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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): *Bonjour, chers collèagues*. Welcome.

This is meeting 18 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Tuesday, March 11, 2008.

I would remind everyone today that these proceedings are televised. I would also ask our guests at the back of the committee room if they would please turn off their cellphones, and to each one of the participants here, as well, disable your ringing devices, including cellphones and BlackBerrys.

Today our committee continues our work on the study of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. For this report that we're in the process of drafting we have spent many months studying Canada's role in Afghanistan, both the security aspect as well as the developmental aspect. To that end today, we will have before us witnesses representing the independent panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan.

We will have to ask our media friends to avail themselves of the opportunity right now to leave the room. We appreciate your willingness to be here.

As already mentioned, we have three members of the panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan here, three individuals who really need no introduction. First of all, the Honourable John Manley is back with us today as chair of the committee, and with him are two panellists, two members of that committee, Mr. Derek Burney, as well as Ms. Pamela Wallin.

We welcome all of you here today to the foreign affairs committee.

There are no opening statements from our panel. We will proceed immediately into the first round of questioning.

We want, as a committee, to thank you for your work and your time and your dedication in bringing forward your report. It's a report that we have looked at, that all Canadians have had the opportunity to look at. It's caused a lot of debate, and we appreciate that. I think all parties, all Canadians, want to be well educated as to what you've learned while you were there and while you met with others, so we appreciate the hard work you've done.

Without further ado, we'll go into the first round. Because we do have unanimous consent, we will have ten-minute rounds.

I'll welcome comments from Mr. Wilfert.

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

I'll be splitting my time with my colleague, Bernard Patry.

I'd like to welcome the members of the independent panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan, and I'd particularly like to welcome John Manley, my former boss when I was a parliamentary secretary to the minister of the day.

Mr. Chairman, one of the main recommendations of your report was that Canada's continued military presence should be contingent on obtaining from NATO an additional battle group of about 1,000 soldiers. How did you arrive at that, given the fact, for example, that in testimony before this committee on February 14, retired General Lewis MacKenzie said he would recommend 4,000 additional troops in Kandahar Province alone, and 10,000 more in southern Afghanistan? Other military experts have suggested 5,000. These numbers are drastically higher than what the panel has recommended.

Can you assure this committee you're confident in this 1,000 additional troops? Because we have asked the government on repeated occasions for clarification on the 1,000, and they have basically suggested that we ask you.

I'll turn that over to members of the panel.

● (1535)

Hon. John Manley (Chair, Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan): I'm glad to know that nothing has changed since I left.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I know you'd be disappointed if it had.

Hon. John Manley: I thought, when question period was going to be hot, that you should come as parliamentary secretary and answer the questions.

First of all, maybe I could preface answering your question by saying that coming to the conclusion that Canada's continued engagement should be conditional was something that we reached over a long period of deliberation. It really was based on a first conclusion that Canada's role in Afghanistan was one that was just and noble and right, and an appropriate extension of Canadian foreign policy, but it should not be done in a naive way, and neither should we be putting our young people at risk if there weren't a reasonable likelihood that they would be able to succeed in the task that they were taking on with great courage.

We then began to look at some of the conditions. Quite frankly, we're not military experts either. NATO itself published numbers with respect to what troop levels should be. If my memory serves me, in the south generally, not specific to Kandahar, it was published that the additional increment should be in the order of 4,000 troops, which made the recommendations we received from our military, particularly generals Hillier and Laroche, that what was required in Kandahar province was an additional battle group of 1,000 soldiers. In our report we recommended that this should be the minimum that Canada should be looking for.

What I'll do, Mr. Chairman, if it's okay, is invite my colleagues to say something, if they want. I found over the weeks we worked together that they were rather shy, but they may feel that they would like to add something to my responses. So if that's agreeable, Mr. Chair, I would just invite them to say what they feel they wish to say.

The Chair: Yes, thank you, Mr. Manley. We welcome any comments from any of the panellists.

Mr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Manley, Ms. Wallin and Mr. Burney.

Mr. Manley, your second recommendation on the deployment of additional combat troops, as my colleague has just mentioned, does it in some way imply a rotation of Canadian troops?

[*English*]

You acknowledge that no insurgency can be defeated through military force alone, and you emphasize the importance of the other Ds, development and diplomacy.

[*Translation*]

On the development plan as such, you say the following: "CIDA's internal procedures should be altered as necessary to facilitate this shift in emphasis." *(p. 36 in the English version*).

As I understand it, this could mean that CIDA has failed in Afghanistan. What are the procedures that CIDA should alter?

Hon. John Manley: Certainly, we rotate troops back to Canada. Normally, it is for a period of six months, but with regard to the rotation of troops in other roles in the NATO force...

Yes, we would like to see roles rotated, because things are more difficult in the south. But there is no real rotation principle. NATO needs to insist that, as an organization, it has made important decisions for Afghanistan. All member countries have the obligation to participate. We cannot just say that there should be a rotation. Canadians decided to go to Kandahar. There are advantages because, after a number of years there, we have a better grasp of the situation in Afghanistan. We have already made an investment there.

It has been said that CIDA is important for our activities in Afghanistan. The mission has to change. We must put more effort into reconstruction and development in order to help the population and to improve their situation. While it is good to help international and multilateral groups and the Afghan government, in Kandahar province, CIDA and the non-governmental organizations working with it must be able to put projects in place. It is not just a question of having programs, it is a question of projects that the population can see. This is the change we recommended.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Burney (Panellist, Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan): I would just add in answer to the second part of your question, Mr. Patry, that I think, first of all, the most essential ingredient for development in Kandahar is security. Without security, there can be no development.

Rather than being critical of what CIDA is doing, I think what we were emphasizing is that this is, after all, a war zone and that normal procedures for the kind of development assistance that is normally conveyed by CIDA is not directly applicable to the situation. So what we were recommending, in essence, was that there be a change in procedures that would enable a quicker response to some of the more basic needs of the people in Kandahar whose area has been made secure by our military activity. That's what we were concerned about, the ability of CIDA to react quickly, to provide assistance such as wells for drinking water, health care centres, very basic needs of the people, so that the full strategy of secure, hold, and develop in a war zone is applied in an efficient manner.

The change in procedure that we were emphasizing and the change of emphasis that we were recommending was to key it more to the reconstruction effort, the immediate needs of the people in Kandahar, as opposed to the longer-term needs of the Afghan government to develop capability and competence to run a government.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burney.

Ms. Wallin.

Ms. Pamela Wallin (Panellist, Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan): I just want to emphasize that point, because we heard from Afghans themselves that while we are spending huge sums of money on the aid and development front, many people weren't aware of it. It wasn't visible to them. While they have generous feelings towards Canadians and believe that we're there helping and for all the right reasons, they didn't know when we were helping with education or health care, or those things, because a lot of the money is diverted through other delivery mechanisms. So there wasn't credit where credit was due.

We also heard from our soldiers, from our troops, that to have a more complete image and not be just the soldiers, the troops who are tackling the enemy, but to be the people who are providing an answer to the problems that the Afghan people face makes their job on both fronts easier. It makes the soldiers' job easier, and the development and aid workers' jobs, if those are seen as an entire package, and not the military and the development seen as separate forums.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Barbot, you have 10 minutes.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In your report, you make no mention of an end date, a date by which Canada should withdraw from Afghanistan. By so doing, you are, in a way, flying in the face of the majority of Canadians who have said that they want Canada to withdraw its troops.

So not only have you not stuck to 2009, you have not really indicated the date by which Canada would leave the country. But we are part of this coalition with a number of other countries—38 countries, if memory serves—and we do not understand why Canada must maintain its presence in the most dangerous part of the region, when there are other countries, in our view, who could also do their part. Canada could then become involved in other aspects of the mission with which we are more familiar, such as aid.

Other countries have set an end date. The Netherlands, for example, has recently stated that it wants to leave Oruzgan on July 30, 2010. So why could Canada not do the same thing? Why does this responsibility of being in a war zone fall to us entirely? Does it mean that Canadians should look forward to being in Afghanistan indefinitely?

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Barbot

Mr. Manley.

Hon. John Manley: First of all, I would say that it is important to understand that we are not alone. We have no partners in Kandahar province, but there are others in the south and they are conducting very difficult operations. Next to us, in Helman province, we have the British and the Danes. The Netherlands is in Oruzgan with the Australians. The Americans are in the south with the Romanians.

We have chosen a difficult task, but we are not alone. We are certainly working with others, and we think that NATO should find a partner to work with us in Kandahar.

Why did we not recommend a withdrawal date? We discussed it, and we said that our mission "should not be half-hearted nor open-ended". But we found it impossible to determine the date by which we could state that our mission would end. We can, however, say which tasks we need to accomplish. We felt that we would be able to leave the region when the army and the police were in a position to provide security for the Afghan people, and that is not a date that we can specify.

Now, as I understand it, Parliament is going to decide on an end date. In my view, this is Parliament's role, not our panel's. So it must now decide which tasks we must accomplish and by when, so that, in 2011, we will be able to say that we can withdraw our troops and that our task will be complete. That is the role of our officials.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Given the job that needs to be done and all the criticism that the Manley report has levelled at the mission up to now, do you really think that 1,000 more soldiers could really be an effective addition to Canadian troops? In fact, we are seeing very limited results. So 1,000 soldiers in just one part...You said yourself that there are other soldiers elsewhere, but I imagine that they have the same problem. There are about 58,000 troops in total. To what extent could 1,000 more soldiers in one part of the country make a difference?

Hon. John Manley: That is a good question. First of all, I will say that our task was not to decide how many soldiers are needed in Afghanistan as a whole. That is something that we did not try to determine. We expressed no opinion on the matter. We must understand that about 2,500 members of the Canadian Forces are in Kandahar, of whom 1,000 are in combat roles. So when we say that we need a combat group of 1,000 soldiers, that would effectively double the number of soldiers on the ground in Kandahar, which would help us to implement the strategy that Mr. Burney has just explained. This consists in holding the land that we have won so that reconstruction and development can continue. So we will be able to increase our efforts to train the security forces, the army and the police. Because if it is our goal to leave Afghanistan in a few years, the Afghans will have to be able to carry on. We are training them at the moment, not in a military college, but in the field with our troops, in quite difficult situations. But if we increased the size of our force, we could also increase the training.

● (1550)

[*English*]

Ms. Pamela Wallin: And nobody is more motivated than the Afghans themselves. We heard this from a huge variety of political people—governors, leaders, and tribal council members. They believe they are and will soon be capable of taking the lead, and they want that role.

Many of them apologized to us for the loss and sacrifice of our own troops there to help them. They are highly motivated. They are a very proud and dedicated people, and they want to take control of their own country. They said to us, “We want you to be able to go home as soon as you can, and we are working as hard as we can to get up to speed so we can take the lead and be in charge”. When you're working with people like that who are so motivated and committed, you don't want to walk out on them until they're ready.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Of course I understand the Afghans' motivation; we would be doing the same thing if we were in their shoes. But in our effort to help them, we must not lose sight of our own reality. How long will Canada be able to keep 2,500 soldiers there? We are getting more and more casualties. So all Canadians should be asking ourselves the question. How long can our war effort continue? In the Manley Report, you call for additional effort, you say that there should be 1,000 more people. But there is nothing that says that we should have achieved such and such a result by such and such a date. Up to now, there have not been many results. That concerns me a little.

[*English*]

Ms. Pamela Wallin: I don't think you can just put dates on those things. I was trying to impart that they are motivated to make this happen as quickly as possible, but they are dependent on us, and we are dependent on our NATO partners and allies. That's why we have asked our NATO partners to step up to the plate.

Yes, we asked to go to Kandahar. We took on that assignment willingly, but we need assistance and help. We think that because this is a UN-sponsored, NATO-led mission, we should be able to turn to our NATO partners and say "Send in a little help, because that will help us get the job done more quickly and effectively".

Mr. Derek Burney: We did recommend a specific date for the conditions we set. We did say we should get this support in terms of troops and new equipment for the Canadian Forces by February 2009. Otherwise, Canada should serve notice of its intent to transfer responsibility for security in Kandahar to somebody else.

We're not in a position to know whether those conditions are being met. That's not our responsibility. But we did set a precise date for the conditions to be met.

It's a very different issue to talk about when the mission is going to be completed. You can either assume that you can put an arbitrary timeline on a mission as complicated as this.... As the chairman said, we spent a lot of time debating this, to see. We knew Canadians would have loved to have heard from the panel, you know, that by December 31 in such-and-such a year, our mission would be accomplished. We found no operational logic that would lead us to a time certain for the completion of the mission. We saw the mission being performance-based, not time-based.

We fully expect that the Afghan security forces will be taking the lead responsibility for security to some extent in the coming year and in the coming two to three years. But when the point will be that they will be able to take full charge for security in Kandahar, there's nobody who could give a guarantee about that today, as far as we can see from an operational standpoint. Politically, that's a different matter. We were not making a political recommendation.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burney.

We'll move to the government side. The parliamentary secretary, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the panel for coming in front of the committee. As you know, we have a debate going on, and you're part of the debate. We have the debate in the House. It took this side of the House quite, I should say, some persuasion to have my colleagues, my friends on the other side, to agree for you to come. Initially, they were reluctant for you to come. I don't know why. But anyway, you are here.

Hon. John Manley: So we were well announced.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: We are very happy you're here as part of the debate that's going on.

As you know, since your report was released the government has taken concrete steps to implement a number of the recommendations you have stated. Of course, even this motion that is in front of the House to be debated with input from the Liberal Party as well.... I want to tell my colleague from the Bloc, that motion does have an end date in there that she's seeking. So she should read that motion, which is going to be coming up for debate.

As you know, from what you have recommended, as well, the Prime Minister has called NATO allies looking for the 1,000 troops. He's going to Bucharest for their thing. He's also done a cabinet committee on that. Mr. Mulroney, sitting in the back there, is part of it. What do you think of the government steps so far in achieving the objective of what you have recommended to the government? That's question one.

Question two is that recently a British parliamentary delegation came to Canada looking at their role. One thing they were really surprised about was that Canadians do not go to Afghanistan to see the level of progress, to understand what is happening and how the progress is ticking on, so they can come back and report to Canadians. I'm talking about Canadians in general; I'm not talking about one panel like yourselves or somebody. This would help Canadians understand the tremendous sacrifice and the involvement of Canadians in Afghanistan. Don't you think that would be a good recommendation to have?

Hon. John Manley: Let me take a crack at those questions, Mr. Obhrai.

First of all, as I know very well, this city is full of bookshelves containing reports done by royal commissions, panels, committees, special task forces, and dare I say, parliamentary committees, which have never been reread, let alone acted upon.

So, in general, I would have to say, speaking for myself and I think my colleagues, we're delighted that the government has adopted much of what we recommended. We're especially delighted that it appears that Parliament has proven one of the ways it can work to reach a consensus, at least a majority consensus, on an issue that is of great importance to Canadians and on which the country's prestige and international respect has so much at stake. So we're very happy at that.

It was our belief from the outset, and certainly mine in taking on this task, that when we asked our young men and women to put their lives at risk, we must put a little bit of partisanship in the background and look to the interests of the country. Whether I might agree or disagree, when our kids are putting their lives on the line, we just have to find a way to make sure we authenticate them in the task they've taken on.

With respect to going to see, I've made three visits to Afghanistan, once as the minister back in January 2002. I was the first Canadian minister, I think, in over 40 years to visit Afghanistan. Mr. Mulroney was accompanying me at the time as one of our officials. I was there again as a director of CARE Canada prior to taking on this task, and then I went with my colleagues on the panel. Each time I've learned a great deal, and I've been able therefore to observe some of the progress that's being made.

Canadians need to understand that Afghanistan is devastatingly poor. We think of Haiti as the poorest country in the western hemisphere. The per capita income in Afghanistan is one-half that of Haiti. Progress is being made little by little, bit by bit, and it's about water, electricity, housing, schools for kids, and hospitals to take care of people.

If you go—I spoke to your chairman, and I hope this committee will have an opportunity to go, although I'd suggest that you maybe go in a couple of groups rather than arriving in a caravan—you will hear from people that while they aspire to more, they recognize the progress that has been made and is being made.

Yes, it's a military mission, and, yes, Canadians are not accustomed to seeing our soldiers in battle scenes. But underlying the military mission is the fundamental task of improving the lives of some of the world's poorest and most disadvantaged people, and Canadians will be able to see the progress if they go to visit.

● (1600)

Ms. Pamela Wallin: Some of the people who said that mostly eloquently were our soldiers, our troops. People phoned me at home before we even left on our trip—soldiers who had done one, two, or even three tours voluntarily because they believed in the mission—that is, the larger mission of improving people's lives.

One soldier called me and started describing the schools and what it was like to walk into those schools and see the faces of the young girls. We got the opportunity to do just that. When you see their faces looking eagerly at these strange creatures from afar, and they reach out to you, you know that is just as much a part of this mission in every soldier's mind, every development worker's mind, as keeping the enemy at bay.

So on that side it was truly rewarding to see the progress—and you can see it.

The Chair: We have about three minutes.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): I'd like to thank and congratulate you for the work you have done and the effort you have put into this very exhaustive report. I'm sure it was very tiring. I understand you travelled into some of the remote areas to do this, so I congratulate you on it.

I want to comment on one part of the report where it's talking about a premature military withdrawal or an ill-prepared partial withdrawal.

Ms. Wallin, we had a conversation just before the committee began, and there has been some talk of negotiating with the Taliban. My concern is that you never negotiate from a point of weakness; you negotiate from a point of strength. Wars come to an end, and many who were the enemy are brought into the friendship of the government if they're willing and able to participate—not all, but most are.

On the concern about this negotiation or leaving too early, what is the feeling of the women of Afghanistan, the parliamentarians, about this issue of the Taliban? Are you convinced that they, to a person, do not want to return to the old regime of the Taliban? Is this something that is just not negotiable to them? Where do you start? Do you remove women from Parliament? Do you take away women's rights?

So are you convinced that from a woman's perspective there is much work to be done yet, and it's just too early to leave that issue until that part of it is complete?

● (1605)

Ms. Pamela Wallin: Yes, it would be absolutely fair to say that we did not meet anybody who thought it would be in any way acceptable to see a return of the Taliban regime. We drove past a stadium in Kabul where hundreds of women had been lined up and shot, merely because they were women. This is still very real. They were mothers, sisters, daughters, or relatives of some kind. So that reality and those images do not leave you soon.

But perhaps even more strongly than we understand it as outsiders coming in, the Afghans themselves realize the gradations and differences inside the Taliban. This is not some monolithic group. At one end there are the serious hardliners who are responsible for, or at least involved in, acts like 9/11—those kinds of people who are fervent and dedicated on that level. But you also have people at the other end of the spectrum who are Taliban of convenience. Because they could not receive a paycheque from our system or we weren't efficient enough in delivering it through NATO or the UN, they ended up taking money from a drug lord or a Taliban leader to feed their family and for sustenance.

So there's every gradation. You have to keep your options open in being able to talk with those further down the road who have renounced the violence and the activities and have participated in the reconstruction and rebuilding of that country. But it's hard to judge that from afar. That's why we have all kinds of people on the ground—diplomatic, development, military—who can help us assess that, so when we get to those points, if we do, we're talking to the right people about the right things.

The Chair: Thank you again.

Hon. John Manley: I would just add a couple of thoughts, Mr. Chairman.

I think it's really important to recognize that this insurgency, unless it's the first time ever, will not end in military success. It will end because of a political agreement that will resolve some of the issues there. As we said in our report, some of the Taliban committed very serious offences. Some of them, quite frankly, should be taken to the International Criminal Court in The Hague for things they did, for example, in Bamyan province to the Hazaras people, who are Shiite, and some of them for other incredible atrocities that were committed.

We must not lose sight of the fact that ultimately a political solution must be found. It must be conditioned, of course, upon appropriate respect for human rights, including the rights of women and others. It must be conditioned on the renunciation of violence. We mustn't get ourselves into the position where we think no political reconciliation is possible and that we're prepared to fight to the last Taliban, because quite frankly, we will never reach that point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Manley.

We'll go to Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our guests for the work they have done and for being here today.

Just to clear the record—and I'll speak for myself as an opposition member—it wasn't not wanting to have you at committee, it was the way in which you would present yourself at committee. Initially, the government came forward and said we should have a joint committee of defence and foreign affairs and have you present as well as government members and be televised and then go to the House. We said no thank you; we have our work as a committee, and we are independent from the government. This is how we arrived at your being here today. I thank my colleague for his comments on that.

Let's turn to the task of your report. I echo my leader and others who have said they encourage all Canadians to read this report. It's extremely important for the aforementioned reasons.

I think it's safe to say that the question before us, before Canadians, before Parliament, is not whether Canada should help Afghanistan, but how. I say that as someone who is from a party that has a different view from the government and the official opposition on how to do that. One of the recommendations we've already touched on is to provide a thousand more troops from another NATO country. It's not a surprise to me, and I think this has already been agreed upon, by the way. I think it's a matter of where they come from. If not France, it looks as if it's probably the United States.

One of the concerns I have is command and control. I'm a new member of Parliament, and one of the first debates we had was on the extension of the war to the current deadline, which we'll vote on tomorrow, and it looks as if there will be an extension to 2011. During that debate, many people were not aware, and I include members of Parliament, that we were under Operation Enduring Freedom command and control, and that didn't end until July, you noted in your report.

My first question is, if we receive the extra thousand troops and they happen to be from the United States, how does that work in command and control? We know the Americans will not go under the command and control of another country. Does that mean that Canada will then be under American command and control, or will they have a separate command and control? This leads to other questions about the comprehensive nature of how the mission is going. Of course, that's one of the issues you've touched on.

Mr. Manley, maybe to you first.

● (1610)

Hon. John Manley: Thank you.

We were first of all seized with the ability to succeed in the mission defined for us there, which in order to achieve the development objectives required an improved security situation, and that required the additional troops. The organizational structure of Operation Enduring Freedom prevailed until NATO took over, but at an operational level, if I understand correctly, it has been a long time since we have put our troops under the direct command and control of another country. We had a rather unfortunate experience with that at Dieppe, and we've sought to maintain our own command and control of our forces since that time. I think what you point to will inevitably be an issue around coordination of effort.

Clearly, we think Canadian Forces should be going toward a greater effort on training and development of the Afghan security forces. That is going to require coordination in order to make sure the hold and development efforts are proceeding apace. But there will need to be a coordinated effort.

There are command structures for the regional command south, which we're part of. Currently it happens to be a Canadian in charge; prior to that, it was a Brit. But that doesn't mean they tell the Canadian troops where to go or what to do or how to conduct themselves.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I appreciate that.

There are still 12,000 troops under Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, as you know. My concern, though, is that under the operational practice of the Americans.... It was brought to this committee by Colonel Capstick and others as a real concern—who we are following. I agree with you. I hope we don't follow the wrong direction and the wrong mission, which is solely the counter-insurgency. In simplistic language, it's find the bad guys, get them, and kill them. I don't want to see our folks in there.

I talked to a constitutent yesterday, whose son is serving, about making sure that we contemplate this thoroughly and seriously. She totally disagrees with the mission, and she is very concerned. She was actually calling me because of the vote coming up.

I'm concerned that if we don't understand the consequences of getting, in this case, a thousand troops from the United States, who actually gets to decide what's going on? And with the number of American troops there now, it has affected—I won't give you an opinion on it—what we're doing on the ground in the south. That's why I asked the question.

I would like to turn to what I think is a question on many people's minds, and you've already touched on it. There's a consensus that you can't win this militarily. We've heard it over and over again, from people in the military, in development, from the opposition side, from government—well, not so much the government side, but you hear it time and time again. The government seems to have taken from your report what I'm calling a "mini-surge", that a thousand troops and more helicopters and drones will somehow get the job done. I didn't see that in your report.

I'm looking toward and our party has been pushing for how we open up other avenues, particularly around reconciliation and diplomacy. We don't have enough resources on the ground for that, and it's not balanced. In heaven's name, what are we to do? I don't think you were trying to say give us a thousand troops, helicopters and drones, and that's it. And that's what I'm hearing from the government.

● (1615)

Hon. John Manley: Yes, and I would hope that is not the way our report is read by anyone, because we've tried very hard to emphasize that this is an opportunity. When I was foreign minister we were then first talking about the three-D approach, that you have diplomacy and development as well as defence.

We can't win it militarily. We could lose it militarily, however. So we can't send the Salvation Army in; we have to send the Canadian army in. And they have to be equipped, capable, and able to do the job. But if that's all we do, you're right, this will not end happily. It will end in an awkward way and in a disappointing way.

What we've tried to say is that for the safety and security of our forces.... Nobody likes to take casualties, not that we should be afraid of taking casualties. But this is a tough place, and I would not like us to think that Canada does only the easy jobs in the world, that we go only to places where we can dispense aid and then take our vacation on the weekends off. This is a tough, tough environment.

But these are human beings who live there who we're trying to help. So we need the security. We need the ability to move our troops around so that they're safer, which is why we talked about helicopters. We need to be able to see what the insurgents are doing on the ground, which is why the drones are so important. These are all valuable tools to improve the security situation. But goodness, if we forget the fact that we're there to improve people's lives, to give them a government that can look after them when we're gone, then really we're wasting our time.

The Chair: Ms. Wallin.

Ms. Pamela Wallin: I have a couple of points.

You can't separate the equipment from the mission. It is our intention and it was our fervent belief, I think, on the part of the panel members that it is our responsibility as a country to look after our troops and those we ask to make this kind of sacrifice before, during, and after. But certainly during, they need that equipment. When you see the situation.... We were fortunate enough in some cases to be in helicopters. Our young soldiers are on roads that are filled with IEDs, and they are losing life and limb. We need to have better equipment into that area.

I want to just respond a little bit on the American side, too, because I think you may be misunderstanding. The OEF is not just a straight military operation. We met with representatives of OEF—

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, I understand. It's a separate one.

My only point was that it's not under the ISAP auspice; it's a separate command and control.

Ms. Pamela Wallin: Right, but they are very much involved with development.

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, I take your point. Thank you.

Ms. Pamela Wallin: What we said also in the report was that we'd like to see NATO much better coordinated, and then the delivery of all of the things we're talking about would, I think, come faster and be a little bit more efficient.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move back to the government side. Mr. Khan, please, for five minutes.

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

I'm delighted to see the report. I read it with interest, and I'm glad that finally we will not be debating from the superficial information that we've had in the past.

I would like to bring your attention to and receive your comment on how you envisage the type of engagement we can have with Pakistan. Your report calls for a forceful representation with Afghanistan's neighbours, and in particular Pakistan, to reduce the risk posed to regional stability and security. In your assessment, to what extent does the security of Afghanistan, particularly in Kandahar, depend on developments in Pakistan?

I'd also like to add that when you wrote these comments there was a lot of disturbance in Pakistan, and I agree—insurgency thrives in chaos. But since then there has been an election. The country seems to be on the road to democracy. If you talk to the Pakistanis, they will tell us—as they will tell you, probably—that they have a hundred thousand soldiers deployed, and they've taken heavy casualties. They have one full corps deployed in Peshawar.

I would like you to shed some light as to what type of engagement we're talking about. Are we talking about two different prisms—increasing the capacity to tackle the problem, or strictly a diplomatic offensive?

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khan.

Mr. Manley.

Hon. John Manley: I'm going to ask Mr. Burney to make some comment on this as well, from his experience. But I'd say, first of all, I think we observed the elections in Pakistan with the first sense of optimism about the state of affairs in that country in a long, long time. As we noted in our report, we were writing around the time of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, and things looked very grim indeed. I think the defeat of the Islamic extremists in the election can only be described as a promising sign.

There is no question that the inability to secure the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, together with the financial assistance that has been so readily available to the insurgency—we think, as we said in our report, to some considerable extent from the gulf states and from citizens of Saudi Arabia—is undermining the safety and security of Canadian Forces and other ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Therefore, if there were a way to deal with this, needless to say, that would be very promising. Therefore, I think most of us on the panel would agree with the assessment that Pakistan has been perhaps the most dangerous place on the planet, and its future impacts directly on Afghanistan.

What can Canada do? Truly, we are limited in our relations with Pakistan to diplomatic measures. We are an aid provider to Pakistan. I think that should give us at least some leverage. But we need, more particularly, to act in concert with our allies in dealing with Pakistan, encouraging them and assisting them where they are willing, to help crack down on what's happening in the western provinces.

Derek.

Mr. Derek Burney: I would just reinforce the view that this is the most dangerous region in the world. You have nuclear weapon states surrounding Afghanistan—some actual, some potential. Unquestionably, the open border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is, next to the shortage of troops, probably the most serious deficiency in the mission to try to counter the insurgency in Afghanistan.

One of the reasons for the recommendation on augmenting troops is obviously to provide a capacity to help patrol that border with the Afghans that we don't have today. As long as that border is as wide open as it is, the insurgents will constantly be refinanced, retrained, and regrouped and will come back into Kandahar to create mischief.

I just want to emphasize, though, in addition, John's final comment.

Our first recommendation, the very first recommendation in the panel report, speaks to the need for a diplomatic effort, led by the Prime Minister, not only with respect directly to Afghanistan and the need for a more comprehensive strategy there and more coordination, but precisely so that we work in concert with our allies to exercise representations with Pakistan in a manner that is sensitive to Pakistan's sovereignty but helps address the root of the issue, a large part of which is in Pakistan.

As our chairman said, we are encouraged by the result of the election, particularly the result of the election in the border regions. We hope that's a promising sign, but everybody knows we're a long way from any kind of total joy about stability in Pakistan.

I would just want to re-emphasize to your committee that this is the most dangerous region in the world that we're talking about. This is not picnic grounds. A lot of people focus a lot of attention elsewhere, but when you consider the countries that surround Pakistan and the capacity for mischief that is in that region, you understand the complexity and the tension that goes with the mission we're performing.

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burney.

We will proceed back to the opposition side. Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm sharing my time with Mr. Chan.

Thank you all very much for being here and for your fine work.

I find it interesting that we went into Afghanistan to deal with al-Qaeda, but the real threats from a terrorism perspective are in other countries right now, and they're not being dealt with at all—but maybe that's a tale for another day.

We spend a lot of time talking about the military component in the mission, but what if I were to pose to you that the real end point for this mission is the sustainable development of the four pillars of Afghanistan's security—trained, equipped, and paid Afghan police, Afghan army, Afghan judiciary, and Afghan corrections—and that should be our end point? Maybe when we go to Bucharest our goal should be to tell our partners, let's roll up our sleeves and make sure that those four pillars are going to be having the investment and that we're going to have a coordinated, effective, sustainable approach to building those four pillars.

Lastly, perhaps you could shed some light onto what kind of concrete road map you could offer us to deal with the culture of impunity in Mr. Karzai's government, and secondly, developing the political reconciliation that has to occur within Afghanistan between the tribes, particularly between the Pashtun tribes and the non-Pashtun tribes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Chan, you have a couple of minutes.

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): I join my colleagues in thanking you, the panel, for your great work. It is a very complex matter, and you have tried to summarize it in your report. Of course, there are many issues related to the mission that I'm very concerned about, but there are a few that stand out in my mind.

The first concern I have is that there doesn't seem to be enough commitment from NATO and the west compared to their commitment in Yugoslavia, when they were dealing with that problem. That is both in the military and in the amount of aid dollars they're willing to invest in Afghanistan.

The second problem I have is that, yes, we have picked the most dangerous region to be in, but I don't think it's fair that just because we started in that region, we have to stick to it until the end. I think it's important that the other NATO members assist, step by step, and pick up that experience we've gained. Yes, we have to make an investment in it. But we also owe it to our troops and to our youth, as you have said, if we're putting their lives on the line, to make it our responsibility, politically and nationally, to get a fair bargain on our commitment rather than having Canadian soldiers do most of the heavy lifting. We continue to do that without bargaining for a better deal for our soldiers.

The third point I have is that you talk about a diplomatic effort in the region. Many of the witnesses who have come to this committee have mentioned reconciliation and a democratic effort in parallel with our military effort, led by the United Nations. I think Canadians might even have a role on that front.

Those are the three points that linger in my mind.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chan.

You left our committee with about a minute to answer those fairly comprehensive questions.

Mr. Manley, you can do it.

Hon. John Manley: We may run a little over.

Those are important questions, and they're not easy questions.

Let me start by saying that I think the committee entirely agrees that those four pillars Mr. Martin referred to need to be accomplished.

We need to have reasonable expectations of what success will look like. We will not establish the Court of Queen's Bench in Kandahar province. We will need to rely heavily on traditional methods of dispute resolution, the wisdom of elders, and the respect people have in their own communities in order to see a reasonable system of justice established.

In the case of the police, it takes time to train police. It takes longer to train police than it takes to train soldiers. We need to recognize the fact that while everyone will tell you that the Afghan National Army is probably one of the great success stories of the last few years and is growing in its capacity, size, and ability, the police would not be described as a success story. There are some better things happening, but even the basic things, as I think Mr. Dewar referred to, like getting them paid, is problematic. There's no ATM machine at the Walmart in Kandahar. Getting them paid is really challenging. Well, if you don't pay your police, and they get killed at a faster rate than soldiers, it's not surprising if they set up a bit of a toll booth on the highway.

These are important problems. One of the reasons we called for a very active coordination of effort was to try to tackle some of those issues as well as the question, as you put it, of the culture of impunity, which we called corruption, that you see in the government. Once again, we're not going to get Afghanistan very high on Transparency International's list of countries, but we can make improvements.

The worry we have is that if we don't really insist, which is what we suggest needs to be done on a diplomatic level, that President Karzai and his ministers deal with the issue of corruption, we are seen—not just Canada, but the international community—as the sponsors of that government, and we become implicated in the corruption people see.

If you hear one thing on this question about support for the Taliban—and there is zero support for the Taliban—there is a recognition that the Taliban may have been a lot of things, but they weren't corrupt. We have to be concerned that if the effort isn't there to address those issues, support will be lost.

● (1630)

Mr. Derek Burney: I'll just add a point on the corruption issue, and I do it with some sensitivity to the fact that you're all elected members of Parliament.

You have to understand that some of the people who have been involved with practices that we want to condemn were elected to the national assembly in Afghanistan. We even met a Stalinist—an unreconstructed communist—who would like to see a return of the Soviet Union to Afghanistan. So the point I'm trying to make is that sometimes when you sow the seeds of democracy, you don't get a pristine verdict from the electorate. There may be many reasons why some of these people are elected by their local people, but it's very difficult for the international community to go in and impose a standard of democracy that suits our interests, as opposed to what they see as being in their interest.

I'm not excusing it; I'm just trying to put it in with a degree of realism that it may be a little unusual.

Ms. Pamela Wallin: That's one of the things we discovered, with our mentality of what we think is important and we want to impose—we want to make sure there are women's rights and we want to make sure there's a judicial system. And they would look back at us and say, “That's great, but first we need some clean water and some schools and a little bit of health care, and then we will figure that out.” So we also have to listen to the folks there and do it in the order that's going to work.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Raymond Chan: I hope we'll have a chance—

The Chair: We'll try to get you in, Mr. Chan. You've already gone six minutes over your round.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lebel, you have five minutes.

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

Panel Chair Manley, Ms. Wallin, Mr. Burney, thank you for being here today and for your work.

As soon as I read Mr. Manley's foreword, I was struck by the different aspects and issues that influence Canada's presence in Afghanistan. The security of our country, Canada, and of the rest of the world, our reputation on the international stage and our ability to contribute to the well-being of one of the poorest peoples on earth all had an effect on me. Last week, we welcomed six Afghan women who had been democratically elected to the Afghan Parliament. They came to tell us about the great good that is coming from Canada's presence there and the major results that have been achieved.

Earlier, you spoke about the rotation of Canadian troops. At this very moment, soldiers from other parts of Canada are going to Afghanistan and a number of soldiers are coming home to Quebec. As several from my constituency were in Afghanistan, I have called and spoken to some of them. They all told me of their pride in the work they have done. I spoke to one young man who was brought home a little earlier. Two months ago, his wife gave birth to a little girl. He told me that, had it not been for the birth, he would have asked to extend his tour of duty in Afghanistan for three months in order to help with the work being done there. His brother will be coming home in two days.

Another soldier told me that he found it impossible to think about reconstruction and development without a military presence and the security needed for those responsibilities to be taken on. We may well want to do development and reconstruction work, but without the military to provide follow-up and security, it is impossible.

I would like to know your opinion about that.

● (1635)

Hon. John Manley: For us, that was a fundamental principle and we tried to explain it clearly in our report. Security and reconstruction are linked and we cannot forget that. At the moment, it is not possible to advance the cause of reconstruction and development in Afghanistan without having the military force necessary to guarantee the security of workers, of representatives of non-governmental organizations and of those of CIDA or other international aid agencies. This is necessary in a dangerous situation. An alternative government in the form of the Taliban would like to establish itself. They are ready to say that no progress has been made, that the international forces are providing nothing and that another uprising is needed. Conflict exists, and it is clear to us that we must continue our security efforts if we want to continue development.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lebel.

Ms. Deschamps.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Right off the bat, I would like to make it clear that I am not a big expert in military matters or strategy. But human rights, the rights of women and democracy interest me greatly.

Mr. Manley, in your report, you state that Canada should invest in projects that meet the urgent needs of the Afghan people. In connection with the present mission in Afghanistan, a witness recently told this committee, and I quote: "The priorities and the efforts of the mission seem confused. Everyone has their own priorities." By "everyone", he was speaking of the United Nations, NATO, the United States and Canada. He also asked himself this question: "Are we really in Afghanistan because the Afghans asked us to be there?"

I refer to the questions from the witness because I am also pondering the words of Ms. Malalai Joya, the Afghan parliamentarian who was expelled because of her criticism of, among others, the Afghan government. She claims that the Canadian presence in Afghanistan is changing absolutely nothing in the situation of women in the country. Many Afghan women commit suicide. Just a few days ago, an Afghan woman set herself on fire in front of a court because she could not obtain justice.

Through her website, Ms. Malalai Joya provides information to women's groups here about the situation in Afghanistan. She also says that the great majority of the Afghan population sees Canadian troops as invaders, not as an allied force that is trying to help them. What is your response to that?

Let me conclude by repeating her words: the Canadian presence is changing absolutely nothing in the situation of women in the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Deschamps.

Mr. Manley.

Hon. John Manley: Thank you, Ms. Deschamps.

I do not know what Ms. Joya is basing those statements on. I first visited Afghanistan in January 2002 when I was deputy prime minister. When I was in Kabul, I visited a CIDA project run by the NGO CARE. That was the reason why I agreed to become involved with CARE Canada after leaving politics. The project involved giving widows in Kabul enough food so that they could survive. CIDA is one of the few international aid organizations that continued to work in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime.

I met those widows; there were 30,000 of them in Kabul. The goal of the CARE project, the Canadian project, was to help 10,000 of them. All it involved was giving them a sack of wheat, a sack of beans and a bottle of canola oil per month. One woman told me that her husband had been killed during the civil war, leaving her with six children, the youngest six months old. At first, she worked, but when the Taliban arrived, she could no longer do so. She asked me to thank everyone when I got back to Canada for saving her children's lives.

Six years later, our panel went back. Now, the CIDA and CARE project is not just a humanitarian project. The widows are involved in a development program, they receive micro-loans to help them create their own jobs. This is a significant change that has been brought about in a few years.

Can we say that people there are living in comfort like ours in Canada or the United States? No, not at all. This is a country that is twice as poor as Haiti. It is still a problem. Has the situation improved? Let us hear what your witness has to say, but as far as I am concerned, I have seen an improvement.

● (1640)

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: I would like to add something.

[*English*]

The Chair: Very quickly, very quickly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: The witness I referred to, Mr. Manley, is a retired army lieutenant-colonel.

Hon. John Manley: Who is it?

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Landry.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Obhrai, please.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you.

This is a question that I'm just posing to the panel. I've alluded to the British parliamentarians coming here and talking about Afghanistan and their contribution, and all of that. One of the questions I asked them was if there was any political party in the British Parliament that is asking for an immediate withdrawal of British troops, and they said no, not a single one. Yet here we have, of course, one party alluding to that factor, and there's a difference of opinion over whether we should leave now and then do all of the other things.

My question is what impact that statement would have back in Afghanistan, not here, among the people in Afghanistan. But in our debate here, we have this issue of immediate withdrawal. Now, would that have a negative impact on security, would it have a negative impact on reaching the political settlement we're all talking about as quite necessary over there, because then they would say, well, why? It seems to me that out of all the other countries, no other party has asked for this.

I know this is a politically sensitive issue, but I think it's best that it be addressed. We just can't put it under a rock. Let's just go ahead on this.

● (1645)

Hon. John Manley: Mr. Obhrai, of course I don't do party politics. And we didn't try to write a report in any way written from a partisan point of view. I think most fair observers have said that we were critical of governments—plural—of different political stripes in some of the things we said in our report. We made recommendations that were fundamentally based on our view of what was in the national interest.

Perhaps I can put it this way: if you believe Canada should have an active role projecting Canadian values abroad, then that's a principle, and if you subscribe to that principle, then you need to ask yourself, how does any country do that?

I held the view for a long time—I held it when I was the Minister of Foreign Affairs—that there are essentially only three ways countries can influence the world and project their values. There is development assistance, there is diplomacy, and there is defence. Now, it's entirely legitimate to take the view that we should do only one or two of those things. That's a legitimate point of view. But it's not a point of view I share.

When I became foreign minister, I actually thought Canada punched above its weight in the world. It's something we all said, and we were all very proud of Lester B. Pearson's Nobel Prize and its legacy. But I discovered that in many of the international clubs we were members of, we didn't in fact have much of a voice. Quite frankly—well, I said it once, and the Prime Minister didn't like it that much, but I'll say it again—we sat at the table, and when the waiter came with the cheque, we excused ourselves and went to the washroom. That's not a way to project our values.

I believe in a robust foreign policy for Canada because I believe this country has an enormous amount to offer. I believe we have an enormous responsibility because of the wealth that, for whatever reason, we have inherited. It's therefore our duty.

Now, I'm not going to take issue with those who think we should only do development assistance, or maybe some diplomacy, or we shouldn't do military—that's not my role, even though I don't agree with that point of view—but I will take serious issue with anyone who says that Canada should just retreat into fortress North America and not play that role in the world. On that I'll take them on.

Ms. Pamela Wallin: I think there are implications. And we saw, as other countries debated whether they would stay or go, that it doesn't help for those who are fighting for democracy and freedom on the ground. It does make it a little difficult.

We can't solve all of the world's problems, but we see from the results of polling across the country—you know it from talking to your own constituents, I'm sure—that Canadians don't see Canada as a spectator nation. They see Canada as a participant nation. The question is, are we living up to that self-image? We need a bit of a reality check on where our contributions are and what we're doing.

Afghanistan, as John has said, has put us back at the table. We are there in all of the three Ds. We are there in every way. The presence is real. We now have voice because we are putting our lives and our values on the line. It does give us respect in the international community, and I think that's valuable, because you want the Canadian voice to be shared. We need to be able to comment, and to criticize NATO and our allies in it. If we believe in a multilateral approach and those organizations, the UN and what not, we need to be able to criticize it, but you can't do that if you're not a participant, if you're not there.

Now that we are at the table, it gives us our voice back to really engage, not just to solve the problems of Afghanistan but to deal with some of the issues of the international community and whether those mechanisms, such as the UN and NATO, are as effective and efficient as they can be. We have a responsibility—and now a right, I think—to engage in that conversation.

● (1650)

The Chair: Very quickly, Mr. Burney.

Mr. Derek Burney: I would like to conclude the non-political discussion we just had by quoting my chairman. It's always useful, with a former deputy prime minister, to quote him:

> If we are not willing to lend our military resources when asked to do so by the United Nations, in a mission coordinated by NATO, in a country whose democratically elected government wants us and whose citizens desperately need us, then we wonder where and when Canada would do so.

If the answer is we're not going to perform that kind of mission, then that means we might as well shut down the military and rely exclusively on the United States for our defence.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we'll move to the NDP. Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I appreciate the points from my colleague across the way. I think I prefaced my comments last time, my last turn around, to say that it's not about whether we should help Afghanistan, it's about how we do it. For those who have a certain stereotype in their minds about our party, you should know that it's not to withdraw to any fortress, it's to engage.

I know, Mr. Manley, you appreciate that. I'm not sure my colleague across the way does. In fact, as someone who left university and went and worked for six months in a war zone at the age of 22, I have personal experience as to what it means to be in harm's way, and I was doing it not in the military but as a development worker. So I appreciate the fact that there are other ways of doing it.

I also have to say that the three-D approach that you mentioned, Mr. Manley, sadly is in imbalance right now. You said that in the report.

At the committee, when I asked a deputy minister where is three-D, because it wasn't being mentioned in his presentation, he said that we don't use that term any more; we now use the "whole of government" approach.

My concern is that we aren't in balance. Today we hear that we're a billion dollars over budget in terms of the military expenditure. We hear from on-the-ground people that the situation in security is getting worse. The day-to-day lives of Afghans is not getting better compared to a couple years ago. Civilian deaths are up, and some of those sadly have to do with the conflict we're engaged in—not meditated by us, of course, but that's the cold, hard reality of what's going on in Afghanistan.

We've heard time and time again from people who have come before our committee saying we have to change the way we're doing things. They point to the other two Ds. I was shocked at committee when I heard that we had nine DFAIT and six CIDA people on the ground. The government has since changed those numbers, but how the heck do we do three-D—well, they don't do three-D, it's called the whole of government approach—when we don't have the requisite resources? I know you mentioned that in your report.

But I also have to talk about—and we haven't brought it up today—the way we're doing our development.

You, Mr. Manley, were with CARE before. I want to quote to you another John—that is, John Watson. As you know, he has been very critical of how we've been doing development. He said "There's no question that there are many more schools being burned than being built, and that's because the military is engaged in the building of the schools. The schools are looked upon as part of the conflict."

My question is around signature projects. I believe, after hearing from witnesses, people on the ground, that they're not the way to go, and quite frankly, I don't think Canadians care if there's a Canadian flag on the school, particularly if, as Mr. Watson says, it's going to put people in harm's way.

So I have two questions, on the three Ds and how we do aid, and is the military actually the appropriate vehicle for delivering aid and doing aid?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Manley.

Hon. John Manley: First, I entirely agree that we've been deficient in the resources we've made available on the other Ds. But I'd have to say, although we have kind of the image in Canada that we're doing all the heavy lifting and the military is dominant, let's face facts here.

We have 2,500; we can't put another 1,000 of our own troops in. Britain is not twice our size. They have many times more soldiers, not only in Afghanistan but elsewhere in the world, than we do.

If you look at any of the spending numbers and pick any of the three Ds, look at the spending numbers relative to other countries that we should see as our peers. We are vastly deficient in our expenditures.

● (1655)

Mr. Paul Dewar: But within our own envelope, how much we're spending on military, we're about ten to one. That is roughly the coefficient.

Hon. John Manley: And in development, we've talked about these targets for years. I'm happy to say that I brought in an 8% annual recurring increase for development assistance when I was Minister of Finance. I'm sad to say that in the testing the department does on what focus groups think of the budget as they read through it, development assistance had the lowest score. So I think, quite frankly, that those of us who believe in the importance of development assistance need to do a lot better job talking to our citizens about why Canada has a role and responsibility, and how we can make a difference.

You know, I've had this discussion with John Watson. I think in some circumstances he's absolutely right, and on some NGOs he's absolutely right. The Red Cross, for example, has to maintain an entirely independent role in conflict situations, because that's the role they try to play; they're bringing that kind of support and assistance.

And I've had this discussion with CARE and others. Right now the largest NGOs, I believe, in terms of people on the ground in Afghanistan, are the Aga Khan Foundation and CARE, neither of which is in the south, for security reasons. And I guess my question would be, well, if you're not there doing anything because of the security risks, surely it's better to be there doing something, even with the protection of the military, than not to be there at all, so that people get the benefit of it, rather than leave the military as the only people who can deliver development assistance. I know about this, because I'm somewhat involved in that community, and this is very controversial in the development community, but I don't see a way around it.

Now, on the question of signature projects, quite frankly, our panel discussed these at some length, and you're entirely right that the Canadians don't care if Kandaharians salute the Canadian flag. They probably should care if they salute the Afghan flag, and we ought to be doing things that try to promote the development of confidence in a government structure that is going to provide assistance to its people, and not threaten its neighbours or allow its territory to be a training ground for terrorism. Somehow or other, we have to create that environment. That, in fact, is what will enable us to move our military forces out, when there's confidence that there's an Afghan government that's able to do that.

But in terms of projects, I think what our panel had in mind was this: people have to be able to identify an improvement in their lives with the efforts under way on their behalf. If they only see some of the destruction you're referring to, then it shouldn't surprise you that their confidence and their respect is going to dissipate.

Mr. Paul Dewar: To wane.

Mr. Derek Burney: I'd like to add a little point to this, if I may.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Burney.

Mr. Derek Burney: You have three of us here, so you have to make allowance for that.

The Chair: I'm not all that used to giving nine minutes to a five-minute slot, especially an NDP one.

Mr. Derek Burney: Yes, but a nine-minute question at least deserves a nine-minute response.

Hon. John Manley: Mr. Chairman, take it off our opening comments.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Burney.

Mr. Derek Burney: There is a bit of a philosophical debate about signature projects—yes or no. And we know there's a prevailing view, hard in CIDA itself, resisting that. But the point we're trying to make is that if three-quarters of the assistance Canada is giving to Afghanistan is going through multilateral channels, or government channels in Afghanistan, there's no awareness on the ground that we are doing anything.

And to your point about imbalance, which we agree with, we're not going to correct that imbalance unless there are more identifiable Canadian projects being conducted in that country. So putting a flag on it is not as important as getting recognition for Canada in Afghanistan that we're actually doing things directly for the Afghan people, and not have all of it going through multilateral channels.

Now, I know in the development community there's a debate about the efficacy of these different approaches. All I would say is that in a war zone, I think we have to be more conscious of quick impact projects that people can identify. It was frustrating for us to meet with the elders of various communities, who were totally unaware we were doing anything other than our military role. So we're trying to get more recognition, more media attention, of the third D of the triple-D—if that phrase is still in use or not.

● (1700)

Ms. Pamela Wallin: That is just as important in Canada as it is in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you very much, panel, Mr. Dewar.

With the prerogative of the chair, I would like to ask a question.

Just a number of days ago the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, presented a report to the Security Council entitled *Report of the Secretary-General to the UN Security Council on the Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security.*

In your panel's report, you recognized that issues of good governance are integral to achieving what we all want—a more secure, more stable, more democratic Afghanistan. But one of the observations of the Secretary General in his report was that

> Preparations must begin immediately on voter registration and planning for the next elections. This requires decisions by the Afghan authorities on electoral dates and the adoption of electoral legislation. The international community will need to begin mobilizing funds to support these vital processes, especially that of voter registration, which must start in the summer of 2008 in order for elections to be held in 2009.

Can I ask you to look ahead and comment on how you would recommend that Canada assist in this crucial next stage, not just of elections, but also of the democratic process? In regard to Mr. Dewar's question on signature aid, and things like those as far as democracy is concerned, Mr. Martin brought out the four areas—the corrections, the judiciary, the police, the military—but beyond the military exercise, how can Canada effectively play a role in the democratic process going on in Afghanistan and really make a difference there in this area?

Hon. John Manley: Well, the first thing I'd say is that it's right that—

The Chair: Could I just interrupt you?

We do want to thank Ms. Wallin for coming. It's five o'clock, and she has a flight to catch.

We thank you very much for being here.

A voice: We're used to her leaving us.

The Chair: You're used to her going early?

Ms. Pamela Wallin: Thank you very much for the opportunity. One of the things we concluded as a panel, and which I think we have seen in response to this report, is that the Canadian public is hungry for answers and discussion or debate, and even when we disagree, to at least have intelligent, informed conversation.

So thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

The Chair: We appreciate your attendance.

We'll go back to Mr. Manley on Canada's role in helping achieve democracy there.

Hon. John Manley: First, I want to underscore the importance of the upcoming election, in part because one of the things we're trying to instill is democratic institutions, but also because the past elections are a benchmark for how these elections will be run. By every measure, I think they were remarkably successful, given the state of affairs at the time; they will be a reference point for the 2009 elections, which I think a lot of people hope will combine both presidential and parliamentary elections. If they don't go well, it's going to be a serious problem, not just for Afghanistan, but also for the international community. So it's right that these should be focused on.

Canada actually has some history of involving ourselves with those. Elections Canada was very involved with the last round of elections. Therefore, we ought to be heavily engaged, whether it's through UN agencies or the OSCE, or wherever that coordination comes from. This is one of the things that we do quite well and should be contributing to.

Mr. Derek Burney: I would add, first of all, that improving governance is obviously a top priority from a Canadian perspective, as we understand it.

I just wanted to add that it's my understanding, Mr. Chairman, that it was a Canadian firm, a Montreal-based firm, that provided all of the basic security for the elections that were held in 2005-2006. So as a Canadian, I would hope that since these elections were conducted in a very efficient fashion, with security at the polling booths across the country, that same Canadian firm would be responsible for that portion of the elections coming, because in this kind of environment, you can appreciate just how important it is to have secure polling places for the electors.

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go again to the opposition side. Mr. Chan.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Manley was about to answer my question but ran out of time. That was about 40 minutes ago, so I just wanted to remind Mr. Manley about my three questions.

One is on the overall commitment from NATO and the west in Afghanistan. The second is on the country rotation in and out of the south, the Kandahar region. The third one is whether it is appropriate to have a parallel democratic process led by an eminent person authorized by the UN in parallel with the military intervention that we have now. We're talking about the commitment to Afghanistan as a whole.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin: I have a follow-up question.

Hon. John Manley: This time we won't get to your question.

Hon. Keith Martin: Thanks for your indulgence in our ways.

When I spoke about the four pillars, I hope that what comes out of Bucharest is that we focus with our NATO allies on the establishment of hard targets in terms of numbers and timelines for those four pillars so that the Afghan people know when we're going to leave, and we'll be able to know what hard assets are required to achieve those targets.

This is my question. In every map that I've seen over the last year, Taliban influence has actually increased in the country. Can you explain, from your perspective, why the Taliban influence is in its ascendancy, as opposed to decline?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

I guess they all want to take a crack with four questions.

For some of these, if you need to get the answer, we would appreciate a written response if possible.

Mr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Burney talked about the most dangerous region being with a neighbouring country with nuclear weapons.

Do you have any opinion concerning the silence from China and Russia on this issue?

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, I just very quickly want to ask about empowerment at the village level. When you take all these national elections aside, the real issue is what are you doing at the village level in terms of clean water, electricity, etc. There seems to be a lack of coordination among our development partners in terms of delivering on-the-ground, real results at the village level.

Could you comment on that?

The Chair: All right, so we have questions on the Taliban, on Russia and China, empowerment at the village level, and Mr. Chan's three.

Hon. John Manley: In my day there used to be pads provided. I guess too many witnesses stole them when they left, so I've been writing on my sleeves. I'm trying to remember these questions.

Actually Mr. Chan's and Mr. Martin's questions do relate to one another. Oh, here comes a pad. It's too late now. Have you written the answers on them? There are no answers on this; this won't help.

First of all, regarding the degree of the commitment, this is one of the messages in our report and one of the reasons, I think, that it's actually being read outside Canada. We have tried, without exaggerating it or making it too dramatic, to make it clear that the status quo is going poorly. The commitment is inadequate. Afghanistan could be lost. Again, it could be lost. The consequences for the international community and the consequences for NATO are serious if that happens. And it's not good enough to simply say we've got troops in this area and the security situation is permissive and we think it all looks good. We're trying to highlight for the other countries in ISAF, which are more than NATO, that this is not going well and it requires a greater commitment.

Now, on the positive side of that, you mentioned in the first round the commitment to the former Yugoslavia. To some degree I've seen this movie before, because when I became foreign minister and I first went to NATO ministers meetings, the conversation was about the former Yugoslavia. Canada had 1,800 troops in Bosnia at the time, and the recurrent refrain was “Why are the Europeans not more committed to reconstruction and security in the former Yugoslavia? After all, it's part of Europe.” And there were lots of excuses and there was lots of hot air. But I think you would have to say at this point in time that NATO members in the European Union and others have responded to the challenge, whether it's in Bosnia or Kosovo, more recently with a much greater commitment, and Canada is no longer there.

One can hope we'll see that re-created in Afghanistan, if the message could just be heard. There was a concept, you're right. You said—and I'm sorry, we're going to have a hard time getting all these questions done, but let me talk while we're at it. When we went in, in 2001, it was to pursue al-Qaeda. That was the issue of the day. We didn't actually foresee that the Taliban government would collapse like a cheap suit. They weren't defeated; they just went away, and they took their time, regrouped, rebuilt, and waited until the attention of the international community, particularly the west, was distracted by what I call the folly in Iraq. The consequence was that things could get regrouped in Afghanistan. Before we knew it, we had an all-out insurgency on our hands, partly because of neglect. It's a risky place, and it's going to require a degree of concentration.

Regarding rotation, there's no principle of rotation. We rotated out of Bosnia. Should we expect to be rotated back in? We're part of a military alliance. We've got a task to do. We stuck up our hands and volunteered to go to Kandahar, and that's where we are. My own view, and I think this is what's reflected in our report, is that we say we went to Kandahar for whatever reason, because we actually don't know what the reason was when the government took that decision. But I think we do need to look at ourselves as Canadians. I understand that your constituents get tired of this issue. They don't like hearing that soldiers are getting killed and brought home. They want to change the channel. Let's watch something else. Let's watch Darfur. Let's watch something in Southeast Asia.

● (1710)

It's frustrating. It looks as if it's not going well, but we've taken on a commitment, and it's an important one, and therefore we have to deal with it responsibly. We're a senior member of that international community. We'd better be dealing with this that we've taken on in that way.

I've forgotten what the other questions were.

The Chair: Russia and China and the village level. Mr. Burney's got them.

Mr. Derek Burney: I wrote them down. You see, I used to be an official, not a politician, so I wrote the questions down.

Hon. John Manley: And I'm used to having officials write them down.

Mr. Derek Burney: I want to add to the point about commitment. The dog that doesn't bark in this whole debate is what John alluded to in his comments. There is no question that the commitment in Afghanistan has been distracted by events in Iraq by the number one player in the military mission and the civilian mission. Don't forget, the Americans are not just involved militarily, they're making a huge development assistance contribution as well.

One of the encouraging things going forward, in my opinion—and it's far easier to find negative things to focus on in Afghanistan—is that in the eyes of the aspirants for the presidency in the United States today, from either party, this is the good war. This is the one they know they have to win on their terms of winning. So it seems to me that part of the distraction of NATO and the reluctance of NATO is a reflection of the distraction in Washington about the priority Afghanistan has had. I don't think that's going to be a problem going forward.

On the high-level representative, absolutely. The issue of the lack of coordination of the international civilian effort, the multiple agendas, each country doing its own thing.... Even within the United Nations you have individual agencies of the United Nations doing their own thing. There's a desperate need for a high-level representative pulling together the power and the capability of the UN in a concerted way. Unfortunately, the appointment of Paddy Ashdown did not materialize. We have to hope there will be some other form of high-level representative who will give that.

China and Russia obviously are potential players in the region. For good reasons that you're aware of, Mr. Chan, the Russians are in the rear seat at the moment, but nonetheless, they're very concerned. In fact, this is probably one of the few areas in the world where the current Russian government's view on Afghanistan is similar to the view of the western allies.

On China, and this is a personal view, we as a matter of our own foreign policy should be looking for ways to make the Chinese aware of their global responsibilities as a responsible stakeholder in global peace and security, not in pursuit of narrow self-interest, which is the only motivation to date of Chinese foreign policy. So yes, I think today they are a passive participant in events around Afghanistan. They should be more active. It's in their fundamental interest that there be stability in Afghanistan and in that region.

● (1715)

The Chair: The bells are ringing.

Can we have unanimous consent to stay for a couple more minutes? We're in the same building where the votes will take place, so we'll get there.

I'm going to break the order as well, because I certainly want Madame Barbot to get her round in here.

Madame Barbot, five minutes please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Thank you.

One of the aspects of the war in Afghanistan is that the public does not seem to be really concerned by what is going on. We have not yet been convinced, not made to see what is happening over there. It is a difficult position to be in. It is not that people do not want to help Afghanistan, quite the opposite. But we have not managed to get real answers. There has been a lot of talk about the lack of transparency. We have been trying to find out what is going on over there for several months and people line up to tell us that things are bad and that they will get worse if we leave. Is that enough? You will probably not be able to answer that question?

Let me tell you about a memory from my childhood. Earlier, Mr. Burney spoke about the need to put flags so that people can see what Canada is doing. It seems that people who receive aid do not see what Canada is doing any more than we see what our country is doing over there. I was born in Haiti, and unfortunately, people often talk about Haiti as being one of the poorest countries in the world, without having lived there or knowing what it is about. But that is reality, after all.

I remember when I was a child and we had natural disasters, provisions and flags were provided by the United Nations. I do not want to seem cynical when I say this, but the flags meant that you could identify the provisions when they were sold in the local market. As a child, I wondered why they did that and why those who gave the aid did it in a way that it ended up being sold in the market.

We who are in Parliament are trying to get answers and we get none. We are constantly asking why we went to that country. What exactly are we going to do? We see the focus changing all the time. First we went to Afghanistan to get rid of the Taliban. Then we were told that it was to save women. Then we spend money so that we can tell people to look at the good we are doing. On the other end, the people receiving the aid are clearly pleased to get it, but, at the same time, they never get out of their poverty. Come what may, they have most of the casualties. I am conflicted when I hear all this. These are living, breathing people whom we say we are trying to help, but, when all is said and done, the strategy makes me think that we really cannot solve the world's problems.

It may be heart-breaking, but this is really how this situation makes me feel. We have never had a true picture of what is going on, much less a true assessment of our ability to solve the problems.

Do you have any comments?

● (1720)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Barbot. There was not really a question there, but comments, and we thank you for that.

I'm going to ask Mr. Goldring. He'll have the last question of the day. Mr. Goldring, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The first point I'd like to make is as a former member of the Royal Canadian Air Force in the sixties: I hope we never send our military in harm's way without the best of kit. I think that's an extremely important comment.

You spoke of Haiti before—there's some relevancy and some comparison to Haiti—and you spoke of democracy. We did a study of Haiti, and being there on the ground in Haiti was invaluable to give us a perspective on the country. One of the things that I noticed that came out of that was the real sense—as you said, Mr. Manley—that an election doesn't necessarily make democracy, that there's a lot more involved in it than that.

I know we can build our capacity on governance, we can build our capacity on political parties, we can build all of these other things. But something that came through very plainly in Haiti was that many of the citizenry didn't understand what their representative would be doing for them, their member of Parliament. There was a very poor understanding of it.

One of the recommendations that came through was to—as in Canada—take it into the schools. I know you've been building the capacity on the schools, but the next thing is to work on the next generation and the generation to follow: that they be aware and seized with the importance of what improving a democracy means on the long term. Is that one of the observations that you made too? If you would, comment on the long-term next generation, and the generation to follow too, because those will be the people that vote.

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

Mr. Manley.

Hon. John Manley: We didn't get into what they should be teaching them in schools. It's so basic at this point. We met with a group that was very proud of their school having been built, but their main concern was that it was inadequate in size. There were so many children that they could only attend school in four shifts a day, so each child got two hours in school. The next problem in the education system is teachers being trained and paid. You're building, from the ground up, a system that has so far to go. That's why we need to be reasonable about what we can achieve and what we can really expect.

Quite frankly, we have been all over the map. Madame Barbot made the point that I think we made in our report, that in terms of transparency and communications, this has not been well understood by our population, and we are asking them for enormous sacrifices in terms of our young people and our treasury. If we don't tell people unequivocally what it's all about, it's no wonder they want to change the channel.

There are lots of reasons why we're there; we shouldn't think there's only one reason. We're there to educate children and women, establish security, and make it more difficult for al-Qaeda to use Afghanistan as a training ground from which to attack populations elsewhere. Trying to get a handle on the poppy cultivation that is destroying societies around the world is one of the reasons we are there. There are a lot of reasons why we are there, and they are good reasons. But the failure to have a coherent strategy that encompasses development, the political side, and the security side will potentially undermine our success in achieving any of those objectives.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Manley, Mr. Burney, and Ms. Wallin.

A couple of times today Mr. Mulroney has been referenced here. Mr. Manley, you mentioned that you went with him once to Afghanistan. We want to welcome Mr. David Mulroney. He is the head of the new task force on Afghanistan and he was your secretary, from what I am told. I think part of what he is doing answers the fourth and fifth recommendations in your report, as far as systematically assessing the effectiveness of Canada's role and helping cabinet and the Prime Minister to communicate why we are there, as you have stated today.

We thank your committee for your hard work, and we thank you for being here at our committee to help parliamentarians and Canadians understand clearly why we're there.

Thanks for your attendance here today.

● (1725)

Hon. John Manley: Thank you.

The Chair: We are adjourned.

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