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Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

Standing Committee on National Defence

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): It being 3:30, we'll call to order the seventeenth meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence, dealing with our study of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

Today we'd like to welcome, from DND, Colonel Capstick, the former commander of the strategic advisory team in Afghanistan.

Sir, we're very pleased that you could be with us today. If you have some opening remarks, we'd like to hear those and then we'll move into our rounds of questioning.

The floor is yours, sir.

[*Translation*]

Col M.D. Capstick (former Commander, Strategic Advisory Team - Afghanistan, Department of National Defence): Thank you Mr. Chairman. Thanks also to committee members for giving me the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon.

[*English*]

You can now tell why my remarks will mostly be in English this afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear in this important discussion of the Canadian Forces' portion of Canada's effort in Afghanistan. In these opening remarks, I'll try to provide you with information on a unique Canadian military contribution in Kabul, the Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan, or SAT-A. I also hope to provide you with some insight into the major strategic focus of that team, the thing we worked on the most, which was the Afghanistan compact and Afghanistan's national development strategy.

Finally, I'll leave you with my evaluation of some of the major national-level issues that face the elected Afghan government and must be addressed as part of the international state-building effort.

In June 2005 I was appointed by the Chief of the Defence Staff to develop and lead a strategic advisory team that would be deployed to Kabul to provide the Government of Afghanistan with strategic planning assistance. The concept was based on General Hillier's experience when he was commander of the International Security Assistance Force. During that mission he assigned military planners to assist the Minister of Finance of the day, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, at Ashraf's request, with developing a strategic plan for Afghan reconstruction.

The essence of the concept is that the military officers involved would bring the rigour of the well-developed military strategic planning process to the solution of civil and societal problems. The team I led consisted of 15 people. I had seven strategic planners who were employed in two sub-teams, a DND civilian, a strategic analyst, a military officer with expertise in developing strategic communications and information plans, and a CIDA-contracted capacity development expert. I also had three non-commissioned officers in the support role and a small command group that consisted of a chief of staff and me.

On arrival in Kabul in August 2005, the Canadian ambassador of the day, Chris Alexander, as well as the CIDA head of aid of the day, Dr. Nipa Banerjee, worked very closely with me to determine where we would have the best effect. In short order, the Afghanistan national development strategy working group and the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission were identified as good places to be. By early September, we were working in those offices on a daily basis.

In both cases, we worked very closely with Afghan counterparts to provide the tools necessary to develop the plans they need to move the country forward. The ANDS, Afghanistan's national development strategy working group, example is a good one. Our team worked in the same office—picture a room about twice this size—mixed in with young Afghan staff who were charged with putting the strategy together.

The ideas and programs were fed into the group from a variety of sources: Afghan leaders, ministers, international organizations, and individual academic experts. We assisted the Afghans in putting these inputs together into a strategic framework that would then be used to sequence activities, coordinate projects, and allocate resources. In essence, we acted as the mechanics that helped the Afghans put their invention together.

We used essentially the same method in the civil service commission, and after helping them prepare a strategy, we then redeployed a team to the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to help develop that ministry's objectives into an actionable plan.

After we became familiar with ANDS, we realized that we could assist the International Security Assistance Force to align its activities with the national strategy. To that end, we worked on a concept that would allow the commander, General Richards, to shape his campaign plan to the ANDS and help direct provincial reconstruction team tactical level actions so that they would be connected to national priorities and would be more coherent throughout the country.

General Richards and his staff have spared no effort in this regard, and we in fact provided him with the appropriate chapter on Afghanistan's national development strategy for his provincial reconstruction team manual, his direction to provincial reconstruction teams. So that was the team, and that's what we did.

I'd now like to take a bit of time to provide you with some context in terms of what Afghanistan has accomplished in a few short years and briefly discuss the plan for the future.

Despite the pessimistic tone of much commentary, Afghanistan has seen some remarkable progress in the last four years. As part of the Bonn process, which was the road map that established the basic political framework necessary for good governance, Afghans agreed on a constitution. They held very successful presidential elections in October 2004. And they held very well organized and well-turned-out parliamentary elections on September 18, 2005.

● (1535)

I had the honour of accompanying the Canadian ambassador and observing polls, and it was a remarkable feeling, like being a witness to history.

These achievements should not be underestimated. Thirty years of conflict has not only destroyed the basic structures of the state and much of the physical infrastructure, it has also inflicted serious damage to the social fabric of the country. This kind of damage is almost impossible to see, but it is probably more significant than the kind of damage that can be photographed and measured.

Massive population movements have all but destroyed many of the traditional methods of social regulation and conflict resolution, and constant fighting has left the population with a collective case of essentially psychological disruption—they are really tired of the conflict and the fighting. The success of the Bonn process in effect signalled the collective commitment of the people of Afghanistan to replacing the power of the gun with democratic processes.

In addition to this impressive political process, Afghans and the international community have established basic security in about three-quarters of the country. Hundreds of thousands—I think the number is in the millions now—of children, including girls, have returned to schools. Clinics, roads, irrigation systems, and countless other development projects have been completed and many more have been started. Much of this work has been completed with little fanfare or media attention.

The focus of Canadian leaders, the media, and our citizens has understandably been on combat operations in Kandahar province. These are the most intense combat operations the Canadian Forces have been engaged in since the Korean War, and of course they warrant Canadians' attention. That said, looking at Afghanistan only through the lens of combat operations in Kandahar is like looking at Afghanistan through a straw: a far too narrow field of view is presented and it misses much of the bigger picture.

With the end of the Bonn process, the elected government and the international community turned their collective attention to developing a comprehensive and robust plan for the future. This plan is articulated in two major documents that were presented at the London conference on the future of Afghanistan in February 2006: the Afghanistan Compact and the Afghanistan national development strategy. These are in essence the vision—that's the compact—and the plan, the national development strategy, that will determine the future of the country. The compact is a political-level mutual commitment between the international community, including Canada, and the Government of Afghanistan. It is a clear declaration of international support and the reciprocal commitment of the government to perform. ANDS is, in short, a strategy for achieving that commitment.

On February 15, 2006, the UN Security Council endorsed the compact and welcomed Afghanistan's national development strategy. This resolution is both a unanimous declaration of international support for the elected government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and a mutual commitment to the future of the country. Both documents address the problems of Afghanistan using a strategic framework that includes three pillars or lines of operation: security; governance, rule of law, and human rights; and economic and social development.

At this juncture I'd like to make two important points. The first is that the compact and ANDS together is the plan for Afghanistan. This is an Afghan-led plan and its execution is jointly monitored and coordinated by the Afghan government and the international community under the leadership of the United Nations assistance mission in Afghanistan. Secondly, all elements of the official Canadian contribution to this mission—military, diplomatic, and development—work together in all three of the pillars to accomplish the common goal. Time precludes an in-depth examination of how the whole-of-government or three-D concept works on the ground, but the provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar and strategic advisory team for Afghanistan in Kabul are two of the most obvious examples.

Although remarkable progress has been made in all three pillars, much more needs to be done. Afghanistan is at or near the bottom of every single UN human development indicator. Grinding poverty, illiteracy, very high infant mortality rates, chronic undernourishment, and massive unemployment are but a few of the problems that Afghans face every day. ANDS does address these critical areas, as well as the rest of the problems that must be overcome to attain the vision of a stable, secure, and prosperous Islamic state. Even though it is a comprehensive and robust plan, it will take sustained international engagement, resources, time, and patience to accomplish its ambitious goals.

● (1540)

I'll now use the compact strategic framework to conclude with a few remarks on some of the most pressing national-level issues that must be addressed in the near term.

The insurgency in the south is clearly the biggest issue in the security pillar. It has retarded development in that region and presents a threat to the progress that has been made in the rest of the country. The Afghan government and NATO have responded with initiatives such as the policy action group, a joint Afghan-international body that is now directing all aspects of the national-level strategy for the south. Other initiatives, such as the Afghan development zone concept, are intended to establish close links between security and development. That is the only formula that will stabilize that part of the country.

Afghan national security force development is another major issue that is crucial to the future. Afghan National Army reform is seeing good progress, but it needs to be accelerated. Afghan National Police reform has been more problematic, and that institution has not earned the trust of the population for any number of reasons, including widespread corruption and a lack of professionalism as we know it in terms of how police operate. The international community has recently enhanced this program, but much more needs to be done, and it will take time.

In the governance, rule of law, and human rights sectors, much has been accomplished, as I described earlier. That said, corruption is still an issue, and that and the general lack of an effective judicial system are major concerns. The Government of Afghanistan has recently taken some important anti-corruption measures and has also made some significant arrests in an effort to impede the corruption.

Recent changes to the Supreme Court are promising in terms of judicial reform, but the lack of an effective judiciary at lower levels is serious. Afghans basically lack confidence in the system, because of things like arbitrary arrest, detention, and the inability to access courts to solve basic social problems. Again, this is not something that is going to fixed overnight, and work is being done on it.

Finally, in this sector, reform of the civil service and of government assistance has been very slow and has not been very well coordinated. Public administration reform needs a major effort like the one applied to the army.

In the economic and social development sector, a major effort to achieve coherence and urgency is necessary. Several major official development agencies from other countries do not use the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund or the ministry of finance to move the money to programs and projects. Others use only contractors of their own nation to deliver. This results in excessive overhead and security costs.

Finally, the entire development program could be considered by some academics as under-resourced. Carl Robichaud of the Century Foundation has determined that the per capita aid expenditure in the early days of the Bosnian intervention was $649 U.S. per person, while in Afghanistan, left in a far worse post-conflict situation, the commitment is only about $57 U.S. per capita.

Clearly, coordinating and aligning the development effort with ANDS is an area that needs sustained international leadership. The Afghan state-building project is complex and complicated, and the problems are serious. But the problems can be overcome by this concerted international effort that was pledged at the London conference. Patience, resolve, and perseverence are essential, if the people of Afghanistan are to see the results of the promises made in the last four years.

Personally, after a year in Kabul I am optimistic about the outcome, but realistic about how tough this really is. We should have no illusions. Much remains to be done in Afghanistan, and the future of the country is by no means assured.

Finally, again personally, I am proud of the effort that Canada, the Canadian Forces, and each and every sailor, soldier, airman, and civilian has made to keep the promises that the international community and our country have made to the people of Afghanistan. I'm proud to have served with these outstanding Canadians, and the army, navy, and air force regular, reserve, and civilian people whom I had the honour and privilege of commanding in Kabul speak very well for this country.

All of us left there believing in the mission, and all of us left there with enduring images of a people determined to make their children's lives a little better than theirs.

● (1545)

Thank you for your time, and thank you for your interest in the mission and the outstanding work that your fellow Canadians in Afghanistan do in the name of our nation every day.

If the chair is willing, I'm ready for questions or comments.

The Chair: Good. Thank you very much.

We have a pretty structured way of posing questions. We'll go around with a seven-minute round, and then the next round will be for five minutes.

We start with Mr. Dosanjh, and then Mr. Bachand will be next.

Go ahead, Mr. Dosanjh.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you, Colonel, for being with us today.

I want to ask you to comment on what I say. We've been hearing a lot about the reality on the ground, and we know there has been intense fighting for some time in Panjwai and places such as that. You tell us today and simply confirm that the police are largely corrupt in Afghanistan, and there are all kinds of difficulties.

In fact Brigadier General Howard said that CIDA funding is not flowing to the PRT, and he said that the operational budget was being put into the PRT.

We have your comments, which I believe were reported on October 5, when you said that “the amount of international aid that has poured into the country (like the number of soldiers, not enough) is often invisible, what is sometimes called ‘phantom aid.’” So I'm assuming you share the concern that the aid isn't as much as it ought to be, or isn't getting to where it ought to go.

Then you have a situation where in terms of the security situation, our minister for CIDA wasn't even able to see the aid projects we're responsible for, and Afghan press couldn't attend her press conference in Kabul. Basically that tells me we are in a very difficult situation.

We also have Mr. MacKay's words reported today. Minister MacKay says essentially that the aid workers are not allowed to go do what they need to, because of the limits that have been placed on them after Glyn Berry's death.

Quite a lot of literature tells us that the eradication of poppies, particularly emphasized and pushed by the U.S., creates enemies on the ground, and in fact creates hungry families there. I'm told it creates a situation where particularly men in those families would be willing to fight on the side of the Taliban, given small amounts of money. Some estimates tell me that there are about 80% to 90% of those men in areas such as Kandahar province and Helmand who are hungry because of the destruction of their crops—with emaciated children I've seen in some videos—who would be willing to fight on the opposite side.

The reason I mention all these things, and there are many one could mention, is that I really want you to take us behind the scenes. You've been in Afghanistan; you have a better sense than I could have, never having been there and only reading about these things. Tell us what's happening beyond the stories that we hear of victories or defeats. What's happening on the ground? Are we winning the hearts and minds of ordinary people, or is it true that 80% of them—this is not a scientific estimate—might fight on the other side? I'd really like you to unvarnish the coverage for me and tell me what's happening.

● (1550)

Col M.D. Capstick: I'll try. It's a very comprehensive question. I'll try to start where you left off.

As I said in my opening remarks, somewhere around 75% of the country is relatively stable and secure—stable and secure enough for development to occur. Of course incidents occur: suicide bombers here and there, and some old factional elements who will come out of—I almost said the woods, but most of the place was deforested—the hills and try to create a disruption for their own purposes, generally related to some kind of criminality or other. A number of things happened over the previous four years to help create the conditions that gave us the current situation in Kandahar, in Helmand in particular, and in a couple of the places in the southeast.

In most of the country, things are happening. When you drive through the streets of Kabul, you can hardly move. Kabul was about 350,000 people when the Soviets invaded in 1979. We think there are somewhere between three and a half and four million people there now. The good news is that this has fuelled a fair degree of economic development. Of course, it has also created unemployment and congestion, disrupted traditional social structures—it's being worked.

In the other areas, in the north and the west in particular, it is very stable. You have to get the picture in your mind's eye that “stable” in Afghanistan is not downtown Ottawa. There are people out there who are bad guys; it's that simple. But development is occurring, and small enterprise is picking up, and millions of kids have gone back to school, including girls. It's pretty impressive to see. Most of the schools in Kabul, for example, run three shifts during the school year, to get all the kids through. That is very upbeat and optimistic.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Let me ask you a simple question—

Col M.D. Capstick: If I could, sir, I just want to get to that poppy one and those farmers, before I lose my train of thought—I'm a pretty simple soldier here.

We have to be careful about drawing direct linkages between eradication and starvation. In the first place, there is a lot of mythology about the Afghanistan counter-narcotics strategy. I don't have it at hand, but there is a comprehensive strategy, and eradication is not the main focus of that strategy; alternative livelihoods are.

But it's more complicated than that. To create alternative livelihoods you have to have roads that can take crops from the farmer's field to the market centre, and you need a market, both internal and external, etc. It's a complicated economic process.

Whether the poppy is eradicated or not, or whether that guy is growing it or not, the farmer is at the bottom end of the poppy-growing food chain in terms of the money. The economic model is like post-U.S. Civil War share-cropping at the end of an AK-47. The cartels provide the seed, the fertilizer, and what's needed to grow the crop. Once the crop is cut, they come and get it, so the farmer doesn't have to worry about all that stuff. But he's in debt for all of it. And when the crop comes off, he gets a certain amount of money, enough to basically keep his nose above water and feed his family at subsistence levels until the next cycle starts again. These guys are trapped, and it's very complex. So eradication is really the last resort, and I guess I can leave that one there.

The Chair: Yes, Colonel. We're going to have to move on, in the interests of time, but maybe you can get back to it later.

And now we have Mr. Bachand for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I have here a study by the Canadian Institute of International Affairs Occasional Papers that you supposedly conducted. The study mentions Colonel M.D. Capstick, and two series of letters come after your name. The first series is OMM. Could you tell me what that stands for in English?

● (1555)

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: It's the Order of Military Merit, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: And what about the letters CD?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: That's the Canadian Forces Decoration.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Wouldn't you say that lends some weight to your arguments?

Col M.D. Capstick: Not a great deal.

Mr. Claude Bachand: In your study which I read through carefully, you talk about three pillars. I'd like to start with a few brief questions. There's no need for you to go into detail. I just want to know if I've understood your study. More than likely you looked to this study for inspiration when making your presentation.

Your study refers to three pillars: security, that is reforming the national Afghan army, police reform and the dismantling of armed groups. As far as you're concerned, the chief mission of Canadian Forces is security. True or false?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: What I meant, sir, is that in the context of the official Canadian government contribution to Afghanistan, the Canadian forces have the lead. We are the lead agency in the security pillar. We do most of the work in the security pillar, and that includes those areas you spoke about, plus the actual stability operations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I see.

In so far as the second pillar is concerned, you seem to be saying that it encompasses governance, the rule of law and human rights. This includes reform of government and the justice system and the fight against corruption. You also mentioned the poppy-based economy and seemed to say that this issue should be the responsibility of Foreign Affairs.

Do you still maintain that position?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: Yes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: The third pillar is economic and social development, over which CIDA should have responsibility, in your opinion.

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: Yes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I see. Getting back to your presentation, you mentioned the SATA, or Strategic Advisory Team in Afghanistan. Let me read something you said in ...

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bachand, we've lost the translation. I'm not sure what's happened.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Will you stop the clock, please?

The Chair: I will stop the clock.

We're fine now.

You have four minutes and four seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you.

Here's what you had to say about the SATA. I'll read it in English:

[*English*]

> ...it is a team of strategic planners that has been assigned to the Presidency to assist in the development of the kinds of plans necessary to achieve the vision described earlier in this paper.

[*Translation*]

That's what we were talking about a few minutes ago.

[*English*]

> In short, it applies generalist military planning skills to the solution of civilian problems. SATA is an Afghanistan-Canadian bilateral arrangement that does not come under the command of either ISAF or the U.S.-led coalition. Instead, the team leader takes his direction from the senior economic advisor to the President, in consultation with both the Canadian Ambassador and head of aid, and its operational focus is squarely in the other two pillars.

[*Translation*]

I have many questions about this. We're always hearing how our forces' mission is becoming far too defensive in its approach. Now I learn that the SATA is comprised of military planners who are trying to resolve civilian problems. I have a problem with this and I have three related questions for you. Perhaps you could jot them down and then answer all three in quick succession.

First of all, how do you feel about military planning as an approach to resolving civilian problems?

Secondly, bilateral arrangements between Canada and the United States seem to suggest that Canada will be pulling out of the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF. If in fact the ISFA, which is now in total control of Afghanistan, adopts a certain position, the SATA could well argue that it doesn't have to go along with what NATO Command is saying.

Thirdly, why target these two pillars? You've just said that Foreign Affairs should have responsibility for one of the pillars, and CIDA, responsibility for another. Now, we're hearing that the two can be replaced by the SATA committee, which endorses President Karzai's decisions.

These are my three questions.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: Okay, sir, I'll try. I guess I'll start with the first one.

I'm obviously a biased responder to this. This team was based on an idea. What do I think of using military planners in this kind of role? A plan is a plan is a plan. We have a very rigorous professional development system, such that from the day you're a young officer cadet, whether army, navy, or air force, you learn how to plan. That's what we do: we plan, we plan, we plan.

Why use military officers? Well, part of the problem is—I don't know whether it's a problem, but the reality is—that most government departments have just enough people to fill the seats in their headquarters. We are far less expensive than hiring international consultants. I could be a little bit cynical and talk about the number of $1,000 U.S. to $2,000 U.S. a day tax-free consultants walking around Kabul and producing not so much. If you've been to Kabul, you will have seen them.

Military people show up for work. Our people have a unique ability to adapt and be flexible and build confidence with the Afghans. In essence, we're the only department that can generate the number of people required on a continual rotational basis. If you go to another department and tell them, we're going to rip 15 people out of your hide and send them to Kabul...oh, man! And they may not have had the professional development and training.

To clarify it, for your second question, the bilateral arrangement is between Canada and Afghanistan. My relationship with ISAF and with the U.S. coalition was one of cooperation. I had instructions from General Hillier to provide them with whatever support possible.

That said, the fact that we were a purely Canadian Afghan operation opened doors and caused a very rapid level of trust to be developed. I think that was attributable to a couple of things. The first is Canada's reputation in Kabul as a good citizen in the international community, for want of a better word—I don't have a phrase for that—and secondly, the reputation that was built up by senior Canadians who had been through there over time: our then-ambassador, who's now a deputy special representative of the Secretary General in the UN mission in Kabul, Chris Alexander; Nipa Banerjee, from CIDA; and both General Leslie first, as Deputy Commander ISAF, and then General Hillier, as Commander ISAF.

And I'm about to retire, so I don't have to kiss up to any of them.

Quite frankly, those three or four names opened doors all over Kabul. They understood that I wasn't there on behalf of either of those two headquarters trying to push this agenda. To be very clear, ISAF is not in charge of Afghanistan, and NATO is not in charge of Afghanistan; the democratically elected government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is in charge of Afghanistan.

The Chair: We're going to have to stop you there. I'm sorry, we're out of time.

Ms. Black, then it's over to Mr. Calkins.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you very much for your presentation. There was a lot in there. I tried to write down some of the figures and things, but I'm sure we'll get them in the transcript.

You talked about, I think you said, “grinding poverty, and illiteracy, and horrible infant mortality rates”. This morning I met with a group that's working on the ground in Afghanistan, in Kandahar. They showed me photographs of malnourished and starving children who are living right in the city of Kandahar, right in the camps there. I found it very disturbing, and I think it must be very hard for the men and women of the Canadian military to see this.

I'm wondering why the aid is not getting through to them. They're living in Kandahar city. Is there not a way to funnel the aid through an organization like the Red Crescent that can get the food that's needed to these children who are starving?

Col M.D. Capstick: I wish I could give you a sufficient answer to this, but I really can't, because my team's focus was at the national and strategic level. We weren't on the ground in Kandahar. Security's probably the—

● (1605)

Ms. Dawn Black: I'm sure it is, but there must be a way through.

Col M.D. Capstick: And again, you'd have to....

Ms. Dawn Black: Okay.

One of the reports that came out last week said that teenage security people are being hired, then given an AK-47 with ten days of training. The way I read the report it seemed to indicate that they would have some responsibility for providing security for some of the men and women of the Canadian Forces who are working to build this road in southern Afghanistan in Kandahar.

I found that very troubling. I'm wondering, what are our obligations internationally in terms of child soldiers? I have two sons who are in the police department. They went through nine months of training. I know you can't compare Canada to Afghanistan. However, I find this very troubling: ten days of training and automatic weapons to provide some kind of security.

I understand what you've said about the Afghan police. I know a great deal needs to be done, but is this any kind of a solution to encourage that?

Col M.D. Capstick: The group you're referring to are auxiliary police. They are from the national level, a response to a need to enhance the amount of Afghan local security that's available. I shouldn't speak for them, but I know them.

There's not a professional Canadian officer or senior non-commissioned officer who is going to put the lives of his or her troops in the hands of untrained young people with AK-47s. We look after ourselves, we defend ourselves, and that's the way it is. So hopefully that will up the confidence level.

In terms of the international convention, this happened after it was under discussion, when I was in Kabul. Whether or not they're under 18 years of age, I don't know the answer to that question. But they are an Afghan government organization, and they're under the control of the Afghan national police, we hope.

Ms. Dawn Black: Yes, that's a bit worrying.

Col M.D. Capstick: No, they are an auxiliary police force.

Ms. Dawn Black: Thank you.

I know you talked about the Afghanistan Compact, and I believe you had some participation in it and the ANDS. I'm wondering how far along we are in that process. I know you can speak more to the country as a whole, but what is happening in Kandahar through this process? Is anything happening at this point, or is the security just not at the stage where they're able to...?

Col M.D. Capstick: The compact is the political deal between the world community and the Afghans, sanctioned by the UN, so it's hard to say in any particular province. But ANDS is the comprehensive plan. There are programs, which are part of ANDS, that are being moved into Kandahar, Helmand, Oruzgan, and those other provinces, as the security situation permits.

For example, one of the programs three to four layers down in the Afghanistan national development strategy is the national solidarity program, run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. One of the main parts of that program is setting up community development councils from the village level up. I think community development councils are being established in somewhere between 400 and 500 villages in Kandahar, because not all of Kandahar or Helmand province is in the middle of a firefight every day. These are in districts, and in Kandahar there are 40-something districts. It's a pretty chopped-up political arrangement.

So the short answer is yes.

Ms. Dawn Black: You mentioned figures, and I want to make sure I have them right. You said $649 U.S. was spent on post-conflict aid in Bosnia right away—

Col M.D. Capstick: Per capita.

Ms. Dawn Black: And only $57...?

Col M.D. Capstick: Correct. That's internationally, and those dollars are from the Century Foundation.

Ms. Dawn Black: Yet for Canada, Afghanistan is the largest recipient of foreign aid.

Col M.D. Capstick: Correct.

Ms. Dawn Black: Which countries aren't pulling their fair share, in terms of reconstruction?

Col M.D. Capstick: I can't do that.

Ms. Dawn Black: No?

Col M.D. Capstick: It would be hard for us to know. We were working as the mechanics on this thing, okay?

● (1610)

Ms. Dawn Black: It's shocking, those figures.

Col M.D. Capstick: We didn't have day-to day-control over anybody's dollars or even insight into anybody's dollars. But they're there, and.... We'll put the researchers to work.

Ms. Dawn Black: I'm wondering if you could help the committee, in terms of what's happening along the Pakistan border and the counter-insurgents who are coming back and forth across that border. What advice would you give to this committee, in terms of pursuing that, or what are your thoughts about it?

Col M.D. Capstick: The Afghan-Pakistani border is a very difficult issue. I know that at the political level, ministers of more than one ministry of the Government of Canada have done what ministers do, in terms of dealing with the Government of Pakistan. I know that the Canadian ambassador has done what Canadian ambassadors do, in dealing with the Government of Pakistan. Clearly there are people coming back and forth across that border, and clearly it is a difficult issue.

Militarily there's a thing called a tripartite organization at the national level, where the heads of the Pakistani military, ISAF, and the Afghan National Army meet to discuss these issues—and all the way down there are similar apparatus, telephone lines, and so on.

But at the end of the day, you have to picture that it's a rough piece of ground, to say the least. It makes the U.S.-Mexican border look like a cakewalk, and I'll leave that one at that. This is a tough issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Black.

Over to Mr. Calkins, and then back over to the opposition.

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

Thank you, Colonel, for your testimony here today.

I want to get a better understanding of exactly how this whole strategic plan and everything works.

My understanding of a strategic plan is that obviously it's to get from point A to point B at the strategic level, and you're not too worried about the operational details. Those are worked out in operational plans at a lower level. So keeping that in mind, the strategic plan is evaluated every once in a while to make sure that you're achieving your objectives. I'm wondering if you could paint the scene for us when the Canadian Forces arrived in Kabul. What did the initial strategic plans look like, and how successful were the Canadian Forces in achieving the goals and objectives listed in that strategic plan? Because every plan must have goals and objectives.

What timeline were we looking at in order to have the ability, when it came time to rotate...? What did it look like when we rotated out of Kabul and moved down to Kandahar, except for the PRTs still in Kabul?

Col M.D. Capstick: I'll clarify first: the Canadian PRT is in Kandahar.

What we have in Kabul are staff officers at the International Security Assistance Force's headquarters and in the coalition headquarters. But to help ANA, the Afghan National Army, and the Afghan national police reform, we have 15 Canadians led by a major—mostly young officers and NCOs, non-commissioned officers—who are at a place called the Afghan National Training Centre. They put together Afghan army units and do the final stage of training before they go downrange. And we have the team that I led, the Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan. That's what's left in Kabul; it's sixty-five to a hundred-ish, depending on the day.

I can't really talk to whatever the Canadian Forces strategy or campaign plan is. The Canadian Forces are part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade-led country strategy for Afghanistan. So we have a campaign plan for Afghanistan, which is the operational plan, one level down.

What we worked on was the Afghans' plan for their country. So what we helped them do was take all the inputs they were getting—and believe me, they were getting lots of input, lots of bright ideas—and basically put them into a strategic framework with objectives, sub-objectives, etc. Now the next stage is to resource these, because of course they need to be resourced.

Does that help?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yes, it does.

Could you please give me a comment on how successful the Canadian Forces were in meeting those objectives when we were in the Kabul region ?

Col M.D. Capstick: The record speaks for itself. The Canadian Forces in Kabul—both with battle group, as part of ISAF at one point, and then in the later days with the reconnaissance squadron and some engineers—we played our part in what's called the Kabul Multinational Brigade. That's part of the International Security Assistance Force.

For example, the reconnaissance squadron was instrumental during the parliamentary elections last September, providing over-watch, basic blanket security, presence patrolling in the streets, and so on.

● (1615)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If you can refresh my memory, how long was the main bulk of the Canadian Forces in Kabul?

Col M.D. Capstick: I don't have the dates, but somebody can get the dates for you. The last operational task was the election in September, and then the focus through the fall and up until the new year was the move to Kandahar from Kabul. It was a pretty complicated exercise.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Given the fact that the Canadian Forces have left their strategic planning there but operationally have moved to Kandahar, given the differences between Kabul and Kandahar, and given that the planning must be a little bit different because of the terrain, the amount of resistance, and everything that's in that region, I'm wondering how the plan has changed. I don't need details, but has the plan changed? Are we meeting or seeing levels of success similar to what we did see up in the Kabul area?

Col M.D. Capstick: This one is outside of what I did. Whatever I could tell you about Kandahar would be opinion and not necessarily fact.

Of course the plan changed. The insurgency developed to the extent that it did while we were there, so we, the Canadian Forces, have adapted to deal with that threat as it has presented. But on the actual details of the planning itself, you're going to have to wait for the brigade commander to come home.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'll just follow up with a couple of comments that I thought were quite interesting in your presentation. You spoke about the fact that the folks in Afghanistan appear to be tired of the fighting and all the chaos in their day-to-day lives. We're moving toward trying to replace the rule of the gun with the rule of diplomatic law and diplomatic societies. You commented about how there are millions of girls in school, there's irrigation, and so on. And then you made a comment to the effect that these reconstruction successes have proceeded with little or no fanfare, while we seem to have lots of fanfare every time we have a soldier coming home in a casket.

What could the Canadian Forces do or what should be done, in your opinion, to bring the other side of this message, about all the good work that's being done in Afghanistan? From a strategic planning perspective, how do we get that message out to the Canadian public?

Col M.D. Capstick: That's a tough one. The best we can do is to keep talking and keep trying to demonstrate these things. But it's natural. As I said in my statement, these are the most intense combat operations we've been in since the Korean War. I'd be concerned if Canadians weren't concerned, if Canadians weren't interested. If Canadians weren't discussing, debating, and following this issue, then I'd really be concerned, as a soldier. You can only do what you can do within the limits or reality, but people need to keep talking and get the rest of the story out, which I've been trying to do for the last month.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll start our second round. We're down to five minutes per questioner, so keep that in mind.

We'll start with Mr. McGuire, go over to Mr. Hiebert, then come back to Mr. Bouchard.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): There are probably not that many similarities between Bosnia and Afghanistan, but you have experience in both countries. It appears that NATO will be in Bosnia for quite some time before the wounds are healed there sufficiently for us to withdraw our military.

In trying in this committee to get a timeframe on Canada's commitment, when can we look forward to the day we can bring our troops home? We are now committed for three years, and you said in your remarks that it's going to take a long time before the civil apparatus can be put in place to the point where the Afghans can actually run a system of government, a system of justice, social programs, the whole system.

How long do you think we will have to stay in Afghanistan in order to get them to the point where we have reasonable expectations that our sacrifice will have been well spent and worth the effort?

● (1620)

Col M.D. Capstick: I really can't answer how long the Canadian Forces will be there or how long Canada will be engaged there. What I can say is that the international community, if it's to be successful, is going to have to be involved for a long time. Define “a long time”. That's tough, but I know these kinds of institutions of government, these institutions of state, and even as a soldier, an army, are not built in one year, two years, four years, or a decade.

The Canadian regular army was, I don't know, fifty-plus years old when the First World War began. Our militia was in many cases far older than that. You don't have to have a PhD in history to recall the rather ad hoc method of mobilization in 1914. By reading history, I know exactly what our British mentors thought of us until Easter Sunday, 1917, at Vimy Ridge.

It takes decades to build an army and a police force. It takes a long time to rebuild a system of governance in a place that never...it was never like a strong democracy in the first place. When you go back to the mid-seventies, when the internal communist coup overthrew the Daoud government, which was the last sort of progressive-looking government, there's a lot of damage to fix.

How long will Canada be there? That's a political decision made by the political leaders of our democratically elected government, one or another. But it will take a long time to repair the damage in Afghanistan.

That said, there are a lot of dynamic, visionary—and I hate to sound corny—inspirational Afghan leaders. People have come back two and three levels down. People have come back and given up very nice middle-class lifestyles as professors, engineers, and business people in the States, Canada, Australia, and Europe, come back to a certain degree of physical discomfort—living in Kabul is not like living in Orleans, Ontario—and in some cases a certain amount of personal risk. Knowing these people and having worked with them, the stuff is there, the parts are there, and that's why I'm more optimistic than not about the way ahead.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Given that they have a population almost equal to ours, with over 30 million people in Afghanistan, if the desire is there among the population to live normally, or more normally, you would think there would be a lot bigger effort by the local population to ensure that the Taliban and their ilk are confronted more aggressively. We don't see or haven't seen any reports of what you just indicated, that people are going back to help make Afghanistan a better place in which to live.

Why isn't there more commitment? Maybe there is and we don't know about it. Why isn't there more local support out of these 30 million people? We're in there, along with 36 other countries, spending a boondoggle amount of money on their behalf to make life better for them. So why aren't they more visibly active?

Col M.D. Capstick: I think they are, but you're just not seeing it because of our focus in one certain area. For the people in Kandahar, we need to be able to provide that basic security first so that they're confident enough to be able to do that. These are people who have been run over by the forces of history multiple times in the last 35 years. The ones in Kandahar, Helmand, and those areas are not going to commit until they're pretty sure we can keep them safe. In the rest of the country, they have committed. I stood on election day last September 18 and watched people line up for over two hours in the hot sun to vote. It was pretty impressive.

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McGuire.

We'll go over to Mr. Hiebert, then back to Mr. Bouchard.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): I was wondering if you could give us a bit more of a detailed update in terms of the progress that's being made with the training of the Afghan National Army. I have a multiple-part question, so you might want to take some notes here.

Specifically, what are their general capabilities? What specific duties are they engaged in at the present time? What sort of contribution are they able to make to the NATO-led mission in the south?

And as a bit of a follow-up from the previous conversation you just had with Mr. McGuire, at what point do you think we'll be able to say the Afghan army is now trained to the point where they are no longer in need of our services in terms of training? We understand that the military can evolve on its own, but at what point do you think they will be in that position?

Col M.D. Capstick: The general capabilities of the Afghan National Army are small-unit combat operations, offensive and defensive. By small unit, I'm talking about the section, platoon, company level of operations, a couple of hundred troops at a time in a combat operation. They can conduct, as I just said, both offensive and defensive operations.

In the south, they are engaged in every operation with the brigade led by General Fraser, which encompasses the six provinces in the south, plus British troops, Dutch troops, some Americans, Romanians, etc. The ANA participates in almost every one of those operations, and those operations are coordinated with the Afghan National Army corps commander, who is located in Kandahar City and is responsible for that same area. So it's not like we're conducting operations without them. They're coordinated operations.

I'm far too old and decrepit to have participated in direct combat operations, but the people who have will tell you that the ANA troops fight like tigers. They drive around in unarmoured Ford Ranger pickup trucks provided by the Americans, with a lot of pretty old Warsaw Pact-style weaponry—AKs, RPGs, and those kinds of things—and everything to them is a frontal attack. Everything.

The tradition in Commonwealth armies is fire discipline: teach your troops to control fire, conserve ammunition, and aim shots. The guys have given up trying to teach the ANA that, and they're teaching them ammo resupply instead. The ANA soldiers do not shirk.

How long will it take? It will take years before they're ready to go without any trainers at all. You could see a point where they may not need as many manoeuvre forces from the international community, but they will need trainers, mentors, and helpers into the future. How long? I can't answer that.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: All right.

My second question has to do with the Afghan National Police. We had a witness before this committee not that long ago who suggested that we should be considering increasing our commitment when it comes to the training we're offering to the Afghan National Police. Apparently just a handful of RCMP personnel are providing that training at present.

In your view, is the commitment that we've made adequate to achieve our goal of training the Afghan National Police to a point where they're efficient and capable of doing the job they need to do?

Col M.D. Capstick: I'll try to give you some context here.

The Afghan National Police program is an international program. Germany is the lead nation on that program. Forty-some-odd German police officers in the Kabul area run the program, if you will. It was slow getting off the mark. The United States has put a lot of money into Afghan National Police reform, and there are a large number of international police officers and contractors from I don't know how many countries helping to train the ANP right now.

Our RCMP officers are in the provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar. They have been focusing on mentoring and bringing along and helping to professionalize the Afghan National Police who are in Kandahar. That's the context and flow.

We do have a Canadian contribution in the headquarters. The Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan, CSTCA, is the title. It was led by Brigadier-General Gary O'Brien. I think he's still there, and he has some significant Canadian staff resources that are helping the Americans with their end of the program. So that's where we are on police reform.

● (1630)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Is it sufficient?

Col M.D. Capstick: I don't know if the Canadian contribution is sufficient. I know the international contribution needs to be accelerated and upgraded across the board.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Bouchard.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, Colonel, for joining us this afternoon.

You stated that the mission continues to be very demanding, that corruption is still a problem and that Afghans have no confidence in their courts. Yet, Canadian Forces have been on the ground in Afghanistan since 2001.

My question is this: have we fulfilled more than 50 per cent of our mission, in your opinion?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: I'm not sure I really understand your question. Much work needs to be done in Afghanistan across the board. It will be a long time before the international community can collectively declare mission accomplished in Afghanistan.

As I said, we are talking about a place that has been swept over by the forces of history, especially in the last three decades. There has been very major physical destruction to not only the infrastructure, but things we don't traditionally think of as infrastructure. Entire swaths of the agricultural economy were ruined by the fighting. Entire areas were deforested. On top of that, they had about seven years of drought. This is a very tough place to try to rebuild.

What is clear is that in the last couple of years, it has transitioned from being an internationally-led process to being an Afghan-led process. When I talked about the bond process, the constitutional Loya Jirga, and the two very successful elections, I'm talking about a significant process there. We're now at the point where Afghans and Afghanistan are taking control of their own future.

This isn't like it was in Kosovo, which was under UN administration. This is a sovereign state, and they are doing their thing with international help. Yes, there's lots to be done. Pick any sector you can think of. For every ministry we have in the Government of Canada, there would be problems in those sectors in Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: From an outsider's perspective, the Canadian Forces mission seems to have veered away from its humanitarian and peacekeeping objectives and taken on increasingly military overtones.

What would happen if Canada were to withdraw fully from Afghanistan?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: To cease or stop combat operations in Afghanistan would mean moving out of Kandahar province. Somebody has to fight the counter-insurgency battle in Kandahar province. If there were no international troops today in Kandahar province where the Canadians are, in Helmand where the British are, and Oruzgan where the Dutch are, my personal prediction would be essentially that there would not be a Taliban government, but chaos would continue down there.

This insurgency is not a purely Taliban operation, if you will. It's a complex and advanced mix of Taliban both old and new, criminal elements, drug cartels, and tribal leaders. They all have a different motivation, but their aims overlap. The place where they overlap is in the fact that they want to deny the Government of Afghanistan its ability to exercise its rightful sovereignty down there.

Why? For the Taliban it's clear. They want to re-establish the theocracy that fell in 2001. For the rest, for the drug lords and criminals, it's profit. There are huge amounts of money at stake. For the tribal leaders, a lot of it is that they just don't want their traditional power disrupted. Most of those groups, especially the criminals and tribal leaders, don't want any government down there, and that's what would happen. There would be no government down there and those people would be subject to the whims of the powerful, as they have been for most of their lives.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Do I have time for one last question?

[*English*]

The Chair: Just a short one.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Fine. I'll be brief then.

Are Canadian troops engaged in combat more often than the military of other countries present in Afghanistan?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: I believe that's an accurate comment at this point. I believe the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister have done what they do at the political level to try to get more troops down there.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Hawn, and then back to the official opposition.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Colonel, welcome.

You said that the PRT is connected to the national priorities of the Government of Afghanistan. How effectively, how consistently, has the Government of Afghanistan transmitted those priorities?

Col M.D. Capstick: These priorities are pretty recent. The London Conference and the presentation of the Afghanistan Compact and the interim Afghanistan national development strategy was the first common strategic framework in a common language ever used in Afghanistan development. This happened in February and since then there's been a big push to get that out there. The government is spending a lot of time lining up its own ministries to follow the plan.

As for the communications, that's an interesting question. The Afghan cabinet is following the plan. The international community is involved in something called the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, which is supposed to manage the plan as it develops.

General Richards at ISAF is responsible for getting the PRTs working towards that plan, and he has spared no effort in that regard.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: We talked about the amount of money spent per person. There are apples and oranges, and I don't know what the answer is. But is there a difference between what a dollar buys in Bosnia and what a dollar buys today in Afghanistan?

Col M.D. Capstick: There certainly is a difference. Is there enough money in Afghanistan? Academics who do development studies will be debating that one for fifty years. From this simple soldier's point of view, it doesn't look like it.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I don't disagree with that.

You've talked about the three pillars of the mission, and there's been a lot of talk about balance, or perceived lack of balance, in Canada's commitment to the mission. Canada is supplying a great portion of the combat power in the 25% of the country that's not in decent shape. But we are one of 37 allies. Is it fair or unfair to say that the coalition's mission is balanced among those three pillars?

Col M.D. Capstick: It would be fair to say that the mission is more balanced than not.

We have to be careful about our stove pipes. We tend to focus on the military side, on the International Security Assistance Force. That's only one organization in this process. The Afghan reconstruction process is being led by the Afghan government. The main international player is the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA. Under it, there is a whole alphabet soup: World Bank, IMF, you name the official development organization. I don't even know how many countries are involved in development, but there are more in development than on the military side.

● (1640)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So there is balance to the mission.

Talking about the poppy crop for a second, what is your sense of the Afghan government's commitment to a solution to this problem? What are they doing about it?

Col M.D. Capstick: There is an Afghanistan counter-narcotics strategy. It is a broad-based plan. I almost used the word “holistic”, but that's tough to understand. It covers a lot of areas. It includes alternative livelihoods, interdiction of the stuff when it's on the move, interdiction of the labs, and eradication in some of the hard-case areas. It is a broad-based plan, though, and that's the plan the government is committed to.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Do you think it's realistic?

Col M.D. Capstick: It's going to take time. Everything takes time there and we have to be patient.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: We've talked a little bit about military planners in reconstituting failing civilian government organizations. There would seem to be a lot of precedent for this in other things that Canada and other countries have been involved in militarily, specifically the Balkans. Can you comment on any of these precedents and how this might relate to them?

Col M.D. Capstick: I don't think I can, because this was unique.

I mean, the only precedent I know of was the planners that General Hillier lent to Ashraf Ghani when he was Minister of Finance. There are no other countries in Kabul right now that are doing something similar, although both ISAF and the coalition have political-military integration sections, if you will, that deal with the government.

But nobody else, such as Afghan civil servants, sat in Afghan government offices and worked side by side. I mean, you have to picture the room. By the time I left, there were 15 Afghans in a room, and three or four Canadians. My guys had Government of Afghanistan e-mail addresses. They ate lunch with them; during Ramadan, they did not eat lunch with them. They hid in the truck to smoke and that kind of thing. We're the only people who were doing that.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Okay. Just—

The Chair: Sorry, that uses up your time.

Over to Ms. Bennett and then back to Ms. Gallant.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I think it was in the honourable member McGuire's riding this summer that a number of the military families were concerned about the same soldier having to go back to Afghanistan two, three, four times, because the mission has now been prolonged to 2009. I really did feel they were very concerned that Canada's commitment there is extraordinarily difficult, because of sort of drawing Kandahar as the area we have the responsibility for.

In your paper on the three-D approach, is there a way, on the ground, that you have an ability to provide feedback to the Government of Canada and to the people of Canada as to what rebalancing would look like? If the people of Canada are as uncomfortable with the combat mission as I think they are, how would we change our responsibility in Kandahar and maybe take a different part of the country for a while? How would we decide to spend more money on development or diplomacy instead of on the military—again, the story is that while we've been doing this mission, 200 or 300 schools have blown up—which I think is what Canadians thought we were there to do.

● (1645)

Col M.D. Capstick: I'd be careful about drawing the relationship to us being there and schools being blown up, because they were being blown up before. We weren't in Kandahar before the elections on September 18, and there were somewhere between I think 14 and 20 religious leaders who were assassinated in Kandahar province and Helmand in an attempt to disrupt the election. Schools were being burnt then, etc. Because we're there now, we know about it. So there's that point.

How does the feedback get to the Government of Canada? The kinds of decisions that you listed about the location and content of the mission, etc., are decisions that are made by political leaders. That's the basics of civil-military relations in a democratic society.

The feedback to the government is through the military chain of command. For a year, I had direct access to the Chief of Defence Staff and to the commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command. I gave them opinions in a fairly frank manner. Brigadier-General Fraser has direct access to General Gauthier, the expeditionary forces commander, and to General Hillier. We make recommendations all the time. What they do with them is their call.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But in your eloquent paper on silos and the problem with silos within the three-D, are the silos only being dealt with here in Ottawa, or can the silos be dealt with on the ground in Afghanistan?

Col M.D. Capstick: The reality is that the silos were being dealt with on the ground in Afghanistan before they were being dealt with nationally or internationally. People on the ground do what they have to do to make things work. For example—and I talked about it a bit in my presentation—when I arrived in Kabul, I was joined at the hip to the Canadian ambassador and to the head of aid, the senior CIDA officer in Afghanistan. For the entire year I was there—and the new team is carrying on—I met with the ambassador on an ad hoc basis, when we had to if there was an issue, or on a weekly basis just to keep each other informed. I thought the head of aid was living in our house for a while.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But in the allocation of resources, what feedback loop exists such that there could be more money for development if you on the ground decided that would be important?

Col M.D. Capstick: They go through the departmental chains back to Ottawa.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But there isn't a decision-making body there that deals with all three-Ds?

Col M.D. Capstick: No, but the Canadian ambassador is the head of Canada's mission, if you will, in Afghanistan. He may not have that on his desk plate, but the ambassador is the head of mission. The ambassador is the senior Canadian official in the country and the ambassador meets regularly with General Fraser, etc., and whoever is there, and he in fact instituted a weekly conference call to try to get all of those things together.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I just wanted to know—

The Chair: Just a short one.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. If the Canadian people were pretty clear they didn't want us in Kandahar any more, but wanted us helping somewhere else, what do we have to do?

Col M.D. Capstick: That level of decision is not going to come from the bottom up or from the people on the ground; that level of decision is one that political leaders make right here, right on this hill. We follow orders.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gallant, five minutes.

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

Just following up on Dr. Bennett's question, could you compare the relationship that Afghanistan has with the international community through the compact versus the relationship of Sudan, to which I believe she was referring, with the international community as it would apply to the strategic framework you worked on in Afghanistan?

Col M.D. Capstick: Well, as I understand it, the Government of Sudan does not want an international force in its country. The elected Government of Afghanistan, on the other hand, which now has all three branches of government—executive, legislative, and judicial—working, though not all perfectly, wants us there. This is a joint Afghan-international operation. The Afghanistan Compact, including the security pillar, which includes stabilizing the country, is part of the Government of Afghanistan's plan. It is a sovereign government and a member of the UN.

● (1650)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

If you can, as it pertains to the PRT, would you explain how the money flows? It comes from Canada through CIDA, and where does it go from there and how does it eventually—

Col M.D. Capstick: I really can't, Ms. Gallant, because I didn't work down there. But there are CIDA people in that PRT, and I guess the picture you should get is that of PRT with a Canadian lieutenant-colonel as the commanding officer, because that's how we operate in the military. There's a senior diplomat in there, the guy who replaced Glyn Berry, and there's a senior CIDA officer in there—with help. It's the CIDA people who plan, coordinate, and manage the development projects; it's not the CO of the PRT doing that. His job is to help them do that by providing the security and technical assistance they need and a place to live, because you can't go and live in a guest house in Kandahar until that insurgency is settled.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay, and just following up on another question, would the continuity afforded by an eight-month deployment versus a six-month period assist the mission in achieving its objective sooner?

Col M.D. Capstick: I'll speak of what I know.

Because my team was put together in very short order, I could not get everybody for a year. I could get some for a year and some for six months. It became very clear very quickly that we had to be there a year. For the team that replaced us, I think all but one are there for a year.

In Afghanistan, when you're dealing with Afghans, trust and relationships are everything. You have to build that trust up; you can't be disrupting it every six months. Every time I had to rotate one of my officers out of those places, I had to go and hold a lot of hands and make sure they didn't think we were abandoning them.

As far as the units down south are concerned, General Fraser is the brigade commander, for example, and I believe his tour is nine months anyway, as is that of some of his staff in that headquarters. For the rest, that's a force generation issue that others, like General Hillier or General Leslie, are far more capable of answering than I am.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: It's a short question. Actually, it's a follow-up on a question Mr. McGuire asked on why a country of 25 million people, if they decide to make this happen, can't make this happen?

I just finished a book called *The Places In Between*, by a Scotsman named Rory Stewart, who walked across Afghanistan in 2002. It's an interesting book, but what it pointed out to me—and I'll ask for your comment on this—is that they can't do that because the culture varies between villages that are sometimes only twenty klicks apart. Is it fair to say there is not a culture in Afghanistan, but there are dozens and dozens of cultures in Afghanistan?

Col M.D. Capstick: That's a fair comment. It's really not an easy place to get around. It's like a lot of societies that are tribal-based. It's very rural, with very austere conditions. There are people who have never left their village, ever. There are families that have been in that village for generations, and somebody may have gone to the village next door. They haven't gone as far as Edmonton to St. Albert or that kind of thing. So there is that.

More importantly, though, they have started to take control of their own destiny and their own fate. People aren't rushing to go and join these guys, the insurgents. I won't call them Taliban on purpose, because that does elevate some of the criminals to a level they shouldn't be at.

The example that I think of happened on May 29. A two-phased riot occurred in Kabul when there was an American vehicle accident. Stage one was clearly a spontaneous response to a tragic accident. That stuff happens. It's probably not going to happen in downtown Ottawa, but that stuff happens in lots of parts of the world. And phase two of the riot in the afternoon was clearly an event orchestrated by certain groups that wanted to get things going.

Everybody was afraid this would carry on. The next day, nothing happened, but not only because of the big Afghan National Army presence on the street. We went to work the next day and sat with our Afghan counterparts and they were in shock. They were angered about the riot. They could not believe this could happen in Kabul. Down in their souls, they said that if this was the harbinger of things going bad again, they wanted nothing to do with it. Essentially, the people got a grip on it. When 5,000 people in a city of 3.5 million riot, I'm not sure we should panic, but you could feel it.

And it was not only the professionals we were working with. The one-eyed, half-an-arm plumber who seemed to live in our house because we always had something broken was in as big a shock as everybody else. He just did not want this to happen. But they are taking control, and that election day last year was pretty impressive.

● (1655)

The Chair: Mr. Dosanjh will finish the second round, and then we'll get started on the next round.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

My friend Mr. Hawn raised the question with you about the balance of the mission, something he had raised once earlier.

It's an intriguing way of looking at the balance in the mission. I sat at the cabinet table when this mission went as a three-D mission to Kandahar. My understanding was that it was to be almost an equal measure of reconstruction and humanitarian work, diplomatic efforts, and defence.

You mentioned the intensity of the fighting that's going on, and we've been essentially fighting a war for the last several months. Now we are reduced to looking at the balance of the mission, with us doing the military fighting substantially, only doing some reconstruction and humanitarian work, but then backfilling our part of the reconstruction and humanitarian work that we ought to be doing by using the examples of other countries that are doing that work. That is not acceptable. That was not the mission. If that is how the mission is now going to be looked at, then it is a changed mission, which is what most of us have been saying for some months.

I'm not asking you a question. I just want to leave that with you, but you can answer or you can make a comment on it.

The next question I really have is with respect to the eradication of the poppy crop. We have the interview of Norine MacDonald published in the *Ottawa Citizen* yesterday. In the interview, she says the following things. I will refer them to you and you can comment on them.

The question asked of her was "Have you encountered violence?" To quote her:

> Violence is a daily fact of life for everybody in southern Afghanistan. There's bombing every night. You go to sleep to the sounds of the Americans bombing in Panjwaii. There's fighting on that road all the time. We've been with people who have been through Taliban ambushes. A lot of Afghans are having to leave their villages and move to other areas, and then move again and again, to avoid the fighting and bombing.

After a little while, she goes on:

> Between the drought, and the (opium) crop eradication, and the bombing and fighting in the villages, they're in a desperate situation now.

And then there's a question: "How then would you describe the security situation in southern Afghanistan?"

> It's a war zone. It's dramatically deteriorated in the last year. Certainly, crop eradication played into the hands of the Taliban. Whatever local support the international community might have had in southern Afghanistan was substantially affected by that forced eradication scheme. The Taliban saw a political opportunity there and they took it.

I'm not certain that it is true, but from all of what I've heard and all of what I read, it is my understanding that what Norine MacDonald of the Senlis Council is saying is opposite to what Karzai is saying. He said in the House of Commons, "If we don't kill the poppies, poppies will kill us", or something to that effect. That is totally contrary to the UN policy about poppy eradication and Senlis Council's recommendations.

The question I have is, are they right that we're losing support because of the poppy eradication? Or are you right when you said "Almost none"?

● (1700)

Col M.D. Capstick: Sir, I'm wearing a Canadian Forces uniform and not a Senlis Council badge.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I appreciate that.

Col M.D. Capstick: The Senlis Council has an agenda, and it's big on commercializing the poppy crop for medicinal reasons. The reality is that unless there is absolute security, any legal poppy crop will become illegal in a heartbeat. There should be no doubt in anybody's mind. I think that too much has been made of eradication, because from my knowledge, not very much eradication really went on down there anyway. Canadian Forces do not do poppy eradication. No NATO forces do poppy eradication. Under the new Afghan counter-narcotics strategy, poppy eradication is but one part of that strategy and it's almost like the last resort part of the strategy. There are all these other strategies that I talked about earlier: alternative livelihoods, interdiction of the stuff on the roads, interdiction of labs, etc., are part of that comprehensive plan.

At the end of the day, in the simplest terms, if you want to look at the south of Afghanistan for about a four-year period after late 2001 and early 2002, there were very few international forces there, and even fewer Afghan security forces. What's happened is that the 8,000-plus NATO troops that Brigadier-General Fraser is commanding are standing where these guys had a free run, in a security vacuum, and they don't like it.

In the final analysis, we didn't start the insurgency down there; the insurgents started the insurgency. And until enough security is established in the region, there is no way to do development. We can talk about it all we want, but you have to have the basic security. That's a principle of counter-insurgency that has been known to military professionals for 50-plus years. That's what Field Marshall Templar did in Malaysia. He brought the people to secure areas. We can't do that these days. We have to bring security to the people, and that is a joint Afghan-international effort that is now going on down there. That's what's happening in Kandahar province.

And believe me, personally, Mike Capstick as a taxpayer and as a human being, I'd rather see 90% of the Canadian effort being expended on development as opposed to the conduct of military operations. Until we can shift that security situation in the south, that's simply not going to happen.

The Chair: Thank you.

That ends the second round. The way the third round is structured is the official opposition, government, Bloc, government, official opposition, government, official opposition, and then the NDP.

Mr. McGuire, do you want to start for the official opposition, a five-minute round?

Hon. Joe McGuire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Capstick, there's a book, and I forget the author's name, but the book is saying that Afghanistan is in worse shape now than if we had stayed home. I know you don't believe that to be true, and I don't believe that to be true. What does this say about countries like ours and NATO? What do they do to prevent genocide in a country or mass suffering of a people inside a country, when we either don't know what we're doing before we get there or we don't seem to be that effective when we do get there? I believe we have to do something in these countries, whether it's Zimbabwe or wherever, when you see hundreds of thousands of people being massacred by their own rulers. But then we see books like this that say we'd be better off staying home.

I could probably answer the question myself, but I'll let you answer.

● (1705)

Col M.D. Capstick: I think you might have answered your own question there, sir. That's a tough one, and you're really into a realm of policy and strategy. It's more theoretical than practical, and those kinds of decisions are made well above my pay grade. That's not to say I don't have an opinion.

You need to have a comprehensive plan when you go in. Now, that's easier said than done, because history's not neat or clean; history's messy. Things happen that aren't being controlled by political leaders or by the Secretary General of the UN—they just happen out there. So you need a comprehensive plan.

I think the Canadian concept of whole government—the shorthand is a three-D approach—is really more than three-D. When you look at the RCMP, Corrections Canada, etc., that kind of idea is needed. Can that be achieved, mobilized, driven together at the international level? I can't answer that, but that's what's needed.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to carry on with something my friend Mr. Dosanjh said when we talked about coalition teams, I would suggest to you, Colonel, that coalition teams are what won us World War I, World War II, and World War III, which was the Cold War. It was won by what's not a novel concept of countries' forces providing particular parts of an overall solution to an overall set of objectives, which were met in those three instances I mentioned.

Is it militarily or strategically...? I guess at a higher level a good approach is to play your strength and have the flexibility to move your strength from role to role as the overall strategic objectives require.

Col M.D. Capstick: I'm not sure what sort of question you want me to answer there.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I'm talking about the fact that the Canadian military has to be very good at what they're doing right now, and in my view we're in a better position to provide the best military part of the overall strategic solution. Does it make sense for us to be doing that, given that we'd all rather be doing development? There's no question about that.

Col M.D. Capstick: I'll comment on what I know, and I won't comment on why or how it got there.

For the first time in over 30 years of service I've stood in a place and watched American officers and British officers essentially drooling over the equipment the Canadian Forces have brought to the table in Afghanistan.

That battle group in Kandahar is the most capable unit-size organization in Afghanistan, bar none. It delivers far more firepower, far more mobility, and better yet—I don't want to insult any allies—far better-trained soldiers and leaders than anyone else has on the ground. For the first time in my career I can say that.

I commanded in Bosnia in 1997 when a British general stood up and said that the Canadian army had lost its right to call itself a real army. I can assure you that not one member of the 3rd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment of the British army, which was the first regiment of Brits into Helmand province, would agree with now-retired General Sir Hew Pike and his comment.

So we have the stuff and we have the troops. Canadians should be proud of the way those troops have stepped up, because we haven't done this in my time in the army, and it's amazing to watch the adaptation on the ground.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

A previous witness who had spent a fair amount of time in Afghanistan, and not just with the military but with Afghan civilians, suggested that compared to what the Russians did and the way things happened under the Russians, what is happening now, as bad as it is, is really a cakewalk. Do you have a comment on that?

● (1710)

Col M.D. Capstick: I'll comment on the context. You see a lot of these historical analogies. You see commentary on the British invasions in the late 1800s. You see commentary on the Soviet invasion of 1979. There's a substantive difference here, in that right now under NATO auspices and a UN mandate, and in cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan, this is not an invading force, nor is it an occupying force. As I alluded to before, these operations are Afghan-led.

The policy action group in Kabul, which meets on a very regular basis—I think the president chairs it about once a month—and is directing the strategy in the south, is an Afghan-led operation. There are about 30 million people in that country, and the Taliban are a pretty small minority—that's even if you can call them Taliban. So the analogy isn't there. This is not the Soviet invasion of 1979.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Can the Afghans tell the difference?

Col M.D. Capstick: That's hard to tell. Some can, some can't.

There are remote villages—you read about them in Rory Stewart's book. There are people there who have never ventured outside of their village. And strangers almost never venture in. To them, in those areas, a stranger is a stranger.

So some of them can't tell. But the people running things, the people in the government, the educated people in Kabul, the thousands who've come back to the country, they understand the difference and they recognize it.

The Chair: Mr. Bouchard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: What is the nature of the relationship between US troops and NATO forces? In your opinion, what changes are needed in order to possibly improve relations between the two sides?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: As of last week or the week before, what was called stage four of NATO transition has occurred. So right now, General Richards, the NATO commander, commands all the troops. He has five regional commands: regional commands north, west, south, east, and Kabul. All those manoeuvre forces are under NATO command, if that's what you're asking me. We have achieved what we call in the military "unity of command" in Afghanistan.

Now, there are still special forces of various countries under national command, but that was so far below my radar that I can't comment on it. I don't know how they work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go back to the government, if needed.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I could ask another one.

We talked about delivery of aid and the delivery agency—where the money from CIDA goes, who's delivering it, and who's best equipped to deliver it. Given that delivering it is sometimes pretty tough, what's the best mix for it? I know there's not an easy numerical answer. But as for the delivery agency, whether it's the CF or CIDA, what kind of mix are we talking about?

Col M.D. Capstick: CIDA has the lead on getting development aid to the people, as it should. That's the way it is. CIDA uses the Government of Afghanistan to the maximum extent possible. There's a fund called the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, and that's how CIDA's money gets put into the system. Beyond that, I don't expect CIDA to know how to make a fire plan, so I won't tell them how to do development.

The military isn't in the development business, per se. The PRT development projects are CIDA projects. We provide extra security and technical assistance. I think the last five fatalities occurred while building a road. The reality is that in the current security situation in Kandahar the only way to build a road is with military engineers. When the fighting ends, there is no local general contractor who's going to go out there in his yellow Cat and start building a road. So the military has to do it. If it's a development project, it's been coordinated by CIDA in the first place. They may have bought the gravel. I don't know how all that stuff works at the tactical level. That's the short answer.

● (1715)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thanks.

The Chair: Back to the official opposition—Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): I have a couple of questions.

Colonel, it's been brought to my attention that the way they pay soldiers in some other countries is far different from the way we pay ours. The cost of sending a Canadian, an American, a western soldier, as opposed to sending one from the less developed countries, is much higher. It has been estimated that three soldiers from less developed countries could go for the same price as one western soldier. Can you shed some light on that?

Col M.D. Capstick: I'm not sure where I can go with that one. We are a professional armed force and a highly trained professional armed force. In fact a lot of work was done over the late nineties, if you recall all the quality of life stuff that went on and everything else, to bring our allowances, benefits, etc., up to a reasonable standard.

I wouldn't suggest replacing Canadian soldiers with three soldiers from some less-developed country, but that's just a personal opinion. And there is more to it than that; there are the actual operations and whether they could do them. I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Do you see any difference? I mean, is that discussed at all?

Col M.D. Capstick: I don't think it is in the NATO context so much. It maybe is in a UN chapter VI peacekeeping operation, the traditional kind of thing, as I did in Cyprus as part of the 58th Canadian unit that went there. I've heard it discussed in that context, but not in a NATO context.

And besides, countries have to volunteer to do these things; it's not as if you can hire them.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: My second question is that we've seen children there in Afghanistan being born into a war situation, a devastating situation, for over 30 years. Are you aware of anything that's being done for their ability to maintain some sort of a normal lifestyle, going forward?

Col M.D. Capstick: Yes, there is lots being done. There is a big focus on education in the international development process. I knew the number of orphanages once, but there are thousands of them across the country.

Like any post-conflict society, you have this broken aftermath of the conflict. They've lost probably three generations' worth of education, and right now the ministry of education is working very hard to get primary education, in particular, and basic literacy back up and running and on the road.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: And would you say that we're in a post-conflict situation there right now?

Col M.D. Capstick: I would say that in 75% of the country we're in a post-conflict situation, and in part of it we're still in the middle of the conflict.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there anybody from the government side? No? Good.

Is there anyone from the official opposition?

Ms. Black, for five minutes.

Ms. Dawn Black: You've said that you're very proud of the work that Canadian men and women are doing in Afghanistan. I think Canadians are proud of the men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Certainly from my perspective, what I want to know is that we are not putting them in a position of undue risk or a situation that can't be achieved. And that's the basis of many of the questions that I ask. It's not that there's not a sense of pride in the accomplishments of the Canadian men and women of the armed forces; it's more a sense, as a mom, and as a Canadian who is a member of Parliament, that it's very important to ask the kinds of questions that attempt to get to that level.

In listening to everything you've said, Colonel Capstick, it seems to me that the work you've been doing in the unit that you had in Kabul could be described more accurately as capacity-building for the people and civic structures in Afghanistan. Obviously that's been enormously rewarding to you and you've seen real progress there. That's not happening yet where the insurgency is happening; obviously the goal or hope is that security will get to a situation where eventually it will. I think that question is debatable.

But I want to ask you about what has been happening since 9/11 in the south of Afghanistan. I've asked this question before and I've never got a really in-depth answer—and maybe you're not the one who can answer it, but I want to throw it to you anyway. It is that Operation Enduring Freedom has been taking place; the Americans have been in Afghanistan since 9/11 and have been in southern Afghanistan since 9/11, fighting in this counter-insurgency at some level, up and down, over those five years. So why does it keep getting worse?

The Canadians have only been there for a short time, and I wonder about the achievability or chances of success there. If the Americans have been there with all the might of their military and all the resources that are there for them, why has the situation only continued to get worse?

● (1720)

Col M.D. Capstick: I'm going to answer this as a fairly long-serving military professional. I'll answer part of the last part first.

I don't think we'd be there if we didn't think we could defeat that insurgency or control that insurgency. As I stated before, you're never going to get to Ottawa levels of security. That's just not that part of the world. We have well-led, well-trained troops down there. We have a plan. The Government of Afghanistan has a plan, but it takes time. Any counter-insurgency operation in military history takes time. The Malaysian emergency—and they kept calling it an emergency—I think started in 1948 and ended in the mid-1960s. It resulted in the establishment of the State of Malaysia. That was a very different world at that time. Counter-insurgency takes time and patience.

What has changed? I guess the four-word answer is “boots on the ground”. Unfortunately, in this kind of operation there's no white flag hoisted. There's no instrument or surrender sign. There's no big ceremony on a rail car to sign up. You're dealing with groups that aren't really under any hierarchical military control as we know it. When you really analyze it—and it was probably later into 2002, after the operations at Tora Bora and those places were over with—there were probably fewer than 1,000 American boots out on the ground, in the streets, in south and southeast Afghanistan.

They showed up—and I talked about our equipment and forces before—and they were operating on the ground in armoured HUMVEEs with machine guns or 40-millimetre grenade launchers on the top. With part of the NATO transition plan, all of a sudden now in those main provinces, in the six provinces that are under Brigadier-General Fraser's command, there are around 8,000 troops. We essentially found ourselves standing in what had been a security vacuum. They had their run down there. They weren't being chased on a day-to-day basis. They weren't running up against American troops on a day-to-day basis.

● (1725)

Ms. Dawn Black: Where were the 18,000 Americans?

Col M.D. Capstick: They were all over the place, but there was an austere-sized force down in the south. Their concentration was more in the southeastern provinces, Paktia and Jalalabad area, and those places.

For all of our forces, the overhead is high. The tooth-to-tail ratio is not what we had in World War II, that's for sure. There's a lot of tail, and it takes a lot to keep this stuff going in those kinds of conditions.

Ms. Dawn Black: I think you said a few minutes ago that all of the forces are now under the ISAF command.

Col M.D. Capstick: Correct.

Ms. Dawn Black: So that's all of the American forces as well?

Col M.D. Capstick: That includes the American forces. There are some that were kept under national command, but they're combat forces that—

Ms. Dawn Black: We were told that there was still a significant number of Americans operating in a parallel way under OEF.

Col M.D. Capstick: There was until stage four was completed, which was last week, I believe. Our policy people, our strategic joint staff, can tell you more.

Ms. Dawn Black: All of those troops would then be under...?

Col M.D. Capstick: Yes, there are still special forces under various national commands, and there are some Americans under American national command. The American focus now is on the security side, on reforming the ANA and the police force. That's where their big focus is.

The Chair: That got us through the third round, and I've one short question, sir, if you wouldn't mind.

Earlier you said the insurgency in the south is threatening the security of the rest of the country. Over here with our instant communications, BlackBerries, and all other kinds pestilence that we have to pack around with us, we seem to be up to speed on everything. What's it like over there? If something happens in the south, we know about it pretty quickly. Does it spread through that country that quickly? Can it? Are there communications capable of doing that? Are they on the nightly news? How does that work?

Col M.D. Capstick: It's amazing how communications can spread and how things work there. In fact, now there's a very sophisticated cellphone system throughout the whole country, and I think the third cellphone service provider has arrived to start business there. It's pretty neat to see somebody at a big shura in Kandahar, wearing clothes he would have worn in the 14th century, talking on a cellphone. You see it all the time. And there is the jungle telegraph. It spreads, and it spreads fast. People travel.

Take the Kabul bubble, for example. On the day that unfortunate accident happened, May 29, there was so much communication going on that the cellphone system jammed up by lunch time because there was so much traffic. The local guys that worked with us taught us how to do it. You couldn't get voice through, but you could get text messages through. So yes, there is a huge jungle telegraph.

The Chair: Yes, there are ways to do it.

Well, thank you very much. We appreciate your expertise. It was good to have you here—somebody who was there doing the deal—and your straightforward answers are appreciated by the committee. It will help us with our report.

The committee is now adjourned until our regular meeting on Wednesday.

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