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Thursday, October 8, 2009

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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

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•(0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): Good day everyone. I would now like to call the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee will be considering the plans and priorities of the Department of National Defence and of the Canadian Forces.

Before we begin,

[English]

I want to welcome our new member from the Liberal Party, the Honourable Mr. Dosanjh. Thank you for being with us.

With us today we have the Minister of National Defence, Peter Gordon MacKay.

Thanks very much, Minister, for being here with us. We have an hour. Perhaps you could take 10 or 12 minutes for your presentation, after which each member will have the opportunity to ask you questions.

The floor is yours.

[Translation]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, honourable colleagues. It is a pleasure for me to be here today. I know that there is a great deal going on in my department.

[English]

Colleagues, I have with me today members of the National Defence team: Robert Fonberg, the Deputy Minister of the Department of National Defence; Denis Rouleau, the Vice-Admiral and Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff; Dan Ross, the Assistant Deputy Minister (Materiel); and Major-General Walt Semianiw, the Chief of Military Personnel. Finally, I have as well, and I'm pleased to introduce to you, Lieutenant-General André Deschamps, the new Chief of the Air Staff, just having assumed that post last week. So I'm delighted to be surrounded by some very capable members of the National Defence team.

As I said at the outset, Mr. Chair, it's always a pleasure to be with you. In the time since my last appearance here, there has been a lot of activity within the Department of National Defence. I'll begin immediately with the most relevant development, in my view—that is, issues that stem from the Canada First defence strategy, which, as you know, calls for an investment of \$490 billion in personnel,

equipment, readiness, and infrastructure over a 20-year period. These are known as the four pillars of the Canada First defence strategy, and I'm pleased to report that we're making progress in a number of the key objectives of that strategy.

[Translation]

We are looking to increase the numbers of the Canadian Forces. Last year alone, the Canadian Forces enrolled more than 7,000 new recruits. And this year, we are on course to exceed our target. Furthermore, the drop in the attrition rate is more good news. Over the last two months, this rate has fallen to 8.47%, or more than a full percentage point.

A comprehensive new retention strategy, released this summer, is helping. The new strategy offers a renewed commitment to military families, greater flexibility with respect to career options and better career management support.

[English]

Mr. Chair, of course, once you have the people, which is the most valuable asset we have at the Department of National Defence, you need to ensure that they have the equipment, the tools, they need to do the work we expect of them. This year alone I've had the opportunity to travel across the country to visit a number of our bases and announce numerous investments or improvements, particularly to do with aging infrastructure that you would understand, in many cases, has not been touched since the Second World War.

I was in Gagetown, for example, in July to announce one of our core Canada First defence strategy equipment commitments; that is, the family of land combat vehicles. This is a project worth in excess of \$5 billion, and it will essentially replace all of the core capabilities of land combat.

I announced another one of the government's major acquisitions in August in Halifax: new heavy-lift F-model Chinook helicopters. The price tag there is over \$2 billion.

And I've had an opportunity to travel from Gander, Newfoundland, to Esquimalt, British Columbia, to announce infrastructure projects ranging from new maintenance hangars to road, water, and sewer upgrades, and a new health services centre on many of the bases across the country.

Our investments are bringing significant economic benefits, as you would understand, Chair, to communities right now; that is, they're creating jobs in keeping with the government's other plans around economic stimulus. We're seeing local contractors and suppliers, local hands on local shovels, going to work on many of these projects on these military bases. Just two weeks ago, for example, this government announced significant benefits for companies arising from the Chinook acquisition, and if we want to get into some further detail about those actual projects and subcontracts for local suppliers, I'm pleased to discuss those details.

With respect to domestic operations, the men and women of the Canadian Forces continue to perform at a very high and demanding tempo. In addition to deployments on 18 different missions, from Afghanistan to Haiti to Africa, we know we're working in support of other agencies like the RCMP, and Public Safety, in preparation for the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver, while at the same time carrying out many other important duties, such as maritime and arctic surveillance, and search and rescue operations.

I know we'll have a chance to talk about this further, Mr. Chair and colleagues, but keep in mind that Canada has the world's largest coastline. We have very demanding and diverse terrain across this country. We have NORAD responsibilities now that include maritime approaches, so our home game, if I can put it that way, in addition to the away game, is an extremely busy time for the men and women of the Canadian Forces.

You would all know our government's commitment and our country's interest in the northern strategy, which was released this year, which focuses on sovereignty, social and economic development, governance, and the environment. In August I spent a week in several northern communities in the territories, with the Prime Minister and other members of the cabinet, on board the HMCS *Toronto*. We also had the HMCS *Corner Brook*, one of our submarines, to observe Operation Nanook, which is the Canadian Forces' annual sovereignty exercise. We saw there the participation of more than 700 people from 15 different government departments and agencies participating in this operation, which is just one of the ways we're demonstrating a visible Canadian presence in the Arctic, in addition to investments in infrastructure such as ports, runways, and buildings in the Arctic.

On Afghanistan, and on the international front, again, I would suggest to you, colleagues, that our men and women in uniform continue to perform magnificently, continue to earn the respect of our allies and partners in the United Nations-mandated, NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. The recently released fifth quarterly report of the Afghanistan mission, which I commend to you, provides an honest and frank account of our mission for the quarter ending June 30. Despite setbacks in the security environment—and I note, as all of you will, with sadness the attacks this morning in Kabul that have taken the lives of Afghan citizens, and certainly our thoughts and prayers are with those who were affected by this most recent insurgency attack. Despite this very challenging security environment, there has been progress. I never overlook the inextricable connection between security and development. We have achieved notable progress on benchmarks that are outlined in the Afghanistan report that I mentioned.

●(0910)

We are seeing continued progress on our benchmarks, from immunization of children to the education programs. We are building schools, hospitals, and roads that connect many of the villages. One of our major signature projects that I know you're familiar with, Mr. Chair, is the building of the Dahla Dam. The irrigation that comes from that allows Afghans to grow alternative crops like wheat, as opposed to poppies. I want to draw to your attention the fact that this year, for the first time in 40 years, Afghanistan will produce more wheat than poppies, and will produce sufficient wheat to feed their entire population, which we believe is of significant importance.

On visits to Afghanistan I was impressed by the improved capabilities. Others would have also noted that the Afghan national security forces, both army and police, are making gains in their ability to plan, execute, and sustain independent operations. Let's never lose sight of the fact that one of the primary goals is to enable and empower Afghan security forces to essentially protect their own population, protect their own sovereignty, and do the job that in many cases NATO and Canadian soldiers are doing on their behalf.

A major development in the way Canadian and Afghan forces conduct operations in Kandahar was and will be the continued arrival of U.S. reinforcements. That enabled a shift in focus from disrupting the insurgency in the countryside to protecting the population in and around Kandahar City. Known as the village approach, this is something that we believe other countries are emulating. This is specifically referenced in the recent report of the commander of ISAF. Stanley McChrystal spoke of the success and the pursuit of this village approach, which is "take, hold, build".

With security in place, we believe that Canadian development aid is enabling the villagers of Deh-e-bagh village, for example, to undertake some of the projects vital to their interests, such as solar-powered street lights, irrigation, and road repair. These projects are providing work for local Afghans, and more projects are in the works. We have found consistently that when we're able to hire local Afghans to do much of this work, having a shovel or a pick in your hand is a great alternative to having a rifle or being drawn into the insurgency.

This new village-based approach is making insurgency less relevant to the population and allowing them to focus on the quality-of-life provisions that we're working with them to develop. It again illustrates this link between security and development.

The Canadian way of operating is recognized and cited by senior NATO commanders as an example to follow.

●(0915)

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, Canadian Forces success comes down to the men and women who put the equipment, the operations and the strategies into action. We as a government have an obligation to care for these people who work so hard to serve their country. This government is committed to providing them with a level of care that reflects the very high value we place on them and their service. As the CDS and I readily admit, we are not perfect at this, but we are getting better at it every day.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to announce our government's decision to cover the full cost of insuring Canadian Forces members against service related injuries and illness. I also announced the opening of integrated personnel support centres across the country.

[English]

Mr. Chair, some of the improvements, which I know we'll have an opportunity to discuss, are moving along quite well. I had the chance to visit personally and speak to some of the clients as well as some of the health care service providers who are currently working in these joint personnel support units.

It is a sign of what I would describe as a compassionate shift in the direction of providing greater service for those men and women who have put themselves in harm's way and who have sustained, in many cases, serious injuries, both physical and mental. We are taking great strides to deal with those very real results of their incredible service to Canada.

In fact, this summer the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Natynczyk, launched the "Be the Difference" campaign, a mental health awareness campaign to educate Canadian Forces personnel on mental health issues.

I will share with you, colleagues, that last night the Canadian Forces were recognized by the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health. Mental health issues were front and centre. There was a great deal of recognition in the room for the efforts that the Canadian Forces have already undertaken to deal with mental health issues—most importantly, putting the issue before the public in an attempt to destigmatize.

You can understand that within the culture of the Canadian Forces there has often been—and continues to be, to some extent—very much a stoicism and strength, and there was a stigma attached to having issues, particularly issues related to post-traumatic stress, which we are now confronting.

With respect to this, in terms of the economic need, as part of the ongoing five-year \$52 million plan, we've begun to host a number of new initiatives. This means a directorate dedicated completely to mental health, and more mental health care workers. That's an issue I'll come back to during the course of our discussion; there is a general need in the country, as you would know, for more psychologists and psychiatrists, not just in the Canadian Forces but more broadly.

We've also now identified and moved forward on a centre for expertise in addictions treatment. We are chairing an international experts group on suicide prevention, and we are conducting research on post-traumatic stress and mild traumatic brain injury.

I want to commend the fine work of this committee for the work that you have done and for the report that was tabled yesterday in the House of Commons along with the government's response to your recommendations. Your committee's report on the health services of the Canadian Forces that we provide to the men and women in uniform is extremely timely considering our continued and ongoing efforts to improve in this critical area.

In fact, it's clear from the long list of programs that I just mentioned and the recommendations of this committee that some of

these initiatives are very much under way. I hope you will find that the response by the government to your committee report addresses many of the genuine concerns that were raised.

I want to thank you again for the time and thought and obvious personal attention and care that was put into this discussion and this study.

Again, just to conclude—I know you want to move on to questions—I want to thank the members of the committee for the invitation to be with you this morning. I want to thank you for your ongoing work on important defence and security issues for our country.

● (0920)

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention and for your commitment to improving Canadian Forces services.

[English]

We as a government have made a lot of progress in many areas, and will continue to work towards greater success. We look forward to working with this committee to continue making progress on a number of the important issues.

I am more than ably supported by the gentlemen here with us.

Again, both men and women of the Canadian Forces thank you for your continued interest in their well-being and in the work they do on behalf of all Canadians.

Merci beaucoup.

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

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Dosanjh, for the first round.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Yes, and if I finish...one of my colleagues will take up the time.

Thank you, Minister MacKay.

I'll try to be brief. I hope your answers will be brief as well.

I'll go to the issue of the probe under way with the Military Police Complaints Commission and the detainees' torture allegations.

On these allegations, Mr. Minister, or any other torture allegations, when did you first know of the torture allegations in your previous capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs or in your current capacity as Minister of Defence? When did you first know of any of these or other torture allegations, and what did you or anyone else, to your knowledge, do in the government?

Hon. Peter MacKay: One of the things that was done immediately was the stopping of transfers. At that time, when it first came to my attention, I was actually in the theatre on a visit to Afghanistan, and the decision was taken immediately to stop transferring prisoners until such time as further information could be garnered. I don't have that exact date, but I was there in my capacity as a minister. I'll provide that to you.

The ongoing efforts by the government at that time, as you will recall—and I'm not sure if you were the defence critic or the foreign affairs critic, but I know you're back in that position and I congratulate you—were to undertake improving the agreement that had been left in place by the previous government, your administration, to ensure there were greater protections for prisoners who would be taken into custody by Afghans. But let's be clear about what we're talking about here, Mr. Dosanjh. We're talking about abuse allegations by Afghans on other Afghans.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Absolutely.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I don't want any Canadians to ever have any misunderstanding or any misgivings about allegations that are out there. These are not allegations against Canadian Forces personnel or Canadian Forces military police. The subject of the investigation you're referring to, the Military Police Complaints Commission, is limited to what the military police did with respect to the transfer of prisoners.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Yes, I am quite aware of that.

The second question is, why is your government throwing obstacle after obstacle, hurdle after hurdle, in the way of that inquiry or investigation that is under way with the Military Police Complaints Commission?

Hon. Peter MacKay: The short answer is that we are not. In fact, we are cooperating. We've provided thousands of documents. We've provided witnesses. We continue to cooperate within the mandate of the Military Police Complaints Commission. That mandate, as you will know, has recently been affirmed by the Federal Court. That is a mandate that was handed down, that is in legislation, that has been affirmed now by the Federal Court, which looked into the scope under which this investigation could take place.

We're also bound by the Canada Evidence Act, which was amended in section 38 by your government in the wake of 9/11 in the year 2001. So we are legislated, we are bound by judicial precedent, and we are cooperating fully within the mandate of the Military Police Complaints Commission.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: With the determination that this government is bringing motion after motion, and there is a battery of lawyers on a full-time basis essentially impeding any progress of that inquiry—

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's your interpretation.

• (0925)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Let me finish. I let you finish.

One is led to conclude this has actually not much to do with national security. It has more to do with political butt security.

Hon. Peter MacKay: As you would know, sir, as a former attorney general and as a former minister of the crown federally, the federal government, and certainly the political branch of government, does not interfere in quasi-judicial inquiries, so there is no political direction of government lawyers. There is no interference on the part of the government when it comes to the mandate of the Military Police Complaints Commission. You're not suggesting for a moment that somehow we should direct how witnesses are called or who is called or what evidence would make its way into that commission, are you?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Are you then suggesting that you, as minister, or your officials don't direct the lawyers who work for you and the Government of Canada?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I absolutely take the advice of lawyers from the Department of Justice, in my department—

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: And you don't direct them?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I do not direct them. That's correct.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: In fact, that would be an abdication of your responsibility if they're doing something wrong and you want to pursue a certain line as minister—

Hon. Peter MacKay: Did you, sir, direct cases under your department when you were the attorney general?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Sir, you are not an attorney general; you are the Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's correct.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Therefore, have you, or any other officials in your office, directed the lawyers to take the positions they continue to take to create obstacles in the way of this inquiry?

Hon. Peter MacKay: We do not conduct hands-on decision-making for lawyers who are involved in the Military Police Complaints Commission, nor do we direct the commissioner.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Next question. With respect to the rape allegations vis-à-vis children by Afghan personnel, is there any investigation under way, to your knowledge, and if there is, do you know the state of that investigation?

Hon. Peter MacKay: The state of the investigation into...?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Into the allegations of rape of children by—

Hon. Peter MacKay: There was a board of inquiry, and a national investigation service inquiry has taken place with respect to these matters, yes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: That concluded they found no evidence.

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's correct.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Certain documents have come to light, which you've seen in the newspapers. I've seen them recently. As a result of that information coming forth, is your department taking any steps to deal with that issue?

Hon. Peter MacKay: If there is new information that comes forward, then steps would be taken.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: With respect to the 2011 deadline, the combat role will end.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Correct.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: The resolution of the House actually reads that our mission in Kandahar would come to an end in 2011. Can you tell us what would happen in Kandahar vis-à-vis our mission in 2011?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Well, it will respect the motion that has been passed by the House of Commons.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I understood your remarks earlier, made in another context, to say something might be left behind; some troops might be left behind. That would fly in the face of the spirit and the text of the resolution. I want to give you an opportunity to clarify your remarks.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I don't need to clarify my remarks. The combat mission will end in the year 2011.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: It said the mission will end.

Hon. Peter MacKay: We will respect the parliamentary motion. We can't be in Afghanistan fighting to protect and promote their democracy and not respect our own in this country. What that means, in my view, is that we will, in the spirit of the parliamentary motion, shift to more development, more reconstruction within that country.

That involves things, as you know, sir, such as training, such as helping the Afghan people enhance their own security, which Canadians are very good at. That involves a number of departments, including the Department of Public Safety. So we have police officers—municipal as well as the RCMP—there currently, training Afghans. We have the ability to enhance their own governance model. We're working with, certainly, CIDA, the development agency, to see all of these projects and signature projects move forward, and will continue to do so in that spirit.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Anita or Bryon, do you want to take the two minutes I have left?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Minister, counter-insurgency strategy requires a strong, stable partner. Comments made by U.S. General McChrystal indicated that, obviously, we really have to win the hearts and minds of the Afghans. Given the increased attacks, particularly where Canadian soldiers are facing increased boldness by the Taliban, what is the assessment in terms of being able to respond? To have a strong and stable partner, with the cloud hanging over the Afghan government because of the elections, how do we move forward in an effective way in responding to that?

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's a very good question, Mr. Wilfert.

Obviously we are continuing in the vein that we have thus far, which is to try to partner very much with local authorities, with the local Afghan army and police in terms of enhancing their security capacity-building. We're also working on these projects through CIDA and the Department of Foreign Affairs to work directly with villages, village elders, to identify projects that are of a priority in nature, whether it's water, energy, a school, or a hospital. That type of village approach is the one that I spoke of in my opening remarks, and it is very much aimed at the classic hearts and minds; that is to say, we want to empower Afghans to do more for themselves.

We are there at their invitation. We are there with the backing of the international community. There are over 60 countries involved in the Afghanistan mission. There's the Afghanistan pact that was signed in England at the very beginning of this particular mission, as you're aware.

We're continuing to evolve. We're continuing to work with Afghans to see that they're the ones who are doing the majority of the work, because we intend to leave. The exit strategy is obviously to empower them to do many of the things we're doing on their behalf and to work with them to achieve those goals. We'll continue to do that.

We're waiting with great interest, as I'm sure many are, to see how President Obama and his administration will respond to recommendations from ISAF Commander Stanley McChrystal. That admin-

istration is going to make a decision, I suspect, very soon as to whether there will be a surge of anywhere from 20,000 to 40,000 more troops, in addition to further civilian support for the Afghan mission.

This is our biggest international obligation, as you know. This is a mission we've committed to in a whole-of-government fashion. We're there until 2011 in the current configuration, and we will be there post-2011 with a much different configuration.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the minister for joining us. I would also like to thank his colleagues who work very hard. I'd like to talk about something other than Afghanistan and prisoners.

I am pleased that you briefly mentioned military contracts and their importance to Canadian taxpayers. I'd like you to reassure us a bit more, because many taxpayers and military companies are critical of the fact that DND looks to outside suppliers far more often than it does to domestic ones. I don't have to tell you that these contracts are paid for with taxpayer dollars. Let me give you two examples.

Let me just clarify that we intend to put our three or four questions, and then give you the opportunity to respond. I believe Mr. Bouchard has a question as well.

Our first question pertains to Leopard 2 tanks. At this point in time, all of the tanks in service in Europe are repaired by two German companies, Krauss-Maffei and Rheinmetall. Meanwhile, 50 of the tanks are standing idle in Montreal. As I see it, this is one example of Canadian taxpayer dollars helping to create jobs in Europe, but not in Canada and even less so in Quebec. The tanks are being stored at 202 Workshop Depot in Montreal. This unit could repair them just as easily as Rheinmetall in Saint-Jean. We would like you to reassure us. We've heard that of the \$650 million allocated for upgrading the Leopard tanks, \$500 million has already been spent in Europe and that very little would be left for Quebec and Canada. This is the first example of taxpayers not getting their money's worth from a military contract.

Another issue is boots. Major Coghill requested some modifications to camouflage boots. He contacted industry officials and asked them to produce some sample boots. Ultimately, he reported that there was talk of him having to go through the Government Electronic Tendering Service in November, but that he changed his mind. I think the decision has now been made to order black boots and to start the process over. All of this leads us to wonder if Canadian taxpayers are receiving value for their money.

My second question concerns the Collège militaire royal in Saint-Jean. I want to thank you for re-opening this institution. I see that General Semianiw is smiling, and with good reason. We are extremely pleased with this decision. Now we want you to move on to the second phase. You have reopened the collège, but it does not enjoy the same status as it did in 2005 when it was first closed. It has been reopened as a college rather than a university, and has been given an operating budget of about \$12 million, instead of \$25 million as was the case in the past.

Are you planning on waiting until the election campaign to announce the second phase, or are you prepared to make me and General Semianiw happy and announce the second phase of this initiative immediately? That would make all of us happy.

Finally, I will let Mr. Bouchard put his question about the Chinook helicopters. Then we will ask you to answer our questions.

• (0935)

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the floor.

I would also like to thank the minister and his associates for coming here today. I'm truly pleased and privileged to speak to such an illustrious and competent group of individuals.

Yesterday, Sir, the Minister of National Revenue announced that none of the 15 Chinook helicopters purchased by the government would be based in Bagotville. The minister presented a number of arguments in defence of the announcement, specifically, that it would cost an additional \$100 million to put in place the required infrastructure in Bagotville, that this was an air base and that there was no training area at the base. He went on to add that three bases had been considered.

Through access to information, we obtained a document dated June 3, 2008 in which the location of the Chinook helicopters was discussed. According to the document, Bagotville was the least costly option, when compared to Petawawa. The report did recommend that all Chinook helicopters be based in Petawawa and that four squadrons in Canada be shut down, among them 438 Squadron in Saint-Hubert and 439 Squadron in Bagotville, and that Griffon helicopter maintenance personnel be transferred to the newly created unit.

Minister, as suggested in the June 3, 2008 report, have you decided to shut down, or have you contemplated the possibility of shutting down, four squadrons, including 438 and 439 squadrons and transferring personnel to the new Chinook unit?

Furthermore, Minister, regarding the statement by the Minister of National Revenue in which reference was made to three bases, I would like to know if these are the same three bases mentioned in the June 3, 2008 report, namely Bagotville, Edmonton and Petawawa.

Lastly, why was Bagotville the focus of a study, if, as an air base, it is truly not suitable as a base for the Chinook helicopters?

Thank you.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you for your question.

First of all, there are no plans in place to transfer the Griffons to Bagotville or to any other base. There are no plans in place to shut down squadrons or close bases. Absolutely not.

As for where the Chinook helicopters will be based, a decision has yet to be made. You're correct in that a study has been done to consider the financial and operational implications, but for now, we're waiting until we have more information before making a final decision.

[*English*]

You mentioned the reference to the regional minister and his suggestion that the base was not going to be Bagotville for the Chinooks. That may very well be, but as I said, there's no final decision. Some of the considerations he said publicly are absolutely the types of considerations we are undertaking: the existing infrastructure, the training capability, the proximity to the numbers of troops we would move. Let's not forget that a Chinook helicopter is a large aircraft for transporting heavy equipment and troops. Therefore, the location of this particular fleet of new Chinook helicopters takes into account the size of the country and the types of bases that exist in the country right now. We're getting very close to making that decision.

I might at this time ask Lieutenant-General Deschamps to comment on this as well. He is Chief of the Air Staff.

Général.

• (0940)

[*Translation*]

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps (Chief of the Air Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Bouchard, as the minister stated, in order to be efficient, we must look at troop requirements and take into account access to training areas. Many factors must be considered, including transit times and costs.

There is also a phenomenon known as "acculturation"...

Mr. Claude Bachand: I have a point of order.

I want to listen to what General Deschamps has to say in response to Mr. Bouchard's question. That said, could we reserve comments for the second part of the meeting, since he's planning on staying? I'd like the minister to answer three other questions before my time is up.

The Chair: Yes, certainly.

Just so you know, the minister has 45 more minutes to answer your questions.

[*English*]

Minister, I don't know if you want to add something on the question concerning other subjects. You have 40 seconds.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I have every intention of coming back to these questions. I know we have boots, Bagotville, the issue of the Leopard tanks, and CMR. We have the Chief of the Air Staff here. It's a very specific question with respect to the basing of Chinook helicopters.

With respect to the boots, I'm told there was a single bid that came in that was very expensive.

[Translation]

We have not yet come to a decision regarding the contract.

[English]

I understand that you, like many members of Parliament, want to lobby for a particular company for the National Defence department to purchase boots from. As you mentioned yourself, we have to be responsible to taxpayers to make sure that we're getting the boots. I understand we have about 17 different types of boots available to the Canadian Forces right now in various colours, sizes, and shapes. We try to put the comfort of the soldiers first and foremost. We seek feedback from them regularly. We have an open and transparent bidding process that is followed when it comes to these contracts.

On the subject of Collège militaire royal, we are examining options. As you quite rightly pointed out, it was this government that reopened

[Translation]

the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean, in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. It's a wonderful decision. Many people, like all of you here, are very pleased. I remember when it happened. This college is really very important to the Canadian Forces and to all cadets. It offers a marvellous program. However, no decision has been made yet on whether or not to increase the number of programs offered. That remains a possibility.

[English]

You walk before you run. We've reopened this formidable storied institution. We intend to monitor enrollment and programming. It has a great deal to do with the numbers that we're receiving into the Canadian Forces and the necessity for certain program needs, trades, and education.

[Translation]

In my opinion, the future looks very bright for the Collège militaire royal. The institution's future is critical to our Canadian Forces.

[English]

There are actually 40 tanks in Montreal, not 50. It was part of a larger purchase of 100 that was meant to replace the aging Leopard 1 tanks and put a larger, more capable, more protective vehicle into the theatre of operation.

I can tell you unequivocally that the tanks we have in theatre right now, the Leopard 2s, have saved lives. As you know, the insidious nature of insurgency warfare is that they're making the bombs bigger. They're changing their tactics. This is the most protective piece of equipment short of a helicopter that is flying above the ground. Those tanks are the best piece of kit that we have on the ground in Afghanistan today.

We entered into an expedited process to receive those tanks early, and with cooperation we were able to accelerate that purchase. Also with cooperation, an add-on to the contract was that Germany

provided us with an advance copy of 20 tanks, which we are now required to replace from the pool of 100 that we purchased.

We needed to upgrade some of the tanks in Europe because we needed them in the theatre. To put them on a ship and bring them back to Montreal to upgrade them and then send them back into Afghanistan didn't make operational sense. They wouldn't have arrived before the wrap-up of the combat mission in 2011. So that was the operational decision that was taken.

With respect to proceeding on the upgrade of the tanks that we currently have in Europe, we went back to the original manufacturer of these tanks to do the necessary upgrades to the guns, the under armour, and I believe the strap-on arming as part of that contract.

We have every intention of proceeding with the upgrade of the 40 tanks that are in Montreal for training purposes. I believe we have a small number that have already entered into some reconstruction that we're doing on our own, but we hope to also proceed with the further upgrade of those tanks in Montreal.

I understand you're concerned about the time, but I'll ask Dan to very briefly add a few more points.

• (0945)

The Chair: We don't have enough time—maybe within 10 seconds.

Mr. Dan Ross (Assistant Deputy Minister (Materiel), Department of National Defence): There are three pieces of work being done in Canada: the 42 tanks being repaired and overhauled—not necessarily in Montreal, but it's a competitive process—plus building 18 armoured engineer vehicles, and armoured recovery vehicles, which are very expensive, and that's very high-quality work. All of that will be done in Canada as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We appear to be in a bit of a time warp, so I hope the same time warp applies to the answers to my questions.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for coming. We're glad to have you here. I'm pleased also to note that your elbow is better, and for that reason I'm glad I have two gentlemen between you and me today.

First of all, let me say I want to commend your department and the Canadian Forces for its work on the mental health issue, particularly PTSD, and in particular your announced campaign to ensure that at all levels of the military culture, from bottom to top, there's an awareness of mental health issues as being as important a type of injury as physical ones. I'm sure you will agree with me that this is not a one-off deal. There's much work to be done, but you have been doing this work, as we've been doing our committee work, in raising the attention to these issues, and also in response to our report. So I hope that continues as an ongoing project of the Canadian Forces.

I do have, though, four specific questions for you, Mr. Minister, that I would like to ask, and I'd like to ask them first, so that you can then respond to them all.

Mr. Minister, first, you're on record as saying—and you said this in the House the other day—that there's not a scintilla of evidence to support claims of government attempting to delay or diminish the ability of the Military Police Complaints Commission to get to the bottom of allegations of your government's knowledge of torture of Canadian detainees in Afghanistan. So why are you objecting to Canadian diplomat Richard Colvin's evidence about this topic? Why does the government fear what Mr. Colvin has to say? Because, after all, he's the man who knows. And I would remind you that it was the government that invoked section 38 of the Evidence Act, and they did so after Colvin made it clear that he would cooperate fully with the commission.

Second, according to the Prime Minister in the House of Commons in January of 2008, you met with then Kandahar Governor Asadullah Khalid in the fall of 2007 and discussed with him issues of torture of Canadian detainees. Were you ever made aware of torture allegations against him personally, and if so, when?

Third, were you made aware, and if so, when, that at the senior levels of the military, including at meetings at National Defence Headquarters, there was knowledge of allegations of the sexual abuse of young boys by Afghan security forces at Canadian bases in Afghanistan, and in addition, charges that Canadian Military Police were told by commanders and trainers not to interfere in incidents where Afghan forces were having sex with children?

And fourth—and this is related to the third—despite the fact that in June of this year you said in the House that the Canadian Forces were still investigating the issues of sexual abuse of young boys, the board of inquiry that was set up in October of 2008 had already filed its report in May. Five months later it's still not released, and it indicated in May that it was sitting with the military leadership. Have you seen this report, and will you make it public immediately?

• (0950)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Harris, for your questions.

With respect to personal involvement in the direction of witnesses, I have none. We obviously give basic instructions to counsel. There's a clear indication that we do not, the government does not, and the minister does not conduct day-to-day operations in an arm's-length quasi-judicial hearing, whether it be the board of inquiry, the National Investigation Service, or the Military Police Complaints Commission. All these are under the auspices of my department, but I do not delve into the details, and I certainly do not participate in the day-to-day decisions made at those hearings.

Mr. Harris, I know you're familiar with proceedings in court. You're obviously familiar with the fact that the commissioner himself, Mr. Tinsley, and this is a recent development, I'm told—it was yesterday—is seeking leave to appeal the decision of the Federal Court with respect to the parameters that were reasserted by the Federal Court when it comes to the mandate of the Military Police Complaints Commission. That appeal, or the seeking leave to appeal, really precludes me from discussing further details of the case itself. I would say that counsel for both Mr. Colvin and the government, and now in this instance Mr. Tinsley, are bound by the rules of evidence in the Canada Evidence Act. They are bound by the National Defence Act, which set up the Military Police Complaints

Commission. And they are bound by precedent. To that extent, I would underscore, despite your assertions in the House, Mr. Harris, that I am not directing, the government is not directing, and we are not involved in the day-to-day process. And I would suggest to you, sir, that you would be appalled if the case were otherwise.

Mr. Jack Harris: It is the government that invoked section 38, not the lawyers. They had to be given direction.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Section 38, as you know, is part of the Canada Evidence Act. It was put in place to protect national security. It was put in place, in fact, to put a process and parameters in place to ensure that issues that affect and impact national defence and national security are given protection. There is a process that is to be followed with respect to the examination of evidence under section 38.

You asked a question about meeting with then Governor of Kandahar Khalid. Yes, I did meet with him. As far as any specific allegations about Mr. Khalid, the governor, being involved in the sexual abuse of Afghan children—

Mr. Jack Harris: No, no, it was torture.

Hon. Peter MacKay: —the torture of Afghan children, to the best of my recollection, I do not recall any specific allegations being levelled against the governor. I do have a vague recollection that there were rumours circulating at that time. I could not attribute those to anyone in particular. I could not pinpoint when or where these rumours would have been brought to my attention.

You then referenced, I believe in your next question, military policing and whether... Was it a question on transfers?

Mr. Jack Harris: No. I'll repeat it. In 2007-08 there were discussions within the senior levels of the military, including at NDHQ, regarding the allegations of sexual abuse of young boys and how to handle them PR-wise, and so on. My question was whether you were informed of that as the minister responsible. I would have thought that you would have been made aware, and if not, that you would have been very upset that you weren't. So tell us more about that.

• (0955)

Hon. Peter MacKay: I believe the first time I heard any allegations of Afghan abuse of other Afghans, it came around the time that one of the members of the Canadian Forces had made public statements and then later appeared before this committee or before the Afghanistan committee. That has now, as you know, also become the subject of investigation. But if you're asking me if I personally have firsthand knowledge or if I heard, even directly, hearsay from other individuals, no. I was simply privy to the same rumours and newspaper articles that emerged around that time in 2007. I have not seen specific reporting on this issue.

I did at that time meet with the Chief of the Defence Staff and make certain inquiries as to what instructions were there, what soldiers were expected to do on the ground if it was brought to their attention. I was advised quite pointedly that they were given instructions to report it to the chain of command. Since that time, as you know, this discussion has been in the public. It has been a subject of questions. I will repeat that there is every expectation that a Canadian soldier, upon witnessing abuse of a child of any nature, would prevent that, that they would intervene. We're there to protect people. We're not there to turn a blind eye. At the same time, we are not there to assume the role of the police or the Afghans themselves. We are there to help them build their capacity. That includes, by the way—and you can appreciate this more than most—the building of a justice system. If we have policing capability and nothing to plug the justice system into, their domestic justice system is going to suffer.

Mr. Jack Harris: I appreciate that, but what we're talking about here is that even before the allegations were made public, there was knowledge of this within the senior levels of the department and the military, the Canadian Forces. What were you told about this? The complaints were that in fact the military police were given instructions contrary to what you're saying. I agree with you, that's the way it should be. But there were known to be allegations to the contrary. Not only that, these complaints were being discussed. Were you made aware of that then, or was it only in 2008 when these complaints became public? That's the question.

Then the follow-up, of course, was on the BOI, which was done and needs to be made public.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, 10 seconds please.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, I have never heard that the military police were instructed or given any instruction along the lines that they were not to report or not to do their job. The answer is no.

With respect to the report itself, it has been filed. It is being examined, and we have every intention of eventually releasing it, yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will have to give the floor to Mr. Hawn for 10 minutes.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister and the defence team, for being with us today.

Could you comment briefly on the significance of General McChrystal's strategy that he proposed to President Obama with respect to what the Canadian Forces in fact have been doing for the last several months in Afghanistan?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Well, thank you, Mr. Hawn, and thank you for the work you do as parliamentary secretary. You assume a very important role.

Like everyone, I'm anxiously awaiting what the President's decision will be in response to the recommendations of General McChrystal. With respect to that report and how it reflects on the Canadian Forces, one of the bright spots—if I can call it that, because it was a very stark and in some cases even startling report that painted a picture of a deteriorating security situation—is that General McChrystal does note that the approach that appears to be

most effective is the model Canadians have been following. That is a whole-of-government approach that encompasses the work of other departments, like CIDA, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Department of Public Safety, working in unison.

He also quite clearly recognizes that the village-by-village approach...that is soldiers working with Afghans, and most often Afghan soldiers in the lead, going into a village, clearing the village of insurgency, setting up a perimeter of security, then holding that particular village or that piece of territory and building their capacity, identifying what the local population's needs are—do they need water and irrigation, do they need roads built, is there a school, a mosque, or a project of importance to that village—and working at a very cooperative, on-the-ground level with the local population. This, at the crux of that report, appears to be the recommended approach General McChrystal is making to the President, in addition to clearly more broad security implications and having the force to do that.

So to that extent, without saying so, it is a tacit approval of the whole-of-government approach that the Canadian Forces and the Canadian government have been following in Afghanistan in Kandahar province.

• (1000)

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: Thank you.

I'd actually like to turn to the ADM of Materiel for a question.

Mr. Ross, can you explain the relationship between acquisition programs for equipment built in Canada in small fleets versus acquisition of equipment built either outside Canada or in Canada under licence with larger fleets of worldwide...whatever it is, and the long-term industrial benefits to Canada?

Mr. Dan Ross: I'll try to be brief. Obviously, that is a question under the mandate of Industry Canada. We're extensively involved in that. We look at the potential of leveraging major defence procurements to get opportunities for Canadian industry to a global fleet—for example, landing gear for all Hercules worldwide, all EO/FLIR systems, electro-optical systems for surveillance aircraft. That's the kind of strategic priority we have, and we work closely with Industry Canada to try to achieve that.

On the other hand, when you buy very small quantities, perhaps from a Canadian firm, you don't have that same leverage to access multinational worldwide components on their fleet, and not for a long period of time.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Could I add to that, Mr. Hawn? The industrial regional benefits package or approach policy that has been pursued by this government and previous governments requires, mandates, that there is dollar-for-dollar spent in Canada. So if a contract is awarded to Lockheed Martin or Raytheon or a company that has its corporate headquarters outside of Canada, they are required by law, if it's a \$200 million contract, to spend \$200 million in Canada. There is a number of ways of doing that: they can partner with a university; they can do research and development; they can contract with a local supplier. But Canadians are the primary and sole beneficiaries, dollar for dollar, under that regional benefit package.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: Thank you.

Back to you, Mr. Minister.

The implications of the awards that the Canadian Forces and the department received last night with respect to the long-term health of the Canadian Forces, and quoting, I think, General Semianiw, that occasionally we drop the ball, but we pick it up on the first bounce—

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Hawn, you're obviously very familiar... as a former member of the Canadian Forces, and now in your work as parliamentary secretary, you know this has been an enormous priority for the Canadian Forces, how we take care of men and women in uniform who are returning, in many cases, pretty banged up. They've suffered some physical and in many cases some psychological injury as a result of their service. We owe it to them to respond appropriately, to put the resources in place. We're building that capacity through the joint personal support units, through programs, through changing attitudes, which are the most difficult, in some cases, to bring about quickly.

The Chief of the Defence Staff has taken a lead role in this, with the "Be the Difference" campaign. General Walt Semianiw has been really at the sharp end of the stick and the primary implementer of this movement to assist persons suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder. We have doubled the number of mental health care professionals within the employment of the Department of National Defence. We have intentions to hire more.

To be very frank with you, Mr. Hawn, the big challenge is that those health care professionals are not always available. We need more psychologists and psychiatrists, and that's true generally within the health care system. Last night's recognition from the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health was an indication that we've made progress, but you're absolutely right, there are further strides that have to be taken. We're committed to that. It's budgeted. We're very, very cognizant of the long-term responsibility. To come back to Mr. Harris' earlier comment, this is not an issue that will go away. Quite frankly, when you compare it to how Korean veterans and First World War veterans returned, we've made enormous steps forward.

Having said that, there is a growing awareness in the country that we have veterans who are now in their 20s and 30s. They're going to be with us. They're valued citizens. We owe them the respect and the support and the necessary enablers for them to transition back to civilian life. In many cases, I'm proud to say, we've made it much more available and accessible for them to continue a career in the Canadian Forces should they so choose.

•(1005)

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: Thank you.

This is a quick question for the Chief of the Air Staff.

Is it fair to say that from an operational commander's point of view, in the decision where to base assets the primary consideration would be the ability to do the job?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Absolutely. As we look at our ability to generate, we always have to keep resources in mind, the finite quantity of personnel and money. When we look at where to locate our capabilities, we have to balance those two: effectiveness and efficiency. It always plays an important role in our advice to government.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: Finally, here is a quick one for the minister.

Mr. Minister, to go back to mental health for a second, which is such a thing that we'll never get it 100% right, is it fair to say—and we've heard it in this committee from others who have had experience with other militaries with other programs—that we're not perfect, but that in relationship to other countries we are simply the best at it so far?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Hawn, you and I are both biased in that assessment, but I am led to believe from objective—

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: From other assessments as well, not yours and mine—

Hon. Peter MacKay: —from other assessments and other sources, including other countries.... I'm sure that as part of your study you examined the health care system for the forces in other countries. Yes, I am very much of the view that we're the best in the world when it comes to responding to the health care needs of our soldiers, sailors, and airmen and airwomen. We're committed to keeping that standard and to build and improve upon it every day.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: With the knowledge that the glass is never going to be full, that we'll always be filling the glass.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Sadly, you are not able to put a person back together.

We had some very emotional speeches last night from a number of people. Lieutenant-Colonel Grenier, who was given an award last night in recognition, talked in particular about the stitching back together of people in a psychological way, which is a very complex process. But the support of the families in bringing people into the process, diagnosing early, having the available counsellors and individuals who are there to help people deal with these issues.... In particular, there is more and more research and greater understanding of post-traumatic stress and of how we move forward to treat those very real psychological injuries. They're not as visible as the physical injuries, but they're just as debilitating and just as important to treat.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: Thank you.

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

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, if I may, I want to come back to one issue to clarify.

There are two reports pending; one has been completed. I didn't want there to be any misunderstanding—this is in relation to Mr. Harris' question. In the case involving abuse of Afghan children, the board of inquiry report has not been finalized. If that's the report that Mr. Harris is seeking, that report has not been completed. However, there is a different report that has been completed. It confirmed, as he said in his question, that no criminal actions were committed by Canadian Forces, and therefore Canadian Forces were exonerated. That report is available.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I sincerely want to thank you for joining us today. The information that you have conveyed to members of the committee will help them a great deal with their future work.

● (1010)

[*English*]

I want to thank you very much for being with us today.

[*Translation*]

We continue with the business at hand with senior officials from the Department of National Defence.

[*English*]

So, members, I will go on with our witnesses.

Thank you, and we'll see you another time, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Nobody is listening.

The Chair: I think we will suspend for a minute, and after that we'll come back.

● _____ (Pause) _____
●

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We now continue with the business at hand.

[*English*]

All the witnesses are here. We are now ready to start again, and I will give the floor to Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you to those who remained behind.

I have a number of questions, all of which are unrelated. I'm going to put them out there. I would have been happier if the minister were here to answer them, but I trust that you will do what you can.

My first question relates to the inquiry and the invocation of section 38 of the Canada Evidence Act. Can you say on what criteria it was invoked in inhibiting an inquiry? We see simply a bit of a credibility gap, and I would like very much to know on what basis it was invoked. That's question number one.

The second question is totally unrelated. I appreciate very much the minister's comments about support to families of military personnel related to post-traumatic stress disorder and whatever. One of the issues I and many of my colleagues are concerned about—and we have talked with many military families—is that health care provided to military personnel is not extended to their families. If it is, it is done on an ad hoc basis. The minister himself in his comments made some remark about the support of families. There needs to be a holistic approach with families, and I question why the health care isn't extended to families.

My third question is again totally unrelated.

Mr. Fonberg, I'm sure you're well aware of the issue of Kapyong Barracks in my riding of Winnipeg—South Centre. You know it is a decommissioned army base and that there are currently court proceedings going on. A decision has been made. We do not know whether there will be an appeal as yet, but we do know that there are a number of vacant houses on that base.

What would it take for the Department of National Defence to make those houses available to the public? We know the criteria that are in place through the regulations, but we also know anecdotally that there are a number of people who have access to those houses who do not fit under the regulations, and we know there's a very low rental rate in Manitoba.

Those are three unrelated questions. I think my colleague has a fourth one, and then we'll ask you to answer.

● (1015)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, I have a very quick question.

Back in February, Vice-Admiral, I asked you about the joint support ship program. The issue, of course, was a priority for the government in 2006. When are we resuming the procurement process for the JSS program, and when will these requirements be released?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes to answer all of those questions.

Mr. Robert Fonberg (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chairman, I will start with Mr. Pentney on the issue of section 38.

Mr. William F. Pentney (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the question and the opportunity to appear.

I don't have the text of section 38 before me, but broadly speaking, what it requires is a witness who believes their evidence may involve issues that would impinge on national security or the defence or international relations of Canada, or in this case a counsel who, believing that evidence that might be tabled in a public proceeding could involve those things, takes steps to prevent that from happening and undergoes a process to review it to determine whether or not the release of that information would in fact impinge on national security, the defence of Canada, or international relations, and if so, to redact or remove those parts of the evidence.

The government, like all other parties, is bound by section 38 of the Canada Evidence Act and is taking steps to simply follow the procedures that the act sets out to determine this. It is an awkward proceeding, admittedly. It might be easier in many ways to let it out. But once the cat is out of the bag in respect of something that truly does impinge on national security, defence, or international relations, it's impossible to rein it back in, in a public proceeding.

So that's the balance that section 38 tries to strike. In this case, on the belief that there is evidence that could affect the national defence or national security of Canada, steps have been taken to try to follow the process that section 38 sets out.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have more questions.

The Chair: Your time is up.

Can you answer in 30 seconds?

Major-General W. Semianiw (Chief of Military Personnel, Department of National Defence): Yes, I can, Mr. Chair.

To be very clear, we're talking about both health care and mental health care, which is a component of the overall health care case. My response will address the mental health issue.

I want to remind members of this committee of the policy currently in place. If a man or woman in uniform develops a mental health illness caused by the military, their family is provided that support.

Hon. Anita Neville: Do you mean support or health care?

MGen W. Semianiw: We provide mental health care. They are seen by psychiatrists, psychologists, or mental health nurses if it is a condition that actually began with the individual in place—the Canadian Forces member.

For example, I go to Afghanistan and come back and develop PTSD. If I'm back home getting help, we will not just support the family; we will provide mental health support through psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health practitioners. That's the policy in place.

• (1020)

Hon. Anita Neville: I would like to have a larger discussion on this, but clearly there's no time.

The Chair: You'll have time to come back with other questions.

Hon. Anita Neville: Can you respond on Kapyong?

Mr. Robert Fonberg: All I can say is we have the court decision and we are reviewing it. The court will determine the next steps. The decision did say that the duty to consult had not been satisfied, so we are trying to work our way through that.

Hon. Anita Neville: But you also know that the houses are not part of the first nations appeal. There are two different issues there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will have to give the floor to Mr. Braid.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Vice-Admiral, can I get it in writing if we don't get back to this?

The Chair: Can you give us the answer in writing?

Vice-Admiral D. Rouleau (Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): Yes. JSS is still an ongoing priority for us. In fact, this past July we had what we called a shipbuilding summit with Industry and discussed the requirements. JSS is moving in parallel with the results of that summit. In fact, Industry just returned to the four departments that were leading that summit with their returns in mid-September. So this is very fresh right now, and that project is still a priority for us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for being here this morning.

I have questions that touch on a number of different topics. I'll continue with the current thread of discussion on mental health services. First of all, congratulations on the tremendous work the Department of National Defence is doing in this very important area. Having worked in group benefits myself in the private sector, I recognize that this has taken a significant financial and resource commitment on the part of the department. You're clearly already making great progress in this area.

I recognize the great work that is being done within the department. Has any thought been given to how you might share the great work that's being done and effective treatments that are being completed, or best practices, beyond the department, in terms of effective mental health approaches for suicide prevention, for example? Has any thought been given to that as we move forward?

MGen W. Semianiw: There are two components to the question: the government aspect and the public aspect. I'll address the first. We work with other government departments, in particular the RCMP, and with Treasury Board to ensure that we pass on lessons learned so they can see what policies, programs, processes, and machinery we have in place. That's already done through a number of committees. More importantly, I sit on a committee with senior officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that the two departments work together toward a common goal.

On the outside, that's a great question. We are part of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, so that ensures we're not only within the military and government; we're actually on the outside. Only last year I spoke in Toronto at an industrial accident prevention meeting that was purely private. We shared ideas and listened to what had to be said. So this is being done, both through committees and in discussions with members.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you very much, sir.

I believe my next question will likely go to Vice-Admiral Rouleau. Could you please explain and touch on the relationship between the National Investigation Service and the chain of command within the Canadian Forces?

Vadm D. Rouleau: The NIS is a completely independent arm of the armed forces. In fact, they're part of the military police, but the training they get for the type of work they do is completely unique to their function. They have absolutely no linkages whatsoever to the Canadian Forces chain of command, even though the provost marshal, who is the head of the military police, works for the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff from an administrative perspective.

The NIS, which is also a part of the military police, does not report to me and is not responsive to me. For all I know, they could be investigating anybody sitting at this table here or wearing a uniform. I have no control over it and nobody in the chain of command has any linkages to the NIS as to what they do, what they report, and how they report it.

• (1025)

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you for that clarification.

My next question is on the subject of Afghanistan. I started my week on Monday by meeting with representatives from a very capable NGO based in my riding, the Mennonite Economic Development Agency. They take very much a business approach to development. They're working in Afghanistan. They're administering a CIDA-funded micro-finance program. They spoke to me in very eloquent and positive terms about the progress they feel they're making in Afghanistan and the progress they're seeing in Afghanistan.

Could any of you gentlemen, from your perspective, touch on and put in your own words the progress you believe we're making in Afghanistan, particularly from development, governance, and human rights perspectives?

Vadm D. Rouleau: I guess the first element, when we talk about this specific aspect that you've just mentioned, is basically giving back to Afghans a means of prosperity and moving forward. Certainly when I was there, you look at the schools that are being built, you see the capacity being regenerated within their governance structure, not only at the national level but at the lower levels, and you see that their capacity from a national perspective is to have their own military forces so they can eventually take control of their country. Then you go down one more level and see that their capacity has been developed from a policing perspective, which enforces a lower level. This is being worked out at a municipal level, whether it's in Kandahar or Kabul or even in their village approach.

These are giant steps forward that have been made. To allow that to happen, they require security. They require basically an umbrella over all of this. Otherwise, it's impossible to do. Our work, which the minister was describing when it comes to the village approach, means basically getting close to the Afghans and showing them that we're there to protect them, that we're there to enable them to do every one of those items I mentioned so that they can go and do them on their own. That's the approach: not from a distance, but with them.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Braid.

I will now give the floor to Monsieur Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for Vice-Admiral Rouleau concerning the comment he just made. We met with SNC-Lavalin officials this summer and we were very pleased to learn that a summit was being held. You just said that the position of the people concerned had shifted. You have the report in hand.

Do you intend to formulate a genuine policy for shipyards? The industry seems to be critical of the fact that every 20 or 25 years, they receive a large order—for instance, an order to build frigates—and because of the size of the order, often it is the companies like ThyssenKrupp or Northrop Grumman who benefit. At least that is my opinion.

I think I know what you want and I'd like you to confirm it for me. Would it not be better to build one ship every year for 25 years and renew the fleet gradually, so that Canadian shipyards benefit?

I also have a question for Mr. Fonberg.

Mr. Fonberg, I have heard many people decry the fact that the Air Force has been too heavily favoured. I do not want to upset General Deschamps, but many people believe that the Air Force has received far too much.

I would also like to talk to you about accrual accounting. People have explained to me that there is an end-support-service component to this. Right now, it seems we have reached a ceiling and cannot go any higher. I'd like you to confirm that for me, or tell me that we are on the wrong track. Apparently, there is almost no money available for a period of twenty years and some services like the Navy would be forced to plan for the longer term, for example, for thirty years, as we have just seen.

What do you say to your detractors who argue that accrual accounting is a bad thing and penalizes certain services while others gain?

I believe Mr. Bouchard has a question for General Deschamps.

• (1030)

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for either the Deputy Minister or the generals. It concerns Bagotville's expeditionary squadron.

In 2008, the Minister of Defence announced that the expeditionary wing would be operational in 2010 and would be comprised of 250 CF members. According to a recent release, the minister is hoping that 60 CF members will be deployed to this unit by the end of 2009.

According to the 2009-2014 five-year plan for CFB Bagotville, 60% of investments will go toward the squadron's infrastructure budget. Provision for the other 40% will be made in phase 2 of the five-year plan, which means that DND is giving itself until 2019 to build the infrastructure for this new elite corps.

How does DND intend to keep the commitment it made to the public that 250 CF members would be deployed to this unit in 2010, with an additional 550 CF members and 100 civilians assigned to it in 2015?

Can DND provide us with a detailed plan of the physical implementation of Bagotville's expeditionary squadron and clarify exactly how many members will be deployed to the unit each year? Could he also provide a detailed outline of expenditures and provide us with a timetable for implementation?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have a minute and a half left. Therefore, I would ask Vice-Admiral Rouleau to respond to the questions. If the other witnesses do not have time to respond, they can always submit their answers in writing to the committee.

Go ahead, Vice-Admiral Rouleau.

VAdm D. Rouleau: Alright.

The first question concerned shipbuilding in Canada and the plan to bring together shipbuilding in Canada.

The summit held last July was the first ever of its kind in Canada. It did not result in a report as such. All of the industry people who attended this summit and took part in the discussions over the course of two days had until the middle of September to submit their ideas, suggestions and opinions on various subjects. We are pouring over all of the material received, not merely from a defence standpoint, but also from the perspective of the other three departments that attended the summit—as you know, four departments participated—to see how these can help us undertake the work that needs to be done over the next 20 or 25 years.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Fonberg: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

On the question of whether the air force has too much funding, that's a trick question.

I'll deal with accrual accounting.

As we went through the Canada First defence strategy on the modernization of all of the major fleets, I think the general view was that the army, navy, and air force came out exactly where they needed to come out after a very strong and tough internal discussion, and then a discussion that we had, obviously, with our political masters over a number of months.

Accrual accounting is simply the recognition that long-lived assets ought to be matched up with the rate of consumption of those assets, so you fund them over time. What we record as an expenditure, year after year, on a 40-year asset, for example, for the navy, \$26 billion for frigates, is on the order of \$60 million or \$70 million per year because that is what it costs you to actually run that piece of equipment. The notion that we would build the fleet over whatever it will be, a 10-year period, and expense the whole thing makes no sense from an accounting perspective. Accrual accounting simply reflects that for a long-lived asset, you need to have a way to account for it that fits with the actual life.

Going forward, all of our major fleets will be expensed on an accrual basis, including the aviation assets that we're buying, as well as the naval assets, and in fact the army assets that we're buying.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We don't have enough time for the other answers.

I will give the floor to Madam Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and through you, to our witnesses.

For soldiers who are eligible to renew their contracts but choose not to, does the practice of obtaining the reasons for declining the renewal exist?

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Mgén W. Semianiw: Thank you for your question. The answer is yes.

[*English*]

We conduct exit surveys to confirm why personnel are leaving. The results are incorporated into our retention strategy, which is designed to determine why people we don't want to leave are leaving. We do this as part of our exit strategy.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Soldiers and their families tell me why they are not renewing. In addition to repeated tours of duty, one of the most common complaints is that the families simply do not have access to health care. In outlying posts, soldiers who have families with dependants who need medical treatment don't even have a clinic.

Now we know that our soldiers in Ontario are required to pay health premiums, even though the federal government pays for their health care. And notwithstanding the millions of dollars that have gone missing in Ontario for eHealth Ontario and now for cancer treatment, is there anything at the federal level that we can do to help the families, so we can retain our highly trained soldiers?

MGen W. Semianiw: On the first issue, which is mental health, the policy is that if we have soldiers who have mental health challenges in Petawawa, their families will get support from military psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health practitioners. Outside of that realm, it is a challenge. We are in the process of examining this issue, and we hope to come up with some ideas and options to study. We know this is a challenge for our military.

On one of our bases in Trenton, we built a mini-mall and brought doctors in. That is the number one issue—finding a doctor. I would assume it's not just an issue for men and women in uniform, but for Canadians across the country, given the state of the health care system. We are trying to ensure that the first line of medical care is available and nearby. We are aware of the problem, and we're examining options to ensure that we can provide the support our people need.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I'd like to recognize the tremendous work that has been done with respect to the children and their access to mental health care. Through the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families, many children who would not otherwise have any coverage are now being helped, and it really makes a difference in the classroom.

Now I'm going to go to more military matters. In the event that a vote recount indicates that someone other than President Karzai has won the presidency, have security preparations been made for the transition, or are any deemed necessary?

Mr. William F. Pentney: I'm not aware that security preparations have been made, but I am confident that the NATO leadership, including the Canadian leadership in our area of operation, is aware of the security situation. I believe the process is unfolding. The security situation is what it is. There are efforts under way to address it, but I'm not aware of any specific plans to address a transition.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: With respect to equipment, I understand the military focuses on different aspects at different times. You're not necessarily buying everything all at once—ships, your air fleet, etc. I'd like you to tell us more about equipment acquisition.

As to choppers, Chinooks, once chopper pilots are licensed to carry on duties in the military, they know how to fly a Chinook. But are they trained to interact with the army personnel who will be using their services?

•(1040)

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Once they receive training on the platform, they have to do acculturation, which is living with the army, their customer, to learn how the army operates in the field. This allows them to integrate what they've learned about flying with the tactical scenarios the army has to live with. There is a need to integrate these folks, and there is a period of on-the-job training once they get to the tactical units. It's important to place them close to the army, so they can get that day-to-day interaction with their primary customer.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fonberg, did you wish to add something brief?

Mr. Robert Fonberg: Mr. Chairman, on the issue of equipment acquisition, the rhythm we follow is essentially lined up over a long period of time, based on when the equipment that's being replaced actually needs to be replaced. There is a very long lead time required for these discussions, negotiations, and acquisitions, so that when we get into the replacement of frigates, for example, we still have many years left on the life of the frigates, but we will start the process. We've started that process basically now. The way the rhythm works over time is really driven by the life cycle of the existing equipment.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will give the floor to Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen.

In the report of the Auditor General this year, National Defence was found to be inadequate in the following areas: planning and management; risk management; and governance. Can you offer some explanations to the committee as to why there is this disconnect between DND officials and senior managers that has

delayed the sharing of specific information? Where is the accountability of senior management in terms of not being properly briefed and not being provided with routine reports on their progress? How are they supposed to make informed decisions?

Mr. Robert Fonberg: That's a very complex set of questions. I have to go back to the Auditor General's report to see whether in fact she said "inadequate".

This is a very large, very complicated department. The reality is that the organization, on the financial side, is planned extremely well. It tends to be, and it has traditionally been, more of a bottom-up planning exercise than a top-down strategically driven exercise, for a whole variety of reasons that go back into the 1980s and the 1990s.

My view is that what the Auditor General did, and what actually helped us crystallize much of our own thinking, was to identify certain gaps in our strategic and planning architecture, as well as in specific issues around my responsibilities and role as the accounting officer and the need to make sure that we have the right kinds of forums and the right kinds of decisions, or the right kind of information flowing into that forum, to make sure that at the end of the day I would actually have what I needed to be accountable for all the resource decisions in the organization.

When we spoke to the public accounts committee and submitted our management action plan, it was extremely well received. We have been on this in a very thorough and intense way since probably last February. We have our governance right. We have our decision-making forums and control points right. We are completing the alignment that is required between our strategic planning architecture and our actual business allocation processes, and we will have that right as we get into the following year.

So the Auditor General was actually quite comfortable that we're on the right track to address the gaps that she'd recognized.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, I will follow up with that later, but my colleague Ms. Neville would like to ask a question.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

I would like to quickly go back to Kapyong, Mr. Fonberg. You well know that the Treasury Board submission for the houses has not gone forward, and it is not being challenged by the first nations communities, at this point anyhow.

There are a number of vacant houses. It's a serious issue in Winnipeg, and I'm hearing anecdotally stories about things going on that shouldn't be.

What would it take to make some of those houses available to members of the community, at whatever market rent you wanted to charge, rather than being prescriptive in military personnel, contract workers, RCMP, etc.?

Mr. Jack Harris: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, I understand the House bells are calling members to a vote. I'm not sure what the procedure is in committee, but I see some members have already left. We're being called by whips to go and vote.

•(1045)

The Chair: It's 30 minutes of bells, so we still have some time. We have two choices before us: Ms. Neville can finish in two minutes and after that we can suspend, or we can adjourn our meeting until next week. We need unanimous consent.

Hon. Anita Neville: Give me an answer, please.

The Chair: Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn: I suggest that we allow the answer and that we adjourn.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Robert Fonberg: The aboriginal litigation...as you know, for both the barracks site and the Winnipeg South housing site—the decision covered both—we had hoped that we would be able to negotiate with the aboriginal groups to get agreement notwithstanding the litigation. That didn't happen. With the decision on the duty to consult, we're just going to have to see how we proceed in fact. We are encumbered by the duty to consult, as I understand it.

Hon. Anita Neville: I understand that, but at the present time there are over 100 houses sitting empty. While the consultation process is in place, people can have a place to live. This has been going on for years.

Mr. Robert Fonberg: This has been an ongoing issue for us from the last time we were here. Let me say we recognize the frustration.

We're looking at the court's decision. We will try to develop a course of action that addresses the competing interest and the legal requirement.

I wish I could be more helpful than that under the circumstances, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, before you adjourn the meeting, I just want to mention that Mr. Bouchard asked a question earlier and it wasn't answered. Could we receive assurances that our witnesses will send us a written response concerning the expeditionary squadron?

The Chair: A written response will indeed be forwarded to the committee.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

If there are no objections from committee members, I would now like to adjourn the meeting.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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