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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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● (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

This is meeting 19 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, March 13, 2008.

Today we're continuing our study of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. We will set aside the final 30 minutes of our meeting today for committee business.

We have five witnesses today. We have the Honourable Flora MacDonald, the founder of Future Generations Canada. Ms. MacDonald has received numerous awards and recognitions. She is an officer of the Order of Canada and has been Minister of Foreign Affairs. We welcome you back to Canada's Parliament today.

We have Ms. Sally Armstrong, a journalist, human rights activist, documentary filmmaker, and award-winning author. Welcome.

From the Centre for International Governance Innovation, we have Paul Heinbecker, distinguished fellow. He served as chief foreign policy adviser to then Prime Minister Mulroney and as assistant secretary to the cabinet for foreign and defence policy. In the summer of 2000, Mr. Heinbecker was appointed ambassador and permanent representative of Canada to the United Nations.

From the University of Redlands, we have Robert Jackson, director of international relations. Professor Jackson is the author and co-author of 36 books and some 50 articles in the field of comparative Canadian and international politics. He's currently working on projects focusing on Afghanistan and North American security policy.

And from the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, we have Surendrini Wijeyaratne, policy officer, peace and conflict. She has conducted interviews in Afghanistan for the CCIC's report entitled *Afghanistan: A Study on the Prospects for Peace*.

We welcome all five of you. We apologize for being a little tardy getting here. We had votes in the House of Commons, and as you can see, we'll probably be able to go only until a quarter to five today. We look forward to your comments.

We'll ask the Honourable Flora MacDonald if she would make her comments first, please.

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Founder, Future Generations Canada, As an Individual): Thank you for your invitation. This is something of a familiar setting for me.

Today I'd like to talk to you about Afghanistan. In doing so, I may say that I read with care the mandate as set out in the motion of November 20, 2007.

First, let me mention that I have been going to Afghanistan regularly since March 2001, when the Taliban was still the government and had control over most of the country. This year, in May, I will be making my tenth trip to Afghanistan. Once there, I venture out into the high central mountains of Bamian, Parvan, Oruzgan, and further south to the provinces of Ghazni and Paktia. In these areas I travel with local people, sleep in their mud brick huts and eat their unvaried but healthy food. As a result of this long and intimate relationship with the people of Afghanistan, I would like to state certain assumptions that have a bearing on your mandate.

First, progress is being made in Afghanistan, although certainly not uniformly across the country.

Secondly, a form of local governance is emerging, although not particularly the one dictated by western thinking.

Three, rebuilding Afghanistan is going to take a long time—militarily, to continue the containment of the militant Taliban in their heartlands of Kandahar, Helmand, Zabol, Paktika, and in other provinces in the northeast and southeast. I may say that not all the Taliban are militant. Among them are people who desire peace and stability in their country, and many would willingly share those views with others. They're a political movement, and like any other political movement, there's real variation in their beliefs.

Fourth, rebuilding Afghanistan politically, economically, and socially may take even longer than it will militarily, but Afghans themselves will be able to meet these challenges if they can count on a good measure of security.

Fifth, in the broad sweep of history, Afghanistan has been around for a long time. It has suffered attacks, defeats, and partial occupation, but it has never been conquered. Even Alexander the Great had flattering comments to make when he transversed it some 2,300 years ago.

Sixth, when I first when to Afghanistan in March 2001 there were very few cars on the streets of Kabul, few men, and even fewer women. Today traffic jams are frequent. Some would call this progress in the materialistic sense. Buildings are now sprouting up in the four major centres of Kabul, Kandahar, Harat, and Mazar. A paved ring road connecting these four centres is well on the way to completion.

Seventh, but what about rural Afghanistan, where 60% of the population lives in their traditional villages? The first time I visited the Shahidan Valley in the western part of Bamian Province, a group of teenagers who had been demobilized from the warlords militias told us very bluntly that what they wanted most was to go to school. We, the NGO Future Generations, replied, "If you build yourselves a school, we'll find you a teacher." They did, and we did. Education is one of the most sought-after goals in Afghanistan.

● (1545)

Eighth, the Afghan people are hard-working and ingenious. Most villages have no electricity, so it means that once the sun goes down there, mud brick huts are without light or heat. Abdullah Barat, a man I had persuaded to leave his well-paid job here in Ottawa to return to Bamian and work with Future Generations, became the leader in helping to rebuild his valley in Bamian Province.

In cooperation with another NGO, Norwegian Church Aid, we undertook a program of buying, installing, and maintaining solar panels on the roofs of the little mud brick huts. The energy collected in the solar panels is transferred to a battery inside each house, and from there it is connected to a neon rod light in the ceiling. The artificial light immediately transforms the lives of the villagers. Children are able to study in the evenings. Women can do weaving. Men can attend to their many chores. Many tasks are simplified by the use of this battery power.

In addition, wind power and water power are also harnessed to provide additional power and filtered to provide clean drinking water.

One has to ask, how did all this happen? Primarily because the villagers came together under the leadership of Abdullah Barat, an Afghan-Canadian, to discuss how they should proceed. They decided to elect their own local councils or shuras. These shuras meet on a weekly basis, discuss the needs of the village, and then select the priorities. Records are kept of each meeting. This exercise started in one village in the Shahidan Valley. Other villages were impressed and decided to emulate it.

Today all 75 villages in the Shahidan Valley have formed their own local councils. Their next step was to form a valley council or shura, which meets monthly. It is here that local disputes are resolved before they escalate into wider conflict. In the past four years since the shura system has been in place, hundreds of local disputes have been resolved through discussion and compromise. The shura members see this as one of their key accomplishments.

One year ago the capital of Bamian Province, Bamian Town, elected its shura, and for the first time in the history of Afghanistan a woman was elected to head the shura. Four of the 10 members of that shura are women, and this is a breakthrough indeed. Bamian Province is the only one of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan to have a woman governor.

To sum up, I think the international effort in Afghanistan is important to Canada, and not just militarily, although I support the work of our Canadian Forces in Kandahar and elsewhere.

Even more, Afghanistan needs long-term development, such as Abdullah Barat and his team of Afghan volunteers are carrying out. The accomplishment of these Bamian people and their belief that they are making a difference contributes greatly to the stability of that province.

This is not to belittle the work that is being done along humanitarian lines by the military and other organizations, but it is not long-term development. To carry that out properly, Canadians have to understand, to gain a better understanding of the complexities of the Afghan people, including the diversity of their religions, their ideologies, and their ethnicities. These are the things that make up their national psyche, and they are at the root of much of the internal discord. It is important to learn from Afghans themselves and about their capabilities. That's what I hope Canada and Canadians will do.

● (1550)

Afghanistan today is still a country caught between two potential futures: a fragile democracy that moves forward slowly or a failed state. Having survived so many obstacles in the past, it has shown its tenacity and courage. Unfortunately, however, for many, the jury is still out.

The Chair: Our thanks go to the Honourable Flora MacDonald.

We will now move to Ms. Armstrong.

Ms. Sally Armstrong (Journalist, As an Individual): Thank you, and thank you for inviting me to join you today.

I wanted to speak to you about what I see Canada as having accomplished in Afghanistan. I'd like to begin by reminding you that this is a country most Canadians couldn't have found on a map seven years ago, and now we can't get it out of the headlines, we can't get it off the news, and we certainly can't get it away from our tax dollars. It is not surprising, therefore, that a lot of Canadians are starting to ask what the heck we are doing in this quite primitive country half a world away, which seems to be bent on self-destruction.

The simple answer is this: we're helping them to rebuild, as we promised we would in the Bonn Agreement that was signed in 2001, in November; and we're protecting ourselves, as we realize we must, in the traumatized aftermath of 9/11.

I began reporting out of Afghanistan soon after the Taliban took over. They took over in the fall of 1996, and I got there by March 1997. I did that because the Taliban had created a human rights catastrophe for the women and girls. It's through that lens that I've continued to report from that country and follow the fledgling development, the sometimes disastrous setbacks, but, I can say, the flickering hopes for peace.

Beating the Taliban is not the issue here. That's the same as saying you can beat the Mafia. What you can do is push the Taliban back into their caves and keep them there long enough for this government to get on its feet and learn how to govern and train a national army that can take care of their own people. These are not overnight tasks.

What Canada has done has produced some excellent results, by making interventions that have been time-sensitive, for example, in the electoral process. When people weren't even talking about when elections would happen in Afghanistan, Canada had already launched a voter registration project.

Canada was the first country to put money into the containment of heavy weapons and to put thinking into how ammunition should be dealt with.

These were very early investments and they paid off. They're not sexy, they don't make headlines, but they did pay off.

There are 700,000 micro-finance projects in the villages, which CIDA is doing, and they are enormously successful and very popular.

And as you know, it was Canada that stood up and said we'll take Kandahar, the toughest file in the nation.

The other thing is that Canada not only supported but funded to a very great extent the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which has been hailed as the single stunning success story in that country.

But six years of combined effort from 44 countries has not significantly altered the lives of Afghans. Consider that we are investing 1/25th of the military and 1/50th the aid that we put into Bosnia and Kosovo. Those are the issues that are now being reconsidered by NATO, by the UN, and by the international community, including and in particular Canada.

We need to focus on what we know how to do, and Canada knows how to do plenty. What's more, I feel that it's time to call some of the negative notions for what they are. I think Canada can do that.

For example, the fundamentalists who would prefer to see Afghanistan fail—and there are plenty of them—confuse modernity with westernization. Every single thing that's seen to be modern is denounced as western. It's time somebody raised this issue.

Human rights, for example, aren't western or eastern; they're human. But nobody is saying this. It would be easy to dismiss the criticism of the treatment of women in Afghanistan as simply western notions, but it wouldn't be correct. Once again, everything that looks like progress is dismissed as the demon west. That's just nonsense, and it's about time somebody said so.

Two of the critical assessments that were made at the beginning of this intervention turned out to be wrong and are now being addressed.

For example, it was thought that development and reconstruction would be automatic and that small investments would have big payoffs and put the country back on its feet. It didn't happen.

● (1555)

It took a very long time for people to realize that this is not a post-conflict country. This country is war-devastated in ways the international community hasn't seen in 60 years. The infrastructure, the irrigation system, the power lines, agriculture, human capital—everything in Afghanistan was degraded to a shocking degree.

The second challenge was state building, literally bringing Afghans together in one set of institutions that had legitimacy. Indeed, the Bonn process was successful in restoring legitimacy, but it didn't guarantee that the systems would work, and in fact, for the most part they didn't. What happened, as you know, is that Mujahideen leaders took control of the ministries and simply refused to give them up. Remember that the international community was invited in by the government to help. We weren't invited in to make decisions, and we couldn't say, “Fire those three ministers.” We couldn't do that; it was not our role. This is a very tricky file.

Canada is very, very effective in working on governance. They have been working with these ministries, and now at last we're beginning to see reform in the ministries. The old commanders don't have the same access to heavy weapons, and the Afghan National Security Forces now have 140,000 people on their payroll. These kinds of things were not there as recently as 2004.

The other thing I think people in Parliament should know is that from the get-go there's been a very strong network of grassroots women in Canada who've done a great deal about Afghanistan. I feel that, if asked, they would have a great deal to say about which direction the government took on this file. They've been on this file since 1997.

I'll just give you one example. There's a group called Breaking Bread for Women in Afghanistan, and what they do is have potluck suppers. I mean, how Canadian is that? They invite 12 or 14 friends over, and everyone's asked to kick in $75. The goal is to raise $750 on the night, which is enough to pay the salary of one teacher for one year. That program in Canada has taken off like a grass fire. Today, there are 50,000 little girls in school in Afghanistan because of that program. Everybody knows that all of this is about education. It is the key to reform.

The confounding thing for me as a journalist, as I tell these stories over and over, is that Canadians not only know what to do on many of these files, but they know how to do it. One has to wonder, who's holding up the barriers and stopping people from doing what they know would be effective? I firmly believe that if we simply took the people sitting on this side of this one room, we could come up with a way to make sure there was food on the table in the province of Kandahar.

We rush into a country following war, and the first thing we say is, “Whose side are you on? Are you with the Taliban or are you with the government?” That's not what they want to hear. They want to know, “Did you bring dinner? I'm hungry. My kids are cold.” I think we could do that. We could bring basic medical assistance. I know it's complicated. I believe Canadians could do that.

Just in the last couple of months more than 900 Afghans died of the cold. I mean, imagine that. Most of them were kids. But also, 316,000 livestock perished. That's what they eat. That's how they stay alive. But they all died. How hard is it for us—we know how to deal with the bitter cold—to drop tents, blankets, food, animal feed, out of a plane? If you want to win hearts and minds, I don't think that's very complicated.

If you were to stop 100 people in the bazaar in Kabul today and ask them how it's going, 80% would say, "It's getting worse; the police are corrupt; I don't trust the government; my life's not getting better, despite the promises you made to me." This is a very traumatized country. The majority of the people in Afghanistan today grew up in war. Two million people died in the last 30 years—that's one in ten. Everybody knows someone who died in this war. Overcoming it and healing that process is difficult. The legacy of that trauma cannot be underestimated.

● (1600)

Afghans are very suspicious of each other. They slag each other all the time too. But they're also suspicious of others, and I think we should keep that in mind and base it on some of the trauma they have been through.

But despite all of that, when I was there in January, I can tell you it was the first time I saw progress to an extent that surprised even me. The normally chaotic traffic that Ms. MacDonald was referring to is still chaotic, but it's calmed slightly. The garbage that had been piled up to as high as eight metres is being picked up. This makes a big impression on civil society. I saw other changes. The overflowing, stinking latrines had been dug out, and now they were working. And what was amazing to me was that the streetlights were on—when the power was on, which is pretty hit and miss, but in 11 years of reporting from Afghanistan I'd never seen streetlights.

There are mountains on either side of the city of Kabul that used to be covered in houses, like normal places. Those houses were not only hit with rocket-propelled grenades, but were also overhit from the overkill that comes from civil war and reduced to rubble. And for one frustrating year after another, nothing changed. This time, to my astonishment, the houses have been rebuilt. There are glass windows in those houses, and when the power's on, there's light coming from the windows.

I met one woman who said, "Remember when I used to meet you and was always terrified because I had the entire payroll for my NGO in my purse?" That's how she had to pay people; she had to carry the money around in her purse. She said, "Not any more. The bank has opened, and I have an account and I write cheques to my staff."

These are very, very important changes for people who've suffered these kinds of abuses, and although not to the same degree, these changes, as Ms. MacDonald can attest to, are going on in Bamian. And this time when I was in Panjshir and the Shomali Plains and Mazar-e-Sharif, I could see those changes there as well.

But there is a cloud of fear that permeates every corner of this land. People are scared to death. They're scared they are going to be caught next to a suicide bomber; that they're going to drive over an IED; that their little girls are going to be harmed on the way to school; that the teachers are going to be beheaded, as they have been; and they're scared to death that the international community is going to abandon them again.

In closing, I would like to remind you, as you know better than I, that you can't do anything without security. You can't run a government, a judiciary, a school, a hospital, you can't do anything. And what we have to remember is that if their security is at stake, so is ours.

Thank you.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Armstrong.

We'll now move to Ms. Wijeyaratne.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Surendrini Wijeyaratne (Policy Analyst, Peace and Conflict, Canadian Council for International Cooperation): Good afternoon. My name is Surendrini Wijeyaratne. I am a Peace and Conflict Policy Analyst with the Canadian Council for International Co-operation. I am also a fellow of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation.

I wish to thank you for the opportunity you are giving me today to present some comments about the prospects for peace in Afghanistan. These comments are based on findings from interviews I carried out in January and February of this year with diplomats, staff members of international agencies and Afghan civil society organizations as well as community leaders and government representatives in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

I'll do the rest of my presentation in English. Thank you.

Calls for peace efforts and a political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan are gaining more attention. The Manley report recognizes the need for political and social reconciliation, and it calls for greater coordination of international efforts on the political and military fronts and a coherent strategy toward the region. But much more needs to be done to ensure that supporting a political solution to the Afghan conflict and enabling reconciliation receive the priority they deserve in Canada's whole-of-government approach. It is well past the time to rebalance Canada's mission to play a much stronger diplomatic role, but also to ensure that Canada's diplomacy leads to support for the conditions for a peace process.

I'd like to highlight five current areas in which there are peace initiatives that, with further support and some reform—because there are challenges with them—could help foster the conditions for a peace process in Afghanistan.

The first area I'd like to talk about is the area of political outreach or political reconciliation. Current political outreach and reconciliation efforts are best described as nascent peace talks undertaken by the Afghan government with the support of the international community. These talks seek to persuade individual combatants, who are generally low- to mid-level commanders of the Taliban, as well as other armed opposition groups, to leave the insurgency and to accept the legitimacy of the current Afghan government and the constitution, and ultimately to stop fighting.

There are serious concerns regarding the lack of coordination between political and military actors in the current outreach and reconciliation efforts. According to the interviews I undertook for the study in January and February of this year, this lack of coordination has sometimes resulted in the individuals and opposition groups who are participating in these political outreach and reconciliation efforts being attacked or harassed once they've returned to their communities of origin.

Most of the Afghans and members of the international community I spoke with support some kind of peace talks with the opposition—and when I say "opposition", I mean armed opposition groups—but they also stated that before the Government of Afghanistan proceeded with more substantial talks with the Taliban and other opposition groups, the government itself needed strengthening and greater coherence.

It is also quite clear that any future peace process should not be reduced simply to negotiations with the Taliban or even other armed opposition groups. Certainly this will be one important and integral element to a peace process, but people placed equal consideration on finding avenues to engage the Northern Alliance and other Mujahideen groups; the government and Parliament; civil society organizations, and women's groups in particular; religious figures; and even former communist allies, to build a national vision for the country and to address the legacy of war.

Afghans must clearly be at the centre of these peace efforts. Canada and the international community can help support the conditions necessary for more substantial peace talks to take place.

This brings me to the second area of current peace efforts focusing on transitional justice and social reconciliation. These efforts are undertaken primarily through Afghan civil society organizations and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission—already referred to today. It is clear from interviews that the legitimacy of any future peace process is linked to these issues of transitional justice, human rights, and women's rights being addressed. For the Afghans I spoke with, a peace process is not only about negotiations, as I already said, but also includes accountability and justice for serious human rights atrocities.

In 2005, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission developed a time-bound action plan on peace, justice, and reconciliation, ending in June of this year. The plan outlines four priorities for transitional justice: symbolic measures, truth-seeking and documentation, institutional reform, and reconciliation.

Afghan civil society representatives, as well as diplomats, said that transitional justice in general and the action plan in particular have been dearly neglected areas of current peace efforts. There are a number of Afghan NGOs working in the field of transitional justice, human rights, and women's rights, and Canada can certainly do more to assist these organizations to help ensure that this difficult work receives both the financial and political support it deserves.

● (1610)

Another area of the current peace efforts relates to the disbanding of illegal armed groups. There are at present an estimated 1,800 to 2,000 illegal armed groups throughout Afghanistan. Afghans and members of the international community alike recognize the need for some form of ongoing disbandment work, particularly in lead-up to the 2009 elections. Canada, once again, could play a much stronger role in supporting such security sector reform efforts.

You've likely heard quite a bit about the peace jirga that was held between Afghanistan and Pakistan in August 2007. This was aimed at building confidence between the two countries. One of the outcomes of the peace jirga was a joint declaration recommending further cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, including a recommendation, once again, to talk to opposition groups. Canada has indicated its support for continued peace jirga activities, and it should also ensure that its policies toward both Afghanistan and Pakistan are complementary and consistent.

At the community level, a number of Afghan non-governmental organizations, as well as some international organizations, work in the area of community peace building, helping to address local level disputes over land, water, and pasture, for example. A recent report from Oxfam International highlights the need for greater support for community-level peace building, as well as its potential to help develop the foundations for peace.

So if there are already peace efforts under way, is there a need for a more developed peace process in the future? Well, the answer is clearly yes. There's clearly a need for a more coordinated effort to support a political solution, social reconciliation, and transitional justice in Afghanistan. Current efforts are too disconnected to have the kind of impact needed to support long-term peace and reconciliation.

Why then hasn't a more systematic peace process emerged? Findings from this research suggest that more international support is needed to work with the Government of Afghanistan, opposition groups, and Afghan civil society organizations, including women's groups, to create the conditions necessary for a more coordinated and systematic peace process. Clear strategies to achieve peace and reconciliation, including transitional justice, will not evolve on their own. The prospect for peace in Afghanistan grows more remote as violence continues unabated and no concerted efforts are made to engage all parties in a dialogue for peace.

Canada is indeed in a leadership position in Afghanistan, and it should make the most of that position by becoming a strong advocate for peace. To do this, Canada can do four things. It can rebalance its diplomatic, development, and military strategies to place greater emphasis on development and building the conditions necessary for an eventual peace process in Afghanistan. It can encourage the international community and the Government of Afghanistan to strengthen the conditions for a future peace process and to coordinate current efforts. It can promote an immediate peace-making and national reconciliation mandate for the UN envoy, which is under negotiation right now. And it must support a recommitment to the action plan on peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Canada can also fund innovative and independent channels—the community-based peace-building work in Afghanistan—including through women's groups and women's networks and civil society organizations.

Afghan men and women desperately need peace and stability, and Canada should ensure that its mission is doing everything possible to support the goal of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Thank you.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Mr. Jackson, please.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Director of International Relations, University of Redlands):

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm glad to be here to discuss this topic with this important and vital committee on this interesting issue.

I apologize for any small typing errors found in my presentation. When the clerk got to me last week, I was giving a presentation at Chatham House in London. I had to get back to southern California to teach and then make it up to here, so it's been a rather quick and rushed job.

I want to talk to you about four different topics, and I'll be brief on each of them. I'd be glad to discuss them afterwards with you and to provide a further brief, if you'd be interested, after these discussions take place.

First of all is the new security dilemma. I've discussed this in the book I've given to the chair, a book I brought out last year on American foreign policy.

Essentially, in my opinion, the United States made many mistakes in Iraq. Most of this was due to what happened after 9/11, as we all know. We entered an era of belief in ubiquitous insecurity, and it made everybody act rapidly to have responses and public policy positions that, at least in my opinion, were not carefully thought out. This leads to the obvious need for a calm consensus to take place in Canada and to avoid incendiary language and insults on the topic, because people will have strong differences of opinion. We need to explain why we are in Afghanistan and to go from the strategic reasons to the challenges of execution and tactics, not the other way around. Too often, the discussions take place in the wrong order.

This is a difficult topic, as there are many factors and different pieces of information to consider. It's a bit like cleaning up after an explosion in a shingle factory. There are all kinds of bits and pieces; what do we make from them? There are different perceptions of what is going on, contested estimates of enemy strength, and opinions on what should be done.

In my opinion—and I'll try to prove this in my eight points—either NATO gets serious now or it will slowly fritter away all the years of work and human lives that have been put in so far.

First of all, why do we need to be there? What is the strategic goal? Initially, of course, it was to remove the Taliban government. Now it is to see an Afghan political system put in place that is strong enough to endure without international support. One could argue for a different position. One could take a minimalist position and say we should leave the job to the warlords and get out of Afghanistan. In my opinion, that is not a reasonable position, but at least it's a clear policy position. Whatever the goal is—and we need to decide what it is—we should deduce the details of the policies from the goals, not the other way around.

Let me move to my second point. What should we consider to be the errors in Afghanistan? First of all, I believe there's been a serious lack of realism about what we're doing there. Some lessons have been learned, basically through trial and error. We misunderstood the enemy and we misunderstood the endurance of the Taliban. We had a poor understanding of the social structure of Afghanistan. We lacked language skills and knowledge of the culture, tribes, and local warlords. We underestimated how difficult it would be and how long it would take to build up the central government, the ANA, and the police forces. We underestimated the financial expenses and the costs in terms of Canadian and NATO lives. We mixed up the logic and requirements of peace enforcement with peacekeeping mission logic.

Let me move to the current situation.

Despite some successes, there have been many dangerous developments. The Taliban has regrouped and gained strength in the southern provinces. American and NATO military have killed thousands of insurgents, but because they've had to rely so heavily on air power, they've also killed far too many civilians. The violence has increased. More than 220 foreign soldiers were killed in the year 2007, the deadliest year so far. Experts, and all those to whom I talked in the British military, expect that there will be many more deaths than that in the year 2008.

Suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices are becoming more common, and the Taliban is threatening to strangle Kabul, which is what they would like to do. Suicide bombings create fear out of proportion to their ability to destroy, but they do create a tremendous amount of fear. The United States military says that the Afghan government controls only about a third of the country. The rest is run by local warlords or the Taliban. I should remind you that the Afghan security czar said this week that the government controls 95% of the territory. That just shows you how different the figures and facts are about the country.

● (1620)

The Taliban has, to some extent, been disrupted. There has been some defection at both foot soldier level and higher command, though it's not very widely discussed, and apparently we are now getting some good intelligence on internal mechanisms of the Taliban itself. We have to expect even more backlash from the tribes the longer we're there, and in my opinion, donor fatigue is settling in quite rapidly.

What do we need to do now about this fragile state? First, of course, we need more Afghan ownership of the policy. That's clear. It's controversial, and I know you'll want to discuss it in your deliberations, but one way or another we do need to split the Taliban, getting some to join the government. There also needs to be more burden sharing in NATO, the very subject that you've been discussing now for weeks. There needs to be better international and regional cooperation. Of course the whole Durand Line needs to be discussed. And lastly in this category—I'll come back to it later—good governance continues to be a big issue in the country.

Let's move to NATO and the military.

NATO policy in Afghanistan, in my opinion, needs to change radically. While Britain and the United States have recently moved soldiers from Iraq to Afghanistan, more are still needed there. The militaries of the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and the Netherlands have all been effective, but much more needs to be done by the Germans, French, and Italians, who have been shirking their responsibilities. Leaders of the latter countries have jeopardized Afghan operations by their stubbornness, or what are called caveats, in not allowing their troops to go in harm's way in the south and southeast of the country.

Of course, there are two sides to this issue of more troops. If we compare the number of troops with successful handlings of insurgencies elsewhere, such as in the historical case of Malaysia and the most recent case of East Timor, the number of troops there by comparison with the local population and local insurgents is much too small. But I must say, on the other hand, that the military so far is not looking for a massive increase in the number of soldiers. The locals might not even tolerate a larger military presence there than we already have.

Let me move to good governance.

There's a lack of administrative capacity in the country. There is only a narrow skilled human resources base, and this is particularly true at the highest levels of government. Only about a quarter to a third of the government ministries, out of 27, are effective. The higher Afghan bureaucracy was decimated by decades of Soviet and Taliban control. Today they are struggling with huge amounts of paperwork required by international funding agencies and governments. About 25% of civil service time is spent merely reporting on the funds received. They don't have much time for action.

Now I come to a small Canadian contribution that I am particularly interested in, and possibly you are as well, and that's Canada's Strategic Advisory Team.

There will never be success in Afghanistan until a strong and capable government is set up in Kabul. Of course eradicating the poppy fields, building a few roads, educating more people, and fighting the Taliban are important, but they will never be successful if the democratic institutions and state bureaucracy are not powerful enough to counter the fragmentation caused by powerful warlords. Canada's Strategic Advisory Team has been helping with this vital task, and the government, in my opinion, should put more funds and more people into this effort.

Canada's armed bureaucrats punch above their weight in Afghanistan. They are only 16 officers in number, but their influence in Kabul is impressive. Recently they have been embedded in the departments of education, justice, public service reform, transportation and aviation, and rural rehabilitation and development, and the office of the special economic adviser to the President. They are obviously not included in the department of defence, as their work is not in the security field. This small group consists of dedicated planners and strategic analysts who are bringing their skills to the Government of Afghanistan. They work to bolster the capacity of the government to receive and spend the funds they have and to develop coherent public policies from the centre. When I was there, Afghan government officials, ministers and otherwise, unanimously told me that SAT is doing necessary and excellent work and should be continued.

Let me next move to the timeline, a difficult political question in Canada. I realize that I may be walking on some difficult eggs here.

While it's true that the Afghanistan Compact will come up for renewal in 2010-11, in my opinion there is no doubt that it will have to be renegotiated, so using that as a termination date is not going to help us. And NATO will be forced to play a role after that date, no matter what.

Our approach, therefore, must be for a long-term comprehensive contribution. An extended period—and I know this is going to make some people angry with me—of possibly up to 30 years will be required before Afghan is up to scratch.

● (1625)

I heard people trying to say what they thought Afghanistan is like. I hope the members of the committee are going to go to Kabul.

I'm going to use an explosive synonym here to make the feeling for it. If you've been around the world, I would like to say that Kabul today—although I've heard that there's a lot of peace going around—for me is more like a combination of what it was like in Berlin at the Second World War, with the all the damage there, crossed with the modern Lagos in Nigeria. If you put the two together, you'll get what I think is going on.

I think you in fact must go there to see what is going on for yourselves and decide how you're going to comment on the topic.

Although I think the west will have to be in Afghanistan for some number of years—I'm choosing 30 years, but you may say some other number, and no one knows for sure—the military, of course, may only need to carry out proactive activities for a much shorter period.

We need to be very careful in Canada and elsewhere about best-case scenarios. If we put best-case scenarios forward and then build our policies on them, they may have to be revisited. We shouldn't make a commitment today that ends abruptly at some particular point in time, because we simply do not know what circumstances will prevail into the future.

Today there seems to be parliamentary agreement, by some at any rate, that the Canadian mission will be extended to 2011, with an increase in reconstruction and good governance, always within the proviso that NATO provide more troops and equipment. NATO clearly needs to amend its ways, and shirking nations need to increase their share of the military burden. The situation in Afghanistan is imperative and justifiable. But despair and fear are growing, as my colleagues have said, in the country as the bloody march of the Taliban from the Pakistan borderlands towards the capital continues, as they would like to strangle the capital.

The west must succeed in propping up Afghanistan or face the prospect of the collapse of the government we have there now and of the large-scale international terrorism that will ensue. Canada should insist on getting its way on this topic and should push it forward. The Canadian Prime Minister has an opportunity to energize the issue by making a compelling argument at the Bucharest Summit. Otherwise, in my opinion, there's every chance that NATO will fail in Afghanistan, the most pivotal issue facing the alliance since the end the Cold War.

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

Our final speaker this afternoon is Mr. Heinbecker.

Mr. Heinbecker, please.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker (Distinguished Fellow, Centre for International Governance Innovation):

Thank you very much.

I agree with what everybody has said so far, even those parts that contradicted each other.

The Chair: That almost sounded as though you're an elected official.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: That came from 38 years of being careful with people.

Ms. Sally Armstrong: You're a great diplomat.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: I'll start with some contentions.

The situation has deteriorated, but it isn't lost. NATO, the UN, and the Afghan government cannot succeed by business as usual. A much greater effort is needed, proportionate at least to that of the Balkans. Canada's contribution to success can be important but not decisive, but Canada's contribution to failure could actually be decisive.

The majority of the Afghans, who have suffered so much, as we heard in previous discussions, need and want foreign help, including Canadian help. Afghanistan is not Iraq; it's NATO-led and UN-authorized. The local population has not yet given up on it, although their expectations are not being met.

I want to reinforce that. In the fall, Sally Armstrong attended a meeting we had at the Centre for International Governance Innovation, where we met with three young Afghan female journalists. We set up an evening discussion and put out 30 or 40 chairs, because that's what we thought would be necessary, and well over 200 people showed up. The impressive thing was that I didn't hear from any of those women—and I asked them directly, “Do you want us to stay or do you want us to go?”—that they wanted us to go. I think all of them wanted us to do a better job, but none of them wanted us to go.

I'll come back to public diplomacy in a moment.

My view is that Canadians aren't pacifists, and they will support our effort there as long as they believe it's necessary, affordable, effective, and not just serving somebody else's agenda. They believe Pakistan remains a key to the outcome, and that there may be an opportunity there.

I'd like to talk mainly about the diplomatic dimension of this. There are two things.

To start with, I support the Manley report. And I broadly support the Conservative motion, as I know it—I've taken it off the Internet, so I'm not sure I have the last version—with an exception that I would have much rather seen Canadian activities in Afghanistan predicated on results than dates. I don't know how you're going to know in the summer of 2011 whether it's time to leave, and I certainly don't think you can know that now. You may have other reasons for taking that view, or the government may have other reasons, but it isn't based on solid information. I advocate that ultimately good policy becomes good politics. When you are tied to timeframes and deadlines that are artificial, you end up getting tangled in politics as well. So I have some doubts about that part.

The government effort has shifted gears. It will never be perfect. It is the most difficult assignment we've carried out probably since the Second World War, and we started from almost zero. It takes a bit of time for people to understand what they're dealing with and to get themselves organized. I'm relatively confident that's under way now.

I do see that there needs to be a very big diplomatic effort. I don't think we've been doing enough at all. We need to be taking a role that is commensurate with the contribution Canada is actually making. One has to be realistic. There are other countries involved, and those other countries are playing a much larger role, in particular the United States and the British as well. But we are the third donor. We have the leverage, and we should be using that leverage. We should be insisting on using it.

● (1630)

I think the tactic recommended by the Manley commission of holding, of playing chicken with NATO on another battalion in Kandahar, is absolutely the right thing to do.

I've been travelling a bit in Europe, and it will not surprise you to find out that they don't see this at all with the same urgency as we do. They tend to think that this is the Americans' problem. You'll notice they're putting a lot more effort into Kosovo than they're putting into Afghanistan, and they're basically leaving it up to us. I've been around NATO long enough to know that unless you put them in front of an ultimatum, they're not going to respond.

If we're doing what we're doing in Kandahar, our NATO allies will let us go on doing that eternally. It's only when they see that they're facing something that really might change and we really do mean it that they are going to back off, that they're going to start taking their responsibilities more seriously.

I was speaking in Scandinavia—in Stockholm and Oslo—and they have just decided that they would not send their battalion of forces to Darfur, partly because of the difficulty of getting in there. So I said to them, "Well, it just so happens that we need about that many people in Afghanistan." Then they came back and said, "This is a very difficult sell in our country. People don't really support it. It's a very difficult thing for us to do." I said, "Yes, it's like climate change. You care a lot about climate change, but actually we don't care as much as you do, or apparently we don't. So when it comes to climate change, we'll just take a pass the way you're taking a pass on Afghanistan."

One could argue that we've already done that, but nonetheless the issue is that unless we push them, diplomatically they're not going to do it—unless we push in Washington. We realized in Washington in the last week that we actually have quite a bit of influence there. Maybe we could use it constructively.

It's the kind of thing that should be job one for our embassies, job one for our senior officials, job one for our ambassador in Washington. Now, Washington is not only about bilateral relations between Ottawa and Washington; it's also about what's going on in the world and what we're trying to do in the world. The United States is playing the major role in Afghanistan, and we have to respect that and we have to be realistic about it. At the same time, we have a significant enough role that we have a voice.

I would also like to see the creation of some kind of contact group, based in capitals, the kind of thing we used to do for Bosnia and for Kosovo. And that's the way we brought an end to the Kosovo war, in effect. We had a group of senior officials from the various interested capitals and we got them together, and ultimately we got to an agreement on that.

So I think there's more diplomacy we should be directing at Pakistan. There's more we should probably be directing at India and at Iran. I think there's a lot to be done on that front, and if I were in the committee's position, I'd be advocating doing more of that.

● (1635)

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

All of you have given us much to think of today, and I'm certain there will be lots of very good questions. We look forward to them and to your answers.

We'll move into the first round of questioning. I'll ask Mr. Wilfert, Mr. Patry, and Mr. Martin.

You have seven minutes. That is for questions and answers.

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

I thank everyone for coming. It's too bad you hadn't come, actually, much earlier.

There were five things I got out of your presentations. One thing is that we've underestimated the effort. Second, it's a deteriorating situation. Third, there are some hopeful signs. Fourth, there is a lack of political will, both here and abroad, and particularly in NATO. And fifth, there is the need for good governance.

With regard to the issue of good governance, what is it going to take, particularly if you have to build from the ground up, at the village level, if you're going to in fact show the clean water and the power in the schools and all those things? What will it take to effect the kinds of things that Ms. MacDonald and Ms. Armstrong have mentioned? What will it take in order to have that on a much more nation-wide basis, for legitimacy for the government?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

Mr. Patry.

We'll put out three questions. You may want to just take notes.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thank you very much to all of you.

I'll go directly to the question. We're very pleased to have you here, and especially Mr. Jackson, from the Californian university. I think it's great.

We all know that this war cannot be won. It's not a conventional war, and to succeed in the field of development, Afghanistan needs proper, competent security and diplomacy. My question is for Ambassador Heinbecker and also for Mr. Jackson and all the panel.

As a former ambassador to the UN, you talk a lot about diplomacy, but in your opinion, first, what's the actual role that the United Nations plays? I don't feel they play any role right now. I think they lost any role. What should the UN do from a diplomatic point of view to improve this situation?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you very much, all of you, for being here today.

I'm of the belief that we really need to focus on the four pillars of Afghanistan security, having trained, equipped, and paid individuals in the Afghan police, army, corrections, and judiciary. All four have to be there; otherwise we'll have a three-legged stool that's going to collapse.

Secondly, in dealing with the regional working group, I firmly believe, as Professor Heinbecker said, that we have to have a regional working group that we can lead on, with Iran, India, Afghanistan, and three of the CIS states too, as well as Pakistan. How do we deal, inside President Karzai's government and the culture of impunity that currently exists, against a backdrop of warlordism and feudalism that has been the basis of the country for a long period of time?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Wilfert's question was on good governance: what will it take? Mr. Patry's was on competent diplomacy and security: what is the actual role that the UN would play? Mr. Martin's question was, how do we deal inside the Karzai government to help bring about and effect that type of change?

Let's begin with the Honourable Flora MacDonald.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: It was the question on governance that I wanted to speak to.

When I was giving my remarks, I talked about the kind of governance that's growing up in one part of Afghanistan. That is now spreading to other provinces. It is a homegrown kind of governance, not the kind that is depicted through NATO, ISAF, Karzai, or through anybody else who is borrowing western ideas. This is something that is locally grown and is succeeding.

What's more, it's succeeding in provinces like Bamian and some of the surrounding provinces, such as Parvan, where they are becoming quite stable because the people feel ownership of what they're doing. I think the best thing we can possibly do is to encourage Afghans—and they are very creative people—to take this up everywhere.

We go in, and as long as I've been there I've heard them saying, “Oh well, NATO will come and do this,” or “The Americans will come and do that.” For goodness' sake, give Afghans the chance to do what they can do. They are very good at what they can do.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. MacDonald.

Madam Armstrong.

Ms. Sally Armstrong: In terms of governance, village councils have started, and CIDA has had a lot to do with these village councils.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: No, not CIDA.

Ms. Sally Armstrong: Well, they're in it now. They're in it with their new task force.

In any case, the point of village councils, for me, is that men and women are meeting together, and this is a first. And they are effective.

But I think the point you're making comes back to the ministries. They simply have to reform the ministries. They have to get rid of the ministers who are not serving Afghanistan or not representing the people, and they've done that in many cases. I think that's where a lot of the problems are. We have to train people. I think Canada is very good at helping with training within ministries.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Robert Jackson: It is an important question that requires a lot of technical knowledge. The national solidarity program, I would think, is what you should look into if you haven't done so. There is a wonderful CD that describes all the details of it. It is, of course, controlled by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. It's also one of the departments that Canada's Strategic Advisory Team has helped quite a bit. In fact, it's one of the places where we could make a case that Canada has actually helped with the very thing that you're suggesting needs to be done.

I think that fits with my argument, although I wasn't able to talk about the topics that the other people talked about, but you need a connection between what is being done in the centre, in Kabul, with what is happening at the local level. The two need to be brought together in order to have a central government that is functioning and is seen to be functioning out in the regions. But at the same time, the regions have to be active and have funds available for them to be able to do the kinds of projects they wish to put in place.

I think it's the nexus of those two, and that is done to a large extent by the national solidarity program. If you want to see the CD but can't get it, I'll get you a copy of it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Wijeyaratne.

Ms. Surendrini Wijeyaratne: In relation to the question about how you address impunity inside the Karzai government, there are a couple of opportunities coming up in the near future that could at least address it in a small measure.

One is that there's a recommendation in the Afghanistan Compact, as it is right now, for a senior appointments panel. The senior appointments panel is meant to vet all appointments to the administration—the police chiefs, local district governors, and so on. Canada and other donors have a distinct opportunity to take a very strong diplomatic role in ensuring that the senior appointments panel functions fully and credibly and doesn't become manipulated by the government.

The other is, in the elections that are coming up in 2009, making sure that people who run for Parliament are not linked to illegal armed groups out there. There is reform of the electoral law going on right now, and it's a question of taking a stronger diplomatic role to make sure these things are consistent with our norms and standards.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Heinbecker, I hate to impose on you, but there were three questions asked. If I could ask you to answer one question, it would be Mr. Patry's question specific to what the UN could do.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: Speaking specifically to the UN, there are two or three factors that explain the current situation. One is that the UN was attacked in Iraq in 2003, and I don't think they have quite got over it—not yet. They lost some of their best and brightest, and it made the UN, as a secretariat institution, quite nervous about its role in the world.

The second thing is to bear in mind that Afghanistan is one of 17 UN missions. The UN has something like 100,000 soldiers and officials in the field—quite a bit more than that if the Darfur operation ever gets off the ground properly. It has a budget of something like $6 billion. And Afghanistan is one of those missions.

What I would like to see done is that the Canadian government should—and I presume it's doing this, but given the circumstances it would have to do more—make a greater effort to persuade the UN to take this more seriously, to raise its profile, to raise its place in the UN list of priorities.

I understand that Ban Ki-moon described a dozen priorities the other day, and Afghanistan wasn't even one of them. Here we're transfixed, engrossed in Afghanistan, but at New York I don't think that's the case.

That's what we need to do.

By the way, let me offer one word, if I may, on SAT. SAT is a very good idea, but if there were ever a case for a whole-of-government approach to something, this would be it. It's not perfectly obvious to me why this should be done by military planners, especially when the ground rules are that they don't do military activities. What I would have said on SAT is that there's been some controversy over how it's being managed. There's no reason that operation should not be part of the overall Canadian operation, and it should be run like every other part of the Canadian government.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Heinbecker.

[*Translation*]

Madam Barbot, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Heinbecker, you recently said that Canada's goals are not those of the US. Canada wants to rebuild, to establish a viable government, to build schools and to promote human rights. In the present context, Canada is devoting more efforts to war than to development. Canadians want Canada to dedicate more of its energy to development in order to improve people's lives in Afghanistan. They are massively against the combat role. However, most of Canada's efforts are devoted to combat.

Of the major recommendations of Mr. Manley's report, what was taken into consideration is mainly the addition of 1 000 soldiers, as if this was going to solve the problem. In a context that is said to be explosive, in a war that admittedly cannot be won militarily, how can Canada rebalance its action so that it can produce proper results and be compatible with what the Canadian people want?

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci, madame Barbot.*

Monsieur Heinbecker is next.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: You made a number of contentions, not all of which I would share. It's not obvious to me that the Canadian population is massively against the military effort in Afghanistan, if I understood you correctly. And it's not obvious to me how you're going to carry out a development effort unless you have an adequate measure of security.

The UN has just said that most of the south of Afghanistan is not safe for aid workers, and it's not safe for aid workers because of the efforts of the Taliban. To my mind, it starts with that. Unless you can provide the requisite amount of security.... You can build the schools, as someone said, and the Taliban can burn them down again. And they can do much worse than that. So I think it starts with security.

What I would agree with is that we should be doing more on the development side. That I do agree with, but I don't think we're in a situation where we can say, "Well, we've got this out of balance and we'll do it like that, and then we're going to fix it." Because I don't think that's the case. I think we have to do this, and I think—

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Obviously more security is needed but at the present time, other countries do not seem to be working towards this goal. Canada is expected to do this job while taking care of all the rest. This is where I see a problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: That's why I was saying there are a couple of considerations. One is that I think, as a responsible member of the international community, we have to be conscious of the fact that we could be decisive to failure. As I said, I don't think we can do enough to win, but I think we could actually be decisive to failure. We could make that mission unravel if we were to just up and leave.

At the same time, I think we have every interest in pushing our allies to do more. I think the government has begun to do that. That's what I think is going to be happening at Bucharest, where there is a lot of effort going on behind the scenes, evidently, to try to find an extra battalion.

I don't think a battalion is enough. If you look at the number of forces we put into Kosovo—at the end of the Kosovo conflict—proportionately, the number was vastly higher than what we've put into Afghanistan. As Mr. Jackson said, the consequence is that you get a lot higher rate of civilian casualties, because you get the military relying on air power and on other kinds of activity.

So we're in a position where we need a lot more troops on the ground. I guess 1,000 is a number to start with. I don't think it should be the end.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Heinbecker.

Ms. Armstrong, you may quickly comment.

Ms. Sally Armstrong: I want to add a comment to what you said about this massive portion of the population that's against our being there, and your comment about development and war going on in Afghanistan.

I think it's valuable to remember there are 34 provinces in Afghanistan. Almost all of this insurgency is going on in four provinces.

The area where Flora MacDonald's work is going on has seen a tremendous amount of improvement. A lot of the places I've been to have seen improvement. So there is no doubt there is improvement, and with the exception of the four southern provinces, I think it's fair to say that people are marginally better off. What we're questioning is, how come they're not a lot better off?

And as for the protest against the war in Canada, I think it's very important for all of us to understand who's informing us. Most of the protest, if you look at the studies, is based on the fact that people say that we invaded Afghanistan. We did not; we were invited by the government. Protest is based on the fact that we are occupying Afghanistan. We are not. It would be a lot easier for the military if we were, but we are not. And at every protest, you hear the notion that the Afghan people wish we would leave. In my opinion, you'd be hard-pressed to find a single Afghan who wants Canada to leave, except for the extremists.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Armstrong.

Mr. Jackson, very quickly, and then we'll move to the next question.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Very quickly, I think Paul and I do disagree about SAT. I just want to put it like this.

These SAT people work for Afghan ministers. Let's assume an American diplomat was on secondment in the Department of Foreign Affairs here in Ottawa. Would we want that person to report back to Washington, or would we want him to report to his minister here in Ottawa? Of course we'd want him to report to his minister in Ottawa.

The whole point about this staff is that they need to work for what the Afghan ministers want them to do, and not for what Canada wants them to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

We'll move to Mr. Lebel.

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): I don't know what to do for my next 30 years, Mr. Jackson. I will follow the Afghanistan issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jackson, you said that unfortunately there will probably be more violence, more soldiers killed, more suicide bombings and more IED's in Afghanistan. I was very pleased to hear Mr. Heinbecker say that our action should be driven more by the results of our efforts than by politics and target dates. Indeed, we may have to deal with schedules that are of a human rather than political nature. Ms. Armstrong said she saw results because houses are still there. She believes things are improving and people's lives are getting better.

Ms. MacDonald earlier said that 78% of the people still live in villages. The international community is devoting its efforts to the various regions of Afghanistan. What impact will urbanization have on this country?

Ms. Wijeyaratne, you returned from Afghanistan in January or February. What do the Afghan people think of the international support they are getting, and more particularly Canadian support? How do they like what we are doing to help them become a democratic country, as I think they want to?

● (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci, monsieur Lebel.*

We'll have Madame Boucher, very quickly, and then Mr. Goldring.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Thank you for coming today. Your contribution helps us better understand many things. Last week, we were fortunate to meet with a number of Afghan women parliamentarians who told us about their experiences, their struggles and some of their achievements. My only question deals with women. What was the greatest victory for women since Canada went to Afghanistan?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll got to Peter, very quickly.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you for appearing today.

It's evident from your comments that simply cutting and running is not an option, particularly with the Taliban positioned to return, and to return the same repressive regime they had.

My question is more general. I understand that the Taliban in Pakistan, too, share this concern about the Pakistan government and the interpretation of the Koran and sharia law. They have taken it much more seriously and much more severely. Could you suggest any way, any mechanism within legislation or the constitution or something, that could be worked upon within the governance of Afghanistan to bring out a more acceptable, broad-based modernity or moderation that would be broadly acceptable? I feel that many of the Taliban might accept some of this, too, if it were possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

The first question was actually directed to Ms. Wijeyaratne and then to the Honourable Flora MacDonald.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: I want to speak to them afterwards.

Ms. Surendrini Wijeyaratne: I'll answer in English.

First of all, in terms of how the people I spoke to perceived Canada's assistance, the Afghans I spoke to work in civil society organizations or in non-governmental organizations. So these are people who work within the aid sector in Afghanistan, who do aid themselves. They are often in the position of doing the front-line service delivery in very difficult circumstances. They certainly welcome Canada's development assistance, but our conversations were focused on peace efforts and development assistance. While they welcome our development assistance, one of the things they said was that they require further support, and we don't directly support Afghan civil society organizations, for example. One thing we could be doing in parallel with our support for the Afghan government is support the development of Afghan civil society.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to the Honourable Flora MacDonald, on Mr. Goldring's question.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: Right. I just want to say that one of the problems for Canadians is that we are given, through our media, a very unbalanced view of Afghanistan. When you talk about the way women or people are treated or whatever, you refer primarily, in your own minds, to the people you see in Kabul—the Pashtuns. If you were to go further, out to where I go, and you ran into the Hazara, they live an entirely different kind of life. Then if you went somewhere else to another ethnic group, you again would see that their lifestyle is quite different.

This is one of the things I think we really do need to get a handle on in this country. The ethnicities, the religious views, and so on are really quite different in all these places. And we can't just take it from the point of view of what the CBC tells us, which is why two of them are coming with me on my next trip, so they can go beyond the places they usually go to and see something of what the rest of the country is like.

On March 23, the CBC is doing a two-hour special on *Newsworld* at eight o'clock, and it's going to show a much broader view than they normally do.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. MacDonald, for that advertisement for the CBC. We appreciate that.

● (1700)

Hon. Flora MacDonald: It's good for all of you to be able to see it.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to go to Mr. Dewar very quickly. We were supposed to quit at five o'clock because we had half an hour for committee business, so unfortunately, Mr. Dewar, we want to hurry along.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): A balanced mission and a balanced opinion there.

Thank you to our panel.

I just want to clarify something that seems to be out there, that we don't support committing to Afghanistan as a party. Contrary to what you might hear, we do. It's just about how we do it. It's not about aiding Afghanistan; it's about how you aid Afghanistan. Of course, our concern is the method that's being used right now—and we're about to vote on the war, and we'll continue it for another three years—and that is to fight with a counter-insurgency method. That's what's deeply concerning. I think we haven't really understood that, and I think this vote is something we'll look back on and say, "Do you remember when...?" People will say, "You know, we thought we were doing the right thing."

I fundamentally believe we're going in the wrong direction with the counter-insurgency approach, and I just state that for the record. I believe the UN needs to take more of a role. I believe it's interesting that we have something called the UN Peacebuilding Commission, headed by a Canadian. We don't even have a membership on that commission. Do you know why? It's because we don't presently contribute enough troops to UN peacekeeping. That's why we're not allowed on. The second criterion is that we do not contribute enough to the UN. So guess what? We're not on the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which talks about having integrated strategies for building peace.

I guess I just have time for one question. I respect Ms. Armstrong's and Ms. MacDonald's comments, and actually, I read in the late nineties some of the things you were saying, and I was among a number of activists who were saying, "Please pay attention to what's going on in Afghanistan." So I thank you for that.

Surendrini, I wanted to ask you about the grassroots approach to peacebuilding and how that can work with what Mr. Heinbecker said in terms of this compact arrangement. That interests me quite a bit, because we're going to have a vote, it's going to go ahead, and we'll have the war part figured out, or at least some people will. I'm interested in the peacebuilding, so I'd like to know about these two components, how a grassroots kind of approach fits in with this idea of regional partners, if you have any ideas on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

Hon. Keith Martin: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, given the exceptional witnesses we have here today—and some have come very far, like Professor Jackson—may I submit to the committee, as a friendly motion, that we forgo committee business today and allow our witnesses to engage the committee members right to the time the bells begin, so we can have the benefit of their expertise?

The Chair: Unfortunately, Mr. Martin, I'm going to have to think on this one. That's not a point of order. That's the first thing. That's a motion you're moving. Whether or not the motion is in order, I really....

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Angela Crandall): It is in order.

The Chair: Is it a debatable motion? That takes away from our time. Do we have unanimous consent to do this?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right, it seems unanimous, so we will go until.... We still want some committee business, do we, so not right to the end? Your motion said what?

Hon. Keith Martin: Right to the bells.

The Chair: All right, then we had unanimous consent.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I've posed my question for a response. Thank you.

Ms. Surendrini Wijeyaratne: In terms of the question on how grassroots peacebuilding works with higher-level diplomacy, what I found in the interviews I had with international diplomats, as well as Afghan organizations and international organizations working on these issues in Afghanistan, is that most people suggested sort of a parallel top-down/bottom-up approach. They said there needs to be work with the central government right now to build its capacity to engage in talks with opposition groups in order to resolve issues of internal governance and internal fighting within the government. That needs to be a top priority, so the government is more functional.

There also needs to be grassroots community peacebuilding. The reason for that is that a large number of disputes that happen in Afghanistan are not necessarily insurgency-related. These are disputes over land, water, marriage, the regular old things, that are sometimes mono-ethnic, mono-tribal. Sometimes it's between tribes, between ethnicities, between different communities. There has been a lot of work actually done among Afghan organizations. Oxfam International, for example, just put out a report saying that grassroots peacebuilding—working on local-level disputes, strengthening relationships within communities and between communities, as well as with communities and the central government—can help build foundations for peace, and it also can help build the government's legitimacy in some of these communities as well.

● (1705)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

I was just asking Mr. Heinbecker about the other piece—

The Chair: I'm going to give you more time.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: Well, there are two things.

One is that when we and the international community and the UN started in Afghanistan and we had Mr. Brahimi as the head of the operation, we had a truly exceptional man running the operation. Even at that time, when we in Canada were trying to say that all of the authority should be invested in this person so that all the different countries would not be competing with each other and the different aid organizations would not be competing and conflicting and asking contradictory things of people, we weren't able to achieve that, and I would say that subsequently it's become only more difficult to do it.

One of the recommendations in the Manley commission was that there should be a senior UN person appointed. Of course there was talk of Paddy Ashdown being such a person. The Karzai government seemed to be the one that said they didn't want to do that. I'm not sure that should be their call, in fact. I think it would make a lot of sense to have such a person, a person invested with the authority of the international community. At the same time, while the job is not to contradict the local government and to enter into a conflict with it, it is to make sure the interests of the international community are also looked after.

On the issue of peacebuilding, that's one of the innovations the UN is carrying out, and it's one of the good things. It is still nascent, though, I'd have to say. Carolyn McAskie, who used to work for CIDA, is running that. It is not easy work to be doing, because a lot of countries don't think they need that kind of help. It's also very difficult to get the resources attributed to it that need to be there; I suppose that's where more of the diplomacy I was talking about should come in.

As for the number of troops we contribute to UN missions, I don't know where we stand now. The last time I looked, we were around 57th. I have my own view of that. If you included our 2,500 that are not included in that calculation, it would put us in the top 15, but it still wouldn't put us in the top 10. We are not in the business anymore of being a major troop contributor to UN activities. Although we have a monument to ourselves over by the National Gallery, I think those days seem to be over.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Heinbecker.

I'm going to ask Ms. Armstrong if she wants to comment on that. I realize Ms. Armstrong has to leave fairly soon. You have to be at Centre Block at 5:30, do you not?

Ms. Sally Armstrong: That's right. Does it take long to get there?

The Chair: I'm going to have one of my assistants help you get over there.

Ms. Sally Armstrong: Thank you.

I wanted to respond to the two questions that madame asked. One was about the status of women today and if there had been any change, and the other one was about how to deal with the Koran and sharia law, etc.

I'll deal with the religious issue first. I think it's valuable to know that what the Taliban did was hijack their own religion for political opportunism, and the extraordinary thing is that they got away with it. There's nothing in the Koran to support what the Taliban did. There's no place that says a girl can't go to school, a woman can't go to work, or even that a woman must cover her face. So their version of the Koran...I mean, they were making it up as they went along and they were getting away with it.

In terms of the effect, this is an Islamic state, and what you have now is sharia law, tribal law, and civil law. There is a new program, another program that Canada has invested an enormous amount of money in through Rights and Democracy in Montreal. It is the reform of family law. It's a very tricky file, but it is working. It has started. They've already started sitting down with—you have to consider this—illiterate mullahs who also make it up as they go along, who live in the village, and who have had that power in the village all this time. It takes time to convince the mullah to sit down and—heaven forbid—to sit down with women. It is happening, but it is tricky.

As for how women are doing, there are women parliamentarians and women journalists. There are six million kids in school, and two million of them are girls. That means approximately 3.5 million girls are not in school, but two million is a start. And women are back at work. What would you say—is it 20% of the workers in Kabul right now? There weren't that many out in the country....

Things are better, but again, it's a very fragile place.

● (1710)

Hon. Flora MacDonald: I would just add one thing about the differences, about the ethnicities and this kind of thing. In Kabul, the Pashtuns are the prime ethnic group. They've always thought they've run the country anyhow. The people out where I go, in Ghazni, in Bamian, and so on, are Shia Muslims. The rest are Sunni Muslims. There is a big difference between the way they look at things. You don't see women in the Shia areas covered up with the burka. You don't see that sort of thing ever.

So you have to get to know, when you cross boundary lines, how the women are treated. There's a much fairer distribution of responsibilities between men and women when you're in Shia country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jackson, on that point...?

Mr. Robert Jackson: I'm not going to comment on the women issue. I agree with everything my colleagues have said.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Chan.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Well, the answers were basically all going back to your time. The NDP's time was up. We'll get you a question.

An hon. member: Good.

The Chair: Mr. Chan.

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to our distinguished guests. Welcome to the panel. I watch you all the time on television. It's nice to see you in person. Paul we encountered in the Chrétien government, and we always appreciate his input.

I have two points. One is that I agree that military will not win us this battle. I think we need to have a peace process, both at the grassroots level and at the higher level within Afghanistan, between all the different factions.

Is there such a process being initiated? If there isn't, would an eminent person appointed by the UN be helpful in coordinating that kind of process? That's my first question.

Second, I always believe we should have rotation. We're doing a lot of heavy lifting in the Kandahar region on the military side. And even though, yes, we chose Kandahar at the beginning, I don't think we should be stuck with that responsibility all the time. To be fair to our soldiers who are put on the line, I believe there should be some rotation, some integration of other countries' operations, so that we can rotate out for a couple of years and then maybe go back there again.

I want to seek your input on that. Would you agree with me that this is just being fair?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chan.

I'm going to ask if Ms. Armstrong has an answer to that. If not, perhaps one of these guys can take her to Centre Block, where she has an interview.

Do you have a response, Ms. Armstrong?

Ms. Sally Armstrong: I can tell you that negotiations are going on. They're not official negotiations. Karzai is meeting with moderate Taliban. Even the UN are holding meetings with low-level Taliban. But this is a trickle of moderate, low-level Taliban who are basically saying, “Help us find a way out of this. We don't want to fight anymore.” That trickle has to turn into a flood before anything can really happen.

We cannot tell or instruct President Karzai to negotiate with the Taliban. The people in Afghanistan go ballistic when you talk about negotiating with the Taliban. They don't want anything to do with the Taliban.

But I think you're right, and I think the international community has come to understand that we have to negotiate a way out of this. It's just a matter of how soon and how well you can bring the players together.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Armstrong. Mr. Obhrai will take you over to Centre Block.

Mr. Jackson, please.

Mr. Robert Jackson: To me, we're giving this a lot of importance, but I don't think it's the central question.

I want to come back to a question that was posed a long time ago, and I want to go back to my second point, which is what do you people believe is the strategic goal that Canada wants to see achieved there? I said that the strategic goal should be that the Afghan political system would be so strong that it could endure without international support.

With regard to that principle, I want to then comment on the details people have been mentioning. If Mr. Karzai and the government do not want to have a UN ambassador there, then of course there's not much we're going to be able to do about it. Much of what I've seen is that they in fact think that people who come in from outside will be telling them what to do.

I've heard continually today, in both the questions and the answers, that we should be letting the Afghans decide what they want to do. Now all of a sudden, at the highest level, we should have some kind of outside ambassador come in and tell them what to do. I thought the purpose was to let the Afghans decide what they want to do.

Let's go to the second point, which is reconstruction. I've heard a lot of very, I'd say, vague and quite unrealistic discussion about reconstruction. First of all, if reconstruction takes place today without military support, we in fact will have the people who are carrying out the reconstruction killed. It's as simple as that. The Taliban will in fact murder them.

Secondly, if you want to talk about reconstruction, we should talk about things like the gas pipeline. The gas pipeline Russia had built. It goes throughout Afghanistan and helps to bring the electricity to the country. People say they want to do reconstruction. Canada should help with the reconstruction of the pipeline, which is needed. Norway's taking the lead here. They're having trouble with countries like Canada providing enough money and enough clout and saying they will support them.

So I think when we talk about aiding and reconstruction, first of all we have to bear in mind that the Taliban are there, and therefore we have to protect the people who are carrying out reconstruction. Secondly, the government has its ideas of what needs to be done. In my opinion, building a national pipeline is crucial in order to make electricity work again in the country. Rather than some of the low-level projects, maybe it's more important.

Last, I implore the committee to go back and decide what they think the principal strategic goal is. Rather than discussing some of the specific details, what is the strategic goal that Canada wants to see achieved in that country?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

Very quickly—because we're out of time—I will give you time, but you can answer it in the next round.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I'd like to explore a little further the development and what is being done to modernize the sharia law and the interpretation of the Koran, because it seems to be at the heart of the problem in the border areas of Pakistan too, particularly with the Taliban.

As you said, Ms. MacDonald, there are other groups throughout the country too. There's far more to it, but this seems to have been one of the most archaic interpretations with the Taliban in the region. We hear continuously, even from the women members of Parliament, that this is what they're afraid to return to and go back to. Might a more moderate interpretation, a more moderate acceptance within the government, bring back some of the Taliban if they had some of what they wished to do to keep their religious integrity, but still moderate it somewhat?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Ms. Boucher, did you have a question as well?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: He was answering my question.

The Chair: He answered it? Okay.

Where did you direct that one to, Mr. Goldring?

Mr. Peter Goldring: Maybe it could be directed to Ms. MacDonald.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: When you ask, I just seem to think there isn't the fundamental knowledge about Afghanistan in Canada that there should be. We keep putting people into little pockets, and we don't see them as a country that has been unified. It was unified under King Zahir in his early years, and it will happen again. But as long as occupied forces are in there, with all due regard...one of the real problems is the Americans on the ground. We have to get people into a position where they can make their own decisions.

When you talk about the women members of Parliament, a good number of those women members of Parliament whom I've met with on a number of occasions are there in lieu of their husbands. They're taking direction from others.

● (1720)

The Chair: Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: But in Pakistan it seems they have the problem without the Americans being there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Heinbecker is next, and then we'll come back here.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: I don't want to take the time of the committee, but I have two points.

I asked Mr. Brahimi, if he had a decision to make over again, what it would be. His decision would have been to include the Taliban from the outset in the efforts to create a new state. We left them on the outside, and they've done what they've done. There are Taliban and Taliban, I guess. But that was one thing.

Second, sharia law doesn't necessarily equate directly to Islam, because in a country like Turkey they don't have sharia law—at least not yet. I want to reinforce what Ms. MacDonald and Ms. Armstrong said. What we're dealing with is one of the more extreme interpretations even of sharia law.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Heinbecker.

Ms. Wijeyaratne.

Ms. Surendrini Wijeyaratne: Thank you. I'll finish up quickly.

On the question of whether the time is right for a peace process, it was fairly clear from the interviews that a lot of different initiatives are going on but they're disconnected. In order to have a more coordinated or formalized effort, there first needs to be an agreement within the Government of Afghanistan that it will happen.

In the international community, Canada can take that first step and play a role in dealing with some of the political reforms. They need to happen rather delicately behind the scenes to form the basis for a more formalized peace process in the future. Those discussions are going on right now, and now is the time to take a more proactive role in responding to them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam MacDonald.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: I'll make one comment about the Taliban, because we keep looking at them as a great monolith. They're like any other political movement: they're off in all directions. When I first went there in 2001 and the Taliban was still the government, I was working with CARE Canada. I went to where we were having what you might call underground schools for little girls, who would come to a room and a woman teacher would come in. This was all supposed to be quiet.

But when I came away one time, a couple of Taliban men approached me. I could tell they were Taliban by the way they were dressed. One of them said to me, “We know what you're doing, but we won't say anything about it if you'll allow our daughters to go to school too.”

So there are people who are more than willing to talk.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Madam MacDonald.

Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Going back to the argument about who can be brought into the process, I argued that the national solidarity program is an effort to link the centre to the regions and the local councils to try to unify the country, while at the same time not destroying the centre.

At the present time in Afghanistan—as important as the discussions about local control that are going on in this room—our discussion was that the country should move to a more federal system. In fact, the kinds of differences in the country might mean that the notion of a unitary presidential system should at least be reconsidered if we can get a major constitutional amendment.

That's getting quite romantic for me to put forward, being the hard-nosed realist in this group, but nevertheless there seems to be some possibility here that instead of the local controls being suggested, we may be moving slightly toward a federal kind of issue in the future in Afghanistan. Negotiations on this issue took place this week in Afghanistan.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for letting me speak. It is a bit late because I had a question for Ms. Armstrong who seems to know a lot about Afghan women. But I will address my question to Ms. MacDonald.

I do not know what the percentage of women is in the Afghan Parliament. Ms. MacDonald, you said that women are replacing men, their husbands. Is that correct?

I would like to know what your reaction was to the suspension of Mrs. Malalai Joya, who was also a member of the government. She was ousted mainly because she criticized the government of the country and probably Canada's presence in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam MacDonald.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: She's a very fiery individual, and I've been on platforms with her. I think we make a good duo when we're there.

I may say, with regard to women being in Parliament in Afghanistan—and I see a lot of them all the time—I made the remark about some of them being there to be spokespersons for their husbands, but the majority of them are very active on their own. I always take some delight in telling audiences I speak to that there is a higher percentage of women in the Parliament of Afghanistan than there is a percentage of women in the Parliament of Canada. So it's something we should think of.

The Chair: Which is right in their constitution.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Wijeyaratne.

Ms. Surendrini Wijeyaratne: Quickly on that point, I don't know Mrs. Joya personally, but I do think that the women in Parliament do face more challenges and that there is a need to further support them. There is a lot of intimidation, a lot of harassment for all of them to do their jobs. There does need to be much more support so that these women, after having gone to Parliament, are able to actually do their jobs in Parliament.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Rather than comment on women, I'll just say that when the Speaker of Parliament gave me the Karzai robe and shook my hand—I'm pretty sure he was a former warlord—his hand was three times as big as mine. When he shook it, I knew that I was dealing with somebody of some prominence in the Afghan culture.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

We have about a minute left here. Mr. Heinbecker wanted in on that one as well.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: I don't think we've answered the question Mr. Chan asked earlier, which was the question of rotation.

It's a yes in principle, but not quite a yes in practice is what I would say. When we got involved in the Second World War, there was no rotating out. We were in and we stayed in. If it was a classic peacekeeping operation, I think it would be easier to get that type of rotation, but it's not. It's a combat operation in a large and significant part, and not everybody is willing or capable of doing it. Life is not fair.

The last point I'd like to make is not related to that, and that is on the business of public diplomacy. One of the recommendations in the Manley report, one of the recommendations in the motion, is that there be a much stronger effort to communicate with Canadians. I don't see how we're going to be able to support this kind of activity, which I think is necessary, but which is not going to be over necessarily in the timeframe people are talking about unless there is communication with the population.

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

Madam MacDonald.

Hon. Flora MacDonald: Could I just mention to the members that I have given you a document that was sent to me by Abdullah Barat, an Afghan who helps run our little NGO in Bamian Province. It's the story of his workload from 1903 and on. One really is amazed at the accomplishments that a single individual can trigger just by the things he gets done.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam MacDonald.

There have been a number of questions. Because of these bells, votes, and everything else, there's frustration that we can't have more time with you. You may have wanted to expand on your answers to some questions, but the chairman made you keep it short. I encourage you to submit those answers in writing. Our committee will look at them and they will be entered into the blues. We will make certain they are taken into account. They will be circulated and translated as well.

We want to thank everyone very much for staying. We very much appreciated your testimonials on when you were there, and your expertise.

The bells will start in a minute. To the committee, we will suspend and then come back on our steering committee report that the committee passed.

Can we have a motion to pass the steering committee?

Mr. Martin and Mr. Dewar.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

We are adjourned.

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