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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon. This is the third meeting of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, on Thursday, March 25, 2010.

In our second hour today, we will go to committee business. There is a portion there that will be public, and a very short portion dealing with the budget that will be in camera.

We are continuing our study of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. Appearing as our witness today is the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Minister Cannon, I welcome you to our committee. I thank you for responding positively on very short notice. Initially we had asked you to appear yesterday and your schedule wasn't allowing you to do that, but you made a spot clear because the committee had requested your attendance. So we thank you for that.

Before we give you the opportunity, we also have appearing, from the Privy Council Office, Greta Bossenmaier, deputy minister for the Afghanistan task force. It's my understanding that Ms. Bossenmaier will stick with us in the second hour as well.

We will have in the second hour, from the Department of National Defence, William Pentney, the associate deputy minister.

Jillian Stirk, the assistant deputy minister for the Afghanistan task force, is here as well.

Minister Cannon, thank you for attending, and we look forward to your opening comments. The committee will then go into the first round of questioning, which will be a ten-minute round.

Welcome.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to speak to you as chair of the cabinet committee on Afghanistan, to highlight Canada's work in Afghanistan as profiled in the recently tabled seventh quarterly report on Canada's engagement in Afghanistan.

I will be available for only one hour, colleagues. However, officials from across the whole of the government community, including the Department of Foreign Affairs, CIDA, the Department of National Defence, and the deputy minister of the Privy Council Office's Afghanistan task force, will be available after my departure to continue the discussion on the quarterly reports.

Let me begin, colleagues, as we sadly must, by paying tribute to the courage and the sacrifice of Corporal Darren James Fitzpatrick, who succumbed to his wounds on the weekend after an IED attack in Kandahar on March 6. We praise the men and women of the Canadian Forces and our civilian staff who seek to help Afghanistan achieve peace and security. Their dedication will never be forgotten.

Without a doubt, the dangers of Canada's mission in Afghanistan are ever-present and the challenges to achieving progress there continue to be daunting, yet there is clear evidence that the efforts of our soldiers, our development workers, our police and customs officers, and our diplomats are all making a difference.

Despite the volatile security environment, the economic impoverishment, and the governance problems that persist, we are seeing tangible improvement in the daily lives of Afghans, as I will highlight over the next few minutes.

[Translation]

Most of you will be very familiar with the set of priorities and signature projects that Canada established in 2008, following the recommendations made by the Manley panel. You're aware of the 21 benchmarks and 44 progress indicators we developed to track our progress. And you have read that the quarterly reports we have produced to communicate the results of our work to Parliament and to Canadians—the seventh of which was tabled last week.

The latest report covers the period from October 1 to the end of 2009. Along with an update on our targets, this report also provides a snapshot of Canadian engagement at the national level in Afghanistan; that is, beyond the vital work we are doing in Kandahar province.

• (1535)

It comes as no surprise, however, that the progress we achieved this past quarter—to which I will speak in more detail later—was set against the backdrop of increasing instability caused by the uncertainty in Afghanistan.

The efforts of Afghans and the international community in Afghanistan continue to be undermined by those who seek destabilization through the constant threat of improvised explosive devices, targeted suicide attacks—aimed increasingly at innocent Afghan civilians—and a campaign of intimidation of Afghan government officials and ordinary citizens.

Last October, for example, insurgents attacked the UN guest house in Kabul, killing and wounding Afghans, UN employees and international security personnel. And two weeks ago, insurgents executed a series of coordinated attacks in Kandahar on the Sarposa prison. As we will explain in the next quarterly report, insurgents failed in their attempts to create havoc at the prison, thanks in large part to Canadian mentoring and training of prison staff and Canadian support to the prison's infrastructure.

I am pleased to report that, last quarter, thanks to Canadian efforts, two additional targets were achieved, bringing the total to four. Over 23,500 people in Kandahar have had literacy training and over 4,150 Kandaharis—four times our target—have had vocational training. Additionally, over 200,000 Kandaharis have received “mine-awareness education”, a vital part of keeping Afghans safe from the harmful effects of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

Over 52,000 mines were cleared this past quarter. Clearly, Canada's work on landmines is having a major impact: during the last quarter of 2009, the number of landmine victims dropped significantly and farmers are regaining access to land that had previously not been usable for agriculture. This is just one example of the tangible improvements we are making in the daily lives of Afghans.

We also completed another two schools in our education signature project. Fourteen out of 50 schools have been completed and another 28 schools are under construction. In the next quarterly report, you will see these numbers increase even further.

Teacher training, another vital component of education, also progressed with another 197 teachers trained, bringing the cumulative total to 341.

And the Dahla dam—another Canadian signature project—continues according to plan, with consultation to improve local security conditions in advance of the work that will take place during the dry season. An additional fifty jobs were created by the Dahla dam project this past quarter, bringing the total to 405.

Canada's third signature project is the eradication of polio. During the reporting quarter, nearly 400,000 children in Kandahar province were vaccinated against this deadly disease.

Canada contributed to the curriculum of the Afghan National Customs Academy during the reporting quarter. And in January, classes began. This past week, 48 customs officers graduated from the academy.

● (1540)

In the area of policing, one of Canada's key achievements in the last quarter was the signing of the Kandahar Model Police Project Charter. The project will team Afghan police officers with Canadian policeman mentors, and help to make the Afghan police more responsive to the people of Kandahar and more accountable to government.

In an effort to address the recruitment and retention problems in the Afghan National Police, Canada supported the approval of a new pay and incentive package which included pay raises for the police, bringing them to parity with the Afghan National Army, a longevity

raise every three years and an increase in the hazard duty incentive pay.

Canada provides financial support for this initiative through the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan. But in the spirit of honest and frank reporting, we have also reported that progress has not advanced as far as we might have liked across the board. Afghan public perceptions of the security situation in their communities continue to deteriorate. Retention and recruitment problems are limiting the progress we are making in the capacity and building of both the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police.

And the number of polio cases reported nationally increased. None of this, however, should imply that Canada has failed in its efforts. Rather, it points to the fact that progress will be made at different paces and that factors outside of our control will have an impact on our ability to meet our commitments.

Measuring progress in the midst of conflict is no easy task, but Canada continues to deliver on its commitments to help Afghans rebuild their country as a stable, democratic and self-sufficient society.

[English]

Mr. Chair, corruption has been cited as one of the biggest challenges facing Afghanistan's development. President Karzai addressed this issue in his inaugural speech last November and pledged at the London conference in January to tackle corruption as a priority of his government.

Canada is also working to help Afghans fight corruption at various levels. Our police mentors have helped develop an anti-corruption strategy for the Afghan National Police and the interior ministry. Canada has also provided an anti-corruption advisor to the Afghan Attorney General's Office and we have provided the UNDP with a \$1.5 million grant to support their anti-corruption activities in the Ministry of Education.

It goes without saying that we cannot achieve progress in our priority areas without a strong and effective Afghan government. The London conference in late January, at which I represented Canada, was an important opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of the international community to work with the new government of Afghanistan to accelerate the transition to an Afghan-led security environment.

We are also encouraged by President Karzai's move to launch a new political process for reconciliation. Canada has always supported a national reconciliation process that is based on the acceptance by all groups within Afghan society of the central government's legitimacy and authority as well as respect for the rule of law.

At the London conference, Canada also announced it is contributing \$25 million to counter-narcotic efforts, bringing our total commitment in this area to over \$55 million.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Afghanistan will again be a priority area for discussion at the meeting of G8 Foreign Affairs Ministers that I will chair in Gatineau in a few days' time. In particular, I hope to build with my G8 colleagues on the important work Canada has been doing to help Afghans and Pakistanis manage their shared border. Pakistan too faces its own economic, political and social difficulties; and I want to examine how we can further encourage and assist Pakistan as well.

[*English*]

Allow me to conclude my statement by reiterating that despite the still very challenging security situation, this latest quarterly report is a testament to the fact that we are making a concrete difference.

I am pleased to answer any questions you may have, colleagues, and officials from the whole-of-government community on Afghanistan will continue the discussion after my departure.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Cannon, for your introductory remarks in regard to the quarterly report that was brought forward here.

We're going to go to the first round and we will go to Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll be sharing my time, I hope.

Minister, I gathered from your exchange today with the leader of the opposition and with Mr. Mulcair that the government's commitment to withdraw militarily from Afghanistan by the 2011 agreed date is firm and unequivocal. Is that right?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Let me point out, Mr. Rae, that in accordance with the parliamentary motion of March 2008, Canada's military mission will end in 2011. We will continue to have a development and diplomatic relationship with Afghanistan through the Canadian embassy in Kabul, as I mentioned today, as we do with other countries in the world.

Hon. Bob Rae: So if a Conservative Party candidate were to say that he was in favour of renewing a mandate beyond 2011 and of having a parliamentary debate about that, what would your response be to that?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: You have asked me to state the Government of Canada's position and I've stated the Government of Canada's position. If you want to have a discussion on party policy, we'll invite you to come to our sessions.

Hon. Bob Rae: If a candidate were to say, for example, that to his knowledge torture was commonplace in Afghanistan from the time of the arrival of the troops, and that in his view there was absolutely no alternative that could in fact prevent that from happening within Afghan institutions, what would your response be to that?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: My response would be that following the flawed and skewed arrangement that was there previously, we indeed corrected that by putting in a new arrangement, a new prisoner transfer agreement that allowed us to have access to the prisoners at any time.

Hon. Bob Rae: I gather that Mr. Chris Alexander, who is the former Canadian ambassador to Afghanistan, and the deputy head of the UN in Afghanistan, and a Conservative candidate, has said in effect that torture was widespread, and that it was systematic in the system, that abuse of prisoners was systematic in the system, and that in his view there was absolutely no alternative but to continue to transfer prisoners to Afghanistan. And in his view there was never a question of either Dutch or Canadian or British or anybody else's troops conducting themselves inappropriately, but there were certainly a great many instances of abuse inside Afghan prisons. In his view there was no alternative because the decision not to create what might be called a parallel justice system was absolutely clear on the part of the Government of Canada. He said there was no alternative to what's happened. Would you share the view that there is no alternative to what's happened?

• (1550)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: You know, any time that serious and credible allegations have been put forward, the chain of command of the Canadian Forces has looked into that issue.

Hon. Bob Rae: My question, Minister, is that it's becoming increasingly clear—and even with the pile of documents that my friend is going to talk about—the evidence is just overwhelming that there was a systematic problem with respect to abuse inside the Afghan prison system. And the response of the Canadian government seems to be that we had no choice, we did what we had to do, and we can't guarantee that it was effective. People seem to say that's good enough and that's a high enough standard. But isn't the international law standard different? Doesn't it actually say that you cannot transfer people into a situation where they're at serious risk of being tortured?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: That might have been policy in the previous government's case, but indeed what we were able to do was to fix the problem. We fixed what you have described as being a systematic problem. We fixed it by putting in a new transfer agreement.

Hon. Bob Rae: So you're saying that after 2006 there are no instances when—

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: No, I'm not saying that.

Hon. Bob Rae: —torture occurred inside the Afghan prison system.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Don't put words in my mouth—

Hon. Bob Rae: Well, you seemed to imply that.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Don't put words in my mouth, Mr. Rae.

What I'm saying to you is that there was a problem, apparently. We were able to fix the problem. We fixed it by putting in a new transfer agreement that enabled us to go and visit any time we chose, and to withhold transfer until such time as the commander of our forces was satisfied that the conditions were proper and that they did follow all the conditions that had been enumerated in the arrangement. That is what I'm saying.

Hon. Bob Rae: Okay.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Wilfert.

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

Minister, in your report you talk about issues regarding anti-corruption and issues of the rule of law, yet it seems that the Government of Afghanistan is now in a position of having passed a law that basically gives a blanket pardon for perpetrators of war crimes.

We know that the president met last week with one of the major factions opposing his government in Afghanistan. This means essentially that anyone who committed crimes since the overthrow of the Taliban basically is getting a free get-out-of-jail pass. We have people on the ground there who are dealing with anti-corruption, as pointed out on page 9 of your report; can you comment on this, Minister, and tell us what influence, if any, our advisors on the ground have with regard to this type of situation?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I can address it on a summary basis, and then maybe Ms. Stirk can take over.

Canada and its international partners note that the amnesty law was gazetted by the Government of Afghanistan in November 2008 and recently made public. We continue to seek clarification on the final text of the law and to urge the Government of Afghanistan to ensure that all laws are consistent with the Afghan constitution and Afghanistan's international legal obligations.

If the law creates an amnesty for individuals responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, or other gross violations of human rights, it would violate Afghanistan's international legal obligations, as you know. Canada will continue to support the efforts of Afghan civil society to seek clarification on the passage and the coming into force of this legislation. Canada has raised its concerns with the law at the appropriate levels within the Government of Afghanistan, including the Afghan foreign affairs minister, whom I met with earlier this month and with whom I had the opportunity to discuss this matter.

Canada has long underlined the importance of justice and reconciliation in the Afghan context and has publicly and privately called on Afghan officials to implement the Afghan transitional justice action plan. Promoting and protecting human rights in Afghanistan is a core element of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. We regularly raise issues of human rights with the Afghan government.

• (1555)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Did our advisors on the ground alert our government to this situation? What was our response, given that it would clearly violate international law, particularly in the area of human rights?

Ms. Jillian Stirk (Assistant Deputy Minister, Afghanistan Task Force, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Mr. Chairman, indeed our ambassador did alert us to this law. In fact, we were made aware some time ago. Since then, as Minister Cannon has mentioned, we've been making a number of representations in addition to those that Minister Cannon himself made. Our ambassador has been very active on the ground in Kabul in calling

on various ministers of the government to bring this situation to their attention and to suggest that they review this law.

In addition, we're working very closely with the human rights organizations on the ground to help support them in their efforts. We feel very strongly that it's also quite important that Afghans themselves take a lead on all of these issues, and indeed that they take responsibility for their own affairs. We're there to help, to support, and to raise these concerns, but of course it is important that ultimately they be the first in line in pursuing these issues.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Since this law was passed by two-thirds of the members of the Afghan parliament, if it were to remain unchanged, what would be the response of our government to that situation, given this violation?

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

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Wilfert, I think I was able to answer that previously.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Would aid or any other element be put on the table, as well?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: We continue to make those representations. The question you pose started with a hypothesis, and we are continuing, as I mentioned in my response, to make the proper representations to the Afghan government.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: We will follow that. Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Madame Lalonde, *vous avez dix minutes.*

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): It is five minutes, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, through you, I would like to first thank the minister for being here.

From the outset, I would like to point out that Canada has invested a lot and that Canadian men and women who have participated in the mission have worked extremely hard. However, we have lost 140 people. Given how much this mission is costing the country, this is a disappointing performance record. You said that security is not stable. You said that there is growing instability because of the Afghan insurrection, because of a weakening of the economy and persistent problems related to governance. You said that there was nevertheless a tangible improvement in the daily lives of Afghans, but you went on to say that there is a constant threat of explosive devices, among other things, which is creating more and more innocent victims among Afghan civilians. You also said that there was a massive intimidation campaign underway and spoke of the fact that the efforts of the international community are being undermined. This situation is extremely disappointing and leads us to ask many questions.

Further, we have met with many people. One of the problems raised by members of NGOs who have been in Afghanistan for a while is that Afghans are not sure about the quality of the health they are receiving. They said that the roads that have been built are not solid and that bridges have crumbled. I am simply repeating what I heard. We were told that these situations should not happen.

You did not really address the consequences of the election. The least one could say is that it did not provide conclusive results for President Karzai. You also talked about the fight against drugs, but the poppy culture has not been eradicated. On top of all of that, there is the issue regarding the torture of detainees.

What measures does this government, and this cabinet, intend to take by 2011 to improve the situation?

• (1600)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lalonde.

Go ahead, Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde. That was a very wide-ranging question.

I will not try to tell you that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds in Afghanistan. However, to the contrary, I believe that presenting you with a quarterly report, as we are doing, certainly points to progress in some sectors, such as education, the building of schools and progress with regard to security forces. Indeed, progress has been made, but we cannot forget that we are operating in a conflict zone and that progress is difficult. Nevertheless, progress has been made.

I would like to remind you that the Canadian Parliament has supported the objectives which are known to everyone and which are contained in the report. Every time my predecessors or myself have appeared before the committee, we have reported on progress based on a certain number of criteria. However, far be it from me, Ms. Lalonde, to claim that we have made extraordinary progress. We are moving forward in a difficult context, but we are moving forward nevertheless, and we ultimately hope that we will reach our final objective, which is to ensure that the Afghan government does well by its citizens. Everything we do is to reach that goal.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Do you really believe we will reach that objective?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Yes, I do. As a member of the international community, I strongly believe in this objective. I believe in it, my allies believe in it, as do the people we are collaborating with. For instance, every time a woman goes to school, this is progress. Every time we find a stable job for someone, this is progress. Every time we train someone to take on an important responsibility within government, this is progress.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: However, you realize that women are increasingly afraid of appearing in public without wearing a burqa. I will conclude with that fact.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

Mr. Bachand, you have four minutes.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): You talk about progress, Mr. Minister, but according to the document I have read, it seems that the opposite has occurred. That is the problem, we do not agree on what progress is versus setbacks. Let me give you some examples.

In the document, it says: “[...] neither the brigade headquarters nor any of the kandaks had an effective strength of 70% or higher this quarter.” This is on page 12. Therefore, that is a setback.

Next, the percentage of operations carried out by the Afghan army decreased. It stands at 58%, whereas during the previous quarter, it was 80%. As well, based on the progress indicator, while the majority of Kandaharis feel that security has improved, they believe that security has not improved in the six key districts. That is a setback.

As far as the Afghan National Police is concerned, no infrastructure project was completed during this quarter, whereas many had been completed previously. Those are setbacks.

Regarding the percentage of Kandaharis who perceive an improvement in dependable delivery of services, no data was collected. However, a little further, it says that 52% of Kandaharis are satisfied with the provision of education, but previously, that figure stood at 60%. Therefore, it is a setback of 8%.

As far as polio is concerned, 16 new cases were declared, whereas before there were only 9. That is also a setback.

As for health care staff, 87 people were trained last year. During the last quarter of last year, 47 people were trained. That is another setback.

There are all kinds of numbers like this, and I could go on. In my opinion, we have failed. If I had to award a mark to this report, it would not pass, unfortunately. So will you be working harder during the next quarter so that we can give the next report a passing grade of 60%?

• (1605)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Bachand, allow me to give you a different point of view.

When the literacy programs ended during this quarter, 23,500 had received training. Over 220,000 people received training on the risks associated with mines. These are important things because people could step on a mine at any time.

Another kandak was evaluated as being perfectly able to plan, execute and maintain operations on a nearly independent basis. Over 75 additional police officers were trained, which brings the total to 2,105.

The Dahla dam project created 50 new jobs, and 405 people worked on the site. Regarding another major project, two new schools were built, as I mentioned, bringing the total to 14 schools.

Further, 197 teachers were trained, bringing their number to 341. Over 95% of children targeted by vaccination campaigns against polio received vaccinations during that quarter. Thanks to Canadian aid, over 95,500 tons of food were made available through the world food program.

It is not easy to measure progress in a context of conflict. You know as well as I do that the ability to make progress and to report on progress is compromised by security problems.

It is not always easy to notice or measure progress on a quarterly basis, but look at the trend. I think we can be happy with the work which our military, our civilians, our men and women, have accomplished since the beginning of this conflict. Progress has been made, and more particularly since we implemented quantifiable and measurable objectives.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Obhrai, you have ten minutes.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for giving us the progress report as to what Canada has been doing, the achievements Canada has made, and the challenges Canada has.

Mr. Minister, one of the main things the opposition has been trying to do is to find there was torture there and that our soldiers were somehow considering that. They forget that the transfer agreement was made during their regime and that we improved on that. They don't seem to go to the fact of how much money we have put in the present system to stop that, to teach the Afghan justice system, the Afghan prisoners.

To give you an idea of how this information is twisted by the opposition.... Mr. Minister, last term you said that since signing this agreement there have been over 200 visits by Canadian officials to the prison system. Yet Mr. Dosanjh tried to twist that fact to say that it wasn't 200 visits, it was 200 prisoners.

Can you clarify that situation so Mr. Dosanjh can know very clearly that there were over 200 visits to check on the prisoners to see that torture was not being done and that we were complying with our international rules?

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dosanjh and Minister.

An hon. member: It's Mr. Obhrai.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Obhrai—Obhrai, Dosanjh.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: All right, I'm sure that was Mr. Obhrai. I am also very sure that our minister will answer.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I'll be very pleased, Chair, to respond to both of them.

I think the 2007 improved agreement that the government negotiated grants us full and unrestricted access, as I was mentioning to Mr. Rae earlier, to the prison facilities where detainees transferred by the Canadian Forces are held. There have been over 210 visits by Canadian officials to Afghan detention facilities since the transfer agreement was signed. I asked my officials to look at that and find out when the most recent unannounced visit had been held, and I was told that it had been done within the last 15 days. We continue to go there on a regular basis since the government negotiated the agreement.

I point out as well, colleagues, that this arrangement, because it is robust, also ensures that the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has the same unrestricted access, as they have an important monitoring role, as you know, as well as an investigation role to play. So while we coordinate closely with our allies, each country's approach to detainee monitoring or prisoner monitoring, including frequency, is specific to its own bilateral arrangements with the Government of Afghanistan.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Minister, today Mr. Rae asked the question here and you were asked the question in the House about Canada's engagement, as to when the military engagement will come to an end. You made it very clear, here and in the House, that Canada's military engagement will come to an end in 2011. However, this document has indicated the progress. We still have a year to go, and we'll continue doing that. But now Canadians are interested in knowing what Canada will be doing after its military engagement in 2011 is done. What would Canada's focus then be, where would Canada be going, and what are we looking at post-2011? I think all Canadians are very interested in moving forward and seeing what will happen. Perhaps you can shed light on that.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Let me first remind you of what was said in the Speech from the Throne:

In Afghanistan, the Canadian Forces prepare for the end of the military mission in 2011 with the knowledge that – through great sacrifice and with great distinction – their efforts saved Kandahar province from falling back under Taliban control. After 2011, our effort in Afghanistan will focus on development and humanitarian aid.

So we're in the midst of reviewing Canada's development in that regard, as well our diplomatic efforts post-2011. But, colleagues, our focus right now is to continue to deliver on our six priorities and three signature projects.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Obhrai, you have another four minutes.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Minister, while you're talking about the security situation, which is critically important to continue with the development process we have here, the benchmark indicates that there has been a decline in the Afghan force's strength. To what would you attribute that decline? Does that work in the situation where we are working with the international forces to continue providing that security umbrella that we need for development purposes?

•(1615)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I think it's indeed due to the courage, the stamina, the determination, and the will of our troops, the coordinated effort that has been put forward among our allies and the military strategy that has been put forward, which I think have been fine examples of what the increased surge in American troops has done. It has indeed been welcomed by all of our partners, and I do think we are making progress in that regard, contrary to some of assumptions of some colleagues around the table.

Maybe I'll let Deputy Minister Greta Bossenmaier continue and elaborate on that specific issue as to how we're working with our allies.

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier (Deputy Minister, Afghanistan Task Force, Privy Council Office): Thank you very much, Minister Cannon.

Mr. Chairman, with reference to the question about why we saw a decrease in that particular benchmark, it's noted in the report that during this particular period there was the Eid holiday, and it was also after the presidential election. Some members of the Afghan National Army had some leave in that period, so that contributed to the lower percentage of folks available.

I will give you a little peek into the next quarterly report. We are starting to compile that information now, and you will see in the next quarterly report that the number has gone back up, as folks have come back from that. It also highlights the challenges of doing quarterly reporting. Not everything follows in a straight line, in linear progression. There are changes that happen; this is one of those changes that didn't quite work over this particular period, but I think you'll see in the next quarterly report that this temporary shift has gone back up.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Obhrai, you have another minute.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Minister, I was in Tajikistan about a month ago. We are doing border helping in Tajikistan and we are border-helping in Pakistan in relation to customs and smuggling and everything. These are many of the things that Canada is doing out there to help build capacity for the Afghanistan government and to help them ultimately become a complete state that can take care of its own. These are the good-news stories of what Canada is doing that do not get out because the opposition is bent on going after this one little subject and does not want to talk about the excellent work that Canada is doing in many other fields there.

May I suggest that at the next meeting we do a more comprehensive report on the good things we are doing and focus on the situation after 2011?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I think that's a good suggestion.

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

We'll move to Mr. Harris, please.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

First let me join with you and all Canadians in recognizing the tremendous sacrifices and commitment that we have received from both the troops and the civilians acting on Canada's behalf in Afghanistan, and their sacrifice of life and limb, most recently highlighted by the weekend death of Corporal Darren Fitzpatrick. We all join in mourning all of their deaths.

The debate within this country about Afghanistan has to do with differing views about Canada's role internationally and about making sure that Canada's values and international obligations are upheld, so this debate is about important matters of state.

I won't engage in the debate about how long it took your government—you weren't the minister—to react to the concerns about torture in Afghan prisons, but I will say that recently our

committee was told by a representative of Amnesty International that they still have concerns about prisoner transfers in Afghanistan. We have seen prisoner transfers stopped by our government in the fall of 2007 and twice in 2009. Despite your 200 visits that you talked about, not one of these reports has been made public or made available, even in confidence, to this committee.

As of June 2009, Britain stopped transferring detainees and doesn't engage in that.

I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, why these reports aren't public and why Canada hasn't followed the same path as Britain. Obviously they have concerns about their international obligations as well.

• (1620)

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

Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Let me, for the record, straighten something out here in terms of information that's been circulating: the U.K. is still transferring detainees. That has not stopped. I believe it's Mr. Rae who first put this out, so I want to reassure you on that point of information.

As well, in terms of this prisoner transfer and the detainees, the Afghanistan government is primarily responsible for ensuring that the rights of detainees are respected. As you know, Canada has been assisting the Afghan government for years in meeting its domestic as well as its international obligations with respect to the treatment of detainees, and we remain committed to ensuring that detainees are handled, transferred, and monitored in accordance with our obligations under international law. That is what we are pursuing. That is the nature of the transfer agreement that we put in place. That is exactly what we are doing.

Maybe if someone wants to—

Mr. Jack Harris: I'll take that as your answer, Minister Cannon, although it has been made clear to this committee and to the House that the international obligations of Canada don't end with the passing over of prisoners.

I would like to get to another issue that I think is important to a lot of people.

It's been said in many places that this war cannot be won or that the situation in Afghanistan cannot be resolved by military means. I want to present to you a position put forth in December by the Canadian Council of Churches in an ecumenical brief on Canada's role in Afghanistan. They called for reconciliation actions and peace and development, but they called for something further:

We further call for a Canadian diplomatic surge to persuade the international community to encourage and support Afghans in intensified and persistent dialogue or engagement efforts towards a military ceasefire and a sustainable political settlement.

In short, we encourage Canada to mount a peace mission and to accord it the same level of political energy and commitment, along with requisite material support, as has been accorded the military mission to date.

I regard that as a very powerful statement of hope that Canada would equally engage in efforts towards a ceasefire and settlement. I'd like you to tell this committee what you as minister and your government have done, and what efforts you have made to pursue this particular route.

I know we're engaged with the Americans on the military side. What are we doing as a country, at the diplomatic level, to pursue what the Canadian Council of Churches calls here a hoped-for "diplomatic surge"?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Thank you for that question, Mr. Harris.

One of Canada's six priorities for moving forward in Afghanistan is to support the Afghan-led political reconciliation efforts. That's aimed at weakening the insurgency and, obviously, fostering a sustainable peace.

We're encouraged by recent plans announced by President Karzai to launch a new political process for reconciliation in Afghanistan. I think it's important that any national reconciliation process be based on the acceptance by all groups within Afghan society of the central government's legitimacy and authority, as well as respect for the rule of law. I mentioned this in my remarks a few moments ago. We think that's important. Of course, these groups have to indicate that they will put aside their arms and work towards a peaceful political process that, at the end of the day, will enable us to have an Afghan society that is free from conflict. That is an objective.

Now, you're putting forward a suggestion. We're operating here on a mandate that the Government of Canada holds as being extremely important, a mandate and a motion that the Parliament of Canada adopted. Among the priorities that the Parliament of Canada adopted was this priority, and that is what we are doing.

•(1625)

Mr. Jack Harris: Sir, there can be no reconciliation without peace, and in my view there can be no real development without peace. You yourself have referred to the difficulties in undertaking development and reconstruction projects in the middle of war. We've got minimal progress, I would say, in terms of our goals. We have completed 14 out of 50 schools. I think we've got 300 teachers trained, out of an expectation of 3,000 by the end of 2011. It seems to me, sir, that as long as we are engaged with the military struggle and war, this won't happen.

Aside from encouraging the Afghans to pursue this, a lot of other actors in this neighbourhood have a very strong interest in what's happening in Afghanistan. What international diplomatic efforts are being made to engage all of them in a process to ensure that there can be peace in Afghanistan, that the borders can be secure, that it won't be something that's going on for many years to come, and that in fact there could be peace by 2011?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: You asked what other international diplomatic efforts are being made. I think the international community is committed to that. If you followed what has taken place at the London conference, you will know of the initiative that has been put forward by my colleague David Miliband in the United Kingdom, as well as the Prime Minister. I think all this points to a better engagement strategy to be able to ultimately, as I mentioned,

make sure that the Afghans themselves will be able to lead this transition and to assure all of the partnership of that outcome.

That is the purpose we are all pursuing. We want to be able to see this state become stable. We want to be able to see this state free from terrorism. Whether those are Canada's objectives or the objectives of other parties that are involved, this is what we all wish to see occur.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Harris, you have about 30 seconds left, if you want to use them.

Mr. Jack Harris: No, you can't do very much with 30 seconds, except—

The Chair: Well, then we can pass it on to someone else.

Mr. Jack Harris:—make a statement. I think we can be playing a leadership role. You have told us what others are doing, and I'm very concerned that Canada should be in the forefront of this.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: We've talked about the border initiative. Let me say that in the leadership role we're playing, we lead by process. Leading by process is something that has been looked at by a lot of our colleagues, and with a great deal of interest. We were able to bring together the Afghans as well as the Pakistanis at the same table to discuss border-related issues, and from that be able to put in place a structure that will lead to other initiatives. That's part of my G-8 discussions with the foreign ministers next week.

These are initiatives that Canada does well at. We've led the way, we're mentoring, we're acting as a catalyst, we're bringing sides together to discuss common interests. We have the largest border in the world, with the United States of America. We have best practices that we can share, and that is exactly what we're doing. Canada is well regarded among not only our colleagues but among the Afghans themselves.

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

We have a couple of minutes left. We'll go into the second round.

Mr. Hawn.

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

Speaking through you to the minister, no sane person doesn't want peace and stability in Afghanistan. But Mr. Minister, can you give me your thoughts on what the Taliban view of the unilateral Canadian ceasefire might be?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Let me say, colleagues, that as long as there are terrorists who are killing our troops or injuring our people, whether they be civilians or military, we will continue to do the job we've been asked to do. Let me point out that when we talk about reconciliation, it is one of our objectives, and we look for a solution there. But the condition for it to take place has to be that the terrorists, the insurgents, put down their arms and want to do this.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: For the past year or so, Canada has been pursuing a process of population-centred operations rather than insurgency-centred operations, and the Americans have picked up on that. What's your view of the progress in this and progress in the longer term in actually winning the hearts and minds of the people?

•(1630)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: As I mentioned before in my statement or in response to one of the questions, we've been able to increase our presence and take over some of the areas.

I'll let Greta Bossenmaier respond to that specific tactic.

The Chair: Go very quickly, please. We will have the deputy minister in the second hour.

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier: I'll be very brief, Mr. Chairman.

The fact that other countries, including the United States and the broader ISAF forces, are looking to the Canadian model, which is a population-centric model for engaging with the population, for the broader ISAF forces and ISAF operations, is very telling, I think, of the success we're having.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I thank you all.

Minister, thanks again for coming. We commend you on this report. Thank you for the transparency that the government has shown in the work that's going on and the work that has yet to go on. We thank you for coming and updating this committee.

We're going to suspend for a couple of moments and then are going to come right back. The deputy minister will have a very brief statement, and we may proceed into questioning again.

We'll take about a one- or two-minute suspension.

•(1630)

(Pause)

•(1630)

The Chair: In our second hour today, we'll continue with our study on the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, perhaps a little more specifically dealing with the seventh quarterly report to Parliament, for the period of October 1 to December 31, 2009.

Continuing with us in this hour—actually in these approximately 40 minutes, because we're going to try to keep about 15 minutes for committee business—we have Ms. Greta Bossenmaier, deputy minister of the Afghanistan task force; Mr. William Pentney, associate deputy minister from the Department of National Defence; Ms. Jillian Stirk, assistant deputy minister, Afghanistan task force, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Development; Madame Françoise Ducros, vice-president, Afghanistan task force, from the Canadian International Development Agency; and also from the Department of National Defence, Rear Admiral Robert Davidson, director of strategic joint staff.

Ms. Bossenmaier, I believe you have a very brief opening statement. We thank you for your input into the last hour and welcome you again. We look forward to what you have to say.

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I will be brief.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to be here this afternoon.

As Minister Cannon has indicated, making and measuring progress in the midst of conflict is not an easy task, but Canada

continues to deliver on its commitment to help Afghans rebuild their country as a stable, democratic and self-sufficient society.

[*English*]

Following the key recommendations of the Manley panel, the Afghanistan task force within the Privy Council Office was formed in 2008 to help coordinate and ensure the effectiveness of Canada's efforts in Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

I am privileged to work on a daily basis with dedicated colleagues from across government on this important Canadian and international priority.

•(1635)

[*English*]

As I heard, you want to speak about the seventh quarterly report. The quarterly reports are really a whole-of-government effort, and I thought it would be appropriate to have representatives from the whole-of-government team here to join me. It really is the nature of our work to work in collaboration. The degree to which so many different departments and agencies are working hand-in-glove, in Ottawa and especially on the ground in Afghanistan in what really can be called “one mission and one team”, is unprecedented, especially given the conditions under which our colleagues in Afghanistan work.

In keeping with this whole-of-government approach, we have here a representative team of the folks both in Canada and on the ground in Afghanistan who are working on this whole-of-government effort and have contributed to the quarterly reports.

Thank you very much.

We welcome your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move into the first round.

Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae: This may seem like a strange question, but how many Afghan task forces are there?

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier: The term “Afghan task force”, Mr. Chair, doesn't always fit exactly. There is one within the Privy Council Office; there is one within the Department of National Defence; we have a representative here this afternoon from CIDA, and she is responsible for an Afghanistan and a Pakistan task force, a bit of a different model. We have colleagues who work in the Department of Public Safety. They don't necessarily follow a task force model, but they're playing a very important part in the overall Afghanistan effort. Then, colleagues within the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces don't necessarily call themselves a task force or follow a task force mode, but they are of course critical elements within the overall Afghanistan effort for Canada.

So I would say that there isn't necessarily a one-size-fits-all model, but you have efforts from across a multitude of departments and agencies and the Canadian Forces that are part of this whole-of-government "one mission, one team" working in Afghanistan and also working here in Ottawa.

Hon. Bob Rae: When I read the Manley report, Ms. Bossenmaier, my impression was that he was looking for a real attempt to coordinate what everybody is doing, all together. My impression—maybe I have the wrong impression—is that we still have silos: we have CIDA doing their thing; we have DFAIT with their task force; we have PCO with their task force and DND with their work. Obviously, there are other ministries involved as well.

Are you coordinating the coordinators? How many people are we talking about here? What is the size of the overall effort at managing and coordinating the mission?

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier: I think the fact that we're all here today is really a representation of this whole-of-government effort. It is a coordinated and coherent effort.

One of my main tasks in the task force within the Privy Council Office is to help ensure that we have a coordinated, coherent, integrated approach. It starts from the cabinet committee on Afghanistan, which we support. We have a deputy ministers committee on Afghanistan as well, and a number of other groups that are working in a coordinated and integrated manner.

The quarterly report that you see in front of you is an indication of that, in the sense that it is pulling together the overall efforts, progress, results, and challenges from across the whole-of-government team.

What you're seeing reflected here in Ottawa is also reflected on the ground, where we have an integrated approach both within our embassy in Kabul and with the teams in Kandahar that are working in terms of "one mission, one team".

Hon. Bob Rae: I'll give my remaining time to Mr. Dosanjh.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): How much time do I have?

• (1640)

The Chair: You have five minutes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: That's wonderful. Thank you.

I have a question; I don't know whether it's appropriate. I'll ask it. If it's not appropriate, you can tell me. If you can't answer it, I'll accept that.

I understand that there is an equivalent of CSIS at DFAIT, and it's called the Security and Intelligence Branch. Can you tell us whether or not that particular agency works with JTF-2 and CSIS? And is there any information-sharing between them?

Ms. Jillian Stirk: Mr. Chair, I have a colleague who is responsible for international security issues at the Department of Foreign Affairs, but I don't believe we have a branch, exactly, as you have described it. I'm afraid I wouldn't be in a position to comment on relationships with other agencies outside of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Right. Can anyone? No? All right.

As the next question, I want to seek a clarification of what Mr. Obhrai asked. He accused me of making a statement. I actually sought a clarification, and one didn't come.

You've heard the minister say that we've made 210 visits to prisons in Afghanistan. Does that mean that we've actually visited various prisons in 210 separate visits? Or does it mean that we have visited a number of times and the total of prisoners interviewed or seen during those visits has been 210?

Ms. Jillian Stirk: Mr. Chairman, to build on the minister's statement, we have conducted 210 separate visits. There is a very small number of prisons to which Canadian detainees are actually transferred, but this refers to the number of actual visits by Canadians to visit the prisoners.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: And how many prisoners have been seen during those 210 visits?

Ms. Jillian Stirk: I don't have the precise numbers of prisoners seen, because of course that number varies all the time. What I can tell you is that since 2007 when the supplemental agreement was put in place, some 200 visits have taken place. Some prisoners would be seen more than once. It would depend upon how long they're actually in the prison. Others might only be seen on a single occasion, if they were released.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

I have no other questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dosanjh.

We'll move to Madame Lalonde.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Bachand will speak a little later.

The risk that transferred detainees will be tortured can affect Canada's ability to convince others that it really cares about Afghans and their fate. In other words, it is not simply a matter of knowing whether the answer is yes or no. This issue is only one piece of the puzzle, and we are trying to help Afghans live better lives and know what their rights are.

Why does Canada feel it is safe to continue to transfer detainees, when British forces believe there is a risk of torture and therefore stopped transferring detainees? There has to be a good reason, but there isn't. You are risking destroying everything which has been achieved so far.

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

First, as the minister, Mr. Cannon, has just said, the British have not stopped their transfers. That is not true. However, we do not want to speak on behalf of the British.

[English]

The commander on the field has to be satisfied—

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Forgive me, but the information we received indicates that the British have extended their moratorium.

Mr. William F. Pentney: I know, but as Minister Cannon has just said, the government has information indicating that the British are still transferring detainees.

[*English*]

The commander on the ground has to be satisfied, according to the laws that govern, that there is not a substantial risk of torture and that sufficient measures have been taken to address the issue. So there is on the one side a series of engagements the Government of Afghanistan has made with respect to how it will conduct itself in the handling of Canadian transferred detainees.

Second—and others can speak to this—there is capacity-building work to improve the quality not just of the prisons but of those who guard. We work very actively as a government, through correctional services and other officials, to try to build the justice capacity and the capacity of the members. The commander on the ground receives continuing reports of the monitoring visits and other information so he is satisfied, every time he makes a decision to transfer, there is not a substantial current risk that Canadian transferred detainees will be subjected to torture.

In summary, under the current arrangement there's a three-part strategy of trying to ensure that....

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

the focus is on the risks. We know that there are still risks. We can generally avoid those risks. However, Afghan officers and the government know very well that it is extremely important for Canada to have this agreement with them and that it be upheld.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachand, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I would simply like to make a distinction.

You say that the British have not extended the moratorium. Perhaps Mr. Davidson can enlighten me, since he is an officer. It appears that the British are conducting operations with Afghan kandaks. When prisoners are taken, the British tell the Afghans who are with them during the same operation to arrest those prisoners because the British do not want to be responsible for them. So it's basically the same thing. This is what is happening on the ground.

Can you confirm this for me, Mr. Davidson? After all, the people who gave this information were highly ranked British officials.

Rear-Admiral Robert Davidson (Director of Staff, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence): I cannot exactly confirm that information. But I know that, as we speak, the British are still transferring their detainees. They have not ceased to do so. Perhaps, as you said, there are some operations where detainees are taken by Afghan authorities. I don't know. However, in all of my discussions with the British, they have told me that the transfers are continuing.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have another 40 seconds, Monsieur Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Fine.

I don't know who can answer my question, Mr. Chair.

I had a question on the academy which is to be created to train customs officials beginning around mid-January of this year. Has this academy been opened yet? Is it already operating? I would like to know.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Bossenmaier.

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Canada Border Services Agency is not represented here, but I will reply about some of their operations there.

A new customs academy has recently opened in Afghanistan. Our ambassador was part of that opening ceremony in January. We've now seen the first set of students who have already completed a course through the customs academy.

Canada has played a number of important roles there, everything from the development of curriculum, of material, and also has the role of being the associate dean, and also has a trainer there. So Canada is playing an important role in terms of helping to build the customs capabilities within Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Gallant.

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

Through you to the witnesses, we heard about the great work the Rotarians have been doing, most recently in Haiti. With respect to Afghanistan, I understand they are working together with the Canadian government to eradicate polio. I have some questions regarding our commitment to eradicate polio among the Afghan population.

How does this project support what Canadians want to see accomplished in Afghanistan, namely, the six priorities?

• (1650)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Bossenmaier.

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In our six priorities and three signature projects, one of those signature projects, as has correctly been pointed out, is working on the eradication of polio. It is a really important project for the overall health of Afghan citizens.

We have a representative here with us from the Canadian International Development Agency. I will turn it over to Ms. Ducros to provide some additional information.

Ms. Françoise Ducros (Vice-President, Afghanistan Task Force, Canadian International Development Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Indeed it is one of the signature projects. We've supplied funding to the World Health Organization. We work with other organizations as well in the inoculation of children. We also work with the forces in ensuring days of tranquility to inoculate children against polio.

Polio has been eradicated in about 84% of the territory of Afghanistan. As was suggested earlier, we did not meet the 2009 target to eradicate polio. Part of that is actually owing to the cross-border transmission of the virus. In order to address that aspect, we also have a certain amount of funding that goes to the eradication of polio in Pakistan.

That said, we have inoculated 95% of the targeted children and we've committed to an ongoing effort to eradicate the disease.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: There has been a report saying that the incidence of polio has increased lately.

Ms. Françoise Ducros: The number of cases in the south has increased. The World Health Organization has attributed that increase to the transmission of the disease from across the border. We have actually managed to eradicate it in the north, and there are ongoing efforts to deal with the issue in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What's the process for producing the quarterly report?

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier: Mr. Chairman, as Minister Cannon pointed out, the quarterly reports are one of the hallmarks of the interdepartmental effort, the whole-government effort, on Afghanistan. The Manley panel in 2008 called for more frequent and frank reporting on Canada's efforts. These reports are focused on Canada's six priorities and three signature projects.

We work with our colleagues in the field and in Ottawa to compile the results and to challenge ourselves in terms of the results that have been achieved. At the end of every quarter we work across the whole of the government community to produce the reports. The reports come out a couple of months after the quarter, and that's attributed to the significant amount of work that it takes to compile information and report on information from a conflict zone.

This is the seventh quarterly report. It represents the whole-of-government effort, both from the field and from headquarters.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What is Canada's position on recent changes to Afghanistan's electoral law that impact the electoral complaints commission?

Ms. Jillian Stirk: Mr. Chairman, let me say that we were concerned by some of the changes that the president initially proposed to the electoral law, specifically the provisions with respect to the electoral complaints commission. We were concerned that some of the proposed changes could mean less independent oversight of the electoral process. We also had some concerns about what some of the changes might mean for participation for women and whether we would be able to monitor the possibility of fraud as effectively as we would like.

Since the initial decree on elections, there have been a number of consultations and discussions. Our understanding is that there is now agreement that there will be international representation on the electoral complaints commission. The U.N. special representative there will be involved in the appointment of those international

representatives. While we're watching carefully and believe that further reforms are required before the next round of parliamentary elections, we feel that things in that respect are moving in the right direction.

•(1655)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What was achieved at the London conference?

Ms. Jillian Stirk: As Minister Cannon said, the London conference was really an opportunity for the new Afghan government to present its programs to the international community. Of course, a lot of the focus was on security issues and ensuring that the Afghans are ready to take on greater responsibility for their own security.

There were also, of course, important announcements around development and governance, and a new focus on local governance, if you like. I think people saw this as a positive sign. In addition, there were some announcements about the intentions of the Afghan government to pursue reconciliation and reintegration, and the announcement of a trust fund at that time.

As Minister Cannon mentioned, it was also a good opportunity to bring the international community together to reiterate support for the Afghan project. We hope we'll see the Afghans take on greater responsibility for all of these areas and that we'll see some results in the near term.

The Chair: We'll move over to Mr. Harris, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, panel. I'll give you an opportunity to explain one of your successes. We all understand that literacy is probably one of the most important long-term development indicators and supporters for development and self-determination.

I see from this quarterly report that you note you've achieved a target, completing literacy training for over 23,000 individuals and exceeding the target of 20,000.

Could one of you, any one of you, describe why that was successful, if it was, in the sense that you trained the right people? What people were given literacy training? Are we talking about women in villages who are now able to do certain things, or are we talking about giving literacy training to police officers so that they can actually follow instructions or read manuals or learn things they might need to learn to be good police officers?

Can you describe what the intent was with the goal of 20,000? How was it achieved? And is there anything you can say that would indicate that this program needs more help and more support, or anything at all about it?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Ms. Ducros.

Ms. Françoise Ducros: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It was a broad-based effort. It was deemed to be at the very beginning, following the Manley panel, a key goal to achieve. It was done through various NGOs and organizations at different levels, both through school training and through vocational training in a broad-based way. I can forward details of the projects we did, but it was multi-pronged and very broad-based, and it occurred throughout the country through various projects.

Mr. Jack Harris: So this number is not particularly in terms of the Canadian...? This is an Afghanistan-wide target of 20,000.

Ms. Françoise Ducros: This is an Afghanistan-wide target that we can attribute to Canadian intervention.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay.

So you engaged the NGOs. Were these international NGOs and local NGOs as well?

Ms. Françoise Ducros: I will have to get back to you with the details of the particular projects to deal with this.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay.

So this wasn't in the area that Canada was particularly active in—it was the entire country?

Ms. Françoise Ducros: Well, Canada is active throughout the country. We have 50% of our programming done through Kandahar and targeted directly at Kandahar, but the other 50% of the programming is national in scope, through the various programs. We cover several provinces beyond Kandahar.

• (1700)

Mr. Jack Harris: I suppose I'm glad to see that we achieved a target. I'm wondering, though, whether the target itself, given the population of Afghanistan and the rate of literacy, is rather modest. Could you give us any idea what the...? I know the illiteracy rate in Afghanistan is quite high and the literacy rate quite low.

This is really outside of the mission in the particular segment of Afghanistan where Canada's been operating, is it?

Ms. Françoise Ducros: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier, about 50% of Canadian programming is directly targeted at Kandahar, but there are other national programs throughout, including some with the ministry of education and with other programs as well.

We conduct MISFA, giving small credit loans throughout the country in various provinces. We operate in 14 provinces, I think. I would have to get back to you with the details with regard to this.

Mr. Jack Harris: Maybe it ties in to the discussion that the minister and I were having and to the minister's earlier comments about achieving development during wartime. It seems to me that perhaps this goal was achieved because it could be achieved in places where there wasn't a level of instability such as there has been in Kandahar since Canada...well, not since Canada has been there, but Canada is obviously operating in Kandahar.

Is there any indication of what level of literacy training has been successful in the areas in which there has been the kind of instability we've experienced in Kandahar?

Ms. Françoise Ducros: Mr. Chair, we have those numbers. I don't have them off the top of my head, but we can provide them—

Mr. Jack Harris: If you can provide them to the committee, that would be great.

Ms. Françoise Ducros: —in writing.

The literacy rate in Kandahar—I'm speaking from memory—is about 8%, I understand, among men. It's even lower among women. I'd have to check those numbers and get back to you.

We operate literacy training throughout, including in Kandahar. I don't mean to suggest that we only have literacy training where there is no instability, but we do it throughout the country as well. We can provide details in writing, but we operate through trusted partners in country, so we actually can operate in areas of instability.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you. I'd very interested in seeing this, particularly the kind of breakdown we're looking at, so that we can see whether my theory holds up at all or whether you have found ways of being successful in literacy training despite the lack of stability and the lack of the sense of security that the population has. It would be very interesting to know that you could do that despite the conditions.

Ms. Françoise Ducros: We have set up a process also of working with community schools in areas, including unstable areas. Literacy training would be a component of that as well. I can certainly get you those numbers, if you request them.

Mr. Jack Harris: In fact, it may be more important than in areas where you can't maintain schools. We've had circumstances in which schools have been knocked down because they're a target for Taliban who don't want to see this kind of progress happen. Literacy training, which can happen underground, I should think, might be one thing that can be done despite instability, so I'd be interested in learning more about it.

Could you tell me how much time is left, Mr. Sorenson?

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds.

Mr. Jack Harris: I will offer the 20 seconds to my colleague.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jack Harris: If I had known it was going to be you, I might have....

Mr. Laurie Hawn: We just used the 20 seconds, so it's okay.

Thank you again to the panel for staying.

The minister mentioned counter-narcotic efforts, but he didn't expand on it; he wasn't specific. Could we expand on that? Could you give us some specifics about what role Canada is playing in counter-narcotics?

The Chair: Ms. Stirk, I see you feverishly flipping pages.

Ms. Jillian Stirk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd be happy to talk a little bit about counter-narcotics.

This is an effort that we deal with in a number of different ways. The minister in fact announced a major contribution during the course of the London conference—I think it was \$25 million—to the UN counter-narcotics efforts. This is ongoing work that we have been doing, and I think it perhaps is one of the most important elements for this period.

But there is also an important counter-narcotics effort to the Dubai process. This process aims to bring together Afghan and Pakistani officials working on border security. There is of course an important anti-narcotic effort to that. We help train border officials to better manage the border, to put in place technology that will help promote licit trade and prevent illicit trade, and to help them recognize how to deal with some of these challenges in a way that is within full respect for the law.

It's not an area that is directly within my purview, but these are some of the highlights from the last period.

● (1705)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you for that, including you, Mr. Chair.

As a slight follow-up on that, Admiral Davidson, maybe you'd be the best one to confirm that Canadian Forces are not part of the poppy eradication program.

The Chair: Admiral Davidson.

RAdm Robert Davidson: Mr. Chair, the Canadian Forces does not get involved in poppy eradication. That's clearly not something we see as being within our mandate, so we don't do it.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Okay, thank you.

Again, Mr. Chair, through you probably to Admiral Davidson, obviously there are a lot more U.S. forces in the country and a lot more in Kandahar. With respect to the security situation, how is the increase in U.S. forces impacting it, and how fast is it evolving?

RAdm Robert Davidson: Mr. Chair, the Canadian Forces continue to be responsible for Kandahar City and its approaches, notwithstanding that the surge has begun to take place. In fact, I think it's worth noting, and it's a measure of the U.S.'s degree of confidence in the Canadian Forces, that there are actually three battalions under Canadian command in our area of responsibility. Within our area of responsibility, the addition of those forces has significantly improved our ability to conduct the necessary operations.

For example, in the Dand District, where we opened the operations towards focusing on a village approach as opposed to a counter-Taliban one—more of a population-centred approach—one of the U.S. battalions is beginning to go into that particular area and will take charge of it. That will then allow Canadian Forces to focus in “clear” operations. We'll be following a counter-insurgency strategy of “clear, hold and build”. This allows us to shift our focus to clear another area from the insurgents, hold that ground, and then allow the development activity to progress.

Undoubtedly, the surge of U.S. forces, which is progressing apace, is allowing us to put greater emphasis on development inside the area.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Maybe we can have a quick answer to this one, Chair, from Ms. Bossenmaier.

Corruption, obviously, is a major effort. What and who is the key to getting a grip on corruption in Afghanistan? It's a big question, but...

The Chair: It's a big question, and with a very short answer.

Ms. Greta Bossenmaier: Mr. Chairman, as Minister Cannon mentioned, corruption is a significant issue, and it's a significant issue that Canada has engaged upon. Picking up on an earlier comment, it also was one of the key topics at the London conference. We had the international community coming together with the Afghan government, saying that addressing corruption will be one of the key success factors in terms of the future stability and good governance within Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Wilfert, please, for five minutes.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, this is through you probably to the admiral.

The Canadian Press recently obtained previously censored reports via freedom of information described in the media as in contrast to the measured, sanitized quarterly reports put out by the government. The news story released on March 18 based on these reports indicated that the Taliban came very close to retaking Kandahar in the spring of 2009, so much so that in terms of Afghan governance, Kandahar was pushed to the brink, and in fact some members of the provincial council temporarily abandoned the region.

This is in very clear contrast to what we have heard in the past. Obviously even some of our commanders on the ground were quite concerned at the time about the military situation.

Can you comment on that?

RAdm Robert Davidson: I would say that I dispute that the Taliban were about to take command of Kandahar City. Of course I'm sure they were in a position to declare that themselves.

In a counter-insurgency, you can't prevent insurgents from being in certain parts of the country, and that's certainly the case in the counter-insurgency we're seeing in Afghanistan. There are insurgents who are operating from time to time in various locations. They do that because they can melt into the background environment, and then they can come back out again when they see fit, be it to conduct an IED attack or some other attack like the recent attack on the Sarposha Prison.

The mere fact that they have a capacity to do that in some areas doesn't mean that they're in a position to take command of the city, and I would dispute the allegation that they were in any position to take command of Kandahar City in 2009.

● (1710)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Admiral, or any one of our panellists here, how would you describe the institutionalized building in Kandahar? In terms of the governance issue in Kandahar, how successful do you think we have been, given reports of that nature? One of the things we're obviously trying to do is capacity building, particularly in terms of governance.

The Chair: Ms. Stirk.

Ms. Jillian Stirk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would say that in many ways capacity building is an underlying theme or objective of almost everything that Canada does in Afghanistan, and certainly it is a very important part of all of our efforts in Kandahar province in particular.

Governance has been an important aspect of that, and we have been engaged in trying to build capacity in a number of different Kandahar institutions. There has been a lot of focus particularly on the justice side, but also on trying to make local government more responsive and more relevant for local Kandahar people. Indeed, it is a challenge. It is perhaps not surprising that it's a challenge given where we started in Afghanistan, a country torn apart by war for more than 30 years and with only the most basic of institutions.

We feel that there have been some important achievements in developing governance in the region, but of course there is still a very long way to go. These kinds of nascent institutions are constantly under threat from the insurgents, who see these as a threat to their own influence in the region.

But certainly I would say that we continue to work very hard in terms of capacity building and trying to strengthen and improve local governance so we can eventually hand over our responsibility for these institutions to the Afghans.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: This report, unlike past reports we have received at this committee, makes no predictions concerning the success or failure of goals tied to the priorities of the government or regarding the military missions or security. Am I reading that wrong, or is that in fact the case? It seems to be in stark contrast to previous reports this committee has received.

Mr. William F. Pentney: Mr. Chairman, if I could begin, others can pick up and speak on this.

Perhaps picking up very quickly on elements of the member's two earlier questions as well, you must recognize that while we honour the sacrifice that Canadians have made, there are Afghan officials whose lives have been taken. There is a targeted assassination campaign that has been going on for some time. There are Afghan National Police whose lives have been lost in great numbers because of the attacks they have suffered. There's the Afghan National Army.

So it is true to say that in the south as elsewhere, as is common in a counter-insurgency, Afghan officials throughout the government are under threat. Those who cooperate with allied forces are under threat. It would be well for the committee and the Canadian population to understand the sacrifices that the Afghans themselves have made in building and defending their country.

It is certainly true that in the south, as part of the counter-insurgency, creating that fear and instability, undermining efforts to develop adequate governance, and trying to generally instill in the population the sense that they're in control and we're not part of—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I certainly recognize that, sir, from my two visits to Afghanistan. I certainly saw that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. William F. Pentney: And in terms of achieving the goals, I would say on behalf of the goal in respect of the Afghan army that there has been great success. There is now a headquarters and also

several kandaks that have achieved operational success. It's a long road to build a highly professional, trained, and fully functioning army, but we've seen tremendous progress made in the south in respect of that aspect of Canada's goal.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Obhrai, I know you had a question. We have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: That's it?

The Chair: That's all.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: All right.

Talking about this long road, can you tell us about Operation Kantolo, the village approach, so that we can understand it in terms of governance?

The Chair: That will be the last question and the last answer. Thanks.

RAdm Robert Davidson: Mr. Chairman, I recognize that you would like me to be very quick, so I will.

What we have begun is a village approach, which is to focus, as I say, on “clear, hold, and build” kinds of strategies. The idea is to go into various locations, clear the area of insurgents, hold the ground, and allow a transition for Afghan national security forces to take primary responsibility there if possible, particularly the Afghan National Police, if that can be done. That will let them create the environment in which our other government department partners and non-government agencies can get in there and start to do more development.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate your coming today.

I would encourage you, if you would like to add more to your questions—if you feel you would have, could have, should have said a little extra—please feel free to submit a written answer. I know Mr. Harris had some good questions on literacy and some of CIDA's work and we would look forward to receiving that information.

Just for my own benefit, I went to the website of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. We did give \$25 million to that, and if I could get a little more information for the committee on the work they do, and specifically what Canada has contributed to this before—is it part of a bigger package and there were portions that went to this particular area—we would certainly appreciate that.

We will suspend, and I would encourage you all to stay for committee business. The first five or ten minutes will be public and we'll deal with Mr. Hawn's motion, and then we'll go in camera for some business as well.

• (1715)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1720)

The Chair: We'll call this meeting back to order. I know it's Thursday and others have events and commitments for a little later on, so we will move right into committee business.

We are going back to the motion that Mr. Hawn brought forward.

Mr. Hawn, I will give you the opportunity to very quickly speak to that motion.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I will, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that.

Mr. Claude Bachand: On a point of order, do we go in camera for this?

The Chair: We will go in camera later, when we deal with different budgets for witnesses and other things.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've been through this before, of course. I want to bring it back to clarify, because it got a little off track. Do you want me to read the motion again?

The Chair: I think it's before them.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Everybody has it.

The purpose behind the motion is that we think we should be spending the majority of our efforts on the Canadian withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2011—leading up to it, what happens then, what happens after, Canada's continuing efforts, and so on.

We recognize that there is not agreement on that, but the motion stands. We've all seen the motion a number of times now, so I'll leave it to our colleagues across the way to address.

The Chair: Mr. Wilfert, I see you have an amendment to this.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Yes. I think we're all familiar with my amendment, Mr. Chairman. It speaks for itself. The words "begin without delay to" are to be deleted and replaced with the words "on condition that it first complete its study on the transfer of Afghan detainees".

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I do not accept that as a friendly amendment. They're free to propose it, but in our view that would gut the purpose of the motion. We've been around this, so we don't need to belabour that.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, as a point of clarification, notwithstanding my amendment, we are also clear that as we had today an update on the Afghan mission, we have indicated that because of other considerations obviously there may be another briefing. We understand that.

The Chair: Mr. Wilfert, you've made a condition in there. How long do you foresee this going? Is this something to kill Mr. Hawn's motion by simply saying that this will be a two-year study on detainees? Do you see this going until Christmas, or summer?

I know at one point your amendment was only to drop the words "begin without delay" so that the motion would read "that the committee investigate and study Canada's preparation". It seems to me that again you've added something else into it.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: No, that was there before. We've agreed to that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: So then—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: In answer to your direct question, Mr. Chairman, I'm quite happy to have the detainee issue wrapped up as expeditiously as possible. We've asked, of course, for a public inquiry. We haven't received that. I've been on the record indicating

I'm very happy to look at what Mr. Hawn has proposed in terms of post-2011. I think that it's very important.

But we have some very significant issues on this side that we want dealt with. Hopefully there will be a resolution on this soon. As to how long it will take, Mr. Chairman, I'm not a clairvoyant. But I can tell you that I did indicate and prefaced my remarks by saying that we are not opposed to a briefing or so from officials. I think we talked about that in light of developments we may take later on.

The Chair: Mr. Hawn is asking for a vote, but Mr. Harris is on the speakers list.

Mr. Jack Harris: We have a conundrum here. Mr. Hawn wants to begin this study without delay and his motion also says it's of immediate concern and primary importance.

Well, I can tell Mr. Hawn and the whole committee that as far as I'm concerned, as long as the government continues to prevent this committee from pursuing the study it's determined to undertake into Afghan detainees—which it had to do because the government refuses to hold a public inquiry—then we have to pursue it.

We had 2,500 documents tabled in the House today—still censored. We have an ongoing challenge in the House, which I hope will be resolved very soon by the Speaker, which may allow us to undertake the study. But if we get into that, there is no telling how long it's going to take or how quickly we can resolve it.

So I don't want to have a motion that somebody can wave around at any given time that says, "Hey, look, we've agreed this is of immediate concern and primary importance and we've agreed to study this." But I do agree with Mr. Wilfert that we can, throughout the course of the next while, give consideration, as we have today, to the ongoing situation in Afghanistan.

We can leave it to the chair to interpret what the result of that motion is—

• (1725)

The Chair: Yes, I think as long as that's—

Mr. Jack Harris: —with, I suppose, the opportunity of this committee, with the majority sitting on this side, to overrule you if we think you're doing the wrong thing.

The Chair: It sounds good. We do.

Mr. Jack Harris: And if you take that as a friendly overruling from time to time without treating it as a motion of non-confidence, then we'll be happy to carry on under your direction.

The Chair: I think we have an agreement, an understanding. Yes, we do.

Are we ready for the vote? Ms. Gallant, do you want to speak to it?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: No. I think we can do it.

The Chair: All right.

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

The Chair: Are we ready to entertain the vote on the amended motion?

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes, Mr. Chair. And we will be voting for it, if that's all we can get. That's fine.

The Chair: All right. All in favour of the amended motion by Mr. Hawn?

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

The Chair: It looks like it is unanimous. Thank you very much for that.

We're now going to suspend and go in camera. There will be a very brief five-minute meeting, where we'll be looking at a budget.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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