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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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● (0900)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

This is meeting number 48 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

I welcome everyone back. I say “everyone” with tongue in cheek. Madame Barbot and Mr. Goldring are here, and we'll wait for the others, but I want to begin on time this morning so that we can keep fairly close to the constraints we have.

We continue our study on Afghanistan and the briefings we have been receiving on Afghanistan.

In the first hour we will hear from the Conference of Defence Associations, Alain Pellerin, the executive director. He is a former colonel in the CAF and spent 17 years in Europe, including 10 years with NATO agencies. He brings to his testimony this morning extensive exposure to international negotiations, public policy, diplomacy, protocol, and problem solving.

Also from the Conference of Defence Associations we have Brian MacDonald, a senior defence analyst. Mr. MacDonald is well known to Canadians, as he is often consulted by national media to comment on different military issues. He's also a retired colonel in the CAF and currently consults on international, domestic, strategic, and business security issues.

From UNICEF Canada, we welcome home Mr. Fisher, who is returning from a brief holiday. We're very thankful that Air Canada got him here today. Nigel Fisher, president and CEO, has worked for UNICEF for over 20 years in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. He has advised the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He has served as the Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, specifically as deputy special representative of the Secretary General for relief, recovery, and reconstruction in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2005.

We certainly look forward to your testimony this morning. We welcome you for the first hour, and we'll have different guests in the second hour.

Perhaps you have attended our committees in the past and you've given testimony in the past. We'll have opening statements, and we'll then go into a round of questioning.

Welcome. The time is yours. We look forward to what you have to say.

[*Translation*]

Colonel (Retired) Alain Pellerin (Executive Director, Conference of Defence Associations): Good morning, Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

[*English*]

The Conference of Defence Associations is grateful for this opportunity to comment on the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, an international force of more than 36,000 troops from 37 countries. This total does not include the commitment of an extra 700 Poles, an extra 500 Australians, an extra U.S. brigade of some 3,500, and the U.K. battle group of some 1,200. That will bring the total to over 40,000, all of whom will be deployed in the key southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan. This deployment will also provide support for the work of the 25 provincial reconstruction teams, PRTs, across the whole country.

My recent 10-day visit to Afghanistan in late October and November, when I had the opportunity to speak with the Canadians there, provided me with a privileged although not unique perspective that I wish to share with you today.

That perspective allows me to report that the Canadian troops, both male and female, regular and reserve—as you know, some 15% of the contingent is from the reserve force—serving in Afghanistan believe in their mission. They believe they are making a difference. They believe that progress is being achieved. They believe in their leaders. They believe in the quality of their equipment, and they believe that they have been well prepared for their mission. Those are very important beliefs, because these troops are on the ground; they're the ones implementing the mission. They also believe that if they are withdrawn before the mission has achieved its objectives, all they have sacrificed will be put at risk.

We must also remember that the ISAF mission, which is a Canadian mission, is about a lot more than purely military operation. It is not just about killing the Taliban in the mountains—far from it. ISAF is also involved in the reconstruction of the formerly failed state that has slowly advanced to the status of a fragile state.

Such Canadian responsibilities include the PRT in Kandahar, which has a strength of about 250. That includes not just Canadian Forces but a number of RCMP officers, Foreign Affairs officers, and CIDA officers. Critical assistance in developing the governance capabilities of the elected Government of Afghanistan is provided by the strategic assistance team in Kabul—some 15 officers from DND, mostly military but some civilian. They work very closely with the Afghan government—in fact, they work very closely with each minister of the cabinet. That's a very important and unknown program. This is part of the tangible Canadian contribution that also includes very important assistance in the training of the Afghan National Army, and especially the training of the Afghan National Police.

Canadians understand that there are no quick fixes for the reconstruction of a fragile state. After 25 years of brutal war everything needs to be rebuilt. That being said, the situation is much better than it was six years ago under the Taliban, and better than it was over a year ago when the Canadian battle group was deployed in Kandahar. Progress is being made.

We in ISAF are not there as invaders—that's an important dimension to remember; we are there at the request of the elected Government of Afghanistan, and under a UN mandate. The people of Afghanistan are weary of war, destitution, and hopelessness. The majority of the Afghan people want us there. Recent BBC and Asia Foundation polls conducted before Christmas indicate that 80% of the citizens support the presence of the coalition soldiers in Afghanistan. They want the economic and social development progress that is taking part in much of the country to spread to all parts of the country, including the south and east.

● (0905)

They fear what would happen to them if our search for an early exit strategy places its emphasis upon exit rather than upon strategy and leads to the callous abandonment of a fragile but growing state that is still too weak to stand up to its oppressors. They especially fear the return of the Taliban and its partners in crime, drugs and terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen, our presentation will deal with four topics: criteria for assessing the ISAF mission's effectiveness, the ISAF concept of operation, assessing the success of the ISAF operation, and finally assessing the consequences of a premature withdrawal of ISAF.

The CDA believes the ISAF mission and Canada's considerable part in it will be considered to have been effective and successful if and when the campaign of terror being waged by the Taliban and their extremist allies fails, security is restored to the point that ordinary Afghans enjoy personal liberty and freedom from fear, the Afghan army and police become effective in ensuring security, the country's market economy begins to flourish, central Afghan government control spreads throughout the country, human rights are respected, a significant infrastructure development program is under way, and the elements of a made-in-Afghanistan democratic system of government spread to all parts of the country.

It is obvious that achieving the foregoing is a phenomenally complex and difficult undertaking. Nevertheless, the CDA believes the absence of any one of the above criteria would put the successful completion of the ISAF mission in doubt. It is also important to remember that it is better to help Afghans do it imperfectly than do it ourselves. In essence, our approach should be an Afghan face at an Afghan pace.

Next I will discuss the ISAF concept of operation. The mission of the NATO ISAF is to conduct military operations in order to assist the government of Afghanistan in establishing and maintaining, with the full engagement of the Afghan national security forces, a safe and secure environment that will allow the government to extend its authority and influence and thereby facilitate Afghanistan's reconstruction and establish regional stability.

From its inception, this mission has consisted of five phases. The first one, phase one, was assessment and preparation, including operations in Kabul. Phase two was geographic expansion, which is now completed. Phase three is stabilization; phases four and five are transition and redeployment.

In October 2003 the UN Security Council authorized the extension of the NATO mission beyond Kabul. In October 2004 stage one of the expansion to the north was completed, with stage two in the west following in September 2005. Stage three of the expansion—to include the south—was completed on July 31, 2006. Remember that: 2006, less than a year ago. Stage four—to include the east—was completed on October 6, 2006.

Currently the Canadian Forces and seven other nations, as part of the ISAF Regional Command South, are engaged in the early stages of the stabilization phase, whereas in the ISAF Regional Command West and ISAF Regional Command North the Germans, the Italians, and the Spaniards in particular have progressed further into the stabilization phase of the operation.

I would now ask my colleague, retired Colonel Brian MacDonald, a CDA senior defence analyst, to provide you with his assessment on whether the ISAF operation is a success and on the dangers of a premature withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Thank you.

● (0910)

Colonel (Retired) Brian MacDonald (Senior Defence Analyst, Conference of Defence Associations): Thank you, Colonel Pellerin.

Ladies and gentlemen, a conventional mantra has been that there is no military solution in Afghanistan. In our view, a far better way of phrasing that would be to say that there cannot be, without the military-provided security, any chance of development. And we have noticed in this past year that there has been an extension of the area in which the Afghan citizenry feel that security has been improved.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which is a highly respected international institution, conducts each year its Afghanistan opium rapid assessment winter survey, and that has just been published within the last month. It covered structured interviews with the headmen of 508 selected villages across Afghanistan in 236 of the districts, and thus provides a useful grassroots database of opinion at the village level.

The winter survey reports that the security situation was rated by these grassroots village headmen as either very good or good in 23 provinces and as very bad or bad in eight provinces, including those of the southern region. In late 2006, then, some 75% of Afghanistan's provinces felt secure. The challenge for ISAF is to extend that area of felt security even farther, and with security comes development.

That same UN Office on Drugs and Crime survey asked about whether or not external assistance activities were reaching their villages, and the village headmen reported that 451 of the 508 villages had in fact received external assistance in some 828 separate activities. Of these activities, 54% were provided by the Government of Afghanistan; 24% by United Nations and international organizations; 17% by NGOs; 4% by USAID; and 1% by others.

The assistance activities took the form of medical activities, some 50%; infrastructure activities, 20%; agricultural activities, 13.5%; education, 11%; and employment, 4%.

We can also turn from the grassroots perspective to the macro level of looking at changes in the gross domestic product, the investment, and the exports of Afghanistan over the past five years. When I draw these statistics from the recent report of the International Monetary Fund, which was tabled about six weeks ago, it showed that over the past five years the average GDP growth rate was in the order of 15% annually; the growth rate in the investment of capital formation was in the order of 40% annually; and the increase in exports from Afghanistan, not counting the export of heroin or opium, was growing at a rate of about 20% annually.

The IMF report commended that despite a difficult security environment and persistent expenditure pressures, Afghanistan's performance during the first six months of the 2006-07 fiscal year was in line with the program. The authorities met all of the end-of-September 2006 qualitative and quantitative performance criteria and indicative targets, the structural performance criterion, and most structural benchmarks except for those related to the state-owned banks.

Other evidence may be found in the report of the Canadian Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and International Aid, which has been tabled before you and does not, therefore, require further comment from me.

We conclude from our examination of data at both the micro grassroots level and the macro international organization level that significant progress has been made and is continuing to be made. We nevertheless need to go a great deal further than that. Nonetheless, there has been a successful track record.

This leads me to my second point, which is the assessment of the danger of ISAF's withdrawing prematurely. This is the question of what would happen if we were to withdraw. Here the question I think centres upon the capacity of a fragile state to provide the security needed to allow future development to continue along its past success path. And here again is another crucial problem, and that is the balance of financial resources between those possessed by the Government of Afghanistan on the one hand and those possessed by the anti-government forces on the other.

● (0915)

The International Monetary Fund report that I have already cited shows that the domestic tax and non-tax revenues of the Afghan government amounted to about 4.5% of GDP in 2003, and are projected to rise to only 6.8% in 2007-08. This has been supplemented, of course, by grants from the international community, which would raise the central government's revenue base to about 9% of GDP in 2003, and about 14% in 2007.

Clearly, this is a very weak financial resource base. In developed countries, we would normally expect to see central government expenditures between 40% and 55% of GDP. In third world countries, developing countries, we would normally expect to see it somewhere in the order of 20% to about 25% of GDP. In comparison to those benchmarks, the actual revenue base available to the Government of Afghanistan is quite small.

Set against this are the financial capacities of the anti-government forces, particularly those coming from opium and heroin production. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime reported that in 2006, the export value of opium and heroin to neighbouring countries amounted to about $2.7 billion, of which the farmers got about 20%, or about $0.5 billion, with the drug traffickers getting the remaining $2.14 billion, or about 80% of the total value.

This was followed up by another study done by the World Bank and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, entitled *Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics, and Implications for Counter-Narcotics Policy*. It estimated that the trade at that point had increased to about $3 billion, accounting for 92% of global production and for about one-third of the total economic activity of Afghanistan. It traced a process of consolidation taking place in the drug business, and it also looked at the effects of this in terms of the ability of the drug traffickers and their allies to bribe and corrupt public officials and to fund the hiring of soldiers for the Taliban and the forces that are engaged against us.

The executive director of the UNODC stated on March 20 of this year, in a briefing to the United Nations Security Council, "In the south—the vicious circle of drugs funding terrorism, and terrorism supporting drug lords is stronger than ever." In other words, opium cultivation in the south of the country is less a narcotic issue and more a matter of insurgency, so it is vital to fight them both together.

At the CDA, we believe that this great disparity in financial resources between the drug traffickers and their allies on the one hand, and the revenues of the national government on the other hand —a ratio of 6.8% to 33%—is such that if ISAF were to withdraw, it would result in a complete overthrow of the Afghan national government. The country would be quickly pitched back into civil war, with a decline into regional warlord control at best, and the coming to power of a new Taliban structure at worst, depending on the moneys to be provided by the drug traffickers. In our view, Afghanistan would evolve from being a narco-economy to being a neo-Taliban narco-state, with the prospect of the return of human rights abuses and perhaps the al-Qaeda training camps, and the destruction of everything that we have stood for and sought to achieve in our program of assisting the reconstruction of a formerly failed state.

Thank you, sir.

● (0920)

The Chair: I thank you both.

Mr. Fisher, please.

Mr. Nigel Fisher (President and Chief Executive Officer, UNICEF Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, I much appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee today. I speak to you from personal involvement with Afghanistan for over a decade, both with the UN Department of Peacekeeping and with UNICEF. You may be interested to know that besides having been deputy special representative of the Secretary General in Afghanistan, I was also at the same time the designated official responsible for the security of all UN personnel in the country.

Assistance to Afghanistan should be a high priority for Canada today and for the foreseeable future. It's in our self-interest to invest in Afghanistan's security and reconstruction. Canada's military role is important and absolutely necessary at this time, but it is not sufficient. An increase in non-military development assistance to Afghanistan is absolutely essential.

In my ten minutes, I will offer some brief introductory observations on a menu of priority issues for Canada in Afghanistan today, but respectfully suggest that Canada strategically focus its attention on a limited number of these, including important reconstruction and development priorities, so as to be able to achieve results that are demonstrable to Afghans and Canadians alike.

Issue number one is NATO and the Canadian military. NATO troops with Canadians in a central role in the south are very much needed in Afghanistan at this time to engage and contain the Taliban, but Canada has to be realistic about its military objectives. This is guerrilla warfare, and ultimate victory on the battlefield is unlikely. Militarily, we are buying time to allow other pieces of the reconstruction puzzle to be slowly put in place: institutions of good governance, security sector reform, economic and social development, human rights, and respect for the rule of law, all of which have to be visible and tangible to ordinary Afghans. They must see that there is an alternative to predatory government and to Taliban extremism.

Issue number two is the Taliban and others. Should there be any negotiations with the Taliban? The Taliban are not one solid, unified entity, nor are other groups, such as Hizb-I-Islami. So the answer is yes: talk quietly to those who are willing to talk. The Karzai government has had some success in this regard, especially during the period 2002-2004, and some Taliban have come in from the cold. There is space to exploit the traditional tensions within the Taliban movement, between their national aspirations to power on the one hand and their transnational alliance with Islamic extremists on the other. Efforts need to be made to prise away those who are not hard-core radical extremists

Issue number three is governance. It's important that Afghanistan have an effective government of integrity, which is seen as such by Afghan citizens. Thus, building the institutions of governance and supporting Afghan-led development are important. Discriminating Canadian support can help strengthen institutions and leaders that will truly represent Afghan aspirations, while frankly helping to weaken those with a history of predation and human rights abuses. Canada can further help to extend government-led development programs, like the national solidarity program, or the micro-finance investment support facility, designed to ensure that Afghan government resources visibly reach ordinary Afghans around the country. When Afghans see some benefits accruing from their government, they will support it.

Issue number four is human rights and the rule of law. For most Afghans outside the south, insecurity is not about the Taliban. It's about the daily intimidation, extortion, and abuse visited on ordinary Afghans by local commanders, warlords, and their forces. If Canada and the international community do not invest in establishing the rule of law and institutions of accountability, which diminish the power of those who abuse ordinary Afghans, neither we nor the current Afghan government will have credibility in the eyes of the country's citizens.

Despite some recent progress, by any indicator, Afghan women and girls are the worst off in the world. They suffer from the highest maternal mortality rates, insecurity of person, abuse, and discrimination. Canada has long made gender equity a cornerstone of its development philosophy. An application of that philosophy is much needed in Afghanistan today.

● (0925)

Issue five is counter-narcotics. The parallel narco-mafia state is flourishing across Afghanistan, but the level of commitment of the international community to counter narcotics in the country is absolutely derisory. Destroying crops without providing alternatives is a recipe for disaster. The international community either has to invest billions in on-farm and off-farm income generation alternatives over the next 15 to 20 years—because that's how long it will take—or bite the bullet and find a way to channel Afghan narcotics legally into the pharmaceutical industry and health systems around the world; otherwise, the underground narcotics economy alone will overwhelm any hope for a democratic, peaceful, law-abiding, pluralistic, and prosperous state.

Issue six is social and economic development. As we like to repeat, security and development are two sides of the same coin. Tangible social and economic reconstruction will act as a catalyst for increasing security and political stability. At the most basic level, ordinary people need to see some positive, tangible change in their lives at community level. Let me briefly take the two examples of education and health care.

There is a huge popular demand for education in Afghanistan. Six years ago, under Taliban rule, a few thousand children attended secret home schools in Afghanistan. With UNICEF, I was directly involved in the first massive back-to-school program in 2002. Today over 5 million children, 34% of them girls, attend almost 9,000 schools, many of which are still desperately short of facilities and materials. Education of girls is one of the best long-term social and economic investments that any country can make, and that includes Afghanistan. Despite Taliban violence and threats and despite explosions like the one that killed four children, boys, earlier today in a Herat primary school, Afghans want a better future, and education holds the key. Around the country in the 34 provinces, there are already over 8,000 community shurahs formed specifically to look at security and protection of schools, and many of those involve traditional religious leaders and local leaders. Surely we have an obligation to support such courage and hope.

In terms of basic health care, Afghanistan has the highest child and maternal mortality rates in the world, so investment in health care in Afghanistan can yield huge immediate and long-term benefits. UNICEF experience in Afghanistan supporting the fledgling national health services indicates that measurable returns on investment are possible. Examples are reduced child mortality rates from vaccine-preventable diseases or improved maternal health care services. These are all fields in which CIDA has invested through UNICEF and others. The international community has at its disposal the knowledge to significantly reduce child and maternal mortality in Afghanistan. We need the sustained financial resources to put that knowledge into action on a massive scale, and at a time when CIDA is under scrutiny to show the impact of its programs, a scaling-up of Canadian investment in basic health and education in Afghanistan would indeed produce measurable results.

The final issue is Afghanistan and its neighbours. May I just note in passing that Afghanistan's neighbours, Iran and Pakistan in particular, have to be drawn constructively into the process of peace-building and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, after three decades of conflict and predatory leadership it would be surprising indeed if Afghanistan were at peace; it should not be surprising to anyone that it will take decades at best to achieve it. Therefore, Canada should retain a long-term commitment to Afghanistan's future well beyond 2010. It is in our strategic interests and certainly in the interests of peace, order, and good governance in Afghanistan. There is no quick fix, and it is premature to talk about an exit strategy.

Canada needs to be clear and realistic about its military and reconstruction objectives, and it does need to articulate a much clearer Afghanistan strategy, consisting of three broad areas: first, military operations and security sector reform; second, good governance; and third, economic and social development.

We would also argue for a significant increase in Canada's investment in reconstruction and institution-building in Aghanistan, and Canada—as yet only halfway towards its stated goal of committing 0.7% of its gross national income to overseas development assistance—can well afford that increased investment.

● (0930)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

Thank you to all our guests.

We'll go to the first round of questioning. We'll have six-minute rounds, and one round may be all we'll have.

Mr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be sharing my time with my colleague Mr. Wilfert.

[*English*]

We're going to ask our question, and we'll let our guest answer it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pellerin and all the other gentlemen who presented here this morning spoke a great deal about NATO's International Security Assistance Force, of ISAF. This is the first NATO mission outside of Europe. You talked about security, development and drugs.

The approach of the current and former Canadian governments was the 3D approach. For my part, it's my impression that ISAF is not progressing and will not progress in the near future, that is the next two or three years.

Geopolitics are very important in that part of the world. Just think of Pakistan, India, Iran or Russia, for example. My question is very simple and yet very important.

Don't you think that right now, it wouldl be important for the international community to show a bit of diplomacy? An international conference should be held that would include members of the P5, China, the European Union, India, Iran and so forth. I get the impression that for the time being, no progress is being achieved, and that without diplomacy, there will be no progress in the near future.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Wilfert.

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

Thank you for coming, gentlemen.

In terms of policy and solutions, it's been said this is the most under-resourced operation since the Second World War. For example, the ratio is 1:1,000 in terms of peacekeepers, compared to Kosovo at 20.5 or Bosnia at 19.

There clearly seems to be a lack of coordination among the NATO members there. Obviously they all have different mandates in terms of their ability to exercise on the ground.

The question is this. Is this war winnable, given the strategy that's presently in place?

● (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

For the remainder of the time, we'll go to our guests.

Mr. Pellerin.

[*Translation*]

Col Alain Pellerin: With regard to the first question, I do not accept Mr. Patry's statement to the effect that there is no progress being achieved. In this regard, I would say that we have to take into consideration the entire country. If you read the commentary in the newspapers or listen in the House of Commons, you get the impression that we're concentrating on the Kandahar region, in the south, where there is a military dimension.

As Col. MacDonald mentioned, in the other regions, that is 75% or 80% of the country, a great deal of progress has been achieved. We have to remember that the Taliban were in the south, where we are now, and that there is more drug cultivation in the south than in the rest of the country.

For example, the Germans sent 3,000 troops to northeastern Afghanistan where there are no Taliban and where the drug problem is less significant. When it comes to ensuring the necessary reconstruction, development and security, it's much simpler for the Germans than it is for us in the south. I think that there is progress throughout the country. We demonstrated that and Col. MacDonald demonstrated it as well with his figures.

With regard to Mr. Wilfert's question,

[*English*]

I agree with you that there aren't enough boots on the ground. If you look at counter-insurgency operations in the past, for instance, Malaysia is always a good example that's mentioned. Northern Ireland is another example where on average you had between 20 and 25 soldiers to a population of 1,000, whereas in Afghanistan and the south, you'd probably find it's 2.5 or 3 soldiers to 1,000. At the end of the day, I believe it means the counter-insurgency operation will be successful, but it will take longer because there aren't as many boots on the ground as there should be.

That being said, if we look at the number of countries that are involved now in the south, there are eight countries. The Brits will increase their force by another 1,400, the Americans will increase by 3,500, the Poles will send close to 1,000, and the Australians will double their size. There is a commitment at least by some nations to do more where the real problem for NATO is, and that's in the south.

I would suggest that if we are not successful in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar and the eastern provinces, then the NATO mission will fail. It's why it's important to address it and to address it successfully.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pellerin.

Does anyone else have any very quick comments in regard to the questions?

Mr. Fisher, very quickly.

Mr. Nigel Fisher: I would just say that I think there's been a lot of progress with ISAF, on the presence there internationally in the last few years. You look at the relative security in two-thirds of the country. You look at the fact that, from my perspective, development and reconstruction activities are going on in the south, often hampered, but the presence of the ISAF and NATO force is very important. And if you look at the growth in economic activity, social activity, there have been a couple of elections, and there are more hostilities in parliament these days than there are in two-thirds of the country. I think that's a pretty good sign.

The Chair: Thank you. We understand that quite well.

Madame Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I will be sharing my time with Ms. Barbot.

We found that if the United States withdrew from Iraq, it's highly likely according to analysts that the Mujahidins would move toward Afghanistan.

The Soviet Union, which came to the rescue of a government it wanted to support, deployed a lot of soldiers in Afghanistan—at least 80,000—and spent a great deal on infrastructure, schools, etc. And yet they were chased out, and the CIA contributed to this, through a vast movement of the Mujahidin, which as a matter of fact enabled Osama bin Laden to gain some experience.

What evidence is there that NATO could resist this geopolitical context?

● (0940)

Col Alain Pellerin: My colleague may also want to add a few words.

There's no doubt that there's a very great difference between the intervention of the Soviet Union in 1979 and the presence not only of NATO but of 70 countries that are participating in the reconstruction of the country. A mandate from the Security Council governs their presence in the country. There is still a lot of—

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I'm talking about resources.

Col Alain Pellerin: Close to 80% of the population supports the presence of the coalition. You're saying that's not the case, but the figures prove it.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: There are so many studies that provide contradictory figures that it's hard to believe this.

Col Alain Pellerin: Col. MacDonald can tell you about the figures that were drawn from the surveys. Some credible polls, for example that of the BBC and the Asia Foundation, indicated that before Christmas there was support to the tune of 80%. You can't compare the two because the Soviet presence, which was countered by the Americans and Saudi Arabian money, led to a war that was unsustainable.

The war continues in the southern and eastern parts of the country, but 75% of the provinces are relatively stable. There's no doubt there are problems, but there is some stability. Our presence has the support of the population. This country has been at war for almost 25 years. The public is fed up with the war. They want some stability and the coalition wants to give them that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Nigel Fisher: I think if you look at the roots of the military presence as currently now in Afghanistan, there's one big difference from the Russians: the Russians invaded. The troop presence that's currently there came out of the Bonn agreement, and there were Afghan parties there, everybody except the Taliban. So many of the Afghan parties still have an interest, however tenuous, in the current peace and stability in Afghanistan and in the growth of stability in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Barbot, you have two minutes.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): We have doubts about that of course, but let's suppose that 80% of Afghans support the alliance. However, the other part of the equation is the Canadian population. We know that the public is less and less supportive of the fact that our Canadian troops are still over there. This is particularly the case in Quebec, which will soon start to see bodies being flown home.

In that context, and given that the mission has already been prolonged to 2009, what tangible results can the government show the people? We're often told about Afghan women who can go to school and I have no doubt that some of them do that. However, in a context where we can't even manage to get rid of the Taliban who keep coming back, how can we present serious results to the public that will go on beyond a few months?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barbot.

Mr. Pellerin.

Col Alain Pellerin: If we look at the polls, the support of the Canadian public is quite stable, at about 50%. It varies a little, but overall, 50% of the population supports the mission. With regard to Quebec, I do agree with you, it's a bit less.

It will be interesting to see what happens when my regiment, the Royal 22nd, goes to Afghanistan in August. We have to remember that Quebeckers want us to explain why this kind of mission is taking place. In that regard, perhaps the government does have its work cut out. The Quebec public also supports the Canadian Forces, and in particular my regiment because it has been around a very long time. I think that if we explain clearly to Quebeckers that this is a just mission and that progress can be achieved, they will support us. It's not only as you mentioned a matter of helping women go to school; it's much more than that. For example, we've been in the Kandahar region for a little over a year and the Taliban, who are still present there, are now using the tactics of the weak. Remember operation Medusa from last September. They lost about 100 men then. There are no frontal attacks, as we saw last year, in the Kandahar region. I believe our presence has been felt, not only in Kandahar, but in villages such as those in Panjwai valley, where operation Medusa took place last September. Six thousand families have gone back to live in the valley because the Canadian Forces are providing security there.

I believe there's been a lot of progress, but unfortunately, the mission seems to be evaluated in terms of the number of deaths and bodies being flown home to Canada. In my opinion, you have to go to Afghanistan in order to talk to the troops and see how much the soldiers believe in this mission. They see progress and they are prepared to continue. All I'm asking is that they be supported.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pellerin.

[*English*]

We're going to have to go to the next round.

Mr. Goldring and Mr. Khan, on a split. I would ask for very quick questions and then quick answers.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Gentlemen, thank you for being here today.

It certainly is good to see the advances that have been made. When we first started, there were some 700,000 children in school, now we have some tenfold increase. Of course there's still so much more to do. And there is the tragedy of our soldiers coming home.

You made a comment earlier, Colonel Pellerin, about governance and having a strategic assistance team that's largely military. Could you expand on that a bit? What do they draw on from their experience to deal with the headmen? Are the headmen the same people as local warlords? Is this the training that comes from RMC? To me, coming from the military and talking about a form of governance, although it's important....

Col Alain Pellerin: That's a very interesting question. I would suggest that you invite Colonel Capstick, who was the first commanding officer of that mission in Kabul and who is back in Canada, or Colonel Dixon, who's there now.

On the background to that, there was a request from President Karzai to General Hillier to provide some advisers to the government to do very basic things: preparing plans; flow charts, where they could go to international meetings; and to suggest a plan—a very simple plan—on how to implement their future.

With respect to those officers, I think it's a background in our own training. In Canada, the training for officers in our profession is second to none. I think we have a very good training system. It's very hands-on, and that starts at the military college and staff college, etc.

There are about 15 or 16 senior officers in Kabul. They're involved with all the ministers They're close advisers to ministers. One of them is a chief of staff to a minister. It's is very unknown here in Canada that we're working so closely with the Afghan government and that we are very successful.

Again, we try to do that at their own pace, because it's their country. It's not our policy to be implemented by them, but rather what we can do to help implement their policy. It's a very successful program.

● (0950)

The Chair: Mr. Khan.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, thank you for being here.

I just want to touch upon something that's been bothering me. We never hear from my colleagues or the media that the school children who are blind and deaf in southern Afghanistan, in Kandahar, came down for a picnic at Camp Nathan Smith a couple of weeks ago. That is a huge success story. Nobody talks about the 100 projects that are taking place as the military moves forward and the development they did in Kandahar. And I don't hear about the security for the Kajaki Dam, which will be providing electricity to possibly two million people. Of course the UNICEF gentleman, Nigel Fisher, talked about the progress.

These things have to be looked at on an incremental basis. Afghanistan is larger than Iraq, with 30 million people, and we have limited resources. A tremendous job has been done. Nobody talks about the judges who have been trained—75 and 95 and 20. There is a lot of progress going on. And there's the cooperation between the jirga on the Afghan side and the jirga on the Pakistan side. There is some communication.

There are of course some concerns, and you addressed those concerns—the regional actors—but there has been a new development. I'd like your comment on that. There's a new united national front that has come up. Are you aware of that? And if you are, what is your view? There is also a former defence minister, Mohammad Qasim Fahim, and Yunus Qanoni and Mustafa Zahir, Zahir Shah's grandson, who were trying to bring about a prime minister's position. So I see it as very positive, because they're thinking of democracy. I would like to receive your comment on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khan.

Mr. MacDonald.

Col Brian MacDonald: Perhaps I could respond first of all to your comment about the lack of media attention. Since I have occasional contact with the media, I think perhaps I could comment on this.

I covered the first Gulf War with CTV, and I also then covered with CTV the Balkan crisis. One thing that was really interesting to me was the way in which the attention span of the media had shortened in that period of time. When Lloyd and I would be doing a talk-back at the end of a sequence of data in the first Gulf War, we would characteristically spend about 2 minutes and 40 seconds in that talk-back. By the time we had hit Bosnia, we were down to a minute and 15 seconds, a minute and 10 seconds. As a consequence of this, the amount of attention that can be paid to the detail is something that simply seems to be decreasing. The attention span somehow is decreasing.

Among the other controlling things in television there is, first of all, the traditional journalistic principle of "if it bleeds, it leads"—that it is far easier to talk about disaster than to talk about good things happening. Beyond that, of course, there is the problem of having to have visual materials. If you can't get the pictures, then you can't tell the story. All this makes reliance upon television as our dominant medium as a means of expressing and communicating complex ideas—as is certainly the case in Afghanistan—difficult.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Ten seconds.

The Chair: Okay, you got it. That's all.

Mr. Wajid Khan: When we talk about our troops pulling back, and we talk about the negative feeling in support of the troops, do you think it has any impact as far as their security in Afghanistan is concerned? If somebody says pull your troops back, the enemy thinks this is a weak link in the chain: if we attack a few more people they'll end up withdrawing them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khan. Unfortunately, we don't have time for the answer.

Madam McDonough.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today. I have to say that you've unloaded a lot of information, and without our having the ability to really process it and think it through, it's difficult to respond. It feels like a bit of an assault, but I know that's not your intention.

I'm very disturbed about two things. One is that I think there is a failure generally.... I'm not meaning to level this accusation specifically at you, but I feel that it's been repeated here, again. It happens all the time in Parliament when one tries to ask questions, and all too often in this committee. There's a kind of intermingling and mixing and not making a clear distinction; one talks about the ISAF troops in general, and we don't really deal with the specifics of what the Canadian troops are doing in Kandahar as part of the counter-insurgency mission. The same is true when we keep hearing —as we do—various references to success stories, but actually, very seldom do we get the kind of information we need to really assess the mission in Kandahar, per se.

I want to say, Mr. Fisher, that I very much appreciated in your presentation that you were acknowledging that there is a very serious problem with Canada's failure to deliver with anything like a reasonable effort the 0.7% ODA. Every time we hear the claim that our highest commitments are to Afghanistan, of course, it's never acknowledged that we're at less than one-third, and in fact, less than one-quarter of some of the other developed countries in the world in terms of our level of commitment.

I want to go to a couple of specific reports that you haven't referenced in all your good news about progress. Most of what has been presented today is in very stark contrast to the assessment of the Secretary General in his report to the Security Council last week. Specifically, that report goes on at considerable length about the very serious popular alienation from both the Afghan government and, I think, the countries that are engaged in propping up that government. That is a result of a horrendous amount of corruption, bad appointments, and as Mr. Fisher himself said, the fact that the biggest security threats experienced by most people in Afghanistan are not at all from the Taliban but are in fact from the corruption that exists at the level of officials and from the violence associated with warlords, drug lords, and so on. I wonder if you could address that. I'm saying this specifically to Colonel Pellerin and Colonel MacDonald, if they could address that.

● (0955)

The Chair: Be very quick, please.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Yes.

I'll stop there, and if I have time for another question....

Col Alain Pellerin: Since we don't have much time, I'll leave it to Colonel MacDonald, because he's done all the research on the report.

Col Brian MacDonald: There is certainly no question that a critical problem in Afghanistan is the corruption of public officials. And the reason you have the corruption of public officials is the availability of money to corrupt them. That money is coming predominantly from the drug traffickers. These are large quantities of money that could be used to buy off an official, and as a consequence create a situation in which the local populace sees quite clearly that officials who should be working on their behalf are working on their own behalf.

There is a parallel problem, and that is the decision on the part of the international community to focus first on the reconstruction of the Afghan National Army, which has been going reasonably well. Some of the commentators, and I must confess that I probably agree with them, will suggest that the institution that should have been focused on first was the Afghan National Police, because it is considerably behind the Afghan National Army in terms of the development of a credible, consistent force that acts for the benefit of the people rather than for their own ends.

If we are able, then, to get the reform of the Ministry of the Interior, including the Afghan National Police, I think we'd be in a position to be in a far better frame for the future.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I have a brief follow-up question.

There is very little devotion in your comments to the need for an aggressive, robust, peace-building process of a regional nature. I know that Mr. Fisher has referred to this, and I just want to quote that the key in peace operations is to ensure that the resort to military force is a support to the peace process rather than a substitute for it. Those are the words of Ernie Regehr, but that view has been expressed again and again by those who are very experienced in what it means to be involved in genuine peace-building. I'm wondering if you could comment on that, because this is a very widely shared concern among Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam McDonough.

Col Alain Pellerin: Absolutely. If I could quickly make a comment—and I've worked with Ernie Regehr and I have a lot of respect for him—I don't have any disagreement where that is possible in Afghanistan, and I think that has happened.

What we have to remember is that the ISAF got involved starting in the north, starting in the west, which were chunks that were easier to handle. There, peace-building is possible. In fact, it's happening in the region. Development is happening, reconstruction is happening, schools are being rebuilt and what not, so that process is happening. It's just that in the south you have the combination of the worst two elements, the drug money and the Taliban, which need to be addressed before you can start the peace-building process, unfortunately, and that is what's happening now.

But I think after one year in Kandahar I can say that we can report a lot of progress in the Kandahar province.

● (1000)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pellerin.

I have one very quick question for Mr. Fisher. We haven't heard so much from you in the questions and answers, but in your conclusion you say, "Therefore, Canada should retain a long-term commitment to Afghanistan's future, well beyond 2010."

I think Canada has said that we are committed to a long-term future, that being through humanitarian aid, and a long-term future with development dollars and ODA and making sure that Afghanistan remains one of the big recipient countries.

You also say:

> It is in our strategic interests and certainly in the interests of peace, order and good governance in Afghanistan. There is no quick fix and it is premature to be talking about an exit strategy.

Do you believe it is premature to talk about an exit strategy in regard to our military in 2008 or 2009? Is it preliminary to question how we can transition into a different phase but recognizing the importance of long-term stability in development?

Mr. Nigel Fisher: I think it's always important to question, but the wrong question is, how soon can we get out militarily? There is a military and a development investment required. When I say military, certainly for the next few years, well beyond 2010.

We also have to look at the objective of that. If we think Afghanistan is just one more theatre in the fight against international terrorism and we equate the Taliban, in all their forms, with international terrorism, I think we miss the point. We have to focus on Afghanistan, its reconstruction and its security, as a means of ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a continued source of terrorism. I think there's a subtlety there that perhaps we don't get in just talking about international terrorism, lumping in Iraq with Afghanistan, and Taliban with al-Qaeda.

So, yes, in short, I think it's premature to think about moving out the military in the next few years.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all three of you for being here. Certainly you have clearly talked about the successes we have experienced there, the frustrations and the difficulties that will still be there, but it's good to hear that we are making some fairly huge steps in achieving what I think all the world wants to see achieved.

We will now suspend and we will come back with our new witnesses shortly.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1005)

The Chair: We'll call this meeting back to order.

This is our second hour. We have two guests with us, Marc André Boivin, the coordinator representing the *Réseau francophone de recherche sur les opérations de paix*. He has been working in the research field of peace operations and peacekeeping. From the University of Ottawa, we have Pierre Beaudet, professor, International Development and Globalization Program, Faculty of Social Sciences. He has been a consultant to CIDA and a researcher and director of Alternatives and Alternatives International, and he has worked in the international development field.

Certainly we welcome you here. We have invited you in the past and have run into some problems. I don't know if they were technical or what they were, but welcome here today.

You know how this committee works. You have ten minutes or so for opening statements, and then we'll go into questions.

The time is yours.

Mr. Pierre Beaudet (Professor, International Development and Globalization Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I prepared a few remarks. Because you have read up on the issue and have heard from many witnesses, you know that few people are optimistic about the current situation in Afghanistan, with the exception of the Minister of International Cooperation and the Chief of Defence Staff.

Most people and analysts hold a rather sombre view of the current difficulties. I will not comment on the military side of things, except to say that I believe we can call into question the idea that the war is being won because 500 Taliban have been killed. History has shown that that is not the way to win wars. As well, most observers say that for each Taliban killed, another 500 are recruited. That was what I had to say; I will leave those issues for the military.

I first want to talk about reconstruction in Afghanistan, something that is of greater interest to me. From the outset, I have to say that the situation is complex. Since the Bonn conference and, more recently, the London conference, Canada has participated in the concerted effort to rebuild Afghanistan. However, most analysts point out that the current level of reconstruction aid is far too low, almost ridiculously so, given Afghanistan's needs and challenges.

You have perhaps read about a number of comparisons between investments made in Kosovo and Afghanistan for the reconstruction of those countries. The ratio is of one to seven or one to eight. Consequently, funds allocated by the international community are clearly insufficient to rebuild Afghanistan. Military funding is 10 times greater than that for reconstruction. Such numbers call into question any real commitment to rebuild Afghanistan.

Let us now consider the situation on the ground. The socio-economic circumstances in Afghanistan are not improving. I am pleased to see that money from CIDA, taxpayers' money, is used to open schools and assist a number of people, but no one who is intellectually honest can say that the overall picture in Afghanistan is improving. Things are actually deteriorating, in terms of poverty and marginalization.

In the past few weeks, I was amazed by the proliferation of informal refugee camps. Some of the regions in the south and elsewhere are so badly off that people are fleeing and ending up in the desert with a few tents and very little assistance, because this is happening in a completely disorganized and chaotic fashion. That is not a good indicator.

The minister and the Canadian government have decided to invest in the National Solidarity Program, which is intended to rebuild villages and small communities. That is what they call the "quick impact". That is the good news. The bad news is that several analyses have shown that the program is improvised and disorganized and that a number of interventions lack preparation. I am not blaming the military personnel or provincial reconstruction teams, because they might not have been trained to do community development and assess the circumstances of a village or a community.

I do not know the practical results of all this, but I do know that CIDA is refusing, despite access to information requests, to release information on the estimated and partial results of those operations. You know how things work in Ottawa: all information is eventually made public. A number of documents that are currently circulating show that these initiatives are not achieving their expected objectives. The aims were perhaps worthy, but the circumstances prevented us from achieving them.

If you add up everything I have just spoken about, it is impossible to get the sense that the reconstruction program in Afghanistan is moving forward in a systematic manner. I believe it was Ms. McDonough who mentioned earlier that Afghan citizens were quite aware of what was going on. Afghans are rather well informed, contrary to what we might often think. Websites and the Al-Jazira network are disseminating a lot of information, and people are angry, not only in Kandahar, in the south, but also in Kabul and in other regions where people find that the socio-economic conditions have not improved significantly.

● (1010)

Where is the money going? The issue of corruption was raised earlier. I hope that aid programs, including Canadian programs, will not be caught up in murky business. I would like for CIDA to be transparent and provide us with the information, because it does exist.

I will conclude very quickly by asking the following question: In the face of such chaos, what can we do? I do not believe that there should be an immediate, total withdrawal from Afghanistan tomorrow morning, because I think that efforts need to be made. There are two totally fundamental issues that need to be re-examined. The current strategy, not the tactics, is not working. You are aware of where the current strategy originated. It arose out of the vision that was established, even prior to 2001, to restructure that part of the world. I am not making this up, there is an abundance of materials on the various strategies drafted in Washington. The strategy is not working, it is a failure both in Afghanistan and in Iraq, as well as in other areas in conflict, and it has to be changed. Canada has to speak out against the strategy. We have to question, criticize and distance ourselves from it. It will not be easy, but I think we have to do the honourable thing, as we did in the case of South Africa, some 20 or 25 years ago, when the Conservative government at the time was bold enough to call into question the approach taken in Washington and London on the issue. We must negotiate with the Taliban or with those that my colleague from the University of Ottawa, Roland Paris, calls the Neo Taliban. As Nigel Fisher said earlier, the Taliban and Neo Taliban are not like Al-Qaida. They might not be nice people, people who share our value system, but we do have to negotiate with them, we have to reach a political accord. I think the British military commanders were right when they said that the war cannot be won militarily, that there needs to be political engagement.

Lastly, we need to adopt a regional approach. Afghans are aware of what is happening in Iraq, Iraqis know what is going in Palistine, and the same applies to all peoples in the region. Without a comprehensive vision and a view to achieving peace, which are opposed to the Bush administration's endless, global war, I think that we, unfortunately, will not achieve our objective and Afghans and Canadian Forces will pay the price. Other assistance programs and policies in that area of the world might also be negatively affected once all the circumstances have been made public.

Thank you.

● (1015)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaudet.

[*English*]

Monsieur Boivin, you have ten minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc André Boivin (Assistant-director, Réseau francophone de recherche sur les opérations de paix): Good morning to you all. My name is Marc-André Boivin. I work for the Réseau francophone de recherche sur les opérations de paix, or it might be easier for you to say the Francophone Research Network on Peace Operations. This group is based at the University of Montreal. I have focused my studies on the international intervention in Afghanistan.

I first would like to thank you for allowing us to appear this morning. I hope that what we have to say will help guide your deliberations. I think that this is a major issue, as we were painfully reminded over the last week.

I would like to suggest this morning a few observations on the objectives of our action in Afghanistan, the nature of our activities there and the way that those objectives are part of a broader international framework.

[*English*]

The situation in Afghanistan poses very complex challenges to the international community's involvement. I have no doubt this fact has been amply illustrated by my numerous predecessors. Afghanistan is not only complex; in many ways it's a very particular case.

It must be said that before 9/11, Afghanistan was virtually non-existent as a foreign policy preoccupation, not only for Canada but for many of its current partners in Afghanistan. The current international post-conflict stabilization mission should have happened at the beginning of the 1990s after Soviet forces retreated from the country. It is little known that a United Nations mission was sent to oversee the post-Soviet transition and broker a peace between rival mujahedeen factions. This mission was severely under-resourced, and obviously failed to bring about peace.

Keep in mind that when they're assessing the international presence, the Afghans recall this period bitterly. Lakhdar Brahimi, then head of the mission, resigned at the end of the 1990s to protest against the world's obvious indifference to the Afghans' plight and the unabated regional meddling fuelling the civil war.

The 9/11 attacks changed all that, but we need to be reminded that the international intervention was fundamentally set up to thwart terrorism, not to stabilize Afghanistan. The intervenors, most importantly the United States, came to see Afghanistan stabilization as their long-term guarantee against terrorism's prevalence. But it took two years before they admitted to nation-building schemes as a necessity and started to allocate the consequent resources.

Fighting terrorism and a post-conflict stabilization endeavour are two distinct objectives, which can be at odds. The tensions between Operation Enduring Freedom and the International Security Assistance Force, and between their different participants, reflect this. In many ways, the failed state concept became the bridge between these two objectives, and was used accordingly in the latest international policy statement to justify the Canadian presence in Afghanistan. But internationally the divisions remain.

Terrorism is first and foremost a tool that is used to maximize the symbolic impact of otherwise limited capacities to act. It's not new and it's not solely associated with Islamic fundamentalists. Anarchists in Russia used the equivalent of roadside bombs to assassinate Alexander II in the middle of the 19th century. Successfully fighting terrorism has a lot more to do with criminal investigations than with all-out military operations.

A recent book called *Beyond Terror*, published by the Oxford Research Group, emphasized that fighting terrorism with military force can actually produce the opposite effect and fuel terrorism. But because the phenomenon has such a high profile, it is tempting to over-react and actually play into the hands of the terrorists by generating an adverse political backlash that is out of proportion with the original action.

As the spectacular images of the 9/11 attacks slowly recede from our minds, the real scope and nature of efforts needed for successful transition to peace in Afghanistan are becoming clearer. The recent development aid announcements by Canada and the United States, and the expansion and reinforcement of ISAF, tell how the Afghan mission is turning more into a post-conflict stabilization effort. But with the initial anti-terrorism impetus gone, this more long-term approach is also faced with the renewed insignificance of Afghanistan on the world scene.

● (1020)

Calls for the prompt withdrawal of Canadian troops are, in my view, as much if not more the reflection of this public opinion fatigue as issues with how the Canadian involvement is proceeding. Herein lies the conundrum. While the character of the international intervention in Afghanistan today makes it more likely to succeed, the political will to sustain it is fading.

[*Translation*]

As regards Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, the media's obsession with casualties among soldiers, while understandable, clouds certain other aspects of our presence there. In terms of numbers, Canada is the fourth largest contributor of international aid in Afghanistan, providing more than countries like France and Germany. CIDA has played a key role in programs like the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, and the National Solidarity Program, which, in terms of development, have been very successful.

Canada is also guaranteed considerable political influence over what happens to the international presence in Afghanistan. It has been one of the driving forces in the transition of ISAF to NATO and the extension of ISAF to the entire country, a task not fully completely until October 2006. The first Canadian Ambassador to Kabul, Chris Alexander, is now the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General who is in charge of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the UNAMA. Moreover, Canada played a key role in developing the Afghanistan Compact, which establishes a road map for reconstruction and stabilization in the country, both for the Afghan government and its international partners, until 2011.

On the military side, the bulk of our contingent is operating under ISAF, a UN-mandated and supported mission whose role is to stabilize Afghanistan and help the Afghan government achieve full sovereignty over its territory. This mandate falls clearly within those typically adopted for the most recent UN peacekeeping operations. Some claim that Canada has strayed from its traditional peacekeeping missions by throwing itself into a war in Afghanistan. Apart from the fact that the mandate for the mission under which our troops are operating contradicts this statement, some critics fail to clarify that many peacekeeping missions today are carried out by regional organizations like the African Union or the European Union, which operate under UN mandates. However, it is clear that international troops in southern Afghanistan, in practice, are facing an insurrection that quickly deteriorated in 2006. A simple inventory of advances in Afghanistan—and there have in fact been some significant ones—is not enough to hide the fact that on a daily basis, Canadian troops have had to face insurgents in full defiance of the stabilization process put in place by the international community.

● (1025)

[*English*]

Throughout the 1990s the Canadian military has acquired a wealth of experience in peace operations. The major reforms being implemented and the new investments in defence will both lead to a much more flexible and deployable military force and show how seriously the Canadian government has come to look upon our involvements in failing, failed, and fragile states.

Afghanistan has also been a showcase for a better integration of the Canadian foreign policy tool box, integrating the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of National Defence, and CIDA in the planning and enacting of our involvement. This is referred to these days as the whole-of-government approach.

Although far from perfect in practice, this approach promises a much more far-sighted involvement in countries trying to escape cycles of violence, when provided with coherent and sustained political guidance by the government.

In many ways the Canadian intervention in Afghanistan has shown a great deal of resolve, focus, and sophisticated understanding. Most of the problems come from balancing the reasons we are there with the costs involved. And these are related to wider issues that supersede Canada's role, per se.

First and foremost, there is the question of the role played by Pakistan. Kandahar is directly in the path of border infiltrations from Pakistan, and Canada's contingent has borne the brunt of the insurgents' activities in the south.

Canada's voice in Islamabad has a very limited echo, but its British and American allies have much more sway and will need to confront more directly the Musharraf government.

Regional tensions involving all of Afghanistan's neighbours have historically played a key role in destabilizing the country. Canada should ensure that all regional players have a stake in a stable Afghanistan.

Canada's significant and sustained effort has certainly not been emulated by a number of its NATO allies. What's worse, the gap between the countries involved in the south—such as Canada, the U.K., or the U.S.—and most of the European countries operating in the north seems to be widening. While the first group has recently made major announcements in further investments in troops, the second group is fumbling. Very recently the Italian government barely survived a vote asking for the support of their troops deployed in the region of Herat, in western Afghanistan. The Germans just sent Tornado fighter jets to Afghanistan, but their role is strictly limited to reconnaissance.

There are clearly major rifts between key international players regarding the ultimate objectives, the way to achieve them, and just how important Afghanistan is in their international agenda. Canada has a role to play in bridging these.

The current insurgency and misery in the south are intimately linked to the political exclusion of a significant part of the Pashtun population during the Bonn process. The Pashtun are the most numerous group in Afghanistan and are the traditional rulers of the country. They were also the power base of the Taliban.

Peace in Afghanistan is directly related to the inclusion of this important disenfranchised part of the population. Hamid Karzai has recently admitted to talking to emissaries of the Taliban. A Pashtun himself, he understands that any long-term solution to the violence is much more likely to come from a political settlement. This should be encouraged, for a simplistic, us-against-them approach is ultimately self-defeating.

The explosion of poppy production is a clear indicator of the severe long-term government issues faced in Afghanistan. Short-term poppy eradication policies have catastrophically failed and there clearly is need for innovative solutions.

More generally, the intervention in Afghanistan cannot be realistically conceived as a short-term, quick-results project. Countless stabilization missions have shown just how complex and long-term the outlook must be.

● (1030)

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, there is some tension between what is happening in Afghanistan and what must be accomplished before the country can achieve peace and what Canada is prepared to do to help Afghanistan, which depends much more on the vagaries of our national policy. Canada has certainly gained the respect of the international community for its role in Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces have earned a reputation for their professionalism and their robustness. We are among the rare donor nations that have honoured their commitments to the degree that we had initially promised, and our insistence on including international action in a multilateral framework has become a long-term vision.

However, we must recognize that the Canadian people, like the people in our partner nations involved in Afghanistan, are showing signs of impatience. Sooner or later, this will catch up with our political class, who, ultimately, are elected. Canada cannot save Afghanistan on its own. For us to be able to have a serene discussion on how Canada can help Afghanistan, politicians must achieve a balance between the long-term requirements of this type of involvement and what the Canadian people truly expect from their foreign policy.

I do not envy your job.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to the first round.

Mr. Wilfert, five minutes.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for coming, gentlemen.

I think we would all agree that we have seen or we have certainly read about some short-term success stories in terms of capacity-building and the opening of clinics, schools, etc. The issue in terms of development aid seems to focus more on the long-term capacity of the Afghan government to in fact be able to maintain these social well-being projects, if you will.

The Government of Afghanistan has clearly not even been able to spend the development aid it received. I think the figure was around 44%. It has not been able to spend it, and it has not been able to spend it in a clear and coordinated approach.

Back in the fall of last year, the American commander said he'd like more development money for the military and that it could be used. Is that really the answer, given the fact that they're not able to spend the money they have?

What would you suggest would be the tools needed to develop longer-term capacity-building, rather than the projects there now that may not be sustainable down the road?

Mr. Pierre Beaudet: As I said in my presentation, there's a lot of obscurity about what's going on there, partially because the government has decided to keep the information outside of public scrutiny.

But there are certain reports coming in, including the one I have about some of the recent experiences over the last six months of the PRTs and the national solidarity program: lack of genuine community participation; no real participation by women; village committees are held by the same powerful, influential, and relatively well-off persons who are in charge of these villages; continue with the status quo; monitoring and evaluation are non-existent; a negative impact on social capital; exacerbate strife and disunity—It goes on and on. It's based on a series of interviews that have been conducted in the Kandahar region over the last six months, and it's very worrying.

The conclusion is that it's not the way to go. The Canadian military, as well as other militaries, is very well trained to perform certain tasks but not in social and economic reconstruction. It has never been done successfully.

This is the first move. It has to move. It has to shift from an emphasis on the PRTs and what they call the "quick impact". There's no quick impact. The quick impact is negative, so why do you continue? It should be mandated to CIDA and some of its partners through the approach they've learned on how to do social development.

You don't arrive there on a Monday morning, convene three people in a village, ask them in a half-hour session what the priorities are and what they're going to do, and then leave $5,000. It's not the way to do it. It's not the way to go.

It should be changed and modified, going back to the lessons learned and the more traditional practices of development and long-term reconstruction. Is it easy? No, it's not easy. It's very difficult. Is it dangerous? Yes, it's very dangerous.

It's not going to be possible unless there are political negotiations to calm down the strife and calm down the fighting to get at least a part of the Taliban or the neo-Taliban to a negotiating position. If we do that, it will be like Mozambique and other situations, where the situation changed after a very tough and bloody civil war. It didn't change in one week, and it didn't change by trying to kill the insurgents and by trying to do a quick-fix approach.

You have money. You need to spend it, and you'll be happy and satisfied. But look behind it.

● (1035)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Can you again tell me the report you quoted from?

Mr. Pierre Beaudet: It's a report by two independent researchers, Omar Zakhilwal and Jane Murphy Thomas. It's part of the North-South Institute study on humanitarian and development programs in the context of wars and conflicts. It's still a draft.

I believe there are many critical reports inside CIDA at this point. I'm afraid that when they come out erratically, some people will get their fingers burned. Why do they do that? I don't understand.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, could we ask that a copy of that—

The Chair: It's still a draft, the way I understand it. Is it public?

Mr. Pierre Beaudet: It's public. It's on the web.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Could we have that tabled with the committee?

Mr. Pierre Beaudet: Sure.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you.

The Chair: You do have another 30 seconds, if you want to make some more—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I have another 30 seconds.

Mr. Marc André Boivin: I want to add, then, to the question being asked.

The Chair: Yes, okay, we'll let Mr. Boivin finish.

Mr. Marc André Boivin: I had the pleasure of being here when Barnett Rubin came a few weeks back. He wrote a book called *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* long before anybody was interested in Afghanistan.

One of the key findings that he put forth in his book, looking at the last two centuries, was that Afghanistan has only been able to sustain a political apparatus when it has had outside funding sources, whether through occupying part of India, having a deal with the British, being sustained by the Soviets, or having Iranians playing off one donor against the other.

The question you were asking is a very important question. Lakhdar Brahimi, who was the former head of the UN mission that was there in the 1990s, mentioned this to me in a private conversation, saying that his biggest worry was actually sustainability of what we were trying to accomplish in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boivin.

Madame Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I would like to thank you both very much for being here.

I think a lot about the fact that the Canadian troops will very soon be replaced by Quebec troops. From that moment on, Quebec will be much more on the lookout for what is happening in Afghanistan.

I believe that Quebeckers would agree with their participation if they saw we had a strategy yielding positive results and which will lead to other ones. However, there is a fact which is not pointed out enough. Mr. Boivin mentioned it at the end of his intervention, namely the fact that it is important for Quebeckers to be convinced that the Canadian and Quebec participation not be disproportionate to the participation of other NATO countries, especially if many soldiers are killed. It could be argued that this is not how we should approach the situation, but the fact remains that this is not Canada's war. It is the war of the United States and NATO, and Canada agreed to participate.

I would like to know what you think about this.

● (1040)

Mr. Marc André Boivin: Do you want to know how to convince Quebeckers?

Ms. Francine Lalonde: It seems to me that Quebeckers must agree on a strategy which strikes a balance between security and reconstruction, which yields positive results and which will lead to other good things. Of course, we must also feel that our participation is not disproportionate.

Mr. Marc André Boivin: I will again quote Barnett Rubin. When he was here, he was asked whether it was possible to be successful in Afghanistan or whether the situation was desperate. Barnett Rubin, always quick with a comeback, immediately replied that it depended on what objectives had been set. I think that is the answer to your question.

Since 1956, lofty objectives were systematically set for peacekeeping operations, but the troops on the ground were not necessarily given the resources to fulfil those ambitions.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: That seems to me to be the problem.

Mr. Marc André Boivin: However, things did work out in some countries. At the beginning of the 1990s, several civil wars were raging in Latin America, and had been ongoing for many years. However, these wars came to an end with the help of UN missions which had received fewer resources than anticipated. Nevertheless, the key is to think long-term. It is obvious that we cannot evaluate the situation by only counting the number of Canadian dead.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: No, but—

Mr. Marc André Boivin: Ultimately, that is what makes headlines, and it is what leads people to ask questions.

We have never talked about this, but the Canadian Forces are currently undergoing a vast transformation program. There's been mostly talk of acquisition programs, but these did not happen in a vacuum. The Liberals had begun a vast transformation program of the Canadian Forces to turn the page, if you will, on the cold war, and the Conservatives continued that policy. So Canadian Forces are undergoing major change at the same time as this extremely demanding deployment is happening. We are seeing the signs of the kind of pressure the Canadian Forces are under.

Mr. Pierre Beaudet: As a Quebecker, I am offended when the media and other sources imply that we are genetically programmed to oppose the military participation of Quebec. Some people have even said that we lack courage. I am offended by this and by the fact that people think that Quebeckers are a little dim and misinformed, or that they don't know what is going on. I completely object to that.

I think that Quebeckers are well informed and that they are very skeptical and critical, and justifiably so, of the current deployment and the way it is being managed. Further, I do not believe that the deployment in Afghanistan will be successful with the help of a couple of spins—pardon the expression—that is, with a little more help, with a few more Leopard tanks, helicopters and 5,000 troops. No.

I don't believe that the situation will succeed with that approach because it was badly thought out since 2001, and even before then. We have to honestly recognize this and look at the root causes to adopt a completely different strategy from what is currently the case. That will be extremely difficult, because everyone knows full well that the major players are the Americans. So let's stop kidding ourselves.

However, as I said earlier, in some cases, Canada has, in certain circumstances and with certain allies, objected to American strategies which did not make sense, such as supporting the Apartheid regime throughout the 1980s. So we did stand up to the Americans and force them to back down on that issue. In this case, we need to show the same courage. That would take real courage.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Goldring.

● (1045)

Mr. Peter Goldring: Mr. Beaudet, through all of the meetings, I haven't really heard witnesses characterizing the Taliban as being not nice people. We see what our troops are doing over there and what the cost is to bring about the improvements. You say there has been no serious improvement, yet even our troops returning from there—to a person—are saying they agree with what we're doing because we're making substantive gains on the ground there.

We look at the projects and the seven million children who are now in school. When they began there were fewer than 700,000. That's a tenfold increase. We look at the number of mines that have been cleared. There's some 1,000 square kilometres of land that has been brought into use because the mines have been removed.

We know we need security there. Whether it's in Haiti or it's in any country that has internal strife and turmoil, you do need the security and the police, and you do need the troops to bring things about. These improvements are happening, and they are moving. I find it curious that you would say there has been no serious improvement.

Monsieur Boivin, you said that it's very complex and that there's a long-term requirement. I think that's understood by the committee. It is a long-term commitment. As we are improving and going through the education of the children—it is inter-generational and it will take time.

So I do agree with your comment. It's complex and it's long-term. But I disagree with your comment that we haven't made serious gains, Mr. Beaudet.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Maybe we'll hear from Mr. Khan and then you can answer both of them.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Boivin. You mention Pakistan. Could you tell me how many kinds of Taliban there are? Is there one kind, or two or three groups? Are they scattered? Are they within Afghanistan? Are they part of al-Qaeda? Do you have any knowledge of that?

Also, would you like to tell me if you have any knowledge—because I want something new. What you gentlemen have both said is true: historic perspective is very valuable, but we've heard that many times before.

What do you know about the previous president of Afghanistan, Mr. Rabbani, and Tajik Islamists, who have announced the united national front? These are the issues I want to know about from you. Would you please reflect on that?

I also want to make one quick comment. Troops, whether they are from Quebec or they are based anywhere else, they're all Canadian troops and we feel exactly the same respect for them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khan.

Mr. Boivin, I think most of them were directed to you.

Mr. Marc André Boivin: I thought they were for Mr. Beaudet, regarding the gains, first off.

Mr. Pierre Beaudet: I think there's still a lot of investigating to do. I repeat that I'm not happy with the fact that those retaining this information are keeping it. If we had it, we could make a more nuanced judgment. There are, however, some macroindicators. It's not just because some schools are built that you can make a final judgment.

By the way, a lot of these schools that were built have been destroyed. In a lot of villages where the kids were put in school, the kids are out of school. It's terribly in flux.

It would be very premature and a bit audacious to conclude that there has been substantial progress. What is more striking and more evident are the setbacks. There have been setbacks in terms of the huge increase in opium production, meaning that the agricultural sector has not started. There have been setbacks in terms of rights and laws. The impunity law, which allows people who committed atrocities to get away with it, is really questionable. There's the situation in Bagram and the situation in many official and non-official jails, where there's heavy use of torture. Unfortunately, there was a little Canadian story a few weeks back, etc.

So I think the situation is very serious.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Have you visited Afghanistan recently to see for yourself?

Mr. Pierre Beaudet: Yes, I have visited. I went to Kabul, because when you end up in Kandahar, you are locked in the Canadian bunker.

The Chair: Mr. Boivin.

Mr. Marc André Boivin: As to how many kinds of Taliban there are, and where, when the Taliban were forced out, they obviously had to go into a clandestine mode. That makes it all the more difficult to say who's who.

From the reports I've read—and you probably have access to more secretive ones than I do—there are actually about four groups that have splintered off, with different regions of responsibility where they have almost independent actions. There have been reports that in some regions the Taliban has said they will not attack the schools because the schools are popular with the population and they don't want to alienate the population. In some other sectors, you've had the Taliban shooting teachers and attacking the schools.

Actually, to say "neo-Taliban" is probably a better way of differentiating them from the actual movement that was in power first off. Secondly, it's very fragmented.

What you obviously know already is that the Pashtun population is on both sides of the border, the Durand Line. There is a big Pashtun population in the tribal agencies and in the autonomous regions where Pakistan's government sway is very limited. These tribal populations are interconnected, and be it for insurgent activity or for economic activity, there's a lot of activity going through that border and it's very hard to control.

What we do know is that the leadership of the Taliban operates openly from Quetta, Pakistan. The week after Vice-President Cheney was in Pakistan, you all of a sudden had your first arrest of a major Taliban figure.

● (1050)

The Chair: We're way over the time already.

Mr. Marc André Boivin: There's one example there. Pakistan has its own set of problems. It has very complex governmental dynamics. To what extent Musharraf is involved, to what extent it is former ISI—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boivin. We have to conclude it there.

Madam McDonough, please.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Thank you very much.

Mr. Beaudet, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I'd like to ask for a clarification. You've referred to internal CIDA reports that you think are being held back or not shared. As a member of Parliament who shares the responsibility of trying to make decisions about what is going on and what should be going on, I find that alarming. I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit on that.

Secondly, with respect to Pakistan, I'd like to ask both of you whether you're familiar with the conclusions and observations that have been widely shared over the last few days by Haroon Siddiqui, a highly respected journalist—I think you'd say "editor emeritus"—at the *Toronto Star*. On his recent return from Pakistan, he basically had a lot to say, in that we really need to stop blaming neighbouring Pakistan. I quote directly:

> Pakistan admits there are hundreds of thousands of Taliban sympathizers among the millions of Pushtun tribesmen straddling the Afghan-Pakistan border, nearly 300,000 of whom criss-cross it every day.

The point is that it's not controllable. He made the point that the U.S.–Mexico border isn't controllable, so who are we kidding and why would we think that's the solution? He's basically suggesting that we had better understand that the full engagement of both the Taliban and of the Pakistani government in a regional peace-building process is the only way to go.

I wonder if I could ask for your comments on those two things.

Mr. Pierre Beaudet: Just briefly, my colleague from the faculty of law, Amir Attaran, professor, has been on that hot pursuit for the last six months. He's battling with CIDA bureaucrats to access the documents. So that's the situation that I know, and I hear urban rumours on the other side of the river that they are problematic cases. That's not to say, by the way, that nothing is being done and there are no valid, valuable, and genuine efforts, but you have to look at the macro business.

On Pakistan, I agree with you that it's a complex situation. Pakistan has not been in crisis for the last two weeks. It has been, I think, under military dictatorship for most of its history. Recently, one would notice that the United States, which had supported Pakistan militarily for many years, is now moving towards a strategic alliance with India, including in the nuclear area. So the Pakistani government is very concerned, afraid. You don't need to be Einstein to imagine that they are keeping some hot irons in the pot. If this U.S.-India strategic alliance is being built, it is likely and it would be rational, so to speak, that the Pakistani government will continue to use various tricks.

So without defending them, because I don't think they're defendable, there are a lot of dirty games in that region. Therefore, if you focus or pinpoint on, ah yes, them, I think you miss the global picture. That's how I feel about it.

● (1055)

Mr. Marc André Boivin: Regarding pointing fingers at Pakistan, the thing is, the Musharraf government, in order to sustain itself, has allied itself with Islamist parties, Islamist parties who were backers of the Taliban. There's a direct link there. But to go with Mr. Beaudet on this, the bigger picture is that the governance problems in Pakistan have an impact on governance problems in Afghanistan. The two countries are interlinked in so many ways, and to the Pakistani government, it's quite clear that they have to have some sort of influence and some sort of satisfaction with whoever is in power in Afghanistan.

Karzai was exiled in India, was educated in India. You say "India" to Pakistan and they see red. There's a very confrontational situation there. Both countries are playing all sorts of dirty tricks. India has opened a consulate in Kandahar, in Peshawar, which are Pashtun lands, which Pakistan saw as an obvious insult to their sway over Afghanistan.

There's another game being played with Iran, which controls lots of parts of Herat. You spoke of the Rabbani coalition; that's also interlinked with Iran's influence on Afghanistan. The basic idea is that these players see it as a zero-sum game, meaning that either I control Afghanistan completely and nobody else has any control, or somebody else will control it completely. It has been like this for the last few decades. So it's to change that mindset and say please leave Afghanistan in peace and try to come to some sort of agreement on this.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Thank you very much. Most of this doesn't get talked about.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam McDonough.

Also, thank you to our guests for your presence today. We appreciate your input into this issue, an issue that is, I think, of very great relevance, but an issue that is of very great concern as well to all Canadians as we try to deliver the best possible answers to a country that so desperately needs them.

We will now adjourn this part of the meeting. Maybe the members can stick around for a little bit in regard to committee business. Are we going to have time for that?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Angela Crandall): Maybe the subcommittee can discuss it.

The Chair: All right. We will adjourn. Committee business will be put off and we'll talk about it at our steering committee.

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