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Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

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● (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): We'll call the meeting to order. There are a couple of items of business I'd like to deal with for the committee members just before we get into hearing the witnesses.

You have before you a couple of issues we need to deal with. One is the committee budget for the report. The clerk has passed that out to everybody. It looks like a total of $19,750 has been budgeted to bring in witnesses and print the report, and there are some miscellaneous funds. Is there any discussion on that?

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Do we have the report, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, it's the long sheet. It's just the budget. I'll give you a second to have a look.

Joe, would you move that, please?

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): I so move.

The Chair: It's been moved by Mr. McGuire that it be accepted. Is there any further discussion or comment?

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Is this the budget for our current study on Afghanistan? If I understand correctly, our study would be completed on October 31.

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): Mr. Chair, he says that if he understands correctly, it's scheduled to finish October 31. That end date is one I slid in.

The Chair: Mr. Bachand, I think that is just an open.... We don't have to go to the end of October. We could finish it earlier; it's just a number to be put in so that we could proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: If ever we were authorized to travel to Kandahar, Afghanistan, the cost of the trip would be covered under another travel budget? Correct?

[*English*]

The Chair: This budget is just to prepare the report and for the issues that go with that. Any travel would have to be approved separately.

It's been moved by Mr. McGuire. Are there any further questions? All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The other issue to be dealt with is the motion that we travel from here to defence headquarters. I suppose this is a necessity. We're going to need a van and so on. We've planned to do that next Thursday at the same time our committee would regularly meet. The clerk has arranged to have a van outside the members' door right after question period to take us over and bring us back. We'll be in constant touch with the House, of course, in case some surprise happens.

Mr. Claude Bachand: This is a big delegation. Will there be SUVs, the black ones, following us or...?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: There may be large SUVs and they may be black, but they'll be burning canola oil or something.

Will someone move that?

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): I so move.

The Chair: It has been moved Mr. Hiebert. All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, committee. We'll move on.

Today we have a panel to present to us. I would like to welcome Mr. Steven Staples from the Polaris Institute. He's the one with the high-tech stuff—high tech to me, probably not so high tech to others.

We also have Kevin McCort from CARE Canada, I believe. Kevin, it's good to have you here.

Finally, from the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, we welcome Mr. Gerry Barr and Ms. Erin Simpson.

We'll start with Mr. Staples and move down. We'll have all the presentations, and then we'll get into our rounds of questioning.

The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Steven Staples (Director, Security Programs, Polaris Institute): Mr. Chair, honourable members, and guests, thank you very much for the invitation to appear before you this afternoon. It's been three years since I had the last opportunity to address the Standing Committee on National Defence, back in March 2003. It's nice to see some familiar faces. Ms. Gallant is here. Mr. Bachand.

Ironically, we will see how many of these issues we discussed then remain with us today.

I want to note that my appearance today was only confirmed on Monday, so my apologies. Normally, we would have provided you with advance copies of our brief in both official languages, but there were some materials distributed earlier; a report called *Boots on the Ground*, which we released a few weeks ago, has made its way into people's mailboxes.

In the past few weeks, Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay has appeared before both the Senate and the House of Commons defence committees, and in each instance, some of the research that the Polaris Institute has contributed to the national debate on Afghanistan has arisen in the discussions. Not surprisingly, Mr. MacKay has disagreed with our findings, and I'd like to take this opportunity to set the record straight on the topic today, as well as address some of the other assertions made in those presentations.

I invite questions from you for further clarification.

On May 17, the Polaris Institute released a report written by our associate researcher, Bill Robinson, called *Boots on the Ground: Canadian Military Operations in Afghanistan and UN Peacekeeping Missions*. The report built upon a brief we presented to the Commons finance committee last fall during its pre-budget consultations. That report was entitled *It's Never Enough: Canada's alarming rise in military spending*, and I've brought English and French copies of that brief with me here today.

At your last meeting, on June 6, Minister MacKay told you that the total expenditures of Canada's multi-faceted engagement in Afghanistan to date amounted to approximately $2.3 billion, that the DND portion of that is $1.8 billion, and “that is an incremental cost of Canadian Forces operations in or related to the Afghanistan mission itself”, he said.

I'm sure that members of this committee would also like to know the full costs of the mission. Minister MacKay's figures represent the incremental costs of the mission and exclude personnel costs. Add soldiers' salaries, overtime, and bonuses, and the full cost of the commitment exceeds $4.1 billion.

Unfortunately, we do not have the list of specific missions Minister MacKay used in calculating that figure, but it's likely similar to the list of missions we documented in our report, *Boots on the Ground*. Likewise, our report calculated that the incremental cost of these missions since fall 2001 is $2.6 billion, according to DND figures, so we're in the same general ballpark with Minister MacKay's figures. In our report we included both the full cost and the incremental costs, because while both are valid, they do measure different things, and I should note that the Department of National Defence uses both accounting methods in its planning.

Minister MacKay and others would argue that the lower incremental figure should be used, because the soldiers would have to be paid anyway. That's true, but the defence budget is rising precipitously because of the demands to recruit, train, and deploy more troops abroad; therefore, assessing the costs of the missions should take into account their full cost, not just the price of gasoline and ammunition consumed in Afghanistan.

That brings me to the trend in Canada's overall military spending. In our brief to the finance committee last fall we explained that Canada's current level of military spending is already very high by NATO standards.

At this point I'll just refer you to our slide here. These figures come from NATO itself. We have outlined the top seven spenders in NATO. There are 26 members. Where does Canada fit in terms of real dollars? Number seven. These are NATO figures. I include Russia there, as NATO does, just by comparison. That's why you see that there. Canada, at $11 billion in U.S. dollars for 2004, is seventh highest among the 26-member alliance. Globally, we are fifteenth highest. Even today we are a very high military spender.

In the coming few years, as a result of the last two budgets, which have set Canada's military spending on a rise at such a precipitous rate, it almost literally leaps off the chart.

● (1545)

Let me go to the next slide and show you the trends in military spending. In 2005-06 our military spending is about $15 billion. This is all in 2005 dollars, and they've all been adjusted, so we're comparing apples to apples. This goes from 1980 up until the current budget of 2005. You see a steep increase under the Trudeau years. This is the Mulroney government here, and then of course the end of the Cold War in 1989-90. And here we experienced the peace dividend and reductions in military spending up until the end of the 1990s.

At the same time, this is when the federal budget began posting surpluses. You can see defence spending has been put back into the military budget up until the point where we're almost even to the point at which we were at the end of the Cold War. The day the Berlin Wall fell, Canada's spending has almost achieved that same level. The 2005-06 spending, which is about $15 billion, is already just 5% below spending at the end of the Cold War. Within two years we'll exceed what we were spending then, having clawed back the entire post-Cold War peace dividend.

With the increases announced in the Liberals' 2005 budget of $12.8 billion over five years, combined with the additional topping up of the Conservatives in the last budget of an additional $5.3 billion, Canada's military spending will reach $21.5 billion by the end of the decade. Let me just put that on the map for you. We'll add those increases. That's where Canada's military spending is headed in the next few years, well over $20 billion, practically off the chart. Again, I remind you, we are comparing apples to apples. These are all adjusted dollars updated to the last budget. This is an increase of 43.3% over today's spending. By comparison, it will put Canadian military spending at a higher level than any amount of spending in adjusted dollars since the Second World War.

The main driver of this high level of military spending is the perceived need to make our forces more interoperable with U.S. forces, to assist in the U.S.-led war on terrorism. I might remind you that the U.S. level of spending is higher than that of the rest of the world combined and is arguably bankrupting their country.

This brings us back to Afghanistan. The mission in Afghanistan is really a proving ground for greater military integration with U.S. forces. Again, Minister MacKay did his best to portray our current role as a peace-building humanitarian mission and anything but Canada's contribution to the U.S.-led war on terrorism. He also told this committee that our engagement is intended to build a stable, secure, democratic, and self-sufficient Afghanistan. But this diverges from the reasoning the government gave in the Speech from the Throne this year, which said we are in Afghanistan to "defend our national interests, combat global terrorism and help the Afghan people". The government defined its view of the country's national interest as building stronger multilateral and bilateral relationships, starting with Canada's relationship with the United States.

The mission in Afghanistan has crowded out all other possible international roles for our military. In the last five years, the Afghan mission has consumed 68% of our military spending on international missions. While Minister MacKay portrayed the mission as supporting the UN, the truth is that during the same five-year period the full cost of our contribution to UN peacekeeping was only $214 million, or 3% of our military spending on international missions.

Once a proud top ten contributor of soldiers to UN blue helmet missions, today we are far down the list at 50, just behind Romania and ahead of Mali. In terms of actual soldiers, we provide only 59 peacekeepers. You can fit all of our UN peacekeeping troops on a single school bus.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, we are, as I would argue, seeing the Americanization of the Canadian Forces as we adopt U.S. war-fighting tactics. For instance, the reconstruction effort, which is laudable, is only a small part of our role. Only 250 of the 2,300 troops in Afghanistan are devoted to our provincial reconstruction team, while more than 1,000 are in the Canadian battle group engaged in the U.S.-style search and destroy missions in the countryside. And as you know, we are currently under U.S. command as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. This became painfully obvious to Canadians recently when Canadian commanders had to admit the decision to bomb and strafe a school in Azizi, killing more than a dozen civilians and children along with Taliban fighters, came from their American superiors.

At some time in the coming months we will move our troops back under NATO's ISAF command structure, but there's no fixed date. Yet committee members may have felt that Minister MacKay was conflating these two missions, the U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom and NATO ISAF, by arguing that one would be a continuation of the other. This would be news to NATO, which sees the two missions as very distinct. First, NATO has a clear UN mandate—which is different from being UN-led. It's not a blue helmet mission, but it does have a UN mandate, which is maybe the next best thing, while Operation Enduring Freedom does not. Second, NATO is involved in a peace support mission, not a counter-terrorism mission.

● (1550)

When asked about the two missions by the *Globe and Mail* recently, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said:

> We'll keep the mission distinct from [Operation] Enduring Freedom.... I do, we do, and the allies do consider this a NATO mission....

The fundamental difference is that Operation Enduring Freedom is basically a counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency operation and ISAP is a stabilization mission.

This is an extremely important point, because the debate is whether or not the counter-terrorism mission Canada is conducting with the U.S. is fundamentally incompatible with NATO's peace support objectives. As the NATO Secretary General said, it's about stabilization, reconstruction; it's about winning hearts and minds. But what must be a growing concern to this committee is the number of reports emerging from Afghanistan indicating that we are losing the battle for hearts and minds and the Taliban is winning.

Two weeks ago former U.S. Secretary of Defense John J. Hamre told the *New York Times* that Afghanistan is the sleeper crisis of the summer. In the past two weeks the Taliban have appeared in unprecedented numbers in groups of up to 300 men. The U.S. is now rethinking its decision to reduce their numbers in Afghanistan and has delayed the final handover to NATO that was scheduled for the end of this year.

More bad news came yesterday from the British think tank, the Senlis Council. Based on extensive interviews on the ground in Afghanistan with Afghan farmers, they've concluded that the aggressive military interventions so far by U.S. troops and their supporters have meant the coalition forces have lost the support of local people. The report adds that people have gained little from the occupation, especially in the south, where so much was promised and so little was delivered. The council estimates that in Helmand province, which the British are moving into now, next door to Kandahar, 80% of the people support the Taliban.

In terms of attacks, in 2004 there were just five suicide attacks, while there have been 21 in just the first semester of 2006, and the attacks are more sophisticated and lethal. We've already seen that Canadians are finding their armoured Jeeps are no longer sufficient defence and are now relying almost exclusively on the LAV IIIs. How long before the Taliban will be able to defeat their armour?

Again, Minister MacKay reiterated a multi-faceted approach to Afghanistan that included development and political support as well as our military role. However, it is the political approach that receives the least amount of attention, and it must be attended to right away, before it is too late.

Last week I had the privilege of accompanying Dr. Seddiq Weera at a press conference here on Parliament Hill. Dr. Weera is a diplomat and an Afghan-born Canadian who was imprisoned for more than four years under the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Later he came to Canada to study at McMaster University and the University of Toronto. Now he's advising the Karzai government. At that press conference he urged the Canadian government to support a renewed peace process that will bring all the political elements in Afghanistan together to the table, including the Taliban. He has spoken with the Taliban leaders and has said he has a list of those leaders who are prepared to begin a dialogue.

But according to Minister MacKay earlier this week, as he said, “insurgents are not interested in peace”. I would argue, and also Dr. Weera would argue, that it's this kind of enemy-centric view that will be our undoing, because the longer the combat mission goes on, the more it helps the Taliban and al-Qaeda find more recruits. Our own military leadership has said that every time we kill one of them, it helps them recruit 10 more. And in the U.S. last summer, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld himself said we need to start talking with the most moderate elements within the Taliban.

Here is an influential Afghan-born, Canadian-educated diplomat who can help us take a lead role in this country. And what is the government's response? Foreign Affairs officials cancelled their meeting with him at the last minute. One has to ask whether the Canadian government is interested in finding a diplomatic solution to Afghanistan. Will we learn that our combat role will be as fruitless as a struggling man up to his neck in quicksand? If so, I fear Afghanistan will become Canada's Iraq.

In conclusion, the Polaris Institute urges this committee, first of all, to advise the government that our role in the U.S.-led combat mission is ultimately a mission impossible. We need to assess the success of the military mission objectively and work with our NATO allies to bring a quick end to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

● (1555)

Second, let's support the work of Dr. Weera and others in Afghanistan to pursue a diplomatic solution to the Afghan, essentially, civil war.

Finally, we must return our military commitment to the United Nations and answer positively the next time the UN comes asking for contributions of blue helmet peacekeepers.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Staples.

Mr. McCort, three minutes.

Mr. Kevin McCort (Senior Vice-President, Operations, CARE Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee. Thank you very much for the invitation to speak to you today about Canada and Afghanistan.

My name is Kevin McCort, and I am the senior vice-president for CARE Canada, a non-governmental organization providing humanitarian aid and development assistance in over 40 countries.

I've been invited to appear before you today to share the perspective CARE has developed over many years of working in Afghanistan, specifically with respect to the motion adopted by this committee on May 16. There are many aspects to that specific motion, but I will focus on the relationship between the combat operations of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan and their efforts to help reconstruct the country.

CARE worked in Afghanistan from 1961 to 1980 and then again from 1989 to the present. We're working currently in 14 provinces throughout the country and have over 900 staff, 99% of whom are Afghans. We are an organization that believes in building local capacities and taking a long-term approach to our work.

I had the opportunity to visit Afghanistan in late May, just last month, where I met many of our staff and those of other NGOs; members of the Afghan government; Canadian military, aid and diplomatic staff; and residents of poor areas of Kabul as well as villagers in Logar and Paktia provinces.

I went to Afghanistan for two purposes: first, to review the Canadian-funded projects within the CARE country program; and second, because it is such a high-profile issue in Canada, to understand the complex and evolving set of relationships between the military forces present in Afghanistan and traditional development actors like ourselves.

While I could undoubtedly talk for hours on the many dimensions of this complex country, I know my time is limited, so I will focus on two key recommendations that speak to this relationship between combat operations and reconstruction.

First, I must re-emphasize the absolutely critical importance of avoiding civilian casualties and treating local residents with respect. I know the Canadian Forces understand that hearts and minds will be lost through accidents or careless acts, but it is worth repeating.

I was in Kabul on the day of the attack in Azizi, which was not conducted by Canadian Forces, but one that caused my Afghan host to draw a parallel between this event and its civilian deaths and how the Soviets behaved in the 1980s. He lost members of his family in 1986 in a similar attack, and he recounted these events of 20 years ago as if it were yesterday. Our media may move on, but the people affected do not forget, and some may be drawn to the insurgency of today as they were in the past. Specifically, this member, who is currently on our staff, joined the mujahedeen in 1986 because of this attack on his family. When this happens, it obviously hurts reconstruction efforts.

I left Kabul two days before the traffic accident involving coalition forces that inspired the riots that led to the destruction of the very office I used during my visit to Afghanistan. One of the buildings destroyed was our office. An angry population, which could do little against an overwhelming military presence, turned against other international organizations like CARE. We have no intention of leaving as a result of this attack, but if we or others are eventually forced to leave, this will surely hurt reconstruction as well.

Our security in all countries where we work is based primarily on our integration with and acceptance by the local communities. We need coalition forces that act in ways that do not undermine Afghans' acceptance of our presence just as much as we need the United Nations or other NGOs to also operate discreetly and with respect for Afghan culture, norms, and traditions.

My second point is that we must not confuse the mandates of entities primarily responsible for combat operations with those of organizations dedicated to reconstruction. I know security is needed for development, just as I know development can reduce insecurity. But I am convinced organizations specialized in one should not assume they can take on the roles and responsibilities of the other.

A very good example of reconstruction and development work occurring now in Afghanistan is the national solidarity program. It's an initiative of the Afghan government, funded mostly by international donors, including CIDA, and involving many NGOs like CARE who help implement the program throughout the country. It works like this. NGOs act as facilitating partners. They meet with communities and help them establish democratically elected community development committees. These committees manage a process, involving men and women, that determines the range of community priorities, and then the community votes for the most important project. The funds needed to implement the project are transferred by the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development directly to the community development committee, which implements the project on their own.

● (1600)

The facilitating partner monitors the process, helps the committee as and when needed, and provides progress reports to the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development. Ideally this process repeats itself over time, with progressively less and less involvement of the facilitating partner. This helps the community strengthen its management capabilities and builds a productive relationship between the government and its citizens.

You might ask why I would explain this in detail to you. Because implementing the national solidarity program means you have to work the grassroots. It takes amounts of time and expertise that are not found in combat forces or in provincial reconstruction teams. It takes a high degree of acceptance and protection by the local community, which may not be extended to a foreign military force, and when done by local governments in partnership with NGOs, predominantly staffed by Afghans, it can be done at a fraction of the cost of a PRT alternative.

The community I visited in Paktia knows well that the international community is behind the national solidarity program, coalition forces, and PRTs. They've actually dealt with all of them, and they have opinions about the strength and weaknesses of each in fulfilling their various roles. I asked them a simple question: when it comes to reconstruction, who do you prefer working with, provincial working teams or the national solidarity program? There was a clear vote for the latter, which says to me that we will make our greatest contribution to the reconstruction of Afghanistan if we work in ways that the Afghans most prefer and accept.

The Canadian PRT does have plans when it comes to reconstruction in Afghanistan. As explained to me, their mandate is to focus on the rehabilitation of the security and justice infrastructure and capabilities of the provincial government. I have no objection to this, as the activities I have heard about are closely aligned to their security-focused mandate.

My advice to you is that as Canadians we have choices when it comes to channeling our contributions to the reconstruction effort. In my opinion, the clear favourite should be civilian-led programs such as the national solidarity program.

Perhaps I can end with a short note regarding Asif Rahimi, currently the deputy minister responsible for the national solidarity program. Asif has had a long connection to CARE and to Canada. He worked for CARE while he was a refugee in Pakistan, then again when we reopened our office in Afghanistan. He subsequently immigrated to Canada and worked for CARE in Ottawa, and he has now returned to Kabul to play a senior role in the Afghan government.

Perhaps he personifies our approach to development and reconstruction in Afghanistan. His is a long-term commitment, the form of which changes over time, but nonetheless remains solid in the face of enormous challenges and changing circumstances. We need to remain committed to Asif and people like him, because in the end, he is us.

Thank you for your attention, and I welcome any questions you may have.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCort.

Mr. Barr or Ms. Simpson, or whoever wishes to speak, please do.

Mr. Gerry Barr (President - Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council for International Cooperation): Mr. Casson, I'll lead off. My colleague, Erin Simpson, is here principally for the back and forth that we hope will follow these presentations.

I will start by saying the Canadian Council for International Cooperation is an umbrella organization of Canadian NGOs working worldwide to eradicate global poverty and to promote peace and human rights, and I'd like to thank the chair and the committee for the opportunity to present as part of your review on Canada's role in Afghanistan. The lives and the futures of Canadian soldiers and of Afghans are at stake in the Canadian mission, and we welcome a focused reflection by this committee.

Today I'd like to speak to three issues. The first relates to civilian and military roles in the delivery of assistance to Afghans. The second point is the mandate of Canada's military engagement. Finally, I'd like to highlight the need in Afghanistan for a greater attention to development and human rights.

The issue that's front and centre for many NGOs active in Afghanistan is the blurring of lines between aid strategies and military strategies. You've heard a little bit about that here from my colleague Mr. McCort. This blurring arises when the military delivers aid, and when aid delivery by NGOs or the government is tied, implicitly or explicitly, to a military strategy.

It's problematic because it puts both those who receive aid and those who deliver it at risk, and because it diverts aid from its proper purposes—poverty eradication and the promotion of human rights, and, in the case of humanitarian assistance, the health and the nutritional security of communities.

It probably won't surprise anyone on this committee to know that NGOs were shocked at the recent comments of Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Doucette, who was reported in the *Ottawa Citizen* as saying that development assistance is a useful counter-insurgency tool in Afghanistan. It's a comment that puts a sharp spotlight on an ongoing controversy about aid in Afghanistan since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001. Throughout the war, the delivery of aid by, or in close coordination with, coalition forces has put people at risk. When aid strengthens the military objectives of one side in a war, aid becomes a weapon, and those who receive it frequently become targets.

Canada's official position is that there is no confusion of roles in the Canadian strategy in Afghanistan because humanitarian assistance—that is, specific life-saving assistance—is not being provided through the provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar. In fact, that is simply a budget-line distinction, not a distinction of roles. The military is carrying out community development-type activities, such as repairs to local schools. There is a civil-military cooperation fund managed by the military for these types of activities, and the details about the spending of that fund have not been made available to requesting organizations.

Beyond these programs, CIDA's confidence-in-government program for Afghanistan is publicly described now as providing aid to communities that commit to cooperating with coalition forces to drive out the Taliban. The idea is to weaken the Taliban by rewarding communities that plainly take sides with the coalition forces.

If true—I repeat, if true—that strategy is a clear violation of the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality and independence, principles with their origins in the Geneva conventions and principles that are reaffirmed in multiple UN Security Council resolutions.

As well, the program would certainly appear to blur the distinction between combatant and non-combatant, also enshrined in the Geneva conventions. These principles are fundamental to the general goal of the conventions, which is to provide minimal protection to non-combatants in war zones. By essentially recruiting communities to side with Canada in a war against the Taliban, we are involving those communities in the war—but we can't protect them. Even the governor of Kandahar stated that the military can't protect these projects or these communities from security threats. So if we systematically link the delivery of aid to the military offensive against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, we make targets of the communities that benefit ostensibly from that assistance.

● (1610)

I think the committee must inquire into the statements of Lieutenant-Colonel Doucette. We need clarification of the military's position with respect to the use of development assistance in their campaign, and I would respectfully say, Canada needs to make this right. The committee should also seek clarity, and urgently, from CIDA on its approach in the field and the rationale for it. The delivery of aid should be focused on the needs and rights of Afghans and not tied to any military or political strategy, and in all but exceptional circumstances, military forces should avoid engaging in reconstruction or relief activities in Afghanistan. Aid workers are the right people for that job.

The mandate for military forces should be focused on providing a secure environment and protecting Afghan civilians, and military communications should emphasize that mandate and avoid messaging that emphasizes the humanitarian and reconstruction role of the forces. God knows there are reasons for humanitarian and reconstruction efforts, but they ought to be done by the right people.

Beyond distinguishing the military from assistance strategies, there is also a need to distinguish the Canadian operation in Afghanistan from the combat-focused U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom. In our view, the transfer from Operation Enduring Freedom to the NATO-led UN-authorized ISAF needs to happen promptly and without delay. The NATO mandate should remain clear that the use of force is a last resort and it is for the purposes of security and protection.

There is a wide range of security threats in Afghanistan. The committee will know that, surely. The threats posed by warlords, for example, and by other factions, and a military campaign narrowly focused on defeating the Taliban will not have the range necessary to ensure security for all Afghans. Of course, poverty and unfulfilled human rights set the stage for violence in Afghanistan. Currently, Canada's development resources are focused on the type of security that really should be left to the military and the police—for example, paying the salaries of Afghan police, large weapons destruction programs, and that sort of thing. About 40% of CIDA's development assets in Afghanistan are focused on security sector reform.

Canada should give greater attention to current initiatives to resolve longstanding conflicts between various factions, including the implementation of the action plan for peace, justice, and reconciliation, a little bit down the line of the comment made earlier about prioritizing some of the political initiatives. We should also be investing more in women's rights, and a greater focus needs to be placed on the development of sustainable livelihoods and local community development.

To summarize very quickly, the military should stick to security and protection of civilians, not to delivering assistance. Assistance delivered by government or non-governmental bodies must not be tied to military strategy either explicitly or implicitly. The transfer to ISAF should be carried out promptly, and the implications of this transfer in mandate terms should be made clear to Canadians.

Lastly, resources and attention need to be directed toward the peace process, reconciliation, along with the support of gender programs, livelihoods, and community developments.

● (1615)

Once again, thank you very much for the opportunity to offer these views here. It's greatly appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start our round of questioning. There's a seven-minute round.

Mr. McCallum, I understand you want to start.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sometimes in a slight conflict between my role as an opposition member and as a former defence minister. I think the latter may win—at least for my first question.

Mr. Staples, on the subject of the size of defence spending, I totally reject the notion that Canada is a big military spender, because the sensible way to look at this is expenditures as a percentage of GDP, which tells you how much you're spending relative to your total economy, and Canada is about the lowest—or one of the lowest, other than Luxembourg—in the whole of NATO. If you look at the numbers you had up there, we might rank eighth or something like that, but when we're $10 billion and the U.K. is $50 billion, they are much less than five times bigger than us in terms of GDP or population. So overall, we're a low spender—but getting bigger.

I find it very difficult to believe that in a meaningful or comparable way our spending is really going up from $15 billion to $20 billion in two years. Can you explain those numbers, please?

Mr. Steven Staples: Certainly.

I'll answer the last one first, especially if I misspoke. I said it would be $21.5 billion—I'll get the exact number here—at the end of the five-year period. So it would be the 2010-11 budget, at the end of the decade. So it's not just in a few years, but it's over—

Hon. John McCallum: Well, your chart showed that it was going up $5 billion in two years. I don't believe that, unless you're adding in the cost of equipment. If you're doing that, I could believe it.

Do you include the cost of equipment in those numbers?

Mr. Steven Staples: Yes, we use real spending estimates, so not just the budget, but we also include any revenues that—

Hon. John McCallum: Well, no wonder you have high numbers.

Mr. Steven Staples: But that number actually came from General O'Connor himself, now Defence Minister O'Connor, during the election campaign, when he said it would exceed $21 billion by the end of the decade. So I'm going by his numbers in determining where we're going to be at the end of those five years.

Hon. John McCallum: He's probably using cash numbers, and the way they do it for the accounts is by accrual, so you only count a small fraction of the cost of any equipment, which should make those numbers radically lower than what you've presented.

Mr. Steven Staples: He said that specific figure, so we're using his numbers.

The problem is that in your budget of 2005, the Liberals' budget, you at least broke out the spending in each of the five years so we knew what the bell curve looked like, but with the Conservatives, we don't have those exact breakdowns—although they have said they're continuing with your increases and topping them up by $5.3 billion. And only in the last budget did we get the number of $1.1 billion, was it, over the next two years on top of that.

Hon. John McCallum: I would suggest you discount election promises when the purpose is to make the number look big, because they're not comparable with the other numbers you have in your series.

But I'd like to ask a question about the interconnection. This is to probably the other three, or any of you who would like to address this. I'm not suggesting you're saying this, but I'm asking you to try to reconcile a possible problem here. It's all very well to say you want to protect women and you want to build schools—schools for girls—or all of these worthy objectives, and I couldn't agree more with that, but if you do that in a military vacuum and the day after you construct such a school the Taliban raze it to the ground, you're not going to get very far. It's all very nice to have blue helmets in an environment suitable for blue helmets, but an environment in which Taliban are all over the place is not an environment suitable for blue helmets. So you have to have a strong military presence to protect these schools and other projects that you're building—and even to fight the people who try to destroy them. So I'm all in favour of a strong push for development and a strong push for diplomacy, but I cannot understand how you do them without a robust military presence.

I'm not suggesting that you're necessarily disagreeing with me, but I'm asking, how do you reconcile those two objectives, assuming you do agree with the way in which I set out the problem?

● (1620)

The Chair: Mr. McCort, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin McCort: It is a difficult problem. We know, as CARE, that we've built girls' schools, during the time the Taliban controlled the country, with their approval and their support. We did it in a number of communities. We had CIDA funding for programs that helped build schools for girls and put girls in schools.

Those schools were not destroyed. The process we went through was working with communities so that the schools were clearly owned by those communities. I think there's a risk that if the schools are being built and are perceived as not being owned by and not being a priority of that community, then they become a target. When they're clearly integrated into the priorities of that community and the community itself is strong enough on its own terms to keep the Taliban out, then the schools seem to survive.

But those capacities of communities to be able to keep anti-government elements, the Taliban insurgents, out of their communities appear to be weakening. They're weakening for several reasons. Part of it is the lack of economic alternatives. Part of it is just constant and endless pressures on those communities.

The Chair: Mr. Barr.

Mr. Gerry Barr: I would certainly say there's an obvious need for robust military presence, and security of civilians ought to be the paramount consideration of the Canadian Forces.

My comments attempted to track in the direction of unpacking a little some of the contradictions in doing development in a way where the role of the military is conflated with that of non-governmental actors. If Canada is involved in a field of hot conflict, as it is, and if its development initiatives are also identified with military force as an actor in the war, then those communities that are the ostensible beneficiaries of the development work become targets, and quite ready targets.

The government of Kandahar itself said that military forces and the police are unable to protect these communities and are unable to protect the projects that are being contemplated. Well, that being the case, they become pretty obvious soft targets, following a sort of *politique du pire* to undermine the development value.

Development is vanishingly difficult to do in any event in a field that is a field of hot conflict. If it is done by the military and done in a way that is linked to collaboration of villages and regions with the military, as I say once again, in a field of hot conflict it creates these contradictions.

So our forces might be running against the part of their mandate that requires them to protect civilians by effectively setting up communities, through development initiatives that are badly considered, as targets for insurgents.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachand, it is your turn.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I'd like to start by thanking you. It's reassuring to hear different points of view on Canada's presence in Afghanistan. I was probably there at the same time as you, Mr. McCort. I was there from May 14 to May 18, at the time of the bombings in Azizi. I admit that I was a little shaken by what I observed there, despite having been to trouble spots such as Eritrea, Ethiopia and Bosnia in the past. However, the situation in Afghanistan is the worst that I've seen so far. It was extremely demoralizing and frustrating for us not to be able to reach out and help the children who were in such dire straits. Security was so tight that we were not allowed to get out of our armoured vehicles. We could only watch the scene unfolding outside. The experience gave us much food for thought. Is the Canadian forces mission in Afghanistan being properly conducted? While we were there, however, we did receive some excellent briefings from NATO officials.

I was in Afghanistan at NATO's invitation. I was surprised to learn that General Richards, the Commander in Chief of NATO forces in Afghanistan, had said that since the next phase of operations would be in the south, that is where Canadian forces are located, perhaps it was time to refocus the Canadian mission, to focus less on hunting down the Taliban and more on ensuring the safety of persons involved in reconstruction efforts.

I imagine these words are music to your ears. In my opinion, Canadians are very critical of our participation in Operation Enduring Freedom. I'm a friend of the Americans, but not every Canadian shares my sentiments right now. When people hear that Canadian forces are being deployed as part of Operating Enduring Freedom, they aren't too happy. I'm in favour of rapid intervention by NATO. Plans are being drawn up to ensure that this intervention takes place as quickly as possible.

I'd like to hear your views on Canada's changing mission. I would imagine that you back NATO's position 100% and that, rather than see our troops hunt down the Taliban, which merely has a provocative effect on people, you would prefer to see them focus on security and on winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. Some of these village residents probably have family members who belong to the Taliban. Displaying bodies of dead Taliban that have been hunted down is not a very popular thing to do. I think revising our mission would be a good idea.

Would you care to comment on General Richards' position? Do you think it's a good idea, and the only direction in which we should be moving at this point in time?

● (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin McCort: If I may respond in English, I certainly agree that less hunting and more protection is essential. It's important for us as an organization that we not seek protection for ourselves from the military. We advocate for protection of communities. If they're safe, then our staff is safe.

Our point of departure on protection is that the communities themselves are the first point. Our staff, being Afghan, blend in perfectly. In dangerous areas they actually don't even travel with pens and paper to complete their integration. It's dangerous for me to go, and risky for them, but they're not targeted or picked out.

We believe that shift has to happen as quickly as possible, but it shouldn't be taken to assume that we're seeking protection for ourselves and our staff. They're going to continue operating independently, adopting security measures that they choose—including travelling penless and paperless—but they do need the communities themselves to feel that they're not going to be targeted and that they'll be protected.

Mrs. Erin Simpson (Policy Officer (Peace and Conflict), Peace, Security and Development, Canadian Council for International Cooperation): As well, one of the things we've been hearing from our human rights colleagues is that for many Afghans, and for women in particular, the Taliban are not the only or even the principal security threat, so the focus of the international forces in Operation Enduring Freedom on chasing the Taliban is actually not answering their security needs. For a woman in a community, the local police could be her principal security threat. It could be drug lords or criminal activity. It is a general climate of insecurity that needs to be addressed, and that approach isn't helpful, so I echo and support what you were saying.

● (1630)

The Chair: Mr. Bachand, you have a minute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Another concern of mine is what happens when we assume complete control of Afghanistan. General Richards and General Jones, the Commander of Operation Enduring Freedom, have informed us that NATO will maintain responsibility for anti-insurrection activities, while Operation Enduring Freedom will continue to be responsible for anti-terrorism operations.

This presents a problem, as far as I'm concerned, because it's not clear who has command and control duties. On looking at the events in Azizi, it's not clear whether the US notified NATO that it planned to bomb the area.

I'm worried, given the presence of troops representing the international community, that lives will be lost as a result of friendly fire incidents. Some confusion may reign as to who is in command. Two types of intervention can have harmful implications. I'd just like to know where you stand on this issue.

If we're short on time, Mr. Chairman, perhaps the witness could respond in writing to my question.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Staples, go ahead. There's half a minute.

Mr. Steven Staples: According to the *New York Times*, the Americans are concerned about whether NATO is going to be able to handle the increased military activity and the fighting that's going on there. According to that report, it's looking at delaying stage 4, which is ultimately having NATO take over the east part from Operation Enduring Freedom.

The Americans are leery of NATO's ability and fortitude to conduct what they see as the counter-insurgency role. They're beginning to hedge. When Brigadier-General Fraser took over in February, we remember the last American commander exhorting Canadian troops to get out there and...kill them. In fact, I would argue that Canada has muddied the waters between the two missions. For the longest time it was difficult for Canadians to even understand that we were under Operation Enduring Freedom. Government officials, the media, and Canadian military officials fudged it. They tried to say we were under NATO; now it was clear in everyone's mind, with the bombing of Azizi, that we were under Operation Enduring Freedom, so even when we do transition under NATO, maybe sometime this summer, there is still the problem of Operation Enduring Freedom going on in the country.

The Chair: That's enough. That's all the time Mr. Bachand has.

We're going to move on to Mr. Christopherson for seven minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation. I'm not our defence critic. It's Dawn Black, but Dawn had another commitment, so I'm here to fill in as well as I can. Thank you very much for providing some light where a lot is needed.

I just want to make sure I've got this right. Operation Archer is the Canadian mission attached to Operation Enduring Freedom, which of course is U.S.-led and is dealing with counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency, for the most part. The UN-mandated NATO ISAF mission is more of a traditional peace and support mission. Is that correct? It is.

I'll ask a few questions about that. For the sake of argument, let's say that today they're still under Enduring Freedom and tomorrow they're instantly under NATO. After that shift takes place, what day-to-day activities for our troops will be different tomorrow from what they are today? I'll open it up to any or all of you.

Mr. Steven Staples: That's a very good question, and one I didn't see a good answer for at the last meeting, when that question was raised at this committee.

There seemed to be a sense that there was going to be a continuation: the mission would just be simply a continuation, and there would be very little difference. That's why I pointed out that it would be news to NATO, because NATO sees these missions very differently. As Mr. Bachand just pointed out, the head of NATO does see a change for Canadians when we come under NATO, but I think the government needs to explain that. It was one of the fundamental questions that needed to be explained before we voted to extend the mission for another two years.

The Chair: Do you have anything to add, Ms. Simpson?

Mrs. Erin Simpson: Just to echo Steve's comments about the real need for clarity on that, Minister O'Connor stated in the recent debate in the House that nothing would change in the transition, which would really be news to a lot of people, as Steve said. I think there's a need to really clarify those things.

As Steve said earlier, the two missions are different in their purpose, their structure, and even in their endorsement by the international community. The NATO mission is a peace support operation, as you said. It is designed to support the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact, which is essentially a peace agreement that was signed, one in which Canada played a role in trying to push and create. It involves a whole series of supporting actions for reconciliation; it does involve security, with a robust security force, but it is UN authorized. It is quite a different mission from Operation Enduring Freedom.

The most recent UN Security Council resolutions that make reference to both Operation Enduring Freedom and the ISAF mission also make it very clear that these are two quite distinct missions, and that though they do expect communication, they are distinct and involve different types of activity.

So I think this is definitely a matter for the committee to take forward.

● (1635)

Mr. David Christopherson: If I could, I just want to add something.

Please correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding is that NATO has been engaged in an internal debate about whether they are going to do this at all, and if so, what exactly they are going to be undertaking and take responsibility for, and that it was this debate that was preventing them from assuming their role, which they were supposed to have already done by now. Is that correct? Is there still debate within NATO about how they feel about what they've been asked to do? Help me with that a bit.

Mr. Steven Staples: I think there has been a debate, and there continues to be a debate. This was what the Dutch were debating. It was about what role they were going to be undertaking in Afghanistan. Was it going to be a peace support mission, similar to what we would consider UN peacekeeping? It is similar, and I think Canadians are....

In fact, generally all UN peacekeeping missions are under chapter 7 these days, or 90% of them are under chapter 7. So it's robust; they can fight back or shoot back, but it is not as combat capable. As one colleague of mine at the Canadian Forces College described it to me, there's a difference between being able to engage in a fight and trying to pick one. So in a NATO mission, you are able to fight back, but in a counter-insurgency mission, you're out looking for a fight. The rooting out, the purposeful engagement—that's the difference.

Because there was so much concern about this, I just want to note that one of the outcomes of the Dutch debate was the prisoner transfer agreement. Some very tight conditions were set on that agreement. Even though the parliament did approve it, it was not a blank cheque, and their agreement is much better than our prisoner transfer agreement. I'm not going to get into that, because I think you should have Amir Attaran or Michael Byers, perhaps, here to discuss that. But just as an example, that's one of the positive outcomes.

I think this debate is going to come back in Riga in the fall, at the next NATO summit in November.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm curious, but what will happen if NATO doesn't come to an agreement and agree to take over?

My second question is that I understand that Canada has offered—I'm sure they had to beat off those in front of them who wanted it—to take over leadership of the mission. I assume it's the NATO mission that they're going to take over in 2008?

Maybe respond on those two things. One, hypothetically, what happens if NATO continues to disagree and is not ready to nicely take over, so Canada can make the neat little transition? Secondly, what role have we offered to play in 2008, which nobody else, it looks to me, wanted? But anyway, how does that fit into things?

Mr. Steven Staples: It's not entirely clear to me.

I thought it was 2009 in the proposal—which sprung out a couple of days before the debate.

● (1640)

Mr. David Christopherson: I could be wrong.

Mr. Steven Staples: But you're right in general terms that we might be taking over that mission. It's unclear what that essentially means, but it is fairly clear that NATO is prepared to take over the south. There is a staged approach in terms of taking over one province at a time, the south, and then finally, I think, the east is the last one, which they call stage 4. So that is moving.

However, that being said, there has been reluctance in NATO to take over. When the Liberals approved our moving to the south under Operation Enduring Freedom, the timeline was supposed to be very short; we would essentially move to the south and then transition to NATO almost right away. But there has been a delay. The British have been slow to come in, the Dutch are not there yet, and are not going to be there until the fall. That's why there's no firm date.

I'm getting this second hand, but I was with Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, who said he had actually spoken to SACEUR and NATO, and he said there was reluctance to see exactly what was going to happen and to get the troops up to strength in the south, before NATO was willing to take that over—which is curious, because it speaks to a question of whether we were way out in front, ahead of NATO, and left hanging out there. But there's more investigation that could be done on that.

Mr. David Christopherson: Is that my time, Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Yes, it is. Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Who will speak on behalf of your party? Go ahead.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): I'd like to move that we adjourn this meeting.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): All right. Your motion is in order.

[*English*]

Is there anybody who wishes to support this motion?

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Are you asking for a seconder, or are you calling the question?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): I'm calling the question. I'm told there's no debate.

[*Translation*]

I'm told that there's no debate on the motion. Therefore we can proceed immediately to vote.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Are you calling the question?

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Yes.

(Motion agreed to)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): The meeting is adjourned.

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