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—
Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

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• (0905)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): We have quorum. I'll call the meeting to order.

Good morning, colleagues. Our esteemed chair, Mr. Casson, sends his greetings. Unfortunately he's mining for stones. He is going through a very unfortunate experience, one that I know I experienced myself, so we wish him good health and a speedy recovery.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): That is so painful.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Poor guy.

We will deal with the motion from Mr. Hawn. Mr. Hawn, you have the floor, sir.

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

What I was asked to do is put together a list of topics that would make sense to discuss from the point of view of continental defence. There is obviously a great deal of spillover between pure defence and pure security. The two are interrelated.

There is obviously a great deal of cross-border activity, not just between Canada and the U.S., but now with Mexico as well. If we're talking continent, obviously we're talking the entire continent. And there are agreements, current and pending, with the three countries.

This was intended to be a list of topics. It wasn't necessarily, in my mind, intended to be the work plan per se, so we may want to focus it down to something that's, at least to begin with, more manageable in terms of the time. Again, I wasn't necessarily thinking of having everything done on this topic by the end of this session, because it can be a very broad topic with many links going out.

The real central part of it, I would suggest—and I'd be open to amendments or to make it in some format that makes sense to the committee—is perhaps starting with Canada COM, because continental defence, from the Canadian perspective, starts with Canada COM.

Canada COM and USNORTHCOM, of course, work together across the 49th parallel. Canada COM obviously works closely with PSEPC, which works closely with the Department of Homeland Security, which also, obviously, works with USNORTHCOM. So that may be the area we want to start with.

I would leave the motion out there just for the moment to say here's a list of areas, but again, we may want to put them in a different order of priority or narrow the focus, and then as we

develop along that line, we can branch out to other things that will come up—more specific things such as NORAD. When people think of continental defence, they think of NORAD. Continental defence is much, much more than NORAD. NORAD is a very small but important part of that.

I put that out as a suggestion. The motion is very broad. We may want to focus it down or put it in a different order, or some kind of priority order. So I leave that open for discussion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Thank you, Mr. Hawn. Indeed you've given us, as you said, a very broad spectrum of various areas to engage in.

Are there any comments, colleagues? Monsieur Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, although it is noble of my colleague to make this motion this morning, I do not think we had begun that task. It is premature to say that we are going to begin a study. We have to vote against this motion, because we want to finish with the report on Afghanistan. The situation there is getting more untenable by the minute, and has an impact on Canada's very reputation. I am talking about the Afghan detainees.

We have already come out in favour of a study on the question of Afghan detainees. This must come first. As regards procurement, we must clearly work with the recommendations. The agenda and the timelines set by the steering committee contain enough work to take us to the summer.

I understand the reasons why my colleague wants to deal with his motion, but doing it now does not work for us. So we are going to vote against the motion.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): We know it's the privilege of every member to bring forth their ideas, and we respect that.

Monsieur Bachand, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): I will start by saying that I appreciate my colleague's efforts. The only problem I see at the moment is that he has cast his net very wide. There are all kinds of questions, including environmental damage, industrial espionage, immigration, border services, policing, etc. Several of these questions are beyond our competency. I do not want to repeat what my colleague Mr. Coderre has already said. Our work is not finished. I feel that, if we want to do a study, this is not the way to proceed.

We should decide that our next study will be about continental defence, once we have finished what Mr. Coderre and I were discussing. Then we would establish the terms and parameters of the study. It is absolutely impossible for me to vote on this motion in this way.

In the future, the committee should indicate a preference for several smaller studies, and not a study like this, that could take a year or two because its scope is so broad. I do not want to reject my colleague's work out of hand, because I find it very honourable. But at the moment, I would like us to set this motion aside, and devote our energy to Afghanistan and to the procurements. Then we can discuss the larger file, and the topics that we would like to explore.

I have nothing against talking about continental defence, but how far would we go? In my opinion, we are going too far. I would like to see the committee get together again to establish parameters and terms for the study.

● (0910)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): By leaving it on the table, you're just saying that this will be addressed in future committee business.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): We'll go to Ms. Black.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): The Auditor General is addressing this issue today. I think it might be wise to see what comes out in her report today, before we adopt a frame of reference to go ahead. I'm not opposed to undertaking this issue; I think we need to. But I don't think we should vote today on this motion and lock ourselves into these terms of reference.

I agree with Claude that we need to push it ahead and complete some of the other work before we really adopt the frame of reference we want to follow.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): We'll have Mr. Hiebert.

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

I'm just wondering what other work the committee was speaking to, other than the current report we're working on.

Ms. Dawn Black: We have procurement. We have to come to some conclusion on procurement.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, do you know if there's a report associated with our study on procurement? I don't think that was part of the motion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): If I recall, with respect to your question, we discussed three or four topics or—I'll use Claude's comment, if I may quote him—short studies. Some of them, if you'll recall from committee business, were quality of life and detainees. Those were not necessarily studies, but we needed to have a committee meeting per se.

The next in-depth study was in the process of unravelling, given that we had the Afghanistan study before us. Unfortunately, for whatever reasons, we were moving at a bit of a slower pace than we were hoping to. So the thrust was to get this over and done with. If

you recall, colleagues, it was suggested to us by the chair to come forth, in our spare time, with specifics within that report on wording and so on. I hope we're at that stage today.

Go ahead, Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Thank you.

I was under the impression, with the prospect of our wrapping up our study on Afghanistan, that the steering committee had requested that a motion be brought forward along these lines. So I think what Mr. Hawn has tried to do here is simply fulfill the request of the steering committee.

Ms. Dawn Black: You're right. I think the steering committee did request more information. I don't think they asked for a motion, but they did ask for a broadening of what the government was asking for on the study. I don't think they asked for it in the form of a motion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Yes. Having been at that meeting, there's no question—it's the privilege of every member to bring it forth as a motion at any time they wish. We cannot stop that. But in the next committee business, hopefully, all parties will be in a better position to put forth suggestions for future business.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Perhaps.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Voting against it or putting it on the shelf doesn't necessarily mean, Mr. Hawn, that we can't bring it back at the appropriate time.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I'm wondering if we could have a brief discussion about whether it is too broad or touches on things that some members don't want to address. We could possibly bring those recommendations forward now and then revise the motion so that at our next meeting we could have an opportunity to consider it more fully.

● (0915)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I think that we all agree that files should be very closely examined. I have just come from the forum in Brussels. A problem is on the horizon, and it is becoming more serious. I am talking about intercontinental missile defence, and the opposition it is encountering in Europe. This is a very important matter, of course. We are not saying that motion is not valid, but when it comes to beginning a study on this topic when we still have work to do, I can only echo the words of my colleague Claude: we should work along the lines provided by the steering committee. We will come to a decision together, and we must discuss it, but it is perhaps not necessary to make a motion right now, although everyone has the right to do so.

The study on procurement is not finished, and we must discuss the recommendations. Whether we like it or not, there is also the question of the detainees. That is going to take much more than this one meeting. We have to get to the bottom of things, and perhaps even have a word with NATO. It would be good to invite General Henault to brief us on the situation. In short, we have a lot on our plate. We have not finished the Afghanistan file. I can tell you that if you are bound and determined to stick with this motion, we will not support it. That does not mean that we could not deal with the matter at the steering committee. Then we could establish an agenda and decide how we are going to proceed. After all, there certainly is not going to be an election this spring, and there will be work to do come autumn. This could be part of it. I think that we should proceed step by step. In one sense, we have put the cart before the horse.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): I have Mr. Hiebert, then I have Ms. Gallant.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I was just going to say this, for the benefit of Mr. Bachand, who I think was predisposed at the time. I was suggesting a moment ago that if it is too broad, if that's your concern, perhaps we can make some amendments to the motion, even today. And then we can have an opportunity to revise it and discuss it further at our next meeting, if that would be amenable to you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): I have Ms. Gallant first, unless she's prepared to—because he's looking for a response. It's up to you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Are you going to be responding? Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I think that we must use what Mr. Hawn has prepared, have a steering committee meeting, tidy up all the files that are involved, come back to the committee and make a recommendation. That is the normal procedure. The steering committee sets terms and parameters and submits proposals for approval to the whole committee. At that time, we can start a study step by step.

Starting immediately by a motion is a little hasty in my view. I suggest that this motion go back to the steering committee. The discussions that you mention could take place. If we decide that it is best not to include immigration, we can take it out and then make a recommendation to the whole committee. I am not ready to vote this morning: so I would be forced not to support this motion. I think that Mr. Hawn has done a good job, and it would be a shame, because of questions of procedure...

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I just want to mention that since the quality of life study, there has been nothing substantial done by this committee. We're the only committee in Parliament that has not yet tabled a report. This committee is basically flying by the seat of its pants.

Yes, we did the Canada-U.S. cooperation study when you were chair previously, but there was never any report done. Nothing came of it. This is the defence committee of Canada, and we have really

nothing to show for it. For ages we've been talking about doing North American defence. Every time there's a change in session, we have a new cast of characters, and we've never followed through on what our plans have been. The defence of North America, the future of NORAD, the very future of whether or not we're going to have a bilateral role as opposed to a secondary role, being under a command of U.S. war...

North American defence is of prime concern to Canadians and something worthwhile going forward with. Yes, it's bound to have little studies here and there, but we do have to get some focus and have a long-term study. The reason Mr. Hawn provided a motion so well in advance is so that we can line up credible witnesses well in advance, instead of having to cancel meetings here and there because we don't know if somebody is going to show.

In the quality of life study—there was probably somebody here on that committee—they saw hundreds of witnesses, but it takes time to do the planning. So be it tabled or not, I do believe this should go forward at some point rather than just, helter-skelter, focusing on whatever is the flavour of the day as opposed to doing something meaningful such that we can see the fruits of our efforts.

● (0920)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): I don't think anybody around this table disagrees with you, and that is why I think my sense has been, and still is, that we want to finish this study that we are now close to completing and table it so that this committee, indeed, as you said and we all agree, has something to present to Parliament of all the work we've been doing.

In the interim, with all due respect, some of the other topics that were discussed in that steering committee in terms of quality of life, etc., were not meant to be a study per se, but more so one committee session. Correct me if I'm wrong, the colleague who brought it forward.

Ms. Black, I'm just reconfirming in terms of one topic that was suggested in the steering committee—quality of life, for example. If I understood correctly during that meeting, it wasn't meant to be as a study per se, but more so one committee session. Am I correct there?

Ms. Dawn Black: We have a briefing now on what happened in the original quality of life study. The discussion at the steering committee, as I recollect it, was that we might look at that to see how those recommendations had been implemented and if there was anything outstanding. So I didn't see it as another study or anything, just looking at that report and examining whether everything had been followed up on or what state recommendations were at.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Personally, unless anybody disagrees around the table, Ms. Gallant, we agree with you that we need to show something. We've been working on the Afghanistan study for quite some time. We're now close to the recommendation part of the study, and that's what we want to focus on, so that we have something to table in the House.

Then of course, we have discussed different topics. I believe Mr. Hawn's issues that he's bringing forward today were also discussed in the steering committee and were well received. There's no question about that.

I'll go to other speakers first. Mr. Blaney, please.

[Translation]

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

I would like to commend Mr. Hawn's initiative.

In December, before we began the study of procurements, our parliamentary secretary actually proposed, likely before I arrived, that we should discuss continental defence. We were told that the minister was open to the committee's recommendations. In my opinion, the committee has an opportunity to influence the decisions of the minister and the government on an important matter.

This is the reason why this study is important. Nothing is stopping us dealing with current matters one by one. That being the case, the steering committee can give us a game plan for the coming sessions. We set aside continental defence in December, but it seems to me a good time to remind members of the steering committee that this is something that deserves to be discussed, accepting what has been said beforehand.

Thank you.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We should wait until there is a new Minister of Defence.

[English]

Maybe, Laurie, you'll be the defence minister by that time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Are there any further comments? Colleagues, any further comments?

I've had two suggestions here, either a vote or we request that Mr. Hawn just withdraw and we....

Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I'm wondering if some of the members could give some indication, those who are not interested in voting on it today, as to when they might be more amenable to looking at this motion. I think sending it back to the steering committee is part of the solution, but ultimately it's going to have to come back to the whole committee for discussion anyway. So if you have any idea as to when you think you might be more open to the topic, that would be helpful. We could table it until that date.

• (0925)

Hon. Denis Coderre: February 2008.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: February 2008.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I think that's a reasonable suggestion on Mr. Hiebert's part. Frankly, I'll be happy to go back and rework it in perhaps what's more of a logical flow in terms of a starting point with Canada COM to USNORTHCOM to PSEPC to DHS. All lot of these things will fall out of that, so I think—

Hon. Denis Coderre: We should have it at the steering committee. The issue here is that we're not saying no. That has to be clear. We all believe in that issue, but there's a process—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes, I understand that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I have just one more point on planning and preparation.

Even if this study doesn't arise until September, when we come back after summer break, perhaps we could at least have an agreement as to when it's going to start. And since we're so restricted on travel, if travel is going to be included as a part of this study, we are quite restricted on time when Parliament is not sitting. So if there are places we're going to see, it would be helpful to be able to use the summer. As well, the researchers and the clerk would be able to look up witnesses for the summer and prepare for the big study. So if it is going to be tabled, I would request that we do meetings on planning what the parameters are going to be, and an idea of what we want to see, prior to rising from Parliament this summer.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): I agree with you, and that will be up to the steering committee, as this is one issue that was also discussed in the past, I believe. Let me just say also, for my part, that nobody's questioning the topics that are put forward here; I think it's the timing aspect of it, and certainly at the next session of the steering committee it should be brought up again.

Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Can I propose that we revisit this topic at the meeting immediately following the conclusion of our Afghanistan report? Is that amenable?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are we going to get done this spring?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): If I may, there's a steering committee.

Hon. Denis Coderre: There's a steering committee, and that's where—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): If I may, Mr. Hiebert, proper procedure—and correct me if I'm wrong—is the steering committee. Each representative from the different parties has an obligation to bring forth their suggestions to discuss within the steering committee, and the plan is put forth in terms of, as Ms. Gallant said, whether we need to go to the Liaison Committee. Is there travel? This is another obligation of the chair, should travel be required, to secure funds or budgets for witnesses, etc.

So that is the responsibility of the steering committee.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Which made the request for this particular topic already.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): There were several other topics on the agenda; it wasn't just this one, if I recall. I'm speaking not as the chair, but as a member of the steering committee on behalf of this party. And others on that committee can also express their views.

I believe we're engaging in good constructive exchange on an issue that is important. But I'm also on the edge of my seat simply because we all have put the urgency around the table, as Ms. Gallant said. We have to show something, and as constructive as this exchange has been, I think we have to get back to the report.

Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I don't have all my notes with me from our meetings, but I believe that in the past we passed a motion on what we were going to study. If the clerk has it with him, I'd like to be refreshed on what that motion we voted on says.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): These were the three that were suggested, in this order: procurement processing, including the tendering process and the establishment of capability requirements; continental defence in the context of the evolving relationships between NORAD, NORTHCOM, and Canada Command; and third, quality of life for members of the Canadian Forces and their families.

• (0930)

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): This was further refined in meeting number 46 on April 19, with the adoption of these.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): In our meeting of Thursday, April 19, 2007, meeting number 46, the committee adopted the following:

Notwithstanding the Committee's concurrence in the fourth report of its Subcommittee on December 13, 2006, the Subcommittee recommends that the Committee undertake the following work with priority given as suggested by their order:
 completion of a report of the study of the Canadian Forces missions in Afghanistan;
 a study of the evolving relationship between NORAD and NORTHCOM; and
 a focused study on a single aspect affecting the quality of life for members of the Canadian Forces and their families.

It is on record. You're correct in the way you've stated it, and those were the priorities, which is what I just said. This is our first responsibility right now to focus on, however long it should take.

So it has been put on record, Mr. Hawn, for your benefit, sir.

Are there any further clarification problems? Do you wish us to vote on this? It's already there.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: If it is there as a priority, I suggest we table it for the moment and finish what we're doing here and then come back to it. The steering committee can discuss it further, but it's already been discussed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Okay, we're satisfied.

Are there any further comments? Can we just dispense with it?

Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Just to have this clear, it's not a matter of whether or not we're going to do this study. Mr. Hawn's motion was more or less setting the parameters of what the study is going to be, because we've already voted that we're going to do that study next.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): I believe Mr. Hawn just put it in more detail for us, but the overall concept of it was already agreed upon. He's given us more information here, which I'm sure will come forth in the future as well, as it unfolds.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Can I rework the motion to give it a little more thought in terms of the connectivity of the issues from one to the next?

Hon. Denis Coderre: The steering committee should take—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: The comment about the relationship between NORAD and NORTHCOM says that the people on the steering

committee don't understand the issue of continental defence. NORAD is a very small part of it. NORTHCOM's and Canada Command's is a more important relationship in terms of continental defence. NORAD is just a subset of it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): We had agreed on the broad study of it, and of course the finer details, in terms of witnesses, where, etc. Can we end discussion of this, or is there any last comment?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: We have also voted on an important motion about detainees in Afghanistan, and agreed that continental defence is on our list of priorities once we have dealt with procurement. We feel that it is clear that we should discuss it after dealing with Afghanistan. The question of the detainees complements the report as such. So we should look at that as well.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): The topics I mentioned earlier from a previous meeting were applied in terms of their being studies, if I am correct. What you are suggesting now is a meeting per se, to engage not necessarily in a study. Am I correct?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Well, we'll see. All I'm saying is that we need a steering committee for several issues, including the detainee issue we have to deal with.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): Ms. Black.

Ms. Dawn Black: I brought a motion forward that the minister come to report to us on the issue of detainees before it went quite as far as it is now. I thought we had a date that the minister is appearing to discuss that issue. Is that not correct?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): We've been informed that two weeks from today, May 15, the minister will appear with the CDF, General Hillier.

Ms. Dawn Black: Will he appear on that issue?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): That is my understanding, yes. That meeting is in the afternoon as well, but we will be giving notice to the full committee. For now, you know it's in the afternoon on May 15.

Are there any further comments?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are we having a meeting that day?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): I believe we're going to meet, and it would be a good idea to have two meetings, given that we're trying to get this report out.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I'm not suggesting that; I'm just asking.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Cannis): I don't know. As you know, our chair has unfortunately and unexpectedly taken ill. Hopefully he'll be back by then and we'll huddle about what's been discussed. With your permission, we'll allow it to go until maybe next week so that the researchers and clerks have an opportunity to discuss it with the chair.

Are there any further comments? So by next week we'll know— one or two meetings.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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