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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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● (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.)): Good afternoon.

Pursuant to Standing Order 122, we are having a briefing on the situation in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

We have as witnesses today, from Project Ploughshares, Mr. Ernie Regehr, senior policy adviser—welcome, Mr. Regehr—and through video conference from the University of Calgary, Mr. David Bercuson, professor, director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies. Welcome also, Mr. Bercuson.

I want to point out that we also have with us today a group from the Teachers' Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy sitting in our committee. Welcome to you also. We're very pleased to have you with us this afternoon.

We'll start with Mr. Regehr. You have 10 minutes for your introductory remarks. Please, Mr. Regehr.

Mr. Ernie Regehr (Senior Policy Advisor, Project Ploughshares): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

As you know, Canadians are deeply ambivalent about Canada's role in Afghanistan. It's not the first time Canadians have questioned the decisions and political priorities that send soldiers abroad and into harm's way. The criticism sometimes extends to the military leadership that commands and directs these operations, but we understand such criticisms to be in the context of deep respect for, and of honouring, the extraordinary service commitment and sacrifice of the soldiers who serve in our name. The same respect is due and is paid to civilian workers, government diplomats, and non-governmental workers who share in the risks and the courage that are central to these complex operations.

Our organization has joined this public debate over Afghanistan on that same basis. I have to add that we do it from our vantage point in Canada. I have not visited Afghanistan, and thus, like most Canadians, must rely on the reporting of others: news media, the UN, NGOs, research groups with people on the ground there, and of course on our own government.

That introduces the first of three points I want to make.

We Canadians depend on thorough and extensive reporting by the government. It is especially welcomed that the Minister of Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff have recently visited both the defence committee and this committee. It needs to be much more frequent and to include a much clearer and more forthright Canadian perspective on the progress toward meeting the objectives of the mission. Reports on Canadian activities and roles and logistics are obviously very important, but we also need assessments that confirm that those at the highest levels of Canadian leadership have a keen awareness of what is or is not working, to build confidence that their decision-making is guided by that awareness and by a specifically Canadian assessment of what the situation requires.

In looking at the testimony of the minister and the Chief of the Defence Staff, I'm struck by two things: the testimony involves relatively little in the way of assessing the overall situation in Afghanistan, and when such assessment is offered, it is sometimes significantly out of step with the reporting we hear from other sources.

On the key question of the strength of the insurgency, Minister O'Connor told the defence committee that of Afghanistan's 34 provinces,“the insurgency is a great challenge in maybe six or seven. In the remaining provinces you have, in Afghan terms, relative stability.” At this committee the figure was increased to nine or ten—that is, you said that there were 20 or 25 relatively stable provinces—but at the end of September, the report of the UN Secretary-General describes an upsurge in violence, and describes the insurgency as covering “...a broad arc of mostly Pashtun-dominated territory, extending from Kunar province in the east to Farah province in the west; it also increasingly affects the southern fringe of the central highlands...”. If you look at a map, that swath of insurgency seems to be closer to including 15 to 20 provinces than the 9 or 10 that were mentioned.

In addition, the Secretary-General said, “At no time since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001 has the threat to Afghanistan's transition been so severe.” The International Crisis Group, in November's second report, paints an even bleaker picture, as does the Council on Foreign Relations.

My point is not that the minister is wrong and all the others are right; rather, the point is that we are in need of serious Canadian assessment. If Canada presents different conclusions than the others, then let's have an explanation for the difference.

There is a sense of urgency in many of the reports one now sees, not only on the insurgency but also on the Afghan economy and reconstruction efforts, both with huge implications for the insurgency. I think part of the Canadian ambivalence can be attributed to a sense that we're not really getting the full picture—or, worse, a feeling that the Canadian leadership is shielding us from the full picture because they fear that Canadian support will further decline if the full gravity of the situation is divulged.

Something as simple as biweekly or monthly reports and assessments presented to this committee and the defence committee, for example, would go a long way toward building a culture of greater accountability and of informed discussion.

● (1540)

The second point I want to make is on staying the course or changing the course, and it comes as much as a question as an argument about the switch from Operation Enduring Freedom to the International Security Assistance Force.

The two operations have been based on two very different rationales. OEF was formed literally for the defence of the United States, based on article 51 of the charter. There has been no UN mandate involved, and the objective was to seek out and attack those who were thought to have been implicated in attacks on North America. The ISAF operation, on the other hand, depends on another paradigm entirely, namely the security and safety of the people of Afghanistan. The switch from the defence of the intervenors to the security of the host population suggests a switch in military focus away from attacks on suspected adversaries in their strongholds towards building up and supporting Afghan security forces, military, and police in areas where the government already has a foothold, is supported, and is demonstrating the advantages of extending governmental authority.

The minister and the CDS focus a lot on the importance, as the minister says, of "suppressing the insurgency". There's almost a sense that this military suppression, in an OEF style, is a prerequisite to progress elsewhere. Well, that's not a promising scenario, given the resurging insurgency. Military defeat of the insurgency, according to those who think it is possible at all, will take at least four things, that is, more ISAF troops, effective Afghan security forces, a break in funding from the poppy industry, and the cooperation of Pakistan. None of these is happening at a pace to make an early difference.

I just came from a meeting in which we were talking about security in Africa, and somebody made the point that since the early days of decolonization, there have been exactly one and a half insurgencies in Africa that were successfully defeated by military means. And it's that pessimism about the course of action we're on that is driving the search for other options, for alternatives. There are suggestions along the lines of pulling out the direct military pursuit of the holdouts to refocus in support of training and provincial reconstruction efforts, substantially increasing non-military aid, reviewing the strategy objectives and tactics of the NATO-led ISAF, and reopening the political process in pursuit of a more inclusive and representative political order for the entire country.

My third and final point, Mr. Chair, focuses on the suggestions for a new political process. The International Crisis Group identifies factors that were repeatedly pointed out to them as driving people to oppose the government. Those factors included, first, political disenfranchisement—the sense of favouring one group or tribe while leaving others out of decision-making power structures—and second, resource quarrels. These are particularly severe over land and water, and they are exacerbated by returning refugees. The third is corruption, a large-scale sense of ransacking the state and donor resources. The fourth is the lack of opportunities and economic development. The government having oversold the benefits that democracy would bring, there's now a skepticism about it. The fifth is abuse by local and international security forces. This mainly involves mistreatment by local police and army but also includes mistreatment by international forces in roughhouse raids on houses, some illegal detentions, aerial bombardments, and so forth.

In other words—I'm coming to the end—and to conclude, it's clear that the challenge coming from what we loosely call the Taliban does not seem to be focused on irrational fanaticism as much as on very basic and familiar grievances, the kind you find in any conflict.

● (1545)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry): Thank you very much, Monsieur Regehr.

Now we'll go to the University of Calgary, Mr. David Bercuson.

Mr. Bercuson, please.

Prof. David Bercuson (Director, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary): Thank you.

I'm afraid my remarks are going to differ somewhat from the prepared sheet of paper that I sent earlier today, because I was under the mistaken impression that today's session was going to be about foreign policy in general as well as, of course, Afghanistan. So what I'm going to do for this first few minutes is say a few things about the mission as I see it. It won't take very long to do that, and then we'll have the usual question and answer period.

First, let me begin by asking, who is the Taliban? We know the Taliban very well from the period in which they governed Afghanistan prior to 2001. One question that I think is unanswered today for many people is, is this Taliban that we are engaged in combat with in Afghanistan the same Taliban that ran the Government of Afghanistan and that allowed al-Qaeda to use Afghanistan as basically a training ground, a marshalling yard, and so on, for the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and subsequent attacks?

My answer is that it doesn't really matter, because even if the people we are confronting in southern Afghanistan are a loose coalition of religious extremists, poppy farmers who don't want their fields to be destroyed, local smugglers, warlords, and so on, there is no question whatever in my mind that the central organizing principle of the military resistance is being established by the Taliban themselves, by the religious extremists, who are in great number across the border in Pakistan, who clearly supply the direction and the funding for the insurgency that is going on. To say that this is not the Taliban that we knew so well before is somewhat naive.

I think the mission is doable. What is the mission? The mission is to support the government of Hamid Karzai in such a way that the Taliban cannot disrupt the government and its efforts. Whether those efforts have been totally successful or not is not for me to say—I haven't been there—but I think that the Taliban are definitely trying, through armed action, to disrupt the attempts of the government to establish links with the countryside; to disrupt the efforts of NATO and other organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, to rebuild the countryside in order to allow the power of the central government to flow. The mission is doable and it is necessary, I think, to protect Canada's national interests. It is not in our national interest to see a Taliban government re-emerge in Afghanistan, and I don't think we should kid ourselves that that is exactly what will happen—a government run by religious extremists and for religious extremists—should this mission fail.

We need to keep remembering that the mission has two components: one is military and the other is reconstruction. The military mission is necessary to protect the reconstruction mission. The reconstruction mission, in the long run, is only possible within the larger context of military protection.

Can the reconstruction mission succeed? I definitely think so, but it will not succeed if it is going to be attacked constantly by the Taliban and by their supporters. The fact that Canadians have been killed building roads, trying to build schools, trying to bring supplies, and so on, is proof positive of the fact that the Taliban, the jihadis—whatever you want to call them—will do whatever they can to disrupt the reconstruction mission. The reconstruction is simply not going to be possible without the establishment of some form of security.

The establishment of security is not, in itself alone, enough to make this mission succeed. I think everyone realizes this. I think NATO realizes it. Certainly our government realizes it. There must be extensive efforts to rebuild the country. There must be extensive efforts at social reform and so on, consistent with the mores and values of the local population. But quite clearly, it doesn't really matter what religion you are, corruption is the same for all religions and all peoples, and all peoples recognize it. There needs to be established, obviously, a workable and incorruptible, or as incorruptible as possible, government in that country. That can only be done through reconstruction, but it's not going to happen without military security.

● (1550)

The military challenges are great. We must always remember that in one form or another, this is a war over there, whether you call it a small war, an insurgency, or asymmetric warfare. But the fact that people are trying to use violence to disrupt our mission means that it is a war. Our soldiers are being attacked; aid workers are being attacked. It's a war.

In any war, the other side has a will and an intelligence of their own. They will use whatever they can and be as resourceful as they can to get around whatever forces and technology you're going to try to apply on the battlefield in order to have your mission succeed.

We must remember that in Canada we have a military that is transitioning essentially from a peacetime military to one in action, a military in combat. Lessons needs to be learned. Sometimes those lessons will be very hard and will involve the loss of life, until we learn how to operate in that area.

I think it's very important for us to continue to point out that NATO simply does not have sufficient troops on the ground to do the job.

Now, I haven't been to Afghanistan, but I think I understand what fighting an insurgency of the kind we are fighting over there requires. It requires a combination of different types of forces—special forces, regular forces, and so on—and different types of technologies, and it certainly requires mass. There's no question that mass, or large numbers of troops, has a quality all its own. Until we have the kind of mass that is necessary to defeat the insurgency, the insurgency will continue. This is a major challenge to NATO. It's a political and a military challenge.

The political challenge is that if NATO does not succeed in Afghanistan, then in my opinion the future of NATO is very cloudy.

I think a united NATO needs to confront Pakistan and try to convince the Pakistani government, in whatever way is necessary, that this double game they are playing can no longer continue. That is an essential ingredient for a military mission to succeed.

But if NATO does not succeed in Afghanistan, then its future as a security organization will be very cloudy. I think that Canada will suffer if NATO's effectiveness is eroded, for reasons that I will get into in just a few minutes.

I think that we made a commitment. There was a vote in Parliament regarding that commitment. We should keep that commitment until February 2009, when the first rotation into 2009 ends, or possibly one more rotation in 2009. At that point, we should seek to ramp down our forces, and we should seek to move them elsewhere in Afghanistan, if they're going to stay, to a less hostile place, and fundamentally hold our NATO partners' feet to the fire.

If you think this is an important mission for NATO, then by 2009 Canada will be able to say we have done our part; it is time now for someone else to do some of the heavy lifting in Afghanistan, while we give our forces time to rebuild and rejuvenate. I think it's dangerous if in Canada we believe that we will be in Afghanistan for ten, twenty, or thirty years. We don't have the military resources to do that. The government has plans—and I think they're commendable plans—to rebuild the Canadian military from where it was in the early 1990s. You can't do that when you're constantly in combat operations in a place like Afghanistan.

We have to give Afghanistan the kind of effort that we promised our NATO partners we would give. When that effort is completed—we're not going to win the war in Afghanistan on our own—I think it will be time for us to let other NATO partners do some of the heavy lifting in that area.

Why is NATO so important to Canada? Because we need, and have always needed, offsetting influences to the presence of the United States. The United Nations simply doesn't do it for us. As a security defence organization, the United Nations has become a total and abject failure. We saw these failures through the 1990s, with the civil wars in Bosnia and elsewhere. Now we're seeing the kind of situation re-created in the Security Council that is going to be very much like what we saw during the Cold War years.

● (1555)

It's very obvious—and we can get into this in a question and answer period—that the interests of Russia and those of the west are diverging, and that the interests of China and many areas and those of the west are diverging. You can see that in the way we approach the Sudan and the way China approaches the Sudan. We will have deadlock in the Security Council very shortly, if we don't have it already. That means the United Nations as a security organization is not going anywhere.

We either work with NATO or we are left to fall back on virtually complete reliance on the United States of America. I don't think that's in Canada's interest. I think a strong NATO going forward in the future—a politically transformed NATO, a NATO that becomes a global security alliance of democratic countries—is the sort of thing Canada ought to work for, but if NATO fails in Afghanistan, that's not going to happen.

I think that in a whole variety of ways it is in our national interest and does serve Canadian values as we see them in the world for us to continue the mission as it is now until 2009, but at that point I think we need to start evolving the mission into something else.

Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Thank you, Professor Bercuson, and thanks to the modern technology that makes it possible for you to be with us here today, even though you're in another province far away.

Thank you also, Mr. Regehr. It is not your first time here, and you're always welcome here. Thank you for your testimony.

We will go to the first round. I would suggest that our first round be a seven-minute round. Is that what you mentioned, Mr. Patry?

Mr. Bernard Patry: Yes, I mentioned it.

The Chair: Mr. Wilfert will be first, and then Mr. Martin. You can organize your time. The time is yours.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I thank both of the presenters.

Having been to Afghanistan in May, I would say that the mission certainly has changed. A somewhat interesting comment about the role of this mission is that, yes, it is reconstruction and it is military, but it's also diplomacy.

Professor, you talked about diplomacy, in a way, regarding Pakistan. There's no question that the eastern border is very porous. There's no question that Pakistan needs to, as you say, deal with this issue of doublespeak. The double game that they have been doing can't continue.

On the issue of negotiating, I'm not sure who we'd negotiate with, because if I were Mullah Omar in the Taliban, I wouldn't want to be in negotiations with anyone. Obviously they're in it for the long haul; they're hoping that Canada and other states will eventually leave because of public opinion, and you don't have to look too far in history to see nations that have intervened in support of a government and eventually didn't stay for the long haul.

Can you talk a little more about your view, Professor, on this issue of Canada's role? You say the military is changing; you're saying that after 2009 we should ramp down our approach and go, and if we're going to stay, we should go to less hostile areas. What about the issue of Pakistan? What kind of leverage would NATO have in dealing with Pakistan, given the fact that we continue to get assurances, yet nothing happens?

Then I have a quick question for the other gentleman.

● (1600)

The Chair: Mr. Wilfert, we're going to take the question from Mr. Martin as well, and then we'll get the answers.

Go ahead, Mr. Martin, very quickly.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for your testimony.

The Taliban of 2006 is not the same as the Taliban of 2001. We went into Afghanistan for our own security reasons, not to rebuild the country. Is Afghanistan the primary source of terrorism in the world? If yes, why? If it isn't, then which country is the primary source of terrorism?

My second question is for you, Professor Bercuson. The Minister of Defence said the Taliban can't beat us in a conventional war, and he's correct. They're just going to use IEDs. We say in medicine that a slow bleed kills. My fear is that the slow bleed will kill our troops and drive us out without our having any fundamental impact on the ground that will be any different from the situation today. We see Taliban controls increasing and not decreasing, and so far we're losing the war.

The Chair: Mr. Wilfert has a question for Mr. Regehr as well. Is that correct?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: That's correct.

When you talk about political inclusiveness and disenfranchisement, etc., what process would be put in place to deal with this if in fact we could negotiate with whomever what the process would entail?

The Chair: Professor Bercuson, go ahead.

Prof. David Bercuson: The first question concerns what NATO can do about Pakistan.

If we had a united NATO.... We're going to see after the Riga conference, coming up later this month, whether NATO has the will to pull itself together—26 nations moving in the same direction—or not. If it does, then I think—and this is going to sound very hard—that Pakistan has to be confronted with the possibility of military action along its borders, which is the stationing of enough troops along the borders to be able to turn back insurgencies coming through from Pakistan.

I would say you need to put military, economic, and diplomatic pressure on Pakistan. Pakistanis need to know that if we're fighting a war in Afghanistan, and Pakistan is the weak link in the chain, we simply cannot allow that weak link to continue. It's as simple as that.

That's my answer with regard to Pakistan. If that's the case, I think it's more likely than not that the Government of Pakistan will back down and give us more help than they're giving us at the moment.

As far as the second question is concerned—can we be defeated by an insurgency?—I agree with the defence minister. I don't think they can beat us in a conventional war. They will use what they can to defeat our technology, our training, our morale, and our centre of gravity, which is Canadian public opinion. That's what they will do. I think that if the mission remains politically important to us and is politically doable, we need to continue doing it.

Can IEDs be defeated? They can be defeated, just as any other weapon can be defeated. One of the things we're finding out in Afghanistan is that the enemy is adopting tactics, strategies, etc., that are being pioneered elsewhere—in Iraq, Lebanon, and so on. I think we need to learn lessons from these other insurgencies much more quickly than we are. We need to close the loop from learning to decision-making, and I believe that, given time, we will.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Bercuson.

Mr. Regehr.

Mr. Ernie Regehr: First, in response to who to negotiate with, one of the characteristics of the insurgency is that it is most intensive in an area that is ethnically and geographically defined. It's not divorced from particular populations and from a particular geographical region where it's concentrated. In other words, it's not centred in fanatics who roam willy-nilly throughout the country and have bases throughout the entire region. It's focused.

Within the region where it is focused, there's a broad range of leadership. It takes people who know Afghanistan a lot better than I do to identify that leadership. But there is political, municipal-level, ethnic, and traditional leadership in those areas. I think there's a broad range of people with whom to discuss, people who in fact identify the grievances that drive them into the hands of the Taliban.

So I don't think the point is to search out the Taliban leadership and make it even stronger by making it the centre of negotiation. I think it's to search out the people who have grievances against the government, who are disenchanted with the government, and who, for a lack of other political housing, go to the Taliban as the umbrella under which they express their dissidence. I think it's this kind of non-Taliban leadership, which expresses grievances, that you want to go to in the negotiations.

Can you win or lose? A basic rule of insurgency is that guerrillas win if they don't lose; governments lose if they don't win. In other words, all a guerrilla force has to do is avoid losing, and it wins. It meets its objective. But if a government is not decisively victorious, it loses.

As I was saying before, on the African continent, of a great many insurgencies against governments, the governments don't win.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regehr.

Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, thank you for being here today.

The more we talk about it, the less we feel we understand what is going on in Afghanistan. Perhaps you could help us gain a better understanding of the situation.

We are discussing the possibility of winning or loosing. This is all very well, except that we have now reached the point where we are wondering why we are in Afghanistan in the first place. The public is saying that the main reason why we are over there is in order to help the Afghan people and to bring the country back into the fold of democracy. However, we are finding ourselves in a very serious situation of being at war against the Taliban, an enemy that no one seems to be able to identify.

The government of Canada, that we have tried to question several times on this matter, is telling us—and ministers have also said so in committee—that except for the southern and the eastern parts of the country, the rest of Afghanistan is on the right track.

A well-known journalist, Céline Galipeau, is presently in Afghanistan to do a feature story. She is saying that the northern part of Afghanistan is controlled by the so-called war lords, the Mujahidin, well-known for their corruption. The North is not receiving the aid that has been announced and crime is increasing at an alarming rate. According to Ms. Galipeau, the North feels let down by the international community and is facing a major crime problem that is getting more serious every day. So the picture of a southern region that is under assault and riddled with enormous problems does not seem to be substantiated by this journalist.

My question is addressed to both of you. What is the present situation in Afghanistan and how are we doing regarding the reconstruction of the northern part of the country?

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barbot.

[*English*]

Professor Bercuson.

Prof. David Bercuson: I haven't been there. All I can say is this. Afghanistan is clearly a mess, and it ought to be a mess, because it has been a place of constant warfare, insurgency, tribal conflict, Soviet invasion, etc., for decades and decades and decades. I don't think anyone should be surprised by the fact that in Afghanistan today we'll still find corruption and warlordism and all sorts of nasty things going on, and I think it's probably clear that we're going to find these things going on for the next 50 years.

But what is it that we're trying to achieve? We're trying to give that government, which was selected by the people of Afghanistan in votes that were held in front of international organizations that passed international scrutiny, a chance to begin to come back on the road to recovery. I have no doubt—I've read reports of journalists who have been there, I've talked to people who have been there—that people are impatient with the pace of recovery. I can certainly understand that. But we have to focus on what our particular mission is. We are a small country. We don't have very much in the way of resources. We need to focus on what it is we need to do. We need to play our part in the military role to establish security so that the reconstruction efforts can start and succeed, and we need to do what we can with regard to the reconstruction efforts. That's what we need to do. And we need to do it for a period of time that we can sustain, which is not forever, and I don't think it's for 20 years and I don't think it's for 10 years. That's all we can do.

As far as the Afghans themselves are concerned, I think that given time and given security, they will fix their own country. It's in their own interests to do so. I don't know that there's very much more that really can be said about it.

If we are expecting Afghanistan to turn into a liberal democracy overnight with a complete lack of corruption, I think we're expecting far too much and we're setting the bar far too high. If that's what our measure of success is, we'll never succeed. I think that's an unreasonable expectation.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Bercuson.

Mr. Regehr, did you want to respond to Madame Barbot?

Mr. Ernie Regehr: I will briefly. A great tragedy will unfold if the insurgency in the south acts as a magnet and increasingly draws security forces into that vortex, and as a result, other parts of the country grow gradually less protected and less secure, and the reconstruction, which had a chance to move in those areas of the country where the government began with basic support, are undermined because of the lack of security.

And in the south where the magnet for counter-insurgency operations.... Barnett Rubin of the Council on Foreign Relations, for example, makes the point that in fact the focus of military energy there has energized the insurgency, and it's a counterproductive operation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regehr.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you very much to the witnesses here today.

I am not going to ask a question. I'm just going to highlight something that is happening and answer some of the questions. Tomorrow afternoon, I leave for New Delhi in India to attend the Second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan.

This conference deals with the players around Afghanistan. Every country has been invited; plus the G8 countries are going in there. The blueprint for this conference has a massive economic reconstruction plan, including a pipeline coming in from northern Turkistan all the way through Afghanistan into Pakistan and India. They have a massive project for highway construction going on. They have a massive electricity program. These modules were set up for the reconstruction of the whole of Afghanistan by the surrounding countries, whose vested interests—as you said, Professor—can only go up one level, but they have to take it. The countries in that region have decided that Afghanistan's security and reconstruction are far more important for them.

They are also going to have a business conference in that part of the world, parallel to this reconstruction conference, to get private businesses to go there. Canadian businesses are invited to go in there to invest in the opportunity areas.

These things are happening, but they're not coming out. I was not aware until I was told to lead this delegation. When I looked in depth at what has happened since last year, I was quite surprised at the amount of work that has been done in Afghanistan,

As the professor said, a massive war has been going on there. It's not going to be an overnight thing, but yes, the point is that there is goodwill within the surrounding regional countries. There is not one country in the whole region surrounding Afghanistan that does not believe that reconstruction is the most important aspect. They don't have military there. Iran doesn't have a military there; China doesn't have a military there. But they're all part of the reconstruction going on over there.

Now, in reference to Pakistan, we have been engaged—including me—with Pakistan for the last three weeks. Today, unfortunately over forty Pakistani soldiers lost their lives in a suicide bombing, so it is also dawning on Pakistanis that they had better go after this menace, because it has now come home to roost. Today they lost their soldiers and said yes, we're going to fight this menace at our porous border.

So things are changing, yes. We have a challenge, yes. There are things out there that are not very right at this time, yes. The Karzai government is weak, but there is goodwill from all these surrounding countries, including Canada, to work towards building this reconstruction.

Thank you.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Were you and Mr. Goldring splitting the time?

Mr. Goldring, do you want to ask your question very quickly?

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you.

Mr. Regehr, you mentioned that you thought there was a lack of assessment and the government is out of step. You made the comment that there should be negotiation with the Taliban. It's highly unlikely that a negotiation could be carried forward, because what would you really negotiate? Returning to the country of old? Returning to the abysmal human rights and to it becoming a renewed threat to the world?

I would think that the door would be open for discussions, but it takes two people to be able to have a dialogue of any type. Given that and looking at what came with the papers today, there's $300 million worth of projects here. There is a balanced approach to the governance of security, and depending on what area and region, as to how much can be accomplished in difficult areas—because my understanding is that many of the schools that were built were blocked in and destroyed right afterwards—you have to approach the country overall.

Given that scenario and looking at the worthwhile projects that have been done in governance and the operation of the government, perhaps you could advise us on what you feel could be done to better the work that has been accomplished. What areas are not being supported with assistance in the civil society? What more could be done in that area?

Prof. David Bercuson: Well, I have a very different answer from the one you probably are looking for.

If the Taliban today constitutes a loose coalition that has as its core the religious extremists and other elements, whether they be criminal, political or whatever, I think the military force we have in that area should be focused basically on eliminating the hard-core Taliban and using politics and economic incentives, etc., to try to split away from the hard-core Taliban those other elements who really don't care one way or another, politically or religiously, who runs the country. I think that can be done in a variety of ways, including using economic aid, reconstruction, and so on, to try to lure those people out of the overall umbrella that the Taliban has created for them.

I don't think there's any getting around the fact that you must challenge, and you must militarily defeat, the hard core of the Taliban before you can accomplish anything else. It's absolutely vital that they be taken out of the picture.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

Mr. Regehr.

Mr. Ernie Regehr: I'm in some agreement with Professor Bercuson. This is the point I was really making in response to the earlier question. It's a caricature to say we should talk to the Taliban and negotiate going back to the.... There's a broad range of dissidents, and as Professor Bercuson has put it, splitting some of those out from the Taliban is the point. That is the point I was making earlier as well.

On the business of the assessment from the minister and the Chief of the Defence Staff, I don't know if I'm the only one who finds the tenor of their description of the situation in Afghanistan to be fully in accord with what is coming from a lot of other sources. I made the point that to have a serious and informed debate on the likelihood with which we can achieve that military objective that Professor Bercuson is talking about, of militarily defeating determined insurgents, we need to have a frank recognition of the nature of the situation. I think some of the reports from independent groups such as the International Crisis Group, including the Secretary-General's report, paints rather a more pessimistic picture than I took from the minister and the CDS.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regehr.

Madame McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman

Thank you to Mr. Regehr and Mr. Bercuson for appearing before the committee. I want to briefly ask a question to each of you and then leave the time for you to respond.

I have to say I very much welcome the questions you raised, Mr. Regehr, about what seems to be an enormous gap between the information from those who really are delving into what is happening and the kind of simplistic line between good and evil: the Taliban on one side as evil and the good forces we represent on the other side, including, I guess, the Northern Alliance, the drug lords, and the warlords who make up the Karzai government and so on.

I'm wondering if you could comment further. You're probably aware that the UN envoy to Afghanistan from post-9/11 until 2004, who was involved in the organization of the Bonn conference, actually stated, “One of my own biggest mistakes was not to speak to the Taliban in 2002 and 2003”. He went on to say it was not possible to get involved in the conference at that time but he considered it “a very, very big mistake” for there not to have been aggressive outreach to do that and to generate a comprehensive peace process.

I will raise my question with Mr. Bercuson and then leave time to respond.

Mr. Bercuson, I have to say I'm very surprised to hear you urging what is so widely recognized as not working: really, escalating further the cycle of violence, more chaos, more killings, more fanaticism, and more Taliban. I hear you urging that we need more people doing more of the same and somehow we're going to get a better result.

I'm sure you're aware there are many NATO countries that wouldn't go near that aggressive combat search-and-kill mission because they feel that's exactly the result it would produce. Yet I hear you saying that we need more of it. I wonder if you can elaborate further on the evidence that doing more of what's not working is going to produce a better result.

Prof. David Bercuson: Sure. Let me take the second part of your question first.

Again I caution that I haven't been there; I haven't seen the ground over which Operation Medusa was fought; I haven't read any of the after-action reports, or the war diaries, or whatever. But just reading between the lines from what I know about military operations in general, had there been a large number of troops, let's say a mobile brigade, that could have blocked off the escape routes of the Taliban forces across the border into Pakistan, then, to put it very bluntly, there would have been a much higher destruction of the enemy than apparently occurred.

Those forces are not available. NATO simply does not have the kind of mass in the southern or southeastern area of Afghanistan that it requires to do the heavy fighting that is necessary to defeat a Taliban insurgency. So I'm not saying doing more of the same, I am saying doing something a little different, which is to bring to bear sufficient troops to be able to do the job properly.

As far as our NATO allies are concerned, you're pointing to a major problem. I'm not sure that they don't want to "increase the cycle of violence" in Afghanistan, so much as each of those that have significant caveats have them for a variety of political reasons —some of them internal, some of them having to do with the politics of the European Union, some of them having to do with the current government in the United States, who knows? I don't know. But what I do know is that if they are not prepared, if NATO is not prepared to save this mission, to do whatever is necessary to save this mission, then NATO's aspirations to be, in a sense, a force to protect democracy around the world is dead. NATO is either going to save itself or it isn't.

In Canada, we will be able to say we did everything we could. It's very, very important that we be able to say that, not only if NATO succeeds, but especially if it fails: we tried our best to save it.

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

Mr. Regehr.

Mr. Ernie Regehr: Thank you.

I think the point you're referring to about the envoy Mr. Brahimi's comment about the failure to speak to the Taliban raises what the fundamental situation is there.

Is the fundamental situation there a government that has basic support over all the country and is being frustrated by fanatic spoilers generally, or is it a fundamentally divided society in which significant parts of the country feel they are excluded from the political order? Which of those scenarios is the case? The evidence is increasingly there—and Brahimi confirms it—that the latter is more the case. That's a case that requires negotiation. There has never been an insurgency in which the government's first response was, there is nobody to negotiate with, they're all embodiments of evil, and how can we negotiate with them?

The Government of Uganda today is negotiating with the Lord's Resistance Army, the personification of a level of evil that is spine-tingling. They found that after 20 years of trying to deny it, they are now in negotiation in Juba and Khartoum. Talking is essential, and these wars don't end without it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regehr.

Mr. Van Loan, you have about two minutes, according to the clock on the wall, so take 30 seconds.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Thank you.

My question is for Professor Bercuson, who has been quite clear on NATO and the challenge it has as we go through a NATO transformation.

The countries that aren't stepping up to the plate, and you've been quite clear on how well Canada has stepped up to the plate.... We're obviously at a critical time for NATO. Are there other things that Canada can do to encourage the partners in NATO to either step up with greater commitments or to lift some of the caveats that are there for some of those domestic reasons? Are there things you can think of that we can do?

In addition, some would look at NATO and say that over the past number of years, when you look at the Balkans and you look at Afghanistan, NATO has stepped up its game a fair bit. Is it really as dark and grim as you say? If they don't step up this time, is it really the end for NATO?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan.

Professor Bercuson.

Prof. David Bercuson: To answer the last part of your question first, I think in the long run, yes, it will. I think Afghanistan is a defining moment for NATO. There's a lot of discussion amongst practitioners, scholars, etc., about what NATO's future is. I think for the first 10 years or so after the end of the Cold War, no one was sure what NATO was going to do, if it had any role at all to play.

I think that in the long run, if NATO succeeds in Afghanistan, it ought to be able to—and it ought to—reach out to democracies around the world, to Australia, to India, to countries that are democratic and believe that sometimes a democracy will need armed security for its protection, but also to countries that are prepared to transform NATO into a social, economic, and political organization. That can all happen, but it won't happen if NATO fails in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is the first out-of-theatre mission for NATO, and if it does not work, as I said, we're looking at disaster.

What can we do? Aside from trying to twist arms and talk, which I assume our foreign minister, defence minister, and Prime Minister are doing, we are saying there is a deadline to our heavy participation in this fighting, and it is 2009. That's it. After that we're moving to a quieter area or withdrawing from Afghanistan because we need to build our forces elsewhere. That will hold their feet to the fire. There is nothing that can hold a person's feet to the fire other than having a fire and having somebody holding their feet to it. It has to be done.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Bercuson.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Regehr, very quickly.

Mr. Ernie Regehr: I will say one thing, and that is that we really need to exercise caution when we make the Afghanistan mission about NATO and about what's good for NATO. It's what's good for Afghanistan. I know that Professor Bercuson isn't ignoring that, but shifting the emphasis to saying that this is about NATO and its survival, and saying we've got to do whatever it takes for that to happen, does not guarantee good results for the people of Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regehr. I would also suggest that it's what good for Canada and what's good in the fight against terrorism, and our responsibilities for that.

We are going to suspend for a minute or two to allow this group of guests to leave and allow the new ones to come in.

Thank you so much, Professor, and thank you, Mr. Regehr.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: Order, please.

We have to apologize already. I don't like to begin with an apology, but we do know that the bells are going to start ringing, I believe, at 5:30.

We really do want to hear from both of you today. We're pleased to have with us both Linda Jones, technical director of international operations of the Mennonite Economic Development Associates of Canada, as well as Mr. Roland Paris, associate professor, public and international affairs, at the University of Ottawa.

I know that you did have an opportunity to sit in on our previous hour. The discussion this afternoon continues on the briefing or on the update on Afghanistan.

We welcome you to our committee. We'll give you a few moments for your presentations, and then we'll go into the first round.

The floor is yours, Madam Jones.

Ms. Linda M. Jones (Technical Director, International Operations, Mennonite Economic Development Associates of Canada): Thank you.

I'm here witnessing on behalf of MEDA, Mennonite Economic Development Associates. We're a non-governmental organization that has been implementing sustainable economic development programs internationally for over 50 years. We are known as leaders in micro-finance and enterprise development, covering the gamut from investment fund development to capacity building at the community and individual levels.

Perhaps more importantly to this discussion, we have worked in many transition and conflict-affected countries; for example, Romania, Uganda, Tajikistan, Haiti, Nicaragua, Angola, Pakistan, and Eritrea, and we have experienced the power of Canadian civil society to build bridges and bring hope to people who have undergone chaotic and often violent change.

MEDA has been working in Afghanistan for almost three years now. I personally have gone to Afghanistan three times. We have supported a number of organizations that are implementing micro-finance programs. We've collaborated with local organizations, such as the Afghan Women's Business Council, a national organization. We've conducted consultancies for the UN, MISFA, and international NGOs in the area of sustainable private sector development. We have carried out exploratory missions for our own programming.

Recently we received approval to launch a CIDA-funded women's economic empowerment project in early 2007. Through this program we will reach down to village women, integrate them into mainstream markets, and enable them to be active agents in advancing the well-being of their families and communities. I have had the privilege of meeting rural women in Parwan province and I can assure you that they are eager to be in work and they are grateful for Canada's support.

During MEDA's three years in Afghanistan, we have also seen the tremendous impact that Canada's development contribution is having on the rebuilding of the nation.

As you may know, there are two large multilateral programs that receive significant support from CIDA. One is the micro-finance investment support facility for Afghanistan, which I'll refer to as MISFA; and the other is the national solidarity program, NSP. They have received $50 million and $30 million respectively from the Canadian people.

MISFA, the micro-finance investment facility, currently has well over 200,000 active clients, with $36 million in loans outstanding and a phenomenal repayment rate of 98%. Under the MISFA umbrella, MEDA, my organization, has supported Women for Women International in setting up its micro-finance program—training loan officers, designing appropriate loan products—and is currently transferring management to local staff. This one small program of MISFA currently reaches 6,000 female clients, typically with five to eight children each, enabling 30,000 to 40,000 people to be lifted out of deep poverty and to participate in the creation of a stronger and more stable and secure future.

Joyce Lehman went to Afghanistan with MEDA and then joined MISFA as the chief operating officer. She recently became adviser for the micro-finance industry in Afghanistan through the USA-funded ARIES project. She e-mailed me on the weekend from Kabul and said that Canada has been the largest donor for MISFA, which is one of the major success stories in the country. The plea is that donors such as CIDA continue to support the sector for another two to three years to give the micro-finance institutions time to establish themselves as sustainable Afghan institutions, with Canada having played a key role in the establishment of the sector.

As we have all seen, I'm sure, from the recent award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Foundation, a reliable micro-finance industry can have a profound impact on reducing economic hardship and freeing communities from crime and strife.

The other large multilateral initiative supported by Canada, the national solidarity program, has established a country-wide network of democratic and inclusive community-level structures, the community development councils. These councils give citizens a voice in Afghanistan's development.

A primary motivation—and this is important in terms of negotiation—for participation in the CDCs is that they have access to donor funds for projects that have demonstrated popular support in their area. This venture has enabled remote villages, for example, to construct schools, operate health clinics, rehabilitate irrigation works, improve roads, and so on.

● (1640)

On a trip that I took to the hamlet of Chawalkhel in Wardak province, I was proudly shown one such project: a large new boys' school that served all the families in the district. A chief regret of the men and women with whom I spoke was that there had not been funding for a girls' school as well. This was not an effort to pay lip service to my western views. One of these women was widely admired for having risked her life to teach village girls underground during the Taliban regime. There are many such stories in Afghanistan.

While these multilateral initiatives are absolutely critical, it is also necessary to underline the importance of the more limited direct role that Canadian civil society has played and can play in Afghanistan's reconstruction. Recently efforts have increased to involve Canadian executing agencies and private sector players in the development agenda. MEDA is proud that, through its women's economic empowerment project, we will be able to contribute to this process. At MEDA, we have observed how important direct contact—citizen to citizen, NGO to NGO, business to business, educational institute to educational institute—is for the growth of local capacity and the empowerment of individuals, businesses and national civil society.

As a not-for-profit, MEDA has opportunities for engagement that expatriate employees of multilateral programs and other nations do not have. Typically, for example, embassy and UN staffers spend their day in the office, go home to the guest house and travel in armoured vehicles, with no opportunity to interact with Afghans outside of these contexts. As a MEDA staff person, I have been free to move around, unarmoured, unprotected, and to engage with Afghan people. I have travelled to rural areas, and I have heard the requests for support from householders and women's groups. I have chatted amiably with roadside vendors as tanks patrolled the streets. I've eaten in a women's room in a provincial restaurant, and as the veils were removed, I have listened to the stories of women from every walk of life. And I have walked through the streets of Kabul with a distressed father to a pharmacy to purchase medication for his sick child, explaining to him, the pharmacist, and others in the shop that I am a mother of five from Canada. The engagement of Canadian civil society on the ground and the implementation of our development programs make a significant contribution to peace, prosperity, and the building of democratic rights and freedoms in Afghanistan.

MEDA is delighted and honoured that we have the opportunity to be heard by this committee. Based on our organizational experience in Afghanistan and around the world over the past 50 years, we would like to make the following recommendations:

First of all, we would suggest that Canadian dollars can be effectively used to build bridges between Canadian and Afghan individuals, groups, institutions, businesses, and other agencies. If our efforts concentrate on military intervention alone or on publicly funded programs, we miss the chance to engage directly and to be messengers of hope for a better and more stable future.

Second, by working directly with the private sector, we are laying the foundation for sustainable development. When the donor dollars disappear and the executing agencies no longer run programs, if the private sector has been strengthened, then development can continue.

Third, we believe there would be great benefit if Canadians in general were more aware of the results of CIDA's programming: MISFA, NSP, bilateral programs. If the press could be encouraged to present on these outcomes as well as on the military actions and results, the efforts of Canadian civil society and of organizations such as MEDA that work on the ground unprotected, to contribute towards democratization and security through poverty alleviation and other important programs would be reinforced.

● (1645)

Fourth, we would ask you to reconsider the pressure that Canadian civil society is experiencing from the government to program in the most insecure parts of the country, such as Kandahar. We've been asked to take our programs there rather than to other districts; however, all areas of Afghanistan are facing challenges. If we can bolster districts and provinces that have a greater chance for success, we will have gone further in supporting sustainable processes for long-term stability. Then, as Kandahar becomes less risky, we will have good knowledge of the country, proven successes on which to build, and the capacity to move quickly to set up effective programs.

Finally, we strongly recommend that all of us leverage Canada's leadership and the international reputation we have as a builder of peace, democracy, and equitable, inclusive nations, and as much as it is possible seek non-military responses to development challenges, harnessing the creative energy of Canadians and Afghans alike to create the proverbial better world.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Jones.

Mr. Paris.

Dr. Roland Paris (Associate Professor, Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa): Thanks for inviting me to appear before the committee today. It's a pleasure to be here.

I regret that I didn't hear the discussion with the previous witnesses. I was actually sprinting the entire length of Sparks Street, so I beg your indulgence as I continue to wipe my brow and recover from that unexpected run.

My message today is quite simple: the Afghanistan mission for NATO is in trouble and a new strategy is needed to turn the mission around. In spite of Canada's recent military successes in Kandahar province, the Taliban and its radical Islamist allies are operating more widely and more openly today than they were even a year ago, and they are continuing to enjoy the use of safe havens across the border in Pakistan.

The insurgency, which I'll call the neo-Taliban because of its diffuse character, has formed alliances with local drug traffickers and warlords in opposition to the government of Hamid Karzai. There is growing evidence from a variety of different sources that ordinary Afghans are becoming increasingly disaffected with their own government's inability to provide security and basic public services. If these trends continue, I fear that we and our NATO allies will be defeated in Afghanistan. Defeat, should it come, would come gradually, not on the battlefield but in the minds of ordinary Afghans, most of whom simply want security and opportunity for themselves and their families. If the legitimately elected government of Afghanistan and its foreign backers aren't able to provide such essentials, Afghans will look elsewhere. That is exactly what the neo-Taliban is counting on.

They are pursuing what appears to be a sophisticated political military strategy aimed at undermining confidence in the Karzai government through guerilla attacks on military and civilian targets, while at the same time offering ordinary Afghans a kind of alternative government in the form of religious justice, protection, and paid employment for those willing to join the neo-Taliban cause. It is in effect a strategy to win the minds, if not the hearts, of ordinary Afghans by forcing them to turn to their attackers for security and sustenance.

However, it is important to emphasize that the NATO mission is not a lost cause. Most Afghans want the reconstruction effort and the Karzai government to succeed, and the neo-Taliban still has only limited infrastructure within Afghanistan. The country has a functioning and energetic Parliament and an elected president. The economy is growing vigorously—even the non-drug elements of the economy.

An Afghan army is slowly being built, and although reports on its performance are mixed, certainly the consensus is that the units that have been trained are doing fairly well. NATO has shown that in a stand-up fight it can overpower the neo-Taliban and insurgent forces. So the problem isn't that our mission is lost; the problem is that our current strategy doesn't appear to be a winning one.

So what needs to be done? Permit me to make six suggestions as briefly as I can.

First, more foreign forces will ultimately be needed for Afghanistan. From the beginning, this mission has been hampered by a lack of international forces to help the Afghan government establish its presence throughout the country. We are dealing with the consequences today, as we belatedly enter regions that have been neglected for the past five years. So we are living the consequences of early decisions about under-resourcing this operation. In fact, for the size of the country and the population, this is the most under-resourced international stabilization mission since World War II.

Second, to put it quite bluntly, we need to suspend the poppy eradication program. It has utterly failed to reduce the size of the harvest, and worse, it is alienating poor farming communities, some of which now view the central government and NATO forces as aggressors, a perception that the neo-Taliban is strategically exploiting.

● (1650)

Third, we need to make police training a top priority. The police are mainly in the hands of local strongmen. They are undertrained, under-equipped, incompetent, corrupt, and accountable to no one. As the International Crisis Group has pointed out, in most districts Afghan police are viewed as a source of insecurity by the people rather than as a source of protection.

Fourth, we need to get serious about rooting out official corruption. President Karzai recently appointed a regional strongman with links to organized crime as the police chief of Kabul. And in the judiciary too, unqualified people are being installed because they are loyal to various factions. These are the kinds of decisions that are contributing to the erosion of public confidence in the Karzai government.

Fifth, NATO needs to build an Afghan army that can stand by itself. The retraining is going well, but it's slow. The current plan is to train an army of 70,000 Afghan soldiers, but this will almost certainly prove to be inadequate, because there are already roughly 70,000 international and Afghan troops in the country, and security remains a problem. Replacing the NATO forces with Afghan recruits will ultimately produce an army of similar size but with considerably less capacity. So Afghan forces will need to be larger if they are to stand on their own; and in order for us to leave, they will need to be able to stand on their own.

Sixth, the flow of insurgent fighters from their safe havens in Pakistan must be contained. The Government of Pakistan is not doing enough. At the very least, it is tolerating the existence of neo-Taliban operating bases on its territory. But there are also credible reports, including in the most recent issue of *Jane's Intelligence Digest* and from Seth Jones at the Rand Corporation, that Pakistani intelligence services are in fact providing material assistance and intelligence to neo-Taliban fighters based in Pakistan.

In my view, the international mission in Afghanistan can succeed if it reorients its strategy around these elements. But doing so would also require a renewed commitment to the operation from the alliance as a whole, not just from the few countries, including Canada, that have been willing to put their soldiers in harm's way.

If NATO chooses not to make this commitment, the alliance should begin planning a phased withdrawal from Afghanistan. This is, in my view, the stark choice we face now. It is the difficult decision that NATO must make over the coming months. Indecision is not an option, because making no decision means a continuation of the current strategy, and the current strategy appears to be leading us towards a defeat in slow motion.

I very much hope that NATO will not abandon Afghanistan, but it would be better to withdraw than to preside over a mission that lacks the strategy and resources that are necessary to successfully stabilize the country.

Thank you very much for having me here. I look forward to questions and discussion.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paris.

I'll just mention to the committee, again, to remember that we have votes at 5:30. We're going to try to keep the clock tight and stay as close to seven minutes as possible.

We'll go to Mr. Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming today.

I have two sets of questions, and they're mostly to you, Mr. Paris. I don't know if you were here to hear the previous witness, but there was a gentleman from Calgary who made a couple of statements, and one was about a deadline. He talked about withdrawal. He made it 2009 and said that we have to put that out there now, that whatever happens, we're going to be pulling out of there in 2009.

The second thing he mentioned is that NATO has to start playing hardball with Pakistan on the military side, which was interesting, and I'd like to hear your comments.

You mentioned the poppy crop, and that seems like a very challenging mission, trying to get these farmers to get off poppies and into something else. The Americans had the same challenge with Colombia. They went in and destroyed crops, and the crops just kept coming. Unless you have an alternative that can really make them the same amount of money, or a close comparison, it's pretty hard for these regions to have any other source of income.

So could you comment on those two issues?

Dr. Roland Paris: Yes, I heard three issues. I can try to do so quickly.

With regard to a possible deadline, the urgency now is not so much to be thinking in terms of deadlines as much as to encourage the Government of Canada to work with its NATO partners, other member states, to recognize the need to make this decision to go big or get out soon, to underline the urgency of the situation. I don't think the mission is crumbling. I wasn't suggesting that, but I think the trend lines are running in the wrong direction, and we don't have all the time in the world. A first priority is to use all diplomatic levers to emphasize to our NATO partners the need to make this decision, and to do that within the councils of NATO.

With regard to our relationship with Pakistan, I didn't have the benefit of being able to hear the comments of Professor Bercuson, if that was the person commenting. I don't know what he might have been suggesting with regard to the military side, so I'm not going to even venture to comment on that, although the situation in Pakistan is extremely complex and delicate, so any approach to Pakistan would need to be firm but nuanced too, and perhaps we can continue that discussion.

On the anti-narcotic strategy and the poppy crops, a number of experts argue that it's possible to develop some kind of mechanism to possibly even license or regulate the poppy trade within Afghanistan. I don't know enough about the economics of the poppy trade to be able to judge whether one or another of these proposals is workable, but what I do know from what I've read is that the current strategy is not just failing to reduce the size of the crop, it's working against us by alienating the very people who were trying to support the reconstruction effort in the Karzai government.

A starting point would be stopping eradication, because no policy is better than a policy that's self-defeating, and really energetically looking at various alternatives to the policy. One day, the Government of Afghanistan may be sufficiently strong to be able to prohibit poppy cultivation and the trade. That day is still far away, and right now our priority should be to create the conditions for peace.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paris.

Ms. Jones, and then a supplementary to Mr. Patry or Mr. Eyking.

Ms. Linda M. Jones: In terms of poppy cultivation and economic development, you have to look at our farmers in Canada and say they could make more money from poppies or marijuana, so why aren't they growing it? Obviously if people have alternatives that will provide them with a living, they will pursue them. But I agree with Roland that now is not the time to be putting the kind of pressure we are on those farmers. These changes take time, and we have to work hard and together we have to be creative, but it can be done.

MEDA has worked in Peru, for example, on alternative livelihoods, and we have success there, but you just can't throw money at it and expect it to happen overnight.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jones.

Mr. Patry, Mr. Eyking.

Mr. Bernard Patry: *Merci beaucoup.*

Mr. Paris, I read your article about NATO, “Go Big or Get Out”. You talked in the beginning about defeat, but it's not going to be a military defeat, in a sense, because the military are there to protect and to bring security, but because the neo-Taliban move away and come back from Pakistan, and everyone is going around....

It seems that about 10% or 15% of the population are backing the neo-Taliban, and some who are not backing them and the rest of the population are just waiting to see what's going on. It seems that you have success with certain things like building roads and schools, for example, but the security of these schools is not 100%.

My question is this. Some people from Congress and the Senate in the United States say we don't need more soldiers, but we need more money for reconstruction. Even if there was some money for reconstruction...the Karzai government don't spend all the money, because they don't know how to spend the money. How do you stop the corruption? One of the problems the population is facing is corruption, judicial corruption, because they don't believe in our government, and if there are any long-term problems they're going to go with the new Taliban because they want a certain sense of security, things like that.

That's my question.

The Chair: Mr. Paris.

Dr. Roland Paris: On the issue of the relationship between military force and reconstruction and the disbursement and use of reconstruction aid, clearly there is an inseparable relationship between the security conditions and our ability to deliver reconstruction aid and fund reconstruction projects. The first point I would make is that what is sometimes presented as a choice between a military approach or a developmental approach, I think, is a false choice, because in the absence of security, it's really not conceivable that we would be able to conduct the kind of development projects that we and other donors and the Afghan government have in mind.

My understanding is that, in fact, a lot of the development projects have been held up precisely because of the security situation that exists in much of the country. From what I read recently in a UN report, it identified one-third of the country as unsafe for development personnel. So I think you need to do both, essentially, if I understood your question correctly.

With regard to corruption, there are some excellent suggestions in the most recent International Crisis Group report, which I had an opportunity to read last night. The principles of transparency and accountability are applicable here, as in other areas when we're concerned with the possibility of corruption. At the very start, I think one needs to take the accountability mechanisms that have been created and make sure they're observed.

For instance, when President Karzai made a number of appointments that sidestepped the vetting process that had been created in order specifically to filter out unqualified candidates, he was not using the mechanism that was in place. So I think Karzai has to be clear that he's going to use the systems that are in place. At the local level, I think similar systems can be established as well, in conjunction with training for local police. The police judiciary, the internal ministry, are really the key, I think, in terms of tackling corruption in Afghanistan, as a start.

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paris.

Madam Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Ms. Jones, you said that CIDA was pressuring you to go to Kandahar and you talked about the lack of security in that city. Do you have ongoing activities? Do you provide aid in Afghanistan? What are the regions where your organization cannot go?

Mr. Paris, I find your proposal quite interesting. However, some elements were obvious as soon as we set foot in Afghanistan, including the fact that from the start of the operation, there were questions about the number of troops required to have an impact.

The Canadian government is not even telling us the truth about what is going on in Afghanistan. They have increased the number of troops in Afghanistan without telling us what was going on in the field.

Who will take the action that you are calling for? Who will be able to exert influence on what government so that action is taken leading either to a resolution of the conflict or to a withdrawal?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Barbot.

Mr. Paris, please.

Dr. Roland Paris: Obviously there's no simple answer to that question. If there were a simple answer to the question, then the 2,500 troops that NATO has been asking for would be heading to Afghanistan right now.

I think part of the problem here is that there's not a great deal of confidence in the strategy *actuelle* in Afghanistan. I don't think there's a collapse in confidence, but I don't think there's any great confidence either within the capitals of many members of NATO. There's a sense, I think, of drift in the operation. Hope, certainly, and not abandonment, but a sense of drift.

If NATO were to commit itself to a new strategy, and there are indications, of course—the Secretary-General of NATO's comments this past weekend—that NATO is maybe rethinking its strategy. If NATO were to commit itself to what might appear to be a more effective strategy and face up to the kind of difficult decision that I think it will have to make, then the political circumstances in which the governments are making those decisions might be somewhat different.

I don't have the answer to the question, except to say that the facts need to be presented clearly to all the NATO governments with regard to the trend lines in the country. As I said at the end of my presentation, I'm not pessimistic; I'm hopeful that this mission can be successful if the strategy is reconsidered.

The Chair: Madam Jones.

Ms. Linda M. Jones: In terms of the pressure from CIDA, we have been working in Afghanistan for three years, mainly in the central area and around Kabul. Of course, many partner organizations are working much more broadly in Afghanistan. They have very good programs. We're just getting our footprint established there now.

When we first approached CIDA to do a women's economic empowerment program in Afghanistan, we were specifically asked to do a program in Kandahar. I went to Afghanistan on an exploratory mission. I came back and said to CIDA that we would love to work with them, but that I couldn't ask staff to go to Kandahar; I wouldn't be willing to do that. I suggested that if that was the only region they were going to support, then we would have to wait and see how things went. We said that we would like to work with them. And CIDA did change its mind.

I was in Ottawa last week, and again, CIDA is interested in getting a micro-finance program going in Kandahar. I do think it's good, and we'd like to do it. So we were brainstorming: could we do it cross-border from Pakistan, where, for example, MEDA and I personally have a lot of experience; could we do it through local organizations, where we don't actually have to send staff into Kandahar.

But as I say, MEDA has a fairly limited footprint in Afghanistan right now. Most of the organizations have pulled out of Kandahar. But they're still going there for assessments. I got an e-mail from a Canadian guy this morning who's heading up the UN-Habitat's rural development programming. He just came back from Kandahar, where he was doing assessments. People are still going there, but it's pretty risky.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Jones.

Mr. Obhrai, please.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you. I have a short question, and my colleague here will ask the next question.

As I just informed the committee, tomorrow I'm leaving for the Second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan in New Delhi. We have both political and business community involvement there.

One area I saw in my briefing was that there was no involvement of the NGOs at all, civil society, within the context of the regional countries. I think that's one area you can look into. Write to the department to say you need to be involved with your partners in that forum. I think it would be a great thing. I've seen that happen with the great lakes initiative in Africa, where the NGO community is very heavily involved.

Just quickly, Pakistan lost 45 soldiers today to the Taliban. It seems to me that Pakistan is recognizing that the Taliban is moving internally as well, which is a threat to the Government of Pakistan itself. Hopefully that tack will change Pakistan's attitude, and it will come out strongly.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Again, there are more tragic casualties inflicted by the Taliban. It's terrible.

I want to thank the witnesses very much for being here today. This is my first time at the foreign affairs committee. It's truly an honour for me to be here, especially this week, Veterans Week.

I have some quick questions.

Mr. Paris, have you ever been to Afghanistan?

Dr. Roland Paris: No, I haven't.

Mr. Dave Batters: Okay.

Ms. Jones, I wonder if you could comment on the importance of our military—I'll open it up to both of you obviously—in facilitating reconstruction. You mentioned that you walked through the streets and you talked to local vendors as those streets were patrolled by tanks. Our courageous soldiers are providing the essential security that is allowing for the rebuilding of Afghanistan and the important changes.

Let's cover some of those changes, Mr. Chair. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan had no free elections, women had no rights, and most Afghani children were denied the opportunity for basic public education. Today, largely because of Canada's military efforts over the last three years, 12 million Afghan men and women have registered to vote in two elections, and five million children have been enrolled in school, one-third of whom are young girls.

Ms. Jones, I wonder if you could comment on the importance of the security our military forces provides, which allows for the changes I just mentioned and, ultimately, the peace, democracy, and freedom in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Batters.

Ms. Jones.

Ms. Linda M. Jones: I think it's a very complex question. I can give a brief answer, but it does not pay justice to the question and to the over 40 young Canadians who have lost their lives in Afghanistan.

There are certain areas in Afghanistan that are insecure. When I said I walked through the streets of Kabul as they were being controlled by tanks, I was being somewhat metaphorical. The streets I was on did not have tanks on them. I know people who live in neighbourhoods there, and there aren't tanks in those neighbourhoods. I gave that example not to dismiss the role of security, but to say there is another important side, and that is building bridges between people.

In much of Afghanistan there has been security. When the men and women voted, there were a lot of people out there running the elections who weren't protected by NATO forces. I knew a lot of those people; three of them were kidnapped while I was there. So they're not all being protected all the time. A lot of this is happening with civil society, volunteers, people who aren't protected, people who don't have armoured vehicles. So that's an important part of the reconstruction effort too.

I'm not really qualified to comment on the strategy for Kandahar. I feel I'm qualified to say that investing in civil society and economic redevelopment, as Canada has done, is very important and needs to stay important, no matter what military decisions are made. I believe the more we invest in economic rebuilding, the less we will have to rely on military intervention. But you can't just turn one thing off and another thing on. The world doesn't work that way.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jones.

Mr. Paris.

Dr. Roland Paris: I think the point about the accomplishments in Afghanistan is important, and it's often not recognized. But on the other hand, there are troubling signs there right now, and some trend lines you would look at for progress are heading in the wrong direction.

There's the number of attacks. There have been more suicide bombings this year than in the entire previous history of Afghanistan. The insurgency is using new techniques that are apparently being imported from Iraq. There are growing signs of discontent among the population with the government of Hamid Karzai. This comes not just from anecdotal evidence of people dropping by in Afghanistan and speaking to a few locals, but through organizations like the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. It did sit-down interviews with 1,000 people throughout the country this year and last year.

So there are clearly pieces of evidence that suggest the accomplishments have been extremely real, and others that suggest there are reasons for concern. My concern now is that the negative trend lines risk squandering the real accomplishments you're pointing to in your comments.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paris.

Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To both of you, we've acknowledged that tremendous progress has been made. One can only imagine what life would be like without the Canadian military and other NATO forces in Afghanistan—the very immediate reversal, the burning of schools by the Taliban. Yes, this is very difficult work; this is very heavy lifting. But especially this week, I think all of us in this room and all Canadians can be so thankful for the men and women of the Canadian Forces who are willing to put their lives on the line. We've lost, as Ms. Jones indicated, 42 service members doing this very difficult work that needs to be done. It's our part in the world to advance human rights in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Batters. That sounds more like a radio ad for Remembrance Day. I thank you for that. In a very important week, you certainly point to the good work our Canadian military is doing.

Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your testimony before the committee. The purpose of our being here is to learn from your experiences and see if we can get a more comprehensive approach to what is a very complex situation.

Ms. Jones, I appreciate and applaud you for your work on micro-finance. You may or may not know that this committee was actually in Stockholm across the street from where they announced Muhammad Yunus' Nobel Peace Prize award. I hope you're giving good solid feedback around the successes of your micro-finance projects, because you may know that CIDA's reduced its commitment to micro-finance over the last five years. In the House today I urged the minister to use the occasion of the Global Microcredit Summit to reverse that.

I want to pursue this a little bit further. I think the main message you've brought to us is that we should be building on strength, and that means working with civil society to do that and—I don't want to put words in your mouth—sort of fan out from there to increase the security more broadly. You may have seen I was scrambling through my papers looking for a map, because you mentioned the province you were in but I can't visualize it. It's in the Kabul area, I assume.

I wonder if you're aware of the project of Future Generations, which actually is the Honourable Flora MacDonald's passion at the moment. She's chair of the board of Future Generations, which has a number of projects in Afghanistan. The approach to poppy crop eradication is the exact reverse of what's happening in Kandahar, with what seems to be spectacular results. In other words, to state the obvious, you don't have people starve by removing the only economic support they have through poppy crops, you work on building the alternatives.

The leadership of the community in, I think, three different provinces where Future Generations is involved is literally engaging the whole population in the poppy crop removal by announcing when they're going out to remove the crops, with the full sanctioning of the community. Therefore, you're not creating the economic chaos and starvation in people's lives that results in their crossing over to the Taliban, who understandably exploit that.

I wonder if I might ask you to briefly speak about that. And perhaps I could add a quick question to Mr. Paris.

Mr. Paris, you talked about the problem of corruption—and this is something this committee has been trying to do its homework on—in frail, fragile, and failing states. One of the things we've been told about the increasing support the Taliban has been building, along with the obvious problems that are feeding into that, is that the Taliban are paying civilians twice the rate of what the local police are being paid. So as people are losing their economic livelihoods, they're increasingly available to be recruited by the Taliban. I wonder if you could comment on any knowledge you have of that and recommendations that flow from it.

Ms. Jones, I think you could go ahead.

● (1720)

Ms. Linda M. Jones: Okay, absolutely.

The project you described for poppy eradication absolutely sounds like the kind of program that MEDA has engaged in in Peru. It is a community-building process, where you do have to engage the whole community. Surprisingly, the people who grow poppies don't necessarily want to grow poppies; it's the only option they have.

If as a community they get to really envisage where they want their community to go, and work together and make decisions, and they're supported in making those decisions, I think change can be made. Of course, it's way more complex than that, because lots of times you do have drug lords involved and people grow poppies because they're afraid.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Some of whom are in government.

Ms. Linda M. Jones: Yes. There's no easy answer; it's step by step. It's a painful process. Sometimes it's risky.

I also want to mention something about Future Generations. It points to something very important. We come from North America. We want something to happen and we want it to happen now. We can maybe throw more troops at it and maybe we'll just make it happen, and overnight everything is going to start getting better in Afghanistan.

No. Rebuilding a country, creating democracy in a place that hasn't lived under democracy, is a long, slow process. The kind of project you were talking about, Future Generations, is building democracy from the ground up. That's the only kind of democracy that can ever work. Imposed democracy is not democracy; you have to have the empowerment of individuals.

I'll refer to the comment about anecdotal information, about “dropping by Afghanistan”. I hope that everyone has a chance to drop by Afghanistan and talk to some Afghan people. It's like that old adage: they're just like us. It's just like that Louis Armstrong song—people just want to build a better life for their kids. They just want to get on with it.

The analysts will tell us over and over again that the greatest risk for conflict is when young men do not have jobs. If young men have jobs, there are way fewer men to recruit for violent conflict. This is the number one determinant of reduced conflict: jobs for young men. The way I express it at MEDA is that if every guy has a sports car and a girlfriend, he's not going to go to war.

The Chair: Thank you.

Maybe we can talk to our car dealerships here in Canada. I don't know who we talk to on the other point. We'll try to do that eventually, I'm certain.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Yes, keep going. You still have time.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I had a short, specific question that I was hoping Mr. Paris would address. He looks very ready to do that. Thank you.

Dr. Roland Paris: I didn't realize I looked quite that eager.

You were mentioning the wages that the neo-Taliban is allegedly able to provide to its recruits. I've seen similar figures. Of course, there are conflicting reports on this. I've seen everything from $6 to $10 to $12. I think the UN drug office actually says in its recent report—the report on the 59% increase in the harvest—that it's up to $10 to $12, and that's more than double what people can get in the legitimate economy or from joining the police force. It's a serious problem, although the problem isn't just one of the resources available for an alternative livelihood. It's also an issue of people being driven to the Taliban in order to get protection for the livelihood they have, as they perceive it. I think the eradication policy is not working in our interest for that reason.

Personally—and in some ways I'm responding to the other witness, and maybe I shouldn't—I'm less enamoured with the idea of building democracy in Afghanistan than I am with being clear and modest about our goals in Afghanistan. I think that fundamentally we will never succeed in transforming that country into a kind of Sweden or into a shining example of democracy and development—not that you were suggesting that, but I think it's important to be clear.

Even talking about human security, in some ways, is too vague and ambitious for Afghanistan. Our interest, I think, and NATO's interest is to prevent this country from becoming, once again, a major base for transnational terrorism. Everything else flows from that. We need a government that's perceived as legitimate by most of the people there, and a government that's able to maintain a reasonable degree of security in most of the country, which are more modest goals, I think.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paris and Ms. Jones, for your testimony and also for the answers to our questions. We appreciate your input.

We are just going to do a little bit of committee business in relation to one meeting for which we have had a cancellation. This can be done in one minute.

Basically, we had a cancellation from the group from Pakistan on Tuesday, the 21st. I have already spoken a little bit. If we could finish off our Haiti report then, we can get that out of the way. Are we all right on that one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We are agreed. That's consensus. That's passed.

We also have a budget. Where did that budget go?

On the 28th and 29th, I think we should be able to finish up with witnesses on whatever there is on Bill C-293. If we can finish the report on the.... I don't want to go right back to the beginning on this report, again. Let's finish this thing once and for all in that one hour we have.

Mr. Bernard Patry: On the 29th you say we will finish Bill C-293. That is if there are no witnesses.

The Chair: It depends on how many witnesses the committee wants hear.

Mr. Bernard Patry: If there are no witnesses, we're going to finish it.

The Chair: Yes.

Did you all get a copy of the budget? Did we pass that around?

Mr. Peter Goldring: You said to finish the Haiti report in that one hour that you're allotting.

The Chair: I'm hoping we can finish it.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Because we've spent three hours on it—

The Chair: Perhaps we can't. That's why I'm not going to back completely away from the Haiti thing. I want that Haiti report done. I think it can be done in an hour.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Peter, can we meet on the Tuesday morning, as we did the last time?

Mr. Peter Goldring: All right.

The Chair: I think if you could meet and go through it again and streamline it—

Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: —because the person who is with me is sick.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's why we're keeping the 29th open. We have the Haiti report on the schedule. I'm hoping we can finish it, but if we can't, then the committee has to go back—

Now, I want to get this budget passed. Basically, the bells will be starting soon. We have the budget here. This is our travel budget to Washington. We cannot even make an application to go to Washington if we do not have this budget passed. So take a look at the budget.

Angela, do you want to summarize this a bit?

● (1730)

The Clerk of the Committee: We discussed it at the steering committee meeting, but we never had a chance to discuss it here. Members of the steering committee recommended that members use one of their four travel points for Washington on this trip. So the travel costs are just for staff, and then there are the hotels and per diems for all members and staff. It's calculated for 12 members. I had to put in dates, so I put in the week before the committee comes back—January 20 to January 24.

You could leave from your ridings on Sunday and go back on the Thursday.

The Chair: Are there any questions in regard to that? Again, I want to remind you that we're talking about points here on the air traffic. So you'd use up a point.

Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Maybe I missed a beat here, but I didn't realize we had made a decision—or maybe that's what we're here discussing—to spend four days in Washington. I thought there was some discussion about our spending a couple of days in Washington and couple of days at the UN. I personally would strongly favour that. I don't see why we would spend four days in Washington, frankly, especially given the state Washington's going to be in.

The Clerk: It's Washington, because that's what was discussed at the steering committee. We never got to discuss it at the main committee.

The Chair: I agree with Madam McDonough. This is a potential Washington...but it may end up being Washington and New York. Can we change that without much change in budget?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Would that be more money?

The Clerk: Probably the cost won't be much different, because it's just hotels.

The Chair: But there will be some travel.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: The points will cover the round trip. So it will be New York and Washington.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll put that on the budget. Is it all clear? Do we accept this?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: It sounds as if there's a consensus on it. I may get troubled again on 12 travelling, but maybe not. It's a break week and we're using points.

Mr. Dave Batters: If Mr. Casey is sick, I'd be happy to fill in, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, committee. Have a good break week.

The meeting is adjourned.

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