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Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome our presenter today to continue our discussions and study on the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. Appearing today is General Michael Jeffery.

I have a very lengthy resumé of your military history, sir. I'll go right to the end, if you don't mind.

He served as Chief of the Land Staff from August 2000 to May 2003 and retired from the Canadian Forces at the rank of lieutenant-general on August 1, 2003, but carries on as the honorary campaign chairman for the Royal Canadian Artillery heritage campaign.

Sir, you obviously have the qualifications to come and talk to us about the issues we're studying. What I'd like to do is give you an opportunity for your comments and then open it up for questions.

We also have some business to deal with on our budget estimates for travel to Petawawa, Edmonton, and Gagetown, so I propose to save some time at the end. If we've exhausted our questions and could plan to wrap this meeting up between 5 o'clock and 5:15, we'll move into committee business.

Sir, the floor is yours. Thank you for being here.

Lieutenant-General Michael Jeffery (Retired) (former Chief of the Land Staff (2000-2003), As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to be here. The last time I was here I was in uniform. Of course, it's a much different context, although it's much the same sort of feeling being here in the room.

I did serve for three years as the army commander, ending 39 years of military service. During that period of time as army commander, I was involved in the first two deployments in Afghanistan. Given that type of experience, I will try to provide whatever insights I can into the mission. I want to make it clear, however, that I'm not an expert on the region; it's a complex area of the world, and I do not attest to being any sort of expert.

Having been retired now for three years, I am not current with all the details of what's going on in the Canadian Forces. I do maintain connectivity with them, but I wouldn't want to suggest that I am an expert in all those details, although I do have a sense of the challenges they face.

Of all the places the Canadian Forces is required to deploy, I can't imagine a more unlikely place than Afghanistan. It may interest you to know that when I was the army commander in the late 1990s, we were undertaking experimental war games to test new concepts to determine what kind of army Canada needed for the 21st century. It is instructive that for that war game we chose a region of the world that would be the most difficult in virtually every aspect that we, as soldiers, saw as a profession. And the region we chose was in the Caucasus, not very far from Afghanistan. Indeed, it was a coin toss. We could have chosen Afghanistan, never dreaming that this very difficult region would be one that we would deploy into one day.

The full magnitude of that challenge became clear when we were faced with deploying the 3 PPCLI Battle Group into the region in 2002. Given that Afghanistan has virtually no infrastructure, we were faced with long lines of communication and the need to deploy and sustain virtually everything by air. But despite my concerns in that context, the mission was manageable, largely because we deployed as part of a U.S. brigade, with their infrastructure, and also because the political objectives were clear. That early, post-9/11, there was no question that we were fighting terrorism.

Within a year, however, we faced the prospect of deploying into ISAF, in Kabul, and there I had greater concerns. For that mission at the time, I perceived a lack of clear political objectives, an uncertain command and control structure, and limited strategic support for the job, all of which created, in my personal view, high risks. To be blunt, I was not in favour of going. But the decision was made to go.

Since then, however, we have established NATO in the region, and many of the concerns I had earlier have been mitigated. The CF have performed well, and NATO, at least for the moment, seems to be resolute in staying. Indeed, having invested so much in Afghanistan, my view is that we need to stay and get the job done.

My concerns really can be encapsulated, at this stage, in my concern over the lack of resilience that we may have in staying. First is the ability of the Canadian Forces to endure this mission over the long term. Make no mistake, I believe that by any standard, the Canadian Forces have performed superbly in Afghanistan, and the comments of our allies, I think, confirm that. My worry is that they will not be able to sustain this tempo, and I do not yet see the essential increases to CF capacity occurring at the rate required. If this doesn't change, in the long term I believe the CF risks burning out. And of course, it is the army that by far takes the largest load in that mission.

Second, and far more concerning, is that we may lack the national will to stay. This, in my view, will be a long commitment. There are no quick fixes. The ongoing debate on casualties, I believe, misses the point. No one, least of all me, wants to see our young men and women in uniform killed or wounded. But if the lack of casualties were the benchmark for Canadian participation, then we'd never go anywhere. The real issue is what we are trying to accomplish and whether the sacrifice is warranted. Only when we're convinced, as a nation, that the goals in Afghanistan are essential and that we are prepared to pay the real cost for achieving them will we have that national will.

Mr. Chairman, in my view, both these issues—the military capacity and the national will—are the real challenges any government will face as our mission in Afghanistan evolves, and in my personal view, it will be a true test of leadership.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my prepared remarks. I'll attempt to answer any questions the committee may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start our first round of questioning with the official opposition for seven minutes.

Mr. Dosanjh.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you, General, for coming to talk to us.

You raised the issue of the ability of the CF to sustain the tempo over the long haul, and you believe that to achieve this mission we need to stay there for the long haul. What specifically do you think needs to change so the tempo can be adjusted and we can be successful?

● (1540)

LGen Michael Jeffery: If I may put this in some strategic context, until about 1990 the Canadian Forces was deployed principally in Europe, in a footing that really can be best described as just-in-case. We maintained a reasonable size of forces. It varied, but at one stage it was upwards of 90,000. Through a succession of reductions we're now down to 62,000, but even that varies on a day-to-day basis.

In the same timeframe we have seen the tempo of the Canadian Forces, through the nineties into the 21st century, steadily increase. The train lines are going in the wrong direction, and we know that. As I sat here in uniform as a witness, I continued to be concerned. At that stage I said we faced an emerging demographic crisis, because not only did we have that problem, we had the additional problem—which I believe all of the committee members will understand—of the aging of the Canadian population. The pool from which we drew the recruits was getting smaller.

We could have had this discussion ten years ago, and in many respects the problem hasn't improved. That doesn't mean the Canadian Forces has not started to solve its recruiting difficulties, etc. An increasingly larger share of those who are recruited are replacing the ones who are leaving. We have the problem of regeneration of the forces we have today, let alone expansion of the capacity. Unless we can start taking a significant bite out of that expansion piece and make the forces larger, we're going to burn out those we're using, because we're using and reusing them at a high rate.

I think the ideal is to have a six-month tour for a soldier about every three years. When they're in hard combat or hard operations in a place like Afghanistan, even without a lot of combat, that's pretty demanding. We expect our soldiers to go there once every 18 months. They're home for less than a year and they're gone again. It's not sustainable.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: When you were engaged in exercises after 9/11, you said that in the Caucasus you knew clearly that terrorists were the enemy and you were essentially on anti-terrorism exercises. Was any thought given at any stage to the kind of insurgency one might face in those countries if we did go in, and how we would deal with insurgency?

LGen Michael Jeffery: If I may just correct something in terms of specifics, the exercise we did in the nineties was prior to 9/11, obviously, and we were trying to analyze what kind of world we were going into. We already believed that we were going into a much more complex world, and that with the end of the Cold War we were going to see asymmetric warfare emerge: a lot of little guys trying to beat up the big guys, if you want to put it in simple terms. It changes the very nature of conflict. The tactics all change, and you have to adapt the army to that. That drove a lot of our thinking.

In early 2000 we actually developed an army strategy that saw us fundamentally shift the kinds of operations we'd undertake. In many ways General Hillier of CDS has carried those ideas on. So you're seeing that change.

It came home to us in spades early after 9/11 when we started to face that reality. Afghanistan was the first encounter of that. At that stage I would not have termed it counter-insurgency as an operation; it was counterterrorism and search and destroy, to be very blunt. It was that kind of operation. But if you want to put a label on it, what is going on in Afghanistan today is much more classic counter-insurgency operations.

● (1545)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: This may be an unfair question, and I don't mean to cast any aspersions on any of our forces, but this is a question I'd like to have answered. Do you think the Canadian Forces are well trained and well prepared to deal with the kind of counter-insurgency we're dealing with? I don't know whether tanks are what you need in a counter-insurgency. I don't know whether fighter pilots are what you need. I'm not a military person. I'm simply a layperson who happens to be a parliamentarian, so I'm asking the questions in lay lingo. Are Canadian Forces prepared to deal with the kind of counter-insurgency that we face? Granted, we have brave soldiers doing a great job, but being trained for this kind of counter-insurgency is a different issue.

LGen Michael Jeffery: As a statement of personal belief, I believe that the Canadian Forces are among the best trained militaries in the world. I think they're ideally suited for not only counter-insurgency operations but many others. But let me try to put some meat on those bones.

I think it's important that I define, at least from my perspective, what counter-insurgency is. The basic premise of counter-insurgency is where you have either a part of the population or an insurgent organization inside a nation-state or region that is trying to foment unrest and basically disrupt the government and ultimately take over. Straight combat, straight fighting, isn't what you need. What you need to do is to remove that insurgency force, but fundamentally ensure that in so doing you win and maintain, for want of a better term, the hearts and minds of the people of the nation. You have to get the populace on your side. If they're not there to begin with, you have to earn that, and there are a variety of dynamics: political, development, reconstruction, a whole range of issues. The military force may not even be in control. It's a political issue and the military force is in support. That doesn't mean that security is not important. If the insurgent is creating violence, is causing you to fight, then you have to get rid of it. Your challenge is to as quickly as possible get back to that balance of winning the hearts and minds, and if you fail there, no amount of fighting is going to solve the problem.

I don't know if you want me to go further, but you raised the issue of tanks and pilots. I don't know whether that's—

The Chair: The time's up for this, but keep that thought in mind, if you can insert it somewhere else, and we'll go on.

Thank you, Mr. Dosanjh.

Monsieur Bouchard, seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you as well for your presentation.

You are a lieutenant general with considerable experience. No doubt you have commanded many such operations. To date, the mission to Afghanistan has claimed the lives of a number of our soldiers.

In your opinion, how have these deaths affected the morale of Canadian troops in the field? Is morale affected for only one day, or for longer than that? Are measures in place to counter these losses that can undermine the morale of surviving soldiers?

[*English*]

LGen Michael Jeffery: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, let me give my apologies; I'm going to do this in English. My French is getting rustier by the day, so I will not impose upon you or the committee.

Yes, we've had casualties in Afghanistan, but casualties are an inevitable part of the conflict and of what we do as soldiers, and in my mind, given the kinds of operations we've been in, the casualties are relatively light. They're hard for a nation that hasn't seen casualties in a long time, but they are relatively light, and the soldiers feel the same thing.

That doesn't mean to say that every casualty is not important. It's important to all of us; it's specifically important to the soldier who loses the buddy next to him. It is a significant issue, but the dynamic that a soldier goes through when that occurs is principally a focus on getting the job done. As much as it may be painful to lose your best friend, the focus is to get the job done. The first problem comes in the break—in the break in the fighting or in the break in the operation—when you have time to sit back and think about it.

A whole range of academic work has studied this, going back over a century, in terms of war and fighting. I would say that today the Canadian Forces are probably as well prepared as any in the world—and better than I can ever have imagined, given our history—to deal with those kinds of issues of counselling soldiers, helping them deal with their grief, and helping them to get back to the job and move on.

Human nature being what it is, most soldiers will very quickly suppress those concerns as long as they're in the theatre of operations. It will jump out at them again when they get back home. When they get back to Canada, back with the family, the pressure is off, and that's when you'll start to have the problem. That's when, in many cases, post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, is one of the major issues we have to deal with.

I will go back to my point. It is an understandable side effect, and soldiers' morale will be all right as long as a couple of things occur. One is, most importantly, that when they lose a friend and a buddy they can come back and say that he died for a good cause. If they can't, we all have a problem, and that's the source of much of that lack of morale.

The other is that we as an institution—the Canadian Forces and the Government of Canada—help those soldiers with that problem and the aftermath, whatever that may be. As long as those things occur, I don't think you will have a morale problem. That doesn't mean it's not difficult for every soldier to deal with a death, but it will not be a morale problem.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: General, you stated that Canadian Forces may not be able to sustain the tempo and that at this pace, they risk burning out. I also understood you to say that the Afghanistan mission presented a formidable challenge for Canadian Forces.

Are Canadian troops more heavily engaged in combat operations than the forces of other countries battling the war in Afghanistan? Apart from Canada, which countries are contributing the most to the Afghan mission?

[*English*]

LGen Michael Jeffery: If I may, Mr. Chairman, I'll attack this from the perspective of trying to put myself in the position of a commander, like Commander ISAF.

A commander in that situation is dealing with a multinational force, and the first thing he has to look at is the nature of the job, the mission, how big an area he has. It's not uniform. There's great complexity to it. Some areas are peaceful; some are more difficult; some are really terrible and you don't even want to send troops there. It would be ideal if you had all troops at the same level of capability, the same level of professionalism, and indeed the same limitations, if you will, but that's not the case.

The first thing that happens is a commander receives troops on which the respective national governments have put limitations on their employment. You've seen it. Certain of the nations will not be allowed to deploy in certain areas of the country. It's not my place to question that, because Canada has done the same, not necessarily in Afghanistan, although there will be some limitations there. Certainly in other regions of the world, we've often sent troops in with significant political limitations on their employment.

The second is that you have to look at the professionalism and the overall capability of the force. Some are highly professional, well trained, well equipped—all of that; others are at lower orders of capability. The problem a commander has is to mix and match all of those limitations with the tasks that he has. The reality is, certainly in Afghanistan, by my judgment and, I would suggest, the judgment of many other observers, that Canada is in the top three—at the maximum, four—of all the forces in Afghanistan. The British, the Americans, and maybe somebody like the Dutch are up there, but Canada's certainly up in that category and, as the vernacular goes, punching above its weight. In that context, a commander's going to use Canadian troops where he needs them.

So Canada is, in a sense, shouldering a higher percentage of the overall load because it has the troops that can do it, and any commander from any nation would achieve the same thing. The question, perhaps more importantly, is whether it is unreasonable. Is this a disproportionate share? And from what I can see at this juncture, the answer is no. We have far fewer troops in the region, even on any percentage basis, than some of the other nations. We have always had a challenge of matching other nations in terms of their commitment to international operations. This is one of those cases where we stand out as being near the top of the pack, and I think it's high time that be the case. I don't think we're carrying too much of the load. The casualties we have taken are not out of proportion to the numbers we've had or the kind of operations that we have undertaken.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bouchard.

We are moving down to Mr. Christopherson.

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

Thank you, General, for appearing today. I especially want to thank you for your frankness. Without it, the whole system we have here can't work, so it's very much appreciated.

I want to pick up on a couple of things. In part, you said you believed we should stay and "get the job done", even though you expressed that you had some initial misgivings about going in. Again, I appreciate your frankness on that.

I will be putting a couple more pieces on the table, but I will be asking you how would you define "getting the job done". In other words, when X is accomplished, how can we say "mission accomplished", if you will?

I want to come back to quoting some thinking of others who've been involved in this for some time, starting with Leo Docherty, a former aide-de-camp to the British commander who called the mission "a textbook case of how to screw up a counter-insurgency"; our current Minister of National Defence, who said, "There is no military solution there"; and also an Afghan commander, who said publicly, "The foreigners came here and said they would help the poor people and improve the economic situation, and they only spend money on their military operations. The poor people are poorer now than when the Taliban were the government. We don't trust them anymore. We would be fools to continue to believe their lies." The second last quote is from President Karzai, who of course was here last week. He said, "Bombings in Afghanistan are no solution to the Taliban. You do not destroy terrorism by bombing villages."

That brings me to quote one of your other points, which is that it's crucial to get the population on your side. I didn't write down what you said, but I think the essence was that you're in big trouble if you don't, that it's key to do it.

We're now sending in more tanks. We're in the process of destroying an awful lot of infrastructure and villages as a result of the force that we've needed to use to counter what we've met, and by its very nature, of course, that is leaving a lot of Afghan people wondering how we are their friends. We want to help, but it's after we've gone in and blown everything up. And now we're sending tanks over there.

So my question is, with all of this in front of you, how do we, one, establish what is a successful mission; and two, how are we going to get the population on our side if the process right now of fighting is destroying everything around them and, for many of them, leaving them worse off than they were before? How do you see Canada's forces squaring that circle?

LGen Michael Jeffery: Mr. Chairman, if I may, I'd like to address that in reverse order. I want to talk about the challenge of the population first. I agree with a number of things you said here, and it is an issue of balance.

I'm not a medical man, but let me use a medical analogy, if I may. We're all familiar with streptococcus A infection, this flesh-eating disease that gets hold of the body fairly quickly, such that surgeons have to operate pretty intricately to stop the thing killing the patient. In many respects what we're dealing with in Afghanistan is not dissimilar. You make the point that we can't win hearts and minds by bombing villages, and you're 100% right, but if you don't sometimes do that and get the disease out—which is the terrorist—it's only a matter of time before the body is going to die. That's exactly the situation we're facing here.

It isn't that the military commanders want necessarily to use force; it's trying to find that balance. But when the Taliban and the insurgents are regaining strength or re-establishing in certain areas, and then re-establishing their hold on the local populace, you don't have an environment that allows stability operations to occur—to get reconstruction, to develop, to seek and find political solutions to the problem—because that cancer, if you will, is in the middle of the body. Therein lies the challenge.

You're right; finding that balance is the essence of it. There will be from time to time regions in Afghanistan, as in other insurgency campaigns, where the balance is going to be wrong, because security issues will demand a greater use of force. The challenge is to do it as quickly as possible and get back to a balanced approach and ensure that it doesn't infect the rest of the country.

How do you define success? I don't know how you do that. I certainly couldn't give you in a nice academic, objective manner, a "do this, do this, and once you achieve *x*, *y*, and *z*, this is what you're going to achieve". But I can give you a sense, I think, of the kind of thing we need to be looking for.

First and foremost, we must have an ongoing commitment from the western world—not rhetoric, but real, displayed commitment—that will provide to the government and the people of Afghanistan a sense that we're not going to leave them high and dry. I think that's a big problem right now; there is all of that constant worry.

As is happening now, the organs of government have to be established: the political, which you ladies and gentlemen know about far better than I, but that's clearly a large part of it; the security organs of the state; the military; the police; the rule of law—those are the kinds of things that need to be in place.

Basically the international support, certainly from the military point of view, needs to transition from being in the front line to supporting, to being available. We're still very much in the front line. A lot of our effort is being put on trying to get the Afghan national army and its police force to a stage where it can be in the front line. Once you get there, that's a measure that we're having success, that we're moving forward. It's a judgment call whether at that stage you reduce the amount of force you have. It's a judgment call to decide when you start to run your forces down. But you need clear progress in those kinds of things in order to say that you're making a success.

● (1600)

Mr. David Christopherson: I hear what you're saying. I guess our concern is that the balance is not there, for the most part, in southern Afghanistan. The fact that we're sending over tanks speaks more to the heavy end of the balance that you were looking for. That was our concern.

My other question—and I leave that one with you, if you want to comment on what it may signify, the fact that we are sending those tanks.... That really does tip the balance in terms of heavy artillery, heavy fighting, and more destruction.

I was curious when you mentioned, sir, our troops not being sustainable over 18 months.... What happens to a commander in the field who is told the mission is still continuing but the troops just aren't there, or they aren't able to perform? What happens? Is there then a recommendation from the commander to the minister saying, "I cannot complete the mission you've asked of me because I don't have sufficient forces", at which time, if there aren't more, that forces us out? What do you do at that stage as a commander, if you don't have those troops who, you say, are already overstressed, in my words?

The Chair: Give a short response, please, if you can.

LGen Michael Jeffery: I guess the bottom line here is that the men and women in uniform are duty bound to go and do what it takes. We sent people into Europe in 1939, and they didn't come back until 1945. If you want an extreme scenario, that's what you could do.

We've been shortening that time, loading more and more onto it. So you can do it, and without other direction, that's what a military, by and large, will do.

My hope, my belief, is that we shouldn't need to do that. What we need to do is push that expansion of capability as quickly as possible.

● (1605)

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, General, for being with us today. I really appreciate your presence at the committee.

In recent weeks we have heard all kinds of suggestions from all quarters of the country calling for different action to be taken in Afghanistan. The most interesting comments I've heard have come from the leader of the NDP, suggesting that we remove our troops, that we cut and run, so to speak.

My first question of several would be, what impact would withdrawing our troops from Afghanistan have on, first of all, our troops; second, our international reputation; and third and most importantly, the safety and security of Canadians in Canada and around the world?

LGen Michael Jeffery: I don't think we should leave, but I would be irresponsible if I sat here and said there is no choice. There's always a choice. The situation in Afghanistan, as in any region of the world, could actually deteriorate to the point where I'd be sitting here saying we have to get out. What's the old adage, "Better to fight and run away and live to fight another day"? There's an element of that.

With no doubt, I am of the view that if we don't win this battle or win a large part of the war against terrorism here, it will be much tougher when we have to fight it somewhere else. So we should stay. That doesn't mean you couldn't leave if the circumstances warranted it, but if we leave, it's a clear sign to the insurgents, given what I've said about what Canada's contribution is and where it stands in that region, that they're winning. It gives them a big boost and gives the western world, our allies, a real kick in the pants in terms of what it does to the collective commitment. Canada has had a credibility problem in terms of its military commitments for some considerable time. It's earning a lot of that back, but you might see a lot of that lost very quickly.

To be frank, the impact on the morale, the mood of the Canadian Forces, would not be positive. Soldiers don't like going and doing tough jobs just to leave before the job is done. They particularly don't like having their buddies left on the battlefield and not win the day, not complete the mission. It would be hard on them. But all of that could happen if the circumstances warranted it. It's a tough call.

The Chair: One issue was the effect that would have on the safety of Canadians at home and around the world.

LGen Michael Jeffery: In the short term, none; in the long term, I think it would be significant. It goes in line with my view that what we're dealing with here is not just trying to look after the burgeoning state of Afghanistan, given their recent or long history. I have a very, very strong view that what we're dealing with here is a long-term campaign for our way of life, for western values and the western way of life. There are large segments of those insurgents who are out there to ensure that our way of life does not continue.

So my view is, in the long term, it does imply a lessening of Canadian security, because we'll fight them somewhere. If it's not in Afghanistan, it's going to be somewhere else, and it will be much more expensive.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: My second question has to do with your comments about the ideal length of a deployment. The ideal would be six months out of a three-year term. We're currently demanding a tour out of every 18 months from our soldiers, and that ratio is unsustainable.

What impact does that have on our ability to engage in other missions? How is it impacted by that level of deployment, by that frequency of deployment?

LGen Michael Jeffery: I'm not sure I fully understand the question, Mr. Chairman. I'll give a very quick answer.

It's all out of the same pot. The army is only so big, the navy is only so big, the air force is only so big. You can't use them interchangeably. Taking a fighter pilot and putting him into a foxhole in Afghanistan might cause me some humour, but it doesn't really solve the problem. They have different skills. A large part of the load, just by the very nature of the task, falls on the army. The navy and air force can support a tremendous amount, and they are doing more and more in that regard. You're starting to see pilots and naval officers on provincial reconstruction teams and things like that. It's a positive move. That's using what we have as much we can. But the load is on the army.

My personal view is that it's a 5:1 ratio. Five plus one equals six, which means one six-month tour out of every three. So you take the army, and you can deploy one-sixth of it at any one time. You say, well, why can't you do more than that? You can, but what is a sustainable limit? Bear in mind that they have to spend a significant amount of time when they come out of the mission just decompressing and getting over the mission, and then they have to start training to go on the next one. The minimum is six months in both of those cycles. Given weather conditions and all the other tasks, it's probably more.

When we're talking about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan—add up all the missions and call it, in round figures, 3,000—my quick math says we're talking about 18,000 field force troops, and the total number of field force troops in the Canadian army is about 12,000.

● (1610)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I have a last question.

You also touched on the topic of the national will to stay. In light of your comments about the importance of this mission and the investments we have currently made to the resources allocated to Afghanistan, how do you think we should encourage this national will to stay among the Canadian public?

LGen Michael Jeffery: That is not a question that one can provide a simple or quick answer to. There are many factors here, not the least of which is the history of the last 50 years and the sense that Canadians have of themselves and their military, which is changing and needs to change.

In my opening remarks, I boiled it down to one thing, and it's called leadership. I'm not pointing fingers; I genuinely am not. I consider myself responsible for that. I did in uniform and I continue today because of what I've done as a professional. I think everybody in the military, every politician—irrespective of political stripe—people in business and academia, all have a responsibility to understand these complex issues and provide leadership to the Canadian people. We have become, in my humble view, lazy and irresponsible in what is really a collective responsibility on the international stage.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That ends the first round. Starting our five-minute round, we'll go to the official opposition, back to the government, to the Bloc, and back to the government.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General, thank you so much for joining us here. Allow me first to take a minute to pay tribute to your service and the service of our military forces on our behalf.

I want you to elaborate on something. I'm getting a sense that you're saying a lot of the soldiers, including you, are having some questions about the cause and what's going on over there.

LGen Michael Jeffery: I don't believe our soldiers question why they're there, but I believe many Canadians question why they're there. If Canadian will is not firm in saying we should be there and for this reason, then the impact on the soldiers can be significant. I use that as an opportunity to express something here.

The soldiers will do what is required. They'll take the knocks from this mission, casualties and everything included. The fact that there's a legitimate political debate going on about what a nation should do is not a problem. They're not worried about that. They can discern the difference between that legitimate political debate in terms of genuinely asking should we or should we not be there, and what they will perceive as the unwillingness, frankly, to stay the course and to do the hard things.

● (1615)

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Okay, thanks.

You also talked about the fact that you need to have a balance, you need to find a balance between the military role and the humanitarian one, and about aid and gaining the hearts and minds of the locals. In your opinion, and I know you're not directly involved now in what's going on, do you see that balance being achieved?

LGen Michael Jeffery: The first thing I have to say, quite honestly, is that I have not been in Afghanistan since 2002, and I have been out of uniform for three years. So I haven't seen the details of exactly what's going on on the ground. I'm basing my comments on open-source material in terms of what I am aware of.

There have been difficulties in that regard. In some cases, it is because some members of the international community who have committed to do development and reconstruction work haven't delivered. I'm not talking about Canada; it's an international effort. There are something like, I believe, 36 nations in Afghanistan; there are a lot of people engaged. So there are other people there. In some cases, it's because the security situation in the region doesn't permit it to occur. So there are some imbalances. Certainly in the south, the balance has been heavily weighted in terms of the security issue, which is a concern.

I will reflect on the reality, though, that we only took over in the south in the early part of this year. It's one of the tougher regions of the country. It's a tough nut to crack, and it's going to take some time. Whether, on a day-to-day basis, that balance is right I can't tell you, because you would have to be there to see if that is the case.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: You said it's going to take some time. How much time do we need to step back and re-examine the strategies we've been applying and maybe identify a different strategy or approach?

LGen Michael Jeffery: It's hard to put a timeline on it. I would say that you need to be looking at a minimum of six months in the south in terms of what's happening there. We just haven't been at it long enough. One battle does not a campaign make. Just because we've had a bit of a rough go for a period of time doesn't mean the strategy is not sound. Bear in mind that the other guy has a vote. The other guy doesn't want you to succeed. He's going to do everything he can to stop you, so there's that element to it as well.

If you look at the longer-term campaign, step back from this and look at how long ISAF has been there. It went there in 2002-03. Its current campaign of provincial reconstruction teams started in the north, moved to the west, and now is moving south. Ultimately, the next phase is to go to the east. It started with the easy parts, and in the degree of difficulty, it's getting more and more difficult as it goes along. It's taken a couple of years to get this far. Given that the south is a tough nut to crack, it could take several years. It could take a lot longer. I don't want to mislead you, but our expectations need to be tempered with the reality of how difficult these things are.

I was saying you need a minimum of six months to reconsider the strategy. That doesn't mean you change it. Give the commanders in theatres at least six months to figure out whether they have it right or not. They'll normally tell you pretty quickly if they think it should change.

The Chair: Thank you, and thanks for the question.

We'll go over to Mr. Hawn, and then back to the Bloc.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, General Jeffery. I've know you as a straight shooter in uniform, and I'm glad to see that your style hasn't changed.

I'd like to change the line of questioning a little bit. We talked about resilience and sustainability and so on. The Canadian Forces has embarked on a new, more aggressive recruiting program. I assume that you've seen the ads and are aware of the thrust behind them. What's your view of that program? Do you think it can be successful? How do you view that?

LGen Michael Jeffery: I can't resist, Mr. Chair. Mr. Hawn and I would remember the time of recruiting back in the late sixties and early seventies, when the recruiting campaign was a young officer in a nice green uniform getting off a 707 with a briefcase in his hand. It was the sort of the image of the young executive, which is anathema to someone in the combat side of the profession. We've come a long way in that regard.

I have been very concerned for quite some time that the nature of the recruiting advertisement and the effectiveness of the recruiting campaign was not where I thought it should be. This is in part because we have been reluctant nationally to call a spade a spade in terms of what a soldier, sailor, airman, or airwoman is there to do. It goes in line with the myth of peacekeeping, that we're somehow imbued with some sort of special qualities that allow us to do things that others can't. The reality is that it's a harsh world out there, and the military is there to be able to deal with those harsh realities. If one strategic lesson has been learned out of this, it is that what we've allowed to slide over a couple of decades is the ability to do some of the tough stuff.

So in some respects I think it's a positive turn. It's honesty in advertising, and I think it will appeal to certain segments of the population, certainly; whether all segments is another matter. But it will take some time.

The piece of it that I'm a bit concerned about is the accentuation of terrorism as the threat and tying it to recruiting. I believe that terrorism and all of those issues from a broad political perspective need to be addressed, and the Canadian people need to engage in those issues. But it's not the only reason, and it should not be the dominant reason that people join the military. It's just one of many potential missions that the Canadian Forces will have to undertake.

I don't know if I've answered the question.

● (1620)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: No, that's good.

Actually, I have a bit of a follow-on to that, from resilience of the CF now to the resilience of Canadian public and, by extension, the government. You brought up the myth of Canadian peacekeeping. How much has the myth of the Canadian peacekeeper warped or done damage to Canadians' appreciation of the realities of international affairs and what the participation is of Canada and the Canadian Forces in those?

LGen Michael Jeffery: I'm not sure I can put a measure on it, but I would say considerable.

The classic peacekeeping hasn't existed for a very long time—the idea that we have two opposing societies, or states, or portions of the state, and we need blue-helmeted people standing in between keeping them separated until they settle their differences politically. I wouldn't suggest it couldn't occur again, but the reality is that it hasn't occurred for a very long time. It's a much more complex world. If Canadians believe that we can send the youth, the young blood of this country, off to those other regions of the world and that's all we need to do—we don't need to give them weapons, we don't need to give the tools of the trade, as it were, and we don't need to give them the moral backing to do it—we're killing them for nothing. I mean, they will die for nothing.

I remember going into a UN mission where, sadly, I had troops who were not prepared to do that. It was one of those, and many have seen it happen, where we cobbled the mission together for a number of reasons—this is many years ago—and we sent them off to do it and they weren't capable of doing the job. If you did that today, the number of people we've had come home in coffins would have been manyfold greater.

So we can't afford it. It is a myth. You need people out there who are able to look after themselves and use force where it is necessary. It doesn't mean we're going out to kill people. Ideally we can get around it, but you'd better be prepared to.

The Chair: You have a few more seconds.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Quickly, what's your view of putting any stock in the comments of a junior officer whose main job is to make sure the general's boots are shined? I'm speaking of Leo Docherty, the aide-de-camp of the British general who keeps getting quoted as some authority on the success or failure of the mission.

LGen Michael Jeffery: In every comment you must always consider where the comment comes from. I can't say much more than that. I'm not familiar with the individual, so I don't have a comment.

The Chair: That's fair. Thank you.

Back to the Bloc, Mr. Carrier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Good day, General. Thank you for joining us today.

Earlier, mention was made of striking a balance between armed intervention, reconstruction efforts and humanitarian aid in this country. Do you feel that Canada is focussing enough on reconstruction at this time? During his recent visit, Mr. Karzaï apparently said that Canada should focus its efforts more training Afghan soldiers so that they could take over from the Canadian military. Are Canadian Forces doing enough in this area?

● (1625)

[*English*]

LGen Michael Jeffery: I'm not sure I'm in a position to honestly respond to that in terms of a judgment. I would say that relative to the size of our overall mission, we're doing a considerable amount in the broad area—not just reconstruction, but in the broad development area. We have people in positions that very few other nations have. We have a tremendous amount of influence in Afghanistan, right from the highest political level all the way down, given the kinds of commitments that we have there. We are leading one of the provincial reconstruction teams and, of course, we run one of the major regions in the south, so we have a tremendous amount of influence.

Should we be doing more? Someone needs to be doing more. We could go back to the issue of balance; I think there needs to be more contribution. I'm not in a position to say it should come from Canada, because it's not only our problem. As I said, this is a NATO problem; it's a western world problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: You stated that we cannot leave unless our mission in Afghanistan is accomplished. Sooner or later, however, we will have to pull out of Afghanistan. Our troops cannot remain there indefinitely. Countries far more powerful than Canada have had to pull out, just like the Americans were forced to leave Vietnam. Theirs was not a glorious retreat. They pulled out after failing to complete their mission.

If we postpone our pull-out unduly, do the risks not increase and the consequences become even graver?

[*English*]

LGen Michael Jeffery: *Certainement*. We certainly could.

There's a risk there—I would be lying to you if I said otherwise—but to my mind it is an issue of will. I mean, if the western world has said Afghanistan is a place where we are going to be counted—that we are going to ensure that this nation will be allowed to prosper, that it is going to be peaceful, that Taliban extremism will not use it as a base of operation and continue to then export it around the world—then we have a collective responsibility to make that happen. I would suggest, looking around the collective international table, that there are a lot of other people who need to look in the mirror in terms of whether they're doing their share, but if we just fall into step with those who would rather not get involved or do their share, are we any better than they are? I'd like to think that we are better than that. That's a personal view, but I'd like to think that we are better than that.

If we continually say it's all too expensive and we should get out before it fails, then I'm sorry, that is not commitment; that is not national will. That, to be blunt, is cowardice.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Pakistan is playing an increasingly negative role in Afghanistan. Consider the fact that to a great extent, this country is responsible for the terrorist activity in Afghanistan and for forcing the Americans to get involved.

Isn't there a danger that the military operation now under way in Afghanistan could be derailed even further, thereby necessitating further military intervention in this country?

[*English*]

LGen Michael Jeffery: I made the comment earlier that I'm not an expert in this region of the world and I'm somewhat hesitant to get too far into this.

Pakistan is a very complex country. President Musharraf has enough challenges internally as it is, let alone with the problem of Afghanistan. The recent agreement struck with the Taliban is exacerbating the problem in Afghanistan; I don't think there's any doubt about that.

I don't know what the solution is, but it seems to me that however we go forward here, if there's going to be any positive outcome, the international community has to engage politically in Pakistan, so as to be part of the solution instead of part of the problem. I'm not sure that has occurred to the extent that I think is necessary.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

We'll go over to Mr. Calkins and then back to Mr. Murphy.

● (1630)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General, for being here today.

I'm going to change the topic a little bit. I hope you've been following the media lately, and some of the comments that have been made. Former Prime Minister Paul Martin criticized the mission recently and said that Canada has lost its way in Afghanistan. I want you to comment. Do you think the focus of the mission has changed since the initial deployment? What do you think the impact would be if we were to withdraw our troops to a different region, back to Kabul, and limit the NATO commander's ability to deploy Canadian forces? Is that a place we should be going right now, and what do you think about those comments?

LGen Michael Jeffery: I'm not sure I want to get drawn into particular comments, but let me clarify something from my perspective. Just so we're very clear, the focus has changed, but it's changed by design. If you go back and read the UN Security Council's resolution that authorized ISAF and you look at the evolving strategy as it's occurred, the initial ISAF mission was in Kabul. It has changed considerably. Canada's commitment has changed considerably. Those were reasoned decisions and clearly decisions the international community made, the UN made, and Canada made in terms of its involvement as the strategy evolved. We have to be careful of revisionist history in that regard.

As for whether we've lost our way, I'm not going to comment on that. I think I've said enough about it. I'm of the view that we're there and we need to stay there. I'm starting to repeat myself, which is always a great danger. I don't think we should be cutting and running.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'm going to move away from that.

Earlier today a Canadian military convoy was ambushed by a suicide bomber in Kandahar. Fortunately no troops were injured, but the attack did damage a Canadian military vehicle, the RG-31 Nyala. I would like some comments on that.

I remember in the early deployment—which would highlight your previous comment that the nature of the mission has changed—sadly, some Canadian troops were killed when their Iltis jeep ran over a mine—or it was a suicide bomber, roadside bomber, or whatever the case may have been—back about three or four years ago. As our mission has changed, our equipment has changed. I know the issue of tanks and everything else has been raised. Can you give us an assessment, your opinion, of the fact that the mission has changed, and tie it together with the fact that we've needed to change the equipment on the ground there, and give us some indication of whether or not the equipment the forces have over there right now is adequate to do the job?

LGen Michael Jeffery: I have to say, Mr. Chairman, that this is a complex area and I could spend hours in it. So stop me if I go too far.

First, one of the common problems you have to deal with is availability. That is to say, we may know what we want, we may even have taken steps to get what we want, but it's not available. Iltis is a classic case in point, where we had to deploy it because that's all we had. It wasn't that we didn't recognize that it was inadequate. Indeed, we were pushing forward with contracts to get the G-wagon to replace it. We just couldn't move the system fast enough to get it. So there are those kinds of problems.

There are problems of what you have and what you deploy, and the tank is an example. Then there are the straight limits of technology in terms of what the art of the possible is regarding equipment.

To declare my colours, I ran the army equipment program as a colonel in the early 1990s, when we were working through these sorts of problems in the Balkans. We learned very quickly that some of our approaches to equipment procurement had not kept pace with reality; we learned some hard lessons there.

We've done a lot better. Certainly the Canadian army is better equipped today than at any time since I was in uniform. It doesn't mean that there aren't inadequacies, that there aren't areas where it needs to improve. So I'm generally happy with where it is.

The biggest area—and I'll bring it right down to what I think your concern is—is that of protection. It's a tough one, ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry. It really is tough, because the reality is that in land warfare the big three are mobility, firepower, and protection. If you go back historically, the changes in military operations on land have always been as a result of a change in the balance of those three. For some considerable amount of time, firepower dominated. Chemical and other energy weapons are such that they can go through virtually anything. It may take a bigger brick to throw at it, but even the most modern, biggest, heaviest main battle tank can be punctured. Anything can be beaten; therein lies the problem.

We've recognized this. We can't go everywhere with a traditional heavy main battle tank; it won't do the job. We may use it in certain areas, and the reason we have tanks going into Afghanistan is principally because of protection. It's not because of the firepower. The firepower on the LAV-25 is every bit as good as anything in the theatre. They don't need tanks for firepower; what they need is the protection.

Before someone asks why you didn't put more protection on it, you can say it's because—I was going to say physically impossible, but that would be incorrect—this has severe limitations. If you put more and more armour on it, it gets heavier and heavier, and then it can't go anywhere. So the LAV-3, which is one of the best light-armoured vehicles in the world today, is still pushing the limits of weight. We can't put more on it. We're already at the extremes of materials technology to develop new armours that will stop it.

So what we're dealing with, ladies and gentlemen, is one of those points in history where we're waiting for some breakthrough in technology that will allow us to solve the problem. It will not be new armours; it will be new countermeasures to effectively replace that. You are going to see armoured fighting vehicles introduce stealth technology, so they can't be seen or detected. You're going to see some improvements in materials technology, but you're also going to see significant improvements in active systems. Effectively you're going to see sensors on board those vehicles that will detect incoming rounds or explosions, and weapons systems that will knock incoming missiles or round out of the air. That might sound like *Star Wars* to you, but the technology is almost there today.

More passive armour, more hunks of stuff, isn't what you need. You can't put enough on, and the difficulty we're dealing with now with mines and IEDs—improvised explosive devices, as we tend to call them—is that the technology is so advanced and the terrorists have the technology in spades. As fast as you develop a countermeasure, they have something to beat it. So you're playing that sort of game.

I've sort of wallowed around the issue, but I hope I've given you a sense of what the problem is here.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. Murphy, then Ms. Gallant, then back to the official opposition, and that will end the second round.

Go ahead, for five minutes.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you very much for coming, sir, and I want to thank you for your frankness and insight.

There's one area that I want to explore with you, and that is the whole area of communications in the military. Our role in Afghanistan, as you can appreciate, is a very hot topic in Canada. Every politician has an opinion, and all the NGOs have opinions. We're getting comments from George Bush. We had Pervez Musharraf yesterday, Karzai last week. I think the Canadian public genuinely has a thirst for knowledge on this issue. From my vantage point, and correct me if I'm wrong, I think it would be helpful if we had more communication from the military. I know Brigadier-General David Fraser was interviewed, but he's usually interviewed on a specific incident, usually a fatality or some specific problem in Afghanistan.

I know it's a theatre of conflict and you're not going to say what you're doing, but is there any strategy out there for the military to communicate with the Canadian public directly as to the objectives, the strategy, the challenges, how things are going? I honestly think the Canadian public has a thirst for knowledge, and the message is that the waters are muddy because there are a lot of different views and opinions. There are people talking who really don't know the issue, I don't think, and then you have these foreign leaders talking, some of whom don't have a lot of credibility.

My example is going back to the Gulf War, back when General Norman Schwarzkopf spoke every night on TV. He gave a very clear delineation as to what the American military were doing. He had so much credibility before the western people. Is there any strategy, or do you think the Canadian military should be doing more?

● (1640)

LGen Michael Jeffery: Communication obviously is a major challenge in this era, and I think all militaries have learned over the last couple of decades and have got better at it. There are always improvements to be made. It seems to me, however—and I hate to use the term again in a different context—there needs to be balance in that. I think senior commanders, the Chief of the Defence Staff and people like that, need to be available to the public. It is my perspective, and I'll share it, that the current CDS is very available. He is available to talk on a range of issues and is relatively forthcoming, recognizing that he is a servant of the government. He always has a challenge, as does everybody in uniform, to strike that right balance.

Similarly, it is my experience that commanders in theatres of operation have always been available to the media. I don't have intimate personal knowledge, so I'm not challenging anything you've said or implied, but I would be surprised if David Fraser is not having regular briefings where he is available to answer questions on the part of the media and so on.

To take the additional step of then having the military on a regular basis—to use the Schwarzkopf example—give nightly war briefings is an extraordinary step, in my view. I'm not suggesting there aren't cases, and maybe the Gulf War, as you put it in the context of what Schwarzkopf and the U.S. at the time faced, may have been an example of where that was desirable, but I have difficulty personally in imagining a Canadian general standing up and giving daily operational briefings of the conflict.

I must admit it's not something I've given a lot of thought to, but it does seem to me to be a bit over the top and may send the wrong signals. I would certainly think that the implications on the nation...it starts to have a military role in society that perhaps is much stronger than a democracy should have, personally speaking.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: The point I'm making is that the only time we really see David Fraser, or hear from him, is usually after a fatality in Afghanistan, when he's asked to explain how it happened. He passes on his condolences to the family and friends of the person and explains it as best he can. I still think there would be a role—I don't know how it would come about and I'm looking for your guidance—but I honestly think in the Canadian public there's a tremendous thirst out there to have the gaps filled in the public's knowledge. I think they would really benefit and they would want to hear it from somebody who is on the ground over there, explaining what the objectives and strategies are.

Again, if you have any final comments, that's the only issue I wanted to talk about.

LGen Michael Jeffery: I must admit, although I hadn't thought of it in quite that context, I would share the view. My only addition would be that while the military can play a role there, ultimately it's not the military role to explain the national objectives of why we're there. It can support that, but it's not the military role to do that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Murphy.

Over to Ms. Gallant, and then back to the official opposition.

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

Thank you, General Jeffery, for clarifying that the tanks are not being deployed to destroy civilian infrastructure but rather to protect our troops. And welcome back; it's as refreshing to hear from you today as it was when you were a commander sitting as a witness.

Indeed, I wish this committee had had the opportunity to ask questions, the types of questions that the first member of the opposition asked, prior to the initial deployment to Afghanistan. Perhaps we wouldn't be going through this information exercise with the public, and asking the question of why we're over there in the first place, had we had the opportunity to debate the deployment in the first place and have a vote on it, the way this government has provided for the extension.

It is to the credit of our superb training and the professionalism of our troops that they're performing so admirably, despite the lack of proper equipment they had initially when they were deployed to Afghanistan. Is the Canadian Forces equipment being used in Afghanistan today adequate for the mission, in your opinion?

● (1645)

LGen Michael Jeffery: Is it adequate?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In your opinion.

LGen Michael Jeffery: Yes. As I think I said earlier, it is probably some of the best equipment we've had in my time in uniform. But let me be clear: there are always deficiencies. It is virtually impossible in any....

You know, for every system there's a counter-system, and you're constantly playing catch-up to try to do that. Add to that the difficulties of procuring equipment and getting it into a theatre of operation. That is happening, but there's always a time lag, so there's always an issue. There are some issues that you just can't get over, but that's not unique to us. Every military has exactly the same problem.

Protection, as I said, is the biggest area of concern. Certainly my understanding and knowledge indicates that we continue to be doing as much as we possibly can. The only area that I know is an operational concern is on the air side, particularly helicopters. They're available because they're part of the NATO force, but there are no dedicated Canadian ones. That does reduce the flexibility somewhat.

That's the only system that I can think of, or that comes to mind, that might be an issue.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Now, together with the Taliban, we do have in Canada a political party and a sector of society that wants to cut and run, but run to areas that previous witnesses have stated are equally if not more dangerous. Were Canada to do so, we know that they'd want to cut and run from those areas once remains started to be repatriated from there.

You were a Canadian military leader in the days when our troops were deployed to Kosovo and Bosnia. Do you recall whether or not the same sorts of questions as to exit strategies were being asked long before the mission was complete?

LGen Michael Jeffery: You're stretching my memory, but I think the answer is yes. It seems to me we've always had those sorts of debates about whether there is an exit strategy and, if there is, what it is.

Frankly, it makes it a lot easier if you have a clear exit strategy—and politically and militarily, one should—but the world isn't quite that simple. It's easy to get yourself into a situation without clarity in terms of how you get out of it. That is a reality. That said, having gotten yourself in that position, I think it's then a responsibility to continue to work to sort out what that exit strategy is, and to shape the circumstances to allow you to do that.

I'm honestly not sure where your question is coming from, but yes, it has been a problem.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: If I understand you correctly, as the mission progresses and as we perhaps see the completion or accomplishment of our goals, at that time we'll have a clearer idea of where we should be going in terms of finalizing our commitments there.

LGen Michael Jeffery: Yes. I would certainly stop short, though, of saying we don't have to worry about it until we know where we're going. One has to go a bit further than that. But you can also do it too early.

The classic case in point is the first Gulf War, when the U.S. put down very clearly, “We're not going to Baghdad. We're not going any further than this,” which at the time made eminent sense. And the military leadership loved it because it gave them a clear exit strategy. They knew exactly what to achieve, and at the end of that everybody could come home.

I think history has shown, though, that a more far-reaching look at this to consider changing the exit strategy might have actually saved us a lot of grief later on. So just because you have an exit strategy doesn't mean it's right. It makes it easy from the point of view of management of the campaign, but it needs to be revisited in terms of whether you're achieving your political objectives.

The Chair: Thank you.

The time's up. We're going back over to the official opposition to end the second round.

Mr. Dosanjh.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

General, I was reading this morning with a great deal of interest Jeffrey Simpson's piece in *The Globe and Mail*. I don't know whether you had a chance to see that. What he's talking about are the rules around counter-insurgency. He's citing David Galula, the great French counter-insurgency expert. Jeff Simpson says that this expert listed five rules for success against insurgents, and that it would appear that none are being used by Canadians and other NATO forces in southern Afghanistan.

The rules are these: do not divide the military-civilian command; put a civilian in control of the overall operation; since counter-insurgency is ultimately a political affair, try to avoid large-scale conventional military force in response; and above all, remember that the target is the support of the local population—which is what you've alluded to in terms of the hearts and minds situation.

First of all, is it important to follow those rules? Jeffrey Simpson thinks they should be followed. I'm just asking your opinion without actually making a comment on them. I just want to know from an expert whether or not those are important rules, and if they are, are we following them? If we're following them, are we following them adequately?

● (1650)

LGen Michael Jeffery: Bearing in mind I haven't read the article, and I'm not particularly familiar with the author you've stated—

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: His last name is Galula. It's the first time I've heard of him.

LGen Michael Jeffery: I'll look it up, but I'm honestly not familiar with his work. I haven't come here to refresh myself in terms of counter-insurgency theory and doctrine, which is in part what one does when you start to quote principles.

That said, the comments you made, just based on what you've said, certainly resonate with me. Those make sense to me in terms of the kinds of things one must bear in mind. On the degree to which they are or are not addressed in Afghanistan, I'm less clear.

But I think one point is very important here. We are in a coalition, an alliance. This is a NATO operation. We are under NATO command. It is at that level that those things need to be applied, not at every level all the way down. There may be arguments for some of that. To my knowledge, it is civilian controlled. NATO is civilian controlled. The operation in theatre, the UN mission there, is civilian controlled.

As to the division of command and control, I'm not clear on that in terms of what is implied there. The difficulty is that when you get into the Canadian area of David Fraser and the particular task force there, it may have a different complexion. The principles shouldn't be violated, but I'm not sure in the context—again, I haven't read the article—whether they are.

Therein lies the difficulty of drawing conclusions on a coalition effort and applying them to a national force. We're part of a bigger whole.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I appreciate that distinction. If one were to then argue that if we were solely there by ourselves we would perhaps follow these more closely, and now, because we're part of a coalition.... If one were to follow that rule of joint civilian control, then one would follow it whether one is there by oneself or as a part of a coalition. I'm not arguing with you, but that just seems logical to me.

The next question I have is with respect to the issue of hearts and minds and the issue of the tanks. I understand that we're all concerned about the safety and security of our troops, and that's job one, for all of us. But I was struck by some comments made by the chief of military history from the U.S. Army, Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Moten, that our forces' sending Leopard tanks to Afghanistan was a mistake both on the intellectual and the operational level; although recognizing their firepower and their protective capacity, he judged them somewhat detrimental or counterproductive in a campaign for the hearts and minds of the locals.

I just want you to comment on that, if you may. If you don't want to, that's fine too.

The Chair: Briefly, if you wish to comment; if you don't, that's fine.

LGen Michael Jeffery: I can certainly see where one could make an argument in that regard. It is a judgment call, as are all things. Bearing in mind that I don't know the specifics, but what I've read in the media indicates that something like 15 tanks are going, which is, to be frank, a very small number.... They are effectively available to be used as infantry support weapons when the need arises; they're not being used in any sort of mass. And their principal role is to allow them to get into areas because of their protection. It came directly out of the late Panjawai fight, where a number of LAV-3s were hit and destroyed. The thing they lacked was the ability to get in, in an area of fairly intense fire, with adequate protection.

So there is that balance. But you're right, in the sense that it starts to tip the scale. As I said earlier, it's always that balance. The more force you use, the more force you display, the more danger you're in of losing that battle for hearts and minds. There is a strong argument to be made in that regard.

● (1655)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, committee, that finishes the second round. That's 11 spots and gives us a question for everyone at the table.

Now we have time to start the third round, but I don't think we have time to get through it. So I'll leave it up to you. Do you want to move in camera and deal with the travel? Could I see a show of hands of who wants to do that? We'll do it.

Committee, just before we go, there are a couple of things I would like to ask as chair, if I may, of the witness.

First of all, let me thank you for being as frank as you were and answering the questions as well as you could, having been out of the active line of fire, so to speak, for a spell.

One issue I really am concerned about is how our folks are treated when they get home. The people who come back, who have served over there and have come back and are healthy and still whole are one thing, and you mentioned post-traumatic stress syndrome. But what happens in the meantime when we have people who are injured, who come back before the deployment is over? Is there a system in place where they are taken care of?

LGen Michael Jeffery: Yes. Let me try to put it in some context.

If we go back again to our experiences in the Balkans in the 1990s, and to some extent even in early 2000s, to be very blunt, we failed. We failed our soldiers, sailors, and airmen and air women—our soldiers more than anybody else, because they took the greatest amount of casualties. We had been away from real combat, real action, for so long that the collected memory had failed us and we had not put attention to those things as we should. We learned that lesson.

The support system that the Canadian Forces has in place today for soldiers who are injured, including psychological casualties, and for families of soldiers who are injured or have died, is, in my personal view, second to none. That isn't to say there won't be failures. I'm not suggesting it's perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but it is a very, very carefully thought-out process. It goes into action automatically if anybody is hurt. Based on my experience and everybody I've talked to who has been involved with it, they are very pleased with it.

One of the toughest areas, by far, is the PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder. It's tough not because of a lack of will to deal with it but the reality that everybody—nobody more so than a person in uniform—is very proud about what they do and how they feel about it, and no matter how much education and preparation we give people, they can't help but believe that if they have a psychological casualty, somehow it's a failing on their part and they don't want to bring it forward. My friend Romeo Dallaire has said publicly more than once that he'd have been a lot better off if he'd lost a leg. That's exactly the sentiment, and many feel the same way.

So what I'm saying is that the limitation of the system in that regard is the willingness of people, at some level, to come forward and say, “I have a problem.”

The Chair: And the physical problems are easier to see than the others.

● (1700)

LGen Michael Jeffery: Right.

The Chair: On the issue of caveats and limitations by different forces that are there, if one country has their forces there and they're not allowed to actively engage, can they be, and are they, used as backups to the people who are actually going out in the field? Can that intermingling take place? Where a country is under severe restriction as to how involved they can be in the active fighting, how close do they get to the real front lines?

LGen Michael Jeffery: One almost needs to have an example in some detail to be able to answer that question. It's like a jigsaw puzzle. A commander in a coalition environment has to take all these different-shaped pieces of the jigsaw puzzle—those shapes being what each nation has put on in terms of caveats, what the capability of those forces are—and see what kind of picture he can create. In some cases, you don't need to get that complicated. In other cases, you have to be quite imaginative to be able to use the force, and then you have to really run the edges in terms of what those limitations are.

To my understanding—and I'm now perhaps straying a little bit—what's happening in Afghanistan is that the commander has taken British, Canadian, Dutch, and American forces and used them largely together, because their capability and the national caveats allow them pretty much to work together seamlessly. The others are in other areas doing other things where it's much less of a problem. That's a convenient way of doing it. The danger, of course, is that over time you actually do get a significantly disproportionate load on those nations that are doing the tough slogging. The question is, does that become a political issue for those nations?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll suspend this meeting and move in camera. It takes a few seconds for our system to switch over, so that gives us an opportunity to thank our presenter.

Sir, thank you very much.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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