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Monday, February 9, 2009

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Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

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• (1530)

[English]

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

Today, pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we are dealing with supplementary estimates (B) 2008-09: votes 1b and 20b under National Defence, referred to the committee on Thursday, January 29, 2009.

To start, I'll call vote 1b under National Defence, and I'll invite the minister to make his statement. We'll then have a round of questions. They'll be for 10 minutes to start, beginning with the official opposition, the Bloc, the NDP, and then over to the government.

So we will open up with the minister's comments.

Sir, it's good to have you here.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence): Thank you kindly, Chair, and committee members and colleagues. I'm delighted to be with you today. It's a pleasure to come before you to discuss the Department of National Defence's supplementary estimates for the fiscal year 2008-09.

I welcome this opportunity to explain to the committee how we are supporting the Canadian Forces with the fiscal responsibility that Canadians expect and demand, particularly given our extensive commitments in Afghanistan and the historic rebuilding efforts that are currently under way, while certainly being mindful of the global economic turmoil that we face.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know well, we have been entrusted with a great responsibility, but it doesn't compare with the responsibility that has been entrusted to the men and women of the Canadian Forces. In their job of keeping Canadians safe in Canada and abroad, I can only say that those brave souls are exceptional citizens.

After years of neglect that ravaged the military's core capabilities, this government committed to the Canada first defence strategy in order to build a first-class modern military, a 20-year plan for a military that delivers excellence at home and leadership abroad, and that has restored much of Canada's hard-earned reputation as a reliable ally.

At home the Canadian Forces defend our borders and our sovereignty.

[Translation]

We know we can call on our military with confidence to safely carry out missions ranging from search and rescue, to humanitarian assistance, to domestic crisis response. They work alongside law enforcement agencies and provide support to other government departments on challenges as diverse as drug interdiction, human trafficking and over-fishing. Overseas, members of our navy, army and air force are engaged in 18 different operations. They are deployed around the globe. Places like Sudan, Kosovo, Congo, Cyprus and Egypt, as well as the Middle East. They are projecting Canada's leadership on the world stage—most notably in Afghanistan.

All this, however, comes at a cost. The supplementary estimates request approximately \$441 million in additional funding for the Department of National Defence.

• (1535)

[English]

Much of the supplementary estimates serves to enhance the safety of the men and women serving in Afghanistan. Clearly, you will all recall that this was a subject of debate and much discussion in the House of Commons, responding to the recommendations of the independent committee and the subsequent discussion, debate, and passage before Parliament of the additional recommendations of things such as helicopters, UAVs, and equipment that was required to enhance the safety of the men and women serving in the theatre of Afghanistan.

This particular funding that we're discussing here today at your committee covers the period from April 2008 to February 2009, so we're talking about up-to-date information. Parliament will be asked to approve funding to the end of the mission in 2011, again in keeping with the recommendations of Parliament, in future supplementary and main estimates. This money will allow Canada to follow through on its commitment to the United Nations-mandated, NATO-led mission to help the Afghan people to eventually and in the future defend themselves, their own borders, and sovereignty. These funds will supplement and support the upkeep and maintenance of the valuable resources that our troops rely on for their own protection and for the protection of Afghan citizens.

This investment in the security aspect of the mission is critical to the success of Canada's whole-of-government reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. As you all know, this approach is married up. That is to say, the development, the reconstruction, the diplomatic work, particularly towards the election, is completely integrated with the security. Without the security, those additional efforts simply cannot happen. Our forces are helping the Afghan government to strengthen security and maintain law and order by building up the Afghan National Security Forces, so police and army.

Over a number of trips, many trips that I've made to Afghanistan, I've seen how far these units have come in being able to provide security in Kandahar, training, equipment, confidence, independent planning, and patrols. Our forces are helping to create the security conditions necessary to support broader Canadian objectives, some of which I just referred to; the secure environment needed for schools to be built for Afghan children, of which three so far have been completed and 22 more are under construction, with a goal of completing 50; the security that will allow the work to go ahead on the Dahla Dam project, a \$50 million construction project that I, and perhaps some of you, have observed is well under way and is creating jobs for Afghans. It will provide much-needed irrigation for future agricultural enterprises to build the ability of Afghan farmers to grow crops other than poppies.

Still our forces face difficult and dangerous tasks daily. Sadly, during my last trip to Afghanistan, I attended a ramp ceremony to honour the courage and dedication of fallen Canadian heroes, as I've done too many times at repatriation ceremonies at CFB Trenton. I viewed the real human impact of the sacrifices made by our brave men in uniform, as I know Canadians have as well.

Throughout this challenging mission, the Canadian Forces have had to continually adapt to rapidly changing conditions, unexpected demands, a high-tempo, harsh environment, and a determined and ruthless insurgency. Our government has responded by providing our troops with the best possible equipment, from four Boeing C-17 strategic airlift aircraft to rapidly transport military personnel and equipment, to rapidly deploying Leopard 2 tanks into theatre, to the six Chinooks recently purchased from the United States that are now in operation in theatre and allow our troops to limit the use of convoys. These are escorted, as you know, by Griffin helicopters, previously owned by the Government of Canada. These Chinooks and Griffins were also a decision made in keeping with the conditions laid out by the parliamentary resolution to extend the mission.

Also in keeping with the conditions of that parliamentary resolution were new UAVs, unmanned aerial vehicles—the large Herons that have been deployed and are providing invaluable support and intelligence-gathering capability, and smaller UAVs.

Our most notable valuable resources, of course, are soldiers, sailors, and airmen and airwomen. We must do what we can to protect them and to make their jobs easier and safer. The \$331 million requested in supplementary estimates will improve our military's capability to act. It's funding that will contribute to Canada's whole-of-government effort in Afghanistan. And taking care of people first and foremost, Mr. Chair, is, of course, the

concern of all of us. This spending is critical to taking care of our own people, who sacrifice so much to improve and ensure security.

● (1540)

Last week, together with the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Natynczyk, I visited some genuine Canadian heroes at the Ottawa Rehabilitation Centre here in the nation's capital. These three young men who suffered life-altering injuries are certainly courageous individuals who have been working hard to recover from their injuries, and I'm pleased to report to all of you that their spirit is indomitable. Their courage and their patriotic commitment are awe-inspiring, and they are planning for bright futures; they have confidence in their country and confidence in our government, our collective Parliament, to treat them right. And there is no greater reflection of a country than how it treats those who defend its values, its interests, and its own way of life. That's why we are also requesting, in particular, \$90 million to cover the cost of raises for the Canadian Forces personnel to ensure they are fairly compensated for this important work they do.

We're requesting \$10 million to partially fund the *ex gratia* payments and associated costs of the atomic veterans recognition program. I know that my colleague has raised this issue. It is one that we are proud to see moving forward. The remaining \$15 million will be funded through the Department of National Defence's existing reference levels. This will support our government's decision to finally recognize atomic veterans, the brave men who gave exceptional service to their country at an important time in our history.

Mr. Chair, we are also investing in the future, fulfilling this government's commitment to provide enhanced security for Canadians, and giving the military the long-term support it needs and deserves, because we're not only planning to support our forces today, but clearly also making a long-term commitment for tomorrow.

It was the future of our navy that we were thinking about when we requested \$54 million to cover the implementation costs of \$3 billion this fiscal year for the Halifax class modernization/frigate life extension project, known as FELEX. Canada's Halifax class frigates have provided yeoman's service since the first one was commissioned and rolled off the docks over a decade and a half ago, but it is time their combat systems were overhauled and upgraded. Since these frigates entered service, the international security environment has changed significantly—and we may get into the discussion about piracy and the service that is required in places like the Horn of Africa.

This investment will enhance the capabilities of the ships that form the backbone of our navy, so they can meet new threats in shifting operational environments. These surface combatants are, in fact, the workhorses of the Canadian navy.

Similarly, this is why we've requested \$22 million for the Communications Security Establishment Canada. Canada relies on this agency to provide foreign intelligence, advice, and guidance vital to protecting electronic information in this country. CSE also provides technical and operational assistance to our federal law enforcement and security agencies. This is very much a joined-up approach. This funding will rectify long-standing shortfalls, so the agency can replace obsolete equipment and hire much-needed experts. This funding is essential to ensure that this important institution can fulfill its mandate for years to come.

Looking to the future, Mr. Chairman, this government is concerned that we continue to provide the armed forces with the support necessary so that all Canadians can be confident that the government is in fact doing what's necessary to safeguard our nation now and tomorrow. That means planning for the unexpected, staying vigilant, and making prudent investments.

Our requests for additional funding are rooted in ensuring that the Canadian Forces have the capacity to act when called upon.

[*Translation*]

As I said at the outset, we've made a commitment, demonstrated over the past two years, to rebuild the Canadian Forces into a first-class, modern military ready for the future. The Canada First Defence Strategy is all about keeping Canadians safe at home, fulfilling our responsibility to be a reliable partner in continental defence and ensuring that Canada can offer leadership abroad.

The certainty needed to plan for the future of the military requires a long-term financial commitment. The Canada First Defence Strategy supports companies in Canada who in turn, help to support the Canadian Forces by providing ready access to cutting-edge, home-grown technology.

● (1545)

[*English*]

In conclusion, we have one priority: protecting Canadians and our interests, which includes helping others. That, of course, comes with responsibilities and the responsibility to provide our forces with the equipment that they need now and into the future. That responsibility also includes taking care of our men and women in uniform and to plan for their future. The funding that we have requested will help us do all of that and fulfill those responsibilities.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. The committee knows from the agenda that has been circulated that you're here until 4:30. That works out so that each party will have a 10-minute session with you. After you're done, we'll change and carry on with the other witnesses.

So I'm going to open it up to the Liberal Party for 10 minutes. I'm going to be very strict on the time so we all get in.

Hon. Peter MacKay: As part of that, Mr. Chair, I should have introduced those who are here with me: the Deputy Minister of National Defence, Robert Fonberg; Vice-Admiral and Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff, Denis Rouleau; and Rear-Admiral Bryn Weadon.

We're all here to answer your questions. I'll also have officials available to you subsequent to my departure.

The Chair: Thank you for doing that.

Mr. Coderre, go ahead, for 10 minutes, for the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I am very pleased to see you again. First, I would like to make two brief comments that may require an answer, and then I will ask a question about the Chinook. Then, if there's any time left, I would like my colleague, our vice-chair, Mr. Wilfert, to be able to ask his questions.

Minister, we agree on the importance of the Afghanistan mission. We believe that our military troops must have the necessary equipment. I am wondering about the role of our troops on the ground. I am somewhat worried. I know that you were in Munich on the weekend and that you are in negotiations with NATO concerning the role of military personnel on the ground, and it would appear that we are now being tasked with combatting drug traffickers.

[*English*]

It is an issue by itself, because some of our international laws are pretty clear on the role of troops regarding what's going on in the field of operations. That's why some generals, specifically with the United States, were seeking guidance. They felt that to get involved in police operations and go after drug traffickers was not their role at all, even if you were making links and saying it's close. There is an issue there.

I know even now Mr. Karzai wants to make deals with the Taliban, fanatical or not, and some of those drug lords are linked to al-Qaeda. But some independent institutions are saying, at the same time, that sometimes some people from the Government of Afghanistan also benefit from those drug traffickers, so there is corruption there.

I think it would be important, for the sake of Canadians, to hear how you see the role of the military specifically regarding drug traffickers.

My second question is in regard to recruitment.

[*Translation*]

At the end of February, there will be a rotation within the 22nd Regiment: close to 3,000 of our military troops will take the place of other troops, and that's a good thing. However, I have heard that the rotation of the leadership is causing a few problems, whether it be corporals or captains. Some of them are on their seventh or eighth mission in Afghanistan, and this is causing health problems. I would like us to discuss that too.

The other problem is that DND is having to recruit people in their forties, and even in their fifties, so recruitment is a problem as well.

As concerns the town of Shannon, I was in the government when that issue came up in 2000. There was a problem with contaminated water. In 2004, Minister David Pratt allocated the amount of \$19 million directly from the National Defence budget in order to build a water system for the town. That agreement was signed by the Municipality of Shannon, and before that we had initially invested an additional \$4 million.

Now there seems to be a situation. How does the government intend to respond to this situation, which has apparently been going on since 1978? What is its viewpoint on this issue? In 2006, our government issued a call for tenders through National Defence in order to decontaminate the water table of the town of Shannon and commissioned a study.

• (1550)

[English]

Now, my last point is a question regarding the Chinooks. Mr. Minister, I believe the troops need the best equipment; they deserve the best. Specifically regarding transport, too many of our men and women have passed away or been injured by IEDs, which is the reason we supported buying the Chinooks, category D, for about \$400 million.

My concern is regarding the 16 new Chinooks. We're talking about the F category. We said it would take \$2 billion for their acquisition and an extra \$2.7 billion for the manufacturer for maintenance, but when you look at some of the briefings, there's an additional \$2.2 billion for internal costs.

My concern is that everything regarding that category of Chinook deserves upgrading and that we will have to pass from category F to category F+, because of the need for sensors and our desire to arm the helicopters—and also because we need extra fuel tanks and more electronics. The problem is that those helicopters needed in Afghanistan will not be ready before 2012 and 2013. Now, we might save \$6.9 billion if we want to reinvest that money in the troops and some other necessities.

My concern is, why do we need to buy those helicopters now when we know they won't be ready for Afghanistan before we're supposed to leave, by 2011?

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, you have just under six minutes to respond to that. Hopefully you can get it all in.

[Translation]

Hon. Peter MacKay: I will try, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I would just like to congratulate my dear colleague for coming back to this file.

[English]

Mr. Chair, the question with respect to policing and the role of the Canadian Forces versus that of police when it comes to interdiction of poppy crops, or when it comes to the position that was taken by NATO countries with respect to eradication, is one that we did discuss this weekend in Munich at the security conference. President Karzai was there, and I can assure my honourable colleague, quite frankly, that he specifically said, when talking about discussions that

may happen with Taliban, that they would not include anyone who was of a fanatic variety. I believe those are the words he used. What he said was that those who wish to engage in discussion would have to renounce violence and be prepared to accept the democratic will of the people of Afghanistan.

So I'm in fact encouraged that the president has put very tight parameters around individuals he would want to reach out to, because I think the level of violence we might see during this particular election period clearly is of concern to everyone. That subject was broached as well. What we do want to see is that the electoral process is fair and transparent, and that we do everything we can to avoid the intimidation and violence that the Taliban will surely hope to perpetrate.

The subject of eradication of poppies is a complicated one. There is no denying that the Taliban have, in large instance, been able to benefit from the poppy trade. They use those funds to recruit, to arm up, to hire and bribe individuals. So there is clearly a linkage between poppy growth in Afghanistan and the insurgency and its success. What was decided in Bucharest by defence ministers was that there would be a renewed focus on targeting Taliban who were directly involved and implicated in that activity and illicit drug trade.

Having said that, there is also a clear indication in Afghanistan today that the poppy trade is one that doesn't benefit Afghans. The average Afghan sees no benefit whatsoever—not that they should if it's for illicit purposes. What I'm saying is that it has been a scourge for that country, not to mention the impact it has on other countries around the world, where heroin is becoming a terrible problem, including in places like Vancouver and other cities in Canada.

So there is a linkage that we have to be aware of. Canadian troops at this time are not directly involved in eradication exercises. That has not been identified as a priority for our country, yet we are a NATO participant, and if and when there is a direct linkage between poppy growth and the insurgency and those who are using those funds to further the insurgency, then Canadian commanders and soldiers will act accordingly.

With respect to the recruitment issue that my friend asked about, I can assure you, and I say this respectfully to all present, that we are not recruiting persons over the age of 50. In fact, there are a few we're recruiting over the age of 40, although we do in fact have some quite remarkable stories about individuals who have chosen to enter the Canadian Forces later in life. We have an issue to deal with, which my friend is aware of, in terms of retirements. So while there is a bit of a bubble moving through the demographic in the Canadian Forces, we have accelerated recruitment. In parts of the country, recruitment has gone extremely well. As one might expect, we see peaks and valleys. We are actively advertising and recruiting and speaking of the benefits of joining the Canadian Forces. The trades and occupations that are offered today are varied. I would also add that a person's education can be picked up and be paid for by the Canadian Forces today, as one of the additional benefits that are offered when it comes to recruiting.

•(1555)

I did want to correct my friend on one other point, which is that we have not seen Canadian Forces members participate in excess of seven or eight missions, even those who are in leadership positions. I suspect that the maximum at this point would be four missions for someone in a leadership position.

But we have a set number of forces able to participate in these rotations. My colleague is correct in saying there is currently a rotation under way that will involve the *Royal 22e Régiment* from Valcartier, and like in previous rotations, that regiment has done extraordinary work and received the admiration and compliments of the commander of RC-South when I was last in theatre.

On the subject of Shannon, the department—

The Chair: I apologize. Your 10-minute slot is up.

Hon. Peter MacKay: If I could just comment very quickly on Shannon, we've been working very cooperatively with all of the various stakeholders, including the community of Shannon, the Canadian Forces base at Valcartier, the city, and other departments that are involved in this.

There has been in the past, as my friend would know, upwards of \$40 million in compensation and efforts made both to do studies and to complete work that is required on the water system at Shannon. The Department of National Defence has been aware, as have others, of the presence of trichloroethylene, or TCE, in the water, and we have taken exceptional steps to do everything possible to see that it's remedied.

We also have the complication of this now being the subject of a court case, so I'm a little loath to go into further detail with that case before the court, but I can assure you it's in everyone's interest that we resolve this, and there is a willingness on the part of the government to see, first and foremost, that people's health is protected with clean water.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you for that.

Thank you, Mr. Coderre, and thank you, Mr. Minister.

We'll to on to the Bloc, with Mr. Bachand for 10 minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wish to welcome the minister who is kind enough to come and explain his department's financial statements to us.

Mr. Minister, I do not think that we are making much headway in Afghanistan. Let me explain why. The Bloc Québécois was among the first to challenge the briefings that were regularly dispensed to us here. We also succeeded in convincing your predecessor that he should give us a monthly report. As you will see, if you read the minutes, we have always challenged the somewhat rosy vision of things that was presented to us.

Today, if we obtain our information from sources other than the department, we realize that all is not going well in Afghanistan. We are not in control of the territory. Recently, the Haqqani group of al-Qaeda came into the picture, mainly in the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. Moreover, as Mr. Kevin Page demonstrated very

clearly, Canada is sinking into some kind of bottomless pit, considering the amount of money that has to be spent.

Here is what I want to question you about. You are appearing before us today to ask for \$441 million extra, \$331 million of which are reserved for Afghanistan. This is a lot of money.

According to Mr. Page's document, you have been asking for supplementary estimates for Afghanistan since 2001. In 2001, you requested \$624 million; in 2001-2002, \$890 million; in 2002-2003, it was \$739 million; in 2003-2004, you asked for \$1.34 billion; in 2004-2005, you requested \$829 million, and so forth. Thus, the Afghanistan war has cost us \$8.9 billion more than what you had projected.

You and your department determined a total budget to cover the costs of the war in Afghanistan on a yearly basis. On the other hand, every year, you have to come back before us to ask us for supplementary estimates. This year, you are asking for \$331 million extra. In the overview of the main changes made to the budget, the only things we can find have to do with material support for the mission. Would the LAV-3 need to be replaced or refurbished because of the terrain, which is very adverse? Are we dealing with ammunition, repairs and upgrades, immediate care, or technical support? You are not telling us very much.

As we want to defend the taxpayers, we want to know where we are going with all this. Up to now, the war has cost \$18 billion, besides the \$8.9 billion of supplementary estimates that you have requested from us over the years. Don't you think that we are on the wrong track? Don't you find that this could well cost us more than \$20 billion, given the fact that operations will be continued until 2011? Could you find a way to forecast an exact sum for next year's budget so that you do not need to come back before the House or before the defence committee to get supplementary estimates? Would you agree with me that things are not going well in Afghanistan and that all this can become much more costly for us as we go on?

I would like to hear your explanations. I want to be able to tell the Canadian taxpayers and the Quebec taxpayers whether or not they got their money's worth. Up to now, bad financial projections were made, and they were followed by enormous extra costs. You know that during a period of financial constraint, in the provinces and everywhere in Canada, when the people see that Afghanistan is like a gaping bottomless hole, they want to ask questions.

First, I would like to hear your answer to this question.

•(1600)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you very much for this question.

I disagree with the description of the Afghanistan mission as a bottomless hole. It is not accurate.

[English]

Clearly, the costs of security and the fundamental requirements and responsibility that we have as members of Parliament, and members of the government, is to ensure that when we send people into a changing and volatile and urgent theatre of operation, we adapt with them to the security environment. That is to say, the challenges that were faced in Kandahar province versus the security threat and assessment that existed in Kabul at the beginning of the mission were fundamentally different.

I think there will be colleagues here who would be the first to acknowledge that when we deployed into Kandahar, the world changed entirely for the men and women on that mission. As a result, we became increasingly aware of the complex nature of the mission and the tenacity of the Taliban, and the proximity to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border became an enormous factor.

Kandahar, as my friend would know, is the birthplace and incubator of the Taliban. As a result, we saw much more kinetic activity. We saw increased use of IEDs. He mentioned the fact that the LAVs, for example, became subject to attacks from IEDs on the roads. These inevitably caused catastrophic damage not only to equipment but also to the soldiers. So the costs associated with that are directly attributable to the efforts on the part of the government and on the part of Parliament to respond with equipment that is going to protect and save lives.

I can't stress enough to my friend and to members of this committee that there is a direct connection between our ability to increase the security quotient and our ability to save lives and promote quality of life for Afghans. If the measuring stick applied to the success of this mission is the ability to have more development work done, more reconstruction work done, more programs delivered, then we are succeeding. For every young girl who gets an education now in Afghanistan as a result of the schools that we're able to build, the programs that we can deliver, and the teachers we can provide with the capacity to pass that education on; and for every eradication program that allows thousands of children to be immunized against polio; and for every effort that we make to give people job or trade skills, commerce, and access to micro-financing and roads that allow them to connect communities; and for all the issues related to water—the Dahla Dam project, for example—none of these things could happen without security.

Yes, this is an expensive mission, an expensive undertaking, on the part of our country, but if we truly believe in projecting outward those values of protecting people and promoting peace, freedom, and security and promoting a quality of life for these people, then we are succeeding. At the rate we would like? Perhaps not.

For example, there is the way in which the counter-insurgency is demonstrating adaptability to the tactics the Taliban have been using. To explain briefly, we had one experience while we were there that resulted in casualties. The Taliban are no longer placing these IEDs in culverts but are actually putting them to the side of culverts, which are much more difficult to detect when our road-clearing soldiers are out looking for these IEDs planted in roads. The tactics the Taliban have used have adapted, and we've had to adapt similarly. The type of equipment that we use, particularly for detecting IEDs, is very

specialized and very expensive, and this is associated with increased costs.

I would also caution my friend that these figures of \$8.9 billion differ from the incremental costs. We'll no doubt have further discussions about this, but there are costs associated with the mission itself, and there are costs associated with the regular budget of the Canadian Forces—their salaries, their health care, the equipment purchases that we would have made in any event, and the maintenance costs. But clearly, in the theatre of operations the maintenance is much more rigorous, as the environment in which the forces are operating is much more damaging to the equipment itself, and the costs of the increased kinetic activity also take their toll in terms of the resulting figures.

• (1605)

Mr. Claude Bachand: Can I interrupt you on a matter of small precision?

[Translation]

Do you approve of the balance of the mission? Mr. Page's figures, which I have here, show that 90% of the money spent in Afghanistan goes to the military mission. Only 10% of the money is allocated to reconstruction and diplomacy. We have always challenged the poor balance of this mission. Do you think that we will be able to create a good standard of living for Afghans, to win over their hearts and minds by military means alone?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay: No, I absolutely don't believe this military mission can result in the success we're looking for. It's not going to be won militarily alone. It is, however, going to be won by creating the security environment that allows us to increase the reconstruction and development, increase the number of teachers trained, and increase the irrigation systems that we can put in place. However, getting the balance right means getting the security piece right first. One can't happen without the other. As the insurgency has rekindled, we have to meet that force to allow us to similarly clear the ground, if I can put it that way, to continue these programs, to continue the actual building of the infrastructure of the country. That is the balance that's sought.

Our preference would be to put all the money into reconstruction and development, but if the Taliban are going to burn schools down as quickly as we build them, if they're going to interfere with the ability of children to go to school—we saw the splashing of acid in the faces of young girls—we can't do those things until we get the security piece in place. So the balance will be recalibrated as the security quotient increases, and we'll subsequently increase the humanitarian effort and the diplomatic effort in concert with that.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move on to the NDP, with Ms. Black for 10 minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for coming today on short notice to appear at committee under the supplementary estimates.

I listened carefully to what my two colleagues before me had to say, and I must agree in regard to the escalating costs. It's a huge issue for Canadians, particularly at a time of financial uncertainty across the country. We had estimates in June that increased by over \$500 million the cost of the war in Afghanistan, and today we have \$331 million in the supplementary estimates, which, from what you said earlier, is for a few weeks, until the end of February 2009. So there are very serious concerns about the escalating costs.

We have the parliamentary budget officer who has indicated, to date, \$18 billion in costs on this war, and that doesn't even address the cost to the Canadian Forces personnel themselves, the men and women who've been killed, the diplomat who's been killed, the Canadian aid workers who've died in Afghanistan, nor does it address the horrific injuries that many of the men and women in the Canadian Forces are suffering. There is a cost not only in dollars but in lives. The re-rotation of the Canadian Forces personnel is having an incredible impact on the families of the men and women in the Canadian Forces as well.

One of the issues I want to raise with you today is the discussion we've seen in the media around changes to the rules of engagement vis-à-vis the drug traffickers. General Craddock from the U.S. said last weekend that operations by NATO, by ISAF, to attack drug traffickers in Afghanistan will begin in the next several days. Our new Chief of the Defence Staff had spoken out earlier in support of these kinds of operations.

You'll remember that in Parliament last year a motion passed that was quite clear on the issue of drug trafficking, to "address the crippling issue of the narco-economy that consistently undermines progress in Afghanistan, through the pursuit of solutions that do not further alienate the goodwill of the local population". Directly attacking those involved in the drug trade really is inconsistent with this motion that passed through Parliament. Poppy farmers and small-time criminals, some of whom are not motivated by ideology but by a desperate need to feed their families, may in turn be forced into the hands of the insurgency of the Taliban, which fuels the insurgency and results in more death and injuries to our soldiers. In addition to that, I believe targeting those without direct material ties to the insurgency would put Canadian troops into a very troubling grey legal area. I'm sure you must be familiar with the international law on that.

So I want to ask you, do you agree that directly targeting criminal drug traffickers is questionable under international law and inconsistent with the mission as voted on by Parliament? Can you confirm for us today that Canadian Forces will not take part in these kinds of operations where American generals have said it would be fine to kill up to 10 civilians when targeting drug operations?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Well, I would fundamentally argue that I have never heard military personnel, ours or any others, say it was fine to kill civilians—never. So I would take issue with that.

• (1615)

Ms. Dawn Black: I can provide that for you, Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I would be very interested to see it.

My friend says there is no difference, essentially, between a farmer who may be intimidated or forced by means of violence or bribery to grow poppy that is used for heroin and the large-scale drug

operations that are fuelling the Taliban, and I would disagree with that. I think there's a fundamental difference, just as we have seen small-time operators in Canada—though I'm not equating the two—and large-scale operations, grow-ops, that are fuelling drug proliferation here and elsewhere. There is a large difference.

The position taken by ISAF and the NATO countries to target those activities, those drug operations, that are specifically linked to the insurgency is what we're talking about here. We're not talking about alienating the local population; we're not talking about targeting a farmer who may, sadly, through necessity, be growing poppy. There is a big difference, and I would suggest there is an ability to discern who is involved with the large-scale operations of drug trafficking in Afghanistan and those who are not. That is the deliberate effort that will be made.

To date, Canada has not participated in this policy. It's our intention to focus on current operations, which do not include targeting drug trafficking operations. As NATO countries, we do have an obligation to discuss and participate in these policies.

What I would suggest to my friend is that we will always operate in theatre in accordance with international law and our own chain of command when those decisions are made. What our intention is—and let's be clear about this—is that where there is a connection between illicit drug activity and the insurgency and the funding of the insurgency, that, we believe, is legitimate for the Canadian Forces to interrupt, disrupt, and stop.

Ms. Dawn Black: Thank you, Minister. I hope you're correct in that, but I can show you quotes from American military personnel who do not present it in the same way as you're presenting it. I think that is a huge concern for Canadians, if it's Canadian policy.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Well, I'm concerned about the Canadian chain of command and Canadian decision-making.

Ms. Dawn Black: But you're part of ISAF and you're part of NATO.

Minister, in terms of how well the mission in Afghanistan is going, just yesterday David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain, indicated that he feels that it's a stalemate, that they're not making as much progress as they had hoped to do in Afghanistan.

Last December, one of our Canadian brigadiers-general was on the public record promising more offensive operations through the winter months by Canadian troops in Afghanistan, when it's generally a quieter time. As a result, in the last couple of months, in December and January, we've lost 11 Canadian Forces personnel.

There appears to be somewhat of a surge in military activity in Afghanistan by Canadians in this last winter. We're now receiving reports that there is a more fanatical, more violent, and even better trained wing of the Taliban, the Haqqani network, that has moved into southern Afghanistan because, I believe, of somewhat of a leadership vacuum in the Taliban, as some of their military leaders have been killed over the last while. I believe this is evidence of what some of us around this table have said, and what other experts in the field of counter-insurgency have said—versus what you have called the whole-of-government or three-D approach—that the counter-insurgency, in many ways, will fuel the insurgency. It seems that insurgents who are even more violent than the ones who've been killed are now moving into the void, and better trained, more fundamentalist, and more violent leaders are moving into the area where our troops are.

When we look back at the motion that was passed in the House of Commons last year, it stated that Canada would continue as a military presence in Kandahar after 2009 to 2011 to train the Afghan security forces, to provide security for reconstruction and development efforts, and to continue Canada's responsibility for the PRT there. Given those confines and given what has happened in the last few months, can you tell this committee how we have arrived at what appears to have been a surge by pro-Taliban forces in the last few months?

• (1620)

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Minister, we don't have time.

Hopefully, in the supplementary round, you can ask that again of someone else, but your time is up. I apologize for that.

But to wrap this session up, we'll go over to the government side, and Mr. Hawn.

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

Thank you, Minister and officials.

I want to pick up on three things from across the way, just to allow some clarification, the first being from Mr. Coderre with respect to the Chinooks. You didn't have an opportunity to respond to that.

Obviously the Chinooks are not bought simply for Afghanistan; they're bought for the next several decades. And we're buying Chinooks with long-range fuel tanks. Obviously Arctic sovereignty is going to take a prominent role in our plans for the future, and there are things like natural disasters, ice storms, floods, you name them, where we previously had used U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force Chinooks and C-17s, but now we have our own.

So could you comment briefly on the utility of the Chinooks for much more than Afghanistan?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you.

On the issue of the Chinooks, as a former air force pilot yourself, Mr. Hawn, you'll know that the Chinooks, like our fast planes, like our transport aircraft, play a niche role. These particular aircraft are extremely useful in the transport of both troops and equipment in a theatre of operations. You're correct in saying this would not be solely dedicated to Afghanistan in the future, beyond 2011. These types of aircraft will be very useful in disasters, to move troops

quickly in a place such as Haiti, in the aftermath of a hurricane in the Caribbean, or in other theatres of operation that we may find ourselves in, in the future. Being able to transport troops and equipment quickly, efficiently, and safely is absolutely essential to the Canadian Forces.

We are back in business as a result of the purchase of those D models. As to the F models that my friend referred to, that contract, as you know, is still in negotiations, but it's nearing the final stages. That would allow us to have those particular types of aircraft well beyond the expiration of the Afghanistan mission. The intention at this point would be to sell the existing D models and have those costs go towards the future purchase of these new F models.

And yes, clearly, during the time it will take to receive those aircraft, as we have seen with other purchases, including the Cyclones, which will replace the maritime helicopters—the Sea King helicopter replacement project—there may in fact be new technology. There will be in-service support required that will also have benefits to Canada.

Something I really want to emphasize here is that we always try to solicit Canadian companies to bid on these particular contracts. Whenever possible, we'll buy Canadian equipment. The reality is that certain types of equipment are not made in Canada. When that is the case, we have a very strict industrial regional benefits package that requires a non-Canadian company to spend, dollar for dollar, the amount that is awarded in the contract. In the instance of trucks, for example, where the only bidder in a five-month process was a company from outside Canada—a contract worth \$274 million—that company will be required to spend \$270 million in Canada. They've already identified \$84 million or \$85 million-plus, which will be spent over the life of the contract.

As regards many of the component parts, our aerospace industry in Canada is thriving. It's one of the bright spots right now in the economy. That is an element of military procurement that we're very aware of, so in those future purchases of Chinooks and other types of military equipment and procurements we are very mindful of the fact that we need to promote Canadian aerospace and other sectors of military procurement.

• (1625)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: My next question is with respect to supplemental estimates. We're getting sort of wrapped around the axle on that a little bit. It's big money, and we understand that, so we should have a clear understanding.

The basic Defence budget refers to the basic mission of the Canadian Forces, which is training, operations, and so on. The Canadian Forces doesn't plan for natural disasters. You don't generally plan for wars; those come up. Those are supplementary missions that come up, which therefore require supplementary funding. That's where supplemental estimates come from.

Is that a fair characterization of the process?

Hon. Peter MacKay: That is correct. I would call it not only supplemental, but incremental. We're talking about additional costs above and beyond what we would pay for salaries, the normal depreciation, the normal purchase of equipment that is essential to the Canadian Forces. When we enter a theatre of operations, when we respond to a hurricane, when there is a natural disaster as we've seen in our own country, those additional costs are what we're talking about here. Things such as health care and the way in which machinery depreciates is often the subject of some dispute.

So when we are talking about the figures here, it's important to delineate—to use the vernacular—what we would have spent in any event had there not been a war or a natural disaster versus what additional costs are associated with that activity.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thirdly—and then I'm going to save some time, I hope, for my colleague Ms. Gallant—we keep talking about this tired old 10:1 ratio of spending in Afghanistan, and I'm frankly a little bit disappointed that the parliamentary budget officer seems to have fallen prey to that same misunderstanding. A dollar of money spent on the military isn't just paying for the military. When a dollar is spent on the military, some of that \$10 to \$1 is being spent on development and reconstruction, and so on; it just happens to be carried out by men and women in uniform. We consistently make the false argument that we're spending \$10 on the military to \$1 on construction, when in fact a good chunk of that \$10 on the military is in fact reconstruction, development, and so on.

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's absolutely right, Mr. Hawn, and you've been in Kandahar province. You were there as recently as this Christmas. You've seen the schools being built along a stretch of road that is patrolled by Canadian Forces personnel. You've seen the force protection that is necessary to provide for people at the PRT, the work that is being done at the Dahla Dam. All these are inextricable from costs that are assumed by the Canadian Forces, yet they are there solely to protect, in many cases, the efforts of CIDA, the efforts of the RCMP in training, and the efforts, for example, of the transport of humanitarian supplies to villages and to people throughout the countryside.

So there are costs that would be, in a military sense, taken out of our budget but were actually solely devoted to development costs or to the reconstruction of a project, or to the delivery, for example, of immunization of children against polio. We're assuming that cost. It may be identified on a piece of paper as a military expenditure, but it is truly money that is being spent solely for humanitarian purposes. That's an important distinction that has to be made, and it is a false dichotomy to say that 10:1 is being spent on the military, because that just doesn't add up in reality when you see the type of work that Canadian Forces personnel are doing in Afghanistan.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Minister.

I will give whatever time I have left to Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you.

I have two subjects to touch upon. I will ask them both at once so that you can judge your time accordingly.

In a previous appearance before this committee, there was considerable discussion about atomic veterans. I see in the

supplementary estimates that almost \$10 million has been allocated for atomic veterans.

On Saturday I happened to attend the funeral of Sapper Greenfield, who was, as we know, very heroic, highly skilled, dearly loved, and will be missed, and he died doing what he loved and what he believed in. At that funeral an acquaintance, Ralph Storey, who had worked on the Chalk River cleanup, asked me a few questions: who benefits, how much will they receive, do they have to show a medical condition to qualify, when will the cheques start to flow, and will civilians qualify for this program?

The other issue is that we've also done considerable work in the previous Parliament on the issue of mental health, and we're hoping to get back to work on that. We've heard from a number of witnesses and hope to be able to complete the report in the very near future.

You said it is critical to take care of our own people, and you spoke about visiting the injured with General Natynczyk. What are you and the department doing to take care of our injured soldiers, our airmen, and our sailors?

• (1630)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you very much, Ms. Gallant. I know this is an issue you've closely followed and associated yourself with.

The atomic veterans program is designed specifically to recognize the exceptional service of those veterans, who were not, incidentally, all Canadian Forces personnel. There were civilians, and they will be eligible for this package. The funding that has been set aside, both supplementary estimate amounts that you've mentioned of approximately \$10 million and the additional funding to round out the program, is the result of a long-standing issue that was not resolved by previous governments. I'm very proud that we're finally doing something for these atomic veterans.

To date, approximately 300 atomic veterans application packages have been sent out. We have proactively identified individuals who we believe are eligible, and the eligibility criterion here is important. Anyone who was there who was exposed, regardless of medical condition...and this is not exclusive of a medical condition. If there are medical issues related to that exposure, that is separate and that will be dealt with by Veterans Affairs Canada, and that will be dealt with in addition to the \$25,000 package that is being presented. What's important to remember here is that we intend to do this as an *ex gratia* payment in recognition of that exceptional service. So anyone who was there is eligible. I am told that to date we have had 420 phone inquiries, and we have received other inquiries by other means.

As far as their eligibility is concerned, 114 atomic veterans and six non-military personnel have been identified. We hope to see these cheques start to go out. I know there were cheques that went out last Friday, so the delivery of this program has already begun. I would add that if atomic veterans have passed on, consideration can be given to the application of a primary beneficiary or caregiver, so family members are eligible as well.

On the health package, it would take considerable time to go into that detail. I'd be glad to share that with my colleague separately.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The atomic veterans issue, of course, is important to us all, and we appreciate that, and I think everybody appreciates the fact that the cheques are flowing.

We certainly want to thank you for being here. I understand you got back late yesterday from Europe and made yourself available very quickly to us, and that's appreciated.

I have just one comment, as the chair, before we dismiss you and set up the other panel. I'm keenly supportive of the rehabilitation of the Dahla Dam. I knew some expertise came from the Prairies, from my neck of the woods, to help with that. I live in an area of Canada where irrigation has turned a desert into very productive land. I know the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration had some input into that, and I certainly hope that proceeds and brings a better life to those people there.

Thank you very much for being here.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair.

I do want to correct that figure. I mistakenly said \$25,000. That payment is actually \$24,000.

On the Dahla Dam project, as you would know, there are Canadian contractors involved as well, but most importantly, there are significant numbers of Afghans who will receive employment for that project—thousands, in fact, who will be picking up hoes and shovels rather than automatic weapons. The entire Arghandab Valley region that will benefit from this irrigation is in fact one of the greatest potentials we have to bring some commerce and agriculture, with which you're very familiar, to that region of Kandahar province. It is one of the signature projects. I know you have Minister Oda coming to the committee as well, and she can speak in greater detail about that.

In my view, one of the most important contributions we can make is the repair of the Dahla Dam, and I thank those who were involved from other organizations to help identify and put that project forward.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir. It's good to see you.

We'll suspend briefly while we get the panel changed over.

• _____ (Pause) _____
•

The Chair: I would ask people to take their seats and we will begin. I know everybody is anxious to ask some questions.

As we get started, I'd ask that the new witnesses who have come forward identify themselves and their position, and possibly the reason they're here.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Robert Fonberg (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): It's because we like being here.

In terms of new people at the table, with me today is my colleague Bill Pentney, who is the Associate Deputy Minister of National

Defence; and General Semianiw, who is the chief of military personnel, and who in particular, among other things, would pick up a lot of the mental health questions and the personnel questions.

The Chair: We appreciate that. I think we've seen most of you here in the past, so it's good to have you back.

We're going to go into a five-minute round. We have 50 minutes, so we'll get 10 spots, hopefully. I'll keep the time very strict. You've all been here to see how it started off, with the presentation given by the minister.

Mr. Wilfert, we're going to turn it over to you to begin.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I assume that for any questions that are not addressed we can get the answers in writing.

The Chair: Certainly. That's the usual procedure.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you.

I have two questions. First of all, as part of the Canada first defence strategy announced in 2006, the joint support ship program was a priority of the government. Three years later we seem to be back to square one. We wrongly estimated the cost of the ships, resulting obviously in requiring taxpayers to maintain the old ones. Four bidders delivered cost design proposals last year; all were rejected in August, and now the program is further delayed.

What is the current status of the JSS program since the cancellation? When will the supply ships for JSS be built? When will we resume the procurement process for the JSS program, and when will the new requirements be released?

Obviously there are tremendous economic stimulus opportunities both in Newfoundland and in Victoria.

My second question relates to the Canada first strategy, which deals with the priority of protecting the north. We certainly agree with that, for the security and safety of Canadians. It's not simply about Afghanistan but obviously about protecting and supporting Canadians at home. Why not allow an open competition for the Buffalo search and rescue replacement planes? Why not consider Canadian companies such as Viking in British Columbia? I'm not sure what sense it makes to support an Italian firm in the United States. The government has not upheld its buy Canadian policy, in our view, with the recent contract with the American company, Navistar Defense, as an example.

So I'd appreciate answers to those questions, and if we don't get to all of those, obviously, as per our policy, we should get them in writing.

Thank you.

• (1640)

The Chair: You have three minutes, whoever wants to respond.

Mr. Robert Fonberg: I'll ask the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff to speak to the issue of JSS, and I'll come back on the fixed-wing SAR issue, Mr. Chairman.

Vice-Admiral D. Rouleau (Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): On the issue of JSS, as we all know, once the two bidders became non-compliant this past fall, there was the requirement that the capability remain extant, and we are now in the process of basically relooking at the options to be able to deliver that capability. The issue is not at all dropped. In fact, it is gaining speed and momentum right now to try to come up with a solution to deliver that capability within the available budget. This is where it's at now, redefining the requirements, and that is progressing very well.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: You say "redefining". Are there any timelines when we might be able to be brought up to speed on that?

VADM D. Rouleau: I would say JSS will be coming up. By the summer of this year we will have a way ahead as to what are the delivery options, because this is really what we're after right now: how can we deliver, how can we bring about the solution to answering the requirement itself?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I would presume, Mr. Chairman, this committee will be kept up to date. That would be certainly my request.

VADM D. Rouleau: Absolutely.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you.

Mr. Robert Fonberg: Mr. Chairman, on the fixed-wing search and rescue issue, we are not, as you know, in the market looking for a contractor at this point, so we obviously have no particular preference for any aircraft. When we do go to market, whoever is out there who's able to meet the requirements as set out by the Chief of the Air Staff for that platform would obviously have an opportunity to bid, including any Canadian company that can come forward and any company from any other particular country that could come forward.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: As long as the requirements don't preclude companies of that nature. Obviously how you define what you're looking for will indicate who can actually bid.

Mr. Robert Fonberg: Absolutely. And I think we would certainly be prepared to have the Chief of the Air Staff speak in detail to the requirements that he has set out for that requirement.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Again, I'd appreciate an update on that.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, the Gander flight school has been dropped from the 2009 air cadet power pilot scholarship program. It's interesting that two schools in government-held ridings have been added to the expense of that school and have been receiving funding since 1993.

Can someone explain to us or get back to us as to why Gander was in fact closed?

Mr. Robert Fonberg: We'll get back to you in writing.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I would appreciate that.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, we certainly support the \$90 million, particularly with regard to the raises for the Canadian Forces. I was on the committee once where we actually dealt with the quality of life issues. We talk a lot about the hardware, but the actual support of the families and support of providing increase for wages, I think, is absolutely critical, particularly on the issue of retainment.

Mr. Chairman, what is the strategy for recruitment to ensure the retention, especially to fill specific occupations?

Mr. Robert Fonberg: I would ask the Chief of Military Personnel to speak to that.

Major-General Walter Semianiw (Chief of Military Personnel, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chairman, as I'm sure you're aware, the Canadian Forces, like other militaries around the world, is being challenged to recruit a number of trades and specific occupations, which we can provide to this committee if that's what you wish.

It's no different with our U.S., U.K., Australia, and New Zealand counterparts. What we're doing in particular for two areas is targeting naval technician as one particular stressed trade. We have a number of programs in place where we will provide moneys, as the minister said earlier, to Canadians who are involved in college programs to help them through that, as well as to recognize the certificate they receive from that college program.

That's just one small example of what we're doing. We know what those stressed trades are, we have targeted programs for each, and we're prepared to share them with this committee, if the committee sees fit.

Aside from that, the Canadian Forces is also looking at the overarching issue of Canadian Forces retention. As many companies across the country are realizing, keeping good people around.... And remember our aim is to recruit Canada's best and to retain Canada's best. With that, we are putting together a retention strategy focused in two particular areas for us that we have defined to need some specific attention, aside from specific trades or occupations, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Again, can I ask that we can get that information?

The Chair: You bet. They were taking notes furiously.

Mr. Wilfert, you packed a lot into your five minutes. Good for you.

Mr. Blaney, let's see if you can do the same.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): That is what we will see, Mr. Chairman.

First, I want to welcome our general, our Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff and our deputy ministers.

Let me come back to the minister's presentation. I very much appreciate the minister's express will to help the Afghan army become autonomous. I also appreciate the concrete achievements, such as the 25 schools and the dam in Dhala. I find this most encouraging. Certainly, I will support the extra expenditures, because they will clearly serve to outfit our soldiers on the one hand so that they can carry out their mission, and on the other hand to protect them. For instance, I am thinking of Valcartier where we have a defence centre. Deployment was discussed, but some important research is also being done with regard to that. Right now, I want to congratulate the forces for their remarkable work. Especially, as you know, a new turnaround is beginning in Quebec with a deployment from Valcartier. We will continue following the mission very closely.

That being said, let me come back to the issue of opium production. This committee made a study, which raised the possibility of using opium for pharmaceutical purposes, or of purchasing opium. I think that this is an interesting alternative proposed by our committee.

My questions, Mr. Chairman, are first and foremost about the shipbuilding industry. I will put them more specifically to the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff.

The minister raised the issue of funds for modernizing and extending the longevity of the *Halifax* class frigates. I would like to know if you could tell us what the funds will be spent for and whether any Canadian companies will be able to benefit from them. More generally, Mr. Rouleau, could you give us a picture of your intentions—you discussed the Joint Support Ship with Mr. Wilfert—regarding the modernization of the Canadian fleet in relation to the Canadian shipbuilding industry and to Canadian shipyards.

Vadm D. Rouleau: Yes, absolutely. Just for modernizing our Canadian frigates, we currently have a program on both coasts that will certainly bring some very substantial investment to the Canadian shipbuilding industry.

As the minister said, our first frigate, the *Halifax*, was fitted out in 1990, which means that what we call our new Canadian patrol frigates are not really all that new. However, given the change in the mission, the change in operations, their equipment, whether it be radar, communications equipment or electronic equipment for electronic war, must be adapted so as to keep in step with the latest progress in electronics. Consequently, the frigates need a very substantial modernization program so that they can be, once again, able to operate not only in Canada but also overseas, as the frigates did very recently. In fact, our frigate *Ville de Québec* recently patrolled the shores of Somalia to protect United Nations food convoys. All those measures need to be taken so that our frigates can cooperate with ships from other nations. Operating on our own is one thing, but we must be able to work within a coalition. Consequently, the equipment must be compatible. Therefore, the

equipment must be upgraded. This is what we are doing currently for the frigates.

With regard to the potential replacement of the frigates as well as the replacement of our destroyers, which are very old, the program was announced through the Canada First Defence Strategy, where the situation was clearly explained. The document states that there is a need to replace 15 surface ships, which means our Canadian frigates along with our three destroyers. The programs are currently underway for implementing a system for supplying these ships while maintaining a capacity to operate at sea. All this is being achieved in the process of modernizing the frigates.

Mr. Steven Blaney: I have another question. Coming back to the modernization and the extension of the longevity of our frigates, you mentioned that work was going on both coasts. Could you tell us a bit more of what you intend to do with regard to this?

• (1650)

Vadm D. Rouleau: The work is awarded to those shipyards that are able to do the work. At present, on both shores, the contracts have not been put out in their entirety. We are talking about a program of nearly two and a half billion dollars, and perhaps even more. Today, here and now, we are talking about only \$54 million. Therefore, the benefits for the industry are not yet entirely visible, but they will be announced.

Mr. Steven Blaney: When do you expect to call for tenders?

Vadm D. Rouleau: I will have to verify this, I could give you the details of the operation step by step, because this program has several steps.

Mr. Steven Blaney: I would appreciate that.

Have I any time left, Mr. Chairman?

[English]

The Chair: Not right now.

Mr. Paillé from the Bloc, welcome.

[Translation]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you for coming.

On August 29 this year, presidential elections will be held in Afghanistan. According to our information, at about that date, we would extend the mission of the 22nd Regiment and we would accelerate the mission of the other unit so as to have a total of 4,000 soldiers.

Is there any connection between what we heard regarding the increase in the number of troops and the presidential elections about to be held in Afghanistan?

Vadm D. Rouleau: If we look at the timings of the turnarounds, the Valcartier brigade will be deployed this spring, in March and April, and will come back six months afterward, which means next October. Therefore, this deployment is not at all connected with the Afghani elections, which will be held in August. The unit currently on the ground will certainly not be kept there until August; this would be an extension of more than four months.

If an event were to occur near the end of the mission we might look into the possibility of extending the mission by one week or two. At present, we do not need to have both brigades on the ground at the same time. The timings do not allow for any extension that would be due to the elections.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: Finally, you do not expect to superimpose two units or to increase the number of troops on or around next August 20.

VAdm D. Rouleau: Not at all. The timings are for six-month periods. We could look into the possibility of increasing the number of troops if an event occurred during that period. However, regarding the elections, given the fact that they are being held during the very middle of a turnaround, we are not considering that alternative.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: Are you afraid of some increase in violence that might involve Canadian soldiers during the presidential elections that will be held on August 20 this year?

VAdm D. Rouleau: The coalition is in the process of taking additional measures. Registration of the Afghan population is underway. As the election draws near, if necessary, the coalition will study the options at its disposal. Canada is currently engaged with the forces that we have in the field. We have increased the number of *Chinooks* and *Griffons*, which were part of recent deployments, as well as unarmed aircraft that provide us with additional surveillance.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: I see.

[*English*]

The Chair: You still have a couple of minutes to use up, if you wish.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: On an entirely different matter, you know that unfortunately the armoury in Quebec City burnt down last year. The government's economic recovery plan calls for rebuilding of the armoury, but we have very few details.

In more practical terms, will it be possible to rebuild it quickly, so that the ruins of the armoury are not left in this condition for too long? Unfortunately, that kind of delay occurs quite often.

• (1655)

Mr. William F. Pentney (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Thank you for your questions, sir.

The government's commitment to rebuilding the armoury remains the same. We must undertake a consultation process. This is what we announced in the last budget. Public Works and Government Services and all the other departments involved will consult citizens so as to determine the best way of using this space, which is important for Canada. We cannot specify a deadline for the consultations, but the commitment to rebuild the armoury remains.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Over to the government, and then back to the official opposition. You have five minutes, Mr. Boughen.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fonberg, this question is for you. Let me start by saying that the minister, in his remarks, made reference to the Canada first defence strategy, which was announced last year. This 20-year plan will help build the Canadian Forces with both equipment and personnel, ensuring a first-class, modern military, a ready-for-the-future Canadian Forces. He also stated that CFDS investments are going to support a strong and competitive defence industry. Can you explain how this will work? It seems that there has been only negative press about recent purchases for the military.

While you're thinking on that, let me move to another vein. Just as an observation, we hear all the time about how things are going badly in Afghanistan. But I'm always cognizant of this question: what measure is being used to determine that things are going badly? How many bridges have been replaced? How many roads have been improved? What has been the education opportunity for young people in schools? Is the student attendance up? I've been given to understand that over a million young women are now attending schools who did not attend schools before Canada had a presence in that country. Is there land being returned to people that was held by the other folks? Is there an increase in the GNP? Are there irrigation projects, and are there dams being built?

All of these things are part and parcel of Canada's placement in Afghanistan. I think sometimes we overlook these and don't recognize the good work that's being done. I'd just like to make that observation.

Now back to you, Mr. Fonberg, about my first question.

Mr. Robert Fonberg: Thank you for that question, and thank you for the latter comment also. I think the minister, while he was here, did try to address that question on the progress and on what's been happening with such things as education, health care, and roads.

On the Canada first defence strategy, the 20-year commitment that was made included major capital fleet replacement that has capital acquisition costs of close to \$50 billion over the next 20 years. I think the reality of military procurement is that it always is very difficult in the short term. Government made a commitment to the long-term fleet replacement and renewal for the Canadian Forces across air assets, across land assets, and across naval assets.

In all cases, there will be attempts to procure and/or build domestically in Canada, and in those cases where that opportunity is not available, there will be, as the minister talked about, 100% offsets, a requirement by any manufacturer or prime outside of Canada to invest one dollar in the country for every dollar that we pay for their equipment.

Looked at in a 20-year context, and thinking about the certainty that provides to industry, whether it's in the shipbuilding or aerospace areas or around line combat vehicles, I think it gives the government an extraordinary opportunity to allow industry to actually get ready for these investments. The clarity that will come through an investment plan that actually supports the Canada first defence strategy ought to give the confidence to the Canadian supply industry that they can make the kinds of investments that are required to allow them to be more competitive than they might be today, and more able to actually participate in that.

When we look at supporting Canadian industry, we certainly look at it in terms of helping position Canadians and Canadian players in this area for not only an ability to participate in the investments that the Canadian government is going to make for the Canadian Forces, but also, frankly, to play in larger global supply chains. At the end of the day, that's where we'd really like to get Canadians positioned, around the \$50 billion of acquisition costs associated with that capital.

• (1700)

The Chair: Mr. Boughen, you're just about spot-on. Are you good?

Mr. Ray Boughen: Am I out of time, Mr. Chair? I was going to share my time with Ms. Gallant.

The Chair: It doesn't matter if you're good or not; you're out of time.

We're over to the official opposition, and then back to the government.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate having the opportunity to be a back-again new member of this committee.

I have two lines of questioning and comment for you. They are unrelated, but I want to take advantage of the opportunity of being here.

Mr. Fonberg, you may or may not be aware that the decommissioned army base Kapyong is in the heart of my riding. You may or may not be aware that I have tried several times to get a briefing from your department on it and several times have been told to put my questions in writing. As a member of Parliament, I think I deserve an opportunity to have a conversation with somebody about Kapyong, with the full understanding that there are ongoing legal issues there, which I'm quite familiar with. I put that on the table because it is a concern of mine.

I'm also very concerned about the houses that stand empty at Kapyong. We know there are over 100 standing empty. The last time we did a freedom of information request, this situation was costing the government over \$250,000. I'd like to know whether there are houses standing empty at bases across the country. I'd appreciate having information sent to me on the regulations that determine who has access to living in these houses and the procedures that have to be followed for that. That's one area I'm concerned about.

Second, I know the committee has been studying mental health or looking at it, and I understand that across the country there's a discrepancy in the funding available for mental health services. I also understand that in December the ombudsman, Ms. McFadyen, issued a report about the discrepancies in funding for services available in different communities across the country. I'm wondering if you have responded to it. What action do you plan to take based on what I understand to be a very serious and blatant discrepancy in mental health funding across the country?

Mr. Robert Fonberg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll turn the question on mental health funding over to my colleague, the general.

Regarding Kapyong, I was not aware that there had been a number of requests for a briefing. I apologize. I don't see any particular reason we wouldn't actually just give you a briefing, so I will try to arrange for a briefing on Kapyong. Obviously there may be some areas that are more difficult for us to get into than other areas, but I think I can arrange for that to happen, if that's suitable.

On the question of the regulations, I'm not aware of any regulations, but the general may be aware of some. He may also have the answer to the question of who has access to which empty houses and where the empty houses are on the bases across the country. I actually have an assistant deputy minister who deals with all of those issues.

I don't know, General, whether you can answer any of those questions about housing or whether that would be Scott.

I would certainly be prepared to arrange a briefing for you on the question of Kapyong itself.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

MGen Walter Semianiw: If I may, Mr. Chair, I will address the issue of mental health and the ombudsman's report.

The Canadian Forces and the department are working very closely with the ombudsman. When we speak of discrepancies, Mr. Chair, I don't know where that's focused at, because the comments made by the ombudsman did not focus on discrepancies across the country. They were targeted at a specific area, be it at Base Petawawa and Base Galetown.

As for what we have in place across the country, if a man or woman in uniform is sick and needs help, they go to their local mental health clinic. We have those in place. They're called operational stress injury clinics, which are provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and are integrated with our OTSSCs, which are operational stress injuries clinics that the Canadian Forces run. We have many across the country, and they're staffed with psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, and addiction counsellors to provide that help.

In particular, we have just been recognized by the national Mental Health Commission and the senator on having a model that the rest of government, and perhaps the provinces, should follow in regard to what we have in place from a policy process and machinery point of view when it comes to mental health.

On the two issues of Petawawa and Galetown, I'm fully aware of those two concerns. First, on the Galetown piece, I can tell you that I spoke to my staff just last week, and the concerns in Galetown of getting more staff there have actually improved since the ombudsman's report, which we do take very seriously and do address. With Petawawa, we actually now have a full-time major. I just recognized him last week for the great work he has done that is actually coming into play.

We know where the challenges are. We're not perfect. It's better than it was. We know what we need to do, but clearly we're going to do that hand in hand with the ombudsman.

The focus right now for me is a priority on Petawawa and Gagetown. Those are the two areas that I'm working on personally to make sure they're at that same standard. Part of the challenge with Petawawa—and I know you've heard it before—is getting people to Petawawa. At this point, we are busing mental health providers from Ottawa up to Petawawa.

A decision was made, not in the last four years but before that, not to put an operational stress injury clinic in Petawawa. In hindsight, it was probably a bad decision. What we see here today is that having an OSI clinic in Petawawa would have been the right thing to do. It was not done, but we're dealing with that issue to ensure the men and women in uniform get the support they need in Petawawa.

Thank you.

• (1705)

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. We're right on schedule.

It's over to two five-minute spots for the government, with Mr. Payne and then whoever wants to fill in.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will be sharing any time with my colleague Ms. Gallant.

First of all, gentlemen, I do want to tell you that in our riding we have Canadian Forces Base Suffield, in defence research, and it has obviously been extremely beneficial to the riding, as the research obviously has been very much so to the military.

The other comment I'd like to make is about how we've talked about unmanned vehicles. You may be aware that Medicine Hat is home to the administration for the Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle Systems.

Having said that, I have a question. The minister talked about taking care of our injured soldiers and airmen. I'm just wondering if you can expound upon what the military is actually doing in that regard.

MGen Walter Semianiw: Mr. Chairman, as I'm sure you're aware, the Canadian Forces takes very seriously, as does the department, its men and women in uniform. In particular, as was raised, when men and women go into operations, they need to know that if they come back home injured, they'll get the support they so rightly and richly deserve from the government and the country. To that end, we've put a number of initiatives and programs in place to support them.

Firstly, we can tell you that last year the health system was told very clearly by the Chief of the Defence Staff that money will be no object when it comes to looking after men and women in uniform. That's not part of the supplemental issue here, if I can just add that, nor will it be. The issue is to look after those individuals. When you look at the Afghanistan mission, about 1,000 have been injured since 2001. Of that number, half are actually battle injuries and half are non-battle injuries. So we have in place for them both the physical and the mental health support they need, and the support that they and their families need as they go through recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

I'd be more than happy to come back to the committee at some time in the future and lay that all out for you. We have, I would submit, world-class programs and policies in place to support the men and women in uniform.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You touched on an issue very near and dear to my heart, and that's families. In fact, the first time I met Vice-Admiral Rouleau was right before Christmas, just after Parliament recessed. Prime Minister Harper's first point of contact was with Base Petawawa, and together with the Canadian Christmas tree association, we handed out Christmas trees to the families of deployed soldiers.

Last week, a special ceremony was held at Base Petawawa to mark the opening of a family centre. It's to be a welcome centre for soldiers posted to Base Petawawa and to direct family members to available services on the base and in the community. It now houses crisis intervention workers and social workers from the Phoenix Centre and the Pembroke Regional Hospital.

Would you expand upon the ways we are looking after families at Base Petawawa and other Canadian Forces bases?

• (1710)

MGen Walter Semianiw: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, we in the military have a saying: we recruit an individual; we retain a family. And we assist families as our men and women move out if they need support from the Department of Veterans Affairs. We also know that today the role that families play is more important than it was in the past when it comes to keeping individuals in the military and having a direct impact on that final decision.

To that end, just last fall the Chief of the Defence Staff unveiled a family covenant. It is a public expression of our commitment to our families, acknowledging the great work they do for us. Families are operational enablers. They support the operational end. Many times we don't talk about it, we don't see it. So we have put out the family covenant.

We also have a program that covers a number of areas during deployments. We establish a deployment support group at every base and wing where our men and women in uniform go overseas. That deployment support group maintains contact with them, as we have in Petawawa. Indeed when I deployed to Afghanistan in 2005 out of Petawawa and commanded the rotation, we had a deployment support group in place to support families. So that's one small way we assist, and there are many others that I'd be more than happy to lay out for you.

We understand the importance of families. We just had a family summit where we brought in representatives from across the country to talk about the program. They're extremely happy with the program, with what is provided, the role they play, and our recognition of their importance in the Canadian Forces.

The Chair: Thank you, General.

Certainly when we were doing the quality of life study, we went out to some of the family resource centres in the country. The work they do is remarkable. Hopefully the supports that are needed will be supplied to them, because they do good things.

Mr. Blaney, you have just a few minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you very much.

I was lucky enough to meet Mr. Semianiw, and I would like to ask him a question. When we met previously, we talked about training being provided in French for soldiers, particularly at Borden.

Could you update us on what the Canadian Forces are doing to improve this situation and make sure that our francophone soldiers can get proper training in the language of their choice? Is there funding in the budget to ensure that you have the necessary financial resources for this?

MGen Walter Semianiw: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As you know, there are challenges. There were challenges at Borden and on other bases. Today, I will speak only about the situation in Borden. Actually, there is a commander and a colonel on that base who report to me. Major General Gosselin commands the Canadian Defence Academy. So I am familiar with the specific details.

In this case, there were four challenges to overcome. First of all, we needed to have translation.

[English]

Since then, we have added hundreds of thousands of dollars to the translation program in Borden, which was the first challenge, to ensure that documents could be translated into French. The challenge becomes one of finding enough translation services to be able to translate so many documents, but we were committed to ensuring that that translation moved ahead and we provided the funds.

[Translation]

Secondly, we had to find an officer to deal with situations, problems and challenges having to do with the students. We have chosen one.

[English]

He is in place today as well. *S'il y a des problèmes, des crises*, our students know that there is someone they can go to outside of the chain of command, if that's their concern, to address their second language issues, concerns, and complaints. We have been working with the ombudsman on that issue in particular.

• (1715)

Le troisième aspect is to ensure that when the students arrive, they are aware of what their rights are when they come to the Canadian Forces. To be clear, many are new to the Canadian Forces, very young, and they may not understand what their rights are, as well as their obligations in many cases. So we lay that out very clearly for the students so they know exactly what they can get and what they should do.

We have been working hard to move more people into Borden. There are a number of issues. The first is having sufficient instructors.

[Translation]

We also need people on site who spoke French.

[English]

specifically those who provide the service. We have provided additional people in there.

Finally, we proudly say that we knew right from the beginning this was about leadership, ensuring that this was addressed by the leadership, not just moved off. At the time, Major-General Gosselin was on leave, and I spoke to him. He immediately went to Borden and actually sat down with the students at the time to ensure that they could speak to him

[Translation]

face to face. I too went to Borden.

[English]

twice afterwards just to make sure everything was in place, as was mentioned to me, because that was the concern raised by the ombudsman prior to that, Mr. Chair.

I think we're further ahead today than we were in the past. We are working closely with the ombudsman to do it better. We know what we'd like to do, and I believe we're heading in the right direction. Things are definitely better in Borden today than they were when we were here the last time, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Steven Blaney: This gentleman speaks like a boy from Thetford Mines, Quebec, Monsieur Chairman.

The Chair: That ends the second round. As the committee wants, we will go back to the order from the top, and that will be the official opposition, the Bloc, and then the New Democratic Party, and that will take us to the end. I need two minutes at the end of the committee to deal with the motions on the estimates.

Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Obviously the special standing committee on Afghanistan will be struck very shortly.

A deficiency that comes from both Foreign Affairs and CIDA, and also from Defence, is the nature of the briefings that we get. I have to say that being a privy councillor is very nice on my stationery, but it apparently doesn't do me any good after I'm no longer in the government. One of the concerns I have is the nature of the briefings we get, particularly on Afghanistan. Yes, there are many good things going on there; there is no question about it. I certainly agree. But there are also areas of deficiency and areas of concern that we have in the official opposition, and in order to get those briefings, we're going to have to look very carefully, Mr. Chairman, either in this committee or the special Afghanistan committee, at the nature of the information we get, because clearly we cannot do our job if we don't have the real facts.

You're asking for \$441 million more, and much of this is covering Afghanistan. It started with a leap of faith—lately we're not very good at leaping—to give it support. I want to support the men and women. I've been to Afghanistan on two occasions, and I can certainly say that we have no question about providing the right tools for the job. But the minister talks about a whole-of-government reconstruction, and I keep hearing about whole of government, and yet I also hear from CIDA and from Foreign Affairs and from Defence that they're not working as collaboratively as they should be.

For my own edification and for members of the committee, Deputy Minister, you might indicate to us the nature of this whole-of-government approach in terms of what actually goes on mechanically to assist in making sure that everybody is on the same page. Certainly both here and in Kandahar I've heard nothing but people being off the page, and I would like to be somewhat reassured—and I may take this up with you privately later, obviously—as to how that actually, in your estimation, is working. Are there areas you feel could be improved that would help this committee?

Mr. Robert Fonberg: It's a great question.

I was with the minister in Munich on the weekend. We had a number of bilaterals with the Americans, the Poles, the Germans, the Bulgarians, and other people. The interesting thing is that whole of government makes a lot of sense. It's easy to write down on a piece of paper but hard to execute. As much as we kind of struggle ourselves with understanding why it's not easier to make it work, the reality is that we are light years ahead of all of our Afghanistan partners that I have come across. Vice-President Biden was there. General Jim Jones, the new national security advisor, was also there and talked about how the National Security Council is remaking itself to deal with whole of government.

While we have an Afghanistan task force—the Privy Council Office—we have had growing pains. I think you'll see, in the quarterly report that's expected to be tabled toward the end of this month or perhaps a little sooner, just how much progress we really are making. The reality is that a year ago this was probably as much rhetoric as it was substance, but today this is considerably more substance than rhetoric. In a situation where you're trying to fight a war and create space for your diplomatic community and your development community, is it difficult to do the things they need done to turn this into a sustainable effort? Absolutely. It's extremely difficult. But I was astonished, and I kept saying to the minister, let's talk to them about how we're actually doing this in Canada, because we are way ahead of where any of those folks are.

The Americans have a phenomenal story about whole of government in RC-East. I was there last spring. It turns out that the whole of government is the military: "It's okay, thanks, we'll do it all here. We're good. We'll do that whole-of-government thing". "And I always have a policy adviser beside me", says the colonel. They're pretty impressive, but by and large it's military.

Somebody talked earlier about the role the military plays. It's not just the fight; there's a lot of reconstruction as well up there in RC-East, Bagram and those places. The military is doing a lot of that reconstruction effort, but it's a whole-of-government story told by only one partner, and there's only one partner at the table. I think the

Americans will really want to change that. We have a number of meetings scheduled with them, and I think they'll really want to hear how we actually do that.

So we not only have nothing to be ashamed of in how we do this; we are way ahead of all the allies I've spoken to.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bachand is next, and then Mr. Harris.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I'm going to ask General Semianiw a question about the *Collège militaire royal* in Saint-Jean.

The college was shut down in 1995, but it has just been reopened. We were delighted to see the college reopen. What's more, the two ministers who were responsible for the reopening were in Saint-Jean that day. However, the *Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean* was not re-established at the same level as it was at when it was shut down.

I would just like to remind you that the *Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean* was opened in 1952 and the objective was to help francophone soldiers gain entry to the Canadian armed forces. When the college was re-established last summer, it had 200 officer cadets enrolled in a qualifying year, first year or second year, which meant that the institution had the status of a college. It was given a budget of approximately \$12 million per year.

We would like to see the *Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean* become a prestigious institution once again, return to the status it enjoyed when it was founded and the status it developed until 1995. It must become a full-fledged university with a budget of \$25 million, which would mean enrolment of approximately 400 officer cadets.

I've discussed this with the minister on a few occasions. He said that they were kind of taking it one step at a time. How do you see the college regaining its previous status? The Conservative government has recognized Quebec as a nation, so perhaps they should re-establish the military college with the same status it enjoyed when it was shut down. Personally, I think that would encourage francophones to join the Canadian armed forces.

What are your plans in this regard?

[*English*]

MGen Walter Semianiw: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The plan at the time of the opening was very, very clear—I was at the opening—both by the two respective ministers and myself. From a Canadian Forces point of view, the intent was to provide another opportunity for francophone students to be able to study near their homes and remain in Quebec.

I'm not privy to any discussions at this point in time to turn the college into a degree-granting institution. I would submit that's a great question that should be posed in Parliament to the government, because at this point in time, from a military perspective, we're not examining the aspect of taking the college and moving it to a degree-granting institution. Everything is possible, but at this point in time no decision has been made nor direction given to turn it into a degree-granting institution. I'll wait for the minister to provide me that direction when the time comes.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: If I've understood what you've said, General Samianiw, you need the green light from the politicians to start working on this. You cannot go in the other direction. Could the military recommend to the minister that the college be re-open, and then it would be his decision, or are you waiting until the minister tells you that he has decided to re-open the institution completely and asks you to prepare plans for doing so? Which one of the two scenarios is possible? Could it be both? Can't the military leaders recommend this to the minister, telling him that in their opinion, re-establishing the college as it was before will ensure that additional francophone officers join the Canadian Forces, and that this is important? Can you take this initiative or do you absolutely have to wait until the minister gives you an order to make this happen?

[*English*]

MGen Walter Semianiw: Mr. Chairman, I'm sure you're aware that at the end of the day I don't move on my own. I have to make recommendations to the minister and others, who then provide that direction.

Clearly we had an intent with the college. I believe what happened just last year with the students who were there was a great success story. We opened up the college and turned it into being able to provide CEGEP....

[*Translation*]

In this case it was a matter of ensuring that the students

[*English*]

can get their CEGEP actually close to home.

Right now, from a student point of view, from a purely numbers point of view, there is no reason to open up another college, because the addition of the students we have at the CEGEP now, coming out of RMC in Saint-Jean, does meet our requirement, which was our challenge, our need—to have more students coming out of Quebec.

Moving it to the next level, there would need to be a demand. Money would have to be budgeted for that, because I'm sure, as you're aware, Mr. Chairman, it's something that could not happen without additional funding provided. But again, we have looked at it. We took this step to open up the college, from a CEGEP point of view, and at this point in time we are not examining whether or not we should move ahead. Not that it's impossible, I would agree, Mr. Chairman. Things can be done in any order. One goes after three and before two many times in what we do, so I'll wait and see, once I'm provided that direction, where I go.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Harris, you have a few minutes to wrap up.

Welcome to the committee.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very happy to be here.

I have a few specific questions.

Mr. Chairman, there's a lot of interest in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador in the joint supply ships contract, because one of the preferred bidders, after a very lengthy process, was the Marystown shipyard, along with the Victoria yard.

Vice-Admiral Rouleau suggested that the bidders had become non-compliant. What we heard in our province was that the amount of money that was on offer to do the job was not upgraded. Based on the fact of the length of the bidding process and the qualification process, costs had gone up in the meantime and the budgeting amounts didn't meet that.

Is there a plan to go back to these preferred bidders, who had qualified after a lengthy process, to see if there's some way of doing it with them? Or are you going to start from scratch now and go through another lengthy process to get these ships built? I understand everything's agreed to that we need.

VAdm D. Rouleau: In fact, when the two bidders were found non-compliant—i.e., to meet the desired requirements within the budget that was allocated—it seized that process that was happening at the time. That has now been regenerated, and based on the requirements and the current look at what options we have to deliver that capability, the same thing will happen now and we'll reinitiate the requirement for bids.

• (1730)

Mr. Jack Harris: And it could take another three or four years to get to the point at which it ended in August.

VAdm D. Rouleau: The actual requirements.... We will have the way ahead by this summer. In fact, all of this is linked to the current or upcoming discussion on shipbuilding policy and ways ahead within Canada as a whole.

Mr. Jack Harris: Can I move to one other point on a totally different topic?

I'm advised that a few days ago the Military Police Complaints Commission made a recommendation that the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association be given standing and funding for the Afghanistan public interest investigation. This is related, of course, to the treatment of detainees who have been handed over by Canadian Forces and allegations of mistreatment and allegations of torture. The very specific question I have is whether DND will go along with the recommendation to provide standing and funding for the B.C. Civil Liberties Association in this process.

Mr. William F. Pentney: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The government will examine the recommendation of the MPCC, but I have to say that the whole purpose of the establishment of the complaints commission was that it itself should be able to carry forward these cases. We shouldn't have to rely on individuals or organizations to bring the cases forward. The MPCC was established to conduct a full, fair, impartial, and thorough inquiry. The government, as has been indicated, has attempted to cooperate with that inquiry, and certainly DND has provided access to documents or witnesses. But the request from MPCC is under consideration now.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's very good, gentlemen.

I just have some business on the estimates to clean up at the end of the meeting, but I want to thank you all very much for your contribution. You answered the questions very well, and I think the committee appreciates that. So thank you all very much.

Committee, at the beginning of the meeting, I called vote 1b for the National Defence supplementary estimates. Are you ready to proceed on this?

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Department

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures and authority for total commitments.....
\$452,399,359

Military Police Complaints Commission

Vote 20b—Program expenditures.....\$1,203,831

(Votes 1b and 20b agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the chair report votes 1b and 20b under National Defence to the House of Commons?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This meeting is now adjourned.

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