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Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

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•(1105)

[English]

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

Committee, we're gathered today for our eighth meeting of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan.

Today we have two parts to our meeting. For the first hour we have, and are pleased to have with us, Elissa Golberg. She's the former representative of Canada in Kandahar, known as the RoCK. And of course Mr. Brodeur is back as well. In the second half we'll be going in camera to deal with the draft report.

Before we start, Ms. Golberg, I want to apologize to you for last week. We were going to have you here in conjunction with a video conference from Kabul. That was delayed, and it put your time off the agenda. We appreciate your responding to our invitation and your flexibility in dealing with us. As you know, sometimes committees get messed up in their agenda.

We're glad to have you here today. We certainly are looking forward to your comments.

Mr. Obhrai, did you have a comment to make before we start?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): I did, but I will wait until they've done their presentations and we've had questions. I would like to raise a point of order at that time, before you adjourn.

The Chair: All right. Good.

Ms. Golberg, do you have some opening comments before we get into the questions? I think you're familiar with the process at committee. You're here for an hour. You make your comments, and then we'll open it up for a round of questions from each party.

The floor is yours. Thank you for being here.

[Translation]

Ms. Elissa Golberg (Former Representative of Canada in Kandahar, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

Thank you very much. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here today.

For those of you who don't know me, who haven't met me—I know some of the committee members, as I had the opportunity to meet you in Kandahar—for 11 months, between February 2008 and January 2009, I lived in Kandahar as the representative of Canada in

Kandahar, or the RoCK. Yes, it's the absolute best title I'll ever have as a public servant.

Today is a terrific opportunity for me to talk to you about some of the key lessons I've pulled from my time in Kandahar. If you'll permit me, before I start, what I'd like to do is begin by acknowledging the fabulous team I had the pleasure of working with in Kandahar, both military and civilian. Each demonstrated tremendous dedication, commitment, and, above all, sacrifice, something that is not, perhaps, always understood or acknowledged.

[Translation]

What we are being asked to do in Kandahar is new for Canada. Certainly, some of it has antecedents from our experience elsewhere, but engaging in an act of counter-insurgency, where we are an implementing actor at the national, provincial and local level, has required that Canada develop new approaches and new tools, on both the military and the civilian side.

I think we have learned a great deal from our efforts. Some of it is sui generis, unique to the context, but there are some aspects that we can generalize and carry into other contexts. I am keenly aware of this and hoping to apply what I have learned in my new role as the Director General responsible for Canada's Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force, in the Department of Foreign Affairs.

•(1110)

[English]

There are three key take-aways from my time in theatre that I'm hoping to touch on today.

First is the importance of joined-up approaches, a unified strategy, if you will. That means being integrated, not just coordinated, in the field and in Ottawa.

Second is the value of concrete metrics, benchmarks, priority setting, and sober assessments, both in the field and in Ottawa.

Third is the impact that can be achieved with greater civilian engagement—having the right people with the right tools—and having that occur in parallel with Afghan leadership and ownership.

[Translation]

I would first like to make a few comments about the duties of the representative of Canada in Kandahar. As you are aware, the representative of Canada in Kandahar, reporting to the head of mission, is Canada's senior representative in Southern Afghanistan. The RoCK is responsible for the governance and development aspects of the mission. I was the principal link with the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan at the provincial level, and with other countries, NGOs and international organizations such as those of the UN.

The RoCK is the counterpart to the Canadian Brigadier-General responsible for the International Security Assistance Force in Kandahar Province. Together, we ensured a unified, civil-military approach to delivering on international and Canadian priorities.

While I was in theatre in Kandahar, we grew our civilian team from 15 to 63, including a mix of Canadian civilian police as well as corrections, development and political officers, namely from CIDA.

[English]

If you'll permit me, I'd like to talk about five key actions that I think worked while I was in Kandahar. I'd also like to touch on the opportunities that exist, based on my experience over the past year.

The first key lesson for me is the importance of political governance and flexible machinery. You're a perfect example of that. I would cite the creation of this committee and the creation of the cabinet committee on Afghanistan. Mechanisms that we've created internally are communities of practice, which bring together the various components to speak regularly in an integrated fashion, in a way that wasn't necessarily happening before. Clear political direction from yourselves and the cabinet committee, together with engagement at the ministerial level when decisions were required, has made a difference.

I lived in a pre-CCOA function, and I've lived in the aftermath. I had the opportunity to experience both. These coordination mechanisms are very important for forcing links that might not otherwise occur, and they also facilitate leverage. I'll give you an example. Our communities of practice bring together the team in Kandahar, Kabul, Ottawa, and also our other missions abroad. When we're experiencing a problem, let's say with NATO, it's not just a question of going to Kabul and asking Kabul to talk to COMISAF, the commander of all NATO forces. We can also leverage Brussels in a way that we were perhaps not making effective use of previously.

The second key take-away is clarity of purpose. Establishing the six priorities and the three signatures was, from my perspective, absolutely essential, along with the metrics that followed and the sober assessments of how we were progressing. I remember my first day at the PRT in Kandahar when our USAID colleague came up to me and the first thing she said was that the problem with us Canadians was that we tried to be everything to all people. The six priorities have actually helped us not to be all things to all people. It doesn't mean there aren't other important activities that need to occur in Kandahar. It means that Canada doesn't necessarily have to be one that leads on them. We can make sure that others are leading on those initiatives. We stay focused on delivering things that

Kandaharis have told us they want, which are integrated into those six priorities.

These are the kinds of investments that Kandaharis want. You hear it at every shura meeting you go to. It doesn't matter where you are in the province. I travelled extensively. I was only at KAF two and a half days a week. The rest of the week I was either at the PRT or out at the forward operating bases. I was always out and about by road. I feel I had a good sense for what Kandaharis were looking for.

The third key take-away is the adoption of an integrated approach between the civilian and the military team. That was really what creating the position of the RoCK was all about. It was to make sure we had better integration between the military and the civilian components of the mission. In the first instance, it meant that you needed to recognize and bridge cultural differences, which included both bureaucratic cultures and general life experiences.

I worked closely with Brigadier-General Laroche and Brigadier-General Thompson on physical co-location of our staffs, joint planning among our staffs, joint intelligence, and resource allocation. This is a huge advancement, something Canada is doing much better than any of our allies. The development in the field of a joint, integrated civilian-military strategy, the Kandahar action plan, was the first of its kind. Other allies have taken notice and commented on many occasions about what progress they've seen in the integration. They knew that when General Thompson and I were together, we had a unified front. They knew that if they talked to us separately, we would be reinforcing each other's views of things, which was very important.

The take-away from that is basic. You need a common analysis among everyone on the team. To advance that, we pushed our civilians farther out to the forward operating bases, where we had political officers, development officers, and police officers physically co-located with the battle group in the "omelette". Right away, within the first couple of weeks of our doing that, we saw a difference in the analysis that was coming back from the teams in the field. They had a shared vision of what was happening at the district level, and it meant that we could better pull forward the resources from the PRT. It also meant that we could push some of the resources from the Afghan government in Kandahar out to the districts. This is something we had not been able to do before, without having our political development and police colleagues out there.

●(1115)

The fourth thing I'd like to flag is active, empowered civilian engagement and expertise combined with a sustained focus on Afghan leadership and ownership, even if it takes time.

We've drawn a lot of lessons from our first two years in Kandahar, and we've adapted to deliver on governance and development in a non-permissive environment. That's really the key. We are trying to deliver governance and development programs in a context that frankly Canada has never had to do before. We've adjusted our planning cycle and approach so that we can more effectively implement our strategies. As I said, we've significantly increased the footprint to deliver. This has been especially important on the side of police and corrections officers. Having my police officers and my corrections officers working with their Afghan counterparts every day makes a big difference. You have to have enough of your team in theatre so they can have that sustained impact over time. The other thing was engagement with civilian authorities. With the creation of the position of the RoCK, you now had a civilian counterpart, someone whom the governor could turn to, someone whom the line ministries could turn to in a civilian capacity, who could then make the link for them as well into Kabul and their line ministries. There is not always an obvious link between what's happening at the national and provincial levels; we could facilitate that, also demonstrating that the Canadian interest in Kandahar went far beyond security matters and was integrally linked with our development and governance concerns.

Finally, the fifth take-away for me was really the devolution of authorities, and that was a big evolution. Delegated decision-making and financial authorities made a big difference in terms of our being agile and responsive to developments on the ground. For instance, the fact that the RoCK was allocated \$2 million worth of signing authorities—which frankly is probably the most significant signing authorities that a field officer on the civilian side has in any of our missions—meant that when the Sarapoza prison break occurred, within 24 hours of that happening we were able to do the site review, go to the prison with the engineers and the Afghan Ministry of Justice officials, and do a preliminary assessment of what needed to be done. Within 24 hours we had already identified a plan for rehabilitating the perimeter of the security so that we could get back to helping them to strengthen their capacities, but equally important, so that Kandaharis weren't going to see the blown-up prison entrance every day as they drove down the road, which was impacting on their perceptions of security. Because we had delegated authorities, I didn't have to come back to Ottawa and have that conversation about the allocation of resources. I was immediately able to allocate the resources and start the engineering work. That makes us much more responsive to issues as they occur.

We've also created new tools to deal with being in a non-permissive environment. The creation of the Kandahar Peace and Security Fund and the Kandahar local initiatives program has been a real development. Again it means the political director and the development director in the field have an ability to respond to local initiatives as they're emerging. We can make links with things without having to go through a longer process, which was the case before. It also means we can be more creative with the partners we're engaging with. The challenge I would say, though, with respect to partners, and a challenge we'll continue to face, is finding and maintaining a mix of partners who are risk-tolerant, who are willing to work in some of these locations within Kandahar.

In conclusion, I would say we've come a considerable way in the last 16 months. We continue to demonstrate leadership, positively

engaging with our Afghan counterparts, but we need to maintain our focus. We need to continue to adapt to changing circumstances, and we need to continue to set realistic goals and report on our progress against them as we facilitate greater Afghan leadership.

• (1120)

[Translation]

I am very conscious of the time, so I will perhaps stop here in order for us to have a discussion and for me to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much for those comments.

We'll open it up for a round of questioning.

We'll start with the official opposition, for seven minutes.

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

Elissa, it's good to see you again, under different circumstances.

I was struck by two points you made about engagement, having the right people and the right tools. Clearly, under the report the government made in March of this year, priority two was about increasing the capacity-building to deliver core service, economic development, etc.

You didn't raise this, but I will ask you if you are aware of it. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities was tentatively proposed to go to Afghanistan at the end of June, and the purpose was to look at the ability to develop certain programs of capacity-building at the village level, to do very much what this says here. Now they're not going, for whatever reasons, whether they be political, financial, whatever. But to me that is a partner. I raised this with USAID a month or two ago. To me, that is a critical partner. If you want to talk about capacity-building, and I'm a bit biased as a former president, but I can tell you, I know the projects we've done around the world, and usually we're called in for the very purpose—particularly in areas where there is no infrastructure whatsoever—of trying to develop the kind of work that we as Canadians, regardless of party, support.

I just wondered if you could first comment on that and what role, if any, you would suggest we should be playing to move that particular issue along.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: I can't comment on FCM per se, because I left theatre in January. What I can say is that a focus on trying to engage that kind of expertise was important to us, is important to us. I spent a lot of time trying to encourage more presence from NGO partners, for instance, in southern Afghanistan. We had some very positive conversations with the Aga Khan Foundation, for instance, and with CARE as well. There are already 13 NGO partners that we're working with solidly in Kandahar, in addition to the presence of all the UN agency funds and programs. We're quite fortunate from that perspective that most of them are at least present in Kandahar.

For issues such as municipal management capacity and core governance, we had projects under way with UNDP, a program called ASGP. Of course, I can't remember what the acronym stands for now, but it's basically a governance program that was meant to reinforce the capacity of the governor's office so that that office could succeed beyond any individual, which I know you appreciate from having been there. I lived through three governors while I was in Kandahar.

We also had initiatives with UN-HABITAT, which were specifically aimed at looking at how we might build the capacity of the mayor's office, for instance, given that Kandahar City is a major municipality.

So it's definitely something we're keen to continue to work on. We were keen when I was there. Trying to make sure the partners have a good understanding, though, is important, so we take our time in bringing new partners down. We usually have them do a go-and-see visit. We have discussions with them about duty of care for their staff. It's really important that they be thinking about those things.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: That kind of on-the-ground experience, having the right people, the right tools, would make sense, so maybe we should get them to get knocking on the doors again.

Mr. Brodeur, do you have any comment on that, through you, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Yves Brodeur (Assistant Deputy Minister, Afghanistan Task Force, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Not really. I think Ms. Golberg basically explained how we work there, and I think the bottom line for us is that any kind of capacity...or let's say that anyone who can bring additional support in order to raise the level of capacity I think is welcome. But again, under the circumstances, conditions have to be looked at carefully, and we do partner with a lot of people. It's not always easy because conditions are not always right, but surely, again, we would welcome such an opportunity.

• (1125)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: And they are of course funded by CIDA, so they would be used to working in that.

I'll ask one other quick question, and then I'll turn it over to my colleagues. There are over 230,000 displaced people in Afghanistan, and the number seems to be growing. It seems to be an increasing problem both around Kabul and other major centres. How would you suggest we are responding to that as an international community in conjunction with the Afghan authorities?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: Displacement is an issue I'm quite familiar with. In a previous life I was director of humanitarian affairs and disaster response, so I had lots of meetings with UNHCR colleagues in Kandahar. There's a strong UN high commissioner for refugees present. They're the ones who are the lead agency in dealing with IDP issues. Canada is providing them with significant support in Afghanistan. We also work with them on a policy basis. One of the things we've been discussing with the Afghan government both at the provincial level and at the federal level, if you will, is their policy towards internal displacement, the fact that there isn't necessarily a national policy on internal displacement, but there is a policy with respect to refugees and refugee returnees.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: The conditions are appalling, and they could be a hotbed for—

Ms. Elissa Golberg: In Kandahar we've invested in facilitating returnee returns. We've helped establish a centre with UNHCR, and we've spent a lot of time working on IDPs. The number of IDPs has gone down in Kandahar over the last 16 months, which is quite interesting and something we've been trying to track. So UNHCR has been re-registering displaced persons to make sure we don't have a situation where people were displaced, went back to their home communities, didn't want to stay there, and preferred to return to other communities. So we're looking at local integration opportunities as well.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you.

I will turn it over to my colleague.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Thank you for being here. I'm pleased to be here. I don't sit on this committee.

You have used a statement and given the strategic plan for focusing on what Kandaharis want. Could you elaborate on what that is? I think the committee might be interested in juxtaposing that to the strategic approach you're using.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: What you'll hear consistently from Kandaharis is an expectation that their government is going to deliver essential services and basic security to them. That's what they're looking for. Those are the things you hear over and over again. Different Kandaharis at different strata of that society mean different things when they say that, but those are the two common threads you hear consistently.

They also want to see larger infrastructure projects, which speaks to the decision to invest in the Dahla Dam, for instance, and why we were doing some of the larger support work in Kandahar City on water and sanitation. The quick-impact projects we had been doing are still useful. They're particularly useful in some of the more remote districts, but people now want to see larger investments that will lead to economic growth and job creation. Those are some of the things they're particularly keen on.

Mr. Alan Tonks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: We heard some of the same things when we were at Camp Nathan Smith and visited with local councillors. It was pretty basic. We asked them for their top five or ten issues, and it was just what you indicated.

Go ahead, Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): I wish to thank our two witnesses for being here this morning.

Ms. Golberg, I was surprised to see so much flexibility. Previously, there was a little less flexibility. I would like you to explain to us how your decision-making process works. You fall under the civil authority represented by the Canadian government, and the people you are dealing with in the field often come under the Afghan government. You are telling us that your decisions and those of General Laroche or General Thompson reinforce each other mutually.

Are you free to make your own decisions? Does the federal government provide you with a course of action and does it ask you to change your philosophy, or is it the reverse, in other words you take action in the field and then advise the government, that tells you to continue along the path you have chosen?

• (1130)

Mr. Yves Brodeur: If you allow me, I would like to provide the beginning of a response, that Elissa will complete, based upon her own personal experience.

Generally speaking, we are always guided by the priorities adopted by the government—these six priorities that you are familiar with. These priorities involve a certain number of objectives, as you know, as well as a performance indicator that we do our best to respect. The work of our colleagues in the field is integrated work, as Elissa was explaining. It aims at reaching the objectives contained within the six priorities.

I can speak about the viewpoint from Ottawa. We obviously try to provide our colleagues with the tools they need to make the required decisions with a view to reaching our objectives. That is what guides us. We do not review the objectives based upon what might happen on any given day. However, we try to determine how best to reach our objectives given the circumstances at play in any given situation.

I will give you some examples of what we face daily. Elissa would often send us messages, to my colleagues at Privy Council or to CIDA and myself, because we work in a very integrated fashion. Keeping each other informed at all times is a challenge. Elissa was able to tell us that, in her opinion, the best way to achieve such and such an objective was to do this or that. She was also able to tell us that she needed us to provide her with this or that. If she has the latitude to make decisions, she will make them in the field.

One of the basic principles that we strived to respect and carry through on was that of allowing our colleagues working in the field as much room to manoeuvre as possible. They are over there, but we are not. Our task is to provide them with the means they need to fulfil their mandate. How do things work in the field? Elissa will be able to tell you about her experience.

I would like to underscore an interesting and important aspect: we are all alone! Canada is the only country to be working in such a close and integrated fashion. In practical terms, the civilians—who in one way are represented by Elissa—and the military are on an equal footing. There is no hierarchy. The military and us must come together. We must work together, as we are partners. This is spelled out in a document entitled the Kandahar action plan. This document, subscribed to by all of the partners, reflects the priorities of the government as a whole. The partners are therefore committed to working in this fashion.

It is a good model, and as a matter of fact, it is the only one. I believe that Canada is the only country to be proceeding in this fashion, so much so that even our American partners are intrigued. This document is evolving over time and we will probably come out with a second version in the coming weeks. We will discuss this new version with our American colleagues, given their growing presence.

I will stop here, in order for Elissa to continue.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Will this version be submitted to the Committee before any final decision is made, or will we simply be presented with a *fait accompli*?

Mr. Yves Brodeur: This is a working document, a tool that allows us to coordinate the work in the field in the same fashion. We do what we believe is necessary.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: It is a document drafted by people who are in the field. We have had strategic plans, and this is all that we required from Ottawa. We, the people working in the field, are the ones responsible for executing the strategic plan and adapting it to Kandahar.

What do the six priorities mean in day-to-day life in Kandahar? I always felt free to do what I needed to do, because Ottawa had provided me with a very clear plan. It was its execution that was the issue.

Mr. Claude Bachand: However, there is a military hierarchy that goes all the way up to the Chief of Defence Staff. Were there at any point in time differences of opinion between you, General Laroche or General Thompson, such that they had to call upon their superior to obtain confirmation of changes in trends or philosophy?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: I admit that there were conversations from time to time, but there was never a need for us to call upon our superiors.

• (1135)

[*English*]

That's the benefit of having mission command, if you will, on the civilian side and on the military side, because our senior managers trust us to make those decisions and to come to an agreement with them.

Yes, sometimes it meant that General Thompson and General Laroche would have to adjust their military plan, if it meant that on the civilian side we were not necessarily planning to have governance and development projects in those areas. That's the benefit of having the conversation. It's to say, "Yes, you could go into that area, but if you go into that area, you should know that the community there has told us they don't necessarily want schools or police stations there, but they want them further over in another place." That's the value-added that we bring on the civilian side. And vice-versa, General Thompson and General Laroche might say to me, "I need you to talk to that community and determine whether or not that's an area where Canada should be making some of its investments." That conversation goes back and forth, and it's critically important.

Both of us were driven by the six priorities and by the NATO operational plans. Then the decision would come to us, as the two senior officials in the field, to determine what kind of direction we were going to give to the joined-up military-civilian team to make sure it would work.

[*Translation*]

It is not always easy. It is absolutely necessary for there to be tremendous cooperation between us, but I believe that we succeeded where few could have.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's all the time we have for that round.

We're moving over now to the government side, and Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to say

[*Translation*]

welcome to our witnesses.

[*English*]

I just want to take a moment, Ms. Golberg, to say thank you on behalf of Canadians, and Canadian women, in particular, for representing us so well when you were in Kandahar in Afghanistan. I think as women we see things a little differently, so it is truly a privilege for me to be here today. I am not a member of this committee normally, but I did sit in on it one time and saw very clearly that we do see things differently, and it's a privilege for me to be here again today. So thank you on behalf of other Canadian women and myself.

I want to get to some questioning about the human rights of women, because I think they are very, very important. When I was here last time, it was really surprising to me that we actually had members of this committee who thought it wasn't a fact that women were not going to school. That's why I say women see things a little differently: when we see other women being oppressed and abused, we really take it to heart.

So I want you to comment for me, if you could, because of your experience, and tell us how important it is for these women and

young girls to be going to school. What have you seen, and how important is that?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

It can't be overstated how significant it is for these girls and their parents to have the opportunity to go to school. This is a fundamental shift in their society.

And you're especially struck by it when you go to one of the schools that Canada or another donor has helped to rehabilitate and you see seven-year-olds, and I say seven-year-olds because of course when you're watching the seven-year-olds and you're looking at them and they're counting and they're reading and they're singing, you are immediately struck by the fact that that is not something they would have been permitted to do seven years ago. This is new, and this is changing, and it's an adjustment for their society.

Now, I'm not going to sing to you a happy freedom day song. There's a lot of work to be done. Kandahar in particular, the south, is extremely conservative. It is the most conservative part of the country.

Nevertheless, whenever I talked to the teacher-parent committees when we would go out and about—because we didn't construct schools unless the committees agreed to it—they wanted their girls to have the opportunity to go to school. They were asking for that opportunity. And it wasn't just girls. It was also adults.

One of my favourite projects in the field—and permit me to blow my horn on this one—is a small project we're funding through the Kandahar local initiatives program for adult literacy and numeracy. We have about 14,000 adults who have gone through the program, 80% of whom have been women. When I would talk to the graduates of that program, those women would say to me, "I can now go to the market and know that I'm getting the right change." They'll also tell you that it's changed the way their husband looks at them. Now, that's just anecdotally, from talking to some of the graduates. You also have them telling you that it's also meant that their family dynamic has changed, that the husbands are now a little bit more willing to allow their kids to go to school, both male and female.

The other things we've been doing to try to facilitate this in those contexts where there might otherwise be some concerns—because kids are often, obviously, also viewed as an economic asset to the family—is to provide additional support. Through the World Food Programme, we do food-for-literacy programs. So we'll give pulses and oils in order to encourage the family members to allow their children to go to school. There is a range of things we're doing from that perspective.

But it's not only education; it's also employment opportunities. One of the things we've been trying to do through the Kandahar local initiatives program is specifically target, with the Afghan Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, opportunities for women's employment.

Again, Kandahar is different from the rest of the country. I know the committee has talked before about MISFA, the microfinance program. It's been extraordinarily successful elsewhere in the country. We've had a much harder time of it in Kandahar. Why? Anecdotally speaking, it is because the south is much more conservative. What makes microfinance programs generally successful is that women can work outside the home.

We've been working with our colleagues in the U.S.A. to try to find ways that women can have employment generation opportunities inside the home—poultry raising, tailoring, and other kinds of opportunities—that will make them economically viable, but also respect the culture in which they're operating.

The last thing I'll flag is on health care. Access to health care for women in the south has improved in a way that is unbelievable. If anybody had been there before, they would know that frankly women were not allowed, for the most part, to seek health care by themselves. They would always have to be accompanied by a male family member. And frankly, the health care system itself was just not at a level at which it could meet women's needs.

Some of the things we've been investing in have been specifically to facilitate women's access to better medical services, whether it's midwives, for instance, or things like the first maternal waiting home to open in Afghanistan, which is in Kandahar. That's going to significantly improve the chances for women to survive childbirth, and subsequently, for their children to be able to grow up.

So there are some key advances we're making, but this is just the tip of the iceberg. This is going to take significant amounts of time, and nobody should be under any illusions otherwise.

• (1140)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I know I'm probably out of time, but I do have a question about the fact that women protested against the Shia law. How significant was that? It seems to me that it was quite significant, but I'm not there. I am not sure what relevance that has, because I haven't been there and I haven't seen it. So can you tell me just how significant that moment was?

Mr. Yves Brodeur: I think I will have to answer that question, because Elissa had left Kandahar and Afghanistan at that time.

It was very significant. What we saw there was, as we say in French, a *crise de conscience* among women concerning their role and importance in society. There was a very important and significant mobilization of women to protest the law. What happened, and I have said this to the committee before, was that you had the beginning of a debate involving women, and not only women who were against the issue, but also women who had views that were religiously based.

That was a very defining moment. In the recent history of modern Afghanistan, all of a sudden you have women who have decided that they have to be involved, to be active in defining their own destiny. That's very good, and it's recognized. I think, by and large, women want to maintain it, and I think that is what you heard from Mrs. Sobhrang two weeks ago.

It's work that needs to progress. We need to support it, and we're doing so. It's actually quite positive.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Glover.

We'll go over to Mr. Harris.

• (1145)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your presentation this morning.

I'm interested in your statement of progress in relation to the number of civilians engaged in the mission in Afghanistan. I think you've told us that there is now a total of 63, and the breakdown was into police officers, corrections people, development officials, and political officials. Could you give us a numerical breakdown of the 63 we're now talking about?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: There are more than that in Afghanistan as a whole. I think we're at 102. We can give you the specific breakdown in Kandahar, which is what I was responsible for. We went from 15 to 63 in my time there. They included 24 civilian police officers and four corrections officers, and then the rest were a mix of political officers and CIDA officers.

Mr. Jack Harris: You were the first RoCK, I guess. You've been replaced. Who's your replacement?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: It's Ken Lewis.

Mr. Jack Harris: I mentioned the structure as well, of some of the other members of the committee. You talked about mission command, civilian and mission command, military. Would you consider the RoCK as the mission command civilian?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: I would for southern Afghanistan, yes. I reported to the ambassador, who obviously has oversight over everything that's happening in the country. The purpose of establishing the RoCK was to have somebody in the south who was managing the civilian personnel and the governance and development programming. That was essentially the division of labour between General Thompson, General Laroche, and me. They, in the first instance, were preoccupied with security, but not all of security.

As Denis would have pointed out to you—I think he appeared before the committee—we used to have a list of things that were essential to individual Afghans on a daily basis. We used to joke, because the first one was security, and then the rest were basic services. Denis used to say, "I'm responsible for the first." Then he'd say, "No, I'm actually not solely responsible for the first, because within security are also included policing and corrections, which of course is Elissa's area of responsibility." We worked very closely together, but certainly I was where the buck stopped on governance and development issues in the south.

Mr. Jack Harris: Would these individuals, then, essentially report to you?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: That's correct.

Mr. Jack Harris: They did. Okay.

I'm also interested in the Kandahar peace and security fund that you mentioned, and the local initiatives fund. Are these separate funds over which you would have control? If so, what kind of money are we talking about? We know that there's a great deal of Canadian aid going to Afghanistan, and I would think not very much of it is in the direct control of Canadian decision-makers, as I understand it. Perhaps you could elaborate on that for me.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: The KPS is a \$400,000 replenishable fund. It's a delegated authority to the political director at the PRT, the Foreign Affairs officer. It's to help focus on peace- and security-related initiatives, things that might come up. If the governor wanted to hold a *jirga* meeting, for instance, we could use resources to quickly support that kind of reconciliation initiative.

The KLIP, the Kandahar local initiatives program, as I was leaving was upped to \$15 million. The KLIP is a social and economic development fund to work with local partners and again to take advantage of local opportunities that would arise, for us to be able to quickly disburse resources. The support we're providing to Kandahar University, for instance, and some of the work we're doing on employment generation and enterprise development comes out of the KLIP fund.

Mr. Jack Harris: Are these budgeted funds for a period of time, or are they one-off notions? If you're engaged in supporting the university, that sounds to me like something you might not do as a one-off but maybe as an ongoing support.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: It depends on the project. The resources exist out for a certain number of years, and depending on the project, you can allocate funds over a few fiscal years, or if it's a one-off project, obviously the resources are out the door.

The KPS, the Kandahar peace and security program, was a pilot project in the first year. It has now been renewed for this year, because we see that it makes a difference for the political officers in the field to have a readily accessible resource base. We can increase it, depending on how well the program goes over time.

Mr. Jack Harris: How would that compare with our overall aid commitment to Afghanistan? The money for these two together, I suppose, is \$15 million to \$16 million. How does that compare to the overall aid commitment to Afghanistan from Canada?

• (1150)

Ms. Elissa Golberg: Do you mean on a year-over-year basis? Overall it was about \$132 million per year in the year that I was there. This is a fraction of it, but it was meant to be a sort of "small is beautiful" thing. You're really looking at local initiatives, so there's an absorptive capacity question as well. It's about being strategic. Those funds are meant to identify those very punctual opportunities that arise to which we can add value and which complement the larger programs we have in place. You have these two things happening in parallel with one another.

For instance, with the big signature project funds that are going towards primary and secondary school education, we can then use KLIP to focus on the university. It's a complementary set of tools.

Mr. Jack Harris: We had what was to me a disturbing report a couple of weeks ago in the newspaper in which a district education officer or local official gave a rather despairing view of education development and the building of schools, which is obviously something that Canada has placed an emphasis on. He said that building schools in rural areas was almost impossible. He thought the biggest problem was a lack of teachers, that they didn't have teachers—the capacity to actually run schools. Also, the security issues were too difficult outside of urban areas. In the same news article there was a reference to Canada making use of UAVs to supervise construction projects or to see whether the contracts were doing what they said they were to do.

It seems to me, first of all—and this is a military question, I suppose—that it's a very odd use of a \$2.5 million drone to see whether the contractors are actually doing the work they're contracted to do. It also indicates that the notion of being able to do that readily is not as simple as it sounds.

The Chair: You just have a few seconds for a response. I know it's going to be hard to do, but please try.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: The reason we always work with communities is that they have to be part owners of the schools that are being constructed. That helps to ensure their security. We're not going to put something up in an area where the communities themselves are not buying into it, nor the department of education. That's a critical pillar for our decisions around school construction.

I don't disagree that teachers are also key, which is why we're focusing on the 3,000 teachers. It's not just bricks and mortar; it also has to be the teachers, going in parallel, absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you.

That ends the opening round. We have a few minutes left to get into the second round. We'll first go to the government and then back to the official opposition.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): I thank both our witnesses for being here.

Ms. Golberg, you mentioned the requirement for risk-tolerant partners. Did you find any when you were there? If you did, who were they?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: As I said, we did have about 13 NGO partners that we worked with, along with a panoply of UN agencies. Obviously we also work closely with the ICRC. Then there were some private companies. Development Works is an NGO, but not, if you understand what I'm saying. They also do some for-profit work. And CADG, Central Asia Development Group, is a more private-sector-oriented company that we did a lot of infrastructure work with, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development work. So there are some risk-tolerant partners, but it is a challenge. They need to take into account the personal welfare of their staff.

One of the things we would do on a regular basis with all of our partners is we would sit down with them and map out the parts of the province they felt very comfortable going to, the parts of the province they didn't feel comfortable going to unless they had a guarantee from the community that they would be provided with security, and then the parts of the province they weren't willing to go to. That helped influence the discussions we would then have with our Canadian Forces and ISAF partners about the areas they needed to be focusing on to help build up the confidence and the perception of security amongst the partners so that they would be willing to work in those areas. The same is true for the Afghan line ministries. We would also do that sort of anecdotal perceptions-of-security mapping exercise with the line ministries because they also didn't often feel comfortable going to certain areas of the province.

• (1155)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Did you see some progress in your 11 months there?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: I saw progress in some areas. I saw declines in others. It also depends on the time of year. Certainly the height of the fighting season is not the time when you want to necessarily be pursuing some of your larger-scale initiatives. That's the time of year when you should really be planning and lining things up.

In Kandahar City, we made a lot of progress in the year that I was there, if you also count the suburbs of it, and even in Zhari and Panjwai, which are very difficult, as this committee knows. In Panjwai proper and Bazar-e Panjwai, we saw that small city blossom. In the time I was there we went from having pretty much nobody living and working there to having about 200 little shops. So it very much depended. And then we were able to bring partners in. But it's an ongoing dialogue that you have to have with people and a very transparent conversation about security risks.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: You mentioned working in an integrated manner, not just coordinated. Ultimately, it's about the Afghans working in an integrated manner with each other in their own country. Can you comment on any progress you might have seen in the Afghans' ability to understand and operate in that integrated manner, not just with the allies but with themselves, between their own departments?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: Yes. People have a perception that there aren't structures functioning, but there are. There are a few areas that I can point to. We had a weekly security meeting that would occur that the governor would chair, and the heads of the 205 Corps, the provincial police, the border police, and the NDS were all expected to be present, as well as me and General Thompson, for an integrated conversation about security threats and security concerns.

There was a similar meeting that would take place on development matters every two weeks with all of the relevant Afghan line ministries that were present within Kandahar, as well as the UN and the NGOs.

There was one committee that I saw improve over time, which was the Provincial Disaster Management Committee. That was, again, a committee that brought together the relevant Afghan line ministries, as well as district leaders, who had concerns that would arise, obviously, in terms of contingency planning, whether that was

for floods or for droughts, or as a result of situations of conflict that would arise, as we saw in the Arghandab last summer.

So there are structures that exist that bring the Afghans together. It's still a work in progress. They certainly recognize the need for cooperation. Voter registration was another example where all of the relevant security components had to work together in order to have a successful voter registration exercise. It is something that they know needs to be done, but the challenge that we tend to run into is the capacity deficit. It's that they're not deep within the various line ministries. You'll have a director at the top, and then maybe one or two officials, but as you go further down into the bureaucracy you don't necessarily have the depth to be able to have that integration at the working level everywhere that you would need to have.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: This question may be better for Mr. Brodeur. It's a tough one about the challenges post-2011. What do you see as the biggest challenge to continuing our efforts for reconstruction, development, and capacity-building beyond 2011?

The Chair: It will have to be a very short answer. I apologize.

Mr. Yves Brodeur: Two seconds. The challenge will be there. Again, it's hard for me to predict what the world will look like in 2011, but I think one can assume that security will remain. Is it going to get much worse or a lot better? It's hard to tell at this point in time, but that will remain, I guess, a very important factor. As the Prime Minister said, we will remain engaged on the construction and diplomatic side of things.

To me, personally, sustainability is the big thing—how to actually help support the Afghans beyond 2011 to maintain the gains they have achieved so far, for which they have paid a high price, and how to really try to bring this to the next level. I'm quite confident that we'll be able to do that, but it's a long-term project.

• (1200)

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Over to Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, both of you.

To make it simple, I have two questions, and you can figure out who's going to answer them and how to divide them up.

The last page of the government's report from yesterday—the quarterly report—refers to the question of political reconciliation and how difficult that's proving to be. Quoting from the report, the statement is:

...we are supporting efforts, especially in Kandahar, to build confidence and capacity in local communities for future reconciliation attempts.

Perhaps, Ms. Golberg, because of your work in Kandahar, you could fill us in on what is really involved in that effort of political reconciliation.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: Our overall approach to reconciliation—and I'm sure both Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Brodeur have mentioned this before—is obviously Afghan-led, particularly at the national level.

As it cascades down to us at the provincial level, it's about trying to find opportunities. One of the things we've focused on, in the first instance, is supporting the provincial council. The provincial council is one of those forums that brings together various segments of society to have conversations on a regular basis about issues that are of concern to communities. That's a key forum. And we've spent time reinforcing both the infrastructure for the provincial council, so there's actually a proper place where people can meet—as you know, this is an important part of these processes—but also the management of the provincial council.

The second area that we've spent some time working on was the governors-led jirga process. Governor Raufi and Governor Wesa both indicated an interest in establishing a jirga process that would bring together the tribal elders. Governor Raufi had a more expansive vision for it. He wanted not only the “usual suspects” of tribal elders, but he also wanted to bring in teachers and religious leaders to really have a broad-based conversation. We monitored the process, but also supported him. We supported him personally, in terms of being a sounding board for him, but also being willing to provide resources out of the Kandahar Peace and Security Fund to make it happen, help them get a venue and have food, in order to have these meetings take place. A lot of what we do in reconciliation is not terribly sexy. It's about actually creating the opportunity and conditions for those conversations to occur.

Then there are other things we would do. We provided some modest support a while back to the Peace through Strength program for the office, so the office could function. Then we've done a variety of other things, including a project we've been funding with the Tribal Liaison Office that is about mapping. It's helping Afghans better understand what the lay-down is and what some of the grievances are so that they can develop conversations about these things over time.

Hon. Bob Rae: My next question, I hope, is not too far removed from reality. President Obama today talked about human rights. He talked about equality and how important that is. As the father of three young women, over the last 30 years, by necessity, I've become an advocate for women's rights, and I am very proud to do so. It's an interesting question as to what extent these values are perceived in Afghanistan, in Kandahar, as western values, or to what extent they're perceived or felt to be human values that they are now embracing.

Mr. Brodeur, you talked about sustainability. How do we actually move forward? How do we go forward with the confidence that the

kinds of institutions that we're creating and the values that we're attempting to really have ingrained in Afghan society...? To what extent are they seen as a graft that comes from us as opposed to something that is genuinely embedded within the guts of Afghan society?

Mr. Yves Brodeur: This will be fast, because I know Elissa wants to come in on this, and she's the one who lived there, not me.

It is important to understand that we're not driven actually by the will to impose values. Here you could have a whole conference about what that means and what western values are compared to others. It is a very complicated debate. It's even more complex because of the nature of Afghan society, which is family-based, tribal-based, and also you're adding another layer that probably, in many ways, has some similarities to what we have, to what we know as parliamentary democracy and all its infinite variations.

It is clear in my mind, and I think it is the same for my colleagues, that we are not there trying to push values. We're there to try to help the Afghans build the society they want for themselves. They have a constitution, and if you haven't read that, it's worth spending 15 minutes to do so. It's a very short document. It addresses in many ways the kind of society in which they want to live. It's not being challenged. I think Afghans, by and large, are supporting that constitution, but they also are deeply attached to some aspects of their traditional lives: clans, families, tribes. That is very important. We try to actually keep that in mind when we intervene in the field, in terms of trying to accommodate people and helping them to strengthen their decision structure.

Sometimes these things collide, not with us but within Afghanistan itself. It's not easy, but given the complexity, they're doing a fairly good job. It's tough for us as well, because whenever you make a decision, you have to look at this puzzle from different angles; there are different angles, and you have to find the common point where all these things are converging.

I don't think they're rejecting us. I don't think they want us to tell them how to live their lives, but they certainly want us to help them build a space where they can actually have a life that is in conformity with their own values.

Do you want to...?

• (1205)

The Chair: We are just about out of time.

Mr. Obhrai, you indicated you had a point of order. Does it have something to do with the witnesses?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Yes, it does, and mine is a procedural question.

We have the assistant deputy minister of the Afghanistan task force here, so this is the best time to ask him questions. When this committee was formed and when we did the thing, the most important aspect of it was to oversee the Afghanistan mission. One of the most important aspects of that was that the committee decided we needed to travel to Afghanistan to do this. Now, I know that Greg, I, Bob, and Madame Lalonde have not been to Afghanistan. You have been, but you went there as part of the defence committee, not the foreign affairs committee. So I want to know if I can ask the clerk and the deputy minister, in reference to our trip to Afghanistan, about the logistics and all these sorts of things, so we can have an update. It is very important I think to do that.

The Chair: I understand that. I know our travel plans were discussed in camera for security reasons and so on, so this would have to be very general.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Fine. Let's just get to hear this thing. It's very important.

The Chair: I'm not sure if Mr. Brodeur is free to respond.

If you want to comment, sir, I know this is completely off the topic you were prepared to come on.

Mr. Yves Brodeur: Very briefly, Mr. Chair, and again keeping in mind what you said about the fact that this is not an in camera meeting, my understanding is—and the interest of the committee has been registered, and that goes without saying—there's still some discussion with the Privy Council Office, which actually has the lead on this. My understanding is that the request is under consideration, so you should get the signal from them quite soon about the possibility of travelling and when the best time for doing that would actually be.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, I want to make a point here. It's very necessary for us to go to Afghanistan as a whole committee, to ensure the whole committee has a perspective on our mission in Afghanistan. We are doing the other report that we did from the U.S. mission in Iraq, which we're going to do in camera.

The trip to Afghanistan, with the logistics and everything, becomes a very important element of this committee, so I want to emphasize the strong importance of all committee members working together to address when we will go to Afghanistan.

• (1210)

The Chair: I certainly endorse that.

Mr. Brodeur, it is a very complex thing to get an entire committee into a combat zone. It takes a lot of effort and a lot of resources on behalf of everybody involved, not only the military but also the civilian people. We have to make sure that when we do go, it is of value, not only to Canada but to our people over there, and that it's conducted properly.

I'm not sure if that answers your question.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: My main concern here is that the committee act as a committee in this thing. I don't know if I should bring this up, but I do understand that the Liberal critic wants to go by himself, which does not create the cohesiveness that is working in this

committee, because then you have somebody else's view of this thing. It can create a lot of problems. I thought we were all part of one committee, getting the deputy minister's ear on the logistics.

If my friend Bob wants to say something about it, he's welcome to say it, but I think we should be part.... Bob was part of the committee when we went to Washington. In the report we're doing, his contribution was very well done. I hope he's going to do the same thing with this thing.

The Chair: I would certainly hope that all members of the committee who can make that trip, when and if it happens, would be there.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: It's not when it happens: It has to happen.

The Chair: Well, I understand that, but as indicated, this is an open session, and we have to use caution here.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: It's the mandate of the committee.

The Chair: It is. That's right, and it's part of what we said we'd do.

Is there anybody else?

Thank you for that intervention.

Ms. Golberg, I want to thank you very much. It was quite remarkable sitting here listening to you, and also when we visited with you in Afghanistan. We obviously at times get the right person in the right spot for the right job, and I truly believe that you fill all of those. Your commitment to Canada and to the people of Afghanistan is remarkable. To have somebody with your clarity come before the committee is very refreshing, so we thank you very much for that.

If you have any closing comments you wish to make, please do.

Ms. Elissa Golberg: No, sir. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here. I can tell you that you have a team of remarkable public servants who day in and day out appreciate the fact that they're representing you and representing all Canadians, and they're doing it to the best of their abilities.

The Chair: Could you just make one comment for us on how important it is, whether it's a defence committee or this committee or officials from Canada, to visit the area to interact with both the military and civilian people?

Ms. Elissa Golberg: I have certainly always found it to be extremely valuable. I felt the committee members found it valuable as well. It gives you a better feel for the day-to-day work that's under way. I will say that it is logistically a challenge, so please don't underestimate that. In order for us to make sure you see the things you want to see, we have to make sure the right provisions are in place.

The Chair: Very good.

We thank you very much.

The committee will suspend for five minutes while we go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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