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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 44th meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), today we'll have a briefing on the process being developed related to the withdrawal of the Canadian Forces from Afghanistan in 2011.

We have with us today three witnesses.

[Translation]

From the Department of National Defence, we have the pleasure of welcoming General Natynczyk, as well as Major-General McQuillan and Lieutenant-General Lessard. Gentlemen, welcome to our committee.

The general will have the floor for 15 to 20 minutes. You have the floor. Thank you.

General Walter Natynczyk (Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

General Lessard is the current commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, so is responsible for all operations internationally. Major-General Mark McQuillan is the commander of Canadian Operational Support Command, providing general support, again, to all operations around the globe, and here in Canada, whether it be for the Olympics or up to the Arctic.

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for your interest in and your support for the Canadian Forces.

We're going through an extraordinary time right now. Each and every day, we're engaged in operations protecting Canada and Canadian interests around the world. At the same time, we're keeping Canadians safe here at home each and every day.

For the men and women in uniform, we appreciate your interest, especially at this time of the year as we remember our loved ones near and far, and we appreciate that ultimately you have our interests in mind.

This is my first solo opportunity to address the committee in my capacity as Chief of the Defence Staff. I've been here twice before, with General Bismillah Khan, and indeed with the minister last week. I'd like to use a bit of my time to talk about our mission in

Afghanistan and what we're doing right now. I want to paint a picture for you to help you understand the missions, the tasks, and what we've accomplished.

Context is so important when we talk about Afghanistan. We have about 18 months left in the Parliamentary mandate for the Canadian Forces mission in Afghanistan. The Government of Canada has given the Canadian Forces clear instructions. Our military mission in Kandahar will end by July 2011. The Canadian Forces will have completely withdrawn from Kandahar by December of 2011.

The relief in place by our allies, and the withdrawal from a combat zone of a sizable contingent of personnel and all their equipment, is a significant task. We need to carry it out in a very organized and sequenced manner. Indeed, this is the largest redeployment of troops, materiel, and equipment from an active theatre of operations that the Canadian Forces has conducted since the Korean War.

For the Canadian Forces to meet the direction of the Government of Canada to be out of Kandahar by December 2011, we need to begin our planning right now. That's why I issued the order in August of this year. However, before we get into the magnitude of the task, let me tell you about what's going on in Afghanistan.

Mr. Chair and members, I'm really proud of the job that our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and airwomen are doing today in Afghanistan. At the Afghan government's invitation and under the United Nations Security Council mandate, Canada, its NATO allies, and our ISAF partners are enhancing security in the midst of a region that has been locked in conflict for 30 years.

We're enabling the Afghans to take ownership of their country. We are building the capacity of the Afghan government to better serve its citizens, to allow them to exercise a sovereignty that they have been denied for so long, and enabling the Afghan government to bring security and prosperity to its own people.

Our mission is focused on protecting Afghans where they live, building the capabilities that Afghans need to democratically govern their country, and providing hope for a better future. The Canadian Forces are, as you know, playing an essential role in enabling all of these efforts.

We are providing the protection that is fundamental to building a secure environment in which governance, humanitarian aid, development, and the training of the military and the police can occur. Our men and women in uniform, with world-class equipment—again, our allies are envious of the equipment we have—are able to provide the protection to enable the whole-of-government comprehensive effort to advance nation-building.

But it's also about partnering with the Afghans, because we know it's their country. Our focus has been on training the Afghan army. The progress they've made is truly impressive.

I reflect on this every time I go back to Afghanistan. I think about my first visit in 2006. I was at Masum Ghar overlooking where Operation Medusa had occurred. At that time, we had a single battalion on the ground in the midst of a growing insurgency. I think about Labour Day weekend in 2006, when our Canadian Forces, that battalion on the ground, faced massed Taliban troops dug in across the Arghandab River. The Canadian Forces at the time launched Operation Medusa, many weeks of pitched combat against the Taliban, who believed that they could capture Kandahar City.

As we were told by the Afghan government of the day and our allies, "as goes Kandahar, so goes Afghanistan". And they, and indeed the Taliban, were wrong. In support of the new NATO mandate, the Canadian Forces won the day. It was a turning point in the conflict, a very positive turning point. But I reflect upon that time in 2006. There were very few Afghan army members with us. And there were virtually no Afghan police around with us.

When I visited this past September, I stood at the same location, Masum Ghar, and I looked at an Afghan army battalion of 400 there in location. And indeed, throughout the entire area of operation, there are more than 3,000 Afghan National Army soldiers working alongside your Canadian Forces. We're talking about a full brigade of six battalions of soldiers and a very capable brigade headquarters. In addition, we have about 700 Afghan police officers working in concert with our troops and receiving training from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

We recognize, however, that the Afghan National Security Forces' capabilities are growing slowly. They are growing slowly but they are growing in a positive direction, and that is stronger. And their leadership role in operations is increasingly evident. They're now planning, executing, and leading their own operations in the field. The Afghan National Security Forces are enabling security alongside your men and women and helping to build a more secure environment.

The effect is that the non-governmental organizations, the international organizations, and Afghan ministries, such as their health ministry, their educational ministry, and the agriculture ministry, are able to access regions and permit development work to occur. It's all about building hope. It's about creating jobs. It's about allowing for education for the kids and medical care for everyone.

The progress being made in Afghanistan is a source of pride to our soldiers, sailors, and airmen and women. They keep telling me how proud they are of what they're accomplishing as part of this mission and how proud their Afghan comrades are of the role they are playing in building and protecting their nation. Some of our soldiers are back on their second, third, and even fourth tour because they want to be there and they can see a difference.

Our NATO allies and ISAF partners as well as the Government of Afghanistan and the citizens have all expressed appreciation and gratitude for the outstanding professionalism and indeed the sacrifices Canada continues to make in Afghanistan. We are

respected and recognized as a leader in security and reconstruction operations in southern Afghanistan. And we continue to make inroads and seek ways to be more effective on the ground. Our U.S. allies have demonstrated an enhanced level of confidence in the Canadian Forces' capabilities and our leadership, and they have taken the rare step of placing three United States battalions under Canadian tactical command.

It's already clear that the U.S. troop reinforcements that arrived this past spring have made a significant difference to the mission. They've allowed our troops to reposition the forces in such a way that the vast majority of our forces are providing direct security support to the Afghan population. This is a fundamental change in our approach for this mission. For close to three years we didn't have sufficient troops on the ground to secure the region. And you'll recall the government's appeals for our NATO partners to help us in the south.

So we'd been operating with one Canadian battalion and one Afghan brigade. But what would occur is that we'd clear an area, but the Afghan security forces did not have the capacity, did not have the capability to hold the ground we took. And we'd have to adjust to the next area that needed assistance.

That approach has changed, again thanks to the United States and also thanks to our other NATO partners. They responded to the appeal and the appeal from the independent panel of government. Indeed, one former commander of ISAF called the first battalion that arrived—22 Infantry, and now 112 Infantry—the "Manley battalion". But that battalion arrived. And since then, things have changed again.

● (0910)

Now we have four battalions operating in the vicinity of Kandahar City: one Canadian battalion, the 1st Battalion, PPCLI; and three American battalions. Furthermore, there is an additional full American brigade covering the outlying areas around the Kandahar City region out to the borders. It's providing security to the other parts of the province outside of Canada's areas of operations. And the Afghan brigade has grown by an additional battalion, and it has enhanced competency since this past summer.

All of that combines to let us focus on creating the protective region around Kandahar, which I spoke about, creating the secure environment that allows development to occur, governance to take place, and more importantly, governance to take root.

Greater troop density in the Kandahar region has meant that the capability provides a more persistent security presence for the Afghans. It brings security more directly to where people are trying to conduct their daily lives: that is, farming—and this is truly the breadbasket of Afghanistan along the Arghandab River—getting to work, and going to school. It's supporting the Canadian and Afghan efforts to shift focus from disrupting an insurgency in the countryside to focused security on where the people live.

We're protecting the populations in villages and districts, clearing the communities of the insurgent elements, and holding our positions to protect the villagers. Therefore, CIDA and its development partners have the security they need to get going and deliver effect—jobs, education, medical care, and agricultural assistance—and to really make a difference in people's lives.

We call this using a village-based approach; that is, building security at a community level and making the insurgency less relevant to the population. The Taliban's aim is to provide alternate governance. If we're there they can't do it, so platoons of our soldiers are living in the towns they've liberated from the Taliban. This is key to defeating the Taliban.

Things are changing slowly. I believe the next surge of additional U.S. troops that will come in 2010 will see things continuing to shift, and in about a year and a half indeed the context may shift. As our mission comes to a close, we'll be looking at a very different Afghanistan. But right now our people are focused on next week, next month, and next year. We're focused on the 18 months we have to serve on this mission. Our people want to make a contribution to peace and security in Afghanistan.

However, as I said, we have clear direction from the government's motion. Planning for the redeployment of the Canadian Forces troops out of Kandahar has begun so it can be completed on the schedule the government has laid out for us. While planning a relief in place by our allies moves ahead, we will remain focused on the mission at hand. We fully intend to fulfill our NATO- and our UN-mandated responsibilities until 2011. I expect that we will run through the ribbon that marks the finish line of our mission in July 2011.

The Canadian Forces will continue to contribute to the whole-of-government mission that relies on a stable security environment. We will continue to support the capacity-building within the Afghan National Security Forces. We will continue to demonstrate Canadian leadership within ISAF. Our goal is for a seamless transition of the Kandahar region to our allies that will allow our partners from other government departments, NATO, and ISAF to continue to work together to build on the progress that has been made to date.

Part of that seamless transition is ensuring that our troops and those of our partners and allies are as safe as they can be as we undertake a relief in place. And part of it is maintaining Canadian leadership, honouring the Canadian Forces' service, our contributions, the sacrifice, and indeed the Canadian reputation for excellence.

Mr. Chair, the logistics of the drawdown are daunting. We have a wide variety of equipment in Afghanistan: ammunition, spare parts, materiel, kitchens, medical facilities, weapons, and so on. We have more than 1,200 vehicles there. We have several thousand sea containers full of all the things that make the Canadian Forces one of the best forces in the world and allow us to perform the tasks that government has outlined for us in a safe and effective manner.

• (0915)

So the withdrawal of the Canadian Forces from Afghanistan will be a demanding task, and I'll be relying on these two leaders beside me, these two gentlemen, General Marc Lessard and General Mark

McQuillan, and their teams and their headquarters to lead in these efforts. Planning for us is routine. We plan all the time. But it's absolutely necessary, because what we don't want to do is provide surprise.

Mr. Chair, as we speak, a reconnaissance team is already in Afghanistan. They're starting at the 2011 point and they're working backwards, reverse engineering all the complex issues and carefully sequenced steps that will need to be put in place to get from here to there. They will need to consider how to coordinate the return of Canadian Forces matériel and all of our equipment to Canada. They'll need to determine what we will need to dispose of—equipment that has met its full life—and if we sell it or donate it to the Afghans or to our allies. They'll need to weigh the various options available to get the often expensive and not necessarily easily moved equipment home and they'll need to prioritize what needs to move and when, to ensure that our military maintains the capability to respond to the full spectrum of operations until our commitment is finished.

We've made commitments to fulfill our responsibilities to our partners—CIDA, Foreign Affairs, Correctional Service of Canada, the RCMP—who rely on us for their protection as well as their basic support needs, such as food, water, and accommodations. We also have a responsibility to our allies and other partners.

So I have great leaders focused on the logistics of what happens when. At the same time, I'm focused on the people we have in Afghanistan right now: the 1st Battalion, PPCLI, the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, the Lord Strathcona's Horse, the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the engineers, the service battalion, and the medical staff; there are the elements that make up the air wing, such as the helicopters, transport aircraft, and unmanned aerial vehicles; and indeed, we have support from reservists from across the country who have put their civilian lives on hold to serve Canada.

I'm concentrating on coordinating our work with the Department of Foreign Affairs, the RCMP, and CIDA to maximize our efforts and the impact every day in support of Government of Canada objectives. I'm looking for progress today, next week, next month, and next year.

Mr. Chair, my responsibility is to lead the Canadian Forces, to ensure I provide the Government of Canada with defence options to secure Canada and Canadians, and to ensure our military has the capabilities and capacity to act in the full spectrum of operations. I always have to be ready for tomorrow. I must always keep in mind future force posture.

I still remember, just over a decade ago, coming home from Bosnia and starting a job here in Ottawa. The first day on the job, I got the keys to my office, March 23, 1999. I walked into my office and sat down and my predecessor said, "Walt, it's going to be a quiet day, you can just relax. You've just been to Bosnia, that's the main effort, everything's fine." I turned the television on to a news channel and there I saw Canadian Forces CF-18s that had just been given a mission to drop bombs in Kosovo. I had no idea at that moment of what we were about to get into. So you constantly have to be ready for tomorrow.

That's why we have to be ready to respond to any security challenge that the Government of Canada assigns to the Canadian Forces. I think you should be very proud of the professional and highly trained and disciplined force that you have. We who wear the uniform want to go places and do things. That's why they join the Canadian Forces. But they also want to represent Canada in providing peace and security around the world.

As I talk to our soldiers, I say the peace and security of Canada begins 10,000 kilometres away, whether that be in places like Italy, where our veterans just celebrated the battle of Ortona from 65 years ago, or in places like Korea, or indeed Bosnia, or indeed Afghanistan.

We maintain our edge, because whether it's an ice storm or a flooded home or a conflict on the other side of the world, we must be ready to respond. That's the process we continue with in Afghanistan today so that we're ready to respond effectively tomorrow.

Monsieur le président, merci beaucoup.

• (0920)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Dosanjh for seven minutes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you, General. Let me just say that we're very proud of the work the Canadian Forces do, and thank you for doing what you do.

General, in the context of your remarks, I saw a story out of Edmonton in *The Edmonton Journal* indicating that we may have our provincial reconstruction teams stay behind after 2011. It's Ben Roswell who is the RoCK, and you know what that is.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: He's the representative of Canada in Kandahar.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: That's right. He is quoted as saying that we are part of the international presence, and there's been no discussion of the international presence coming to an end in 2011.

Do you have any sense of any discussions that are going on, or are you simply aware of the order contained in the resolution?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I read the article this morning and was surprised about the context of the suggestion that Canadian Forces members would be there, because we're not planning on Canadian Forces members being there.

You're aware that the provincial reconstruction team, or PRT as it is known, is a team of Canadian Forces members with civilian members of Foreign Affairs, CIDA, Correctional Services Canada, and RCMP. They are there together as a team.

As the parliamentary motion indicates, all Canadian Forces members will leave Kandahar by December 2011. As I've said before, we're going to be true to that motion. So if the PRT remains, it will still be a team of civilian officials.

• (0925)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: But if the motion is about Kandahar, could the PRT, including the military complement, remain in another part of Afghanistan? Has that been discussed, to your knowledge?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: There are two portions of the parliamentary motion that are key for the Canadian Forces. One is that all Canadian Forces members would leave Kandahar by 2011. The other is the end of the military mission in 2011, without specifics on what that means. The interpretation by the Government of Canada to me is that it's Canadian Forces members doing various tasks in Afghanistan.

It has often been difficult for the men and women in uniform, because they hear all the innuendo from media or other sources about possibilities of missions. We live on facts and orders. It makes it very clear. For those men and women who have to go into harm's way, guidance must be clear.

That's why, on August 7, I put out instructions to the men and women, based on the parliamentary motion to which those two pieces are key. First is that we're all out of Kandahar and it's the end of the military mission. So from that I wait in case anything changes; but I can't wait for a long time. This gentleman right here has a reconnaissance team in theatre, but we will have to start letting contracts by the summer of 2010 in order to get everything home in 2011.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you, General.

Obviously the morale of our troops is high, and public confidence in them among Canadians is very high. But thinking of those two things, do you think it would help restore or increase the public's confidence and the military's morale itself if you had an unfettered MPCC inquiry?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: It is really up to the process of government to resolve how we move forward on that. The Military Police Complaints Commission provides the Canadian Forces a great source of independent review of how our military police operate. We appreciate that service.

The Chair: Mr. Wilfert.

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

General, it's good to see you again. As we think of our veterans who went to Hong Kong and with Christmas Day coming, there is a tremendous tradition.

On post-2011, there has been talk by Afghan officials and others about the need for a military college for training. How would you envision that, in terms of the issue of outside the wire versus inside, in training an officer corps that is clearly needed in Afghanistan?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: We are obviously not communicating things well enough, because we actually have one operating in Kabul. The Canadian Forces, again supporting our Foreign Affairs colleagues, have created a junior staff college in Kabul. It is being run by a combination of both military and contracted services. General Lessard probably knows a little more about it.

I visited the location earlier this year. I think they're on their second or third course of majors and lieutenant colonels who are going through the program. They are providing the same kind of curriculum, adapted from an Afghan standpoint. They are providing them the tools for planning and executing operations.

I'll ask General Lessard to add to that.

Lieutenant-General J.G.M. Lessard (Commander, Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, Department of National Defence): Absolutely. The Afghan Command Staff College includes five divisions. Canada took the responsibility of mentoring the junior staff course, which is a course of a few months. As the Chief of Defence Staff explained, it's a mixture of Canadian civilians and Canadian military. I was there three weeks ago. There was high praise from the commandant of the staff college for what we do and the way we do it. I saw some of the Afghan students, and they're definitely learning.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: How many of our soldiers are involved?

• (0930)

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: The not sure of the exact number. I'd say between 10 and 15.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: We can get back to you with the exact numbers.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Maybe the next time we go to Afghanistan we should visit it.

The Chair: Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): General, you talk about all of the activity going on at present, and you talk about planning for the withdrawal. How do you plan for the withdrawal and maintain the activity? What are the criteria you use? How do you rationalize the withdrawal process, coupled with the continuing activity?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: We do this often. We did it when we were leaving Bosnia. We did it when we were leaving Kosovo. We did it on the move from Kabul down to Kandahar. We call this a "relief in place".

Having said that, I'll ask General Lessard to weigh in.

Hon. Anita Neville: I appreciate that, but you said this was the largest deployment since Korea. That means it's very complex. I'm curious to know how you balance the two.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: The key is always time.

General Lessard.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: As the CDS explained, he gave me direction in August. It took me about a month. I issued an initial planning guide in September. There are two main activities—they're different but complementary. The first is to continue doing the operations, which is population-centric, protecting the population. Canada was at the forefront in this activity. We started in May and

we're synchronized with what General McChrystal, the commander of ISAF, seeks to do. We'll keep doing this as part of ISAF, meshed with regional command cell. We have to make sure that the Afghan security forces get better, and we have to keep protecting the Afghan population. So that's one activity.

The other one, the daunting one, is mission termination. It has two parts. One is the equipment. General McQuillan is liaising his headquarters with mine and determining the kit, the equipment, the priority, and how we bring everything back. The other aspect of mission termination is a relief in place. When you talk about withdrawal of Canadian Forces, it's really a relief in place. In due time, we will start consultations with the ISAF elements and Regional Command South. We will develop a plan for allied forces to replace the Canadian Forces in the Kandahar City region. There's much work to be done.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Paillé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you very much for coming here today. I will continue along the same lines. You indicated that the government told you to withdraw in 2011.

When did you receive this very clear message of withdrawal by 2011?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: The decision by Parliament is quite clear: July 1 will mark the end of the military mission in Kandahar. July 1 will also be the date that responsibilities are transferred.

I would like to ask General Lessard to talk to you about this in greater detail.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: Strictly on the military side, I received directives from my superior, the Chief of the Defence Staff, to put the necessary plans in place with the various components of the Canadian Forces to cease military operations in July 2011, and for all military personnel and military equipment to be pulled out of Afghanistan by December 2011.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: We are talking about approximately 18 months. Do you think this is enough time to withdraw all the troops and get organized? You seem to believe that this would be enough time. Could there be a possible delay, since the mission is changing daily? Would it be possible, in six or eight months' time, for the situation to be such that you would have to delay the withdrawal of various components?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: The Canadian Forces is guided by the principles of flexibility and agility, but also by detail planning. If we have enough time, we can do what needs to be done, but there can be challenges. However, by using a number of contractors, we can do it.

•(0935)

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: This committee studied everything surrounding post-traumatic stress disorder, services provided to the military and so on. Following the mission in 2011, the number of soldiers returning to Canada will be higher than normal. There will be perhaps faster upsets for soldiers.

With regard to your mandate, will you have to support soldiers, provide them with services in a more efficient manner, given the scope of the work that needs to be done?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: The mandate on services to our soldiers takes the future into consideration. We have learned a great deal, particularly over the past five years, about services that we need to provide to our soldiers not only for physical injuries, but also for psychological injuries, which are often quite complex. We have created joint care centres on each of the main bases, Petawawa, Valcartier, Halifax, Edmonton and Victoria–Vancouver. All the health care services have been grouped together, like a team, to ensure high-quality medical support. The situation is better than it was in the past, but we are learning about it every day. In terms of services to our soldiers, the mission will continue after 2011.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: If you look at the current situation in general, do you have any fears or particular concerns about the withdrawal of troops?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: To my mind, the only challenge remains time. For soldiers, time is always a threat.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: How much time do I have remaining?

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: You are saying that after the withdrawal of troops in 2011, services will continue to be offered. Are you telling me that, starting in 2011, all Canadian soldiers will be pulled out of Afghanistan?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Yes, that is exactly my point. Based on the mandate we have been given, a parliamentary mandate, the presence of the Canadian Forces in the province of Kandahar will end first, then the military mission will end.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: There is a difference between Kandahar and Afghanistan. Could you assure us that, in 2011, Canadian soldiers will be repatriated to Canada, and not just from Kandahar?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: First, it is clear that the mission in Kandahar will end for all troops and, second, it is the end of the military mission in Afghanistan. The Canadian government is talking about the missions we will undertake.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: Fine, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paillé.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Harris.

[English]

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

Thank you, Generals, for coming in response to our request to get a briefing on the situation.

First of all, General Natynczyk, I want to thank you for your forthrightness here today and also for making it very clear, providing a level of clarity we haven't had before, on the end of mission and

the fact that this would happen in accordance with the interpretation, as you put forth, of the parliamentary motion.

You used the metaphor of running through the ribbon at the end of July 2011, indicating clearly that everything will be up and running until that time. However, I'm trying to envisage the period between July and the end of 2011. Can we anticipate a significant troop drawdown in August 2011? Would that happen very quickly? Obviously, with the logistics, your cohorts here have a lot of work to do to make that happen, but in terms of the troops themselves, since they will no longer be involved in an active combat role, would they move out very quickly? We see this happening all the time, troops coming home, and in the case of other forces, different brigades going in and others coming out. Is that what we will see happen in August 2011?

•(0940)

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I would say your assessment is very accurate for the detail. Again, we're just developing the plan, so we're not at the point of having a detailed schedule yet, but certainly I know that General Lessard and General McQuillan will probably share their initial assessments with you.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: We're just at the initial phase of our coordinated planning. Within a parliamentary motion of ceasing operations in Kandahar in July, the overarching element right now is relief in place, a seamless relief in place between Canadian Forces troops and allied troops of whatever nation. That will dictate how fast or how slow Canadian Forces troops will return to Canada, but definitely July is when we cease operations, at the latest.

Mr. Jack Harris: Can someone tell us—perhaps you, General Natynczyk—who is responsible for coordinating this relief in place? Is that something the Government of Canada would do through its allies? Or is this something at the operational level that you would be responsible for in terms of negotiating with General McChrystal or with whoever happens to be then in charge? Is that something you would do?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: It is at the operational level. At the operational level it's actually General Lessard, and General McQuillan's headquarters are in support of General Lessard, who is the one person responsible for Afghanistan, as he is with the Congo, the Middle East, Cyprus, Haiti. It's General Lessard who is responsible. So General Lessard would be talking to General McChrystal at the Afghanistan or the ISAF operational level and then working that with Regional Command South headquarters in terms of the troops available and when actually that rollout would occur.

Again, I'll ask General Lessard to expand on that.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: After the initial discussions with the ISAF commander, General McChrystal, most of the legwork will be done with Regional Command South, which is a divisional type of headquarters situated in Kandahar airfield, and that's where the coordination will be done in terms of having Canadian Forces troops replaced by ISAF troops.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

General Natynczyk, in terms of carrying out the mission, you've given a description in your presentation of the village approach, which I think has received the support on a tactical level and as a theory of carrying out this type of activity. And it sounds very positive, with one exception in my mind. How many villages do we have in Afghanistan, and how many troops would it take to carry out such a needed strategy in an effective manner over more than one village or over the entire country? That seems to me to be the weak point here. Is that something you've thought about?

It's one thing to present a model, but it's quite another thing to actually be able to carry it out over a wide area.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Again, the Canadian Forces are in a specific area in Kandahar City and to the south of Kandahar City, and our area of responsibility has been condensed to allow for a significant concentration of forces that we've never had before because of the reinforcement by our U.S. allies in this region. So where we had been operating, up until this past April, with one battalion in the Kandahar region, we now have four battalions of U.S. and Canadian troops operating in the Kandahar region specifically, and then an additional three battalions with the Stryker Brigade operating around our area.

So it's not only the Canadians who have taken on this village approach. We were just one of the first to get on with it, and we've had some success. But now, again, through General McChrystal's assessment and strategy, which is a counter-insurgency strategy, he is advocating the same approach for all of ISAF; that is, protecting Afghans where they live, enabling that hold in the villages—the village approach—such that the Afghan ministries can build in terms of governance but also to create the security environment such that non-governmental organizations and international organizations can come in and start the development projects. So our region is within that area where the Canadian battle group is, but we now have these other three battalions that are under our command. In addition to that, one of the battalions is a military police battalion that is actually living with the Afghan police force in the city of Kandahar. In addition, one of our companies has been continuously employed in providing security for development in the city of Kandahar. That's why we call it a “stability company”.

But that is changing the context, and again, I ask General Lessard to wade in and expand on it.

• (0945)

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: I have just three points on the village approach, which we also call stability operations.

First of all, they only started about six months ago, in May, so we're really only in the first six months. Second, we're concentrating close to Kandahar City. Kandahar City is the vital ground in southern Afghanistan, the key component, of the counter-insurgency. Third, it's not just Canadian forces or ISAF; it's ISAF with, especially, our Afghan security forces partners. At the end of the day, we want local Afghans to see their own security forces giving them security.

Mr. Jack Harris: I have one final question. General Natynczyk, are you satisfied that we have the detainee transfer fixed and working to your satisfaction? We heard recent criticisms that the Afghan security forces were complaining that they had been given these prisoners, and they wouldn't take them, because they didn't have

enough information to do anything with them. That strikes me as being a significant problem. Would you care to comment on that?

The Chair: You have a minute. Go ahead, General.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I was the vice-chief as we worked from the first agreement, in December 2005, through to that second agreement. The agreement with regard to detainee transfer was a best practice. We worked with the Department of Foreign Affairs and other justice colleagues so that we came up with what I thought, from my standpoint, was a very good, gold standard of a detainee transfer agreement.

The key issue, in terms of the environment in Afghanistan, is that the government has not passed a terror law. They can hold people who have been accused of a crime against the state. I'm not a lawyer. Some of you might be. It is very difficult to get a prosecution against an individual who has been accused of a crime against the state.

One of our challenges is that we have very sophisticated and classified means of intelligence to find out who the Taliban are. We don't turn over people, in my view and in my understanding, unless we have clear evidence that they have done something wrong. Again, we have seen people who we know, through intelligence, clearly have committed crimes. Or our soldiers have actually seen them on the ground having participated in an event, having gunshot residue, or having perpetrated an explosion of an improvised explosive device. Yet putting the evidence together such that a prosecutor and a judge can effect a prosecution so the person stays in jail is difficult in a country that doesn't have a terror law protecting the peace. That's why it's a constant challenge. And every case is different. I would just say to you that I am very confident in the process we've put together to put the cases together the best way we can. But we cannot expose those who have provided information to us or how we have garnered some of the intelligence to find out who the perpetrators of the insurgency are.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

I will give the floor to Mr. Braid.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here this morning and for your presentation and your strong leadership of the Canadian Forces. You are clearly demonstrating to us how the Canadian Forces will meet Parliament's deadline to withdraw by 2011 in a planned way.

It's clear that our mission in Afghanistan has been the most significant for the Canadian Forces in decades. General, could you speak a little bit to the positive impact of this mission, the positive effects of this mission, on our Canadian Forces in terms of training, the development of our forces, the equipment, and our international reputation?

•(0950)

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I'll just say to you, Mr. Chair and ladies and gentlemen—I don't want to boast, but I'm very proud of our men and women—that you have one of the finest forces in the world. You do because the men and women of the Canadian Forces have rotated through one of the most difficult and austere environments in the world, into an area where the culture in some cases is very primitive, where your men and women have proven to be among the best trained in the world. Part of it happens even before someone puts on a uniform, because of our Canadian culture. The fact is that we come from a multicultural mosaic, we come from a country of immigrants, we come from a country where culture is respected, we come from a country with a high educational standard, and your men and women in uniform are well educated, and we're very patient.

I remember one battalion commander told me, “Sir, your soldiers are just plain smart”. When we take those individuals, when we take ordinary Canadians, and we put them through the rigour of the training that we do, they become extraordinary leaders, whether those leaders be young infantrymen or whether they be these generals. But as I said to a platoon out in Shilo just recently, “Whether you have just finished this basic training course as infantrymen, or even if you just finished your three-year hitch as a basic soldier, you have no choice but to be a leader, because we have provided the structure for you”.

We have just raised our game over the past few years because of this Afghanistan experience. I just think right now—again, I'm going into my 35th year—that I have never been part of this organization at a time when the proficiency and capability from privates on up has been at this incredibly elevated level. We were raised in the Cold War, when we thought we were doing the right things, but we did not have that experience of combat. Those young privates, those corporals, those lieutenants, and those captains are the future of the Canadian Forces, and their experience is immense.

Each and every day, at this moment, you have men and women who are going out the front gate courageous and so confident in their ability and in their equipment. Right from the helmets on their heads, to their boots, to their flak jackets, to the vehicles they are driving, they are confident in achieving their mission. Their eyes are trained and their instincts are incredibly highly refined, so they know what right looks like. Also, they have the discipline. They have the discipline that's rooted in Canadian law, in international law, in the law of armed conflict, in the Geneva Conventions. They carry it on a soldier card, they've gone through rigorous training, and they know what right looks like. Those are the men and women who are out there today.

What we're hearing from our allies—and I don't want to pat ourselves on the back, but it's from our allies—is that we have among the best soldiers, sailors, airmen and women, and special forces in the world. It will only get better, because in 30 years' time those lieutenants who have earned their spurs in Afghanistan will be sitting right here. We are products of the Cold War and Bosnia and Kosovo, and those young corporals and young lieutenants have much vaster experience from the current involvement.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you, General.

We are indeed, all of us, very proud of the Canadian Forces. Thank you for underscoring all the reasons why we are.

You indicated in your presentation that there are three U.S. battalions under Canadian command. You also suggested that's somewhat rare. Tell us why that's happened.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Again, I'll start and I'll ask General Lessard to add to this.

I do know, having spoken to General David McKiernan, who was the commander of ISAF until June, and to General McChrystal, how absolutely impressed they were by Canadian leadership in Afghanistan.

That leadership goes back to individuals such as Brigadier-General Jon Vance and Brigadier-General Dan Ménard, all the way through to their staffs, through to those officers and those NCOs who worked for that Task Force Kandahar, the battle groups that have served there, including 2nd Battalion, Royal 22nd Regiment, and now 1 PPCLI, as well as the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team.

What our allies have seen is that our proficiency, whether it be the operational command...going back to when General Lessard was the Regional Command South commander last year; down to General Vance, at a tactical level, as a brigade commander; down to those battalion commanders; and right down to those soldiers. Our allies know that for them to put a U.S. battalion under the command of the Canadians, they will get at least the same level of leadership that they would get from a U.S. battalion.

The other dimension is the fact that our leaders understand counter-insurgency tactics and doctrine and how we actually apply all of that doctrine to reality on the ground in Afghanistan in order to protect the Afghans where they live, create that security environment, and enable other government departments such as CIDA, with NGOs and IOs, to bring effect through governance, humanitarian assistance, and development projects that lead to jobs, education, medical care, and, therefore, hope.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

•(0955)

The Chair: You can take 15 seconds.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: Just to continue on with what the chief was saying, about a month ago, when I was in Afghanistan, I had a good chat with General McChrystal. It's no coincidence that there are three U.S. battalion task forces under Canadian command. What we've seen from the commander of Task Force Kandahar and the brigadier-general commanding the Canadian Forces is innovation, leadership, and especially perseverance.

The chief mentioned the Canadians doing counter-insurgency that's population-centric—in other words, protecting the population. Some countries talk about it and others do it. We do it. And we do it very well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Dosanjh.

I know that you will share your time with Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: General, I asked you a question about MPCC. There is a contradiction that stands out in the newspapers, and I want to offer you the opportunity to comment.

There must be an explanation for what you said in May of 2007 with respect to the incident that was discussed in the House yesterday, the evidence of Colonel Noonan and the evidence of General Deschamps under oath, and the diaries of the soldiers on the ground.

It's your time. I just want to give you the opportunity to shed some light on why there is a contradiction.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Thank you.

I just saw the soldiers' notes in *The Globe and Mail* yesterday. I'll just say that I wasn't on the ground on June 11, 12, 13, 2006, and neither was Colonel Noonan, neither was General Deschamps, and neither was the military police corporal. He wasn't there at the event. He was there after.

I covered this issue on May 4, 2007, as if it were yesterday. Now this is a déjà vu moment all over again. It's interesting, when someone looks at an operation it's almost like watching a hockey game. We're all watching the same hockey game and we're all seeing different things.

You have to try to get a context around this environment. The bottom line up front is the event of June 2006 happened on the battlefield. This was not an event that happened back at Kandahar with regard to transfer. This was not a transfer to a prison. And the Canadian Forces did the right thing. Those are the three points I want to make right up front.

In June 2006 the context is key. This is prior to Operation Medusa. We were under Operation Enduring Freedom. Therefore, we were working for the Americans. This is prior to the NATO mission. We were working under the transfer agreement of December 2005. We had moved from Kabul down to Kandahar in that period of February on. We were dealing with a fledgling Afghan army and we had very little confidence in the Afghan police. As a result, the guidelines were that we would not transfer our detainees to the Afghan army or the Afghan police unless they were being mentored by their American mentors. We would not do that transfer, certainly not on the battlefield.

I remember in May 2007, when I was understanding what was going on, speaking to the platoon commander who actually owned the soldiers on the ground and speaking to Lieutenant Colonel Ian Hope, the battalion commander, who was the battalion commander, Task Force Orion, in the summer of 2006. As I looked to my own notes that I took listening to the platoon commander and listening to the battalion commander, I said I want a refresh, and I spoke again to Colonel Ian Hope last night just to confirm that I was good to go here.

This was Operation Jagra. This was led by the Afghan security force. It was the Canadians supporting the Afghan army and the Afghan police, one of the first operations that they would work together. The Canadian Forces were there to assist the Afghan security forces. It was our approach and guideline for this operation that if there were detainees to be taken, it was the Afghan security

forces who would do it. We would not do it. This was their operation.

This event that occurred, our soldiers questioned a group of Afghans. When we question it's like stopping someone at a speed trap. You walk up and you're looking at the individual. Is that person clean? You're off in a farming area. If that person is dirty, he could be a farmer. If the person is clean, normally the Taliban would clean themselves up before going into a fight. Then there are all the tell-tale signs I don't want to share with you in this forum, but we would do an assessment just talking to the guy, just like a police officer would on the side of the road, asking you how it's going.

Based on the soldier's assessment they had no interest in the individual, but the Afghan police were there. The Afghan police see different things, for whatever reason. The Afghan police decided to take this person under custody and they took this individual off.

We didn't take this person under custody. If we did detain this person we would have brought in the military police. We would have taken this person into closed custody. We would have had the military police process them there. That individual would have moved back to Kandahar airfield, gone through a medical assessment, gone through tactical questioning, and if that person was still a person of interest, then we would pursue with our transfer agreement that I've mentioned before. But what we did on the ground was just basic routine questioning, as we do to thousands, so we ensure we don't take people who could be innocent.

• (1000)

Now, when the Afghan police took this individual away, the Canadian Forces members on the ground—again looking to those strategic privates and corporals—got kind of suspicious. They said “hmm,” and they went to check on what was going on. That's where they saw that the Afghan police were beating the individual with their shoes. They intervened. This is courageous now, because I remember speaking to folks who were there. It was courageous, actually, to take control of this individual. They called in the military police at that time. The notes you see are from the military police who were called in, who then took the individual and went through the process.

It goes to the fact that what the individuals did on the ground at the time was the right thing in terms of handling this individual. Having talked to Colonel Ian Hope, I just want to say that his memory of this event is that he had two or three firefights happening at the same time, that this was happening on a battlefield.

I just want to say that again, knowing that our men and women followed their soldier card so that they would apply Canadian law, international law, law of armed conflict, and the Geneva Conventions and do the right thing. I always talk about the strategic corporal, and I have trust in that strategic private, that strategic corporal, to do the right thing all the way through.

Thank you.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, General.

I would give the floor to Mr. Boughen. You have five minutes.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for giving us your time. I know you're very busy with a lot of different activities. As you look back on the contributions that Canada has made to the Afghan people in education, medical, and social changes in their country, what do you think has been the biggest thing that we have done as a nation to help them in nation-building? They didn't have much of a nation before we arrived, in terms of democratic nation-building.

What would you say has been our biggest contribution as one country to another?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I would say from my perspective—and again, I'll ask General Lessard to weigh in—I think we've provided them hope. They've gone through 30 years of war. They used to be a quite civilized culture. Thirty years of war is almost two generations, and all they have experienced is conflict. For us to provide especially education and medical care is providing hope for that next generation to live a better life.

Again, that education won't occur without providing the security, but key is something that we're finding the most difficult, and that is governance—governance not only federally, but governance at a provincial and district and community level. Again, so much is based upon their culture, but I would say that from my standpoint, we provide them hope through education and medical support.

Marc.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: On the governance and development side, I see really two things. One of them, to reiterate what the Chief of Defence Staff is saying, is basic services, of course. The other is increased economic activity. Many Canadians do not know that just in the last 12 months we've seen bazaars, markets—many bazaars opening up in Kandahar City. That's not just the economic activity that it represents, it also gives hope to local Afghans.

Mr. Ray Boughen: I just have one other question, gentlemen. We see in the papers and the news media announcements that the U.S. troops are looking at a date when they're going to leave Afghanistan. I think it's not far from our date of 2011. Is Afghanistan in a position now where they're able to govern themselves, to defend themselves, to defend their democratic way of life, or are they going to be overrun with insurgents? What are your thoughts on that?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Mr. Chair, I have not had the opportunity yet to sit down with Admiral Mullen, my U.S. counterpart, and General Dave Petraeus to actually understand from a U.S. perspective their full plan in 2011. You'll be aware that right now they have in the order of 67,800 soldiers on the ground, and the President of the United States indicated what amounts to a surge of about 30,000 troops on top of that 67,800.

I do not know at this point in time, on the announcement of the end of that remit in 2011, whether that is back down to 67,800, or whether it's down to zero. I just don't know that. The fact is that it will take some time, especially in other regions of the country, training the Afghan army and police, and especially the growth.

You may want to add on there, Marc.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: I'll make my comments on the issues of Afghan leadership. Right now we're mentoring the Afghans in security, governance, and other activities. Slowly but surely, we're

seeing the Afghans taking the lead, in both security and governance. It will take time, but I am sure that before long we will see the Afghans taking the full lead in their country.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Roy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General, your message is not clear, and I want to tell you why.

• (1010)

Gen Walter Natynczyk: You are saying that my message is not clear.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Your message is not clear and I am going to tell why. In your speech, you have always said and confirmed that it was the end of the mission in Kandahar and the withdrawal of Canadian Forces from Kandahar. On the other hand, Lieutenant-General Lessard is telling us that it is the end of the mission in Afghanistan and that all troops will be repatriated.

On page 15, it states and I quote, “The Canadian Forces will continue to contribute to the whole-of-government mission that relies on a stable security environment. We will continue to support capacity building within the Afghan National Security Forces.” So we are not talking about pulling all of the Canadian Forces out of Afghanistan in July 2011. It is the end of the military mission. There is a nuance between the two.

Have I understood correctly? In your speech, you keep talking about the end of the mission in Kandahar. I understand that the military mission is concentrated in Kandahar, but not all of the troops in Afghanistan will be pulled out in July 2011.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: There are two parts to the motion, or two directions for the Canadian Forces. First, the Canadian Forces will leave Kandahar in 2011 and, second, the military mission in Afghanistan will end.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Correct. However, this means that, after July 2011, Canadian soldiers will remain in Afghanistan and will continue to work in education, reconstruction or to ensure the protection of Canadians in mission there, but also in the Kandahar area.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: That is not the interpretation that the government provided to me. The government clearly told me that the end of the military mission truly meant the end of missions for men and women in uniform. The Canadian Forces participate in military missions. So there are two parts. All the Canadian Forces will leave Kandahar in 2011.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: They will leave Kandahar, but not Afghanistan.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: The military mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011. Aside perhaps from those working in the embassies, we will be leaving.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: That is not what you said in your speech. You said that the Canadian Forces will continue, after July 2011, to contribute to the whole-of-government mission that relies on a stable security environment. You said in your speech that the Canadian Forces will continue to make a contribution in Afghanistan. This means that soldiers will remain in Afghanistan.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Sir, the mandate is clear to us.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: It is not clear.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: To me, it is very clear. The operations in Kandahar province will come to an end in July 2011. All Canadian Forces will have left Afghanistan by the end of the year. When we talk of a military mission, we mean all of its components. That includes the battle group that conducts combat and stability operations. That includes the training of Afghan forces. That also includes troops who are operating with Canadian civilians. We are talking about all the elements of the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Lieutenant-General Lessard, I understand, but that is not what the general is telling us. The general is saying that the Canadian Forces will continue to contribute on the ground after July 2011. That is what is written on page 15.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Could there be a translation problem?

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: I can tell you that the directives my boss gave me in August are very clear. Much has been said about them. It is very clear to me that we will cease operations in Kandahar in July 2011, and all Canadian Forces will have left Afghanistan by year end.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Are you sure they will have all left and there will not be a single soldier left in Afghanistan? That is what I want to know.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Could the attaché still be there? The problem isn't the military mission. When we ensure the protection component of a development project, our duty is to defend the people involved and ensure security, whether in a development mission or while training Afghan forces and Afghan police. It remains a potential security and combat mission. The problem is with the actual definition of the term "military". The government has given me that definition and that is the mission we are accomplishing as members of the armed forces.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Therefore, soldiers will remain on the ground to carry out security missions.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: I will repeat this so that it is very, very clear. My mandate and what I am responsible for—in partnership with General McQuillan, who will be of great assistance with regard to the equipment—is to repatriate the men and women of the Canadian Forces, as well as all the equipment, by the end of 2011. That is very clear: they will be back in Canada, or at least will have left Afghanistan.

•(1015)

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Very well, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

I will give the floor to Mr. Payne for five minutes.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank the generals for coming here today.

It's very important and quite clear that our Canadian Forces will be out of Afghanistan, as stated by Parliament and General Natynczyk.

I have a number of questions, and hopefully I'll get through them all.

I'm wondering if you can tell us what the Canadian Forces and the Department of Foreign Affairs have done for Afghanistan as far as building infrastructure and helping the country move forward.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Given that General Lessard was living there on the ground for nine months and has been commanding CEFCOM these past few months, I think he can give us a pretty good overview.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: I won't go through the whole list. This is more the expertise of DFAIT or CIDA.

Whether it's small hospitals or schools, a significant number of buildings have been built. But it's not the buildings per se; it's the capability. I think we're missing the point here when we look at mortar and bricks. Southern Afghanistan is tribal and extremely rural, so it's not just buildings that you need—perhaps in Kandahar City. You need things that help farmers, like irrigation and wells. It's those simple things that facilitate a heavy agricultural economy.

Mr. LaVar Payne: So we've been doing a number of those projects to help them move forward.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: Yes.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: To put it in perspective, the projects that General Lessard mentioned are very much in the local community, in advance of the signature project on the Dahla Dam. The area we're working in is the bread basket of southern Afghanistan, along the Arghandab River.

The Arghandab River is at the northern end of this Arghandab valley. There's a huge lake with a dam that was built in the 1950s, from the monument I saw on the site. But it's had no maintenance done on it at all. SNC-Lavalin has won a competition for about a \$150-million project to renew not only the dam, but also the very intricate and sophisticated irrigation systems running from that dam out to those communities that General Lessard was mentioning.

If we get the irrigation system working again, the farmers can turn away from poppy crops and get on with pomegranates. This is an area that was known to be an incredible area for pomegranates.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you.

I think it's important that Canadian people know what Canadians are doing in Afghanistan to help the population itself move forward.

As far as the staff you have in Kandahar preparing to develop the plans for removal of all Canadian troops, could you give us an indication of the number of individuals you have there?

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: I'll give you the rough number of people. There are a couple of hundred in the headquarters in Kandahar. But quite frankly, we're not at that stage right now.

The CDS gave direction in August and I gave initial direction in September. In fact, before Christmas I'll issue my warning order where we'll get into the details, and a lot of it will be talking with General McQuillan.

From my perspective, in the next three to six months most of the work will be done in Canada between my headquarters, which is responsible for international operations; General McQuillan, who is responsible for support command; and many other organizations in Canada, such as the assistant deputy minister for materiel. We'll be deciding what to do with the equipment, how to refurbish it, and where it goes.

Before I hand over to General McQuillan, I would say that a lot of the work to be done right now is in Canada.

Mark.

Major-General Mark McQuillan (Commander, Canadian Operational Support Command, Department of National Defence): Sir, thank you very much for the comment. It allows me the chance to provide some comments.

Very clearly, the sustainment of operations will be the focal point up until 2011 when we cease operations. What we will do is exactly as the generals have indicated.

In terms of our mission drawdown, and in terms of materiel, equipment, and priorities set, once we know what the operational plan is for the relief in place, and then once we understand the priorities for reset or reconstitution of the Canadian Forces for a be-prepared mission, that will set the conditions under which we will start the mission drawdown.

It'll probably be focused on three main areas. The chief has talked about this. Time is a significant factor in the mandate.

We'll also take a look at cost. Because as you're probably aware, based on the location of Afghanistan, it isn't easy to get materiel in or out, so it will be a combination of air bridges and/or sealift, and in some cases overland to sea bridges. All those factors, based on all the classes of materiel, will go into the consideration.

What we plan on trying to do.... Again, General Lessard is quite accurate. We are supporting him and his staff in terms of the conduct of how we will actually take a look at potentially drawing down materiel in terms of time and space. What we will clearly look at in terms of that direction, in terms of handing over, donating, disposing, selling, is that we will get the requisite authority and responsibility to do that and make sure it is in place to do so.

On the actual planning of staff and what I anticipate happening, again, a reconnaissance is in place right now. We will start to do a more detailed analysis in the spring with the intent of having a more formalized or finalized plan, hopefully by the late spring timeframe. My expectation on that, of course, in addition to the time, space, and materiel considerations, is what size of organization you need to conduct those functions based on the timelines provided.

We will provide recommendations at that time as to a force size that would be needed. As you can probably appreciate, the force that's in theatre now is supporting the actual operations. Also, a force will be maintained to sustain operations. This will be an additional

task. My expectation is that we will have to phase in terms of people, focus, and orientation to make sure that this part of the operation at the tail end is executable.

• (1020)

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you very much.

Can I have another five minutes?

The Chair: No. There is no more time. Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Wilfert.

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

I have two questions. One will refer to a statement made by the general counsel for the office of the ombudsman for DND.

But on the first one, I was just intrigued by your response, General, to my colleague Mr. Dosanjh's questions with regard to the Noonan report. You gave an incredible amount of detail. I realize that you said you weren't on the ground, so you were well briefed, presumably. In the notes, they refer to the name and the unit of the platoon that originally captured that individual, and they took pictures, I understand, of him showing no injuries at the time, before they handed him over to Afghan officials.

The fact that this took place before the new agreement, or the enhanced transfer agreement, doesn't seem to matter in my view when it comes to whether or not this is a credible example of abuse of a Canadian-transferred detainee to Afghan officials. Can you comment on that?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Again, from my perspective, having spoken to.... I mean, on May 4, 2007, here I am calling the platoon commander, okay? It's not often that the vice-chief of defence actually calls the platoon commander, but again, I wasn't there. Other people weren't there. I wanted to make sure that I understood the perspective and the context, and I also spoke to the commanding officer, Colonel Ian Hope, and refreshing my memory again last night: that our soldiers question, indeed, thousands of Afghans, each and every day. And while we question, we assess whether the individual is a person of interest that we should be taking into custody, because we have every requirement to ensure that we do not arrest people who are innocent.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Do we always take pictures and make notes every time?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I would have to refer back to Colonel Hope why they would take pictures in this event. From my perspective, I didn't even know they took pictures, and again, I didn't see the notes from the military police who came in after the event.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Because I wonder if this is a normal procedure, to take pictures and take detailed notes before they transfer them over to the—

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I don't know. Again, I'll have to refer back to the battalion commander of the day, and perhaps we can get a response in that regard—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Can we get a follow-up, Mr. Chairman?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: —but again, from the information provided to me, and again, I wasn't there....

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I appreciate that. Your response to my colleague triggered that question.

General, on a different note, the general counsel for the office of the ombudsman for DND and the Canadian Forces was before us back on February 25. The comment that was made, and this is with regard, I would assume, to withdrawal, was that:

The environment in which Canada's military has been operating in recent years has changed dramatically, particularly in light of the level and intensity of combat operations in Afghanistan. And it is evident that the Canadian Forces and its members are strained almost to the breaking point.

General Leslie made comments as well.

How critical is it for us to completely withdraw to regroup and refresh so we are able to then respond to future missions, whatever they happen to be?

•(1025)

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I'll just say that the Canadian Forces have a capacity to do operations around the world on a continuous basis—on a continuous basis. Indeed, equipment fatigue is often more significant than individuals' fatigue.

As I mentioned before, there are people who are on their second, third, and fourth tours, because they want to be. Everyone is generally expected to go on at least two tours to Afghanistan. We have 80 people currently on their third tour, and we have five people on their fourth tour, because they want to be there. Indeed, with respect to the fourth tour, I spoke to the commander in Land Force Western Area, Brigadier-General Mike Jorgensen. He personally interviewed the five people there on their fourth tours just to make sure, eye to eye, that these individuals were fine. His interview of one individual I think is worth recounting. He hauled the young corporal in, who was asking to go on his fourth tour, and he asked the corporal, "What is your major worry at this moment?" He said, "Sir, my major worry is that you won't let me go."

Indeed, the men and women of the Canadian Forces, when they put on this uniform, want to go somewhere. I was in Shilo, in September of this year, speaking to about 750 soldiers of 2nd Battalion PPCLI and 1st Regiment Royal Canadian Horse Artillery. I said to folks, "Okay, you've all been there. Who wants to go back?" About 90% of the hands went up. I asked someone who didn't put up a hand what the issue was. He said, "Sir, I'll tell you what. If somebody else tells my wife, I'm there for you."

Then I said that while we've been in Afghanistan, there have been other operations. There are UN operations, coalition operations, Africa, and wherever. I asked how many people wanted to go somewhere. Guess what. A hundred percent of the hands went up.

I spoke to soldiers in Gagetown in June. I spoke to those same soldiers when they were in Afghanistan in March. In March they were tired. They'd been on the tour, at that point, for six months and a bit. It's a long process, in terms of training and theatre. I remember asking them in March, "How are you guys doing? Do you want to come back?" They were looking down. They were kicking stones. They said, "Sir, we're kind of tired. We're kind of tired."

I saw those same soldiers in June in Gagetown. What was their first question to me? What was their first question? "Sir, when can we go back?"

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: General, did you phone his wife? That's all I'd like to know.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Gen Walter Natynczyk: That's just to say that everyone is different. Today we have 67,300 members of the regular force and in the order of 25,000 in the reserve force, and they all put on their uniforms to go somewhere. We all have different family circumstances. We all react differently to stress. I am so pleased that we have made huge progress in supporting those who've gone through some stress and that we are also tailoring our personnel policies to accommodate especially those who have made significant sacrifices for our country.

The Chair: Thank you, General.

I will give the floor to Mrs. Gallant.

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

There is quite a significant amount of equipment we've gathered together since we first started our mission in Afghanistan. Indeed, the days have changed since Bosnia, when the soldiers would take off their frag vests on the tarmac and the new soldiers coming in would pick them up and use them. With respect to this equipment, and recognizing that some is kind of getting worn out, will there be any left in theatre when we leave?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Mr. Chair, at this point in time, before the assessment that... Again, General McQuillan's staff will involve also all those technicians who will descend upon the equipment and do an assessment of it—that equipment that is not worth bringing home from an economic standpoint, that equipment that is worth handing off to our allies or indeed the Afghans. We have computers that have been sitting there since 2002. We have a lot of equipment that's been sitting around, so it depends on what it is.

I'll ask General McQuillan to wade in on this.

•(1030)

MGen Mark McQuillan: Ma'am, we will go through a very pragmatic process of identifying equipment that is identified as surplus and/or disposal and/or to be brought back to Canada.

We have already set up what we call a mission materiel infrastructure board. That is sort of co-chaired right now between CEFCOM and my command. The intent of that is, again, to look at the full range of materiel that is in theatre and then to make an objective and rational recommendation as to what could be offered up under those various categories.

The intent of what will follow is that there will be some things we will have authority for and some things we'll have to go up through the respective chains to get authority for, depending upon the level of materiel that, for instance, is at a donation level. But that will all come together in what we call a materiel distribution instruction. We will try to be very pragmatic and make sure we have identified what we think are the key materiel pieces that potentially can go various ways, get the authorities in place, and then issue the direction, so we are executing that drawdown task in line with those priorities that have been established to set recommendations and approvals in place.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: And the equipment that comes back... Indeed, we have acquired some new capabilities—our heavy-lift helicopters, for example. At some point very soon will we not have to start drafting out where they are going to go, so the infrastructure can be planned? Is that under way already?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I would just say, too, that the commander of the air force has to look at the capability of the helicopters we have currently on the ground, and where they are in terms of their life, because we didn't purchase those aircraft new. They had been used by the U.S. army, and therefore they had a lot of hours on the aircraft. So at what point will they be in another 18 months? And I'll just say to you that the very fact that we can do rotations—and on this last rotation I do not think we took a single casualty—again goes to the importance of the helicopters in enabling a safe rotation of our troops.

But they're being used hard. They are carrying literally tens of thousands of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and civilians around the battlefield safely. So where they will be terms of their full life in 2011, I don't know, but that will have to be another assessment not only involving General McQuillan's organization but also the chief of the air staff in terms of what it will take to get those aircraft back up and reset them and where they will be in their lives when they're reset vis-à-vis the new Chinook Foxtrot helicopters, for which the government has signed a contract, and I believe we'll be receiving them in the 2013 or 2014 timeframe. So all of that will have to be weighed.

At this point in time, I don't have another answer for you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: And lastly, now that we're coming to an end of rotating our soldiers in—and what soldiers do all the time is train—when they rotate out of Afghanistan, how, if at all, will the training change?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: The training will be significantly enhanced because of the lessons we've learned over the last while. Afghanistan sets a benchmark for what global conflict could look like in the future. We are using lessons learned from the Malayan campaign in the 1950s. That is the counter-insurgency that the British dealt with in Malaya in the 1950s. I would refer you to a wonderful book called *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*. It captures the doctrinal lessons of that event. We're using some of that, along with some of the lessons from Bosnia and Kosovo, to enable us to conduct counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan.

All of what we're learning now has raised our standards and training capabilities to a point that we are now prepared for any eventuality. Afghanistan has taught us that we have to be ready for classical peacekeeping and stability operations, which is on the low

end of the conflict continuum, as well as a high-intensity environment like Operation Medusa. We have to cover the entire spectrum. The Government of Canada can commit the Canadian Forces to any environment, and we can't choose how that environment evolves. The most fundamental lesson learned in Afghanistan is that the enemy has a vote.

When we moved from Kabul down to Kandahar, I didn't envisage the growing insurgency in Kandahar. Nor did our allies. This hit a high point on Labour Day weekend in 2006. Insurgents were conducting themselves like conventional soldiers—they dug in to a position and we had to use conventional tactics to dislodge them. Now you have a generation of soldiers, sailors, and airmen who have been trained in this broad spectrum of conflict from stability and peacekeeping, which is what is happening now in the village approach, to the conventional tactics necessary to dislodge the Taliban from fixed positions. In the future, you will see the Canadian Forces training for the whole spectrum of conflict. This is not confined to the army. We tend to focus on the “troops”, but we also have men and women, on the sea and in the air, who are there along with the soldiers, who are learning these lessons and bringing them back home to their units, so that the navy and the air force will also have enhanced training by virtue of their experience in Afghanistan.

• (1035)

The Chair: Thank you, General.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General, I want to go back to an event that some people seem to be interested in. It is one of the thousands of events that our soldiers face on the ground every day. I mean the event we talked about that took place in June 2006. Was that a Canadian transfer detainee, or was it just one of thousands of events on the battlefield?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: According to the information provided to me in 2007 by the platoon commander, and the information I have from the battalion commander, both in 2007 and last night when I spoke to him, these people had been questioned by us but we did not take them as detainees. If we had taken them as detainees, we would have processed them, through our very deliberate process, back to Kandahar. This would have involved a medical assessment and tactical questioning, after which we would have determined whether they were in possession of evidence that would require transferring them to the Afghan detention facilities.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So this was not a Canadian transfer detainee.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: That's my assessment.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: In talking to soldiers, junior officers, and so on, we take pictures of thousands of people. Every time we stop to talk to somebody, if there's a camera we take a picture. So that is not processing per se.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: I'm not aware of the photos. That's why I would say it's worth getting clarity on this.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: You talked about what we learned, and the Canadian Forces learned an awful lot in Afghanistan. With respect to the CF, our allies, and our foes, what have we taught other people?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: What have we taught other people?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: My goodness, we have taught quite a lot. Every time the Canadian Forces chief and I visit other nations I normally talk to the chief of their defence staff, my counterpart, and the Canadian Forces chief talks to the senior enlisted advisor, and it's interesting, because we get back together afterwards and compare notes. We're being held up as a gold standard in so many ways because of the credibility of the men and women who are serving: their professionalism, their level of training, their discipline. Other countries are now using our professional development curriculum for the development of NCOs. We have more countries who want to sign up to our staff colleges. Because of the product we produce, those individuals can go into harm's way.

In the same way, our Afghan counterparts working alongside us see a culture where we are inclusive, where we can partner very easily, where we are cooperative, where we listen. I'll always remember visiting Forward Operating Base Masum Ghar and meeting the commanding officer of the kandak, which is the Afghan battalion, and the rapport the commanding officer had with a Canadian who turned out to be a master corporal because they were able to train together so well. That master corporal was constantly there assisting the RSM and the commanding officer of the kandak. It's that personal touch.

So it's on top of all the professionalism and the level of training, skill competencies, and indeed our discipline, but it's just the fact that we can integrate and cooperate so well with not only our allies but with an Afghan police, Afghan army, who appreciate our mentorship.

Did you want to add anything there, Mark?

• (1040)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Dosanjh.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: General, after the incident Mr. Hawn just talked to you about, forgive me if I seem to be pressing, but the unfortunate part is that we tend to get documents through the press, so we have to rely on what is said in the press to inform ourselves and then ask the questions. In the *Globe and Mail* article it says:

However, the soldier's contemporaneous field notes—written on the day of the incident but not released until months after the DND's media statement—offer a version that matches the sworn affidavit and provides compelling detail of a sequence of capture, transfer, rescue and medical treatment. "Local ANP [Afghan National Police] elements were in possession of a PUC [person in custody] detained by CDA troops and subsequently transferred to ANP custody," the detailed written notes say.

These are notes written by the soldier on the ground. You didn't see these notes when you made the statement in May 2007, and I understand that. You've spoken to the battalion commander and the platoon commander, and I understand that. I'm not asking you to

comment. The picture was taken before the detainee was allegedly transferred.

Why would a soldier on the ground pay such detailed attention to an individual who wasn't a detainee?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: The military policeman who took the note—and these are military police notes, Mr. Chair—was the military policeman who was called in after another soldier had removed the Afghan from the beating with the shoes. So this is again the military police coming in and following through with their detailed process as we were removing that individual from.... One of my staff was able to contact the individual, who confirmed that he was not at the event as it occurred at the checkpoint. But this is the military police coming in after the event and going through their process.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: The article also refers to two other soldiers who testified to the fact that this was an individual detained by us and the individual was abused by the Afghan National Police. That's part of the same body of documents.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Right.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

The Chair: I will give the floor to Mr. Harris for five minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We've gone from what I call clarity to a little bit of confusion over the exit strategy, and this is of great importance, first of all, because when we saw the American surge in Iraq, for example, it was into a much more dangerous territory. Casualty rates went up significantly. First of all, are you anticipating that will happen in the next 18 months? Are we in more dangerous territory with respect to casualties or not?

Very much related to that—and this goes back to General Lessard—we talked about at the end going through the ribbon on July 31, and now we're hearing, well, either we'll be home in Canada by the end of 2011 or on the way home. This is six months. It's a very big window in a dangerous territory.

What I want to ask General Lessard is a follow-up to the first question. Is this a flexible time period, or are we saying we're finished on July 1? There may be some saying, "We can't get someone else in place until August 10, so we have to have some flexibility here", or our allies are saying, "We have the Canadians on the hook till the end of 2011, so if we can keep an additional 2,500 troops for four or five months, we'll do that."

How firm is your position in saying we are out of here? Do our allies understand that on August 1 someone needs to replace us? Is it your job to negotiate and to ensure that there's someone in place on August 1, 2, 3, or 10 to be there?

• (1045)

Gen Walter Natynczyk: First of all, I can just talk about the casualties. One casualty is too many.

Mr. Jack Harris: Absolutely.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: One casualty is too many. It's always been difficult when you have a reinforcement and more soldiers, sailors, and airmen and airwomen coming into the south, and you see the levels, the indicators, the metrics of violence going up, and the indicators are normally an attack against the ISAF forces—IEDs and so on. So that is a real challenge.

As one ambassador once told me on a visit to Kabul, when the allies hit the Normandy beaches violence went up in France. So the very fact that we are there with a significant presence, because there are so many more people there, there will be a lot more violence happening, no doubt.

At the same time, and by having some experience in other theatres, you get to a critical mass of soldiers, sailors, and airmen on the ground. You turn the tide. If we have the right kind of assessment, the right kind of strategy working, then we're able to deny the Taliban from moving into the region and we will see a reduction in violence in the area.

With regard to 2011, again, it's an issue of my direction to the commander of CEFCOM and to the commander of Operational Support Command saying that we will end our military mission, we will move our Canadian Forces from the combat mission in July 2011, and now it's General Lessard's responsibility to get on with a workable plan.

Marc.

LGen J.G.M. Lessard: Again, it's very clear to me that in July we cease our operations, which means everything. It's not just the battle group, it's the PRT, it's the trainers.

With respect to your second question or third component—What about the forces between July and December?—well, that's most probably the personnel part of the mission, the termination task force that General McQuillan talked about. We have over 1,200 vehicles, thousands of sea containers. The majority of these people will be the people refurbishing the equipment and sending it back to Canada.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: Can I also say that we're not going to wait until July 1 to do things? If you can believe it, we actually have snow and ice clearance equipment in a desert in Kandahar, because when we were in Kabul we needed to have snow and ice clearance equipment. So we actually have containers with snowplows. Some of the material could actually be moved much earlier.

I'll just ask General McQuillan to—

Mr. Jack Harris: Before you start, General McQuillan, I understand that if there are 1,200 vehicles and whatever, there have to be people around to get them ready to go and put them on the ships and exit a plan, and that's doesn't turn on a dime. My question was about the flexibility of the ending in the sense of relief in place.

What you're telling us, and correct me if I'm wrong, is that this is not flexible. It is ending in July, and we can expect that very soon thereafter at least the combat troops will be on their way back to Canada. I'm assuming that's correct.

General McQuillan, maybe you could explain some of the issues in terms of getting your gear home.

The Chair: Could you answer briefly?

MGen Mark McQuillan: I can. Sir, it's quite simple. At the end of operations, we will start in full tempo in terms of withdrawing equipment. You're quite right, it's time and space based on the magnitude.

The chief has already highlighted that our intent in doing the detailed planning now is to do the planning on what materiel can potentially be thinned out while at the same time acknowledging that operations will continue. Sustainment of current operations will be maintained to the last point. There is a clear intent to thin out to the extent possible, to cease operations, and then to put the bulk of our effort in terms of moving that materiel in the timeframe provided.

• (1050)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Paillé, you have a short question?

[Translation]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: I will take this opportunity to check a number of pieces of information with you.

Could you tell me if you have received a mandate for a major financial restructuring?

In the case of the Quebec City Armoury and the Sainte-Foy military headquarters, reservists will be joining the members of the armed forces in place. Last week, we were told that a category of reservists would be laid off temporarily. The Sainte-Foy military headquarters are being restructured. There are rumours of a land sale. There is also the lingering uncertainty with regard to the future of the Quebec City Armoury.

Is there a financial restructuring underway in the Quebec City region? Has a clear mandate been given to that effect?

Gen Walter Natynczyk: The land forces commander could give you details about that. As far as I know, the assessment study of the Manège militaire Voltigeurs in Quebec City is ongoing. I think that the idea of another armoury for the Combat Engineering Regiment in the Sainte-Foy area is being considered. I will ask the land forces commander, or the department, to provide you with information on that.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

I will give the floor to Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Chair.

General, at the risk of picking fly poop out of pepper—some seem intent on doing that—I want to go back, once again, to the incident that has seized many. I want to clarify that the notes from the military policeman, which appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, were after we had taken control, after the Afghani in question had become a detainee. The treatment, the beating with a shoe, happened not to a Canadian transfer detainee, but to a person who had been detained by the Afghans themselves, and that person did not become a Canadian detainee until after that beating with a shoe became apparent and Canadian soldiers took control of the situation.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: That's correct, Mr. Chair.

My understanding of the event, again, not having been there, and one of my staff actually contacting the military policeman.... He was not at the event where the Afghan police arrested the individual. He was called in after a Canadian soldier had removed this individual from Afghan police custody. That's when he was being beaten with a shoe. Our policeman came on scene and went through a thorough process.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So this was not the abuse of a Canadian transferred detainee.

Gen Walter Natynczyk: That's my assessment.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

I don't know how it could be any more clear than that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being with us today. General, Major-General, and Lieutenant-General, thank you for being with us.

Committee members, we'll stay together to discuss our future work. It will take two minutes.

I want to inform the members that I'll be going before the liaison committee to present our budget for our study on Arctic sovereignty this afternoon.

Also, we don't have any witnesses ready to appear before us this Thursday, so if you agree we will postpone that to our next meeting in January. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We won't have a meeting this Thursday. The next meeting will be in January 2010.

Thank you very much. Have a nice day.

Have a Merry Christmas.

That will end our work for meeting 44.

The meeting is adjourned.

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