House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs

NDDN • NUMBER 039 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, May 19, 2005

Chair

Mr. Pat O'Brien

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● (0900)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody. I'd like to call to order the 39th meeting of SCONDVA, the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs.

We have two orders of business today. The first and foremost, and most important, of course, is to welcome and then hear from our witnesses, following which we will have two or three items, fairly brief but important, of committee business. So let us begin.

It is my pleasure to welcome General Rick Hillier, the relatively newly appointed Chief of the Defence Staff. We'll have to stop saying that, General.

Gen R.J. Hillier (Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): As long as you say it, I can get away with saying I'm still new on the job.

The Chair: Okay, great, we'll give you a little more time with that "relatively new" part.

It's great to welcome you to SCONDVA as CDS. My apologies that I could not make Monday's meeting with the two relevant ministers, but I know the committee was in good hands with our vice-chair, Rick Casson. I should have known better than to try to negotiate the 401 on a Monday morning to try to get a flight in Toronto.

General Hillier, welcome to you, and welcome to the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Buck, and also to General Dempster, director general of strategic planning. Gentlemen, welcome all. We're very anxious to hear from you, and for you, General Hillier, to brief the committee on how you see the restructuring of the forces.

As you know, with Monday's meeting and with this meeting today, we really now start to move forward in a significant way on the committee work on the review of the policy statements, so you are very welcome. It is very important that you're here.

The floor is yours, sir.

Gen R.J. Hillier: Mr. O'Brien, thank you very much, and ladies and gentlemen, good morning to you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting me here today and for allowing me several minutes of your time to speak about the changing face of the Canadian forces and the new defence policy. The transformation of the Canadian forces is already under way, but the process requires an attitudinal change as well.

Three elements are involved. The threat we face has changed considerably, and that makes a tremendous difference to Canadian Forces personnel.

● (0905)

[*English*]

The threat has changed, and I think the attitude change that comes from an acceptance of that and a realization of that, and the implications of that, drives so much of what is in our defence policy and so much of what we are trying to do as a transformation in the Canadian Forces in order to be able to implement that defence policy.

So the first thing that is changing, I believe—and it is not yet complete and will not be for a long period of time—is that: the threat is changing. The threat has changed. The threat continues to change—and is that ball of snakes not the former Warsaw Pact?

The second thing that has become a very real focus for us in the transformation of the Canadian Forces is a Canadian Forces focus. As you are all aware, we went through integration and unification back in the late sixties and early seventies, but we truly have continued to maintain—this is my personal view—an army, navy, and air force mentality, attitude, and structures, not a Canadian Forces attitude, culture, or indeed structures to allow us to conduct operations and do what we have to do on behalf of the people of Canada.

So the Canadian Forces transformation is certainly focused on a Canadian Forces focus, a Canadian Forces culture, and a Canadian Forces operational entity that gives us a larger footprint when we are directed to use it, a greater profile as a part of that, greater visibility, greater credibility. With that comes a chance to influence regions around the world, and the activities therein, from the point of view of Canada's interests and Canada's values. In short, it gives the Canadian Forces an opportunity to find those leadership appointments to be able to make things occur in the way that we see they should.

With both of those things, the third point that is clear and obvious and evident—and that does cause some concern, I will tell you—is that there is a lot of ambiguity. The threat, when it changes, is not precise, structured, and equipped in the way the Warsaw Pact threat was. It is what I keep referring to as a ball of snakes, of terrorists through to militia forces that have earned their battle honours by beating up on their own populations, and it includes all kinds of things like improvised explosive devices, vehicle-borne explosives, suicide bombers, and of course, some of what we think of as conventional weapons.

That threat continues to change, continues to develop, and on a daily basis is constantly moving. And as a result, our structures and focus on it will also continue to change. That introduces a level of ambiguity into what we do that is different from where we have been in the past. That level of ambiguity requires an enormous amount of thinking and education and confidence—in our leadership, particularly—from corporal right through to senior general, and that is an issue, of course, that causes us all to have to work much more as a team, to be much more focused than we have been in the past, and it does cause some concern. There is ambiguity when the threat is as it is right now.

As we walk through the Canadian Forces transformation, in order to be able to implement the defence policy, we believe we have to look at Canada, for the first time, as an operational theatre. We will get one chance to do right by Canadians if a threat is manifested in Canada, and if it is, we want to be sure we are ready to meet it. We have to look at Canada as an operational theatre and be prepared to conduct operations here, as we do around the world. Secondly, we have to be prepared to get the maximum profile, as I mentioned earlier, in failed or failing states around the world.

In order to get that "one Canadian Forces" operational entity, we truly do have to have a Canadian Forces unified command structure. Such a structure would be based on a command-centric approach, not a staff-centric approach, based on a Chief of the Defence Staff, as commander of the Canadian Forces, being able to work directly with commanders and to command staffs and command teams that are focused on conducting operations in Canada, when we need to do them, focused on conducting and being successful in operations internationally, and focused on being able to support those operations.

That, of course, is a significant change for us. Over a process of many years, we have arrived at a staff-centric structure, which is sometimes, I find, frustrating to work within. We want to move towards a more operationally focused institution, not one that is administratively, bureaucratically, or institutionally focused. Our output—what you want from us—is the ability to conduct operations either at home or abroad.

● (0910)

Third, I want to get to a structure that I believe you need us to get to, and that is one where the responsibility and accountability for what we ask people to do, the resources we give them to do it, and what they do are clear and evident and transparent, and not a detailed staff matrix that makes it difficult for me, as the Chief of the Defence Staff, to determine exactly what tiller bar I pull to get an effect out the bottom end of our Canadian Forces structure.

Last, I will tell you that in a command-centric structure we work to what is universally called mission command—mission command versus risk aversion. Mission command means giving a commander a mission, a job to do, giving him guidance on how you want it to proceed and, in particular, what effect you are seeking—not detailed guidance on how to do every little thing, but on what effect you are seeking—giving him or her the resources necessary to do the job, and then giving them the opportunity to lay their plan out and come back and brief me as the Chief of the Defence Staff, or others as appropriate, on how they are actually going to do it.

In short, we select, we educate, we train, and we give experience to our leaders, and a mission command philosophy gives them the opportunity to then do what we put them in place to do.

Sir, I think I'll stop there. I'm prepared to take any questions and discuss any of those issues or others with you as you, the chair, deem fit.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General Hillier. We'll obviously have a number of questions, as you might anticipate.

Our first round is for seven minutes, starting with Mr. Casson, please.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you, General. You mentioned the fact that Canada could become an operational theatre under some of the threats we face. I'd like you to maybe expand on that. To describe it as a ball of snakes is good; I think that gives us a pretty good visual. But where are these threats that could potentially turn Canada into an operational theatre? Where are they coming from, and what are you doing to know your intelligence network? I guess that is more what I want to know about.

The plans you have laid out in the defence review are ambitious, and I think a lot of it depends on this ability to expand the forces by 5,000 and 3,000. We had a witness here a while ago who indicated that in order to reach those kinds of levels of expansion, you need to start out with a lot of people. I think his number was about 45,000 to 50,000 people that you'd start out with, then you would whittle them down and come out the other end with 5,000 good troops. It takes a lot of people to work through that many—your recruitment, your training, all of those aspects of it. I'd like to know how all of that is going to be handled.

There's also the issue of headquarters and the upper echelon, some of the things we hear are top-heavy. You just mentioned some of the things you're going to try to do there. But is that a target you have, to drain out that office and get them scattered around out into the field?

Gen R.J. Hillier: Well, sir, let me just take those from top to bottom.

First of all, on the threats, I'll just say that al-Qaeda, as you know, has us on their target list, based on all that we know around the world. We know that there are neo-al-Qaeda groups, if I could put it that way, that are springing up around the world, who profess to have the same goals and ideals of al-Qaeda but not been linked directly to them, so are quite willing to execute operations against anybody who they perceive as a threat to them or somebody less than desirable—that is, Canada.

But what I would say to you is this. Irrespective of a threat, man-generated, man-made.... It's always men; it's never women who generate those threats. I've only had to deal with one in my past, and that was Madame Plavsic, in the former Yugoslavia, who was as ruthless and bloodthirsty as any man I've ever met. But it's always men.

Irrespective of those threats, there are all the other threats to stability and security in our society that include natural threats.

I guess my whole reason for coming at this, to say Canada needs to be an operational theatre, is based on the fact that right now in Canada we are actually set up to do anything else but conduct operations efficiently. We are set up to attract young Canadians, to recruit young Canadians, to train young Canadians, put them in collective units and largely send them offshore to do the work we ask them to do. That's what we have to continue to be successful at, but we also now have to take that extra step so that if something occurs in Canada, either naturally or man-made, we can respond to it in a much better perspective.

Right now, when we respond, we do so in an ad hoc manner. Yes, we plan for it, and yes, we do train and exercise some of those plans, but at the moment of highest stress, we change our command and control systems, and that's not what we want to be doing. So our entire perspective is to say, what would we need to do to be ready to conduct operations during moments of high stress and tension in Canada, and to do it successfully on behalf of all Canadians?

We need to do more. We have to have one commander and one command team, first of all, with responsibility for those operations. We need to have the plans and contingency plans made; we need to have those contingency plans exercised; we need to have the units identified, and clearly under the command of that commander, so he does not have to go around changing command structures again at the moment of highest stress; and we need to have those basic systems for command and control in place in Canada, just as we would in any operational theatre around the world.

So it's not just based on a man-made threat, although al-Qaeda terrorist groups out there are certainly capable, certainly have the will, and at points in time probably have the capability to execute operations inside of Canada. We want to be ready when Canadians need us, no matter what has caused the need to occur. That would be the first one.

The use of our intelligence is a part, and how we try to predict where a threat might occur and therefore pre-empt or prevent something occurring in Canada, of course, is one of the things that I really want to be able to put under one commander for Canada, so we have one point of focus, so we're not doing various things with silos and people not talking to each other so that therefore things are missed. I want one commander focused on this, with one command team for our country. I think that's the best approach to it.

On the ability to expand to 5,000 and 8,000—I'd call it 8,000, which would be 5,000 for the regular force and 3,000 for the reserves—my intent, since most of them are going into the land component, is to put them all through the one training system so that at the end of this we actually have an increase in capacity and capability of 8,000 men and women. Yes, 3,000 of them will go into the reserve component, but they will have come through the complete training scheme with the original 5,000 and therefore will be reachable and usable, if we need them to be so. And like in the past, that will clearly be obvious and necessary at times.

We actually don't have to start at 25,000 or whatever. Our loss rate has been significantly less than 20%. I don't have the specific percentages on me, but I know it's certainly less than that. The highest loss rate we have had has been in the infantry. I think we've wandered around the 20% to 25% loss rate from initial training through to trained soldier in the infantry, and that actually has been at the high point. We've been a little bit lower than that in this last while.

Mr. Casson, I'll come back to you on those percentages, but that means that instead of starting with 25,000 or so, in order to get 8,000 out at the end of the pipeline, we're going to start somewhere about 10,000. That means we're going to do it over three years—that's my aim—and do it in a very focused manner.

● (0915)

What I've asked the staff to do is have the ADM (HR-MIL) carry on with responsibility for normal recruiting and training for the normal numbers. I've mission-tasked the army commander to do the bubble of that 8,000, and to specifically do it at the locations where those soldiers will be employed when they finish training.

So in other words, we take them right from the recruiting centre, as civilians, move them to a place like Petawawa, turn units into training schools for short periods of time to allow this to occur, and then we train those soldiers right in the areas where they're going to operate.

We think we're capable of doing it. It's a three-year process to do the bulk of those numbers, to do it right in the locations where most of them will be employed. And we figure that about 10,000 or so would give us the ability to put 8,000 or so out at the end of the flight plan as trained soldiers.

The last point I'll mention is whether headquarters is top heavy. Absolutely. I've always looked at NDHQ with slight skepticism and cynicism and suspicion. Every single field officer or soldier NCO has. I know those two gentlemen sitting right here would feel the same way. That's not to say there's not an enormous amount of great work that goes on there and great people working there. We just need to make sure it's more streamlined.

First, going to the command structure that we're trying to lay out in detail right now will allow us to take much of the staff out and put it with a commander and a command team to do very focused operational command and control—domestically for Canada, internationally for other operations around the world with our special operations group, or with an operational support command and commander. But it will be a very focused commander and command support team and not an NDHQ-heavy team.

I know the vice has a tremendous goal ahead, and that is that at the end of this process, when we do our transformation, National Defence Headquarters, which is what people tend to lump everything together under, will actually fit in that building at 101. As of right now, of course, we're in a large number of buildings around town.

I don't know, Vice, if you want to pile onto that one a little bit more.

● (0920)

VAdm R.D. Buck (Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): If I might. Thank you, Chief.

Yes, in fact one of the objectives of the realignment of the command structures would be not only to be able to fit into one building on Colonel By Drive, but in fact to bring headquarters—the strategic level headquarters, both departmental and Canadian Forces—down to somewhere between 3,500 and 4,000 people, which is a very significant reduction.

Gen R.J. Hillier: So, sir, we're hitting it in the right way, I believe. Based on your questions, we have very similar concerns and we just need to execute this vigorously to try to get there.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

You're up next, Mr. Bachand, for seven minutes.

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

I'd like to begin by welcoming our witnesses. It's always a pleasure to see you, gentlemen.

I'm equally delighted to see the new Chief of Defence Staff, because he gives considerable impetus to the Canadian Forces and brings with him a change of direction, a position that I endorse.

We have here the new defence policy. This is a wide-ranging subject, as evidenced by the Library of Parliament briefing notes which contain five pages of suggested questions for committee members.

I was fascinated by your opening remarks today. I have some questions for you, as you made a number of statements with which I fully agree. However, I sometimes wonder if the facts bear out these assertions. First of all, you talked about an attitudinal change within the Canadian Forces, and about the need for this kind of change because the nature of the threat we face is changing.

I totally agree with you on that score.

You also talked about changing the culture of the Canadian Forces. You mentioned the presence of a certain amount of ambiguity and the need to put our trust fully into the CF leadership.

You stated that Canada is becoming a major theatre of operations. You spoke mainly about responsibility, accountability and transparency. You also said that you needed the people seated here at this table, that is elected officials.

I have served on this committee for several years, and there is one issue that we have not yet been able to dissect fully, and that is DND's culture of secrecy.

To illustrate the meaning of this expression, I would cite as an example the investigation that we conducted into submarines. Because of bilingualism issues, this committee was paralyzed for months. Another example is the famous report recently released by the commission of inquiry into the fire on board HMCS Chicoutimi —a report so censored that it was difficult to follow. If you read the record of the standing committee earlier in the week, you will see that I even labelled the report as an attempt at a cover-up.

General Hillier, in your opinion, should the elected officials seated at this table work hand in hand with you, a little like the situation observed in the United States where a genuine symbiotic relationship exists between the Senate and Congressional defence committees and military authorities? This type of symbiotic or collaborative relationship is nowhere to be found here in this country.

To your way of thinking, is it important for elected officials to be involved with you in this change in culture? Furthermore, what steps do you intend to take to make military files a little more accessible to elected representatives?

I don't want you to tell me that if you answer my question, you would then have to shoot me. I've already been told that before, but I think that's a tired approach. Elected officials need to be involved. Let's get off on the right foot with this new defence policy and work together. I'd like to know if you share my view and what you intend to do to rectify matters.

[*English*]

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sir, thank you very much for the question.

[*Translation*]

It will be easier for me to answer the question in English.

[*English*]

First of all, I'll make a point on each of the things you had mentioned.

The attitude is changing in the Canadian Forces, and I believe it's changing because—I've mentioned this before—we have a leadership now in the Canadian Forces that has cut its teeth on operations. And that is the first time since World War II that the leadership across that entire structure has had that kind of basic training, experience, and troop time, if you will, on operations, and that leadership is now in command appointments right from very junior leaders at section commander level through to me as the Chief of the Defence Staff.

As a result of that, we have learned some seven million to ten million personal lessons over this past decade or decade and a half in getting that experience, and it has caused our attitudes to change. What we need to do now is coalesce those personal lessons into institutional lessons. But the recognition, sir, is there by every one of those leaders, and I'll tell you I get it every single day when I go out and talk to them, as I do a lot, and visit with them and walk through where we are attempting to take the Canadian Forces to implement the defence policy. They are supportive, and what they say is, how come we're not there yet?

The attitude has changed. Are there some holdovers? Of course there are. We're a big organization. We have people who have put in 30 or 35 or more years, who had been focused on the Warsaw Pact, focused on that kind of opposition or enemy, and it is difficult for some to change. But the vast majority have, and they realized there was a need to do that.

My aim certainly wouldn't be to change the culture in the Canadian Forces. My aim is to build a Canadian Forces culture. We don't have a Canadian Forces culture right now, in my estimation. We have an army culture. We have a navy culture. We have an air force culture. I think we need to build a Canadian Forces culture, and you can only do that by making the default setting the fact that airmen and airwomen, sailors, and soldiers work together every hour of every day, during training, during normal work and routine, and during operations. It becomes the default setting—that is, a Canadian Forces footprint, and not an army, navy, or air force footprint—that conducts operations.

On the responsibility-accountability issue, I believe in giving people a challenge and responsibility to do something, and then holding them accountable if I've given them the appropriate guidance on a mission and the resources to do it. In a staff-centric approach, which is what we have really built over these last decades in National Defence, it is very difficult to do that. I find it difficult, sir, to follow an order that I give or a mission to do something down through its logical follow-on and execution. It's very difficult for me to do that, and I therefore believe we have to change our structure fundamentally.

Now I'll come to your last point, sir: secrecy at National Defence Headquarters. I need you involved. These are your Canadian Forces. I think they're mine because I happen to be the one in uniform, but they truly are yours, representing the 32 million people who live in our great country. And I think you absolutely have to be involved to help shape what that Canadian Forces are going to be, both presently and for the future. I think part of my being here, and the minister's being here, and my being here with the minister last Monday to walk through all the issues with you is a fundamental part of helping you shape your Canadian Forces here.

You've put me in a bit of a tight corner, though, by bringing up the board of inquiry in *Chicoutimi*, and I come back to you and say I am obligated, under the legal advice given to me as the Chief of the Defence Staff, to respect the laws that are put in place by you, when you make a request like that. My determination is to bring everything forward that I possibly can to you to lay out. I have been very frank here in some of the points I've talked about, and I will continue to be, for what you need to know and to give you everything possible based on your line of questioning so that you can help shape the Canadian Forces, which are your responsibility.

Sir, there's no culture of secrecy in any organization that I've ever been a part of, and certainly not in any I've commanded, and my reply to you is that there is not going to be in this one.

● (0925)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Bachand, for one final question. Please be brief.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Regarding HMCS Chicoutimi, you stated that you sought some legal opinions and that you merely complied with the law. However, there's more than just legal opinions and laws. According to the Minister's letter to the committee, it's very clear that corporate-style agreements were concluded with BAE and with the U.K.

If an investigation is undertaken and documents have been signed and promises made not to disclose certain information, when witnesses are called before the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, they tell us that they cannot in fact disclose certain information because they have agreed not to do so.

How are MPs supposed to react to that? We also have a responsibility to be accountable, not to you, but to the voters, that is to the people who are picking up the tab.

I trust you because I feel that you have been open and honest with us from the very beginning. I appreciate that quality in an individual. I'm also that kind of person. General, I promise you that if I ever see something like this happen again , you can be sure that I will be calling you to discuss the situation. I have confidence in you and I hope that you will take my call when it comes.

● (0930)

[*English*]

The Chair: If General Hillier wishes to comment, that's fine; I don't mean to suggest he shouldn't. But, colleague, you know that a minister's letter would be more a question for the minister. We will pursue that, if you wish, as a committee after the witnesses are gone.

If General Hillier wishes to comment, he's certainly welcome to do that.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Maybe you won't answer my phone call, General.

Some hon members: Oh, oh!

Gen R.J. Hillier: Absolutely, I will answer your call, Mr. Bachand.

But, Mr. Chair, I think that's right. I think you have to ask our minister that exact question. Our aim is to be forthright and open with you as members of Parliament here, and particularly given your responsibilities on this committee, we want to help you meet those responsibilities. That's certainly my intent throughout.

You understand that there are sometimes short-term challenges to that. I don't have the answer to give you that's going to satisfy you this morning.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Merci, Monsieur Bachand.

Mr. Blaikie, please, for seven minutes.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think I'm going to start with a comment.

I don't mean this facetiously, but I think it would in some ways come as a surprise to most Canadians to learn that there is a need for this unified command structure of this single.... I think a lot of people would assume that post-unification, post-integration—a long time ago—there was someone in charge, there was a Canadian Forces culture. I think the fact that you're able to identify that there isn't is, for one thing, a welcome frankness on your part, and secondly, a statement about how strong institutional cultures can be in spite of 35 years or more of unification and integration.

I myself certainly remember how well received I was in the army, because I was in the reserves at the time, and I remember trooping the colour in 1967 and being inspected by Paul Hellyer, who would 35 years later show up in my office wanting to form a new political party with me. I remember all the fantasies that various people had, as he was going by inspecting the troops, about what they wanted to do to him because of unification.

Having started with that, I wonder if maybe you could tell us briefly about another question as well. There's been a reorganization of the reserves on hold—if you like—for a while now. There were big plans to change things, not all of which I was in favour of, frankly, but where is that at? As you're bringing these new 3,000 into the reserves, is that going to be an occasion for change in the reserves? What exactly is happening there? There's always been an agreement, it seems to me, a multi-partisan agreement for more investment in the reserves, and the conventional wisdom both in the reserves and in the political culture is that it's not politics that's kept the reserves back, it's the regulations.

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sir, thank you for both those questions. Let me just come to the CF culture question.

Unification and integration followed through. In the estimation of many, it actually did accomplish some things at the higher level. Some of the integrated headquarters or staffs provided real value; they really did. But back in the army, navy, air force, the superficial change, if you will, was seen as a change of uniforms. It actually probably—if I can say it—pissed more people off than it actually brought on side, as opposed to bringing us toward one Canadian Forces culture.

We've stepped away from that. Today what I say to our men and women is to be proud you are a soldier, be proud you're a sailor, be proud you're an airman or airwoman—I'm proud I'm a soldier—but don't be so proud as to jealously guard it as the only team in which you can work.

We are all Canadians. We're members of the Canadian Forces. If we want to meet our responsibilities to the people of Canada in this very dynamic environment and changed threat environment, we have to be prepared to work together flawlessly as one team—air, land and sea—and we have to do that to the benefit of Canada. This is a Canadian-first approach, and people are now starting to actually respond in a very powerful way—in part because they understand this is a Canadian-first approach, in part because of that operational experience and because the leadership has seen the real need to change here.

I think people now are understanding we have to get to that Canadian Forces operational entity, which really is based on a Canadian Forces culture, which is based on an understanding of the fact there is more to conducting operations than just army, navy, and air force. We never did get there in the past. In fact, in some cases we actually retrenched a little. Now standing up, for example, a standing contingency task force in which air, land, and sea elements will train up, be brought to operational readiness together under one commander and a small command team, and then be deployed—either in Canada or around the world—to conduct operations together is the start of building that default setting of expecting to work together.

Having a command-centric structure, CanadaCom, with air, land, and sea forces under command of joint commanders across our country brings together that attitude to a Canadian Forces one, as opposed to just army, just navy, or just air force from that perspective. It's not a surprise to people in uniform that we hadn't developed as much of a Canadian culture as all of us now feel is necessary. I get it every day, as I mentioned earlier, from men and women in uniform around our country. They say to get on with it, that they know what we have to do. They ask how come we're not there now.

On the land force reserve restructure, the second question you've asked about, we have in fact done significant work over the past two to four years, based on a very sound plan put in place largely by Lieutenant-General Mike Jeffrey, who was my predecessor as Chief of Land Staff, with consultation across a broad spectrum of people who are involved with the army, with the land component, and specifically with the reserve force. We continue to build the units so they are capable units, to work to command structure to get the most effective command structure in each of the reserve brigades across our country, and to build into the reserve component the new capabilities we need.

I look at psychological operations, the CIMIC capability particularly, and some of the earlier responders across our country to help when the civilian structure needs us. That has all been occurring in a very low-key manner, but an awesomely effective manner. In fact, we've started to change the ability of the reserve component to be able to contribute, first of all in Canada, when there is a need for them to do so—and there has been a need an enormous number of times here—and also on international operations.

We see the 3,000 to finish off what we call LFRR phase two as fundamental to continue to increase that capability and capacity. That will put us in great position to be able to move the reserve component through transformation, along with the rest of the Canadian Forces. We've actually done a lot, sir, on the reserve transformation, but I want to say we've done a lot with the full support of the reserve community; for example, in Reserves 2000, down in Toronto. You probably know some of those folks have just said they understand now that their name is maybe wrong and they should be Army 2000 or Canadian Forces 2000, because they want to be part of that bigger picture. We've done it with them, and not at odds with them. I think that's been a fundamental key to success.

● (0935)

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I think the main thing there was a concern some years ago that various regiments would be eliminated or integrated, and that doesn't seem to have happened. I hope that continues to be the case and that you can find a way to build on the regimental cultures and integrate them into this Canadian Forces culture.

One thing you said, which was very interesting to me, is that we're going to have one chance to display this capability. I wonder what you meant by that.

Secondly, is there any reconsideration being given to the location of bases as a result of viewing Canada as a possible theatre of operation? It seems to me that the trend over the years has been to take bases out of cities and put them in more remote places, or actually places that are already bases, but to take capacity out of cities. If one of the threats is terrorism, it seems to me that cities are the more likely place for this threat to manifest itself. We've been effectively moving our response capability away from the threat. Now, there may be threats that exist in remote areas—to pipelines, whatever—but I wonder if you could comment on that.

Gen R.J. Hillier: When I said one chance, what I meant was that we need to be ready when something happens in Canada, whether it's a natural disaster or a man-caused disaster, to help Canadians and to be successful in helping Canadians mitigate, neutralize, or perhaps even pre-empt a disaster. We've done a lot of work, and you've certainly been part of that in helping, I think, the Canadian Forces rebuild credibility in the eyes of Canadians over this last decade. We went from what was actually, I think, a very low point in the early to mid-nineties to a point now where Canadians have confidence, I do believe, to a greater extent than over past years in their Canadian Forces and in what they do on their behalf.

If we're not ready to efficiently and effectively conduct operations inside of our country, i.e., so that we absolutely are not going to fail when something occurs, then we stand a chance to lose all that credibility and confidence Canadians have in us. So that's why I say if something occurs and we're not ready, then that will be our one chance not to blow it gone, and we're not going to do that. We just need to sort ourselves out so we are absolutely as efficient as possible. That's been the driving rationale behind our command structures and behind our building of the Canadian Forces operational entities, and all the things we are trying to do.

As for the location of bases, as we go through the Canadian Forces transformation and lay this out in detail, you will appreciate that this is an enormous amount of work. Ours is a massive institution, and when you are trying to steer it left or right by just one degree, there is phenomenal detail that you have to get into in second- and third-order effects, etc. We're still working through a lot of this detail. We're only at the front end of it. As we do that, we're going to lay out the Canadian Forces transformation program, the campaign plan to get it done, the capabilities documents required from that, and then the structure that will allow us to be able to implement that defence vision in detail itself. Now, once we lay out that structure, we're going to lay out the next two. One is the infrastructure support we will need across our country to be able to be effective in doing all the things we've talked about here. Then from that, we'll determine what is the best fit of bases, and we'll make recommendations or not.

What I would say to you is that what is important is not necessarily the location of bases; it's your ability to respond. If you have the response capability in or close to major urban centres, then that will meet the criterion of being ready to help Canadians when they need it.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you.

Gen R.J. Hillier: So do we need the 5,000 troops from Petawawa right here in Ottawa? I would say no, because we end up reducing their readiness because of lack of training, etc. But can they respond here quickly? We have to make sure the answer is yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bagnell, please go ahead, for seven minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you, General, and your staff, for being here. I think it's delightful that we have you, as the top person, here so often. It's an incredible privilege for us that you make yourself so available to us. I hope we're not leaving the country undefended, but it's great that you're here.

You can probably imagine my question is going to be about the new attitude in the military and the new attitude, which is great, towards the north. Could you speak about that? Just before you do, though, I have a couple of points of interest.

Hopefully, in your recruiting, you are perhaps enlisting the mailing lists of AFN and Indian Affairs to try to make sure the recruitment reflects the multicultural population in Canada as much as possible.

Another thing is that the women in Afghanistan have recently—and by the way, I was very impressed when I visited Kabul and Gardez with the great job our troops are doing—released a paper about abuses and things that could be done. Hopefully, someone might be able to research that and get it to our general over there in the third bloc of our third bloc war. Maybe it's something we can help out with in that area.

First of all, I want to congratulate you and give you a chance to bask in the glory of the great work you've been doing in the north. I've been leading a charge for northern sovereignty for the last number of years, and over the last year—

● (0945)

The Chair: He knows that.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Just in case anyone missed it.

You've done a great job. There have been a lot of exercises in the north. I'm very impressed. It's wonderful, and I just want to make sure we don't stop the momentum.

Perhaps you could comment on the fact that we don't have any navy assets that could go through or under the ice. It's not that they're both necessary, but the third part of our north needs to be protected.

With regard to our troops, I'm always hoping we can get more in the north. If we're getting 8,000 more right now.... We only have one in Nunavut and, I think, up to seven regular troops in the Yukon, leaving aside the Rangers, who do a great job. So a huge part of our country only has seven of our 50,000 or 60,000 people. I'd like to get more.

On a related issue, search and rescue, with all our bases close to the American border...or if you'd exaggerate this to get the picture a bit, if they were right on the border, then the southern half of their range would be wasted. I'm not suggesting we move them all; most of the searches are in the south. But searches could be more dangerous in the north, with hypothermia and everything. In the south there are already a lot of people, civilians and other agencies, who might be closer. Today, with civilian maintenance and things like that, I think it would be quite easy to have a search and rescue that could also be multi-purpose, with at least one plane north of 60, which, as you know, would cut at least four hours off critical rescue times.

So I'll just leave that whole area.

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sir, I'd be delighted to comment on your points.

The first one you mentioned—the new attitude and your hope that we were involved with the AFN and the Department of Indian Affairs, and so on, as we go out recruiting—in fact is one of the things we really do want to accomplish. I've articulated it, but I know the command team in the Canadian Forces is of exactly the same mind.

Our demographic is not satisfactory to me. We don't represent fully our country's population. I'm not after percentages or numbers or quotas at all. I want to do something different because it's right to do something different. We have to reflect our Canadian population.

Second, from an operational perspective, having that diversity that our population offers is an incredible operational lever. When we deployed to Afghanistan, as an example, we had literally zero Afghan Canadians in uniform in the Canadian Forces. Therefore, in our efforts to understand the culture, and simply for linguistic support and so on, we were not helpless but darned close to it.

What I've asked the ADM (HR-MIL), the Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources-Military, to do specifically in conjunction with the army commander—but obviously not just with him, because the 5,000 and 3,000 are more focused towards the army side—is to lay out for me a five-year program for how we're going to use those 8,000 to change the demographic, to identify for us the ethnic communities across Canada, who are the leaders of those communities, who are the ins to those leaders. Then from the minister's perspective, from Dr. Martin's perspective, mine, and the leadership team's, we can start building the alliances, take it down to the next level and connect those community groups—say, Asian Canadians in Toronto—to soldiers in Petawawa, to the command structure in Petawawa. If we really work at this over the next 12 to 18 months, we can start reducing some of the lack of security they have with joining the Canadian Forces, with being in a military organization, which is perhaps not the ideal goal for many of them at this point in time, and change that demographic, including in it that if you join in Toronto, as an example, we guarantee that your first posting is not farther than four hours away from Toronto, so you're close to your extended family structure—that is, Petawawa. You come out of the recruiting centre as a civilian, and you go directly to Petawawa. As I mentioned earlier, you do your training there, and you're employed there except for operations, and so on.

We're going to be taking up everybody we can get to assist us in developing those contacts and developing the relationship with our diverse groups across the country as part of rectifying what I see as a gaping hole in our demographic in the Canadian Forces here. That's a big task, sir. We're not going to change it overnight. I said it would be a five-year plan, but I want to go at this aggressively.

From the perspective of the north, the conventional military threat, or what is really now asymmetric, is simply non-existent, really, in the north itself, but I believe we have a responsibility in our country to be part of an exercise and an assertion of our sovereignty, without question. From that perspective, we need to be prepared to know what's going on, so we need to improve our capability to survey in the north.

We have many things in progress, much of which was articulated in the defence policy and is in our capital plan to help increase that surveillance, whether it be the Aurora upgrade, more use of satellite coverage, the acquisition of an unmanned aerial vehicle capacity of long-range, long loiter, to look at maritime approaches and land approaches across the north.

Second, we have to be able to respond across the north, and we need to make sure that the headquarters we have in the north, as one of our joint regions under CanadaCom, will be at the capacity and be able to command and control such a response. And then we need to be able to build the units with the expertise, the experience, and the capabilities to deploy to the north when they need to.

Sir, you said yourself that the search and rescue capability is primarily based in the south, of course, because that's where the mass of missions is at this point in time. We continue to reassess, as we prosecute the fixed-wing SAR acquisition process, what would be the recommendations back to the Government of Canada for the appropriate basing to give us the right coverage for the vast majority of the incidents that take place and to still recognize the fact that the north is changing. As we look at utility aircraft and search and rescue, the north looms large in our consideration at all times, and we'll come up with the recommendations for our minister here as we complete that perspective.

I think I've covered all your points, sir. Is there one I've missed?

● (0950)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: No, that's okay.

The Chair: We're going to give him one more kick at it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: One more kick, okay. Well, I'll ask two questions, then.

The only thing I disagreed slightly with was where you said there was no threat in the north. There are only two areas of the country where foreign people have claimed our territory. One is off Nunavut, which is Haines Island. The other is off Alaska, where the Americans are putting oil drills in our waters because they think it's America. I'm not saying we're going to attack those countries, but you're saying there's no threat. Well, I think there's no threat in Gagetown either, or where our troops are now, there's less threat. So I'm not sure that's a good argument, that we couldn't have some economic advantage to having some troops in the north that aren't necessarily going to fight there, just as our troops in Gagetown aren't going to fight there.

My second question, because I won't get another time, is this. I know we're in negotiations with Khartoum to try to be more effective there, to make sure we can keep our aid there but be effective with our soldiers. I know we want to work with the African Union and everything. But the bottom line is that people are still being killed every day. If our negotiations break down with Khartoum, is there something we can do? Whether or not the United Nations is frozen in action, is there something we can do to stop the killing, actually?

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sir, on your first point, the point is taken. I don't disagree with what you say, that various things occur. Our role in it, of course, is what would be up for discussion, if you will.

In Khartoum, what I would say to you is that when I was in Khartoum, then Darfur, and then Addis immediately following that, to talk to the various levels of the African Union headquarters and the United Nations mission in Sudan, I made a variety of recommendations to our minister that were then used to help define part of the package that was announced last week.

Many of those recommendations, from the provision of more helicopters and a longer-term contract, so they have some guarantee—more than just six months at a time—that they will have those helicopters; to providing one aircraft as a strategic lifter for the African Union to be able to go around the African continent, pick up troop contingents that have been offered up from any of the 52 or 53 countries, pick up civilian police contingents, which have in the past months been missed opportunities because they didn't have an aircraft to do it—and this was articulated to me in some great detail—to providing an aircraft for tactical use in Darfur itself; to a whole variety of other things, including provision of a small intelligence cell, a small geomatic cell that provides maps and images to use for their operations; to some logistic support; to some training, either for staff officers, for mission-specific training, or some longer-term staff training—almost all of those things, in fact all of them, can take place irrespective of whether Khartoum wants Canadians coming into Darfur as part of the mission or not.

There is no roadblock, I don't believe, for Canadians participating in the United Nations mission in Sudan. One of the recommendations I did make was that we offer more there, because clearly stability in the north-south accord and the continuation of that peace agreement gives a better chance for some progress in Darfur; i.e., a more stable Sudan is obviously more amenable and easier to work with to get some progress in Darfur.

So in fact, sir, with malice aforethought, but accidentally, I will tell you..I made some recommendations that are actually implementable regardless of whether Khartoum becomes an obstacle to any Canadian men and women in uniform going into Darfur. And I think those are powerful things.

The helicopters, I'll just tell you, are enormously visible, with a great big Canada flag on the side. They're the most powerful enabler that the African Union has now for mobility, for tactical agility, for casualty evacuation, for simply getting the job done. Every commander, right down to section commanders, has told me that. When I was there, I had the opportunity to observe them and use them myself, actually, as part of trying to get a feeling for what we could offer them. They've been a tremendous help to them, and that's irrespective of Canadians being in Darfur.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

General, here's one question from me before a second round from our colleagues. It relates to operational tempo and the ultimate size of the Canadian Forces. I think I shared this anecdote with you personally, and some of my colleagues know this story. It's quite interesting to me.

Here we were in Kosovo a few years ago. I believe Mrs. Longfield was on that trip as well. We went up to talk to some of our outstanding young Canadians in uniform, men and women, at a coffee break. They were taking down their camp; we were starting to pull out of Kosovo. We waded in as we do, all Canadians talking and introducing ourselves. The second young man I introduced myself to said, oh, I know who you are; you taught me at such-and-such a high school. Sure enough, I mentally removed the moustache and the beret and I knew who this young man was, and I wasn't surprised he was excelling in that field of work.

This leads me to my question. I pressed him. I said, how long have you been away, Mike, blah, blah, blah? It came home to me most vividly: he had an 11-month-old son whom he'd seen for one month. The idea the public sometimes has that our people are away six months and then are back with their families is just not correct. I know that, and there's no need to tell you gentlemen that. You've been through it personally.

What are we going to do about operational tempo? How do you see the 8,000 described earlier? I would hope, speaking personally as a Canadian, that's not the final hiring of new people. How many more new people would you foresee us needing down the road, if you can bring out your crystal ball? What about operational tempo and what about the ultimate size of the forces?

Gen R.J. Hillier: First, perhaps I could just mention that on the 8,000, and in particular the 5,000 into the regular force component, the intent is to use them to bring the units that are in existence right now across the Canadian Forces up to strength—particularly the land component, but not just, because there are some into other parts of the Canadian Forces also. In fact, that is desperately needed.

What's occurring now, of course, is that if we want an infantry company, as an example, to deploy on operations, because those companies are all manned right now to such a low level, we actually have to take two companies and squash them together. The intent is to get the right level of soldiers in these companies now, whether that's 115, 120, or 125—we work through those little details here—so that when we need a company, we actually have one that's ready to go and we don't have to kill.... If we need a battalion, we don't have to take two battalions and use them on the same operation.

The intent is to create zero new overhead with that 5,000 and the 3,000 in the reserve component. That becomes, if you will, very much the sharp end, all of it being used for exactly that. Just by that action alone, they're reducing the stresses on the operational tempo a huge amount.

In Petawawa, for example, there are two infantry battalions. We needed one out of there, but we needed the second one for the next rotation. In order to get the first rotation, we in fact ended up squeezing most of those battalions together. Then we had to squeeze what was left and build an ad hoc battalion for the second rotation out of Petawawa. That's not the way we want to continue to do business. We had people going for the second and third time somewhat needlessly, if I could put it that way.

You're aware, sir, that we're now in an operationally reduced tempo, and starting in August, we start to come back out of that. The navy has geared its managed readiness piece back up; that is, in fact, it is ready to come back into higher-intensity operations right now. The air force is still in a bit of a reduced tempo, for a variety of reasons. The land component is to come out in late fall—being prepared then with major combat units ready for operations late fall and ideally ready for deployment in early 2006, which of course led to some of the recommendations we made to our minister for deployment into Afghanistan, as he mentioned here on Monday.

So we're getting back to it and getting back to it with the numbers being done, with the management of the forces, so we can guarantee to the Government of Canada and therefore to Canadians that whatever we put out of country, we can sustain out of country. We believe we would be able to maintain two missions outside of the country.

We also believe, and this is part of our perspective of it, in Canadian first and building a profile and having enough on the ground so we get credibility and leadership opportunity. We believe that a focus like that is also usually valuable. Of course, that's the government's decision. But what we would certainly recommend is two bigger missions, rather than three or four or five or six or seven that are smaller, where we're just below the radar scope in each but the total amount of resources is enormous. We've gone through a lot with managed readiness, with building those units and getting the people up to strength in them.

The last part I would tell you is a personal frustration. I think the vice shares it, but I won't put words in his mouth. I think that General Dempster probably does too.

I've had a personal frustration that we have conducted 100% of the Canadian Forces operations with probably just over 50% of the Canadian Forces people, and I've not had the ability to reach in and get the statistics that let me tell you that for sure. This is a bit intuitive, relies a bit on anecdotes, but I'm actually pretty solid on it from my own personal understanding of it.

One of the driving factors in our command structure that we're moving to is to enable a commander to use effectively the vast majority of the men and women routinely for the operations that we have to do. But I cannot begin to tell you how many folks I've met on operations who've said, “Gee, sir, I've been waiting to get on an operation for ten years and just haven't been able to get one”, and the next individual has said, “Gee, sir, this is my sixth mission, and my wife says that's it. When I go home, this is the last one. It's either her or the Canadian Forces, but not both”. We need to balance that part better. That's part of where we're driving in the command structure, and that's part of where we're driving in the 5,000, and how we're going to use them to not create overhead specifically.

Before I can tell you what we need in additional Canadian Forces personnel—because there will be a need for more, I'll tell you that, though—I would like to actually get a chance to implement the transformation in more detail and get that 5,000 in and the 3,000 in, and see how effectively we can use the reserve component.

In addition to the demographic changes I want in the Canadian Forces, the last part would be the component transfer piece. Right now, if you want to transfer from a reserve component to the regular force component, I think it is sometimes more difficult, because of some of the policies—I'll go to the extreme here and say that it is—than joining as a civilian directly to the regular component. If you want to retire, let's say, with 20 years of service or whenever NCOs go—enormous capability—and go to the reserve component while taking the civilian job, I think we make it more difficult to join the reserve component from the regular component than to join as a civilian.

● (1000)

We need to change that part of it. I've told ADM (HR-MIL) that if we have an application on Monday, by Friday I want the application processed and the job done. That's so we can use, sir, those 3,000 soldiers we bring in and therefore have more flexibility, and so we have the right operational tempo for men and women to balance work and family life, which is good for the long-term health of the Canadian Forces.

It's not perfect; we're not there, and we have a long way to go. We won't get there perfectly, but our intentions are honourable and we're going to address that with energy.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think that addresses it. We'll look for future troop strength additions in years to come.

Gen R.J. Hillier: You'll get them.

The Chair: That's great. I appreciate your candour. I hope whoever is on this committee will continue to be as supportive as this one has been. I know they will be.

Thank you very much.

Now it's the second round, colleagues, and I'm going to remind all of you that five minutes goes a lot faster than seven and you can't ask as many questions as in seven. I don't want to interrupt you or the witness, but they'll have to be a little shorter and a little fewer in number. We still have some important questions from colleagues, and we'll start the second round.

Five minutes, Mr. MacKenzie, please.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

General, I think you've led into what I was interested in last meeting, when we had Veterans Affairs people in.

I read a shocking number: 8,000 people having post-traumatic stress disorder. I know the difficulty in recruiting people, but if we lose them because of those kinds of situations—we've invested a great deal and we'll continue to invest—would it indicate that we're putting good people in the wrong spots? That seems to be an exceptionally high number, given our number of people.

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sorry, sir. You're asking if we're putting good people in the wrong spots?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Well, we have good people in the service, but are we putting them in the wrong places, where we're creating issues for them and they end up leaving the forces because of stress?

Gen R.J. Hillier: I'm not sure of the exact number we have now, and I know I read that number in one media article also. We have between 500 and 1,000 on the military patients holding list at any one point in time. That doesn't mean there are not more, of course, who are receiving some form of treatment.

One is one too many, first of all, and that's not what we want.

What I believe personally and what I will tell you today is that I think coming off this last decade of operations, we're paying the price for what we've asked of men and women in uniform. We had an enormous operational commitment around the world. We then ended up of course with significant domestic commitments. Whether for the G-8 summit, whether for fighting forest fires in British Columbia or fighting floods around Canada, etc., we were helping Canadians where they most definitely needed help. Given the combination of that with a downsizing of the Canadian Forces at the time, I think the burden of that, perhaps foisted unfairly on the men and women in uniform for the rest of the country, is now being felt. We definitely see a lot more cases of post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of that decade of operations.

One, we have to get to a sustainable operational tempo. That's why I believe two missions outside of the country is about right. Two, we have to flesh out those units, just as I said earlier here, so we're not taking the same soldiers and trying to put them outside of the country on the next mission up, or the one right after that, but rather are giving them some time at home to balance that work and family life. Three, we have to do the same with their leaders, because if we've stressed the soldiers and sailors and airmen and airwomen, the leaders who have responsibility for them, from whom we demand a lot, have also been significantly stressed. We have to make sure the same balance is followed in the leadership perspective here.

There's no easy answer, sir. I don't have one to give you. But it's a combination of all those things: a focus, leadership, a managed readiness that gives a reasonable balance for those families and folks, and a variety of things that are necessary to make that occur.

● (1005)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I come from another similar field, and we found the need to do proper testing before we put people in some positions. Do we do that in the military? Do we do a psychological testing profile to determine if the people we're putting into those roles are the right people? Not that there are bad people in the service, but some people are more inclined to certain areas than others.

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sir, what I would I tell you is that we've come one hell of a long way in the last three to five years in particular. We went almost from a denial that a problem existed, or just ignorance of it, through to fully grasping it in some areas and grasping it much more adequately in other areas.

We do pre-enrolment screening, of course, and there are folks who do not come through that pre-enrolment screening. In fact, one of the best days in my life, I think—dark is the cloud that doesn't have a silver lining somewhere—was that I remember hearing that the individual who killed those fourteen young ladies in Montreal had failed an enrolment screening for the Canadian Forces, so at least part of our system is working from that perspective.

We do pre-deployment screenings and preparations with post-traumatic stress disorder avoidance so as not to have it as an issue in mind before we deploy on all operations. We've started that in about the last 18 months. In fact, significantly, it was with the first deployment into Afghanistan that went under General Leslie out of Petawawa, and into the deployment that went with me.

We then follow that up with post-operational screenings in a significant way. Actually, it irritated me a little bit that I had to go into such detail to confirm for people that when I came home from an operation, I was in the same sort of frame of mind and spirit in life, if you will, as I was in before I went on that operation. But then I realized the value was there, that it wasn't just me saying that; our system actually helped walk through that.... There are a whole variety of other measures besides that to actually identify the issue and mitigate it to the extent that we possibly can, and that has included a lot of that pre-screening.

We don't specifically assess for appointments, though. I didn't get a psychological screening in order to become Chief of the Defence Staff, although now if you were asking me, maybe we could do it in arrears.

But we do it, sir, for the operational perspective, with that very real focus of looking after men and women as our goal.

● (1010)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: The other issue is that last week, I think, the Americans made some announcements that they were greatly cutting back, or at least planned to cut back, on their bases in the U. S.

What effect does that have on us? We may or may not have been relying on them for some things, and if they start to cut back, does it put...?

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sir, on the base side, I would say it's not going to have any visible effect on what they do down there. I had an opportunity to talk to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with the commandant of the Marine Corps, on our defence policy and the Canadian Forces vision. As has always been the case, I will tell you, when I personally have dealt with the United States armed forces' chain of command, their response was hugely positive towards our Canadian Forces vision. In fact, they thought it might be a model for many of the European countries to perhaps look at and see if they could find value in it.

At the end of it, they said, we've done many things in our lives.... The commandant of the Marine Corps said to me they'd made every mistake there is to make on amphibious operations; if we'd like to learn from some of those, they're prepared to assist us completely. The chairman and the joint chiefs together said whatever help we need to implement this, we have but to ask.

I don't think their closing bases would do anything but make that help actually more available, because it will allow them to use more resources at the operational end of the stick. I don't want to go to them, though, with my hand out. I want to come to them as an equal military partner—yes, we're smaller; that's normal, but I want to come with a professionalism and with capability and with our brigade combat teams, with our standing contingency task force, with all the pieces that we've put together. I want to come to them as an equal professional partner in operations, not with our hand out.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think it's our opinion, and the opinion of Canadians, that you are an equal military partner with your American counterparts. It's a personal view.

Mr. Martin is next, please, for five minutes.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): General, thank you very much for being here, and Admiral Buck, and General Dempster.

It probably comes as no surprise, General, that members of Parliament don't get psych assessments, either, before we get these jobs.

General Dempster, I understand you're retiring. Is that true?

MGen Doug L. Dempster (Director General, Strategic Planning, Department of National Defence): Yes, it is.

Hon. Keith Martin: I'd like to thank you very much for the service you've given to our country.

Gen R.J. Hillier: Absolutely.

Hon. Keith Martin: It's well deserved. You've done a yeoman job under challenging circumstances, and we thank you.

General Hillier, I have a couple of points. Concerning retention, I hope there's going to be a formal process whereby we can formally ask individuals who are leaving the service why they're leaving, that cohort we want to keep, and also whereby we can encourage them either to stay or to join the reserves so their expertise can remain with us.

The second point I wanted to make is to congratulate you on the training of physician's assistants and the upgrading of their skills. That will be very important for deployments in the field.

My question regards your return from the Sudan. I think this is a topic all of us are very interested in. I was there a few years ago, and it was my assessment that the government in Khartoum would have no interest, really, in stopping the killing in Darfur. They're playing the peace treaty off in the south with the situation in Darfur. The AU force that's there right now is an observer force, and you get this Rwandan déjà vu going on again. What, sir, would it require for the international community to have a stabilization force in Darfur with the robust rules of engagement, a chapter 7, that would enable that force to really stop the killings, torture, and rape from occurring?

Thank you.

And if it veers of into the foreign policy elements, I understand that you won't be able to answer that.

Gen R.J. Hillier: I'd be delighted to answer it and talk to it, Dr. Martin, but it certainly wouldn't be taken as the appropriate response.

Let me just comment on the first point you made, sir. We do exit surveys of people leaving the Canadian Forces. I have a little bit of frustration, as we've never done that in a systematic manner. We don't actively encourage NCOs or officers who are leaving a regular component to consider a reserve component as a viable option, and then actually link them right up with a unit in the area where they might be going, to make it easy for them and to facilitate that part. That's a part that I'd like to get much better.

We do exit surveys. I'm not sure how honest people are when they depart the Canadian Forces about their reasons for going, but we do get what they tell us. Our attrition rate right now is just over 6%—6.2% or something like that, if I recall—which is actually probably pretty healthy. Less than that is good from the point of view of saving dollars, but youth is our lifeblood, it truly is, and we need an attrition rate. This is not age discrimination; this is a simple statement of fact. This is a tough business. There are times in January and February when I actually appreciate a posting to National Defence Headquarters because I know how tough it is in the field when it's minus 25 degrees Celsius or minus 30 degrees Celsius here.

But we do follow up on why people leave. We do look at that very closely. I think part of the reason our attrition rate is still very reasonable is some of the things we do. We do have to actually steer people a little bit more proactively to that reserve component, that reserve unit, the specific contact, and do the link-up and encourage people at least to consider it, and make it easy for them to make a decision after consideration. That we don't do well yet, I'll tell you that.

On the Sudan thing, sir, what it takes to put a chapter 7 force in place is pretty simple. It takes a group of nations, led by one or two nations or a multinational institution, with the capability to put 50,000 to 70,000 soldiers on the ground, with all the bits and pieces to do a peace enforcement mission and with all the capabilities necessary to do it. But what it takes to have success with that mission is entirely different. It has nothing to do with soldiers; it has everything to do with political will.

As for what I saw in Darfur, the question I asked was, what are we actually working to achieve here? Unless there is a political agreement, a political settlement, either negotiated or imposed, what actually are you asking soldiers—men and women in uniform—on the ground to do, to work towards, every single day that they are there? Or do you just go in and expect that you're going to be there forever, until the thing either gets worse or better of its own accord.

One of the things that I believe, as soldiers, we hold you accountable for is setting a chance for success before we go in here. That means that in a place like Darfur, and not just exclusive to it, you have to have some reasonable expectation that there's a negotiated peace, that there's an end state for Darfur that is clearly accepted by the players there, and therefore all your activities can be generated towards getting to that end state. Right now there is no political end state. Negotiations have been somewhat intermittent. Until that part is solved, I don't think the kind of force that you need to go in and do something is simply possible.

So what you do in the short term is enable the African Union, which is doing very good work on the ground. I saw some of it myself. Where they are physically located and in the area immediately around them, there has been a significant improvement in the security situation. If you can enable them to be located in greater numbers in more spots and enable them to extend from each of their locations to base locations further out, that would obviously lend itself towards increasing security and stability throughout the region of Darfur.

It is a tough job, though. The place is the size of France. There is no infrastructure. There are a lot of weapons flowing around. Unfortunately, it's not constrained by an ocean, so weapons can flow across any of the numerous boundaries and borders that are around Sudan or Darfur itself. You must have a political settlement, sir. If you don't, you're not working towards anything that's going to be lasting. All you're going to do is put yourself in the middle of something that will quickly become a downward spiral. You have to either have something or impose something, and I think the latter is unrealistic.

● (1015)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bachand, for five minutes.

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

The Minister did invite the party critics to his office several minutes before the defence policy was unveiled. I for one found the policy to be quite ambitious. At one point, we even wondered if we could afford to achieve the policy's objectives. My question for you, General, concerns this very policy. We've already been informed that a capabilities document is to be released shortly. I'd like to hear your comments on that subject.

On several occasions, you talked about the importance of having helicopters on site during operations, among other things, to transport troops. Mention was also made, in reference to strategic and tactical transport, of the famous striker and to fixed-wing aircraft. In other words, when formulating a defence policy, it is critical to have the necessary equipment to implement that policy. I'd like you to give me an overview of the type of equipment that we already have and of what we need.

Will the Standing Committee on National Defence be consulted about the paper and the issue of capabilities? This is a weighty issue that could prove costly. If we want to have a policy in place, we need the resources and means to implement it. Can you give us an overview of the equipment and material lacking to bring this policy statement to fruition?

[*English*]

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sir, I think the document you referred to is the capabilities document. We are laying the groundwork to start building right now. We're not building it yet. We have, first of all, to determine the details around the Canadian Forces transformation in order to implement that defence policy, so we have some work to do there. Then we build the capabilities required to allow us in the Canadian Forces to be able to implement that defence policy. So we're still some months away from that.

As a result, I can't tell you what amount of money it's going to cost to complete the Canadian Forces transformation to be able to implement that defence policy. We have enough to start. I can tell you that because we're starting it right now. Once we develop the capabilities document and publish it, that will allow a determination of the costs to be done and a comparison to be done against what has been committed in the budgetary process, sir.

I invite this committee to assist in determining what the cost of Canadian Forces transformation is at that point in time here. We're doing that as quickly as we can, but I'll again remind folks here at the committee, it's not because of lack of desire to get on with things right away, but because we're also running the Canadian Forces on a daily basis while trying to transform. It's going to take us a while to get the capabilities document laid out, but we are going to do it and we are going to get it laid out and published. That will allow us, then, to specifically determine the cost of the transformation of the Canadian Forces itself.

Sir, some quick "ifs", some of which we referred to in the defence policy itself. We need a medium- to heavy-lift helicopter. We know from the operation that we've all learned seven to ten million personal lessons, as I've mentioned to you. At the operational end, we need tactical agility to move men and women, with their accompanying personal equipment and weapons, from one point to another very quickly in significantly large numbers, no matter if it's very hot with high temperatures or if you're launching from a very high altitude, such as Kabul at 6,000-plus feet.

So we need to get something, because any operations that we do internationally or, indeed, domestically require that kind of capability. The general requirement is that we need a helicopter that can lift a platoon of men and women, somewhere around 30 to 33 men and women with their weapons and ancillary kit, and lift them at altitude in high temperatures, and lift them a good long distance. On the last part, I don't know exactly what I'm saying when I say "a good long distance", but we'll get there and define that too.

Second, we set up the standing contingency task force, and truly this is an international direction that countries are going in, including Australia, the Netherlands, the Spanish, and the Italians. This involves the development of a moderate amphibious capability, a standing contingency task force with air, land, and sea elements that are sea-based. We need to walk through very carefully what we need to be able to do that, to be able to take a light task force of about 800 soldiers, deploy it by sea, stand it off a coast, or a country, or a region, be able to help them train, help them work up or go ashore and conduct operations while being commanded, controlled, sustained, and supported from that sea-based task group, with some aviation assets as part of that. We need to walk through very carefully what we're going to need in the way of joint support in detail to allow us to execute that kind of operation itself.

We know that on the transport piece, we're going to have to invest some money. Our C-130 fleet and the Airbus fleet are doing yeoman service right now. The C-130 fleet, of course.... I flew in an aircraft going into Afghanistan three weeks ago, and this aircraft was built in 1964. By my calculations, after talking to the crew, it had spent three and a half years airborne in its life, and that's a long period of time. We're going to have to invest some money in the air transport. What we're doing right now is walking through the detailed options that I can bring forward to the minister and say, here is the best way to get the bang for the buck on the transport side of the house here.

Sir, all I can tell you is we're walking through those issues. I have one full team right now that's focused on the capabilities required to implement that defence policy, and they're walking through a process that lays out those capabilities from highest priority down to those that are not required. That may allow us to divest ourselves of some capabilities that we don't need and therefore use money where we need it most.

But I would say heavy-lift helicopters are absolutely the key essential enabler to successful operations tactically.

● (1020)

The Chair: Thank you, General, and Mr. Bachand.

Now, Mr. Rota, please, five minutes.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): What worries me is when I start hearing about the Americans closing down bases. We had someone in a while back; I believe it was with the veterans' groups. We used to talk about bases being a familiar site within many Canadian communities, about the military being familiar with a lot of the community. We used to create a relationship there with a lot of Canadians so that when they saw a uniform, they saw a military person, and there was a comfort there.

When I look at the centralization of command, I agree with the centralization of command. It's the right way to go. What worries me is that the centralization of the forces is to follow. When I see something like that as a possibility, I start worrying about the PR war that's out there, where we have a strong military, but they're all in one place. Canada is a huge country. We talk about European countries possibly centralizing, but they're smaller countries, they're not Canada.

My concern is how much importance you are putting into keeping a military presence in the communities across Canada—for two reasons. One, you have the centralized command. Again, you have to be able to deploy them with one central knowledge base; that's important, but being able to get them out in time....

So there are two questions. The first, I think, you touched on earlier. As far as getting them out to the location is concerned, I think you covered that. Perhaps you want to add a few more details there. Again, the second is keeping them out there more for a PR reason, and getting people familiar with the military, having them feel comfortable with the military, so that when they see someone in a uniform it's not this person from afar, it's someone from near home.

● (1025)

Gen R.J. Hillier: That is fundamentally important to us, being linked to Canadians. If Canadians are not linked to us any more than they are now.... I made a reference to this a little earlier on. I believe we're far better off from the point of view of having that link with Canadians than we were six, seven, or eight years ago. We need to continue to build on that, because if Canadians don't see us as their Canadian Forces and don't take pride in ownership of us, because we are theirs, then we will fail. We won't get the recruits, we won't get the support, and we won't get the blessing of Canadians to do all the things we have done, we will do, and we are doing now on their behalf. Being connected to Canadians is a fundamental part of everything we do—absolutely fundamental.

The command and control structure will not change, except in a positive way, I think—our link to Canadians. It's not going to suck a whole lot of things toward any one spot. As the VCDS and I were speaking about earlier, I want to move some of the things that are actually wrapped in around NDHQ into some of those headquarters, and give the right command structure the ability to use and to command and control and employ our operational units much better.

On the military bases across Canada, we have a lot. Every dollar we spend on infrastructure and on people maintaining infrastructure and base structures, every dollar we spend on something that we absolutely don't need is a dollar we don't have to spend on operational units that can truly move to help Canadians when they need help or else can directly help Canadians by increasing the stability abroad. So there is a balance to be found.

I've been travelling the country visiting those Canadian Forces men and women at their bases over these past months. In fact, yesterday I got back from a visit to Cold Lake, Alberta, and Regina, of course, as part of the royal visit, but also I had an opportunity to see the reserve component, the 38 Canadian Brigade. A lot of these units are located in and around that area, in Moose Jaw itself. We continue to understand that we need to have a footprint across Canada, first of all, for responses domestically, for operations quickly. That's why Shilo is maintained in the region where it is, in Manitoba; that's why, of course, we are spread across the country.

What we need—and this is a next-level-down task that we've not gotten to yet—is Canadian Forces transformation. We need to get enough definition of the structure and the capabilities and the units required and the changes that would take place for those units to be capable of implementing our defence policy. Then we need to compare that to our present infrastructure, and then make a set of recommendations, not one and then another and another, but a set of recommendations to balance the infrastructure we have across our country against what the newly transformed Canadian Forces would need. I actually think we're 18 months away from being able to do that.

I would simply say there's a balance between maintaining the infrastructure so we're visible and spending the dollars to maintain an infrastructure that probably we could do without or we could maintain in a more efficient manner. A balance is something we seek every single day.

Vice-Admiral Buck, do you want to pile onto this one, from the navy perspective?

VAdm R.D. Buck: No, that's exactly right. Certainly from a reserve component perspective, there clearly needs to be a footprint across the country and in the major urban centres. That's an area, frankly, where we need your help, because often when it comes down to a debate about a new reserve unit or something else, the push—generally speaking—for commercial reasons is to push it away, take it away, put it somewhere out of the urban area.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Whitehorse.

VAdm R.D. Buck: Frankly, it'll happen in this city soon, as we try to reinvigorate the reserve facilities. But it is a balance, particularly as we look at the operational capability through the lens of Canada Command, and at being able to provide the best effect to deal with the threats we're facing. That will allow us in our major infrastructure pieces to be able to make appropriate recommendations about what works best and where it should be. As the chief has said, that's probably at least 18 months away.

● (1030)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Gallant, please, five minutes.

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

The federal government has committed helicopters to the cause in Sudan. There have been concerns regarding the mechanical problems that were encountered in Somalia. Have the mechanical problems, which resulted from being in that type of climate, been fixed on these helicopters? If we're sending Griffon helicopters, what about these cracks in the tail rotors that they haven't seemed to find the cause for?

Last, based on the threat analysis here at home, if that number of helicopters are deployed, in your opinion, are we sufficiently covered at home for any domestic occurrences that may arise?

Gen R.J. Hillier: There is no concern. Certainly when I came back, my recommendation, as option one, in fact, for the helicopters to be committed was for leased helicopters from the former Warsaw Pact countries. I believe actually they're from the Ukraine, but I'm not aware of all the details on the contracting. The helicopters committed are former Warsaw Pact Mi-8 helicopters, of which 15 right now exist inside of Darfur and support the mission on a daily basis, flown by civilian contractor pilots and aircrews. They do a superb job. They fly those machines superbly. As I mentioned, they are probably the greatest enabler for the force right now. So we have no intention of deploying Canadian Forces helicopters there.

In fact, given the temperatures and the altitudes in Darfur, the Griffon helicopter would not be a fit for that environment. We simply couldn't use it to give us the capabilities that are needed there. So in fact the helicopters are chartered or leased helicopters. It's an excellent fit. It does the job well. My recommendation was to increase the number, and that's part of what the package enables.

You do bring up a good issue of the coverage at home here. When we had some teething problems as a result of the introduction of the Cormorant fleet—some cracking—and we were very carefully walking through what was the cause, working with the company to make sure it was rectified, etc., we in fact went to great extremes to make sure that where we had aircraft down for inspections and/or maintenance, we had coverage in the areas by double-banking Sea King helicopters, by Griffon helicopters, or by fixed-wing assets to make sure, for example, that search and rescue operations could all be conducted without any reduction in the standard, and that we were also prepared to conduct domestic operations here outside of search and rescue if the need arose.

So we actually went through a significant planning process to make sure we had it covered off.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

Today in the news there's a bit of a concern in the States with the role of women in their military. Would you be able to compare and contrast our policies in terms of women in the military versus our U. S. counterparts?

Gen R.J. Hillier: The great thing about where we are right now—and I'm not satisfied on demographics, etc.—is the fact that it's normal. It's not even a discussion issue from the point of view of having a woman commanding or not having a woman commanding or having women in combat units. In the kind of missions that we will deploy to and are in right now in the international environment, every single man or woman on the ground is in a combatant role. There is no such thing as a rear echelon or people out of the danger zone. I think that's proven in every operation. In Kabul, I explained this to the men and women who went there, or are presently there. I said, you're living among a population of four million people. Out of that population, 25 to 50 want to kill you. About 50 to 100 would help that 25 to 50 kill you. But the remaining four million are delighted that you are there. You're living among them, so just make sure you treat the four million like they're four million, and don't treat them all like the 25 to 50 who you think might want to kill you, because you'll piss them off in a hurry and they will want to hurt you.

The point is that in our contingent, in the contingent over this past year and a half, there have been women deployed as a normal part of our operations. They are in the middle of an operational theatre. They are in exactly the same danger as an infantry man or woman out on patrol, whether they do signals work, do resupply, run convoys from the airport to our camps or to our troops out in the boat. There is no such thing as a rear echelon anymore. I think we've gone through it. The numbers still are not where we want them to be, and there are some things that we want to approach in a very dynamic way. This goes back to my discussion on the demographics a little earlier, which includes women. The great thing is that it's normal. We've got women commanding.

Yesterday in Regina I met...was it the coxswain?

● (1035)

VAdm R.D. Buck: The coxswain.

Gen R.J. Hillier: In army terms, the RSM of the HMCS *Regina*—

VAdm R.D. Buck: The coxswain.

Gen R.J. Hillier: —Chief Petty Officer Davis, who happens to be female. You know, the great thing about it was there she was, with her crew, representing us in the city, and it was magnificent because it was normal.

I think our policies are superb. It gives us the ability to use Canadians and have them serve their country, which is a thing that I think is very popular.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On the part of the first nations and the Métis, there are some who would like to see a regiment primarily of first nations and Métis. Is there any strategic reason to have such a regiment?

Gen R.J. Hillier: I can't think of one at this point in time, beyond that fact that we're going to have to make sure the Canadian Forces represent our population. As we look forward over the next 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25 years to see how we can be all-inclusive, there are things we're going to have to walk through and be prepared to accept—novel ways of doing things here—to make sure we attract people from right across the diversity of the Canadian spectrum.

Strategically, for operational perspectives, I cannot think of a reason that would lead us down that road. What we'll need to do is go down a road of being successful and attracting and recruiting, and then retaining, which is equally important, of course, and very difficult for some of the ethnic minorities. That's the road we have to go down, because it simply is right, as opposed to a strategic operational region.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

I'm going to give an opportunity to two colleagues, and then I think we'll be finished. First is Ms. Longfield, and then I'll see if Ms. Hinton has questions.

Ms. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Oshawa, Lib.): Thank you, General Hillier and Admiral Buck.

With respect to the two missions abroad in which you said you wanted to be larger and more focused, do you see us operating in support of UN, NATO, or other coalition operations? Where do you see us fitting in?

Also, there's talk about establishing criteria for actually how we make that commitment. Do you see any problems with it, anything that needs to be streamlined?

The final one has to do with visibility. When Mr. Rota was talking about the reserves, it came to mind that too many years ago, when I was much younger, it wasn't uncommon to see cadet corps in almost every high school across the country. That was one way of introducing young people to the possibility of a career in the forces, but it also added to visibility. I'm wondering if there's something we can do to look at the establishment and the maintenance of cadet corps across the country.

Gen R.J. Hillier: Thank you for those points. Actually, there are a couple of my pet hobby horses right there.

Truly, on the mission side, what I believe is that we will always be part of a multinational operation. I cannot see, for the life of me, any uniquely Canadian operations anywhere, and indeed, when you're on a multinational operation these days you are never conducting even tactical operations as a solely Canadian unit.

In fact, we did quite literally hundreds of tactical operations when I was commander of ISAF, and every one of those operations had a minimum of eight different countries participating, so the interoperability aspects of it were absolutely fundamental and key to success, one way or the other.

It actually doesn't matter, I guess, from the perspective of the operation; you have to have interoperability. You have to have the confidence and the ability to be able to operate in a multinational environment that is in the public eye, that is in an unstable region, and that is also in the context of a multi-agency environment.

In Afghanistan, we said there was one country, seven bordering partners who significantly played, two military missions, one elected government, a United Nations mission, 28,000 men and women in uniform in the two military missions, and 1,005 international and non-governmental organizations. That's the multinational environment in which we worked.

In this case, it was a United Nations-sanctioned mission being executed by NATO in which we participated. In other places, we participate directly in a United Nations mission, the United Nations mission in Sudan being a case in point.

I think those are the favoured partners. Will there be other multinational institutions that are put together for a specific job? Probably yes, and we just need to make sure that with the key shakers and movers we are interoperable, and that we train, educate, and give experience to our leaders and soldiers and sailors and airmen and airwomen to be able to do that comfortably.

Actually, I think we have stronger characteristics that way than almost any other nation. The United Kingdom a little bit, Australia a little bit, and the United States a little bit are perhaps in the same category with us, but we have some capabilities here.

Going back to the first question, I also think, though, that as we move forward through the implementation of the defence policy we need to work hard to try to develop a lead nation capability for Canada, so that we are not always just a contributing partner to some of these multinational operations but also, for the appropriate mission in the appropriate place, able to take the lead nation status. Right now we don't have those capabilities developed, either the military or the context-setting ones.

Concerning the visibility part and cadet corps, I actually believe the cadet movement in Canada is probably our best Canadian institution. It's magnificent. It must have been a decade and a half ago that we moved it out of the school-based program, which I actually thought at the time was wrong, but there we are; we're past that. I just think we need to reinforce it at every opportunity. We have a great institution in place there in that cadet movement.

My youngest son came through that program for six years, but he also participated in the junior ROTC program in the United States of America, which is school-based, and I got to see the powerful advantages of that school-based program, because it attracted many more kids to participate.

I think we're past that, unfortunately. I don't think there is an appetite across Canada, in schools or educational institutes, to re-engage with the cadet movement. But basing it on the Department of National Defence, somewhat informally on the Royal Canadian Legion, who support many of our corps across the country, whether that's the navy or air or army cadet leagues? I think simple reinforcement of what a great program this is, of the fact that we fund it significantly from the Government of Canada, as you know, and the fact that it does make young men and women better Canadians.... We're not after the recruiting pool; that's just bonus stuff. It actually does great things for developing young Canadians.

On the third point, concerning criteria, I'm sorry, I missed what your focus was. I apologize.

● (1040)

Hon. Judi Longfield: The policy statement indicates that there need to be criteria for how we make a determination about where we're going to deploy, and I'm wondering if you see anything that needs to be beefed up. How are we going to make these decisions?

Gen R.J. Hillier: I think that's a whole-of-government approach, if you will, as opposed to a Defence one specifically, with a Defence series of recommendations and options that might or might not be practical and pragmatic and therefore lead to whether or not we should be a part of a mission somewhere.

I think that's probably all I would say on that one. My own—

Hon. Judi Longfield: I guess I want to know whether you feel integrated enough. It's often Foreign Affairs that makes the determination about where we're going to go, and then you just have to—

Gen R.J. Hillier: In my very limited time—I'm still the new Chief of the Defence Staff, as Mr. O'Brien said earlier—I have been absolutely delighted with the integration. I've had the opportunity to get to know a lot of people at Foreign Affairs, as Admiral Buck and of course DGSP General Dempster have. I had the opportunity to do that over operations over these last three or four years, and the working relationship with them has been superb.

Therefore, integrated in the decision-making, we offer a military perspective—that's our business to do—and offer our recommendations to our minister and to Foreign Affairs as part of the normal staff coming together. Do we feel integrated in that assessment? Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Longfield.

The last opportunity is to Mrs. Hinton, if you have any questions.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Well, it'll be a very easy close for you, General Hillier. And thank you very much for appearing today.

We have cadet corps, by the way, in my riding. We have very strong cadet corps for all disciplines, and we also have the Rocky Mountain Rangers, who do a fantastic job.

The question I'm going to ask—oh, I'm sorry, I should say to my friend Mr. Bagnell that we're a desert climate as well, so I think we probably have a foot up on Yellowknife. Most of the hot spots in the world are desert climates.

On the training centre—this is based on what you've been saying today—you're saying you wanted to see training centres that were closer to home for the benefit of those who are being recruited. We had a training centre—not in my riding, but in the riding adjacent to me, in Vernon—which was shut down. In an ideal world, is it fair to say you'd like to see those sorts of training centres reopened?

Gen R.J. Hillier: No.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: No?

Gen R.J. Hillier: I would not, and here's why. What I want to do on the training centres for kids.... One of the things we found, particularly in recruiting the ethnic minorities, is that they don't want necessarily to leave that extended family location, and what we want to be able to say to them is, look, if you join, you're going to go right here, so you're going to be this close, and you'll know that beforehand. Maybe with that in hand, we can help influence them towards considering us as one of the options, whereas in the past they have not done that.

What we need to do is make sure those training centres are, in every case possible, co-located where the majority of units are. Otherwise, what occurs is—I'll use Petawawa as a great example here—we'd get a unit ready to go on operations. They take six to nine months to do their workups. They start training young kids as drivers of vehicles, then gunners, and then bring them all together to work as a crew. Then it's platoon and then company and then battalion. That takes six months minimum. It's usually six to nine months of hard work. Much of that time is spent in the field. Then they deploy on operations anywhere from six to nine months. We've been generally six months, but in truth we need to have a bit more flexibility in that for operational success and operational reasons. Then they deploy. Then they come back home, they have a little bit of leave, and then they start their process of training one more time. Eventually they come back to operational readiness and get ready to go back into the hopper to go on operations again.

If their training areas are located far from home during those six to nine months while they're training for the operation, they will spend three to six months away from home. Then they'll get home for a couple of weeks after that train-up. Then they'll deploy on a six-month operation or seven-month operation and then they'll come home. Now they've been away not six months on an operation, but actually 10 to 12 months, for operations and training. Actually, when you talk to the men and women, they say, sir, it's not the operation that's challenging, it's the train-up and work to it, because we're actually better supported when we're in Afghanistan or anywhere else than we are when we're away training. They have more access to Internet and more access to phone calls, etc.

Therefore, we want to shape locations of men and women in uniform as carefully as we can with the capacity to train right there, except for very specific things they deploy to do for short, concentrated periods of time. Really, I need training areas, but I need them where we have the majority of the men and women who are in uniform and training.

● (1045)

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Well, then, can you give me an example of where you would think an ideal location might be on the west coast?

Gen R.J. Hillier: Wainwright. I don't say that facetiously. Yes, there is a need. We have a reserve brigade, of course, in British Columbia. We need to have a local training area right there for them, because they're not going to be going away from home for long distances.

But when we do the operational readiness, bringing units together right across the army to train for operations, then it is Wainwright, Alberta, for example, from the army perspective, and Cold Lake, Alberta, from the air force perspective. The ability to mix those two is fundamental, as is being located close to large numbers of men and women in uniform so their time away from home, their travel time, the resultant costs, and, therefore, the deflection of dollars for operations into administrative travel back and forth are all reduced to the absolute minimum from that perspective.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I haven't a problem with Alberta, but I think B.C. has an awful lot to offer. Maybe Vice-Admiral Buck might have a different point of view from the navy perspective.

Gen R.J. Hillier: I'll give the vice the chance to say what he sees on this one completely, obviously. From the navy's perspective, from the maritime perspective, since most of the men and women in the navy are located in Esquimalt on the west coast, that is the place where you want to be able to commence your training, and do as much of it as possible around that area.

Go ahead, Vice, please.

VAdm R.D. Buck: When I joined the navy, there was an adage that you trained on the west coast and you operated on the east coast.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

VAdm R.D. Buck: No, that's true. In 1997, I was sent to the west coast as a commodore. I was a commodore for one year, and then I became the admiral on the west coast. My mission in life was to turn the west coast into an equal operational partner to the east coast. We did that and will continue to maintain it. We are in fact a three-ocean country, not just two oceans, and we have some challenges. The thought that you can only have interests, particularly on the maritime side, in one part of the country doesn't work.

As it relates to the land force, though, one of the other issues and one of my responsibilities as Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff is that I have to worry about the dollars—which I hope, ladies and gentlemen, you have a good day with, because I'm looking forward to some dollars so we can do some of the things we've been talking about.

But certainly as it relates to the land force and the training areas, you actually as well have to size your capacity for the size of the force, and in that particular context we are about right. So building incremental training areas that would not be fully utilized would not, from my perspective, necessarily be the best use of resources.

● (1050)

The Chair: Thank you. Mrs. Hinton. That was very interesting.

Before I see whether General Hillier has a final comment, as Mr. Martin alluded to General Dempster's being about to retire, I want, on behalf of this committee and the Government of Canada, the Parliament of Canada, all parliamentarians—and indeed, speaking for all Canadians—to thank you very much for your great service to the country. I think we have to take every opportunity we have—and I can tell you that most of us as parliamentarians do take every opportunity in our various situations—to try to recognize and thank the men and women of the Canadian Forces.

I agree with General Hillier; I think there's been a significantly important change in the respect for the Canadian Forces among the Canadian public. I've seen it as a member of Parliament, and I'm proud of it.

So we want to thank you very much, General Dempster, and if it's all right, if you have a comment you'd like to make, I'll give you that opportunity now. Then I'm going to go to General Hillier to close up. But thank you very much, sir, for your service.

If you'd like to say anything, you're welcome.

MGen Doug L. Dempster: I will make a very short comment.

I was promoted to be a general officer seven years ago and have spent six of my last seven years in the central corporate staff in Defence, setting strategy and capability and working those issues, and a brief time as deputy army commander.

When I compare where we were in 1998, at the time you released your quality of life report and it was being implemented, to today in 2005, there's been a huge sea change. I think many stakeholders—many Canadians, and of course this committee—have played a vital role in moving us from where we were in 1998 to where are in 2005.

Of course, through those seven years we had 9/11, which I think was a wake-up call, but I think it was not only the wake-up call. Just the condition of the forces was, in your eyes, an important issue that you dealt with and continue to deal with.

I would say the forces are still not completely healthy, in my assessment. There is much more to do. We have an industrial- or agricultural-age HR system; we have equipment rust-out; we have infrastructure that is clearly dated; we have malpositioning of many issues. But all that being said, we're infinitely better off today than we were in 1998, and I thank you for your support.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your kind words. We want to wish you the very best as you move into the next phase of your life.

We want to certainly thank General Hillier and Admiral Buck for being here, for your candour. Your professionalism, as I'm sure you can see, is highly valued by this committee and the Parliament of Canada.

General, let me give you the final word, if you have anything you'd like to finish with.

Gen R.J. Hillier: Sir, I'll try to be really short here, and it won't even be on the subjects we talked about; it will be on this last subject.

In 1998 I was a brigade commander in Petawawa, and we rolled here to Ottawa in the middle of the night for the ice storm. We were at such a low ebb in public opinion and confidence in dealing with the public at that point that we had a major crisis in confidence when I had said we had 950 soldiers on the way, and some reporter was quoting back to me that the minister had said we had 972 on the way, and why the great discrepancy? I said, “Jesus, I don't even know how many we have in the brigade, let alone how many are on the way to Ottawa." That was a crisis in confidence. That's how low we were at that point in time, and I experienced it directly, as Doug just said.

Thank you for what you just said to Doug Dempster, a superb officer who has served his country admirably. We know he will continue to do that, in or out of uniform.

I am the champion of Canadian soldiers, sailors, airmen, and airwomen. Not only is that my appointment, but it's my calling in life, and I love it. But in order to have the great soldiers, sailors, airmen, and airwomen that we have, you have to have some pretty damn fine leaders also, and for too long we have tended to abuse those leaders. What we demand these days from our general officers, our senior colonels, our senior chief warrant officers, our RSM appointments, etc., is absolutely unbelievable and incredible.

What they give us—men and women alike in those appointments and grades—is also absolutely incredible and sometimes unbelievable. They serve our country well, and because of them, we get to utilize the great characteristics of the men and women who are the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and airwomen to the great benefit of the other 32 million Canadians. We need to appreciate more often what we demand from those leaders, and what great things they give us also.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We certainly second those sentiments. You have our full commitment to try to address exactly those points. Thank you very much.

As we excuse our witnesses, we have just about three minutes of committee business to clean up.

Thank you again, gentlemen, very much.

● (1055)

Gen R.J. Hillier: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

The Chair: Okay, let's continue.

Judi.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I thought I would mention this, because we really aren't often able to thank people for doing something expeditiously.

When Jack Stagg was before committee the other day with the minister, I slipped him a little note indicating that I had just recently been at a Veterans Affairs presentation in my riding and the RCMP officer who was standing beside me had said, “Oh, you've got your veteran's pin”, and said they'd been given permission to wear them, but unfortunately, they don't have them, and they were told they might not have them until after Canada Day. So I slipped a little note to the deputy. He has just e-mailed me to say that 30,000 of those pins have been dispatched to RCMP detachments all over Canada.

I think it's indicative of just how in tune they now are. As I say, that was Tuesday and today those are out.

I just thought this committee should know, and maybe if you see Jack Stagg, on behalf of us....

Hon. Judi Longfield: Apparently the legions have been giving them out.

The Chair: Good. Sometimes they hoard some stuff too.

Hon. Judi Longfield: But we are sending it specifically to them.

The Chair: That's good. I think we do need to thank people a little more than sometimes we do around here.

I'm glad, Keith.... I was not aware, frankly, that General Dempster was retiring. So I hope you didn't mind the comments, but I thought they were appropriate.

There are just two or three things. You should have got a couple of voluminous binders to your office through the clerk. Does everybody have those two big binders? Good.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Angela Crandall): In terms of the brief, the board report, which was sent out last week....

The Chair: Yes, the big board report in a binder now came. The naval inquiry binder and then the other one was—

The Clerk: It was sent out yesterday morning.

The Chair: And it was about...?

The Clerk: It's a binder that Joe put together.

The Chair: Joe, do you want to say something on it?

Mr. Joseph Culligan (Consultant, Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs): It's intended as a bit of a backgrounder, a series of documents. Essentially those documents are only a little taste—executive summaries or some key bits from the documents. There are things that have been used over the past few years; some things that are absolutely current; a document, "Strategy 2020", which is the basic vision document that's been in use for about five years—General Dempster told me this morning they're in the process of splitting that into two, revising and bringing it up-to-date; a PowerPoint presentation that the CDS uses; the "Strategic Capabilities Investment Plan", which is the key equipment procurement document; and a number of others like that.

The binder is designed so we can add to it later. For example, at the beginning of June we would hope to have a seminar for the Australian High Commissioner and we can add some of the key Australian documents. They are not the complete document; they're an outline.

● (1100)

The Chair: I want to thank you, Joe, for doing that.

As he says, it's a start and we'll want to add to it. If you're new on the committee—and General Dempster made reference to this—if you haven't got a copy of the quality of life report, you should. It was one of the pieces of work I'm proudest to have been part of. The troops really did the report, and it's something that, for a change, didn't sit on a shelf and gather dust. They've actually started to implement it. It started to turn a bit of a corner, I think, on the wake-up call of the state of the forces in this place.

Also, if you haven't looked at the major procurement study this committee did in 2000, I think the clerk has provided copies. That'll be very important work for this committee as we go into the defence review. That's the first part.

The second thing is that I maybe misread the minister's letter, or I didn't read it carefully enough. If they couldn't provide an unedited copy of the naval inquiry report, which the minister has explained he cannot and will not provide because of the legislation under which he has to operate, we then asked for at least an in camera briefing. I thought he was saying yes, but he was really saying in that letter that somebody would come and explain why they can't give us the unedited copy. We want a briefing—an in camera briefing, at least. We want to make that request. Am I correct?

Can you report on that, Angela?

The Clerk: That's what I took from the meeting last day, that the committee wanted an in camera briefing on the uncensored report. I made a request through the parliamentary liaison person and I had asked to get some feedback by today. I haven't heard yet, because we've been in committee. I asked for that on the 31st. So we'll have some information, hopefully, by the end of the day today.

The Chair: Go ahead, Gordon.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): My understanding is that Parliament is not subject to these acts. We are not subject to these acts and we can demand these documents. We're not talking about being crass and letting this information around. An in camera session will be fine. They can take the documents away. But we're not subject to this, and we are Parliament. The damn departments had better start responding, or else.

The Chair: You've raised a good point. I think you may have had to leave the committee for other duties on the other day when this came up. There is a precedent to demanding this kind of information. We discussed it at committee. There was censored information that was successfully challenged in the past. The parliamentary committee did get access to the uncensored information.

I'll just put it this way. We're asking for at least the in camera briefing if the answer to the first request was no. Maybe the answer to that is going to be no. The third point you see there—and then I'll go to Keith—is that very thing.

Let me go to Keith now. We could still pursue it, as you're saying. We're not going to accept the answer the minister has given us.

Let me go to Keith and then we'll look at this point.

Hon. Keith Martin: It's really, again, along the lines of Gordon's, a bit of a technical question, Angela.

Are we asking for the censored material to be available to the members of the committee in an in camera meeting, or are we asking for a person to come up to explain to the committee why the censored information is unavailable? If it's the latter, then I would completely support that. If it was the former, then I'll vehemently oppose that. As I said in the last meeting, it would be equivalent to having the health records of anybody in this committee sent to the health committee to take a look at in camera and collected.

Sorry, Gordon, I just wanted to finish.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: Absolutely.

Hon. Keith Martin: That would be the equivalent, which is an utterly clear violation of the rights of that individual, albeit deceased, and the rights of that family, which I will oppose until the end of my time here.

The Chair: It's very clear what the committee wants. I'll make a list. We'll go to Anthony in a second.

The committee is very clear. It wanted an unedited written copy, confidentially. That request was refused. The second request was in anticipation that the request might be refused. The committee asked—and we haven't got our answer back yet—for an in camera briefing on the NATO inquiry report, not an explanation and not a rehash of the minister's letter. We don't need somebody to come in here and tell us verbally what the minister told us in his letter. He's operating under parameters as he sees them.

The precedent is that this has been successfully challenged in the Parliament of Canada in the past. The remaining question for this committee before we finish in a minute or two will be, do we wish to continue to press the point that we are not going to accept the argument that we can't have access?

I'll now go to Anthony, and then we'll go on.

● (1105)

Mr. Anthony Rota: It's unfortunate that Rick's not here, because I think we were both on the same wavelength.

I don't want to put words in his mouth, but my understanding the other day when we met was that anything that has to do with mechanical, having to do with the submarine, we should have access to. Anything having to do with Saunders' personal health record, we do not have access to because there was an agreement made with Mr. Saunders' family. That would be irrelevant to us anyway. I think we should push, and I think we should demand, that we have access to what was blacked out as far as it relates to the actual mechanical operations or even some of the orders that were given to the submarine. As for his actual medical records, I think we did not want them and I don't think we need them.

I think that's pretty well decided.

The Chair: That was very clear.

Mr. Anthony Rota: I think we should stand firm on this and demand that the mechanical information should be presented to us in camera, and then we hand it back.

The Chair: That was very clear. You're correct.

The committee consensus was that it was never—it was Rick who started to make the point—within the parameters of our study to have anything to do with Lieutenant Saunders' death. That was not any part of our purview. How could we now demand it? But save and except that, anything else such as the mechanical, the contract that Claude has repeatedly talked about, etc.—everything else—this committee has felt we do not accept that we can't get access to that.

Gordon.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: I don't have any problems with that. I don't need to know the lieutenant's health. I don't want to know.

I want assurance that just because something's called commercial confidential.... I don't really want to know about the secrets of BAE, or whatever, but I want to know what the agreements were, what the conditions were, etc., so that separately I can make some judgment that these conditions were met or not met or whatever.

The Chair: Here's where it leads us, Gord, and it's pretty important so I think we might have to have a motion.

Unless we've already got that, Angela.... You can help me here.

We can get whatever legal advice we need, or this committee can go on record through a motion to make exactly the point you made. On a confidential in camera basis, we want access to everything that is in the naval inquiry report, save and except anything to do with the injuries and unfortunate death of Lieutenant Saunders. Is that understood?

Mr. Anthony Rota: If we could just add to that.... Apparently there was an agreement between Mr. Saunders' family and the military, and that's what I'm more worried about. There was confidentiality there and there was agreement that it would—

The Chair: We're not asking for that.

Mr. Anthony Rota: No, no, what I'm saying is that's what I want excluded, so that anybody else coming in the future can say I'm going to give this in confidence and know that it doesn't get spread all over or anybody else—

The Chair: I just said—

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: I assume that the bulk of that agreement only covers health, and we don't have anything to say about that here.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: I said assume.

The Chair: We're asking for anything, save and except anything to do with Lieutenant Saunders' health. Okay? That's my understanding.

Did we pass a motion to that effect?

The Clerk: We agreed.

The Chair: I did it by consensus, but we're still getting a lot of push-back. If there's unanimous consent, I'd suggest we formalize it now in a motion.

Okay, Claude, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: First of all, I want to say that the study conducted by our committee is not the subject of today's proceedings.

[*English*]

Mr. Anthony Rota: Mr. Chair, are we in public?

The Chair: Yes, we're in public.

Mr. Anthony Rota: Oh, this is okay?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Rota: Okay, sorry.

[*Translation*]

I apologize, Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Fine, there's no problem.

I did want to say that the investigation that we conducted and the public disclosures that we made as a committee did not address Mr. Saunders' health. We're dealing with a different subject here. We have been given a censored document and that is the focus of our discussions. Moreover, I remind you that I was the one who discovered that the document had been widely censored.

I don't feel that it's right that we cannot even look into the Saunders affair. What's not to say that a medical error was made in Lieutenant Saunders' treatment? Why did it take so long to order an evacuation, perhaps citing dangerous conditions? How do we know that a medical error wasn't made? Setting aside everything that happened in Lieutenant Saunders' case, physical condition and the possibility of a medical error are off limits for discussion. I agree that the handling of the connection issue is even worse. As I said to General Hillier this morning, a kind of culture of secrecy prevails where MPs are viewed as people who cannot keep secrets, which is untrue. Occasionally, we disclose certain facts when we feel people should not be kept in the dark. This is not an issue when transparency is the norm. If Mr. Saunders was predisposed to having a certain condition and that ultimately led to his death, then I don't understand why that information must be kept from us.

What's this story about an agreement with the family? Why must MPs also be kept in the dark about this understanding with the family? I'm an MP and I think I'm entitled to an uncensored report. Others have received an uncensored copy. Why not MPs? I have a problem with that.

● (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair: Claude, I understand your concern. I think we all do. But the problem I have, or my disagreement with your point, is this. What you're in essence wanting to do is to retroactively change the parameters of our study, and we can't do that. If you take a look at the parameters of our study, it's very clear that we were going to look at everything and anything about the submarine acquisition process except for the incident of the fire. We were always very consistent on that. That means anything that happened subsequent to the fire.

Now you're wanting access to something that was never part of our original terms of reference. Respectfully to you as a colleague, that's how I see it. That's how I definitely see it as the chair. I respect your different point of view, but if I were to have to make a ruling, I'll tell you, that's how I would have to rule.

We were very clear that we weren't looking at the fire at all. Now that our interest is piqued a little bit, we can't retroactively change the terms of reference.

I sense your strong feeling on that, and I respect that. That's why I'm suggesting that if we're going to proceed in pressing this point for more information, we should do it through a motion so that those who agree with the motion can support it and those who oppose can disagree with it.

Let me ask—and I suspect there isn't, but let me try—would there be unanimous consent today to put a motion to continue to press to get this information? Okay, there wouldn't be.

Let me leave it this way: if we want to continue to press this point, at our next meeting we should have a formal motion from somebody to continue to press to get access to all the information except for anything to do with the fire and the Saunders injury and death. I'll leave that with colleagues to consider for the next meeting.

Unless there's anything else, I guess we'll adjourn and we'll think it over before the meeting.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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