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Chair

The Honourable Peter Kent

Standing Committee on National Defence

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• (1630)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC)): Colleagues, welcome. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are assembled today for a briefing on Operation Impact and Operation Reassurance.

Appearing before us today we have the Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of National Defence, and witnesses from the Department of National Defence: Chief of the Defence Staff General Thomas Lawson; Major-General Charles Lamarre, designate director of staff, strategic joint staff; and Rear-Admiral Gilles Couturier, director general, international security policy.

Gentlemen, thank you for your presence with us today. Our time with you is unfortunately cut short by proceedings in the House, but we will continue to the assigned hour of 5:30 p.m.

Minister, your opening remarks, please.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence): Thank you very much, Chair.

Honourable colleagues, it's a pleasure to be here with you today.

As you know, just a few days ago, Prime Minister Harper and I were aboard HMCS *Fredericton* in the Baltic Sea, observing its participation in NATO's Operation BaltOps, which constitutes part of NATO's assurance measures for our friends and allies in eastern Europe and part of Canada's Operation Reassurance.

It was very encouraging to be aboard the first fully modernized Halifax-class Royal Canadian Navy frigate to be deployed in such a fashion overseas and to see the excellent equipment and kit resulting from this \$4-billion modernization of the frigates in our navy, but also to see first-hand the remarkable skills and dedication of our men and women in uniform.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, speaking of my trip last week, let me start with Canada's contributions in Europe.

In response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, under the umbrella of Operation Reassurance, the Canadian Armed Forces have, once again, deployed to Europe; training in Central and Eastern Europe to increase interoperability with our allies in the region; and sailing the Mediterranean, Black and Baltic seas as part of NATO assurance measures.

[English]

Canada has also provided extensive support to Ukraine in the form of financial assistance, the donation of key military equipment of a

non-lethal nature, and later this year, the provision of training to Ukrainian military forces. In fact, I hope to be able to see the initial deployment of some of our trainers in Ukraine first-hand. Of course, this is in addition to diplomatic and political support, represented recently by the Prime Minister's third visit to Ukraine in the last 18 months.

On April 13, we announced this training operation. Our contribution will consist of approximately 200 personnel who will provide training assistance until March 31, 2017, in the fields of individual and unit tactics training, military police skills and procedures, explosive ordnance disposal, flight safety training, combat first aid, and logistics systems modernization.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Through our efforts and those of other allies, we are demonstrating the continuing strength and unity of NATO.

[English]

Next week I will travel to Brussels to meet with my NATO counterparts and reaffirm our commitment to the alliance and our solidarity with our eastern European allies, as I did in meetings with the defence ministers of Poland, Italy, and the United Kingdom last week. We will take key decisions on the implementation of practical measures to strengthen the readiness and responsiveness of our alliance, wherever the threat comes from.

Chairman, Russia's aggression in Ukraine has shown NATO's resolve and resiliency, and Russia must understand that the long-standing principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are non-negotiable. Indeed, I think there's a broad consensus that the best and most effective way to prevent a miscalculation on the part of Mr. Putin's posture of aggression is through a posture of readiness and a message of deterrence.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, the Canadian Armed Forces are also engaged in battling a significant danger to international stability. Since last year, Canada has played a strong role in the multinational coalition countering the atrocities of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. ISIS has been complicit in absolute atrocities: committed against children, women, men, and religious and ethnic minorities.

[English]

ISIS has been complicit in unspeakable atrocities, including the rape and enslavement of countless women and children. It is estimated that 7,000 Yazidi women alone are being kept as sex slaves by ISIS. A recent report by the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights contains countless reports of abductions, rape, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated against both women and children.

[Translation]

They are particularly targeting religious and ethnic minority communities in Iraq, many of whom are slaughtered.

[English]

We have demonstrated our clear determination to confront this menace to Iraqi and regional security. Indeed, last year we sent troops in an advisory capacity, providing assistance to local peshmerga forces. As you know, the Prime Minister and I also had an opportunity to meet our special operations forces troops, who are engaged in an extremely effective advice and training mission near Erbil in northern Iraq.

In addition, approximately 600 personnel were deployed to the region in October to support Joint Task Force-Iraq and the Royal Canadian Air Force operation of three types of aircraft there. The CC-150T Polaris supports coalition air assets in the region with aerial refuelling, and has now delivered over 10,000 pounds of fuel to coalition aircraft. CP-140 Auroras, recently modernized aircraft, are providing critical aerial reconnaissance intelligence to the coalition. Of course, six CF-18 Hornets have just completed their 100th air strike against ISIS. Earlier this month, altogether the Royal Canadian Air Force has conducted over 1,000 sorties.

Recently the Government of Canada extended the mission and expanded it to include air strikes, as you know, against targets in Syria. Although there have been very few of those, in large measure because of limited intelligence on the ground, it is important as a strategic statement we are making. Insofar as ISIS or Daesh does not recognize a border between Iraq and Syria and they are completely interoperable between the two sides of that border, nor should the coalition, in our view.

Mr. Chairman, the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces are providing critical support to the coalition effort. While much has been achieved to stop the advance of ISIS since the start of coalition operations last October, there is more to do. We are committed to this continued effort to support Iraq's security forces, who must be primarily responsible for their own country's security.

• (1640)

[Translation]

The cumulative effects of striking ISIS targets along with training support to Iraqi forces will ultimately allow Iraqi forces to transition into offensive operations. A few offensive operations have been carried out, but Iraqis on the ground must clearly do more.

[English]

The weakening of ISIS, whether it's through destroying or disrupting equipment, leadership, or infrastructure, will provide the

necessary freedom of movement for Iraqi forces to make more tactical gains. Over the long term, success will be achieved when ISIS capabilities are significantly degraded to the point where they can no longer claim credibly to have caliphate control over large swaths of territory or to pose an international security risk.

That said, Mr. Chairman, obviously in any military campaign there will be regrettable setbacks, as there have been in Ramadi and elsewhere in the region. But fundamentally, in part thanks to the support of coalition forces, ISIS has lost control of approximately 25% to 30% of the territory it controlled last August, representing 13,000 to 17,000 square kilometres.

This will require continued persistence. As we know, some of our allies, including the United States, are calibrating somewhat their approach with additional training resources. We will observe that with interest, but we are committed to the current level of operations as defined in the motion that was tabled and supported by the House of Commons recently.

[Translation]

I think their efforts I have outlined today—in Operation Reassurance and Operation Impact—are a great example of Canada's and our forces' effectiveness.

I would be delighted to take any questions. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Kenney.

We will proceed to our first round of questions with seven-minute segments, beginning with Ms. Gallant.

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

General Lawson, in your recent interview with the media, you dumbed down the problem of sexual harassment in the military to one of biology. Well, your comment dumbed down the position of Chief of the Defence Staff.

What is it going to take to bring the culture of the military into the 21st century?

General Thomas Lawson (Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I must make it entirely clear that sexual misconduct of any kind in the military is absolutely unacceptable. There is nothing that I could say or would ever say that would indicate it's acceptable. In my comments yesterday, I stand by the apology, for they were an introduction to comments that make it clear that we are committed from the very top—myself, my key generals, commodores, flag officers, chief petty officers, chief warrant officers—right through the chain of command to our aviators, sailors, and soldiers, to rid the Canadian Armed Forces of this problem.

What is probably most damaging about my opening comments yesterday is that they obscure the work going on in the military right now on this. It obscures the fact that we have surveys that indicate our men and women in uniform have never been so confident in the sanctity, the safety, and the satisfaction with the workplace these days. But that doesn't matter. We still have an issue with sexual misconduct.

We had an internal review. We acted on it. We brought in Madam Deschamps to carry out an external review, from which she has come up with 10 recommendations, all of which we will meet the intent of. I have raised, under Lieutenant-General Whitecross, a team of 25 men and women to work on this. This work is all under way now.

I didn't ask Madam Deschamps whether we were better than we were 10 years ago. We have all kinds of indications, including retention figures with our women, which are actually better than with our men, that indicate we are much better. But that doesn't matter; we have a problem.

I didn't ask her to look backwards. I asked her to look at where we are today and how we can get better. She's come back with 10 points, all of which we will be actioning.

• (1645)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Minister, media reports have questioned your statements pertaining to a March 2015 incident, in which the HMCS *Fredericton* was flown over by Russian aircraft, suggesting the incident didn't occur. Can you speak to what information the Canadian Armed Forces have about this incident?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes.

There were some completely inaccurate media reports, Chairman, in this respect. In order to help clarify those inaccurate reports, I would be happy to table with the committee a declassified version of the incident report that came to us from the commander of the *Fredericton*—or FRE—who explained that:

...during an underway replenishment at sea, two Russian warplanes closed FRE's position and operated in airspace in the vicinity of FRE for approximately 30 minutes. The aircraft closed FRE's position one at a time at medium altitude conducting manoeuvres to demonstrate they were not carrying weapons. Thereafter, the aircraft continued to operate in the vicinity of FRE, flying at low and medium altitudes at distances that ranged from "over top" to several miles from FRE.

I'd be happy to table this. In fact, while I was aboard *Fredericton* last week with the Prime Minister, the commander and his crew showed us a recording of their radar-tracking of the Russian aircraft flying around and over the vessel in the Black Sea. There have in fact been several such instances of interaction with Russian aircraft, both in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, including most recently last week, I understand, with five such incidents in the Black Sea and five in the Baltic Sea.

I do want to underscore what I said on this matter when I was first questioned about it, I believe, in March, which is that at no time have our RCN personnel felt that the Russian aerial reconnaissance missions around and over their vessels constituted a threat. The Russian aircraft appeared to have clearly demonstrated they were not carrying weapons. I have never suggested, nor would I, that this poses a threat, but it does demonstrate that the Russian military is

aware of our presence as part of the NATO assurance measures, which is the entire point of our deployment.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Minister, in March when our Parliament voted to extend and expand Operation Impact into Syria, there appeared to be some miscommunication surrounding the use of precision-guided munitions by our coalition partners. Could you please clarify how and what information was provided by the Canadian Armed Forces to the Minister of National Defence?

Hon. Jason Kenney: In this respect, Mr. Chairman, I had been advised that the Royal Canadian Air Force CF-18 Hornets carried a kind of precision-guided munition that only the United States Air Force was carrying into missions in Syria. I reflected in my public comments the advice I'd received.

I regret that we subsequently learned, I was subsequently briefed, that the information was not accurate, that there were at least some of the Middle Eastern Arab air forces carrying dynamic precision-guided munitions on their sorties over ISIL targets in Syria. I regret that I had misinformed the House, and I have apologized for that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What measures have been taken to ensure that the forces the Canadian military will be training in Ukraine will be of proper quality to receive our training, and that it won't be used against our forces or the Ukrainian population in any way?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman, the units of the Ukrainian military that will be trained at the Yavoriv training centre jointly by Canadian and American trainers, starting this summer and fall, will initially be national guard units and then eventually, we believe, Ukrainian army regular units of a battalion size during each rotation. They will be selected and screened by the Ukrainian government, and both the American and Canadian militaries will also be screening those referred to us for the training units to ensure that they are not proponents of extremist ideologies.

I think you may be referring to one media report. A militia group, I gather, is being incorporated into the Ukrainian national guard, one portion of which, I gather, one company's element of which, has extremist views. We will not train those individuals. We have been absolutely clear about that, as has the United States and the Ukrainian military. Let me be uncategorical about this: we will not be involved in training that unit.

• (1650)

The Chair: That's time, Ms. Gallant.

Mr. Harris, please, you have seven minutes.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for joining us.

I have to say, General Lawson, that you should get the medal for bravery for showing up today, after yesterday's incidents in the media.

But I do want to follow up on that, General, because we had a statement from Madam Justice Deschamps in her report, which I will read to you. The report says that the military is rife with discrimination, and abuse towards women starts from their first days in uniform while commanders write it off as part of life in the armed forces. Her conclusion is that “there is an undeniable problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault” in the Canadian Armed Forces, “which requires direct and sustained action”.

Do you agree with that statement in light of your comments last night, and in light of the fact that your own internal report, completed about a year ago, said there was nothing wrong with the policies and procedures in the Canadian Armed Forces?

Gen Thomas Lawson: First, Mr. Chair, I do agree that we do have a problem that needs to be addressed.

I would take issue with the characterization of my internal study, which did say that policies were in place; however, it indicated that reporting was likely not at a level that we needed and various other issues that led me to then commission the report that was carried out by Madam Deschamps. Her number one recommendation is indeed that we have a problem that we need to deal with and to accept that we have a problem at the highest levels, and we have done that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jack Harris: General, with regard to your statement last night, I don't know if what you issued would be characterized as an apology, although it has been called that. You recognized that it was an awkward statement, but the suggestion that the problem of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the army is something of a biological imperative, that men can't help themselves, seems to be archaic, at best.

Would you not agree that this kind of attitude, if it were pervasive in the military—particularly at the senior command level, like yourself—would in fact contribute to that problem, or even covertly excuse it?

Gen Thomas Lawson: I agree, Mr. Chair, that there can be no excuse for sexual misconduct. The nature of my comments yesterday came from a question saying, here in 2015, how can it be that the Canadian Armed Forces are dealing with sexual misconduct in view of the fact that this is a societal problem that we see across academic institutions, police forces, and broadcast, perhaps, even on the Hill itself? It was an unhelpful conjecture on my part as to what might motivate someone in a heinous way to believe that they could press themselves on someone else. It was not helpful, and it is for that reason that I apologize for that opening. The remainder of the remarks were that this is unacceptable and we are committed to addressing it.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Kenney, in light of the report of Madam Deschamps and certainly the comments, even though he is taking them back today and apologizing for them, many Canadians feel that the military cannot solve its own problem. It seems to be that you, in your department, and your government, are implicitly taking the attitude that this is the military's problem, and that the military can go ahead and solve it.

Are you and your government prepared to take responsibility to ensure that women or the LGBT individuals who have also been identified and who joined the military are going to be safeguarded,

safe, and in a safe place if they join the military? Are you going to take responsibility for that and are you and your government going to follow up on an ongoing basis to ensure that this is happening?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes and yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's a commitment I will assure you that this side of the House and many Canadians will want to follow up on, on a regular basis.

If I may, I will move to a couple of incidents and one recent one in particular. Who gave the authorization to risk the Canadian Forces members, officials, and the Prime Minister himself to go to the front lines of the activity and mission in Iraq, where the Prime Minister had said that Canadian Forces members would not be, for the sake of a photo op with no operational or public purposes, a stunt for publicity purposes?

Was that authorized by you, Minister Kenney, or by you, General Lawson? It seems to me that the additional special forces people who were brought there, as well as the officials who were there, along with the Prime Minister himself, would have been placed in a dangerous situation on the front lines where we know there have been incidents of return fire and fire. That seems to me to be reckless. It seems to have been done solely for the purpose of a photo op.

Why would you, Minister, or you, General Lawson, authorize that or did the authorization come from somewhere else?

• (1655)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chairman, the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence authorize their own movements. In terms of the additional special operations forces who are deployed there, they were there as a close personal protection unit, which is one of the functions for which they are trained. It's part of their mandate.

The Prime Minister and I, for example, also visited the two Canadian air force bases out of which we are operating in Kuwait and would normally, going on a military visit of that nature to that region, have soft protection as a part of close personal protection. That would be the normal protocol, I believe. As I understand it, we were not, as you characterized it, Mr. Harris, “on the front line”. The forward line of the Kurdish peshmerga troops was ahead of us. We thought it was important, however, that we, as the Government of Canada, demonstrate our support for both our forces operating in the region and our Kurdish allies, and to demonstrate a message of resolve. I believe it was well appreciated.

The Chair: You are out of time, Mr. Harris.

You're just short of your seven minutes but it's—

Mr. Jack Harris: In light of the previous questioner, who asked a short question and got a long question and a long answer—

The Chair: A very short question and answer will be allowed.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I'll just read some headlines: "Canada and the West losing war against ISIS", "ISIS poses bigger threat after nearly a year of coalition bombing", and "Islamist group is now a more immediate risk to more people, larger centres than ever".

Does Canada have any independent strategy in terms of understanding what's happening on the ground in Iraq with the three separate forces at work—the Shiites, the Sunni, and the Kurds—without any diplomatic presence other than one liaison officer in Iraq, in Baghdad, and nothing in Syria and nothing in Iran? Do we have an independent strategy? Are we just tagging along?

Hon. Jason Kenney: We do not have.... The answer is "neither". It's a classic leading question, as you'll know, counsel.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jason Kenney: We do not have an independent strategy, nor are we just tagging along. We are part of the coalition, that is, part of a coalition strategy that's there at the invitation of the Iraqi government. The lead countries in that coalition are the sovereign Republic of Iraq and the United States, which is coordinating coalition efforts.

Our chief has participated in the chief of defence staff meetings with his counterparts to discuss and provide input to strategy. I've offered our views to U.S. Secretary of Defense Carter and many of my European counterparts whose forces are involved in the coalition. We met with Prime Minister al-Abadi in Baghdad about precisely this point.

You I think have mischaracterized the degree of our diplomatic presence in Iraq. In fact, Ambassador Saccomani, who, yes, is normally resident in Amman, has spent an enormous amount of time developing connections and connecting with officials in both Baghdad and Erbil, so I think we've been a meaningful presence in the international coalition meetings and military strategy, and that is what has helped to define our deployment in Operation Impact.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Williamson, please, you have seven minutes.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister Kenney, you recently returned from a visit to Iraq, where you visited our men and women in uniform. Based on that trip and other information you might have, could you provide us with an update on Operation Impact to date?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes. As I indicated in my opening statement, Chair, the Royal Canadian Air Force, as of last week, has flown over 1,000 sorties altogether. I understand that the Hornets have struck just over 100 ISIS targets. Typically, they do so in firing two munitions at each target, so I believe we've expended over 200 munitions.

I mentioned the volume of aviation fuel that has been delivered through aerial refuelling through our Polaris aircraft, and our modernized Auroras, as I was briefed when I was in the region, have been regarded as an extremely effective platform for aerial

reconnaissance, which has been very rich in providing targeting information to coalition headquarters.

I could also inform the committee.... Mr. Harris, understandably, I think, for partisan political reasons, mischaracterized our visit to Erbil as a "stunt". In fact, I think it is hugely important to actually get on the ground and to get a tactile sense of the context of what's really happening.

As for what we could see in talking to our relatively junior officers of the SOF, the forces who are actually doing the training, they were able to describe to us the kinds of tactics that they have been able to transfer to the peshmerga, the kinds of tactics that they perfected during their own operations, their Canadian operations in Afghanistan. They told us that the peshmerga who they've been dealing with are eager to learn and are very quick to pick up on the principles of the training they have received. We would infer, from the relative success of the peshmerga both defensively and offensively against ISIS in that region, that the training has been effective.

One might even go a step further and infer that it has been more effective than some of the conventional military training provided to Iraqi army units in southern Iraq, which have been, shall we say, less effective in maintaining their territory.

• (1700)

Mr. John Williamson: Let me ask you this, Minister. The list you provided is impressive and shows CAF activity in the region. We're going to recess here very shortly. What about the outcomes?

I see a map in front of all of us that shows what appears to be ISIS territory diminishing, but at the same time we're seeing reports where another city fell. When we're home in our districts and folks are asking us about the mission and what the impact is of our involvement with our allies in the area and whether the situation is getting better, how would you describe it?

Hon. Jason Kenney: I would describe this, like any military operation or conflict, as being complex. We should never expect an operation like this to move in one simple straight line. There are always going to be advances and setbacks, but fundamentally, it has gone in the right direction since international forces came to bear last October, including those of the Canadian military. Since that time, as I've said, according to the United States, and factually, according to the maps, ISIS has lost control of about 25% to 30% of the territory it controlled last August.

I guess what you could say to your constituents is that we're on the right side of this. We're certainly on the right side of history, the right side of human dignity in defending the vulnerable minorities who have fled the Nineveh plains to behind the Kurdish lines. We are defending the Iraqi people at the invitation of the Government of Iraq. We are defending Canada and its security interests against this genocidal death cult that has declared hostility to this country, that inspired at least two terror attacks on our own soil last year, and that has radicalized and recruited well over 100 Canadians to join its dystopian campaign to create this kind of seventh century caliphate that regards women as property and minorities as fodder for genocide.

I think it would be grossly irresponsible for Canada, in such a context, in such a conflict, to allow our historical allies to do all of the fighting for us. That would be completely inconsistent with our history, our identity, and our role as a responsible international partner.

Mr. John Williamson: Can you talk a bit about the morale of the men and women in uniform who are serving in the region you visited recently?

Hon. Jason Kenney: It's extraordinarily high. I must say, I've had the privilege of being Minister of National Defence for only a few months, since February. Since that time, everywhere I've gone, to domestic bases or abroad, I have truly been impressed by the morale of the men and women in uniform.

I'll be honest, I did not expect to find how boastful they are about much of the equipment they have, including the modernized and new equipment. I could see that on HMCS *Fredericton* last week, and HMCS *Calgary*, one of our modernized frigates, during Exercise Trident Fury off the west coast last month. I could see it with C-17 crews when I received our fifth Globemaster at CFB Trenton. The maintenance crews were boasting about the new maintenance hangar they have down there. That kind of thing doesn't get a lot of media attention but is the core of operational effectiveness. I could see it in Exercise Maple Resolve in CFB Wainwright a couple of weeks ago, when I attended live-fire exercises jointly conducted by the Van Doors and the Lord Strathcona's Horse tank operators.

Everywhere I go I see a sense that they are pleased with the equipment they have, the kinds of important missions they have around the world, the training opportunities. It's hard to make an objective read of that. Of course, there must be people out there who are dissatisfied. In a big organization that will always be the case, but so far in my first four months I have not encountered them.

•(1705)

The Chair: Thank you. That's time.

We're moving to the second round now with Ms. Murray for five minutes, please.

I'm sorry. You're the tail end of the first round. You have seven minutes. I stand corrected.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

I'd like to ask a question of General Lawson. Is the department looking at closing any military bases in Canada over the coming 12 to 18 months? If so, which ones?

Gen Thomas Lawson: Mr. Chair, as efforts move ahead to provide input to the updating of the Canada First defence strategy—refinement of Canadian Armed Forces' equipment, personnel, units, basing—those are the types of things we provide input on that is absolutely confidential. I cannot share that.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, so you are considering closing some but you're not going to tell us which ones are under consideration.

Gen Thomas Lawson: I wouldn't confirm or deny that, Madam.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, thank you.

What could have possessed you to make the comments you made to Peter Mansbridge, General?

Gen Thomas Lawson: Mr. Chair, the comments, for which I have apologized, referred to a question in which the interviewer had asked how we could be dealing with sexual assault in 2015 in view of the prevalence of this issue being a societal problem. My unhelpful comments were a conjecture that really served no purpose and in fact clouded the very strong efforts that we have going forward.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you, General. I heard that explanation earlier. I thought there may be some clarity. It was not a slip of the tongue. It was clearly a belief because you reinforced it several times.

My question would be.... I have to say that it's not since I was a young teenager that the idea or the excuse would be made that boys just can't help themselves. That's the kind of thing people used to say 35 or 45 years ago, so this is a very interesting excuse for sexual harassment and assault.

How do you think your comments regarding sexual violence in the military might affect those serving in Operations Impact and Reassurance?

Gen Thomas Lawson: Mr. Chair, in no way did I indicate, even for the comments that I apologized for, that there is any excuse for any type of sexual misconduct by anyone in uniform, nor would I ever do that, nor does anyone in uniform believe that.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay. I would like to explore the idea of the trust and confidence of the troops that the CDS must command in order to be in that role. I would like to ask the minister whether he believes that the comments and the attitude, and what I would consider the normalization of inappropriate sexual behaviour and hostility, might affect the trust in command and the confidence of the troops, especially women and LGBTQ military members.

•(1710)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Sorry, Mr. Chair, I'm not entirely clear on the question but I reject its premise.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Well, no, it's a question.

Hon. Jason Kenney: There is and must be no tolerance, nor any excuses offered for sexual harassment or sexual misconduct, particularly in an organization such as the Canadian military, which is based on the concepts of honour and professionalism.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Exactly, so my question is this. Do you believe that your Chief of the Defence Staff can still command the trust and confidence of women and LGBTQ armed forces members?

Hon. Jason Kenney: The Prime Minister reflected the government's view on this during question period. The general has apologized for his remarks before you repeatedly here today. He has retracted them. I think we can all agree that there must be no expression or even implication of any kind of excuse for sexual misconduct in a public institution such as the Canadian Armed Forces.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you, so I'm hearing no answer to that question. I'll have to expect that the answer might be no, that he cannot command the trust and respect of the troops.

I have another question. I'd like to say, Minister, that I support the idea of showing solidarity with Canadian troops, especially ones who are in dangerous situations abroad, but I'd like to ask some questions about the cost of these photo opportunities. We have the Prime Minister, his wife, the minister and entourage, photographers, and videographers on HMCS *Fredericton*, which had to interrupt its participation in a NATO squadron exercise in order to have photos of the minister and the Prime Minister looking through binoculars. Can the Chief of the Defence Staff give me an estimate of what might have been the cost of that exercise?

Secondly, with the visit to Kurdistan, near Erbil, the media were left in Erbil but an entire platoon of JTF2 commandos had to be flown in for this photo exercise, along with an entire convoy of heavily armoured sport utility vehicles, according to media accounts. What might have been the cost of setting up that photo exercise? Together, can you give me an estimate of what this has cost the Canadian Armed Forces?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Before the general.... I don't know if he has a figure. I don't have a figure, but I would say that the context would be comparable and the cost probably comparable to Prime Minister Martin flying to Sri Lanka to visit the Canadian Armed Forces' disaster assistance response team, to Prime Minister Chrétien flying to Bosnia to visit the Canadian army deployment as part of the peacekeeping operation in Bosnia—

Ms. Joyce Murray: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...the minister's inappropriate—

The Chair: Order, please.

Hon. Jason Kenney: —to Prime Minister Mackenzie King visiting Canadian troops deployed in Europe, to other heads of government who visit their troops in the field as a regular expression of public solidarity for the work their militaries do.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you very much for your history. I would like an answer to my question, and perhaps the Chief of Defence Staff could compare it to the cost of updating military family housing, of which I understand 41% is substandard, which is an expression of this minister's priorities.

The Chair: Order, Ms. Murray. Allow the general time to respond, please.

Gen Thomas Lawson: Mr. Chair, all costs are tracked of course for every taxpayer dollar spent in defence purposes. Often the costs associated with a visit of members of the Government of Canada fit into regular activities. However, all costs are tracked and we will provide that to the chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We move now into the second round of questions, which are five-minute segments.

Mr. Bezan, please.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the minister, the generals, and the admiral for being here for another technical briefing, which again comes from the basis that we've been very open and transparent about our activities in Operation Reassurance and Operation Impact. I just want to remind Ms. Murray that when we go and show solidarity with our troops it's quite different than the \$40 million the Liberals took in the ad scam, or when Prime Minister Chrétien went and visited our troops in Bosnia and couldn't even put on his helmet properly. That being the point, I'll just move on.

I want to get back to the comment and the question around the precision-guided munitions and that the minister had received information that wasn't entirely correct. General Lawson, how did it come to be that we didn't have all that information before sharing it publicly?

• (1715)

Gen Thomas Lawson: Mr. Chair, our belief and our understanding from information we had from the coalition was that the particular weapon that Canadians were carrying was only being carried by the USAF. In fact, one of the other coalition partners who was in there later indicated that they were getting that weapon, had that weapon, and that was our mistake in providing that information forward. We got that to the minister as quickly as we could. We apologize for that as well.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you.

I want to go to Operation Reassurance. Minister, could you go into more detail as to what our troops are going to be doing in Ukraine—what type of training they're going to be providing, where they're going to be providing it—so that we have a better understanding of what's going to be happening there this summer and again later in the fall?

Hon. Jason Kenney: With respect to Operation Reassurance specifically, we will continue through the balance of 2015 to have a company-sized force of roughly 200 infantry personnel deployed in Poland. In fact the Prime Minister and I saw some of them. They came to Warsaw to participate in some of our events during our meetings in Poland.

The current rotation are from Madam Gallant's riding the RCRs from Garrison Petawawa and they're doing a great job. I believe they're going to be rotated out next month and replaced by a company-sized formation from the Van Doos in Valcartier. We have had as you know several CF-18 Hornets that have flown a Baltic air-policing mission over the Baltic states and they were, for part of that time at least, based in Romania. They've since been repatriated back to Canada, but we've indicated at some point in the future that if there's an opening for us to participate in Baltic air policing we would be willing to give that serious consideration, and of course the forward deployment of a frigate, the HMCS *Fredericton*, in the Baltic as part of NATO assurance measures currently as part of Exercise BaltOps.

In addition to the Operation Reassurance mission, there will be other very important NATO joint training exercises this summer. Exercise Trident Juncture I understand will be one of the largest NATO joint training exercises in the post-Cold War period, largely occurring in southern Europe, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. I understand that we will be deploying some 1,650 personnel through all three services to Exercise Trident Juncture, which sends another important message to others in Europe who might be forces of instability.

Finally, again outside the box of Operation Reassurance there is what we are doing in Ukraine. We have a map up on the screen, and I hope the paper copy has also been distributed. You can see Yavoriv in far west central Ukraine, which is between Lviv and the Polish border. That's where we'll have our largest training operation. We'll have approximately 200 troops doing conventional combat training, initially of national guard units, starting in full force there in September. We have the smaller more discrete training operations we'll be doing down in Kamyanets-Podilsky, the IED training. We're doing MP training, not members of Parliament but military police to be clear, around Kiev, and other operations including aerial safety training, medical training, etc. All of that will be in central or western Ukraine.

The Chair: That's time, Mr. Bezan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have five minutes.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I know that the issue has been raised by several of my committee colleagues, but my first question is for General Lawson.

I would like some clarification about what you said yesterday. I don't want to focus on the controversial remarks, although they are quite frankly disgraceful. One thing worries me about the statement you made afterwards—which was supposed to be an apology for said comments. You said you wanted to examine very seriously the sexual misconduct issues in the Canadian Armed Forces using an action plan based on the 10 recommendations from the Deschamps report. However, there seems to be some ambivalence when it comes to the Canadian Armed Forces' willingness to implement all the recommendations from the report. That is something the NDP has been calling for since the report was published.

My mother is still actively serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, and I am worried about the safety in her work environment. I would like to know whether the Canadian Armed Forces will really adopt all the recommendations from the Deschamps report.

• (1720)

[*English*]

Gen Thomas Lawson: Mr. Chair, first of all I should be clear that with reference to all 10 recommendations made by Madam Deschamps, we will achieve the outcomes that she was suggesting. Two of them we have accepted immediately, and—the questioner is right—of the other eight we are absolutely committed to the outcome that Madam Deschamps is recommending. She was one person working for one short period of time. I now have a team under Lieutenant-General Christine Whitecross of 25 people working over a period and making sure that we connect how we get from where we are now to the outcome that Madam Deschamps seeks, and we will get there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you.

I also heard the minister make a formal commitment to keeping an eye on the situation and to ensuring that outcomes will be achieved. For our part, my colleagues and I will make sure to ask the right questions and to check whether the work is being done. That is a priority for us. The Valcartier military base is in my riding. So this is a huge concern for me.

Let's come back to the topic at hand. I just mentioned the Valcartier base. As was said a little earlier, 220 military members from the Valcartier military base—mainly parachutists—will be in Poland as part of Operation Reassurance from June 28 to July 15. For the first time, in Poland, a rotation will last six months instead of three. Could you explain to us why the rotation will be longer in that specific case?

Major-General Charles Lamarre (Designate Director of Staff, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence): Fortunately, someone else is taking care of it!

All the rotations are based on the exercises that will take place. We make sure that soldiers have something to do when they arrive on the ground. We based it on our discussions with the allied forces we work with, whether they are Polish, American or the authorities of other countries in the region. Each rotation is based on the events that will take place, on training and on the area where Canadians can truly do something that shows what we want to accomplish in the wake of the Russian aggressions in Europe.

Ms. Éline Michaud: I know there is currently no plan to send to Ukraine soldiers who will be deployed on that rotation. They will be in Poland and may have to travel to other Eastern European countries. I know that Ukraine is currently not in the plans. Can that change as part of the mission?

MGen Charles Lamarre: The answer is no, as those are two completely separate things. As part of Operation Reassurance, we have the training camp in Poland, but some countries have already interacted with our soldiers. For instance, we have sent our troops to provide training and make use of their expertise on winter warfare.

They have also done other things with other countries.

As for the individuals who will go to Ukraine, they have a very specific role, and we are really looking to send them to places where they will be able to use their expertise, either in terms of training military police or in terms of flight safety. They are two separate missions.

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Norlock, please. You have five minutes.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you to the witnesses, thank you for attending today.

Minister, I have two questions. The first one is that I don't really believe that Canadians have been properly advised—especially given your two portfolios—about the minority groups in Canada that you've talked about who are being targeted by ISIS, and about Canada's military mission and why it's needed.

Secondly, we're talking about military missions, but Canada's strategy and our government's initiatives have a humanitarian nature to them and a broader scope.

Could you talk about those two issues?

• (1725)

Hon. Jason Kenney: Sure. Before I do so, though, Mr. Chairman, if you'll indulge me I'd like to note that this may well be Mr. Norlock's last parliamentary intervention after nine years of public service here and many years before that with the Ontario police. I'd like to thank him for his service as a passionate advocate for the people of the Canadian Armed Forces in representing our air force wing at Trenton. Thank you, sir, for being a great partner for the military.

You're quite right. I think there is a humanitarian imperative for our Operation Impact in Iraq and Syria. Let's go back to last August when people were seeing Yazidis on television screens, this ancient sort of gnostic religious community who have faced waves of persecution. There are still a couple of hundred thousand of them left, and they were fleeing their ancient homes and villages in the Nineveh plains to go up to the centre of their ancient homeland in Mount Sinjar. They were literally being hunted down by Daesh, by ISIL terrorists. As soon as ISIL could grab a Yazidi woman or girl, as young as the age of eight, they were sold into sexual slavery and human trafficking operations, which is absolutely odious. There have been confirmed reports of their selling these women on a market to other places in the Middle East. Some girls as young as eight were raped multiple times a day and treated as property of war games by the ISIL or the Daesh terrorists.

Think of the Assyrian people. They're the indigenous people of the Nineveh plains of Mesopotamia. They've been around there for thousands of years, speaking Aramaic and have been Christians for 1,700 years, long before Arabic or Islam showed up in Mesopotamia. They were also being hunted down. I think I mentioned in a speech in the House that I had spoken to the leader of the Chaldean Christian church of the Assyrians who told me about how in Mosul,

Daesh went into the hospitals and approached the elderly, infirm, and handicapped Assyrian Christians who could not leave and threatened them with being beheaded in their hospital beds if they did not convert to Islam on the spot.

This is what we are talking about. These are the kinds of depredations that we have. I don't think we've seen evil like this so raw since the death camps of the SS in the Nazi regime. I hope people understand that there is a profound moral obligation for us to be there, as well as a security one.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

Could you talk about the government's broader scope and initiatives in the area? We talk about the military equipment, etc., but we're also doing humanitarian work in these areas.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes, in addition to the humanitarian protection provided by our military, we are, I believe, the sixth largest donor to overseas development assistance for internally displaced Iraqis. Many of them find themselves behind the Kurdish lines in northeastern Iraq.

I'd be happy to provide details to the committee, but when the Prime Minister and I were there, we announced additional funding. I believe we're now at over \$100 million in monetary support through international agencies like the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and the UNHCR operating in Iraq, in addition to over \$600 million in support as the fifth largest donor country supporting IDPs in Syria and Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and to some extent, Turkey.

Mr. Rick Norlock: There is one other quick topic because of course it's been in the news recently. President Obama announced that the United States would be sending approximately 400 additional troops to Iraq.

Can you speak to whether there are any plans to expand our Canadian Armed Forces' role in Iraq?

Hon. Jason Kenney: We do not have plans to do so, Mr. Chairman. The government was clear in the motion tabled before Parliament about our intention to maintain until April of 2016 the 69 special operators in the Kurdish region as well as the nine aircraft based out of Kuwait.

Obviously, we will participate in ongoing discussions with our coalition partners, but we believe that's a significant contribution. An assessment will have to be made next spring about the nature of an ongoing Canadian commitment.

• (1730)

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

The Chair: That brings to an end—

Mr. Jack Harris: Would there be time for one quick question to the minister, Mr. Chair, asking for a timeline on the implementation of the Deschamps report?

The Chair: To that question, Mr. Minister...?

Hon. Jason Kenney: I am waiting for a detailed report from the military through Lieutenant-General Christine Whitecross, who, as the CDS has explained, is charged with developing the action plan. I look forward to receiving her advice on a timeline.

I can tell you that all of the senior military commanders with whom I have dealt on this matter have been absolutely clear that they intend to move forward with implementation of the recommendations as soon as possible.

The Chair: Minister Kenney, Generals, Admiral, thank you for your briefing and update on Operation Reassurance and Operation Impact.

This meeting is adjourned.

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