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• (1555)

[English]

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

Welcome, Mr. Minister.

We all had a delay today, so we're a little late getting started. Is your time a little flexible, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs): I am here to serve, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I appreciate that.

We've got some people coming into the second half of our meeting as well, so we'll try to balance what we need to do here.

As usual, we'll turn the floor over to you for your opening comments, and then we'll have questions. We appreciate your coming again to our committee. As we know, it's a changing situation in Afghanistan, and we appreciate the opportunity to hear from you today.

The floor is yours.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, let me introduce to the committee Mr. Randolph Mank, who is the director general for Asia South.

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, committee members, colleagues, I would like to start by expressing my thanks to all of you for allowing me the opportunity to share my views on the role that Pakistan has played, which is an important component in the overall mission in Afghanistan.

This role, which is critically important, must continue. It must continue in helping NATO and Canada achieve our objectives in Afghanistan. It's timely for the committee to be focusing on this question as the international community increasingly encourages and engages Pakistan in our Afghanistan strategy. And I am certain that Canadians would agree with that.

This has been an issue of much discussion in the public and private forum of late. And after almost 30 years of turmoil and civil war, it's time for Afghanistan to rejoin the community of nations as a stable, secure, and self-sustaining democracy that will last and never again serve as a haven for terrorist groups. This long-term objective informs our nation-building activities in Afghanistan, activities that

fall into three broad categories: helping to enhance security and stabilize the country; helping to strengthen accountability and representative government and democracy building; and helping to reduce poverty and improve the lives of Afghans.

Clearly, Mr. Chair, Canadians are in Afghanistan defending Canada's national interests by fighting against the threat of international terrorism. Canada and its numerous international partners have the means to help, and I would argue that there is a moral obligation for us to do so, that is, to help Afghanistan rebuild so that its people can live their lives free from oppression, violence, and the abysmal conditions that existed under a Taliban government.

The new government has been clear since our election that we stand for basic Canadian values: freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. We are playing an important part as a responsible NATO partner in a UN-backed mission and as a global actor by standing up for those values. And we are delivering these principles and values, along with humanitarian aid and relief, into this region.

Our efforts are already paying dividends. The December 2001 Bonn agreement, agreed to by a wide spectrum of Afghan interests, established the first phase of national reconstruction and consolidation. It outlined a basic framework of timetables for implementing a new and democratic Afghan state. The Bonn agreement led to the creation of a new constitution and the holding of successful presidential, parliamentary, and provincial elections, all of which enjoyed high rates of participation. Voter turnout was higher than 60%, and almost half of all voters were women, which is unprecedented in that country, I'm quick to add.

Mr. Chairman, Afghans expressed remarkable resolve by participating in these historic elections. They did so often under a threat of violence, but by so doing they have clearly indicated their intention to chart a new course for their country through the democratic process. While elections are an important part of that, democracy is the surest, safest route to lasting stability.

[Translation]

With the Bonn Agreement benchmarks met, a new five-year road map, the Afghanistan Compact, was agreed to last January by the Afghan government and 60 other members of the international community. Over the next five years, the Compact will guide our joint efforts through Afghanistan's next phase of recovery. The Compact is a comprehensive five-year strategy incorporating security, governance and development benchmarks, which the Afghan government and its international partners have agreed to pursue jointly.

[English]

Mr. Chair, this is why Canada has brought together elements from the Canadian Forces, Foreign Affairs, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in a whole of government approach to addressing the compact benchmarks. Working together, we're doing the following: promoting the development of a stable and secure environment in Afghanistan; helping to build governance capacity in that country; and reforming Afghanistan's security sector, including policing and border control.

The overall objective of these activities, of course, is to create a conducive environment in which the reconstruction efforts can take place under an umbrella of security. Bringing together the best of what Canada can offer, we are making a meaningful contribution to international reconstruction and stabilization efforts there, but there's still much more to be done.

Implementing the Afghan compact and meeting the goals we have set with the Government of Afghanistan and our international partners will be an enormous challenge, and the costs of failing to deliver are equally enormous. Some would call this the challenge of our time, and our nation in generations to come will look at this as a defining moment.

Nation building is a complex process, and only a comprehensive and sustained effort by all players will ensure our success. Canada and NATO have long recognized the regional nature of the nation-building exercise we have undertaken in Afghanistan. This recognition is perhaps best exemplified through the establishment last year of an annual regional economic cooperation conference in Afghanistan, more commonly known or referred to as the RECC. It brings focus and foresight to the building of the Afghan economy and Afghan stability.

Meetings of the RECC bring together Afghanistan and its neighbours, along with representatives from the G-8 group of nations and the key international organizations, to develop regional cooperation plans to promote economic development and security in Afghanistan and the entire region. In fact, Mr. Chairman, my colleague, the parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs, Mr. Deepak Obhrai, has just returned from representing Canada at that second conference meeting, which took place in New Delhi last week.

While we recognize the importance of the multilateral mechanisms such as the RECC, we also accept that many of the challenges we face are best treated as issues between Afghanistan and its immediate neighbours. It was in recognition of this that the so-called tripartite commission was established in June 2003. This commission is a group of military and diplomatic representatives from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and NATO who meet about every two months to work out measures for improving security cooperation among the various players. The 19th meeting of the tripartite commission just wrapped up in Kabul on November 12. Some of the issues currently being addressed by the commission include the following: Afghan-Pakistan border security, which I expect we'll discuss further here; improved military intelligence sharing amongst the parties; the development of more effective countermeasures for dealing with the improvised explosive devices, the IEDs; and finally, enhancing operational cooperation between NATO and Afghan security forces.

Mr. Chair, the establishment of the tripartite commission is a recognition of the fact that solutions to many of the challenges we face in Afghanistan will surely not be found solely within the Afghan borders, and that the integral role Pakistan plays in this commission is a further recognition that of Afghanistan's neighbours, Pakistan is arguably the most important. There are many reasons why this is the case, but one way or another they all lead back to the fact that the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is not being monitored or policed to the extent necessary. You've heard many of the expressions to describe it as "porous", as "open".

While many efforts are being made, there is one reality that can't be denied, and that is that 40 million Pashtuns are estimated to live along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. It is from this tribal group that the Taliban insurgents who are attacking our troops derive most of their support—not solely, but this is the chief source. Moreover, it is estimated that some 30,000 Pashtuns move, effectively unhindered, back and forth across the Afghanistan border every day.

Just to put it in some historical context, if I might, Mr. Chair, this border was officially drawn by the British government—the British Indian government—and the Afghanistan kingdom back in 1893. It's been treated as an international border, while at the same time Afghanistan has never recognized it and has disputed it from its origins.

● (1600)

Mr. Chair, we must recognize the effort Pakistan has undertaken in recent years to mitigate cross-border infiltration into Afghanistan. However, much more needs to be done. They have talked about fences; they have talked about mines, which we oppose; aerial surveillance. Again, I will come back to this subject, but they have deployed some 90,000 troops into the border regions and have suffered over 800 casualties fighting insurgents since 2002. Nevertheless, we believe President Musharraf's government can and must do more, and, Mr. Chairman, Canada is willing to help.

As I told Pakistan's Prime Minister Aziz at the recent micro-credit international gathering in Halifax, Canada maintains a strategic friendship with Pakistan based on a broad range of mutual interests. And although security concerns remain at the forefront of our engagement, we accept that there are limits on what can be achieved through military cooperation alone.

Canada has done much in recent years to assist Pakistan outside of the security sector. For example, the Canadian International Development Agency is a significant contributor to development efforts in Pakistan, including the innovative \$132 million debt for education swap, which will convert Pakistan's bilateral debt to Canada into increased spending on education in Pakistan. We hope that through such endeavours the Government of Pakistan will be better able to enhance and expand its public education system, ideally doing away with situations where parents have no real choice but to send their children to unregistered madrassas for formal education. We have seen, sadly, that these have often become recruiting centres for extremism.

[Translation]

Canada also gave generously to relief and reconstruction efforts following the earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005. Last month, on the first anniversary of the earthquake, Minister for International Assistance Verner announced a further contribution of \$40 million for reconstruction assistance, bringing Canada's total contribution to more than \$130 million.

• (1605)

[English]

On top of these efforts, Mr. Chair, we are fortunate to enjoy a mature relationship with Pakistan to also promote Canadian values within the Musharraf government, including human rights, full democracy and good governance, as well as non-proliferation arms control and disarmament objectives.

In our relations we have always concentrated and encouraged a greater separation of Pakistan's political and military establishments and a strengthened commitment to democratic principles. President Musharraf has committed to free and fair elections in 2007, I note, and we have worked with Pakistan on previous occasions to urge them to embrace more true democratic principles. And while we have not uniformly seen eye to eye on all matters, democracy in particular, the Pakistani government has never backed away from engaging us on these difficult issues. I would say that this is true of the meeting I had with the Prime Minister of Pakistan only a few weeks ago.

Nevertheless, the level of political and military engagement in Pakistan is arguably greater now than at any point in the past, and in March of this year, Prime Minister Harper and Defence Minister O'Connor visited Pakistan, and Minister O'Connor made a return visit this past September. On both occasions we raised the importance of security and development missions in Afghanistan with the Government of Pakistan and the premium we placed on Pakistan's cooperation. We also raised with their government our concerns regarding the activities of insurgents within the Pakistani territory. In fact, Pakistani Prime Minister Aziz and I discussed again these same issues this past month in Halifax. I also had similar discussions with President Musharraf when he was in attendance at the United Nations General Assembly in New York last month.

All of this, Mr. Chair, is to say that Canada, along with our allies, continues to encourage Pakistan to step up its efforts to prevent the cross-border movement of insurgents between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Specifically, we requested Pakistan's efforts to seek out and arrest senior Taliban figures inside their country; improve border security; sign, ratify, and implement key United Nations conventions and resolutions against terrorism; legislate and enforce more robust anti-money laundering laws and counter-narcotics training; and work to prevent the exploitation by insurgents of refugee camps inside Pakistan. We believe these constitute realistic objectives that Pakistan can do, but they can't do it alone. They can do it with our assistance, and we will positively contribute to the attainment of the international community's objectives there.

Mr. Chair, I believe you will find the record will show that the Minister of National Defence, who appeared before you, also spoke of a further confidence-building measure, and that includes the proposal—and I believe there has been some action on this file—to

have liaison officers, with Pakistan having a liaison officer inside Afghanistan while we would have a similar officer serving in their country.

While we ask more from Pakistan, we ourselves are also willing to do more to provide assistance. Canada is working with Pakistan's security and law enforcement personnel to increase their capacity to deal with border management and related issues. We're working to enhance the liaison arrangements, as I mentioned, between Canadian Forces stationed in Pakistan and Pakistan's armed forces, consistent with our understanding that security is not only about military threats. We're looking at innovative ways where we can better harness our development assistance tools to help to improve the livelihoods on both sides of the border. In this way, we hope to give young people, who are most vulnerable to insurgents' propaganda, a reason to reject any calls to join that cause.

[Translation]

I would like to give you two examples of the additional types of activities in the works.

[English]

The capacity of Pakistan's security forces in the border regions is limited, particularly given the enormous security challenges they face in the rugged terrain. Military personnel are spread thin and often lack the proper equipment, particularly communications technology. This lack of capacity contributes to the degree of lawlessness throughout the border regions and undermines government efforts to address the cross-border movement of insurgents.

Through my department's global peace and security fund and counterterrorism capacity-building fund, we are looking to increase the capacity of Pakistani security forces. Projects currently being developed, Mr. Chair, include a Pakistani police capacity-building course that aims to have our RCMP trainers work with Pakistan to enhance the professional development of their security and law enforcement personnel along the border and elsewhere, and the provision of appropriate communications equipment, including satellite phone technical assistance, to the relevant Pakistani authorities to help secure the Pakistan-Afghan border and respond to the presence of security threats—that is, to detect and interdict smugglers and cross-border movement of insurgents.

I'd mention a few of the other examples, but this is just some of the work we are doing with Pakistan and our NATO allies to identify further opportunities and further engagement at the border.

Mr. Chair, in closing, I would like to reiterate my appreciation for the work this committee has undertaken. I commend you for recognizing the key role Pakistan plays in helping to achieve Canada's and our allies' objectives in Afghanistan. These issues are complex, and I think it goes without saying that there are no easy answers, but I'm confident that we can work with Pakistan and the international community to resolve the problems that exist. To paraphrase my friend, Minister O'Connor, we appreciate what Pakistan is doing, but we know they can do more.

I thank you for your time. I anticipate and appreciate your questions.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

We'll go to our first round. It's a ten-minute round.

Mr. Dosanjh will begin.

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

Thank you for being with us, Mr. MacKay.

Minister, I have a couple of questions. One would be on Pakistan. What you've delivered by way of your remarks is essentially a summary of what we've been trying to get Pakistan to do. I don't think the world has seen very much evidence of Pakistan doing very much. In a sense, and I mean no personal criticism, you've actually, on behalf of the Government of Canada, delivered an apology on behalf of the Government of Pakistan for not doing the kinds of things that we want done around that border.

Pakistan is a training ground for terrorists, particularly in the region bordering Afghanistan, through madrassas and otherwise. Pakistan has not, in the last several years, produced one major Taliban figure for the world to see, although the suspicion everyone in the world has is all the major figures, particularly Mullah Omar and others, live in Pakistan, and most people know where they are. What they have handed over were some low-level al Qaeda figures, with the exception of one or two major figures. They enter into peace agreements with groups of Taliban or Taliban-sponsoring groups, which has resulted in the last few months in a 300% increase in attacks in Afghanistan on our troops and others.

I understand the need to urge Pakistan to work with us; all I have seen this government do is mollicoddle Pakistan on the international stage, while they can be brave with China, on the other hand, without any problems.

I would like to know why this government does not have the courage to speak clearly and bluntly of the need for Pakistan to come through with some of the expectations. I understand we need to provide them with aid; I understand we need to provide them with training. I'd like to know what you really intend to do. How do you intend to deal with this when Musharraf simply brushes off the criticism that Blair or others might have of what he isn't doing to assist us?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Dosanjh, for the question.

I guess you share my frustration, having served as a defence minister during much of the time you've just described.

As far as being an apologist for Pakistan, that's not at all what I'm here to deliver. In fact, on every occasion, both privately and publicly at forums such as this, I think we have delivered our outright encouragement and have demanded that Pakistan improve its efforts; that they do more in the areas you have described and that that I described in my remarks; that they in fact step up efforts at the border; and that they should very much go after the insurgents, individuals and leaders, within the Taliban circles.

I'm not here as an apologist for anyone. I'm here to outline what the government has been doing. I would suggest that we have

engaged regularly, often, and directly with leading Pakistan figures and will continue to do so.

I find it ironic that, coming from your party, you would criticize us for doing so and for engaging so directly when, at the same time, you're criticizing us for engaging other countries in the same way and demanding that we do so. One doesn't seem to be consistent with the other. We have to do this with all countries. When we have occasions to meet with leaders and give those tough messages, we'll continue to do so.

We knew many of the penetrating statements, the obvious, that you have told us about—the whereabouts of Taliban leaders. It's why we're calling on them to take more action, to improve border security, and to act more forthrightly at the United Nations, which was the message we brought with us when we met with President Musharraf in New York.

These solutions are not easy without the full participation of Pakistan. They're a sovereign country, just as we are. We can only bring these messages to them in a forceful but respectful way if we expect them to act.

I would suggest that implementing these measures around the border is the most direct way we can achieve the mutual objectives of stopping this flow.

This flow of the Pashtun, as you well know, has been going on not for hundreds of years but for thousands of years. This isn't something that can be stopped overnight.

Let's look at the length of the mission, which has been five years, in comparison to the length of time people have been crossing that border.

• (1615)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

Moving to another issue, from the newspapers and otherwise, I understand there are many aid agencies in Afghanistan that are essentially paralyzed and do not want to work because of the situation that's been created. I understand 33 humanitarian groups have signed a petition asking for change by those countries with military forces in Afghanistan because the aid agencies' "neutrality has been compromised". CARE Canada and World Vision Canada have now refused government contracts in Afghanistan.

Added to that, DND very recently increased the commander contingency fund in Afghanistan by another \$1 million. Colonel Mike Capstick, who testified before this committee, recently said it tends to take up to two years to get funding in use on the ground in Afghanistan.

We now share the objective with you of winning hearts and minds in Afghanistan. For doing that, you would agree that aid agencies, the NGOs, are a vital part of the work. What is the government doing about this? Are we encouraging NATO to work more closely with the aid agencies?

Why is the government not trying to solve the problem for the delivery of aid and development funding through CIDA and international and domestic aid agencies, rather than giving the military an additional but, in the grand scheme of things, small amount of money?

Is it your strategy that the military should take the lead on providing aid? Would it not further alienate the NGOs that we so badly need on the ground?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I would answer it this way: one doesn't happen without the other. And until we have greater security, we'll have no greater development. That's the unfortunate reality. Until we're able to establish greater security and push the development into the regions of the country where the threats and the insurgents remain active, it's very difficult. For obvious reasons, some of these agencies you've mentioned are reluctant to provide the important humanitarian relief they need to provide. Yet they would do so at incredible risk to themselves. The governing bodies of these organizations are reluctant to release them to do so until things have stabilized further.

Having said that, some of the projects we have under way in Afghanistan include a girls primary education program, \$14.5 million to see to the development of 4,000 community schools; integrating women into markets, which is another \$5 million contribution, where 1,500 women are being provided with assistance to develop horticulture operations and home-based gardens; the global polio eradication initiative in Kandahar province, another \$5 million to inoculate children to help protect against the suffering and scourge of polio paralysis; emergency food assistance to Kandahar province, \$4.9 million; 12,000 families targeted by the world food program—this is direct aid for displaced individuals living inside that province in the Panjwai and Zhari districts; micro-finance investment support, \$12 million, and this was a recent announcement by Minister Verner—over 200,000 clients in 19 provinces in Afghanistan and over \$70 million in loans provided through 12 micro-finance institutions. This, of course, also includes contributions made by the previous government.

So the development is happening. I would suggest further development will happen exponentially more quickly once more security has been achieved. There is very much a hand-in-glove approach that has to be taken. If we're able to make more progress in bringing stability to the south, we'll similarly be able to increase the development that would happen on the ground.

• (1620)

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: The question of ITAR with respect to the \$4.9 billion, 17 tactical lift planes.... Why was that not resolved before a decision was made? I understand from the newspapers that a decision has been made. That's an issue that falls squarely within your jurisdiction rather than with Public Works. I'd like to know why it wasn't paid any attention to. It's a very serious issue. It may end up

in violation of our charter. It may result in our not being able to do maintenance in our country.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I certainly hope not. I can assure you that was one of the initial problems we inherited with respect to procurement. We recognized right away we were going to have to address this issue. I've taken it up with my counterpart, Secretary of State Rice. I've spoken to the ambassador to the United States and stressed the importance of that. I know that Minister O'Connor and Minister Day have similarly spoken to their counterparts. We've set up a joint committee with American and Canadian officials to work this problem through.

You're absolutely right to point out that as we move forward with these procurement projects, it's going to be important that there is no disparity in the treatment of employees who want to work on this important technology that will be a part of the procurements. And I'm confident, with cooperation, that we will eventually be able to find a resolution to this. But it's going to take a great deal of diplomatic effort, and we've begun that in earnest and will continue to do so.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Dosanjh.

Mr. Bachand, ten minutes.

[Translation]

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

I wish to welcome the minister.

I too wish to begin by talking about Pakistan. It seems that the Pakistani position is deliberately unclear. Some even say that this country may have concluded direct agreements with the Taliban. I observe the conflict in Afghanistan, and I think that one of the ways of solving the problem is to better control the Pakistani border. You seem to have the same concern as us in this respect.

I would like to hear your opinion on the Pakistani secret service. We hear increasingly that not only is Mr. Musharraf's regime close to the Taliban but also that many in the secret service are helping the Taliban. What do you think?

I would also like you to tell us a little more about the infamous liaison committee. When the Minister of National Defence appeared before the committee, he said that there had been a mistake in translation. I was on my way to the airport when I heard Mr. Musharraf answering questions on the CBC. He was really angry; he said that, since his country is a Canadian ally, he would not like to like to have to get into battles with any Canadian troops that might enter Pakistani territory.

Was it really a translation error? Did anything come of his comments? Is it simply a matter of exchanging officers? Why would this involve a uniquely bilateral relation between Canada and Pakistan? Why not convince the NATO countries of the appropriateness of taking part in this process? Considering that there are 30 nations belonging to NATO, I think we would be in a better position to soften Pakistan's position, which at present is rather unclear.

•(1625)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Bachand, for your question. I am going to begin by answering your last question.

I wasn't there for that exchange with Mr. Musharraf, but I read the report. This question was very emotional for him, since it affects his country deeply. I think that his thinking was rather emotional, since he said that Pakistan had lost over 800 soldiers in the conflict, particularly on the border.

[English]

Addressing that issue of the border itself, this Durand Line, or Durant Line, as it's sometimes called, is not a new problem for Pakistan and Afghanistan. This goes back, literally, for centuries. It's one that is aggravated by the terrain itself, as I understand it.

Although no one NATO country is tasked with dealing with the issue of the border, increasingly there's a great deal of focus on how we can assist Pakistan in their efforts to control the movement, particularly of insurgents.

I think Canada has a great deal of expertise we can offer. I specifically offered our assistance to the Prime Minister when I met with him in Halifax. He was speaking at that time about more aerial surveillance and more patrols.

They have a huge number of soldiers there now. But in proportion to the vast size of the task and the type of terrain, there is no easy solution, other than increased concentration; the use of communication; and further satellite phones, because they can't often get reception between various checkpoints. I would suggest that there can be other innovative ways that don't include land mines but might include blockades that would effectively prevent passage at some of the known areas where there is a flow of individuals. We're certainly working with other countries, other NATO allies, and the Pakistani government, to try to close off that flow of individuals into Afghanistan.

There is the political dynamic as well. As I said, Afghanistan doesn't really recognize where that border begins and ends.

On your question about the Pakistani secret service, this, again, is a thorny issue, which I've heard President Musharraf try to address. He has indicated that they are in fact former secret service.

[Translation]

Those are members of the former secret service, not the current one who took part in those activities.

[English]

He has also acknowledged that the insurgency may be assisted by some of those individuals. He has not acknowledged the identity of these people, which I think is where we perhaps need to press him more, or suggested how we stop them and in fact arrest them, if that's possible.

I have not personally heard, and perhaps Minister O'Connor is the more appropriate one to question, of any direct evidence that would link the existing secret service—or any government agency in Pakistan, for that matter—to the insurgency. Musharraf denies this. NATO and other countries have been watching this closely and

pressing him on the subject matter, but to my knowledge, there has been no evidence of this thus far.

I can tell you that through our high commissioner in Islamabad and the embassy in Kabul, we are constantly monitoring and on the lookout for any such evidence that Pakistan is officially, in any government capacity, involved in insurgency.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I would also, with your permission, like to ask a question about the International Traffic and Arms Regulations, or ITAR.

But before that, I want to recall something comical, Mr. Minister. I will always recall the time when I bought my first car. I had seen it in a garage and it was really the one I liked. My father told me then that, if I went to the garage to see this car and I wanted to buy it, I had to be very aloof and not show how much I wanted it.

The government has made a lot of progress towards the procurement of planes, particularly with Boeing. It practically gave the company a cheque, by saying that it had secured the contracts, with the result that subsequently it is hard to negotiate. Boeing and Lockheed Martin may eventually say that their planes were wanted and that they were prepared to supply them to us, but that ITAR was not prepared to let them go.

The government does not have any negotiating arguments left to convince Boeing and Lockheed Martin to be permissive. With such a contract, technological transfers and intellectual property rights are extremely important. And these aspects are the direct concern of ITAR. If the Americans do not want to go along with it under ITAR, you will no longer have a solution. It will be impossible to backtrack and say that you do not want their planes anymore, that you want to buy them somewhere else.

Has the Canadian government placed itself in a position of weakness in relation to the negotiations? Someone will have to make sure, before the final signing of the contract, that ITAR will be more flexible.

•(1630)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Bachand.

I agree with you on what you say about negotiating power, but I think that this decision is not final. Still, this is not my decision to make but rather that of the Minister of Defense, and it will be presented to Cabinet.

[English]

I know, contrary to reports in the paper today, that there was a great deal of time and effort put into these procurement projects, and there were many who expressed interest. But you really would have to take this up with Minister O'Connor, as to the final decision. I'm not going to speculate on the contract itself, but ITAR's issue is one that has always been a factor.

We want to and we will maximize the benefits to Canada. We will ensure that Canadian jobs, Canadian technology, and Canadian innovation will be part of this procurement. To that extent, I know we have officials who had been specifically given that instruction as part of these negotiations and part of the bidding process. We'll make sure we get the best equipment possible for our troops. And just like you when you were buying your first car, we're going to check under the hood.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Black, you have ten minutes.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Minister, for coming today and bringing us up to date on your efforts around Pakistan and the situation in Afghanistan. I guess you are the person who is in charge of the diplomatic efforts for Canada in this regard. I think you have a very difficult diplomatic situation to deal with.

We have Pakistan on one side of the border. They've received a lot of money internationally from the Americans. They have recently, I understand, completed some type of negotiation or agreement with the Taliban in the tribal area of Pakistan. They have come up with some type of an agreement with them not to follow up on some of their activities. We have a government in Kabul that's really distrustful of Pakistan. You told us today there are some 30,000 Pashtuns who cross the border each day, and many of those we know are insurgents. It's a very complex and dangerous situation, and in the middle of that we have 2,500 Canadian soldiers who are meant to be working in this area to bring security and peace.

You've also talked in your presentation today about the things the Canadian government is asking Pakistan to do. You've said that these are to seek out and arrest the senior Taliban figures in Pakistan—whom I think the whole international community knows are there—to improve the border security, which would be a major step forward; to ratify UN conventions against terrorism, which Pakistan has not done; to legislate something around the money laundering that goes on; to work, you say, to prevent the exploitation of refugees and the turning of them into insurgents. That's a big order.

I want to ask you this. What is the diplomatic road map of our government when we're now giving more aid to Pakistan in order to try to seek their efforts to meet these five objectives you've talked about? How are we going to monitor that? How will you ensure that Pakistan is doing these five things that you, on behalf of the Canadian government, have encouraged them to do?

• (1635)

Hon. Peter MacKay: The most direct way I can answer that, Ms. Black, is to say that we are very much engaged in direct discussions with them. I spoke directly with their President. I know that our Prime Minister had a number of contacts directly with President Musharraf, including a visit to Pakistan, as has our defence minister when he visited that country.

They are very aware. The pressure, of course, is not only coming from Canada. The NATO summit in Riga that will take place next week will very much be focused on many of these same issues directly and keeping up a unified approach by the NATO countries

and others. There are a number of NATO countries, we can't forget, that are also in Pakistan, like Croatia, whose foreign minister was here this week. There's a large conglomeration of communities, if I can put it that way, that are zeroing in on what has been, in my view, perhaps the most unpredictable and difficult challenge for all of us in Afghanistan, and that is, cutting off the source of the people, the violence, and the drug trade as well—a source of extreme tension between these two countries.

There's an obvious dynamic that I think is apparent to all between President Karzai and President Musharraf. That is also a factor. That human dynamic of trust and cooperation needs to be enhanced as well, if I can put it that way. There's no magic way to do that other than to try to do what in fact the President of the United States did, and that was to have the two individuals sit down and discuss some of these issues themselves directly. We cannot forget the responsibility of the Afghan government in all of this as well as the Pakistanis. They have to be prepared to do more themselves, and on that border it is an enormous challenge.

Ms. Dawn Black: I understand that, but I'm asking what specifically we will do as a government, what you will do as the minister, to measure whether or not the Pakistani government is taking these five steps that we've requested of them or for which we're providing more support to them. Will you have a measure? Do you have a road map of watching and determining whether in fact they're taking this seriously and taking real concrete action to address those five points?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I think the road map for all of us is the London Conference on Afghanistan compact that was put in place, with numerous benchmarks that include much of what we're discussing here around the border. Prior to that, there was another compact that essentially set out various broader themes of good governance, a return to some of the very principles of democracy itself, the development side, and the issues related to sovereignty itself—that is, the Afghan people having full control over their entire country. The south is where the majority of the difficulties still exist. That's the more general answer.

The more specific answer is that in our embassy in Kabul and our high commission in Islamabad we have regular contacts, and our diplomats there are engaged with government officials in both countries. We have other political contacts, which I've referred to, and we have these international fora that also provide for the checks in the box as to what we have done, what we can see, in concrete terms, to measure work that's supposed to be under way at the border.

Are we still seeing the same degree of movement? Our military information coming from the field is the most direct answer to your question, where we can say, "Well, we've been told there are soldiers at the border, that there is construction of certain checkpoints and fences, that there is aerial surveillance; show us that this is actually happening." We can't, unfortunately, just take people at their word when they say they're doing something in this area, when we know that the insurgency is continuing, and in some cases escalating.

●(1640)

Ms. Dawn Black: Has Canada had any involvement in the counter-narcotics programs in Afghanistan? It seems that the source of money for a lot of the insurgency is from the poppy. I know we have had an alternate livelihood program going, but is there any real countrywide or multilateral program that will effectively help people out of poppy production, to have an economic base for their area and their family where they don't feel they have to rely on poppy production?

There was a program on CBC this week that really showed the latent kind of criminal element almost, or smugglers element to it, but also showed the individual poppy farmers who really said they had no alternative other than poppy production.

Hon. Peter MacKay: You're absolutely right, Ms. Black. This is the chief source of funding for the Taliban. When they're able to pay cash on the barrelhead for farmers and Afghan citizens to participate in this trade and they're able to pay them, in some cases, twice or three times as much as an Afghan soldier or police officer would receive, they're able to convert people pretty quickly to that cause. The choice for Afghans in that situation is to put food on their table or to fight to defend their country, and it's a very difficult challenge.

The British have been the leaders in this particular aspect of the challenge, aided by other NATO countries. Canada has not put forward a specific commitment to that particular area. We have participated in the broader issues that surround it, of course, trying to get people to move away from that type of crop, giving them alternative crop information and advice.

I'm going to ask Mr. Mank perhaps to comment on this as well, because he knows more of the specifics, but that is also a broader issue, if I can put it that way, that the NATO countries are facing. To use your words, how do we give the Afghan people a better alternative?

We also have a real self-interest in this, because that heroin or poppy is making it to our country. It's arriving here in Canada, and it's certainly throughout Europe.

We're engaged in that process, but the British are the ones who have been tasked specifically with that issue.

Mr. Mank, do you want to add anything?

The Chair: Make it a short response, if you can.

Mr. Randolph Mank (Director General, Asia South and Pacific Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): As the minister said, we have been backstopping what the British have been doing. They have kind of a four-part plan that tries to disrupt the drug trade by targeting the traffickers and then strengthening rural livelihoods. CIDA does a lot of work on sustainable livelihoods, and that's meant to do that. We try to reduce on the demand side, and we look at further developing state institutions there that are vital for the counter-narcotics strategy.

The minister referred earlier to some police training. In fact, some of the police training is meant to help in that effort on counter-narcotics as well, both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're moving on to Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and I will be sharing my time with Ms. Gallant.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today and for providing us with an update on the good work that you are doing.

Mr. Minister, our new government has supported a three-D approach to dealing with this situation in Afghanistan, focused on development, defence, and diplomacy. At this committee, we've heard an awful lot about the good work that we're doing in the area of development and defence. I was wondering if you could inform us about the good work that we're doing in the area of diplomacy, particularly if you could point to some successes that we've had in nurturing democratic institutions in Afghanistan, or if you could tell us, looking forward, what we might expect in terms of success in the near future.

●(1645)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you. Much of the progress that has been made, I would suggest, in Afghanistan has come about through the efforts of officials at Foreign Affairs over an extended period of time, since our arrival there, to determine where we could best present to this mission and to the people of Afghanistan projects that would be aimed specifically at elevating their quality of life. Whether that be through provincial reconstruction teams that have identified specific infrastructure programs, such as the building of roads, schools, hospitals, or buildings that are going to provide the very basic social services required in a country that has been so disjointed and so embroiled in conflict for so many years that this type of infrastructure hasn't existed, or building basic roads so that farmers can take alternative crops to larger centres and receive some remuneration for their efforts—farming throughout the country faced a real challenge in that regard. They can grow crops, but they simply can't get them to market.

Irrigation is also a huge problem, given the type of terrain and desert-like conditions that exist in part of that country. Some devastation and environmental degradation have occurred because of forest fires, which have really stripped away some of the basic vegetation from the land. A lot of that had to be determined early on by officials who went and engaged with local people. That diplomacy also involves going to those communities. Sometimes that involves officials of Foreign Affairs—and I feel a little bit choked up when I think about Glyn Berry, who was our Canadian diplomat killed in Afghanistan, and the type of work he was doing—meeting directly with tribal elders, meeting with governors and provincial representatives in parts of Afghanistan and trying to glean from them the necessary information for program delivery. I have nothing but admiration and praise for the diplomacy that has been carried out in a very direct and, I would suggest, a very efficient manner by officials from our country. CIDA officials, similarly, should be lauded for their efforts.

This is all part of the bigger issue that we're concerned about, which is, to use the expression, a whole of government approach, or the hearts and minds efforts we're making in Afghanistan to bring about a clear understanding. Most importantly, we're there to help; we're there to create a stable, functioning democracy that will allow the people of Afghanistan to get on with their lives and to get away from this terrible conflict that they've been living in and this oppression by successive administrations, which didn't recognize that women had a right to participate fully in society, that children and girls should go to school and have an education to advance their own well-being.

In five years there has been absolutely staggeringly remarkable progress made in many parts of the country. Other parts of the country remain very challenging. Canada, to use an expression that I heard very recently, got the short straw when it came to the part of Afghanistan that we're tasked with protecting and securing. In spite of that, we've been doing incredible work, and just as we have been in previous conflicts and struggles around the world, Canada is enormously respected by our international partners because of the heavy lifting we're doing in Afghanistan, because we didn't shy away from that challenge. And the soldiers and the development workers and the diplomats are all working in concert. They're working closely. They're communicating with one another. As we achieve more stability, as I said to Mr. Dosanjh, we'll be able to double our efforts on the development side.

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

Canada's PRT in Afghanistan is comprised of more than 200 military and civilian personnel drawn largely from Land Forces Central Area, and 2 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group in Petawawa. The soldiers from 1 Field Ambulance of Edmonton, the Military Police Platoon, and the reservists from 1st Air Defence Regiment have been doing a tremendous amount of work helping stabilize Afghanistan.

Here at home, the news that gets reported is unbalanced. The humanitarian work these brave men and women have achieved has gone largely unnoticed. There's been a visible outpouring of support for the mission, and I know that the soldiers welcome and appreciate that support. For the many husbands, wives, sons, and daughters in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, which is the training ground of the warriors at CFB Petawawa, the mission will not be complete until their loved ones step off that plane and return home safely.

Can you provide us with details on the humanitarian and reconstruction work being done by the PRT, the impact it's having in Afghanistan, and in particular the assistance that has been provided to the Shaheed Abdul Ahad Kham Orphanage in Kandahar City, and the second annual Kandahar boys soccer tournament?

• (1650)

Hon. Peter MacKay: I thank you for that. I know your constituency and your constituents have provided an enormous amount to the effort in Afghanistan, particularly the provincial reconstruction teams you referred to. As you quite rightly said, I don't think Canadians know quite enough about the specifics of what they are providing.

These provincial reconstruction teams comprise more than 200 military and civilian personnel, drawn in large part from the Land Forces Central Area, plus the mechanized brigade you referenced from Petawawa. There are field ambulances, military police, many reservists, and this air defence regiment. They're doing tremendous work in the field in very tough circumstances.

You made specific reference to assisting the children of the Shaheed Abdul Ahad Kham Orphanage in Kandahar. There have been a number of private donations, and I think Canadians would want to know more about how private citizens can donate to orphanages, communities, and projects that are really delivering and making a big difference in the lives of Afghan people. So far, \$21,000 has been raised for that project alone by private Canadian citizens.

I've been told that the first delivery of more than \$12,000 in aid was unloaded earlier this month by members of the Kandahar provincial reconstruction team. It went directly to an orphanage, where they provided mattresses and bedding. They provided gas lights for the hall so they were able to work at night and tend the children. More than \$10,000 went to purchase school furniture in the Dand District School in September. This was the result of a generous donation of \$10,000 from one individual, a man named John Race.

These provincial reconstruction teams, with the assistance in some cases of ordinary Canadian citizens who want to donate, are making a huge difference. But the ability to do that important work happens only when a security perimeter is established around some of these communities and locations. That's where it's inseparable—when you talk about the work of our soldiers, our military personnel, and the work of the provincial reconstruction team, the aid workers. I can assure you there are officials from every country participating there who are anxious to do more on the reconstruction and humanitarian aid side as soon as that security perimeter is extended farther into some of these areas, so that school supplies, furniture, and even things as basic as children's books, candy, and pencils....

The tragedy, and the best example I can give you, Ms. Gallant, of the conflict that soldiers find themselves in is that the last soldier killed in the country was in the process of handing books to children when they were hit by a suicide bomber. That's what the soldiers themselves were doing. They were taking part in this provincial reconstruction effort when they were hit by an insurgent with one of these devices. So if soldiers in the process of doing humanitarian work are still at risk, we clearly have more to do on the security side to provide that envelope and the opportunity to do more on the humanitarian aid side as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Minister, that takes us to exactly an hour since you've arrived. I know there's some interest in asking one or two more short questions. We've got two more witnesses to come. Fortunately, they've pushed the bells back to 5:55, so we do have more time than I thought we were going to have. Is it all right if we just do one rapid-fire for five minutes here? It will kind of break protocol. I hate to set a precedent here.

Joe, you've got one minute. Then we're moving on.

• (1655)

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): This is just a short question, Minister. Maybe you can put your other hat on for this question. It's on the expenditure of the \$4.9 billion. Under the regional economic benefit program of ACOA and of the western development corporation, what can they expect from that expenditure of practically \$5 billion?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'm sorry. You're asking me an ACOA question?

Hon. Joe McGuire: Yes.

Hon. Peter MacKay: In regard to Afghanistan?

Hon. Joe McGuire: In regard to the expenditure of the \$4.9 million airlift expenditure.

The Chair: Is this related to Afghanistan at all?

Hon. Joe McGuire: Yes. I think the plane will revolve there.

The Chair: We have to stick to the subject matter here, I'm afraid.

Hon. Joe McGuire: It's on the industrial regional benefits of that expenditure. We were saying that Canada is going to benefit from it, and I'm wondering what parts of Canada are going to benefit from the regional....

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'm sorry, Mr. McGuire, I wasn't making the connection. You're talking about the procurement projects and how they could impact in our region and what role ACOA might play.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Yes, that's right.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I know Mr. McGuire has an acute interest in this, having been a former minister of ACOA.

As you know, we've laid the groundwork in Atlantic Canada, in places in Prince Edward Island, for example, like Slemmon Park, where they have developed a great deal of know-how in technologies and the type of research and development that's going to be necessary to meet the requirements of these procurement projects. And it's the same in many of our cities, like Halifax and Saint John, where we want to maximize the benefits.

Without giving anything away on behalf of the Minister of National Defence, clearly we are going to be looking to see that every region of the country participates in these projects. Atlantic Canada is no exception, nor is the west. I can assure you that every regional minister, as you would expect, is going to be making representations to see that these procurement projects are benefiting all of our regions and maximizing the opportunities, jobs, and technical advancements for Canada, first and foremost.

The Chair: Okay, good.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Can I ask an Afghan question now?

The Chair: No, you can't. You used the minute.

Just a quick one, Mr. Hawn, if you have one.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Minister, Afghanistan is going to hold free elections, we hope, in 2007, so we're there until at least February 2009. We're going to have—

Hon. Peter MacKay: Do you mean Pakistan or Afghanistan?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I'm sorry. Pakistan.

So we're going to have a year or two years with that new government, assuming they'll hold those elections before February 2009.

Have you done any planning yet? Do you know any of the players, potential players? Do you see this as maybe an opportunity to plan for some of that change in advance, so we can take advantage of an opportunity perhaps to address the border situation in some more productive way?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Just as we don't, obviously, get involved in elections—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: No, but we know who's there.

Hon. Peter MacKay: —like the recent elections in the United States, although we've been watching them very closely.... I must say that meeting the current Prime Minister, Aziz, and getting his read on what was happening in the country, particularly around the border, was extremely helpful. I must say I was very impressed with his knowledge, his commitment, and his passion for those issues, and his forthrightness in recognizing that they were going to do more and were prepared to do more. But his openness to assistance from Canada and NATO allies in addressing what they know and recognize is clearly a soft underbelly when it comes to the effort to deal with insurgents and to deal with the Taliban more directly....

I wouldn't put too close an analogy on this, but the unfortunate thing is it's not all Pashtuns who are Taliban, just as it's not all Tamils who are Tamil Tigers. There's a clear division between peace-loving people in Pakistan and those who are partaking of the Taliban insurgency. So the political players inside that country are all intimately aware of the fact that there has to be more done. They are looking for greater assistance in techniques and technologies that can be employed at the border. I know that the offer that was extended in Halifax to the Prime Minister was quickly embraced, and I hope to follow up on that with him quickly, and perhaps at that time also receive further information—to get back to Ms. Black's question—about what they're doing and what progress has been made.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're very close to our time, Mr. Bouchard, so just a short one.

[Translation]

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

Thank you for joining us, Minister.

Many humanitarian organizations have appeared before us to talk about the urgency of food relief. They have told us that many heads of family did not have the financial means necessary to support their children and family.

Do you share this opinion? What can you tell us concerning the testimonies we've heard?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Bouchard.

Clearly poverty is one of the root causes of terrorism. And in warring regions, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, there are a lot of people who live in deplorable conditions.

[English]

These are the fundamental challenges, to be able to get aid to those people and to give them an alternative to turning to the Taliban organization for a life and livelihood that leads them towards violence.

So yes, I share the concern. I share the vision of all of the participant countries who want to do more but in practical terms are struggling with this same issue that we're talking about here—namely, how do we in practical ways deliver that aid, provide that alternative into these extremely remote and rugged areas of the country, and engage them in political and diplomatic terms to convince them that this is the alternative?

So there's not only transcending the language and cultural barrier; there's also clearly the very real physical limitation in terms of access to parts of the region. But awareness efforts are continuing, and the Pakistani government is open to participation.

Just to go back for a moment to Mr. Hawn's question, the fact that we have in Pakistan a government that is committed to democracy, that has obviously indicated that they're going to have free and democratic elections, is something we can never forget or lose sight of. That country is a stable country in comparison to Afghanistan. It's not a perfect democracy—no country is—but they are committed to that principle.

I think it's very easy to point out everything that's wrong, and all of the huge, enormous challenges that lie before us, but let's be thankful for some of the fundamentals that do exist. We now have a government in Afghanistan that wants us and needs us there. Similarly, Pakistan is committed to fair and free elections, committed to an openness to the assistance and the efforts that we, along with others, are prepared to provide.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

That brings us to our time. As I say, we have another set of witnesses coming.

Before we suspend, do you have any closing comments at all?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Only to say that I very much commend and appreciate the work you're doing. I look forward to any advice and information to be presented before you. This is a whole of government, and a whole of government, of course, includes a whole of opposition. We want to benefit to the greatest degree possible and then move forward with any ideas and any suggestions and any information that can be provided by your committee. So I thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We'll suspend for a few minutes.

- _____ (Pause) _____
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- (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much, committee, for coming back to order so quickly.

I would like to welcome from DND today, Vice-Admiral Drew Robertson, Chief of the Maritime Staff, and General Lucas, Chief of the Air Staff.

Gentlemen, welcome.

I apologize for the confusion in timing. I understand that the bells ring at 5:55, and very shortly after they start ringing, we'll have to stop with you. As usual, we'll give time to one or both of you to make your presentations, and then we'll go into a round of questions.

The floor is yours.

LGen J. S. Lucas (Chief of the Air Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

It falls to me, as the Chief of the Air Staff, to go first, and I'll be followed by Admiral Robertson.

The Chair: Thank you.

LGen J. S. Lucas: Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for your clear demonstration of interest in the air force's involvement in supporting Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan and for inviting me here to speak with you today about our significant contribution in the campaign against terrorism and in helping to build a new democracy in the region.

[Translation]

Thank you for your clear demonstration of interest in the Air Force's involvement in supporting Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan, and for inviting me here to speak with you today about our significant contribution in the campaign against terrorism and in helping to build a new democracy in this region.

[English]

As I begin, I would like to first acknowledge the tremendous job that our army is doing in Afghanistan. While members of all elements of the Canadian Forces are contributing in Afghanistan, it is truly the army that is carrying the greatest part of the load in carrying out this operation.

Today I'd like to take this opportunity to focus on three elements of our support to the operation. First is the lifeline that the air force is providing to Canadians serving in Afghanistan. Second are the in-theatre tactical operations involving combat resupply and the operation of unmanned aerial vehicles for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Finally are other significant contributions that individual air force personnel are making in support of NATO, the Government of Afghanistan, and its integrated members of Joint Task Force Afghanistan.

[Translation]

At home, as you are aware, the Air Force has focused its efforts on Canada's top defence priority: the no-fail mission of protecting Canada first.

[English]

Whether guarding our vast skies, patrolling the longest coastline in the world, providing immediate response to Canadians in distress through our search and rescue network, or working with other government departments, being prepared to respond to threats to Canadians is job number one for the Canadian Forces and the air force.

In addition, the air force continues to be engaged in many other operations around the world, including the current Canadian Forces operation in Afghanistan. There, we are working alongside the army in an effort to create a safe and secure environment for the growth of democracy in Afghanistan.

Let me begin with my first point: the lifeline the air force provides to Joint Task Force Afghanistan.

[Translation]

Canada's Air Force has been engaged in the campaign against terrorism, continuously supporting Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan and this region, since 2002.

[English]

Today, strategic airlift bridges the considerable distance between Canada and Southwest Asia, halfway around the world.

Together with our tactical inter-theatre airlift, between our staging area at Camp Mirage and Kandahar, the air force provides a lifeline to the members of the Canadian Forces operating in Afghanistan. This air bridge requires absolute dedication to ensure it operates effectively, because, as has been often stated by General Hillier, the very success of the mission in Afghanistan depends on it.

Over the past 12 months, over 550 chucks of strategic airlift, representing the movement of thousands of people and tonnes of materiel, have supported our joint task force in Afghanistan.

Our fleet of five CC-150 Polaris Airbus aircraft has been used largely for personnel transport and for smaller pallet-sized cargo. The majority, almost 75% of the strategic airlift, however, has been accomplished through contracted airlift, including C-17 chucks provided by the United States Air Force.

The materiel and personnel are first flown into Camp Mirage, the primary Canadian base of operations in the theatre. Camp Mirage is also used to administer personnel departing and returning from Afghanistan during periods of home leave travel assistance or rest and recreation.

Camp Mirage is commanded by a Canadian Air Force lieutenant-colonel and is operated almost exclusively by air force personnel. Thousands of air force personnel have quietly served in Camp Mirage since it was first established in 2002.

Currently, the newly formed 17 Mission Support Squadron from 17 Wing Winnipeg, Manitoba, is providing the bulk of the support personnel serving at Camp Mirage. The creation of mission support squadrons is part of the continuing transformation of the air force into a more effects-based expeditionary air force.

14 Mission Support Squadron from 14 Wing Greenwood, Nova Scotia, is currently training for their deployment into Camp Mirage in the near future.

Given the current air threat and risk assessments in theatre, the CC-130 Hercules remains the sole platform for moving personnel into Afghanistan from our staging base at Camp Mirage. The Hercules, about one-third to one-quarter the size of the strategic lift aircraft, is the workhorse of our air mobility fleet. Over the past 12 months, they have made over 500 flights into Afghanistan.

This brings me to my second point, the air force's in-theatre tactical operations.

Air and ground crew are conducting flying operations with the CC-130 Hercules throughout Afghanistan in direct support of Canadian Forces operations in that country. Whether transporting personnel from Kandahar to Kabul or parachuting up to 14,500 kilos of supplies per flight to deployed soldiers throughout the country, they are making a tremendous difference.

● (1715)

[Translation]

They have become a key enabler to commanders by providing supplies to soldiers throughout portions of Afghanistan that are not supported by a good road network, or in areas in which the Taliban are disrupting the road network.

[English]

In addition to supporting Canadian soldiers, they have been instrumental in delivering personnel and supplies for other nations, including the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They are being acknowledged by other nations for their accuracy and effectiveness, particularly when it comes to air-dropping supplies into dangerous and hostile environments.

The air force also has responsibility for generation and provision of unmanned aerial vehicle or UAV capability for Joint Task Force Afghanistan. Air force and army personnel work together in an integrated tactical UAV unit, providing invaluable intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance support to commanders in the field. That information is proving to be fundamental to achieving tactical success for the soldiers on the ground, providing them with greater situational awareness that contributes directly to reducing risk while they carry out the missions.

Lastly, I would like to bring to your attention other significant contributions being made by individual air force personnel in Afghanistan.

Men and women of the air force are also actively engaged in key positions within NATO's ISAF headquarters in Kabul. In fact, my former deputy, a Canadian Air Force general, Major-General Angus Watt, is the deputy commander of ISAF and takes over responsibility for running ISAF's missions during the commander's absences from theatre.

Other Canadian Air Force personnel, including members of my headquarters, have been instrumental in Kabul by helping the Afghan government as members of the Canadian Strategic Advisory Team.

This team was established under the direction of General Hillier, at the request of Afghan President Karzai, to bring to the Government of Afghanistan two main areas of expertise: strategic planning and capacity building. The 17-member team works directly within the central Government of Afghanistan and is currently headed by an air force officer, Colonel Don Dixon.

[Translation]

In addition, airfield engineers and other skilled Air Force personnel are integrated into a variety of units, filling critical roles in the Canadian areas of operations in and around Kandahar.

[English]

My role in this as Commander of Air Command and Chief of the Air Staff is to generate combat-ready air forces for deployment and employment. This involves the training of personnel and ensuring they have the right equipment to do the jobs asked of them. This is why we are working so hard at acquiring a fleet of four C-17s for strategic airlift and replacing the tactical air fleet of aging Hercules with more modern aircraft.

In addition to providing combat-ready forces for current operations, we're always conducting and reviewing contingency plans in order that the air force remains prepared to further contribute, if and when the need arises.

In conclusion, I'd like to reinforce that without the air bridge, the lifeline from our bases in Canada to Camp Mirage and onward into Kandahar and Kabul, the mission could not succeed. The invaluable missions being performed by the men and women at the air force in theatre are integral to the conduct of Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan. I can assure you that you can be very proud of what they're doing on behalf of this country and all Canadians under dangerous and difficult conditions. I will be reinforcing that message when I visit our troops in a couple of weeks.

Mr. Chairman, *messieurs, mesdames, membres du comité*, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have following remarks by my colleague, the Chief of Maritime Staff, Vice-Admiral Drew Robertson.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Vice-Admiral.

VAdm Drew Robertson (Chief of the Maritime Staff, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chairman, committee members, thanks for providing the two of us with the opportunity to speak to you today.

I intend to focus my comments in three areas.

• (1720)

[Translation]

First I will talk about what our Navy is doing to support the Canadian Forces' operations in Afghanistan; second about what your Navy is doing to meet Canada's obligations regarding maritime defence and security; and third about the state of readiness of Canada's maritime forces.

[English]

Let me begin with Afghanistan. Our men and women in Afghanistan certainly fill me with pride and humility on a daily basis. I have pride in their skills regardless of their occupation, certainly pride in the effectiveness of our army in a highly complex and continually evolving situation with a tenacious adversary, and humility in the face of selfless acts of courage, and also in their determination to see the mission through.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, our experience in Afghanistan shows how complex modern operations have become and have forced us to adopt new ways of thinking so that we can get the most out of our Canadian Forces' capabilities.

[English]

I can assure you that your navy has responded where it could, and it will continue to do so. Thus, we've seen naval officers, both regular and reserve, contribute to the strategic advisory team that General Lucas just spoke of. We seconded staff to the U.S.-led Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan to assist in the transition between American forces and NATO forces that occurred earlier this year. We've deployed a wide variety of personnel—military policemen, doctors, cargo movement specialists, drivers, supply techs, and so on—into the country, and we've sent others to Wainwright to contribute to the training that's ongoing there. We've dispatched our specially skilled naval clearance divers to the critical and highly dangerous function of defeating improvised explosive devices in theatre because they have, as I said, special skills.

Mr. Chairman, our people in Afghanistan deserve that we consider novel technical means of providing for their protection. Accordingly, for some time, naval technical and operational experts have been assisting the Chief of the Land Staff to determine the feasibility of deploying what's called the Phalanx close-in weapons system, or CIWS, you would have heard about. It's a devastatingly accurate Gatling gun, and it's our destroyers' and our frigates' essential last defence against anti-ship missiles, which the CIWS destroys in the very last seconds before impact. The question is whether we can turn a few of them to the purpose of defending selected installations in theatre from inbound mortar or rocket fire. While it remains to be determined whether or not CIWS can be usefully employed in such a role, it signals the naval and land staffs' collective resolve to meet such challenges in Afghanistan together.

Of course, Mr. Chairman, the campaign against terrorism is also waged more broadly, and our navy is playing a role in those efforts, as it has since October 2001 when Canada dispatched a naval task group and maritime aircraft to the Arabian Sea, where we defended the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps force that seized Kandahar from the Taliban.

[Translation]

Beyond the campaign against terrorism, the country is dealing with other problems of defence and security, but I know that your committee is quite aware of this, especially in the context of recent events, such as those in Lebanon and Iran, not to mention the Korean Peninsula.

As sailors, we understand that the free use of the seas, on which our economic prosperity depends, is also honorable. Many would like to take advantage of it to cause us great harm.

[English]

Accordingly, our first priority is to defend the nation. That's why, as part of the CF's ongoing transformation, the navy has led in standing up a Joint Task Force Atlantic and Pacific to support Canada Command, and they're making sure that the right maritime forces can be positioned in the right place at the right time to uphold our sovereignty.

Mr. Chairman, our domestic security begins off other countries' shores. As but one example, let me cite the work of HMCS *Fredericton*, deployed for nearly two months, back in the spring, as far as the west coast of Africa. She was deployed in a covert counter-drug operation to break up a drug ring that operates in the east end of Montreal. The successful conclusion of the operation led to the interception of 23 tonnes of cargo worth close to \$0.25 billion. This, as I said, occurred in the Gulf of Guinea, a long way from our waters.

This wouldn't have been attempted by the RCMP without the assurance provided by *Fredericton's* ability to operate unseen, as well as her ability to apply overwhelming force at a moment's notice, had that been needed by the RCMP to back up them up. Although these actions occurred at a great distance from our shores, the actions that were taken contributed to the security of Canadians directly, while also interdicting a drug-smuggling chain that likely began in the poppy fields of Afghanistan.

Mr. Chairman, the fact that domestic international maritime security can be provided at great distance from Canada is also why HMCS *Ottawa* is deployed to the Arabian Sea as part of a coalition force. *Ottawa* is the 20th ship to be deployed to the region since 9/11, initially under Operation Apollo; we've now changed the name to Operation Altair. She's there to underscore Canada's enduring interests in the region; to interdict those who would use the seas for unlawful purposes, including terrorists; to further Canada's objectives in preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; to reassure regional friends and security partners; to deter those who would act against our interests; and to prepare for eventual follow-on operations, should deterrence fail.

The importance of maritime security operations in distant waters is why HMCS *Iroquois* is serving in the Mediterranean tonight as flagship of NATO's premier rapid response maritime group, currently engaged in counterterrorism and counter-proliferation operations under the alliance's Operation Active Endeavour. For the last nine months that group has been commanded by a Canadian, Commodore Denis Rouleau, a testament to the fact that Canada is recognized by navies large and small for its capacity to exercise international leadership at sea.

That's also why our west coast task group has just completed working with an American battle group as the latter prepares for major operational deployment in the coming months. That's why, off North Carolina over the weekend, the CF completed a tactical trial to examine a concept of operations for a possible future Canadian sea-based expeditionary capability. It's why that experiment also involved a Canadian and an American naval task group under

Canadian leadership, whose ships worked to keep the force safe from the types of threats Canada expects to encounter in the future's contestable littoral waters around the world, an environment which the recent successful missile attack by Hezbollah against the Israeli frigate back in July served to illustrate with dramatic and deadly effect.

In total last week, we had over 2,600 sailors at sea in the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Arabian Sea. I think that's a measure of our ability to make an ongoing contribution to international maritime security and provide credible options for potential contingencies worldwide, including as an integral part of joint CF operations in the littoral, if needed.

Let me turn very briefly to readiness. That we've accomplished so much over the last few years is a tribute to our successors in husbanding and marshalling resources through a tiered readiness approach; however, I think we're probably reaching the limit of what's achievable. Some of that work may be undone if we cannot address readiness challenges that face all of us today, and, in the case of the navy, they will be aggravated during fleet modernization and renewal.

The government's support for the joint support ship program marks a significant and highly important turning point towards a recapitalized fleet for Canada. That project is expected to enter a new phase shortly; two teams will complete funded proposals to design and build the ships, and this, I have to say, is great news for the navy. The challenge that I and my successors want to face will be to improve the readiness of the balance of the fleet so as to maximize return on investment, as represented by our ships and our skilled crews.

• (1725)

[Translation]

In the face of the challenge of keeping the Canadian Forces versatile and fit for combat, we appreciate the support of this committee and of all parliamentarians.

[English]

In closing, Mr. Chairman, permit me to reassure the committee that your navy has been making a contribution in Afghanistan and stands ready to provide additional support within its means while continuing to provide for the maritime security of our nation, both at home and working with our allies abroad.

Let me thank you again for the opportunity to appear before the committee. Both of us would be pleased to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much,

As the time is working out, we're going to have enough for one seven-minute round. So know that going in and make the best use of your time. I'm going to have to be pretty strict, and when the bell rings I'm going to have to stop you.

Mr. McGuire.

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

I'd like to welcome our witnesses today to the committee to hear how well the three branches of our forces are working together for our country in this particular operation.

Gentlemen, I'm wondering about your personnel numbers. Are you having any trouble keeping up the required numbers in the air force and navy overall, including this operation that you're involved in?

LGen J. S. Lucas: From an air force perspective, we are in fact in pretty good shape. We have gone through the last number of years deficient in a couple of specific occupations.

Search and rescue technician is an occupation we're having a hard time filling, but it's one of those that come from within. In other words, to become an SAR Tech, you have to have been a member of the Canadian Forces in some other occupation, and then you make a sideways transfer. SAR Tech is one of our more demanding occupations, so it's not surprising that we're having a hard time filling it.

In general terms, many people continue to show up at the recruiting office looking to become members of the air force, and our process right now is working with them. There are some occupations where we're challenged because of equipment problems, but the good news is that we have ways ahead that are going to address most of those problems in the very near future.

So from a personnel point of view, our greatest challenge is actually having the right people with the right skill sets to be able to conduct the high level of operations and the extensive transformation activities that we're going to in the next while. But we have plans in place to address that.

• (1730)

Hon. Joe McGuire: And the navy?

VAdm Drew Robertson: There's a slightly different situation in the navy. We're attracting the people who are broadly required for the Canadian Forces, but we have particular occupations that represent challenges. For the maritime forces, that's a variety of technical occupations—the same electronics technicians who would be valued in other parts of society.

So it's a competition, and we're going to have to engage in that competition a little more directly. The standard for the Canadian Forces' recruiting method is fine for the broad set of occupations. But in the case of the technicians, we're going to have to engage in some boutique recruiting, where we go and hunt them down and make our case to them as individuals at community colleges. We've been engaged in that for a little while, but we need to do more.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Are you able to offer incentives to attract the people you need?

VAdm Drew Robertson: There are incentives available for those who already have certain skills that we wish to have, but not incentives merely in terms of people who want to enter into electronics training in the armed forces.

LGen J. S. Lucas: One of the incentives would be the training we offer. A number of people find that very attractive. One of our

challenges is that some of the training is so attractive, that shortly after they become qualified, they leave the organization and take the training elsewhere.

We find this particularly in Alberta, close to Fort McMurray, where a lot of industries are feeling the pull from that particular sector.

Hon. Joe McGuire: I understand the same thing is happening even with our Joint Task Force 2. People are being lured away to \$1,000-a-day jobs.

Has the operation been draining some of your people from the operations in Afghanistan, given that the army numbers are so stressed?

I think General Hillier said he's going to call on other branches to take positions to help relieve the stress on the army in the Canadian sector of Afghanistan.

LGen J. S. Lucas: We view our activity in Afghanistan as a Canadian Forces activity, and there are obviously many army...but the navy and the air force are making significant contributions where we can.

As we move forward here in some occupations, such as truck drivers and so on, which are generic, we're going to see even more air and naval personnel make contributions where they can. But they're going to be doing so in areas in which they're already trained. So we're not talking about pilots becoming infanteers, or anything of that nature. We're talking about people who have training applying it in a way in which they can make a useful contribution. Most of the infanteers are going to come through the training mill within the army.

We're also looking—and I think Admiral Robertson made this point in his address—at finding places where infanteers are working in staff jobs and replacing them with air force or navy personnel, so that they can be released from those staff duties and become available. That's another area where we're going to make a contribution.

Hon. Joe McGuire: This is happening without any detrimental effect here on ordinary operations.

LGen J. S. Lucas: There's no doubt that we are feeling it. The men and women of the air force and the navy as well are doing their duty and more, but we recognize the requirement for it. The good news is that as more people enter the forces here over the next while, we'll start to see some of that pressure relieved.

• (1735)

VAdm Drew Robertson: That's why I made the point about how many sailors we had at sea last week—2,600. We're still carrying on with business, and quite successfully so. We're making a modest contribution where we can. I made mention of CIWS earlier. The close-in weapons system is not a system that resides in the army presently. If we were to figure out how to use it to advantage in Afghanistan, then it would be naval technicians initially who would have the skill set necessary to maintain it and naval operators who would be proficient at using it in defence of the installations there. That's the employment we envisage.

Hon. Joe McGuire: If there was one piece of equipment that you're lacking, what would it be? It's been announced that you're getting the lift at some point in time. At least the decision is made and those contracts will be let. Is there a piece of equipment you need now that you don't have and you'd like to have as soon as possible?

The Chair: Please give a very short response.

LGen J. S. Lucas: From an air force perspective, we are very shortly going to be approaching saturation point in terms of our ability to process new projects. With the announcements made in June of the C-17 and Chinook to fill two essential requirements and the replacement for our C-130s, we are almost to the point where it's going to be a challenge. We have a couple of more things we're moving on, but by and large, the men and women of the air force are delighted with the new equipment being provided and the new capability. They want to get on and do great work, and they're being provided with the tools right now to do that.

VAdm Drew Robertson: The navy is in a very different position in terms of timelines. It's just the fundamentals of our three services. We've procured a number of new pieces of equipment for service in Afghanistan, and rightly so. It's exactly the right thing to do. For naval ships, the next thing we need is to replace the Iroquois class command and control ships in due course. They're doing great work. The three of them were all at sea last week fulfilling their role as flagships and air defence ships, but replacing them is probably a decade-long undertaking. It just points out the significant difference between the ability to re-equip an army and an air force quickly, in a relatively shorter term than a navy. A navy requires planning over many years—decades.

The Chair: Certainly. And maybe it's the navy's fault that the average procurement time was 14 years.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Bachand.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wish to welcome the vice-admiral and lieutenant-general.

I have some questions about operations. My first question is for you, Vice-Admiral Robertson. Do we have boats right now in the Persian Gulf, in Saudi Arabia?

VAdm Drew Robertson: In the Persian Gulf?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Yes, in the Gulf.

VAdm Drew Robertson: Right now, the frigate Ottawa is in the...
[English]

Well, it's in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Yemen, but it will be bound for the Gulf of Oman and a visit to a country in that region in the short term.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Are these operations linked to the war in Afghanistan?

[English]

VAdm Drew Robertson: I think they're all related, in the sense that they're all forming part of the international effort in the

campaign against terrorism. Certainly taking an international maritime effort in that region in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, all the way through to the Horn of Africa, is to make sure that those who are operating in those waters are, first of all, kept under surveillance; that piracy is kept in check; and that the region isn't open to the free exchange of people between the Horn of Africa, which in some areas is relatively lawless, and back up to the littoral of Iran and Pakistan. It's all useful work that's related to what's going on in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: So there are still ship interception and boarding missions for control purposes. There are some.

[English]

VAdm Drew Robertson: Indeed, and HMCS *Ottawa* has participated in several boardings and inspections over the past week.

● (1740)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: At present a lot is being made of the fact that the operations in Afghanistan are now under the authority of NATO. Are maritime operations in the Persian Gulf or elsewhere also under the authority of NATO, or does each nation decide on its participation, its actions?

[English]

VAdm Drew Robertson: Indeed, the maritime operations are undertaken by a coalition of nations that choose to participate and are not under the leadership of the alliance. That said, if you look at the nations that are involved, there are a few of the coastal states that participate. Pakistan, for example, recently had the leadership of one of the maritime interdiction zones in the region, but most of the navies are the highly capable western navies that are also NATO members.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: All right. Kindly answer my next question very quickly.

Does Canada provide maritime lift as far as the Arabian Gulf with the supply ships? Do Canadian boats do that?

[English]

VAdm Drew Robertson: They have a very limited capability at lift, and at this point my understanding is we are using maritime charter to go from Canada into the region, but I don't know the details about that.

Mr. Claude Bachand: It's a contract.

[Translation]

I am going to turn to you, Lieutenant-General Lucas.

Who is currently in charge of aerial surveillance in Afghanistan? Which nation is doing that? Canada does not have any aerial coverage planes; the F-18s, among others, have not yet been deployed. Will they be deployed one day in Afghanistan to ensure aerial coverage? I think that the Dutch, and probably the Americans, ensure aerial surveillance at present, do they not?

[English]

LGen J. S. Lucas: You could help me by—

[Translation]

You used the term “surveillance”?

Mr. Claude Bachand: I used the word “coverage”.

LGen J. S. Lucas: Is it like with AWACS or...?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Perhaps I could talk rather about air-to-ground missions. Let us say there was a call for air force reinforcements to attack a Taliban position. Who would intervene in Afghanistan?

[English]

LGen J. S. Lucas: Most of the missions in this regard are being provided by United States aircraft. When it comes to the close air support, the missions in which munitions are delivered, there are aircraft from the United States and aircraft from the Royal Air Force and the Royal Netherlands Air Force. Each of those three countries contributes aircraft that have that capability.

Regarding our ISR capability, we have some limited capability in respect of the Sperwer. The UAVs that we've deployed there have some tactical capability, but the United States, with its predator aircraft UAVs, is providing a much more significant capability in theatre in that regard.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Phase two of the F-18 modernization has been speeded up now. Our committee met at the end of phase one, when the first 80 planes were ready. If we are speeding up phase two, is it because a request was received from NATO for a certain number of planes to be ready in case of need in Afghanistan?

[English]

LGen J. S. Lucas: To the best of my knowledge, we are proceeding with phase two of the CF-18 upgrade much as the contract called for. We should have all of the aircraft done by the year 2009. With that, we will have significant capabilities so that if we were asked to participate in an activity in Afghanistan, it would be very helpful, but it would probably be at least another 12 months before those new aircraft could be utilized under those circumstances. So my sense is that—and we've been asked this question before—the situation in Afghanistan is a very dynamic one, one that changes on a regular basis, and because of that, the air force looks at the capabilities we have right now and looks at ways that we could contribute if the commander of CEFCON, General Gauthier, asked us to participate or called for that capability. If the Government of Canada agrees, after we bring this requirement forward, then we will be prepared to do so, but at this point in time, there has been no call for that to go forward, and therefore we're just in the contingency planning stage.

The Chair: That was pretty close to being right on schedule. Thank you.

Ms. Black.

• (1745)

Ms. Dawn Black: Thank you very much to both of you for appearing here.

Admiral Robertson talked about HMCS *Ottawa* and said it was deployed as part of the U.S. Navy's expeditionary strike force. You talked about it being part of the war on terror. Is it part of Operation

Enduring Freedom that we're under? If so, how does that fit into the whole war on terror? Is there any chance that the operation on terror would end up supporting operations that are not in Afghanistan?

How does the chain of command interact with the U.S. chain of command? That wasn't very clear to me when our ground operations were part of Operation Enduring Freedom. I'm wondering how that works in the chain of command down from you to the ship and your U.S. counterpart, and how those lines interact.

VAdm Drew Robertson: It certainly is part of Operation Enduring Freedom. There's a slight nuance. The ship deployed with the American battle group is completely interoperable with the battle group, but its rules of engagement flow entirely from the Chief of Defence Staff and directions from the Government of Canada.

The leadership in theatre at present is principally American, but there is one area commanded by a British officer and another commanded by a Pakistani. Canadians have had command of various areas.

We use the ships that are assigned and take full advantage of them within rules that are set by their government to conduct surveillance, boardings, and inspections—but only up to that limit. We're well aware of what that limit is for any of the ships that are given to us to command. The commanding officer of any ship is very quick to say if they're asked to do something beyond what their government has authorized.

When I had command of a region, I had French ships working for me, and the commanding officers were very eager to conduct boardings. Requests went to Paris, to the Quai d'Orsay, and the reply was repeatedly negative. So despite the natural desire of the commanding officers to be involved, they declined.

Ms. Dawn Black: It's obviously a complex arrangement. Operation Enduring Freedom is an American-led operation, and it's very difficult trying to understand exactly how the chain of command works.

I understand you're saying that the Canadian Navy takes their direction from the Canadian government, but it's still very difficult for me to understand exactly how, if you're in a joint operation, those lines are drawn and how they intersect.

VAdm Drew Robertson: Certainly the leadership in theatre is by the fleet commander, who is an American officer based ashore in Bahrain. He's the maritime component commander for American forces. He has a variety of international officers on staff, and some officers from both regional and western nations as subordinate commanders.

It really is as straightforward as knowing what the limits of rules of engagement are and then asking ships to do those things their governments have approved. There's really pre-approval by the government. If the *Ottawa* is asked to do something that is not already approved, the commanding officer will instantly get back to General Gauthier, in the face of a surprise arising in tasking, and seek direction from Canadian authorities.

Ms. Dawn Black: Thank you very much.

General Lucas, I have a document from the Minister of Public Works on deployment support for the CF-18s in the amount of \$1.9 million, awarded in January 2006. I'm wondering if we carried out that deployment support contract. You talked about it a little bit. If so, what did we get for \$1.9 million?

You touched upon contingency plans for deployment of the CF-18s, so I just want to confirm that there are contingency plans if it is deemed necessary that we deploy them.

● (1750)

LGen J. S. Lucas: In cases such as this, military planners will always develop contingency plans, simply because we have been asked by the government to do a number of things from time to time, and it's always a good idea to have a plan, even if you don't carry through on it.

In respect of the contract, I believe it was done in anticipation that something might happen. I believe it was a contract that has not been carried out but was put in place just in case. That case has not yet arisen, so I don't believe the contract has been carried through, from my understanding of it.

Certainly the full Canadian materiel organization is the one who does that, but I believe it was just some good staff work there. It didn't cost us anything, and it positioned us, should we actually have to go into theatre, to be in a position to do so.

Ms. Dawn Black: Whom do we rely on now for air cover? Is it all our allies? Is it the Dutch, the Americans, the Brits—or is it one of them?

LGen J. S. Lucas: Essentially, they all contribute aircraft to a pool. The Americans have the A-10 Warthog and the F-16, the Dutch have the F-16, the Royal Air Force has the Harrier, and there are a number of Apache attack helicopters that are also available.

They are all made available on a rotating basis, so when our people get into trouble and have to call for air cover, they don't know on that particular day who might actually show up. But they have a great working relationship with all of them, so that in fact we have assured delivery, if you will. A lot of work has been done to make sure the processes and procedures are independent of which country shows up.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Black.

Thank you, sir.

Mr. Blaney.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to share my time with my colleague. I will take the first five minutes, and she will take the two remaining. I would like to welcome our high-ranking officers. I had a look at your track records, and they are pretty impressive.

My first question is for Vice-Admiral Robertson. You talked about the acquisition of the three JSSs, the Joint Support Ships. I would like to know whether this type of ship could be integrated in the operations in Afghanistan, if you could use them? Would these ships

be useful to you right now, as part of Canada's operations in Afghanistan?

[English]

VAdm Drew Robertson: The intent of those vessels is to provide the basic supply support required by a naval task group, to be able to provide transport for whatever might need to be transported using a cargo deck, and to provide support to forces ashore from a secure location at sea.

The amount of room in one of those ships for transport is useful for a tactical deployment of an army unit, but is relatively modest compared to what would be in a cargo ship—one of the large container ships you'd see in Halifax or Vancouver or Montreal. So it might have a role to play in the region, but I doubt we would use a ship like that today. We could use a ship like it today to transport goods to the region, for overland transport then into Afghanistan, but it would not be the principal use of the ship.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: So some more capable ships would be more useful to you in Afghanistan. Is that so?

[English]

VAdm Drew Robertson: In fact I might mislead you if I indicate that maritime resupply is the way things are going. I'm not the person to talk, but I think most of the goods going into the country are going in by air. That's because of the particular geographic circumstance there, but also because of the timeliness of delivery.

● (1755)

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney: I will turn now to Lieutenant-General Lucas.

In your presentation, you mentioned that 75% of the flying activities in which you are involved make use of rental equipment, if I understood correctly. Could you explain to me what sort of rental equipment is used at present. With the acquisition of new aircraft, will the proportion of rented equipment be reduced? What would the impact be?

I understand that we do not necessarily have all the equipment to conduct the operations expected of you, but what equipment is used? Would new equipment reduce the percentage of rentals?

[English]

LGen J. S. Lucas: When I spoke of 75%, I was speaking of the contracted airlift into theatre. A large portion of this was Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft that were used to transport a lot of our equipment directly into Kandahar. In addition, there were some C-17 aircraft from the United States Air Force that also moved people and equipment into theatre.

There is no doubt that this situation will change when we have our own C-17 aircraft. We will make great use of them, specifically for the ability to move people into theatre. At the beginning, in a deployment or a re-deployment into an isolated theatre such as that, we will probably still have to use some form of contracted lift for a surged capability, simply because in a very short period of time you want to concentrate and get folks in quickly. Four aircraft is a great capability, but it's insufficient for being able to surge in and at the end to surge out. It will significantly reduce the amount of contracted lift we have to do, but it will not completely replace it. We will still have to do some work using contract.

The Chair: Ms. Gallant, you have two minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: My first question is for General Lucas.

The policy of the previous government to allow Canadian military assets to deteriorate, or in some cases to be sold off or scrapped, is now being reversed. We owe it to the men and women in uniform to provide them with the best equipment to do their job.

The decision to acquire medium- to heavy-lift helicopters is a necessary acquisition to protect our soldiers, particularly in those situations where the conditions warrant such a capability. There's an obvious need to address Canada's helicopter airlift capability shortfall. And I understand that with the purchase of a proven helicopter like the Chinook, from an operational standpoint, there's a need to integrate training with undertakings in a theatre of operation.

Could the general share with the committee which bases in Canada will be designated as the main operating bases of the medium- and heavy-lift helicopters that will be acquired by Canada?

VAdm Drew Robertson: We've made decisions recently that we will base our Chinook helicopters in two locations. One location will be Edmonton, Alberta, and the other location will be Petawawa, Ontario. We found, after an examination, that this just makes the best case. They are located in close proximity to two of our large army formations and close to good training areas. There were a number of reasons why we selected those two locations, but that's the road we're going down right now.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Admiral Robertson, tell us what you can about the successes achieved during the exercise last Friday held off the coast of North Carolina, and how, if at all, it relates to our mission in Afghanistan.

The Chair: You have forty-five seconds, sir. Sorry.

VAdm Drew Robertson: It's a very tentative first step that was successfully executed with a company of soldiers operating from a safe, secure sea base and supported from there to conduct very straightforward operations ashore in North Carolina. It demonstrated that we certainly have the capability to do it, but it's going to take years to develop that capability, if that's the direction the government chooses to go.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Gallant.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for your good information and for your flexibility with our schedules. That's our life, I'm afraid. We answer bells at all times of the day. We appreciate it.

Please pass on to the men and women under your command how much we appreciate their efforts.

The meeting is adjourned.

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