thinking that if a Canadian general were making 10 times more than a sergeant, there'd be a heck of a spread there. I'm sure you can appreciate that.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** I know a Canadian general is not making 10 times more. That's the first part I can say with certainty.

**Mr. Anthony Rota:** I realize that. I'm just wondering, how does that affect the disparities between the people on the ground?

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** On the first aspect, the pay scale was set by the Afghan government, and it's in keeping with the responsibilities and things they are doing. I realize that from \$70 to \$750 does seem like a lot, but given the level of complexity and the responsibility in what they're doing, those would have been factors they considered when they designed the pay scale.

Second patrolman, at the very bottom, is your recruit who is starting out, and \$70 dollars may not seem like much to us in our country, but to someone there....

Do you remember what I said Afghans were paid per day when they were being hired to work in the opium fields? While on the surface \$70 doesn't sound like a lot, it is a reasonable basic salary.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, we're going to have to move on.

**Mr. Anthony Rota:** Just to clarify the question, how much would he be making in the fields?

**The Chair:** I think he indicated it was \$10 a day.

**Mr. Anthony Rota:** It was \$10 a day?

Okay, very good. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to talk to you about the command structure. You did not mention it in your presentation, but it interests me greatly. General McNeill has left and now American General McKiernan is in charge of the ISAF for all Afghanistan.

Of the 47,000 troops presently in Afghanistan, how many are American? Is it 12,000?

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** Give me a minute to think about that. Actually, Mr. Bachand, I am going to have to confirm the number. I do not have the precise figures with me.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Okay, you can get them to me.

**BGen P. Atkinson:** Yes.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** The Canadian troops, about 2,500 in number, are part of Regional Command South. This is commanded by General Thompson in Kandahar.

Is that right?

•(1620)

**BGen P. Atkinson:** Exactly right. He commands the Canadian brigade.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** The British, who are in Helmand province, are commanded by a brigadier general?

**BGen P. Atkinson:** Yes, a British brigadier general.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** What is he called? Can you send me his name?

**BGen P. Atkinson:** Yes.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** The Dutch are in Uruzgan, correct?

**BGen P. Atkinson:** Yes.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** They have a brigadier general too?

**BGen P. Atkinson:** Yes, and a general as well.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** What is his name? Can you send it to me?

At Gardez, is it an American general?

**BGen P. Atkinson:** It is a colonel.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** With the additional United States troops in the south, do you think that they are going to be asking for a turn commanding Regional Command South soon?



**BGen P. Atkinson:** At the moment, the rotation is between ourselves, the Dutch and the British. That was the plan worked out by the coalition members in the south of Afghanistan. We are currently discussing potential changes. At the moment, the commander of Regional Command South is Major General Lessard, who is Canadian. He commands the three brigades, the Dutch one, the British one and ours.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Is he responsible for the American troops?

**BGen P. Atkinson:** Yes.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** At Gardez.

**BGen P. Atkinson:** Yes. There is also a group of marines in the province where the German troops are located. They are also under Regional Command South.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Okay. You are not ruling out the possibility that the colonel in Regional Command South may be replaced by a brigadier. They could possibly make that request.

**BGen P. Atkinson:** The partners working together in the south would discuss that.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** We know that General Richards, who is British, was in charge of the ISAF. As the Americans have a very large contingent in Afghanistan and they seem to want to put a lot of focus on the country, might they demand that the general in charge of the ISAF always be an American?

**BGen P. Atkinson:** The current ISAF commander is American, General McKiernan.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** So an American commander replaced another American commander.

**BGen P. Atkinson:** He is not American. He is a NATO officer.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** But he comes from the United States.

**BGen P. Atkinson:** NATO asked the United States to supply a four-star officer like General McKiernan to be the commander.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Was General McNeill a four-star officer too?

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** Yes.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** So NATO decided that an American commander should succeed an American commander.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** Yes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You're right on schedule there. You have had your full time.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Okay. I have the information I need.

[*English*]

I'm waiting for the names of the—

**The Chair:** If you supply this information to the clerk, we'll get it to everybody on the committee. Thank you, sir.

Ms. Black.

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

Thank you very much for coming today. I guess it's your last appearance with us, and I wish you well also in Texas.

You said in your opening remarks that three Canadian soldiers have been killed in this rotation and a number have been injured. Could fill us in on the number of soldiers injured in this rotation.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** As you know, from an OPSEC perspective we never talk about the numbers of wounded. We honour our soldiers who have fallen, but if we were to comment and expand upon the numbers of wounded, that would actually give the Taliban a confirmation of their success or not in different operations. That's the reason we don't do the numbers. You'll recall that once a year we put out the statistics. Then they cannot draw any substantial conclusions from the numbers who have been wounded.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** When were the statistics last put out?

• (1625)

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** I put them out, I believe, as of the end of December.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** You've given us a lot of information about the Afghan National Police and a significant update. It's interesting to know that it was, I think, our initiative to have the Afghan National Auxiliary Police in place and that they've proved to be not competent for or capable in the job. But the training seems to have a much more fulsome sort of structure, although I have to say that eight weeks of training is a pretty small number of weeks of training for such complex work as they're involved in.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** But as you may have seen when I talked about their work, they were at eight weeks of training, and then they were taking soldiers.... After they go out and get some experience in mentoring, they bring them back and do more training again.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Still, when you compare it to anywhere else in the world, it's a very minor amount of—

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** That's why I said that this is a work in process and it will take time.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Yes.

The other question I have for you is around the Afghan National Army, which we've been working with for a longer period of time. Everyone who comes here from the Canadian military tells us that this is going well and it's building.... I would like to know what the attrition rate is and what percentage of people stay in the ANA after training. I'd also like to know the ethnic breakdown of the ANA. It would be interesting if you had it for the ANP as well.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** The specifics or exact numbers on attrition and the ethnic breakdown I can provide to the committee. Obviously those are figures I wouldn't have off the top of my head.

What I can tell you is that attrition in the early days of the ANA was high. In RC South, and in Kandahar in particular, the attrition rate of the soldiers we are training in the 205 Corps—the five *kandaks* that we are training—is very, very small, almost negligible. It's pride of authorship, if you will. Because they've been trained and mentored, and we're living, working, and fighting alongside them, they have developed an esprit de corps and a professional ethos that has just become better and better with each passing week and month. So we are seeing in our area, with the five *kandaks* we're working with, a very low attrition rate. If you compare that with two years ago, attrition then, I think, was about 40%. Today I suspect it's much less than 5%.

But I will confirm this back to the committee, as well as the ethnic breakdown of both the ANA and the ANP.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** When we made our first trip to Afghanistan, the ethnic makeup of the ANA was a big concern. At that point they didn't have many Pashtuns in the ANA, and yet that area of the country where Canada was operating is basically a Pashtun area. So I would be interested in getting those figures.

I've lost my other question, I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** We'll continue. You only had 30 seconds left.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Thank you. I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hawn.

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

Thank you, General, for being here, and good luck in Texas.

I have just a couple of questions on Taliban activity. Obviously it's ramping up now because the poppy crop is off the field, and so on.

With respect to that activity, have you seen any changes this year compared with previous years in terms of the concentration of the Taliban in any particular operation? You mentioned the leadership being targeted, and have you seen trickle-down effects from that?

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** I'll make a general comment, and it's one that I've talked about.

Because we've been effective at targeting their leadership, whenever the Taliban have concentrated and have tried to go conventional, if you will, they have lost in significant numbers. They have continued to resort to classic insurgent tactics, the use of IEDs and irregular means—that is, the use of children and women in suicide bombings. It is the only tool they have in their tool box. As we've seen, the unfortunate victims in this are not their target, which is us, but more often than not, the innocent civilians. Their tactics have not changed.

As to the tempo, we didn't see a huge spring offensive. But has there been a spike in the tempo since the poppy harvest was completed? Yes, there has.

• (1630)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** As per normal.

Afghanistan will have a presidential election in September 2009. Has there been any tactical or strategic assessment about what the Taliban might do with respect to increasing their activity in targeting the election in one way or another?

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** I think we can fully expect that it's in the interests of the Taliban to disrupt that kind of activity, as they have attempted to do in the past. But I think the Afghan government is much more capable today, with the police force they have and the Afghan National Army, and with the increased numbers from the international community in place, so that in this round the elections, when they come about, should be even more successful than in the past.

We saw that voter turnout was exceptionally high the last time. The country as a whole is more secure. There are individual pockets of incidents that have occurred, but overall, the security throughout the whole nation should be a huge enabler for people getting out to vote and exercising their rights.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Thank you. I'll give the floor to Mr. Lunney for a quick one.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lunney.

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for all of your contributions to our committee. We certainly wish you the best. I hope we'll see you down the road; I'm sure that will be the case.

I just have a quick comment on what we saw in regard to the attrition rate and the improvements in the ANA, the *kandaks* that we're working with, and the great improvements in maintaining their force.

When we were over there, there was a little frustration expressed by the OMLT people about the fact that they had spent a fair bit of time actually doing some tree planting on the base there, and so on. But I think that's part of maintaining their esprit de corps and their pride in what they've accomplished. I was quite pleased to see all of the trees they planted, which I think will make a huge difference as they get established. It's just a comment. As frustrating as that can be for the OMLT people, I suppose it's really important in helping to maintain their own esprit de corps and the value they place on their forces being there.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** Those soldiers of the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team, the group that has been there now, in essence have deployed outside the wire for almost four months. They've gone out. They've lived up in the mountains. They've lived out in those far reaches, working and fighting, and in some cases, some of the soldiers we lost were from that unit.

Theirs is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks, but as I said before, it's probably the most important task, because that mentoring they're doing, that hands-on training, side by side, building the confidence and trust in those Afghan soldiers, that will be our success in the end. Because building them up to where they can conduct operations on their own confidently will be NATO's and the international community's success, as they take responsibility for their own future.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Exactly. Thank you.

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

**A voice:** Do you want your minute back?

**The Chair:** The general's got an appointment at a quarter to four.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** I missed your last question and I think I can probably delay—

**The Chair:** Just a short one, then.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Very short.

You said there were 10 women police officers in Kandahar now.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** Yes.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** I'm wondering about women in the ANA. Are there any women in the ANA? Supplementary to that is the issue of men dressing in burkas. I would assume you need more women, given the culture, in the ANP and perhaps the ANA, around the issue of confronting someone in a burka.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** That is an issue and it's one of the reasons, in our operations, we have female soldiers and female MPs who assist. I will get the exact numbers. We'll be able to get the numbers pan-ANP. I do not believe there are any women in the Afghan National Army, certainly not as fighting soldiers. Their culture just doesn't go that way.

We will check on the ANA and perhaps in some of the support trades, but I certainly know in the *kandaks* we are training and working with.... We talk about male-dominated societies. That would be one, in spades.

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Sir, thank you very much for your contribution to us over this last period of time. We have appreciated your visits and the information you have supplied to us. It has been very, very helpful, and we look forward to working with your replacement. Good luck to you as you go down the road of your career.

**BGen Peter Atkinson:** Thank you very much, sir, and thank you very much to all the members of the committee. *Merci bien.*

As I said the first time I came here, our opportunity to talk to you about what we do in as transparent a manner as possible is critically important to our country, so that you as parliamentarians can understand and ask the difficult questions that need to be asked so that we are successful together as a nation. Canada is making a critically important contribution in Afghanistan as a member of the international community. I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with you and I thank you very much.

•(1635)

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

Thank you, committee. We are adjourned.

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