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## Standing Committee on National Defence

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EVIDENCE

**Monday, March 9, 2009**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Maxime Bernier**

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• (1535)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegnia):** Honourable members of the committee I see a quorum.

[Translation]

We are now ready to proceed with the election of the chair. I am ready to receive motions.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, point of order.

I am flabbergasted at the situation today. I find it unacceptable.

First, I would like to commend, congratulate and thank Mr. Rick Casson for his work. He was a remarkable chairman. I would like to know why Mr. Casson is not the chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence today.

[English]

**The Clerk:** As I'm sure you're aware, as clerk of the committee I can't entertain points of order or motions aside from nominations for the position of chair.

Sir?

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** I nominate Maxime Bernier.

**The Clerk:** I have a nomination for Maxime Bernier.

**Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC):** I'll second that.

**The Clerk:** Are there any further motions for nominations of the position for the chair?

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** I don't want the issue of the member for Beauce to become a personal matter, but I think that the defence committee is going to lose a great deal of credibility. Given that this will be noted in the minutes, I want our message to be the following: in the case at hand, the Liberal members will abstain from voting as a protest. We'll let it go this time, but we find today's situation unacceptable.

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Can we have a recorded division?

**The Clerk:** Yes. If the committee agrees, we can do that.

[English]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Then I would just put this question to the other Liberal members of this committee. The answer will come with your vote, but I would suggest that it's not compulsory that this is a

personal vote, and you should vote the way your head tells you to vote.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Since when do you dictate what the Liberals will do? Vote with your head and we'll vote with ours.

[Translation]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Just a suggestion, my friend.

[English]

**The Clerk:** Does the committee wish to proceed to a recorded division?

I will take that as tacit consent.

It's been moved by Laurie Hawn that Maxime Bernier be elected as chair of the committee. I will start in alphabetic order.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Clerk:** Maxime Bernier has been duly elected chair of the committee.

I'd like to invite him to take his seat here.

**The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)):** First of all, I want to thank all the members of this committee for their confidence in me as the chair.

• (1540)

[Translation]

I see this new responsibility as a privilege and I will chair the committee with my usual objectivity. I will work to build consensus and I will play the role of chairman appropriately, according to the rules of Parliament. I would like to thank you for your support.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and to the motion adopted on Monday, February 23, 2009, the briefing session on Canada's involvement in Afghanistan hereby begins.

We can now commence our business. Our first witness is Brigadier-General Champagne.

Brigadier-General Champagne, the floor is yours.

**BGen G. Champagne (Director General Operations, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of Parliament, colleagues, thank you for the opportunity to brief you this afternoon. I am Brigadier-General Gerry Champagne, the Director General Operations for the Strategic Joint Staff of the Canadian Forces. In other words, I am the head of operations for the Canadian Forces.

It has been some time since my predecessor briefed this body. In August, Brigadier-General Peter Atkinson briefed you on the general state of operations and Canadian Forces support, especially the support received from the Canadian International Development Agency to help repair the Dahla Dam. He also gave you some details on the Afghan National Police.

During the meeting of your committee on February 9, the Minister of National Defence and the defence team also provided you with an update on the budget, especially concerning the Afghanistan component. He also answered a series of questions that provided an update on the operations in Afghanistan.

[English]

As has been stated previously, the achievement of our goals in Afghanistan, and in particular the building of a secure environment that is able to underpin all other efforts in development, reconstruction, and development, comes at a price. This was very urgent this past week when we saw Warrant Officer Dennis Raymond Brown, Corporal Dany Olivier Fortin, Corporal Kenneth Chad O'Quinn, and, unfortunately, lately, yesterday, Trooper Marc Diab killed while carrying on our mission.

My intent today is to bring you up-to-date on a number of issues. First is security, and second is the Afghan National Security Forces and the whole-of-government effort. I also want to deal with some of the issues that have been on your agenda for the last six months, specifically the counter-IED, post-2011, and the elections. But I will obviously be at your disposal to answer any of your questions after my quick introduction.

Prior to moving into the meat of my presentation, there are two points that warrant mention.

[Translation]

First, for those who have recently been appointed to the committee, it bears remembering that much of what we are dealing with is, by necessity, classified. I am therefore limited in what specific details I may be able to provide to you. This should not be misconstrued as an attempt to be unduly secretive. Rather, it is being done in order to protect the operational security of those Canadians, and our allies, who are doing our nation's bidding overseas. Should you ask a question that I am unable to answer, I will do everything in my power to provide you with an answer and ensure that you receive answers separately, where necessary.

Second, there are items that you may wish to ask me about that fall outside of my lane, or are more appropriately answered by another military or political authority. In the case of these types of questions I will, of course, tell you who I think is best suited to give you the details that you need.

[English]

Before getting into the existing security situation, it is worth spending a minute or two on the notion that in order to win a counter-insurgency fight, a military force requires additional efforts in the spheres of governance and security in order to create an environment where a legitimate authority can govern. Strictly speaking, this is absolutely true. I have been unable to find a single case in modern history where a western-style military has been able to defeat an insurgency without the assistance of partners from the

civilian side. And I could quote from my own experience in Srebrenica.

The truth of the matter is that it is only by using a comprehensive and whole-of-government approach, addressing the fundamental issues underlying an insurgency while providing protection via a security bubble, can an insurgency be defeated. This is why the Canadian Forces are in Afghanistan, and it is this fundamental understanding of the insurgency that has formed the foundation of our whole-of-government approach.

The commander of Joint Task Force Afghanistan works very closely with the Canadian ambassador and the representative of Canada in Kandahar, namely, the RoCK, and the whole-of-government team that is committed to delivering the government's six priorities.

I would also stress that strategic progress in Afghanistan can only be measured over a long period, while tactical progress continues to be achieved every day by our soldiers, working in concert with our whole-of-government partners, our allies, partners, and Afghans.

That being said, where are we with regard to the security situation in Kandahar province? Succinctly put, the overall situation has not changed very much in the past six months and continues to pose serious challenges. The violence level within Kandahar City is slightly higher than the last time we reported to you, although there has been a seasonal drop in violence across the rest of the province. This owes to the onset of winter and the departure of the insurgent leadership to winter quarters.

Members of the Afghan national security forces, in particular the Afghan National Police, have been operating at a sustained high tempo and have been suffering a correspondingly high number of casualties.

As was noted in the last quarterly report, quantifying the perceptions of the citizens of Kandahar regarding security is difficult. All of you who read the last quarterly report will likely have noticed the comments concerning the perception of security by the local population. The perception of the civilians is a very important parameter of the degree of success we are having. I, like you, note the comments in the report that more and more Kandaharis feel the security situation has become worse and that the number of people who believe the situation is getting better has fallen dramatically.

Recognizing their inability to succeed using direct engagement, the insurgents have moved to intimidation, harassment, and improvised explosive devices to foster the perception of worsening security. Notwithstanding the effects of these operations being conducted by the insurgents, the recent voter registration activities in support of the upcoming national elections demonstrate the willingness of Afghans to return to normalcy and to establish a responsible and legitimate government. Significant numbers of Kandahar's population are standing up to exercise their democratic rights despite being warned otherwise by insurgent propaganda. Were they to perceive the situation as intolerable or completely insecure, it is quite likely that voter registration would have been significantly different.

From a Canadian perspective, one of the major events in the past six months was the deployment of the force enhancement called for by the Manley report and a 2008 parliamentary motion. The deployment of our Chinook and Griffon helicopters, as well as our enhanced unmanned aerial vehicles, the UAVs, is starting to show a positive impact, as you saw this weekend. Together, they have helped minimize and mitigate the risk to our soldiers from improvised explosive devices, the IEDs.

We are now starting to find more IEDs before they are used against us than after they are used against us. By way of example, this past December there were 106 incidents involving IEDs; however, only 45 were actually effective against us. The remainder, or approximately 60%, were found by either using our new capability or because of our ongoing effort to educate the Afghans and subsequently having them report their findings to us.

● (1545)

As you are likely aware, we also recently witnessed the rotation of both the headquarters for Joint Task Force Afghanistan and various elements of the Canadian military contingent. This routine actively sees new, fresh forces move into place, while members of the outgoing contingent are able to rest, refit, and retrain to fight.

The current commander of Joint Task Force Afghanistan, Brigadier General Jon Vance, has brought a solid and experienced team with him, many of whom have previously served in Afghanistan. The current battle group is based on the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment out of Petawawa, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Roger Barrett.

Looking ahead, it is worthwhile to comment on two specific areas. The first is the direction that our upcoming campaigns will be taking, as directed by the commander of Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, or CEFCON. The second is the additional forces coming into Regional Command (South) from the United States.

The commander of CEFCON has been quite specific in articulating the principles that will guide and direct the planning, conduct, and operations. In light of the current security situation and the upcoming increased presence of U.S. forces in the upcoming months and years, a revised approach will focus on empowering the Afghans, protecting the civilian population where they work and sleep, concentrating our efforts in the city of Kandahar and its approaches, and aiming to make a visible and tangible difference in the lives of ordinary Afghans. More than anything, the intended effect of this approach to operations should be to shift the perception of Afghans and provide clear evidence to them that the situation is improving.

Part and parcel of this will be to continue our efforts to avoid civilian casualties. Clearly, the Canadian Forces operate with rules of engagement and targeting procedures that intend to ensure that only legitimate military targets are dealt with and avoid causing needless suffering to the people we are there to assist. We will continue to ensure that these processes are followed and that our soldiers operate within the boundaries articulated by the international human rights laws, international law, and the Canadian Criminal Code.

The second aspect I wish to speak on, which will serve to define the tour for the current task force, is the inflow of American forces

into the region. The increased American contribution to ISAF and their ability to significantly improve security in Regional Command (South) can be expected to have some fairly dramatic effects. It is likely that we will see an increase in insurgent activity in the short term. This may be considered similar to what happens when a farmer knocks over a beehive.

American forces are going to be able to dominate more terrain and areas where we have not been able to maintain a significant presence due to our currently available forces. It is therefore extremely likely that we will be seeing more engagement with insurgents within the regions; however, these are battles we will win, and the result will be a weakened Taliban and a more secure Afghanistan.

● (1550)

[Translation]

Capacity building within the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police is a critical element in the conduct of our military mission in Afghanistan.

Our stated goal in this regard is to enable the ANSF in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order. To this point, we have had some success.

Some of our Afghan Kandaks and their associated Headquarters are now demonstrating leadership abilities, and leading operations against the insurgents. This was shown by the performance of 1-205 Brigade, the Afghan National Army Brigade in Kandahar province, which has demonstrated the ability to plan and execute operations with a minimum degree of support from ISAF or our forces.

Similarly, the various units mentored by the Canadian Forces are now achieving higher levels with regard to their capability milestones. For those of you who might not be aware, we gauge progress with the Afghan National Army using a system of capability milestones. When a unit has reached ACM one, it is capable of conducting near-autonomous operations with limited support from ISAF enablers. This is the highest level assigned to a unit and may be equated to full operational capability. ACM two sees a unit able to do this some of the time, although with a higher level of ISAF support. This may be seen as an initial level of operational capability. Lower capability milestones equate to lower levels of capability.

As reported in the recent quarterly report, we now have one of our ANA Kandaks, and its Brigade Headquarters, capable of operating on its own or at CM one. This situation continues to improve and other Kandaks are also approaching this capability. The fact that the headquarters and one of our Kandaks have achieved this level is a feat, considering the difficulties that exist in training Kandaks in Afghanistan. The effects of this increase in capability have been noteworthy.

Over recent months, one Kandak was deployed on a Regional Command South operation, where it fought well against significant resistance. Another Kandak, whose capabilities continue to improve, was engaged in route clearance operation within the province which resulted in a significant decrease in the number of IEDs on the route for which the ANA were responsible.

What is perhaps not as widely known, is that these types of ANA-led operations are becoming more and more frequent, and growing in complexity. We are now seeing operations where the Afghan Brigade is coordinating their actions and activities with the Afghan National Police and other elements of the ANSF. This is real progress.

Additionally, the manning levels within all the Kandahar Kandaks have improved, with effective strengths now quite near our established benchmarks. Similar to our other efforts, this too is getting better.

It is not, however, all good news. There is still significant progress to be made as concerns the Afghan National Police. There are several reasons for this. First and foremost, it cannot be forgotten that the ANP are at the « coal face » when it comes to fighting the insurgency. It is they who suffer being the focus of insurgent activity within Kandahar province. Indeed, this past year alone, they suffered over 230 officers killed in Kandahar province, as compared to 51 of their ANA colleagues. As well, given their relative newness as a force, particularly when compared to the Afghan National Army, it is reasonable to expect that they will be at a lower state.

Work continues to be done, and both our military police and members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as well as various officers from Canadian municipal police forces, are working exceptionally hard to train, equip and ready the ANP for the tasks they face.

We continue to support infrastructure projects, training and equipping of this vital element in the development of the safe and secure Kandahar. The effects of our efforts here were perhaps most dramatically shown by a widely reported ANP foiling of a suicide attack on the Governor's palace, where over 400 kilograms of explosives were found before they could be used.

• (1555)

This incident also shows the partnership between the Canadian Forces and the Afghan Forces, as once the ANP had found the explosives, it was Canadian explosives experts who defused them. Indeed, the former ROCK has stated that of all the initiatives undertaken during her tenure, she was most proud of the work that had been done with the Afghan National Police and security forces.

[English]

As I said earlier, the intent here is to talk about the security situation and how our actions in the security realm enable success in other elements of the mission. The Canadian Forces are integral members of the whole-of-government team and work to support other partners to the maximum extent possible.

Last week there was a question concerning the recent IED strike in the Arghandab and whether or not possible linkages existed with the Canadian signature project at the Dahla Dam. At this time we have no evidence that such a linkage exists. In the case of the Dahla Dam, I'm confident that the security arrangements that exist will enable the completion of the project in accordance with anticipated timelines. In fact, this one example is an apt demonstration of the nature of our mission, for in this case we have local security being provided to our Canadian contractor by Afghan National Security Forces. This is

then backed up by Canadian Forces members, ready and willing to respond should the situation require it.

As you well know, the RoCK leads the Canadian civilian governance and development efforts within Kandahar province, working hand in hand with the commander of JTF Afghanistan to achieve our government's stated priorities.

The tasks undertaken by our forces to support governance initiatives may be broadly described as following under two distinct fields. First is protection that our forces provide directly to our whole-of-government partners, such as when we move the RoCK within Kandahar province. Second is the establishment of the secure environment itself. However, there are other initiatives being undertaken by the Canadian Forces that also assist in this regard. They include the conduct of border flag meetings with Pakistan and support to CSTC-A and the justice support system, to name a few.

In the future, one of the most obvious manifestations of CF support to governance initiatives is the role that will be played by Joint Task Force Afghanistan in ensuring the safe conduct of upcoming presidential elections. This important and extremely complex event is critical to ensuring the legitimacy of the Afghan government, and our role will be significant.

Our operational mentor liaison teams, known as OMLT, are already at work training the Afghan National Security Forces, enabling them to take the lead when it comes to the provision of security at polling stations and vital points. Second, we will be ready and able to respond in the event of crisis or attacks that might jeopardize the conduct of the election and the ability of Afghans to carry out their democratic rights.

Third, the recent force enhancements and abilities we have deployed—our helicopters, UAVs, and counter-IED assets—will all be put to good use to ensure that the general security environment continues to be stable enough for this event to go ahead. Our success in facilitating the conduct of voter registration activities bodes well for the upcoming elections.

•(1600)

[*Translation*]

Development is another area where our forces continue to play a role in support of our Whole of Government partners and the Canadian International Development Agency in particular. The most obvious demonstration of this is our provincial reconstruction team, which has been working hard within the city of Kandahar since 2005. However, there are other obvious and tangible signs of Canadian Forces work in this regard. Canada's work on building Route Fosters and supporting the rehabilitation of the Dahla Dam and its irrigation system are perhaps the most visible. Between these two activities, over 500 Afghans are gainfully employed, largely because of Canadian funding. The Canadian Forces played a critical role in facilitating this type of work. In the case of Route Fosters, it is our men and women who provide the security which enables this movement corridor to be completed. As for the Dahla Dam, Canadian Forces members have played an active role in ensuring that supplies and personnel are able to move to the job site without interference from the insurgents.

Additionally, our military engineers continue to assist and play a role wherever and whenever possible. Activities have been broad in their scope and reflect the wide range of skill sets that our soldiers bring to the team. Our construction management teams have been active in helping to orchestrate road construction and low-level irrigation projects. Others have assisted with local road construction and begun planning for the building of Afghan National Police observation posts. As well, our Civil Military Cooperation Teams continue to execute low-level development tasks (like building wells) which support the military mission.

As should by now be evident, our provision of a secure environment continues to play a significant part in the ongoing work to improve the situation in Kandahar, in all realms.

[*English*]

Before I close, I would like to cover a few areas in which this committee has shown continued interest. The first is to briefly touch upon our efforts with regard to neutralizing the threat posed by IEDs. This has been the most devastating weapon used by our enemies. The majority of our soldiers killed in action, 70, have not been killed in direct combat with the enemy; rather, they have died as a result of this insidious tactic. But we cannot make one mistake in dealing with IEDs. Insurgents only need to be successful once to have a dramatic strategic-level impact.

To combat this, we are taking several steps and implementing solutions as they can be found. Some of these include introducing new specific technological solutions, using our newly introduced air wing to minimize the threat experienced by our soldiers in transit, while also using our UAVs to help find these IEDs on the ground. Just as important, we will continue our efforts at educating Afghans as to the threat that IEDs pose and encourage the continued reporting on them to us. This has a second order effect, in that it builds trust between us and the local population while concurrently helping to mitigate the threat these devices pose.

Further, we have a professional lessons learned organization that analyzes each incident and garners any lessons that can be drawn

from it in order to minimize the chance of a similar attack having the same consequences. We also continue to sustain and use our fleet of vehicles devoted to countering this threat, specifically the enhanced route-clearing capability that was brought into service over the past two years, and we will continue to improve our force protection to the maximum extent possible while still being able to carry out the mission we have been given.

Lastly, we will continue our efforts to disrupt the cells that manufacture IEDs and to take on the leadership that oversees procurement of materials as well as the construction and emplacement of these devices.

As I said before, our current strike-to-find ratio is quite high, at one strike for every 2.9 IEDs that are found. We are working to make this higher and are encouraged by the success we have had at this point. Sadly, this is not a weapon that we can remove from the battlefield nor a threat that we can eliminate completely. This is all too well shown by the deaths of our four soldiers this last week.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

The next area that I would like to touch on is what the Canadian Forces will be doing in 2011 and beyond.

Clearly, our mandate will change in accordance with the parliamentary motion of last year. This has directed that we cease our military operations as of July 2011, and that all Canadian Forces personnel are out of Afghanistan by December of that year. This has numerous and obvious implications, and we have now begun strategic level planning to make that motion reality.

As far as what we will be doing after the pullout is completed, I cannot say. Clearly we take our orders from the Government of Canada, and we will faithfully carry out whatever duty, at home or abroad, is asked of us. What I can tell you is that during 2011, there will be significant activity taking place to ensure that we meet the timelines and marching orders that we have been given.

[*English*]

Another area that has received some attention since this committee last met is the question of political reconciliation with the Taliban. To be completely frank, this is not really an issue for myself as a soldier to deal with. As stated in the most recent quarterly report, it is actually the Afghan government's responsibility to lead national reconciliation efforts. I know and recognize that our other whole-of-government partners do play a role in supporting this effort. However, the Canadian Forces have not had a role in this realm thus far.

[Translation]

Moving on, it was determined last week by the Independent Elections Commission in Afghanistan that their presidential election would be held on the August, 20 of this year. Recognizing that there are issues which remain to be worked out, the Canadian Forces are prepared to play their own supporting role, following the lead of the ANSF who have primarily responsibility for the safe conduct of this event. We anticipate that we will be assisting our ANSF partners in ensuring the safety and security of this event. At this time, the Afghan forces have the lead in the provision of security for this extremely important activity, which we will be ready to support with quick reaction forces and our full suite of equipment and manpower.

It should not be a surprise to any of you that the biggest thing we can do to ensure that election occurs as planned is to keep training our ANSF partners using our Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams, and to keep working for the safe and secure environment which will minimize the risk of insurgent activity. Obviously, I believe that we have a strong team on the ground in Regional Command South, and with our recent force enhancements, including additional troops and aircraft, we are confident that security can be maintained for this important national event.

[English]

Ladies and gentlemen, I suspect I may have taken a little more time than you preferred. My intent was to give you as accurate a picture as possible of the existing security situation within Kandahar province and to touch upon areas where I know you have some concerns.

I thank you for your time and look forward to addressing any of your questions.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Brigadier-General Champagne, for this presentation.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Coderre, from the Liberal Party of Canada, for seven minutes.

• (1610)

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Brigadier-General Champagne, thank you very much for coming here. I think it is only right to send a message of solidarity to our troops. I know that this is a difficult time. We lost four soldiers last week. Our soldiers are our companions and it is only right, not only for their families and friends, that we send them this message of solidarity.

**BGen G. Champagne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Coderre.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Brigadier-General Champagne, we are hearing all kinds of things, things that are all over the map. I do not want to focus solely on Kandahar. I would like you to talk to us a little bit about Kabul. You will understand why in a moment.

As you know, last June the Sarposa prison came under attack and the prison was emptied out completely. Many prisoners, insurgents and Taliban, who had been transferred by the Canadian troops, had been imprisoned there. Have we recaptured these insurgents? Did

our troops conduct any operations to help the Afghans recapture these escaped insurgents?

**BGen G. Champagne:** You will understand, Mr. Coderre, that when these insurgents escaped, they did not necessarily all remain in Kandahar.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** They did not wait.

**BGen G. Champagne:** They did not wait. So it would be extremely difficult for me to tell you what percentage of these people have been recaptured. Depending on the province they went to, they may have been recaptured. We are not following up on the matter.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Did we capture any of them?

**BGen G. Champagne:** I can tell you that we are continuing to work on leadership issues and that this is going very well. However, I am not saying that it was especially because of or only because of leadership problems that the Sarposa prison incident occurred. There was also the leadership of the insurgents.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** There is one reality that is being confirmed. Apparently, the Taliban are in control of more and more territory in Afghanistan. There are the insurgents. I would like to quickly hear your point of view on this topic.

In light of the Prime Minister's remarks, his statement that we will never win the war against the insurgents, there is one reality on the ground. In any event, people think that the solution has never been a military one, on Canada's part. In fact, it is thought that the solution would be the result of combining a military effort, development measures and diplomacy. But for our own comprehension, could you tell us, in your opinion, what percentage of the territory do the Taliban control? Do you feel that they control more? When we go in, things go well, but then the situation deteriorates rapidly. In your opinion, what is the situation?

**BGen G. Champagne:** Mr. Coderre, one has to look at the situation in context. When you state that the Taliban control the territory, you have to be careful about the word "control." In the Kandahar region, the Taliban do not control the territory. Just look at the Taliban presence. If you compare it to their presence during Operation Medusa, when there were between 500 and 600 insurgents, you will see that you will not find that number in the Kandahar region.

Let me go back to the situation at the Sarposa prison last year. We were told then that there could be somewhere between 500 and 600 insurgents. Even the Afghans thought that we were looking for somewhere between 500 and 600 insurgents. Now we are not necessarily looking for such large groups.

On the other hand, if you don't mind, I would like to say that when people are talking about security and the perception of security, it's a very positive sign when an insurgent is unable to bring together a group of this size. He has to do things differently and use small groups of five to ten insurgents, or perhaps just two or three insurgents. He has to resort to assassinations, intimidation and IEDs in order to make the people feel that security has not been achieved. To me that means that he does not control the territory.



**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Tell me a little bit about the Spin Boldak region. This week we heard that three Taliban leaders, three mullahs, decided to join their forces. At least that was the message they sent to the media. The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is porous, particularly because of the tribal zones and so on. Will the additional American troops have a direct impact on the situation? As the election draws near, do you have the feeling that the insurgents are reorganizing and that this could lead to even more difficulties?

**BGen G. Champagne:** Concerning the Spin Boldak region and the area that we call the border region—you realize that the Afghans do not necessarily recognize that border—I can't tell you whether it will be Americans or Canadians in those two zones. The commander of the south region command will decide which force will be assigned to that region.

The arrival of such a large number of Americans will certainly help the deployment of forces in the areas you mentioned with the high Taliban presence, where we will be able to take more direct action, given that we currently do not have sufficient forces to distribute all the way to Spin Boldak.

You have to remember that so far, we have had considerable success in Spin Boldak.

• (1615)

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Yes, exactly.

I would like to talk about Kabul because the insurgents are now directly attacking that city. There is corruption in the Afghani government. I remember that Colonel Serge Labbé was in charge of the Strategic Advisory Team, that was precisely meant to help the bureaucracy. There was also a direct link with the ministries to set up a bureaucracy.

Do you have a report for us on that topic? If we realize that there is more and more corruption, does that mean that the group has failed? What is being done to fight corruption? Could the committee no longer be in existence and could they have decided to do something else?

**BGen G. Champagne:** With your permission, I will not speak about corruption, it is not my field. The SAT that you mentioned was replaced by an organization called the GSO, whose full name I forget. It is an organization run by CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, that is in charge of these positions and of appointing people to the right positions, who have the proper expertise that will help them to improve their capacity within the government.

Perhaps I could ask you to put these questions to CIDA, because we no longer have the same elements within that organization that we had previously.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Was your experience conclusive? Do you think that the SAT was a good thing and that, ultimately, perhaps it should not have been done?

**BGen G. Champagne:** Let me remind you that General Hillier and General Natynczyk, the two chiefs of staff that we had, had only praise for that group. When they communicate with representatives of the Afghani government—even now as we are visiting—they remind us that this team has some tremendous accomplishments. Far

be it from me to say that they failed; instead, I would say that they had great success.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Bachand, from the Bloc Québécois.

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, General Champagne. It's always a pleasure to see you again. The last time we saw each other, you were in Montreal, and you were in charge of the Saint-Jean Military Base. With all due respect, I must say that I completely disagree with each and every point that you made. I entirely disagree with your presentation. Despite having fought tooth and nail with the Minister of National Defence, who was sitting where you are, in order to have this type of briefing, today I want nothing more to do with them.

I will give you facts that completely contradict what you have just told us. You are trying to show that the insurgents are weakening, because they are no longer able to fight us as a group. That is true, but they have changed their tactics in the field. I am no general, but their current methods, particularly the way they work with IEDs, the intimidation and the guerrilla tactics seem to me to be the only way to defeat the NATO troops. Obviously, soldiers armed with kalachnikovs are not going to form a row in front of a 45-ton tank in order to attack. Everyone knows that the insurgents have changed their tactics and that this has been successful.

Moreover, I do not know whether or not you have read the excellent document on counter-insurgency written by Major-General Leslie. He too is saying that the insurgents are operating very successfully, but that we are not. Major-General Leslie is not alone in stating this, the British generals agree as well. You said that we control the territory. However, we do not control even 20% of this territory. Some British generals are saying that they do not control beyond the 500-metre security perimeter surrounding their advanced bases. That constitutes a major problem.

Pakistan is not helping matters. This has always been the case, but today this is even more true. Just in case you did not know, the Pakistani government agreed to the Taliban request that a certain region alongside the border become an oasis for them. The Pakistani forces do not even venture there. It's got to the point where the Americans are now forced to intervene with their UAVs which are more aggressive than ours, which we use for recon missions. They use attack weapons. Their Predators regularly strike the other side of the Pakistani border, because they are unable to control the region.

The Prime Minister and Mr. Obama are not the only ones to have said that this was not possible. History has taught us so as well. How can you say that things will go better with 100,000 men? The Soviets had 180,000 soldiers and they did not win. We will not be successful. That is not what counter-insurgency is all about. To achieve this, you need to use a whole range of measures that are not military in nature. I know that you are a military man, so you therefore have a military perspective. I, however, will continue to completely challenge what you have said.

We don't even control the highway from Kabul to Kandahar right now. Attacks occur regularly. No one wants to use this road anymore, because everyone is afraid of being killed. I'm sorry to have to say this to you. It's got to the point where the terrorists are even striking Kabul in the green section. How else do you explain the fact that the Department of Education and Justice buildings were attacked by a dozen kamikazis who killed I don't know how many people inside Kabul itself?

The situation has gone off-track. You must give briefings, I agree with that. However, I have always challenged these briefings. Moreover, I have often told the general that we have to be more specific in the types of details we want to get from you. If we let you do as you wished, you would come here with three or four photocopied sheets, but that is not enough for me.

I must confess, I do not have many questions for you. I would imagine that you disagree with what I'm saying, just as I disagree with what you have said.

• (1620)

**BGen G. Champagne:** Mr. Bachand, we agree with one another to a certain extent. During my presentation, I did not use the word “win” nor the words “total control of the situation”. I said that the situation, as it is described this year, remains difficult and that additional efforts are needed. I said that our goal is to make sure that the Afghan army is able to make a greater contribution than in the past, and that we have made advances with respect to IEDs, even if we are still losing people. You also talked about road travel, what we refer to as freedom of circulation. Yes, we are able to travel by vehicle, but we are still using only armoured vehicles. In that sense, I was trying to demonstrate that the situation is not necessarily—if I may use a term that is often used by this committee—rosy. The situation is still very difficult and that is exactly why, through the choice of my words in both French and in English, I am trying to fully demonstrate that the situation is still dangerous.

Members of the whole-of-government team still require armed protection. They are unable to circulate freely to carry out their work. You refer to the manual on counter-insurgency operations. Our soldiers study that manual. I also agree with General Leslie because I applied those principles in Srebrenitza, and that was some time ago. Those same principles were applied in Somalia, and today in Afghanistan. The area remains very difficult. Insurgents still hold the advantage because they can go away and then he join the population, and this makes it very difficult to track their movements. We have indicators of when the Afghans start to support us. This is what we are trying to maximize.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, General Champagne.

I will now hand the floor over to the representative of the New Democratic Party. Mr. Harris, you have seven minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Brigadier-General, to the committee.

First of all, I want to say that we too, in the NDP, are very concerned about the losses our Canadian troops have suffered, in particular in the last few days when four individuals have died in the

service of their country. We support their efforts on behalf of the job the government has given them to do. One of the individuals, in fact, was from my own province of Newfoundland and Labrador, which has contributed mightily to this force.

Moving to our questions about your report, I do have to say, though, that we've had the Prime Minister recently indicate that he thought the gains we've made thus far in Afghanistan have been modest and could be lost. I'm looking at the report released at the end of December—which I'm assuming is the quarterly report that we're dealing with here—and I see that in some of the areas, such as increasing the number of Afghan National Army units capable of being involved in their own security, the gains have been extremely modest. In fact, there have been losses in terms of the Afghan National Army's responsibility for security in the six key districts of Kandahar. In June they had responsibility for one of six key districts; as of the end of December there are now no key districts for which the ANA is responsible for security.

In terms of support for the police services in Afghanistan, the Afghan National Police, it now seems that only one out of 17 police units is capable of conducting basic law and order operations, which is only 6% of the total. And the suggestion is that the support for the police is riddled by changes in staffing, high desertion, and casualty rates.

It seems that if one of the goals of this mission is to have the Afghan National Army and Police capable of looking after their own defence, not only are we seeing a deterioration in security and humanitarian ability, but we are also seeing very little or no progress—in fact, deterioration—in our ability to assist the Afghan National Police and Army in looking after their own defence and policing.

• (1625)

**BGen G. Champagne:** Thank you, Mr. Harris.

If you don't mind, I'll tackle the army issue, because this is the one we're responsible for. The police issue is more for DFAIT and the RCMP, and I think they can speak to that.

In terms of the Afghan National Army, it's important to understand that... When I referred to the level of expertise or the level of proficiency, I mentioned level one and level two, which are critical for us because it means those organizations can operate on their own.

In the case of the *kandak* that was reported last year as being responsible for the region of Zhari, the reason they were moved out of Zhari is very simple: in terms of the cycle, like any unit you will find in the Canadian Forces, in Afghanistan, with the U.S., there comes a point when that unit has to rotate in order to retrain their people, get new recruits. Then they go through three levels of preparedness, and I'll use colours to illustrate my point. Red is when they start from basic, then they go to yellow, and then they go to green.

The organization that was in the Zhari area had finished the full cycle. So during the green cycle, which is the highest, they were responsible for Zhari and they did the operation they had to do. In the meantime, there's another *kandak* following behind, and a third one, and all at different levels. At that point, when that *kandak* had to retrain, we had to pull it out of Zhari so that it could retrain and then get back.

The beauty with the *kandak* was that instead of going back to a level red, in a very short period it was able to go back to a level yellow of preparedness. That's why we should not look at the fact that we pulled them out as a lack of success. The fact is the unit had to come out in order to retrain and get new recruits so that it could go back. Each of those *kandaks*, when in operation, loses a lot of people, either wounded in action or killed in action, just like we do. So they need to retrain.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I'm going to ask you about the numbers now. Your document suggests that the troop strength of the Afghan National Army units is in some cases around 70%, but in most cases it's lower than that. How many Afghan National Army troops are in the field in the Kandahar region?

•(1630)

**BGen G. Champagne:** I'll be cautious on this one, if you don't mind.

What we have is a brigade a quarter and three *kandaks*. Each of those *kandaks* is about 650 strong. But again, the strength goes up and down. I will not tell you the exact number of each of those *kandaks*. That would be within the realm of operational security; otherwise, the Taliban would know exactly the size of the force it's facing.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** That being said—and I appreciate there may be some need for security around these numbers—it certainly appears that there's a great degree of fluctuation in the troop strength. Using the numbers you've used here in your report, they suggest that we're talking about less than 70% effective strength, which indicates either a lot of casualties or an inability to in fact recruit people for this work...or desertion, which is mentioned, in the police force. Reading the report, I don't see the kind of optimism you're expressing today in terms of progress being made here. Can you counter that with any information that we haven't heard?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Champagne, you have 15 seconds to reply.

[English]

**BGen G. Champagne:** As I explained to you, a lot of them are back up to 70%. This is a snapshot in time. The recruiting and the reinforcements are coming in, and even today some of those units that might have shown at 60% are now at 70%.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Well, 70% doesn't seem very high to me.

**BGen G. Champagne:** For us, it is a level of effectiveness that we're looking for in a battalion.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Gallant, for seven minutes.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and through you to General Champagne.

First of all, congratulations on the operation with the Chinooks. I know the soldiers are very excited about their successes there. And congratulations for the increasing percentage of IEDs you're neutralizing, both through the use of choppers and UAVs.

Prior to the situation that happened last week with our casualties, there was an issue that was percolating up from the boots on the ground, so to speak, with respect to different things that could be used to detect IEDs. One of the questions was, why is it that our military, for example, does not use dogs to detect IEDs? Maybe it does use them, but not to the extent that other countries do. I understand there's a disproportionate number of Canadian soldiers who have suffered casualties as a consequence of IEDs as compared with the Brits and the Americans, so I would like you to comment on that.

In your introductory comments, you talked about your experiences with the insurgency in Srebrenica, and I'd like you to compare, first of all, what you saw there with what you're experiencing now, and what are the lessons you learned there that you are now applying to the situation in Afghanistan?

Also, with respect to borders, I understand that Canadian Forces officers in Kandahar organized a border flag meeting with ISAF and the Afghan and Pakistani officers to discuss border security matters, the first such meeting in eight years. I'd like you to tell us a little bit more about that meeting, its outcomes and what effect it might have on the progress made with respect to the insurgency. Our area of operation is in Kandahar, so we're adjacent to Pakistan. For the countries that have areas of operations adjacent to Iran, are they experiencing the same sorts of insurgency?

Thank you.

**BGen G. Champagne:** I'll try to categorize this according to your three questions, and if I don't answer all of your points, please remind me.

In terms of our counter-IED effort, as I explained, we have a wide spectrum of capabilities. We have a counter-IED team here in Canada, which keeps going back and forth. It goes through the lessons learned of what's needed in the field, in terms of surveillance, reconnaissance, and detection. This can be translated in terms of types of vehicles or intelligence, including other means of intelligence, which I don't really want to go into in great detail here. But when you're talking specifically about dogs, if you look at the operation that was ongoing this weekend, there was a dog in the trenches that was going after IEDs. So we use the full spectrum.

Unfortunately, sometimes some of the soldiers are not necessarily privy to the full spectrum that we have, because a lot of this is happening around them and not necessarily with them.

Do you want me to go into more detail?

•(1635)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** That's good.

**BGen G. Champagne:** In terms of my experience in Srebrenica and how it relates to Afghanistan, first, I don't have experience yet in Afghanistan. Hopefully, I'll be deploying this summer. But in comparing the two, I'll go back to the whole-of-government approach, or the COIN manual mentioned by your colleague.

In the case of Srebrenica, what was important was that I, as the commander, could only deal with international organizations. It was a lot of simpler than it is in Afghanistan, because you had the enclave there, with the Bosnians on the one side and the Serbs on the other. But the efforts in the enclave dealt with the different international organizations, which is different from what it is in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the strength we have is the fact that it is all Canadians, and we're all focused on the same objective with the same priorities, and we have the projects that we're working on. This makes it a lot easier. At the same time, Afghanistan is a war zone that is quite different from the one in the old days of Bosnia. Bosnia was a war zone too, but not as complicated as the one in Afghanistan, because in Afghanistan it's asymmetrical, whereas over in Bosnia you still had the different groups, but they were distinct. In Afghanistan it's not the same.

Does that explain it?

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** That's great.

**BGen G. Champagne:** In terms of the border flag meetings, I believe we've had about three in the past 12 months. These are extremely important. They happen in the Spin Buldak area. They normally include the commander of JTFA and the RoCK, and the Afghan commander and the Pakistani commander. And then they discuss the issues along the border and how they can improve the situation there. Based on that, they each go back to their organizations and try to put in place some of the agreements they've reached.

Now, we don't normally share those agreements outside of that group, because it's really between the two of them. It's really at this low level, but it still has an effect, because at least we have the Pakistani and Afghan commanders on each side with whom we can discuss the border issues.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** And the militaries with areas of operation adjacent to Iran, are they experiencing the same sort of insurgency?

**BGen G. Champagne:** I wouldn't try to comment on that.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Okay.

The Americans are pledging an additional 17,000 troops. We know that part of the reason the surge worked in Iraq was that it was coupled with significant changes to the local political situation, namely the awakening of their councils.

What kinds of operations do we see the Americans doing in Afghanistan to help change the security and the dynamics on the ground?

**BGen G. Champagne:** First of all, I'd like to clarify that the term "surge" was probably one that they used in Iraq, but it is not a term they use in Afghanistan. It is not a surge in Afghanistan. They're coming in to help in large numbers, and they know they're going to be there for the long run. That's a little bit different from the case in Iraq, where they had a surge in order to do certain things.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Champagne, you have 15 seconds remaining.

[*English*]

**BGen G. Champagne:** Merci, monsieur.

In terms of exactly what they want to do, they're still discussing it. The commander of CENTCOM, who is responsible for that theatre of operations, is still going through his assessment. Once he's finished with his assessment, it will obviously go through his own chain of command. And once the order is out, then we'll have more clarity.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Champagne for your presentation.

[*English*]

If all the members agree, we will suspend for five minutes, and after that we're going to go in camera for our committee business.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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