House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 016 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): I call this meeting to order. This is meeting number 16 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. It's Tuesday, March 4, 2008.

Today we will be continuing our study on Afghanistan and the mission in Afghanistan. As witnesses this afternoon we have Alex Neve, secretary general for Amnesty International Canada; and Hilary Homes, campaigner, international justice, security and human rights, with Amnesty International. We also have, from the Hillbrooke Group, Grant Kippen, principal; and from the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary, Colonel Mike Capstick, an associate.

As we've already discussed briefly, at the close of this meeting we will leave a few minutes for committee business. We have to pass a steering committee report and a few others.

We welcome you here today. It's good to have each one of you, and we look forward to your comments. Normally when we come together, as already mentioned, we have the hour, and because of the bells the clerk has taken the opportunity to bring in everyone here together and we can even extend it past the hour. That will give us extra questions.

I'm not certain which order you want to go in, but it's about a ten-minute presentation and then into questions. How about if we start with Mr. Neve?

Mr. Alex Neve (Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Amnesty International certainly welcomes the opportunity to be in front of the committee today.

Amnesty has researched, documented, reported, and campaigned about widespread and very serious human rights violations in Afghanistan for many decades—in the seventies, the eighties, and the nineties. Of course, in recent years we've highlighted systematic torture, grave abuses of women's human rights, breaches of international humanitarian law in various armed conflicts, fundamental problems with the justice system, and much more. We have put comprehensive recommendations for reform in front of various national-level authorities as well as the international community.

Obviously there has never been a period in which the Canadian government has been so actively engaged with Afghanistan. We look at this therefore as a valuable opportunity for Canada to ensure, not only in words but in practice, that human rights concerns are at the very top of our Afghanistan agenda.

My colleague Hilary Homes and I will share two sets of observations and recommendations. She will focus first on some of our overarching human rights concerns, including those associated with the protection of civilians in the midst of armed conflict. I will then focus on one particular issue, which committee members are likely aware has been a priority for Amnesty International, and that is, the handling of prisoners apprehended by Canadian forces in the course of military operations in Afghanistan.

I'll turn it over first to Ms. Homes.

Mrs. Hilary Homes (Campaigner, International Justice, Security and Human Rights, Amnesty International Canada): I'm sure you are all familiar with the now very well-known pillars of the Afghanistan Compact, namely security, governance, the rule of law and human rights, and economic and social development. Much attention has been placed on security as a precursor to the realization of the other areas of the compact. However, genuine security can only be achieved through commitment to, and substantial progress on, all aspects in concert. The persistent failure of many actors, both international and domestic, to prioritize and support governance, the rule of law, and human rights has ultimately served to create further insecurity in Afghanistan.

Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Afghanistan have been a concern for decades, as Alex has referred to, and they certainly continue to be pervasive. Continual conflict and repression has had a devastating effect. It has literally destroyed institutions and capacity in this area. Significant reconstruction and strengthening is needed, as is the political will on the part of both the Afghan government and the international community to make sure that happens.

In the context of ongoing armed conflict and other military operations, all the actors, namely the Afghan security forces and armed groups as well as the various international forces, have committed abuses, including indiscriminate attacks and/or failure to sufficiently distinguish between civilians and military targets. All have also failed in their specific obligations to protect civilians. On the contrary, there have been some instances when their actions have put civilians at risk in many ways, including some forces that have unfortunately become a magnet for attacks while operating in or moving through civilian areas. Civilians are increasingly caught in the crossfire.

I'm sure a number of you read *The Globe and Mail* on the weekend. There was a feature on Afghanistan. The numbers quoted there are worth noting: in 2005, 1,000 deaths, rising to 4,000 in 2006, and at least 6,500 in 2007. Of course the impact goes beyond loss of life, to ongoing displacement of people and the closing of humanitarian space and access, notably the abduction and killing of aid workers.

This is a context in which the Afghan people themselves are often devalued. They are seen by the differing actors, both domestic and international, as possible human shields, collaborators, unfortunate disproportionate collateral damage, or potential threats if simply gathered as crowds straying too close to foreign forces or attempting to engage in debate and dissent. This situation is compounded by a lack of capacity to investigate by domestic actors as well as sometimes a lack of will among foreign actors, even though the capacity to investigate exists. The result is a troubling lack of accountability.

The rule of law is an essential component in the reconstruction in Afghanistan. Failure to uphold the rule of law, particularly in a context where institutions are weak, if they exist at all, results in continuing widespread human rights violations. In Afghanistan, this fosters a number of things, including the perpetuation of violence against women; the renewed marginalization of vulnerable people and communities; the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience; unfair political trials; torture and ill-treatment; disappearances and unlawful killings; and unfortunately, ongoing impunity for past and current violations, which is complicated further by continuing failure to remove human rights abusers from positions of power.

Some of the additional obstacles to the delivery of effective human rights protection, justice, and rule of law include a judiciary that is staffed with unqualified personnel; a police force that continues to be poorly trained and poorly paid—there have been some improvements, but there are certainly real challenges there—and a force which is itself a target of attacks; threats to judicial independence, be that from armed groups, persons holding public office, warlords, private individuals; unfair trial procedures, including violations of the right to call and examine witnesses; and an overall lack of confidence in, or access to, a formal justice system, which results in a reliance on informal justice systems, particularly in the rural areas.

In 2003 the UN Commission on Human Rights called on the Afghan government to declare a moratorium on the death penalty in light of procedural and substantive flaws in the Afghan judicial system. Fifteen recent state executions marked an end to a three-year moratorium on executions in Afghanistan and came shortly after the Taliban executed a 15-year-old in southern Afghanistan. That executions have resumed is itself a concern, given the worldwide move towards abolition. That it is occurring in a context where the basic legal system is still weak is deeply troubling.

While there have been some improvements for some Afghans, particularly in the areas of freedom of expression and access to education and health care, the overall experience of basic human rights across Afghanistan remains very weak. Human rights offenders face harassment, intimidation, and even murder. To speak out is not without risks.

● (1540)

Many promises have been made to improve human rights through the mandates of the international forces, the United Nations, the recent Rome conference on the rule of law in Afghanistan, and of course the Afghan constitution itself. These commitments to creating and strengthening institutions and building a broad culture of human rights to ensure their survival must be followed through if the progress that has been made is not to be lost.

I'll now turn things over to Alex.

Mr. Alex Neve: I'm just going to say a brief word about the issue of prisoners apprehended by Canadian forces during military operations in Afghanistan.

Amnesty International first raised concerns about this issue in early 2002, when Canada first deployed in Afghanistan. At that point, our concerns were with respect to the policy of handing over detainees to U.S. forces and the likelihood of such prisoners ending up at Bagram Air Base or Guantanamo Bay. That approach came to an end in December 2005, with the first agreement between Canada and Afghanistan, under which prisoners were to be transferred into Afghan custody, with indications that the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission would play a role in monitoring.

We immediately stressed that it had not solved the problem, given the widespread, long-standing reality of torture throughout the Afghan prison system. We urged Canada to consider a different approach, one that would accord with our international obligations. We noted that one possibility would be to work alongside our NATO allies and in very close collaboration with Afghan officials to develop a shared strategy for the handling of battlefield detainees, ranging from all parties working together to build a new prison and running it together to working together within existing facilities. That proposal was not taken up.

By February of 2007, after five years of unsuccessfully pressing for a strong human-rights-based approach to dealing with prisoners in Afghanistan, we felt we had no other choice than to turn to the courts, and we commenced an application in the Federal Court, along with the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association. I'm sure everyone here is aware of the developments since that time.

In May 2007, in response to the court application, the government did negotiate a stronger bilateral agreement with the Afghan government, one that established a specific monitoring role for Canadian officials. In the months that followed, Canadian officials received at least eight detailed allegations of torture from prisoners during prison visits. The last of those, in November, was sufficiently troubling that a decision was taken to suspend any further transfers.

The allegations received involved very worrying descriptions of harrowing forms of torture, including being beaten repeatedly with cables, subjected to electric shocks, having fingers cut and also burned with lighters, and being forced to remain standing or staying awake for extended periods of time.

However, transfers were resumed on Friday of last week, February 29. The decision to resume transfers was made on the basis of a number of developments, including one individual being charged for the incident of torture in November.

That's a very broad-stroke overview, but let me stress three key points here. First, it has often been asserted that monitoring solves this problem. It's been urged upon us that the Red Cross and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Canadian government all play a role in monitoring the prisons where transferred prisoners are held, and will thus reliably protect prisoners from torture. If only that were true.

Monitoring is a good thing, and we regularly press governments to adopt more rigorous systems for monitoring their prisons, with an eye to preventing torture, but in a context such as Afghanistan's, where torture is endemic and long-standing, it does not solve the problem overnight or even in a few weeks or months. It may help to occasionally detect torture after the fact. It may play a role, eventually, in combination with several other initiatives, in diminishing the incidence of torture and even, in the long term, eradicating it, but it is not a quick-fix or short-term solution, such that it could be relied upon to protect prisoners. The worrying allegations made throughout the months that Canadian officials were on monitoring visits in the prisons underscores that to be the case. So unconcerned were some Afghan guards that they even left the torture implements in a prison cell even though they knew Canadian officials were, on occasion, coming by to monitor.

Second, it is often suggested that we're advocating some sort of parallel justice system in Afghanistan—a Canadian jail, a Canadian correction system in Kandahar, operating entirely outside Afghanistan's own justice system. Absolutely not. We've never made that recommendation, nor would we. We have always talked about close collaboration, working together and capacity-building. If this were done right, it would provide both the short-term solution to detainee transfers and a long-term contribution to improving the prison system and better protecting human rights in the Afghan justice system.

● (1545)

Finally, some assert that this issue is not important because these are Taliban fighters, after all, responsible for serious atrocities, and we should not be overly concerned about their treatment. Let us remember that the issue at stake here is torture, not the Taliban. Some of those captured will be hardened Taliban loyalists; some will be local farmers in the wrong place at the wrong time. All should be protected from torture. That has to be Canada's approach unequivocally. Freedom from torture is a fundamental human rights value. It is a clear international obligation. If our engagement in Afghanistan is not about scrupulously advancing such values, what is it about?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Kippen.

Mr. Grant Kippen (Principal, The Hillbrooke Group): Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank you and the other members of the committee for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. I'd also like to commend the committee for its methodical and thoughtful deliberations about the challenges that Canada, the international community, and the government and people of Afghanistan face with respect to issues of security, reconstruction, and sustainable economic development, as well as building effective governance structures and processes.

My particular perspective comes from working in the fields of elections and democratic development in Afghanistan, as well as in a number of other countries in the region. I'm sure that I echo many previous witnesses by saying that our commitment to the people of Afghanistan should be long term, as the nature and the magnitude of the challenges simply demand this perspective.

It's my opinion that as Canada looks ahead to its future role in Afghanistan, it should choose to make democratic development and governance a cornerstone of the work we support and hopefully, in some cases, take the lead on.

In January of this year I wrote an article that appeared in *The Globe and Mail* that called on the Government of Canada to work with the people and the Government of Afghanistan to build a robust and functioning representative democracy. I suggested in the article that Canada use the next set of elections—presidential, parliamentary, and the provincial council scheduled for next year or the year after—as a short-term goal in helping the government build legitimate, effective, and sustainable governance structures and democratic institutions. My belief is that the next set of elections will be critical to building up the legitimacy and credibility of the government there, at all three levels.

The euphoria of the first set of elections in 2004 and 2005 no longer exists, and that is why Canada and the international community, in partnership with the Afghan government, need to commit to doing everything possible to ensure that this next set of elections is successful. Such an effort will require working with a broad spectrum of stakeholders and institutions, the judiciary, the public service, including the military and the police, legislators, and political parties.

Some of the suggestions for areas where we can make a positive difference, I believe, include funding civic education projects in order to engage citizens so that they understand the purpose and process of elections. As elected representatives, you are keenly aware that time in an electoral process is a precious commodity, so every effort needs to be made to start civic education projects as quickly as possible.

One suggestion is to establish a public service training institute. This was specifically identified in the recent Afghanistan study group report that Ambassador Pickering and General James Jones co-chaired. The short-term focus should be on training public servants on their roles and responsibilities during the elections process. I know the Afghan ambassador to Canada, His Excellency Omar Samad, has made this suggestion on a number of occasions, and both the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Queen's University and I have also made this suggestion.

Another suggestion is to support the development of a governors' council, where governors from across the country can come together on a regular basis to exchange information and ideas relating to economic development, security issues, challenges facing public service delivery, etc. At this point in time, there is no such forum in the country.

Another suggestion is to develop programs to support the work of elected representatives and political parties. As you know from the House today, there is a delegation of women parliamentarians from Afghanistan visiting Ottawa, and I would strongly encourage that such exchange programs be further strengthened.

Given that our military commitment and mission is located in Kandahar, I would suggest that we look at focusing our efforts with the aforementioned stakeholders in this region. This effort will only be successful if we give Afghans at the local level the responsibility, authority, and accountability for the elections process, as well as building effective governance structures and processes.

Former Afghan interior minister Ali Jalali recently wrote in a very insightful article that building effective governance at the provincial and district levels in Afghanistan is key to the legitimacy and stabilization of the country. He went on to state that non-military action needs to be focused on assuring, persuading, and influencing the local populace through the provision of security, humanitarian assistance, and basic services, establishing infrastructure, institution building, and support for the rule of law.

● (1550)

Removal of the sources of insurgency in Pakistan requires a new regional approach and needs to address a number of legitimate concerns of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Among the most compelling of these concerns are development and the education of the populace in the rural tribal areas on both sides of the border, promoting democratic values within Pakistan, and enhancing governance in Afghanistan.

For our part, it's going to require a synchronized military and aid development strategy. However, we need to move quickly if we want to make a positive, enduring impact. The timelines are short if we want to mount a major effort in this area.

Other countries and organizations have already started preparing the groundwork for the next set of elections. For example, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, which committee members are familiar with from your work on democratic development, just recently announced a project in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, since 2005 there has been no major work done by the international community on working with political parties in Afghanistan.

The United States Agency for International Development is currently evaluating proposals for what is likely to be the single largest election assistance project in Afghanistan, with a decision likely in the next couple of months.

The recent elections in Pakistan point to the need to invest in strengthening democratic institutions and processes. While the outcome was seen to generally reflect the will of the voters there, there were significant challenges to the electoral process. Both the PPP and PML-N, as well as domestic and international election observer groups, catalogued thousands of cases of alleged electoral violations.

In the 2005 Wolesi Jirga and provincial council elections, there were close to 7,000 challenges and complaints filed. While many of these related to alleged criminal offences and past human rights abuses, there were nonetheless a significant number that pointed to electoral violations related to the involvement of public servants and the use of state resources in the process. More needs to be done for the upcoming elections to address these shortcomings.

With new governments elected at the national and provincial levels in Pakistan, I would also suggest that now is the perfect time for Canada to reassess how it can support democratic development activities in Pakistan. This House will soon have the opportunity to strengthen professional relationships and dialogues with new counterparts in both the national and provincial assemblies in Pakistan.

If Canada hasn't already done so, it should consider establishing a three-D working group to assess how it can best respond to the new government's agenda.

As elected representatives, you are all well familiar with the expression that “all politics is local”. That particular quote is attributed to Tip O'Neill, the second-longest-serving speaker in the history of the U.S. House of Representatives. However, the remainder of the quotation is often forgotten. I think it is worth repeating, because it epitomizes what I believe is the important work this committee does when it comes to helping shape our future role in Afghanistan. I quote Tip O'Neill:

> I have been in politics all my life. I am proud to be a politician. No other career affords as much opportunity to help people. Let us not concern ourselves with what we have tried and failed, but with what it is still possible to do. Let us spare no energy that the nation and the world may be better for our efforts.

Thank you.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kippen.

We'll move to Colonel Capstick, please.

Colonel M.D. Capstick (Associate, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today. l really do appreciate this opportunity to contribute to what is, without doubt, the most important foreign policy debate that Canada has been involved in during my lifetime. l will, with your forbearance, address the committee in English, because I really don't want to slaughter *la langue de Molière* too badly, and will do my best to answer any questions plainly and frankly.

On September 18, 2005, I stood at polling stations in Logar province and in old Kabul to observe Afghanistan's first parliamentary elections in over three decades. My most vivid image of that day was the sense of optimism and the high expectations of the voters. Nomadic Kuchi tribesmen, Pashto villagers, Hazara labourers, and some of the poorest women in the world all shared a sense that Afghanistan was at a turning point and that these elections, which were the final steps of the Bonn process, signalled an end to three decades of violence and terror. In short, on that day Afghans believed they would soon be able to get on with their lives without the crushing burden of fear that they had come to believe was normal.

Despite the palpable optimism of that election day, l was more than a little alarmed to learn that the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and its international partners had no real plan for the next steps. The Bonn process had run its course, the structures of the state had been established, albeit without the human capacity necessary to deliver services to the people, and security seemed to be improving in most of the country. At a polling station in Logar province, l distinctly remember asking Canada's first ambassador, Chris Alexander, what would happen next. Despite his comprehensive knowledge of Afghanistan and his considerable influence in Kabul, he couldn't answer the question. Simply put, the plan did not exist.

Although the Bonn process was an apparent success, there was no agreed strategic plan or framework to deal with the long-term state-building enterprise needed to address the major problems that faced the nascent Afghan democracy. The result of this lack of strategic vision was several months of intense effort to produce the Afghanistan Compact and the interim Afghanistan national development strategy in time for the London conference on the future of Afghanistan that convened on February 1, 2006.

The team l led, Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan, played a small part in the development of both those documents, and I attended the conference with my team's Afghan counterparts. The London conference was another moment of high optimism. For the first time since the fall of the Taliban regime there was an agreed Afghan international strategic framework and a common language. Promises were made, commitments given, and hope was the prevailing sentiment. That sense of hope would not last long. Within months, the lack of strategic vision and the almost total absence of international cohesion in Kabul began to threaten the compact and the interim ANDS. This lack of cohesion, in fact, puts the entire state-building enterprise at risk. To be clear, the Afghan mission can be lost on the battlefields of Kandahar province, but it can only be won in Kabul.

I will not dwell on the strategic failings of the past few years. These are dealt with adequately in both the Manley report and in this committee's excellent interim report filed in January. Instead, the remainder of my remarks will focus on the steps I think are needed to achieve the strategic-level cohesion necessary to the success of both the joint Afghan-international effort and Canada's crucial role in that effort. I will also propose some specific recommendations in respect to Canada's governance and development priorities at the national level and in Kandahar province. Finally, I will provide some concluding remarks about the import of this mission to the Afghan people.

Although there appears to be an international consensus on the need to establish Afghan-international strategic coherence, there does not appear to be any shared view of how to do this. Recent discussions of an international super-envoy have offered the promise of coherence. However, the United Nations assistance mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, remains marginal to the dynamic in Kabul. The appointment of the proposed high-level UN envoy holds the potential to redress this situation but would not, by itself, be sufficient to achieve the necessary cohesion.

● (1600)

A few of the most powerful states represented in Kabul, as well as some of the most important development agencies, have consistently weakened the possibility of UN leadership by their insistence on following national and organizational agendas and priorities as opposed to those laid out in the compact.

The roots of this problem lie in the period immediately following the fall of the Taliban. The U.S. consciously limited the role of the UN, and the dysfunctional lead-nation system of the Bonn process proved to be a structural barrier to cohesion. Clearly, this situation is untenable. If UNAMA is to be effective, the appointment of a special envoy must be accompanied by expressions of full political support and genuine behavioural change on the ground. Canada's political leaders can and must leverage this nation's hard-earned influence and political capital to exercise leadership in developing the international political will that is absolutely necessary for success in Kabul.

It is evident that Canada's “whole of government” approach has matured greatly in the past two years. The recent striking of a cabinet committee, supported by a task force located in the PCO, promises to strengthen the cohesion of the Canadian effort. If the current motion under debate passes, a special parliamentary committee on Afghanistan will be able to exercise oversight over the mission and ensure ministerial accountability.

These positive steps must now be supported by the development of a comprehensive public strategy that defines Canadian objectives in Afghanistan—the ends; specifies the organizations, methods, priorities, and benchmarks required to achieve these ends—the ways; and quantifies the necessary commitment of human and financial resources—the means. This strategy must accord with the compact and serve as the authoritative guidance for Canada's "whole of government" effort. It would permit you as parliamentarians to monitor progress and at the same time fully inform Canadians of our goals in Afghanistan and our plan for achieving them. Taken together, the new cabinet committee, the task force, the special parliamentary committee, and a public Afghan strategy can only improve our national strategic coherence.

However, by its very nature, the Westminster system, based on ministerial accountability, is not conducive to the "whole of government" approach. Soldiers, diplomats, development officials, and police and corrections officers have all been formed by the functional imperatives and the institutional cultures of their respective organizations. The steps that I have described mitigate these challenges in Ottawa, but they must be supported by structural changes on the ground. Canada's Afghan strategy must not only be coherent in Ottawa; it must also be seamlessly coordinated in Kabul and Kandahar.

Despite the strong diplomatic skills of our foreign service officers, the leadership and management of a complex, multi-dimensional operation such as the Afghan mission is simply not a core competency of Canada' s ambassadors, nor is it an appropriate role for senior military commanders. To overcome this, the Prime Minister should appoint a prominent and experienced Canadian as a special envoy. This envoy should have the authority to act as the head of Canada' s "country team" in Afghanistan and a specific mandate to ensure that Canada' s Afghan strategy is coordinated. Reporting to the PM, the envoy should be supported by a strategic coordination team of approximately four people. They should have experience in Afghanistan and expertise in security, governance, and development, as well as proven planning and coordination skills at the strategic level. To ensure their independence from the natural bureaucratic pressures that would certainly affect their judgments, the members of this team must not be serving soldiers or public servants. This team would advise the prime minister's envoy, review all projects and activities, ensure strategic coherence, and act as the envoy's eyes and ears throughout the country.

I'll turn now to governance and development priorities.

Every single Canadian effort in the governance and development pillars of the compact must be designed to strengthen the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Much of the Canadian International Development Agency's support of national programs has been successful in this regard. For example, CIDA support of the national solidarity program has not only resulted in the positive outcomes that other witnesses have described to you; it has also been one of the major reasons that the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, MRRD, is one of the most credible arms of the Afghan government. It should be our objective to make more ministries and the administration of Kandahar province as effective as MRRD.

It is this aspect of the strategy that raises concerns about the idea of a signature project in Kandahar. For example, renovating the Mirwais hospital and slapping a Canadian flag on it does nothing to legitimize the Afghan government. In fact, it could send Kandaharis the clear message that Ottawa can do more for them than Kabul.

● (1605)

That said, the CIDA minister has already telegraphed the government's intent to pursue a signature project. Any such project must therefore be designed in partnership with the Afghan government and the community. Most importantly, it must reinforce the governance pillar and Afghan government legitimacy by ensuring properly supported Afghan leadership and ongoing sustained capacity-building.

There is so much need in Afghanistan that every single development partner must set priorities and leverage their own strengths. The single greatest need cited in report after report is human security, the kind of security that can be provided only by a clean and effective government, supported by a professional public administration system, effective conflict resolution and judicial systems, and security forces that perform their duty with honour. Canada should focus its traditional strengths in these areas at both the national and subnational levels.

Public administration and governance reform efforts in Kabul have been ill-disciplined and fragmented since the fall of the Taliban regime. Despite the expenditure of large amounts of money and the presence of hundreds of international technical assistants, there is still no comprehensive strategy to reform the entire system and its processes. Canada could exercise leadership in this area by working closely with the UN and the World Bank to develop the necessary strategy and to focus international efforts.

The actual shape of this effort needs further analysis, but it could range from the provision of senior officials to manage the program to reinforcement of the Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan with governance professionals, and widening its mandate accordingly.

There is also a desperate need to extend good governance to Kandahar Province. The entire subnational governance structure in Afghanistan is problematic, and I'm being generous. Corruption, weak capacity, and arbitrary decision-making are all common. Clearly, projects intended to correct this situation in Kandahar should be a Canadian priority. This must include projects designed to reform the public administration system, the police and security forces, the penal system, and the control of public finances. At the same time, Canadian efforts must also focus on assisting the Afghan government in its efforts to deliver basic services to the population.

In the simplest terms, most Afghans want the same things that Canadians wanted in 1867: peace, order, and good government. Our development efforts must focus on helping them achieve this.

In conclusion, I'd like to close by emphasizing the importance of this mission to the people of Afghanistan. I often begin and end presentations on Afghanistan with a quote from the Melian dialogue, which says that "the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they must". This expression of political realism has characterized Afghan history, politics, and society for far too long. Overcoming the predators is crucial to the future of Afghanistan and its people. This will take time, a long time. It is simply impossible to repair the damage wrought by three decades of conflict in a matter of a few years. It is easy to see the physical damage to the country's infrastructure and institutions, and those are things that are repairable with money and time. It is, on the other hand, more difficult to see the damage that constant conflict has done to the social fabric of the country, and the issues of human security, good governance, and human capacity are far more difficult to fix than are bridges, roads, and schools.

The international community has failed because of a lack of strategic vision, and in some cases strategic hubris, to establish the conditions required for human security and good governance. I believe that Canada can help rectify this reality by exercising leadership internationally and in Kabul. The first steps have been taken in Ottawa. I also strongly believe that the development of a public Afghan strategy, the appointment of a prime ministerial envoy, supported by a strategic coordination team, and a development focus that reinforces the legitimacy of the Afghan government in Kabul and Kandahar would, over time, rectify most of the strategic errors of the past few years.

Afghanistan and Afghans are often complex and contradictory. Proud, hardworking, and resilient, the Afghan people have learned to survive the worst. The Soviet invasion, a vicious civil war, the Taliban, U.S. bombing, and now a persistent insurgency have combined to destroy the state's institutions and society's traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution.

● (1610)

My biggest fear is that in its frustration with slow progress, confusing politics, and weak governments, the international community will blame the victim and simply abandon Afghanistan and Afghans yet again. Others have made the national interest argument against this course of action.

Perhaps strangely for a former soldier, I will simply remind the committee that Afghanistan is at or near the bottom of every single UN human development indicator. Canada, a country at or near the top of the same indicators, made a strong commitment when we signed the compact in 2006. We reinforced that commitment when the UN Security Council endorsed it, and we have further strengthened it with the human sacrifice that we are all too well aware of.

Opponents of the mission often recite the litany of failures and issues as proof that stabilizing Afghanistan and ameliorating its grinding poverty is mission impossible—as in the *Globe and Mail* article last Saturday, entitled "Mission impossible?"—and that abandoning the country is the only option. This is simply wrong-headed, and would consign Afghans to a few more decades of predation and violence.

The only moral response, in my opinion, is to absorb the lessons of the past few years and exercise the kind of political leadership that is essential to an effective Afghan international strategy, the kind of leadership that Canada and Canadians are known for.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move into our first round of questioning. We'll go to Mr. Martin for seven minutes.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you all very much for being here. Your interventions were all superb.

No one is going to blame the victims. We all know the horrible history of Afghanistan. But I have to ask, at the end of the day are we really going to be able to take a feudal, tribal, Islamic country and change it into a maybe secular, human-rights-embracing nation without generations and generations of intervention by us? And maybe, even with that, it isn't what we, (a), should be doing, because it would be an act of hubris; and (b), it may not be possible at all.

I believe, at the end, that maybe our most pragmatic solution perhaps would be to enable the Afghan people to provide for their own security—through enabling them to have a competent judiciary, police force, army, and correctional system—and to on top of that be able to engage in the development initiatives that are congruent with what they want to have done.

Can you walk us through what specifically we can do, practically speaking, to end the culture of impunity, particularly within Mr. Karzai's government, that undermines, I think, his government in the eyes of his citizens against this backdrop of what we have seen with the narco-warlords, the corruption that is endemic within his country?

Secondly, can you tell us what we can do, practically speaking, to engage in the tribal reconciliation that is required on the ground, I believe, to mend bridges that have been destroyed over the last 30 years of conflict?

Lastly, perhaps Alex or Hilary could tell us how we can practically strengthen an Afghan judiciary congruent with the cultural environment that exists within the country.

Thank you.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Madam Homes, do you want to begin?

Mrs. Hilary Homes: Yes. That was an immense series of questions.

Sometimes we think there's a huge gulf between what we talk about as universal human rights values and what the average person in Afghanistan might. A number of organizations have done studies on what the Afghan people want in terms of addressing impunity. One of those organizations was the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. They released a very good report a couple of years ago called "A Call for Justice", which I would really recommend reading. It's quite thick. I have a copy I can leave behind for you.

They went outside the cities to talk to people in formal and informal settings and ask them what they wanted. They found that contrary to what a lot of people assumed, 90% of the people supported what we consider very classic examples of how to combat impunity. They supported what we call vetting—in other words, removing people from office who are perpetrators of human rights violations or other serious forms of criminality, not down the road but now.

The second area was what we call truth seeking—the establishment of something like a truth commission, or other less formal ways of bringing out the story of what has happened. Compensation was the third area—some sort of reparation for what has happened. The fourth area was prosecutions and criminal justice.

So the gap isn't as big as we think it is. Those are recommendations that an organization like Amnesty International makes all the time. How to get there clearly involves things like a lot of training of all the sectors of the justice system together. You need to focus on everything from the judiciary through to police systems, corrections, rehabilitation, and so on, and bring it together.

Part of what often happens is that the priority is very much on the army and the police and not so much on these other areas. They're sort of left to wobble all over the place. That's a fundamental part of the problem and why people lose faith; it's why their hopes are dashed. But this often becomes the lower priority. It simply has to be raised up to be a strategic program, instead of sort of this, then this, then this. To give you an exact plan with all 150 steps would be hard to do right now. I recommend reading this report, and I will leave you my copy if you like. That's fine.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Homes.

Colonel Capstick.

Col M.D. Capstick: I'll just make a couple of points on that package of questions.

In the first place, what we have to appreciate about Afghan society is that we have a very limited view of it, because we are focused on Kandahar province, one of the most rural and deprived areas of the country. Those of us who have worked there find that Afghan society is far more diverse than you would get the impression of by looking at it from here.

This is an Afghan-led process. During the presidential elections in October 2004 and the parliamentary elections in September 2005, the vast majority of Afghans voted in favour of a moderate Islamic republic; they voted against the extremes. We haven't been able to follow through properly on that vote of confidence.

One of the biggest problems—and I think it goes to the question of this culture of impunity—is that when Karzai first formed that government, it was the result of classic brokerage politics. It was like forming a Canadian cabinet in the early 1900s; you needed some from here and some from there, and some from everywhere. The big difference was that their "some from here, there, and everywhere" had guns, and some had pretty bad track records.

Grant is far more qualified than I to talk about the elected people with some pretty bad track records. But key to getting rid of this culture of impunity is that as the international community presses President Karzai's soft spot and says, clean up your act, we have to figure out the mechanisms to support him at the same time. I'll tell you what, if I were President Karzai—God forbid, I don't know why anyone would want that job, as it's second only in terms of security risks to Musharraf's—or if I were an Afghan cabinet minister, I'm not too sure how confident I would be that what we had said when we signed the Afghanistan Compact was true. I'm not too sure how confident I would be, in particular, in the west's real commitment to Afghanistan. All of this wobbling sends a very, very strong signal to Kabul.

I think, Dr. Martin, we're going to disagree on tribal reconciliation forever. Many of the problems in the Pashtun belt.... There are some problems because certain Pashtun tribes—Pashtun is an ethnic group, but with various tribes—feel left out of the process, because they didn't get in the process in the first place. A huge percentage of the problems down there are Pashtu tribe on tribe—and that's a very complicated exercise. There are several prominent Pashtu in the government, including the president and Minister Atmar, and it goes on and on and on.

I guess I'll end it there. I could go on all afternoon on a little rant.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Capstick.

Unfortunately, we have gone on three minutes too long, and I want to get to Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

You have seven minutes.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I just have one point for our guests: each party has seven minutes, including the questions and answers, so try to make your answers fairly concise.

Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Madam, gentlemen, for coming here today.

I will try to put myself in the shoes of the average person following developments in Afghanistan in the newspapers and through the representations of parliamentarians. Most people realize that they do not have enough credible information to form on opinion on the mission. The vast majority of people would like to see our soldiers ordered home. The members of the Bloc Québécois are not saying that the mission should end. However, we believe that the focus of the mission should shift, so that Canadian soldiers are allowed to do what they do best. It should be left to those countries that, for the time being, do not want to assume their responsibilities to wage war.

People often tell us that we have abandoned our soldiers, but I believe the very opposite is true. We feel that as Canadians, we have done our share and we would prefer to do what we do best. People are struggling to understand the plight of the soldiers. We want the Canadians in Afghanistan to act in accordance with Canadian values, to abide by the terms of the treaties Canada has signed and to act in a manner that Canadians can relate to.

We have heard about the soldiers who were turned over to Afghan authorities and subsequently tortured. This practice ceased, but then started up again. Can you tell me, Mr. Neve, what concrete steps the Canadian government or the Canadian Forces have taken to avoid a recurrence of this situation, if soldiers are turned over to Afghan authorities? Has anything really been done and can we be assured that the continuation of this practice will not have the exact same results as before?

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Barbot.

Mr. Neve.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Neve: There are likely a number of options as to what could be done to ensure our approach to handling prisoners in Afghanistan accords with our international legal obligations. We absolutely agree and accept that some of the measures that have been taken—improving monitoring, one official now having been brought to justice, putting some training in place—are the steps that are taking us in the right direction.

Does that mean we feel we've reached a stage where the risk of torture has diminished to such a degree that Canada can now resume transfers in a manner that's consistent with our international legal obligations? In our view, it does not. Torture in Afghanistan is too long-standing and too systematic to disappear that quickly, and the sorts of reforms that are needed are longer term.

We have put in front of the government, and not just in these last few months of controversy, but several years ago, the idea of a more collaborative joint correction strategy with the Afghan officials. It's often been represented in the media that Amnesty International is calling on Canada to build its own prison off in the wilds of Afghanistan. That's not at all what we've been suggesting. We think, number one, it's something that NATO should take on comprehensively, together. We think it's problematic that there are 34 different strategies with every country pursuing its own particular approach as to how it's going to handle prisoners. There needs to be a concerted, comprehensive NATO approach, and it needs to be collaborative with the Afghan government, and go forward in a way that's going to have some lasting penal reform impact.

It is one of the very serious human rights concerns in the country, not just for battlefield detainees, but for anyone who ends up in the Afghan prison system. Torture, arbitrary detention, cruel and inhuman treatment, abysmal prison conditions, all of that needs attention. It's all part of the country's human rights agenda, and a collaborative approach would get us there.

The Chair: Anyone else?

Mr. Capstick.

Col M.D. Capstick: I'll just add, and as scary as it is, I think I just agreed with everything Amnesty International said, but we have to very careful here. What we're talking about is what I talked about in my script. We have a failure to develop the proper governance strategy. The prison system, as important as it is, is one of a hundred systems in the country that's hollow. The human capacity is not there. It's just not there. They lose track of prisoners because the guards are illiterate. You can't keep track of people if you can't write their names down.

Through all of this, what we have to understand is that the people we're talking about, the detainees we're talking about, are, for the most part, Afghan citizens captured on Afghan sovereign territory. In the mind of the Afghan government they are Afghan criminals, no more, no less.

We have to be very careful in our conceptualization. These aren't the German POWs we shipped to Petawawa in 1944.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: However, are Afghan and French prisoners treated any differently? How so?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: No, and I didn't mean to imply that was true. What I'm saying is that from an Afghan point of view, it's an Afghan problem. The solution is in what Alex said about capacity-building in the Afghan penal system.

We need to put our money where our mouth is, and we need to put our people where our mouth is. There are practical problems with doing that. There are only enough Correctional Service of Canada officers to run the Canadian corrections systems. They're not an army. You can't find 100 of them and bring them to Afghanistan and tell them to help the Afghans run two jails in Kandahar City. We need to find solutions to that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alex Neve: I have a very brief footnote to that. I think that's why it's so critical that this be recognized as a NATO challenge in need of a NATO solution and not just something that lies on Canada's shoulders.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Colonel Capstick, you had alluded to and stated how projects have been working. You mentioned one that was working well, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. Of course we're aware of many other projects that have been, even in the Parliament itself, with the number of women who are being represented, and it goes on to the community committees that have been established and set up. You made a comment here that it's one of the most credible, but the comment is to make more of the ministries and administration as effective as that.

What are the difficulties with this effectiveness? We're really talking about the governance, administration, and infrastructure. The governance and administration are very necessary for the overall management and administration of the country. Could you identify some of the difficulties, outside of the comments from before, that might be more directed towards competency, literacy, and cultural issues that possibly you would give advice on?

● (1630)

Col M.D. Capstick: Yes, and it's a big issue.

At the end of 2001, when the Taliban fell, there was virtually no functioning apparatus of government as we would take it for granted. There was nobody in the ministries. In fact, there were a few guys in the ministries who actually kept going to work during the Taliban period. They weren't getting paid. They were trained in the communist era and have a very interesting way of understanding public administration. One of the most powerful weapons in the hands of an Afghan bureaucrat is a rubber stamp. They really love bureaucracy, but there was hardly any of it there.

This sort of rush of blood to the head occurred in 2002 to reform all these ministries. All sorts of Afghan expatriates came back. Some were very well educated, some not so well educated, and they started filling these jobs.

There are probably four different rates of pay going in the Afghan civil service right now. People funded by this project get one rate of pay. Expatriates get another rate of pay. If you just happen to be a poor Afghan who has spent his whole time in Afghanistan and joined the public service, you're getting one-quarter of the pay of your buddy who came back from Canada or the United States. The whole thing is a mess.

There is a strategy for Afghan National Army reform. One country is in change: the United States. Everybody else contributes, but there's one guy in charge, and that's the American two-star general.

There is no equivalent program for public administrative reform. There are little programs all over town that the World Bank should be coordinating.

Mr. Peter Goldring: You do have a couple of models here that seem to have been working and progressing that way—Canadian CIDA-developed and assisted models. Could none of those characteristics be taken out and expanded? Is it that we need more resources to do that? Is it being gradually done? I would think that it would be as you said.

Col M.D. Capstick: We need a leader, and we need a strategy that addresses everything from soup to nuts, from A to Z in the civil service of Afghanistan—everything.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Would you say you have the nucleus of the development that has been there? Your comment here is on what is still possible.

Col M.D. Capstick: No. MRRD is a very effective ministry for two reasons. They've had two good ministers in a row, Haneef Atmar and Ehsan Zia. Those guys were pros, and they somehow have not been tainted by everything going on around them.

There are ministries there, such as the Ministry of the Interior.... Everybody knows that most of the wheels in the Ministry of the Interior are bad guys. They're former warlords, you name it.

Mr. Peter Goldring: When we had our discussion on development and democracy, development and governance, and on other issues in other countries, one of the issues that came up is the long-term planning and strategy. It's in line with the comment earlier about developing from the educational system.

I would rather suggest that means starting with the school-age children, to bring them through the system, and seeing some improvement a generation from now. Is that a strategy you would subscribe to for the long term, and are we able to gradually build capacity leading towards that longer term?

● (1635)

Col M.D. Capstick: Yes. The real long-term solution begins with the educational system, begins with the kids, then moves on to the universities. But you still have to fill that gap, between now and 20 years from now, when those graduates are coming out the other end of the pipeline. Most importantly, you need to establish the environment of human security, where mom and dad can feel they can send their kid to school in downtown Kandahar and they're not going to get inadvertently caught in an IED or by a suicide bomber; that they're not going to be challenged on the street by some guy in a black turban asking why they are going to school. It's those kinds of things.

So it all has to happen at the same time. But you're right, the long-term strategy of education is what's going to solve it.

Mr. Grant Kippen: I would just add that there's already a large resource of educated Afghans present in the country. Those are the individuals who have grown up and been educated in Iran and Pakistan and have come back. There's a wealth of talent that just needs to be tapped at this point in time.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Is there an element of disconnect if they're educated in another country and have been living in another country? Are they able to come back and assimilate into the—

Mr. Grant Kippen: No, I wouldn't say there's a disconnect. There's just no opportunity for them to get involved.

There's a good report that was done by the Afghan research and evaluation unit on public administration reform in Afghanistan a year or two ago that lays out very succinctly what the challenges are to getting the public service up and going. Mike's comments in terms of the overall coordination are bang-on, that we just haven't stepped up to the plate internationally to help make that happen.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kippen.

We'll go to Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chairman, and thank you to our panel.

I think I'll start with Mr. Neve on the issue of detainees, because it's in our amendment to the government and the Liberal motion that's in front of the House presently, and it obviously touches on the study we're doing on the issue of detainees.

I have a straightforward question. Is Canada's process of handing over detainees more secretive today than the U.S. system of handing over detainees?

Mr. Alex Neve: Yes, in many respects it is. It's been very difficult to get reliable information about Canada's approach, and that does compare notably to other countries that are much more forthcoming with information. The U.S. government issues press releases talking about detentions, giving dates and numbers.

We've never said that we need to have access to fine, precise operational details, but we think it's important that there be enough disclosure of information of a specific enough nature that we can really understand what's happening, and have some assurance as to whether the approach meets international standards.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I saw Mr. Capstick making a gesture. From your standpoint, if we accept the premise.... And I've heard this before, that our system is more secretive than the U.S. system. They post on the Internet. You can get details of who's been detained off the website.

Mr. Capstick, why is Canada more secretive in the handing over of detainees than the U.S.?

Col M.D. Capstick: I don't know. It's a symptom of three successive governments that have proven real shaky at communicating to the Canadian people what we're doing in Afghanistan.

John Manley pointed it out, so I'm not out on too long of a limb here.

Mr. Paul Dewar: He did say that.

Col M.D. Capstick: We need to get a grip on how we're talking about Afghanistan, and a public strategy would go a long way to doing that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: One of the things Mr. Capstick touched on is the concern around people being tortured. I can tell you that when you brought up the issue in the House, it used to be, well then, you're sympathetic to the Taliban. And Mr. Capstick, you commented that these are Afghan citizens. From my standpoint, we don't want to become the enemy, if you will. So it's incredibly important.

If we look at the model, Mr. Neve, if it's not Canada building and administering prisons—and I don't want to see us do that either—then you're talking about a collaborative approach where we are clear and transparent about when we're handing over the detainees. Obviously that's something we should do and that others are doing, and then have more people on the ground.

Do the Afghans presently have enough resources in terms of their human rights oversight? We know that the oversight is with the Afghan human rights agency. Do they have enough resources presently?

● (1640)

Mr. Alex Neve: There's obviously any number of areas where one could say that resources are inadequate, and I think domestic human rights capacity, human rights monitoring, human rights institutions are areas of real concern.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission is an incredibly important institution in the country; it has done some great work. Hilary has highlighted one of their reports. There's a lot of work that they've done, not just with respect to this particular issue of battlefield detainees; that's one very specific issue in a broad human rights landscape.

So yes, there's a vital need, not just for somewhat increased resourcing, but substantially increased resourcing.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Kippen, I want to bring you in on the conversation.

I had the experience of being in Iraq this past summer. It was actually some of the work that has been done in your shop.... Practical federalism was the theme of the conference. We were discussing in Iraq the problems from the beginning, the fact that they hadn't had a discussion on governance models and not bringing in people who were seen as the enemy to the governance of Iraq.

When you look at Kabul as the central shop, if you will, and a place like Kandahar, is anyone discussing changing the governance models—i.e., the notion of federalism? Has that been discussed at all? Is there any work being done on that within Afghanistan and among people who are thinking about policy options here?

Mr. Grant Kippen: There has been that sort of discussion going on. In the constitutional *loya jirga* back in 2003-04, there was a discussion about the best form of representation, what kind of system works. As you know, Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country that is made up of a diverse group of cultures; it's not homogeneous by any stretch of the imagination. They're all looking for their place in society in their ability to have proper representation.

I think this is a discussion Canada could participate in and help facilitate in the country, but it's first steps.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Absolutely. No question.

Mr. Grant Kippen: I agree with what Mike is saying, in the sense that the institutions need to be built out. I think Afghans themselves need to understand what the system is going to do for them.

The international community came in along with the senior Afghan officials, presented democracy, and said this is the best thing since sliced bread; we had elections, now let's move on. One election does not a democracy make. We have to stay for the longer term. We have to facilitate that understanding, education, and build up the capacity. I think there are a lot of expectations from the international communities about what they would like to see Afghans do in terms of their own governance, etc., but I think we've been woefully inadequate in providing the skills and the knowledge and the capacity to make that happen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Can I ask Colonel Capstick about signature aid projects?

The Chair: Ten seconds.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I take it you're against signature aid projects.

Col M.D. Capstick: No, I'm not. What we need to do is understand what we're doing when we do a signature aid project and ensure Afghan capacity is being developed.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Khan now for five minutes, second round.

● (1645)

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen. It's been a very informative and frank conversation. It's been one of the better presentations.

I will not dwell too much on the developmental side, but I will point out that most of the work that is being done in Afghanistan relates to human rights. Whether it's education, economic capacity-building, community development and infrastructure, health, clearing of mines, eventually rule of law, supporting of the Afghan National Police, freedom of expression, they all fall under the same category of providing a building capacity towards human rights, of providing human rights in different fields, in different areas.

I am a little perplexed that we focus on one area and not appreciate the rest. I want to compliment the government for increasing over $200 million of aid towards development. It is a difficult country, if we can call that a country. It is a difficult task. I would suggest that we need not only look at the grass and the bushes, but also look at the forest. Look at the country as a whole as to what has been achieved.

By no means am I saying this is great, everything's been perfect—not at all. But we should at the same time not diminish the efforts of the international community, and particularly of Canada. When I visited Afghanistan I met the minister of rural development and I was delighted to see that the Canadian PRT people were taking that minister out to areas where the Afghan government did not have the ability to go. In those dangerous areas the Canadians were out there helping the minister.

Also, when I met with General McNeill, who was the ISAF commander at that time, he had tremendous praise for Canadians. He said we are one of the only people...that the development people move along with the military as far as Kandahar is concerned. We can laugh or joke about these things, but we must not forget that without the establishment of order there can be no security, and with no security there can be no human rights that we all want.

Without much further ado—I don't have a whole lot of time, but I could speak a lot—I have a question for Mr. Kippen as well as Mr. Capstick.

You mentioned the elections in Pakistan. Since 1947 there have been three dictatorships and several governments, as you know. I think the people of Pakistan have sent a very clear signal. Whenever there is a free and fair election, which this one, I think, was—maybe not 100%, but to a great degree—the religious parties, the fundamentalist parties, have been rejected completely, which is a wonderful thing. The government has been voted out; the secular parties have won. I think at this time we should also give a little credit to the new chief of the army staff, General Kayani, who instructed all corps commanders and intelligence agencies, right down to people working as *nasims*, as we call them—mayors in small places—that if anybody intervenes he will take very serious action against them, particularly the military. Therefore they will only be there to assist and maintain law and order; they will not intervene. That is one of the key reasons we had this election.

What I'd like to ask you, Mr. Kippen, is what the next step should be.

And very quickly, Colonel, we abandoned Afghanistan back in 1989, which I think has brought us to this stage today. What would happen to Afghanistan if we abandoned it today?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khan. You've left about ten seconds for an answer.

Mr. Kippen.

Mr. Grant Kippen: In terms of next steps, I covered that in my remarks. I think there's a tremendous opportunity for Canadian parliamentarians and the Government of Canada to develop professional working relationships with the new parliamentarians, both at the national assembly and at the provincial assemblies, particularly in Beluchistan, which borders, as everyone knows, on Kandahar province. I think the time is short and I think the opportunity needs to be grasped very quickly in order to do that.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kippen.

Colonel Capstick.

Col M.D. Capstick: My answer, as succinctly as I can put it, is that it would be an absolute tragedy to abandon Afghanistan. Chaos would ensue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Capstick.

We'll move to Mr. Wilfert now. He has five minutes.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm sorry I missed the presentations, but it couldn't be helped.

Colonel Capstick, with regard to your final comments that I did catch, you talked about the lack of strategic vision and the need to focus priority on legitimacy for the Afghan government down the road, to try to correct some of the strategic errors, which will take time.

This is a NATO-led mission, which has more caveats in it than pretty well any NATO mission before. Do you believe that there is a political will to succeed in Afghanistan, both by NATO and by the Afghan government?

And secondly, what is your view on the issue of building capacity at the village level? We have done a lot of work at the national level, but the failure to inculcate values dealing with issues such as clean water, jobs, etc.... At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what the government in Kabul does, it's what is going on at the village level that matters, in my view.

Could you comment on that?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

Mr. Capstick.

Col M.D. Capstick: I think we have to be clear here on the structure of the Afghan mission. The Afghan mission is a UN-led mission. The United Nations assistance mission in Afghanistan are the people who are supposed to be coordinating the governance and development pillars.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: They're supposed to be.

Col M.D. Capstick: NATO is in charge in the security pillar, so it's not NATO running development and governance.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I should have said "NATO-led", in terms of the execution.

Col M.D. Capstick: Only on the military side, though. On the rest, it's UNAMA and the big multilateral organizations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund—that whole alphabet soup that's involved there.

Is there political will? Well, you're the folks who can answer that.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I'm referring more to political will in Afghanistan and among the NATO partners.

Col M.D. Capstick: Well, that's very hard for me to judge. I believe there is a political will in Afghanistan. It was expressed during two elections. It's expressed in opinion poll after opinion poll. And it's expressed by the really good people who are working in the Government of Afghanistan at every level.

You know, we get an image sometimes that everybody is corrupt, a criminal. That's just not true. There are great people working there, trying to move it forward.

I'd be careful on this caveat thing, and I've used this example before. I commanded the Canadian contingent in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the NATO stabilization force in 1997-98, and I needed the approval of the Minister of National Defence to move an infantry company across the boundary to support the British battle group that was next to us that was under the same divisional command. So we have to be very careful about slinging mud on this caveat thing. We're not pure as the driven snow.

On the village thing, you're right. Afghans need to see the results of their government serving them where they live—at the village level. But even more important than that is establishing that sense of human security I spoke about. You can build all the wells in the world, but if buddy is still afraid to send his kids to school, you've built wells but you haven't planted the seeds for sustaining it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kippen, did you want to jump in on this, or not?

Mr. Grant Kippen: No. I totally agree with what Mike has said.

I would say that I don't believe we've done everything we can at the national level yet. I think more needs to be done. But as we all know, the need is so vast and great in Afghanistan. How do you divvy up the resources that the international community is prepared to expend there?

We need to be doing more at the village level. The national solidarity program and the community development councils are perfect examples. Unfortunately, particularly with this national solidarity program, there's limited money in the fund that will allow multiple or recurring projects in a particular village. Right now, once they have money for a project, they're off. They're waiting for the next phase.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kippen.

We will move to Mr. Lebel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for that excellent and interesting presentation.

I am trying to wrap my head around today's presentations. If I understand correctly, getting the Afghan people involved in the fate of their country is not out of the realm of possibility. That is what everyone has been saying for some time now. Regarding the signature project, Col. Capstick said that if the Afghan people did not commit to this initiative, it would still serve as leverage for development. I understand that you are not opposed to the signature project. Therefore, it is a matter of asking the Afghan people to pursue a project in partnership with Canada, even though several opposition parties said at the time that we needed to train the Afghan people, the soldiers, the army, and so forth.

What I understand from your message is that whatever initiatives we undertake in this country, they must include the Afghan people. With respect to the signature project, a coordinated effort is not a sure thing. In fact, you said earlier that a number of actions must be coordinated simultaneously. What do you recommend we do, as politicians, to ensure that development goals are met? This has always been one of our key concerns.

My question is for Col. Capstick.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Capstick.

Col M.D. Capstick: Merci.

I think what's crucial, as I suggested in the presentation—in fact I don't think I suggested, I think I was pretty blunt about it—is that Canada needs to have a public strategy: Canada's Afghanistan strategy. It needs to be laid out very clearly what our objectives are.

It's not only soldiers that respond at the behest of the democratically elected leaders of our country. Department of Foreign Affairs officials and development officials are all under the political control, ultimately, of Parliament, where it comes together. So we need to be very clear about what we want to accomplish, what way we're going to try to do it, and what means we are going to use. Then it will start to come together, I believe.

I don't think we have time to get more specific than that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Lebel: You stated your preference for a Canadian plan that would be carried out in partnership with the Afghan people and community. What must Canada do to sell this plan to the Afghan people and to all of the other countries?

[*English*]

Col M.D. Capstick: The mechanisms to actually manage it are on the ground now. When the Afghanistan Compact was signed and the interim ANDS was presented, a whole governing structure was put in place in the government of Afghanistan. It ends with a joint coordinating and monitoring board that is co-chaired by the UN mission and the government of Afghanistan.

You can have all the structure you want, but the behaviours of the parties involved haven't changed. That's what takes political leadership, and that's what can be accomplished with a combination of a UN envoy with some influence and a prominent Canadian prime ministerial envoy, I think, who can walk into the U.S. ambassador and say that we have to get this online.

It's so complicated that a Canadian foreign service officer can do the diplomatic thing, but he can't be expected to coordinate diplomacy, development, defence, corrections, and police reform. It's a hugely complex operation.

We need the political will to make it happen.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Capstick.

[*Translation*]

You have three minutes, Mr. Carrier.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, , BQ): I too would like to congratulate you on your highly informative presentation. Each and everyone of our constituents is interested in this matter.

I was, however, surprised to learn from the Amnesty International witnesses, that there are many civilian victims, that people's civil rights had been violated and that prisoners were still being tortured. I find it somewhat discouraging to see the little good that has been accomplished during our five years on the ground in this country.

Col. Capstick recommended that a special envoy be appointed to report on all of our government's efforts. I think that would help the situation. Currently, the only information that we are getting about the war in Afghanistan is military in nature, or has to do with the soldiers who are being killed. Perhaps we could hear eventually about the accomplishments, about improved governance structures that help the country to function better. However, I'm puzzled when I hear how long it will take to accomplish this feat.

My colleague Mr. Lebel asked the question that I had in mind for you. One recommendation is to appoint a special envoy to coordinate efforts. However, what guarantee do we have that all UN countries will agree to take a coordinated approach? We may want to approach matters from a Canadian perspective, but if each country goes off in a different direction, we will not necessarily achieve the best results.

● (1700)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carrier.

Mr. Capstick.

Col M.D. Capstick: In my presentation, I was explicit in saying that whatever Canadian country strategy we have, it has to accord or line up with the Afghanistan Compact. It also has to support Afghanistan's national development strategy, a very comprehensive —if flawed—document. That thing was put together in a matter of months, and it demonstrates the talent that's available in Afghanistan among Afghans. It was Afghan-led. And it was absolutely amazing that they got it done in about three months—but it needs work.

What we need to be able to do is to transmit political will from Ottawa to Kabul, and to use our diplomatic skills and influence, the ability of a prominent Canadian, a John Manley kind of guy, to herd the cats in Kabul, if you will. That's the only way you're going to do it, because nobody follows orders; there is no such thing as orders.

So that's my suggestion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Capstick.

We want to thank all of you for being with us today. I would agree with a number of colleagues from all parties that this has been one of the most informative meetings we've had on this. So we thank you for your presentations.

We're going to suspend for about one minute. We have votes, and the bells will start in ten minutes, and we do have some committee business we want to deal with.

Thanks so much for coming here.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1705)

The Chair: All right, committee, we'll call you back to order.

The first thing on the committee's business agenda is to ratify the report that came out of our steering committee.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I would like us to start by dispensing with the motion concerning the Omar Khadr case, since this is a very timely issue and the trial is currently under way.

[*English*]

The Chair: Well, I know.

Madame Barbot, we first have to ratify this. We're going to ratify the steering committee report, and then we will go to motions.

On the Khadr motion, we will—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I'm asking that we make an exception and that we debate the motion concerning Omar Khadr before tackling the rest.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, the steering committee report goes first, and then we go to the motions.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Could I ask why, Mr. Chairman? I'm asking the committee to deal on a priority basis with the Khadr motion because if it passes, there will be some scheduling changes.

[*English*]

An hon. member: Mr. Chair, point of order.

The Chair: On the point of order, I'll rule on it without.... Just hold on.

Last week, we had already laid out that we wanted to quickly ratify the steering committee report. It could take one or two minutes; then we will move to the motions.

Now, if your Khadr motion is the first one up, we can deal with it. If it's the second, third, or fourth, there's a process to get to it. But in the meantime, it's the steering committee report that we will ratify.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: If the motion is adopted, the schedule of the steering committee will be modified. That's why I want us to lead off with this motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Your Khadr motion isn't even your first motion.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Yes, but that's precisely the point, Mr. Chairman. I'm asking for the committee's consent to deal with an urgent motion, given the circumstances.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. It will take unanimous consent.

Do we have unanimous consent to leave the steering committee report and to move—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: The consent of the majority is required, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, it doesn't carry.

Let's go back to the steering committee report. We still may get to the motion, but let's hurry and get through the steering committee report.

Last Tuesday, February 26, the steering committee met to discuss the business of this committee. You have the report in front of you.

While this is not mentioned in this report, I would also like to report to the committee that the subcommittee is now up and running. The names have been brought forward and they are preparing to meet. They actually had their first meeting today and they elected their chair. So we would commend all those members of that committee.

Do you know who the chair is?

Mr. Gerald Schmitz (Committee Researcher): I think Scott Reid is.

The Chair: Scott Reid is the chair. We congratulate him on that position.

Do we have any questions arising out of the steering committee report?

Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Chairman, since I will be away on a mission this coming April 8, would it be possible to change the date that we are supposed to consider the report on Haiti to April 3? That was the date scheduled to discuss the Sudan and Burma. Could we switch the schedules around?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): The calendar that was prepared lays out very clearly all of our timing, and it goes all the way down to April 29. Am I right?

● (1710)

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: So there's no opening anywhere?

Mr. Gerald Schmitz: Unless you want to decide to bump something else.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Unless we want to decide to change the thing, right? But the steering committee is already done with this thing here.

The question, with due respect to Madame Barbot, is that we have all the other ones here, and I don't see why we should change April 8 to.... I'm sure she can let the colleague who is replacing her do the Haiti study. I know she's from Haiti and would like to be involved in that.

Don't shake your head, Madame, when I'm putting something forward. You have never agreed to anything that I have put forward.

Well, that's the way it goes.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, thank you for that intervention.

If we can accommodate that, let's try. My feeling is that we'll try to accommodate that.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I don't know.

The Chair: You don't know?

Well, I'm going to make the decision here that if it can be accommodated, just as a courtesy to Madame Barbot, we should do it. We'll try to switch those days. The witnesses haven't been contacted or confirmed yet.

Are there any other questions coming out of the report?

Monsieur Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Chair, not on the last one, but on the last before the last motion concerning the Japanese ambassador, I just have one question.

Are we going to invite the Japanese ambassador and the officials to the same meeting? For me, it's relevant. You invite either the ambassador or the Department of Foreign Affairs, or you've got one hour for each.

The way it's drafted, we're going to get both together.

The Chair: No; there will be one hour, and then the next hour.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I'm going to let you know the Japanese ambassador won't be available then, so I'm going to put it off for now. But I'm doing another venue with him, anyway, which you'll be invited to, so we can leave that open.

The Chair: Okay.

The intention was never to put the department together with an ambassador. I don't think they'd even appear. That may be changed anyway.

Anything else there, Mr. Patry? Good point.

Mr. Bernard Patry: “Diplomatic relationship”, what do you mean by “diplomatic relationship”? Is it economic? Is it social? What do you mean? Just diplomacy, about the closing of Osaka? Consular? I have no clue.

The Chair: This was Mr. Wilfert's motion.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I just want to understand.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: He's not coming.

Mr. Bernard Patry: He's not coming. Okay, good.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: But if he is, I will make sure you're there. I'll have another venue for you.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Okay.

The Chair: All right.

So anything else on the...?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I have a point.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, sorry, I didn't see you.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Yes.

Following the line of Mr. Patry, do I understand we are going to be doing a study on Japan?

The Chair: No.

Let's keep this part of it focused so we can get to the motion. No, there is no—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Don't push the thing. We want to discuss these things. Motions are motions, but let's go through it, let's have a debate.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I'm withdrawing the Japan one off the table.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No, I want to know the intent. Do you want to tell us the intent?

The Chair: I think we thought he would be available at that time, and he's not. Mr. Wilfert had asked to have him here, and it's not going to work out.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: So do I understand April 17 is open?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: That's what I said earlier, it's now open.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: It's now open?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Yes, sir.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: All right, we can—

The Chair: We can fill in there somewhere else.

I want to get back to Madame Barbot, so continue, Mr. Obhrai. Or are you done?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No, I'm not done. How can I be done with this?

Mr. Chairman, I want to go back. Now that April 17 is free....

The Chair: We don't have to decide that. The steering committee can decide that later. This was the proposed one.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: So we can decide the dates, right?

The Chair: Yes. All right?

Do we have a motion to accept Mr. Dewar's report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

● (1715)

The Chair: Moving into our motions, the first motion that appears on the order paper is Mr. Dewar's motion.

Madame Barbot.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Chairman, I propose that we deal with the motion on the Omar Khadr case first, given the urgent nature of this matter and the fact that a trial is currently under way. It is extremely important that we come to a decision relatively soon.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Barbot has made a motion that we move in the order of priority. Her motion is one of the second-last motions that have been brought forward.

That becomes debatable. Madame Barbot has made the motion that the Khadr motion be brought forward to be discussed at this time:

> Whereas Omar Khadr, a young Canadian, will soon be facing trial by military commission on allegations of war crimes; whereas he is the only foreign....

And so on.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Hang on. What do you mean, and so on?

The Chair: You have it in front of you:

> ...and whereas his trial would be the first in which a tribunal would rule on war crimes committed by a child soldier, therefore it is proposed:
>
> That the Committee invite to appear, as soon as possible, first and foremost, Omar Khadr's lawyers and experts to explain why they are calling for all accusations against Khadr to be dismissed; and
>
> Secondly, that the Minister of Foreign Affairs and relevant government representatives be invited to appear before the committee to report on measures taken with respect to this file.

Here's the problem. The bells have started. We now need a motion and we have to have unanimous consent to continue.

We'll go to the clerk on this and she can tell us the House procedure.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Angela Crandall): Pursuant to Standing Order 115(5), the committee has to have a motion by unanimous consent to continue sitting once the bells have started ringing.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we do not have the time to continue on the other motions. The bells are ringing. So we thank you for your presence here today.

We are adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
http://www.parl.gc.ca
