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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)): I'd like to bring this meeting to order.

This is the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan, meeting number 17.

We are continuing our study of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, and we have witnesses today from the Canadian Council of Churches. Mr. Mike Hogeterp is vice-chair of the Commission on Justice and Peace, and Mr. John Siebert is the executive director of Project Ploughshares.

Welcome, gentlemen. I hope I've pronounced your names correctly.

Have you decided who is going to go first and how you will split your time at this point?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp (Vice-Chair, Commission on Justice and Peace, Canadian Council of Churches): I'll begin, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay, you will begin.

We welcome you to our committee. We look forward to what you have. Usually opening comments are around ten minutes, and then we open it up for questions and comments.

Anytime you're ready, go ahead.

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for your invitation to be with you today. It's certainly a privilege.

The brief before you today is entitled "Canada's Role in Afghanistan," and it's a consensus position of the Canadian Council of Churches, which is the broadest ecumenical body in Canada. We have 22 member churches representing the Anglican, Evangelical, Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic traditions. For that reason, the statement before you is a remarkable one. The recommendations before you were formed from a shared belief that a robust public dialogue on Canada's responsibility for advancing peace in Afghanistan is urgent.

The Manley panel noted that public and parliamentary dialogue would make an important contribution to sound and sustainable policy on Canada's role in Afghanistan. We indeed urge this committee to widely consult civil society and citizens in Canada and Afghanistan as you explore next steps for the mission.

The events and announcements of the last few days convinced us of the importance of such dialogue as I've just talked about. The

churches will most certainly need more time to consider the evolving mission in order to sharpen a substantive and constructive contribution to this important dialogue. Nevertheless, today our comments will be framed by the brief in front of you.

As the Canadian Council of Churches president, Reverend Bruce Adema, wrote in his forwarding letter to the Prime Minister last December, Canada should focus on two priorities. First is to support Afghans in implementing participatory reconciliation programs and responsive governance at the district and local level. Second is to encourage the international community to give significant new attention to diplomatic efforts to end the war.

We will also briefly comment on the recent announcements concerning a training mission in Afghanistan, in light of the council's recommendations.

We recognize, of course, the sacrifice made by many in the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan and the profound suffering of the people of Afghanistan through decades of war. Canada's future efforts in Afghanistan should honour such sacrifice and suffering with integrity and commitment.

Through a process of research, analysis, and dialogue with many of you, we have concluded that peace in Afghanistan cannot be achieved solely through military means, and that peace is a generational project requiring international commitment and resources well beyond July 2011. It is a generational project. This is particularly true with respect to the challenges of reconciliation and peace-building at both the national and sub-national levels.

The question before us is where and how Canada can best make its contribution to sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Let me start by saying that reconciliation in Afghanistan is a complex, multi-level endeavour that will advance incrementally. Efforts towards reconciliation at the local and district level are distinct but are related to national negotiations for political reconciliation and reintegration of the insurgents.

My colleague John Siebert will address the national and international aspects of this in a moment, but right now I'll make some specific comments on sub-national governance and reconciliation.

The reasons for conflict in Afghanistan, as you well know, are diverse. Conflicts spring from disputes over land and water, family and tribal grievances, the presence of the Taliban and other insurgents, warlords and criminal elements, international forces, and corrupt Afghan security forces and government officials.

The reconciliation priority, or priority number six in the quarterly reports, has struggled to gain traction. The reports suggest that this is due to the inability of the government of Afghanistan to focus on a direction and to zero in on a lead agency. Canada, to this point, has properly been deferential to Afghan-led reconciliation, but it is clear that the working definition of Afghan-led is national-government-led. That's an unfortunate limitation.

• (1535)

We know Afghanistan is culturally and geographically complex. Indeed, central governments historically have rarely exercised national reach. Authority, governance, and basic service delivery are frequently focused at local and district levels.

There are documented indications of continuing support—dramatic support in fact—for local, informal, and traditional authorities in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is then essentially a hybrid system of interdependent formal and informal power holders.

As such, local Afghan leadership for governance and sub-national reconciliation is a significant resource for peace-building, one that needs further exploration and then support for its incremental development. Our brief details some of the complexities of sub-national governance and reconciliation activities, and we can certainly explore those in the question period.

Suffice it to say now that beyond 2011 it is our hope that Canada will put new energy and commitment into a sub-national reconciliation priority, specifically in collaboration with civil society organizations with a track record of support for local governance and peace-building activity in Afghanistan.

I'll pass it over to my colleague. John.

Mr. John Siebert (Executive Director, Project Ploughshares, Canadian Council of Churches): Progress in sub-national reconciliation will require a stable national context if these gains are to be sustainable. To end this civil war in Afghanistan, Canada should commit itself to advancing a diplomacy surge that has the political energy and financial resources of the military surge.

What is true of local and regional reconciliation is also true of creating a national cessation of hostilities in a new political environment and social framework in Afghanistan. It's complex, multi-level, and will take a lot of time. As some have put it, the peace process in Kabul runs through Islamabad and New Delhi. There are other neighbours who must play a role in finding peace, along with the United States and other ISAF members, including Canada.

In our view, the national peace process must be led once again by Afghans, but not necessarily the current Afghan government. It has been drawn into an entrenched civil war along with supporting international forces. The government of Afghanistan must be part of reconciliation efforts, but not necessarily the manager or custodian of this process. Part of the responsibility of the international community, of which Canada is an integral part, is to work with Afghans in and beyond the government to develop a trusted process through which reconciliation and negotiation efforts can take flight.

Current attempts to induce individual insurgents to switch sides have largely failed. The reasons speak to misjudging their primary

motivation for fighting under the Taliban or other insurgent groups, and the resulting lack of attraction for what is on offer. The goal of national negotiations ought to be the creation of an inclusive political order in Afghanistan. It must include the Taliban and other insurgents and address the legitimate fears that a new political order will compromise the hard-won expansion of civil and other human rights in Afghanistan, particularly the rights of women.

We recognize that Canada cannot be the sole or primary international actor in this diplomatic surge, but it could play a decisive role in persuading the international community, particularly its close allies, to work for a political settlement. To this end, we would recommend that Canada appoint a special envoy on Afghanistan, with adequate staffing and financial support as well as the trust of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of National Defence.

Finally, we have a comment on Prime Minister Harper's recent announcement, reinforced by other ministers, that Canada will continue to field up to 1,000 Canadian forces in Afghanistan after July 2011 to carry out a training mission through 2014. The member churches have not had a chance to consult internally, and Mike and I do not want to speculate on what the churches might want to say collectively. What we would like to do is take the principles articulated in the December 2009 brief from the Canadian Council of Churches and apply them to this emerging situation.

Let's ask some questions. Will continued training and equipping of the Afghan National Army and police bring us closer to the goal of a negotiated, sustainable, inclusive peace in Afghanistan? The answer isn't immediately apparent. Better trained Afghan military and police personnel could extend the services and legitimacy of the national government to local areas where insurgent fighting is light or non-existent. Elsewhere, to simply substitute Afghan troops for ISAF troops presents no gains for a political resolution of this civil war. With this continuing and expensive military commitment in Afghanistan, will Canada also increase its diplomatic activity to support a negotiation surge, as well as increase development and other forms of assistance to address local governance and development needs? If we do not, then we continue to play a role in sustaining the current military stalemate, while missing the opportunity to support the war's conclusion.

Thank you once again on behalf of the council and on behalf of Mike and me for this opportunity to be here. We look forward to your questions.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you.

The usual practice at this committee is to have the official opposition begin with a seven-minute round of questions and comments.

Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, gentlemen, for coming.

I have a series of questions. First, do you have, or have you had, any presence on the ground in Afghanistan?

Mr. John Siebert: Historically, Canadian churches have not had widespread presence in Afghanistan. That's probably something that could be said to be true of most Canadians and most Canadian organizations prior to 2001.

We do bring a record of participation in development, peace-building, and disarmament work around the world. Churches are among the largest civil society organizations. We don't function as a command organization such that we can deliver each and every member of any one of our churches on a particular issue, especially as complicated as this one. But our statement does represent the collective wisdom of our involvement in the world, including in multi-faith dialogues.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Do you partner with other non-governmental organizations on the ground?

Mr. John Siebert: Certainly we do. And I should say that there are Canadian church-related development organizations that do have a presence in Afghanistan, and there are—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Could you name a couple of them?

Mr. John Siebert: Sure. There are the Mennonite Economic Development Associates. There are others. I know there is an ecumenically supported organization that's worked with eye hospitals and that sort of thing for decades. CARE and others that are not religious or faith-based are also partners with us.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: They would have a connection.

Thank you.

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: Just as a quick follow-up on that, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank did have an active program in Panjshir in 2003.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you, sir.

Something you mentioned in your brief, which we certainly have been supportive of, is the appointment of a special envoy for Afghanistan with a mandate to pursue new diplomatic efforts. And we certainly agree with that and applaud that.

You had sent a brief to the Prime Minister on December 10, 2009. Did you get a response? And if so, what was it?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: We did get a response—a letter several months later—thanking us for the intervention.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Were there any specific comments on your brief?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: Not that I can recall.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you very much.

You mentioned human security often in your brief, and we certainly all agree with the issue of human security. You prefaced your remarks earlier by indicating that you haven't had time to consult your membership with regard to the training aspect. But do you see training as an integral part of, or certainly a major

component of, this human security factor in Afghanistan in order to do the kind of aid work and assistance that you were looking to do?

Mr. John Siebert: The human security framework certainly takes account of formal security mechanisms like police, army, border controls, and that sort of thing, but definitely tries to broaden the scope of the meaning of security so that people in their communities and in their families are secure and have access. "Freedom from fear and freedom from want" is a tag phrase that sums up the human security, so it's more all-encompassing.

The training mission could assist, given the proper circumstances. But ultimately, if we don't have a stable national context, if we don't have a peace agreement and a peace-building process that implements it, the training of Afghan national forces won't assist to that end.

• (1545)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I notice that in your comments, sir, on a few occasions you referred to the "civil war". Are you not accounting for the fact that al Qaeda plays a significant role in the operations, and that in fact these are often non-Afghanis, so in any kind of reconciliation you have an unknown component as part of any kind of reconciliation?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: Indeed, that's a fair comment. In terms of a broader reconciliation agenda, we're saying that the al Qaeda factor addresses sort of the broad national and more regional context. Communities are vulnerable to the influence of insurgency. And to drive down to successes in local governance and service delivery and so forth can reduce that vulnerability and therefore create a momentum for change in human rights and justice at those levels, which hopefully undercuts the vulnerability of those communities and feeds up the chain towards a more sustainable civil-society-based peace process.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Something you noted was the support for outreach research pilot projects to try to create a new local reconciliation. There are two parts to my question. The first is what your view is generally of the current operation of CIDA and CIDA projects in Afghanistan. Second, how would your comments differ, if at all, from what CIDA is currently doing, particularly at the local level?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: We've followed the local reconciliation agenda through the reconciliation priority, which, from our perspective, has been led by the Afghan task force at the Department of Foreign Affairs. To be honest, I don't have a lot of information or analysis on CIDA programming.

Nevertheless, local governance and reconciliation is certainly something that can be supported by CIDA, and indeed there has been some intervention, I think, on the Independent Directorate of Local Governance. That agency itself has been identified as somewhat problematic, and you see that also in the brief. Further analysis is necessary.

Our interest in local-level reconciliation tries to reflect the reality that Afghanistan is a decentralized place, with a great diversity across geography and culture and where authority is actually isolated in those pockets. Therefore, support for those localized structures, which are often informal, is critical for the process of developing peace, as I mentioned.

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Tying in, I assume, with your comments regarding an envoy and Canada mounting a peace mission, could you briefly describe what you see that as encompassing?

Mr. John Siebert: An envoy would offer the opportunity to focus renewed diplomatic activity toward a broader peace process and focus, within the governmental system, a series of activities and support for civil society—which admittedly is weak in many places in Afghanistan, but does exist. We have worked with our colleagues through Peacebuild Canada, the pathways to peace program that has been supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. We're grateful for that support, but it is grudging and very small and hasn't been renewed as yet, so we have direct experience of the difficulty in getting momentum within the overall Canadian Forces and the whole-of-government mission to Afghanistan to look at that priority.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Okay, we'll move to the Bloc Québécois.

[Translation]

Your turn, Mr. Dorion.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Thank you for being here, sir.

I appreciate the presentation you gave, especially your insistence on how complex the situation is. The Afghanistan question is often presented in a really simplistic way, I feel.

You stressed the fact that simply substituting international troops with local government ones cannot be a solution, given the power relationships in Afghanistan. That is a very relevant comment, in my opinion. So how can we pressure the Afghan government to recognize in some way the type of motivation that keeps the warring sides fighting? What do we have to do to achieve that, so that we can end up with genuine reconciliation?

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. John Siebert: Certainly there are a lot of dialogues and conversations taking place involving the government of Afghanistan as well as various insurgent groups, including the Taliban, now.

Regarding the training and the substitution of Afghan national forces for ISAF or NATO, there are a couple of points worth making. First of all, ramping up the Afghan national security forces into the hundreds of thousands is never going to be a sustainable proposition within the Afghan economy and the Afghan government's ability to generate funds to support it. So it is always going to be an outside-supported effort.

Second, if you don't have the broader peace framework and the national stabilization through conversation and negotiation—which admittedly is very tough to do—then you can have 300,000, 400,000, or 500,000 Afghan national forces and you will still be stuck with this civil war situation that will still need to be resolved.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Yes, you did mention that military victory is not possible for any side in the conflict, at least not while things are going as they are.

You say that reports indicate that the insurgents are realizing more and more that they cannot win a military victory. Which reports are you referring to exactly?

[English]

Mr. John Siebert: Well, we can quote the Prime Minister of Canada to the effect that there is no military solution to this conflict. That's repeated by the U.S. administration and U.S. generals.

The question is, what is the role of the military in counter-insurgency currently? As I understand, they are trying to put the Taliban and other insurgents into a position of weakness and to force them to enter into negotiations in a weakened state.

Indications from the UN Secretary General's report and other independent reports are that even with the surge, particularly by the American forces in the last six months, the security situation has become worse, that areas like Marjah and Kandahar are actually in a worse security situation than prior to the surge. In other words, the surge in military activity has not necessarily led to the results the military was hoping for.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Okay.

Turning to the outside players in this conflict, you mentioned that the solution sort of runs through Lahore and New Delhi. What could Canada do to bring those two countries together in order to help the peace process in Afghanistan?

[English]

Mr. John Siebert: This would be the job of the diplomatic surge, both to understand the situation more clearly and to encourage movement. Some have described the activity of Pakistan and India in Afghanistan as proxy fighting for what are in fact bilateral conflicts between them. Those sorts of activities need to stop. I would not for a moment promote the idea that Canada alone can mount a white charger of diplomacy and resolve that one. But it could, in concert with others, move in that direction and encourage those sorts of things.

Frankly, we also need to engage Iran. We need to engage Russia and China. They all have security interests, and unless there is this widespread diplomatic effort, the prospect of resolving the conflict in Afghanistan is probably remote.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion: Mr. Chair, I am going to let my colleague Johanne Deschamps continue from here.

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): You mentioned greater diplomatic efforts, or a diplomatic surge. You also mentioned a special envoy. Would his role be to be part of the diplomatic surge?

We know that the government has taken a position on the changes to and extension of the mission in Afghanistan. We have learned that development assistance will be greatly reduced. From what we have heard in your testimony, you are concerned by this reduction in development assistance, given all that remains to be done and all the monitoring of the Afghan situation that will be needed.

[English]

Mr. John Siebert: Certainly it's regrettable that a drop in development assistance to Afghanistan would take place at the same time as these other changes are taking place. Afghanistan is one of the poorest places in the world. The aid assistance would support a range of activities that could address the kinds of conflict sparks that exist in Afghanistan.

It's not just that there's al Qaeda or a terrorist network, or the Taliban and an insurgent problem, but there are also problems at local levels after more than three decades of war, including conflicts over water and land between various groups. These conflicts are very difficult to resolve, although they can be, and there are ways that Afghan society has of doing that. Canada, through aid and other mechanisms, can assist, particularly with civil society groups that are emerging and want to contribute to the long-term sustainability of peace in Afghanistan. A special envoy could contribute to that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Abbott, please.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.

I do want to put on the record personally that I don't share with you your assertion that the surge hasn't led to the desired results and that security has become worse. But rather than getting into a debate, I wanted to put that on the record. I consider that comment not to be at all accurate.

I do want to ask you, though, about the Afghan lead, which I think was the essential part of your presentation, as opposed to a government-led peace process led by Afghans and an inclusive political order. Could you briefly give us a picture of what that looks like, a word picture of what that looks like?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: Indeed. It's fair to say that the Bonn process that formed the current government structure we're looking at was a meeting of victors, essentially, that was not broadly inclusive of all representatives of that diverse society that we've already talked about. So the exclusion of broad swaths of Afghan society from that process creates dislocation and disparity and an unstable political framework. It's important therefore to engage, yes indeed, the insurgents, but also the realities of a decentralized authority structure.

Hon. Jim Abbott: But try to describe it for us, because those are words. We need a picture.

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: What we're talking about is village-level elders, village-level mullahs, district authorities that are similar. It's traditional and informal structures, which are very difficult to define. Nevertheless, they have traditionally been, as I said, an element of the power structure within Afghanistan, who can, at that local level, actually contribute to conflict mitigation.

Hon. Jim Abbott: But let's presume within that society that there is a malignant force, the Taliban, who are actually trying to upset that order. How would they independently gain control, or what force would you see being required in order to have control? In other words, isn't there a place for the Afghan army and for the Afghan police in order to assist this local group, to be able to give some strength to them to resist the Taliban, to resist the malignant forces?

• (1600)

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: John's already acknowledged that there is certainly a place for security forces. The emphasis that we're talking about is the softer side of security, where creating new stability at the local level through the amelioration of those non-ideological conflicts, the conflicts over land and water and those sorts of things, allows a sense of stability and less vulnerability, as I said to Mr. Wilfert, to the influence of insurgents.

John, do you want to speak more about this?

Hon. Jim Abbott: I want to hear that, but the Taliban have their courts. They actually hold a tremendous amount of sway in the villages right now. Would you see that being wiped out, replaced, or enhanced? I'm trying to visualize what you see, because I'm having difficulty.

Mr. John Siebert: They need to be brought into the process of national governance in an appropriate way that Afghans will work with.

Hon. Jim Abbott: What does that mean?

Mr. John Siebert: It means that they're going to participate in the government through following a negotiated process. In other words, if I can go back to the notion of civil war, my understanding—we can disagree on this—is that effectively what happened in 2001 is that international forces worked with the Northern Alliance, which represented parts of Afghanistan against the Taliban and other insurgents that represented other parts of Afghanistan. They still hold sway in large swaths or have regained sway in large swaths of Afghanistan. A national peace process will have to acknowledge that that sway exists and that it needs to be brought into line with a new more inclusive governance structure in Afghanistan. In other words, there will have to be a form of national reconciliation that includes Taliban insurgents in some way.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Under what conditions? We're having a very interesting discussion here, and I'm taking some positive things from it. I'm not arguing; I'm trying to understand. You said that the communities are vulnerable. I don't know what those words actually mean to you. I know what they mean to me. Communities are vulnerable and you empower this more local decentralized natural governance that should be occurring within Afghanistan.

Isn't there a requirement for there to be some national army or police force? That's virtually a rhetorical question. I believe there is. Is it better for it to be international forces, or is it better for it to be Afghans who are trained to do those jobs, perhaps trained by international forces?

Mr. John Siebert: Certainly there should be an Afghan national security apparatus that includes police and military.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Who should train them?

Mr. John Siebert: They could be trained by the current international forces. They are pretty good at what they do in their own country. They may not need training, but the important point is how you get to a stable, national context in which the national police or military presence can be generally accepted. There are always going to be spoilers. That happens in every conflict resolution or peace-building process. But there needs to be a widespread national, stable context, and that can come only through negotiation with the Taliban and the insurgents.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Could you describe the difference between the special envoy and the ambassador that currently exists? What is the difference?

Mr. John Siebert: The special envoy would have a broader international mandate, a regional mandate. I happen to know what an ambassador does, because I was in the diplomatic corps when I was quite young and quite foolish. I know how that functions, and there are myriad operational activities that need to take place within the country.

There is no doubt that an ambassador and political staff within an embassy in Kabul would play a role and relate to this international envoy, but the international envoy's mandate would be different and broader and relate to Canada more directly.

• (1605)

Hon. Jim Abbott: Maybe we can explore that in subsequent questions.

The Chair: Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to our guests.

I'm going to start off with some numbers, because we had a bit of confusion in the House today on what we've actually done. There have been some concerns raised since the government decided to extend the military mission and cut back on the civilian mission. In fact, there was a plan being put forward to the government up until two weeks ago that would have put the emphasis on the civilian mission over the military one. It was worked on for two years, they have a copy of it, and it's available to anyone who wants to see it.

The numbers are interesting: the government is going to reduce the development budget from what the bureaucracy had proposed. The bureaucracy had proposed a civilian-only mission of \$550 million over three years, and now that is going to be cut to \$300 million. Now, of course, we are going to have \$1.5 billion for the military.

Today in the House we had the minister initially say that we had trained 3,000 teachers. According to the government's own report, it's actually half that. She then said we trained only 158. We don't know how many people have been trained. Mr. Obhrai is now the

new parliamentary secretary for CIDA, so maybe he can mop this up for us. What we do know is that the government is going to cut the budget for the civilian mission drastically.

The interesting point here is that there is a focus on training troops. We will have 134,000 troops trained—we know that—up until this fall. That's the number that has been thrown around. The original goal back in 2006 was to train 134,000. The new number that has been floated around is 171,000, which the Pentagon said—before Canada chipped in to help—it was going to have trained within a year. You don't have to be a Nobel Peace Prize winner in mathematics to figure this out. We will have a sufficient number of troops trained already, 134,000, the 2006 number. Even if you agreed that you needed another 40,000 troops, these troops, according to the Pentagon, would have been trained already by the United States.

If we need more “guns and butter”, as the economists say, do we need more training of troops? If so, where does that come from, or do we need more civilian resources, diplomacy, transitional justice, and development?

I'm asking a bit of a rhetorical question here. But according to your brief and your read on the government's own report card, they haven't made headway on reconciliation. However, you're saying that there is a way to do this.

How much money do you think should be invested in reconciliation? If you don't have a specific number, you could provide us with some of the initiatives on the ground that could be costed in the near future. Most of us want to debate this in the House, and we would have liked to vote. Alas, we're left with this forum to substitute for that one. Do you have some intelligence on how much we can do on reconciliation, or any numbers associated with it?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: I'll be candid. We certainly don't have numbers at our disposal, nor is it the appropriate place of the church to do so. Nevertheless, there are some fairly clear recommendations in the brief that you'll see that we think can well be costed and, in an incremental way, build what we think is a strong reconciliation process at both local and national regional levels.

At the local level, that process would begin by partnering on the ground with civil society organizations with a credible track record. Who are those people? There's a range of them. The International Centre for Transitional Justice, which Canada has indeed supported in the past, is one of them. It has in-country staff in Afghanistan, some of the best analytical minds and the best survey minds that are available.

The Chr. Michelsen Institute has also produced very significant reflection on conciliation processes in Afghanistan—an excellent analysis that I encourage this committee to look at. Also, there are grounded indigenous NGOs. They are certainly struggling. Nevertheless, there is an organization called the Liaison Office, formerly known as the Tribal Liaison Office, which has done some excellent analysis and on the ground research.

These folks, in consultation and collaboration, would be able, I believe, to help establish a credible approach on the ground, in concert with the broader civil society engagement in the political negotiation process that John has been speaking to.

• (1610)

Mr. Paul Dewar: I appreciate that.

I think the numbers that were provided by government prior to basically breaking its promise on ending the military mission had been very substantive. I mean, we had, in the document that was going to Treasury Board, \$37.5 million for DFAIT for programming that would conceivably have DFAIT involved in diplomacy. They actually marked their priorities in this paper, which we haven't heard about since they decided to flip-flop on this, that they would actually talk about promoting regional diplomacy. There was money attached to that.

I think you were referring to Ahmed Rashid's recent article when you mentioned that the pathway to peace in Afghanistan is through Islamabad. But it's also through India. I think this regional approach has fallen on deaf ears, certainly with this government.

I'm curious to know what you think the benefit is of Canada pushing a regional approach, and are we actually going to see some movement on diplomacy? And to be fair to the government, its own report card says it's stuck on reconciliation and diplomacy.

Again, I think it's important for people to know that this is a regional equation. Could you give us a little bit more on the need for having a regional diplomacy approach?

The Chair: Mr. Dewar, your time is up.

We're going to have to go to Mr. Obhrai.

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

Mr. Chair, the NDP has asked me a lot of questions here as he was questioning. So my issue coming out here is, do I actually answer Paul Dewar, or do I talk to the gentlemen who have come here?

I think we'll leave you to ask me questions in the House and we'll respond to all the accusations that you are making. I'm out here, so let me talk to these good gentlemen who have come over here and try to understand their point of view here.

Let me first start by saying that the Canadian Council of Churches and yourself have indeed an excellent experience working for development purposes and for governance all over the world. You do carry excellent credentials on that, so nobody is challenging your credentials or anything. But I want to follow up the line that my colleague Jim was following here.

I'm finding it quite strange why you have good experience in all these things, and basically your experiences are mostly based in countries that allow civil societies to come and do these things. But Afghanistan is an extremely different challenge. It's a Muslim country with their own rules and their own view of things and everything. You face tremendous challenges even putting your foot down into Afghanistan to get onto the ground over there without security or anything out there.

Let me say, I have visited all the regions around there, and you have to know the local politics out there. You have come along and you have stated quite clearly in many of your things what would be the ideal situation. There's no such thing as an ideal situation. There are local politics on the ground; there are local issues on the ground.

You come and say let's talk to the Taliban, and Mullah Omar has just said he's not going to talk to anyone.

You have come along here and said that India and Pakistan should get the hell out of Afghanistan. You seem to forget that this was part of the region—all of these countries and all at one time—and they have their vested interests. For you to come along and say they should pack their bags and go—it's not going to happen.

So taking all this into account, the challenges that we are doing around here.... Forget about the development here.

And I'm trying to understand from you guys, all right? I'm not criticizing. I'm just saying that the politics and the situation of Afghanistan is very, very different from where your threats lie in Africa, in Latin America, and all the other countries that have a rule of law.

So in understanding all of these things here, when you bring all these things here, I wish you the best of luck, but I can tell you from the government's point of view here, we do take into account the local sensibility, the local sensitivity, the local regional politics into play.... Paul just said referred to the regional approach.

Canada has invested quite a lot. If you will look at the Manley report, we had signature projects that we have been working on out there for many years that are now coming to an end. So coming to say that the development aid is cutting down or something is not right. The whole Government of Canada approach now is going after 2011. The NDP keeps screaming to get the hell out of there. I don't know who the hell is going to provide security if we get the hell out of there. I mean, the matter is not resolved.

Just before you go on this thing, you have called for a UN special envoy. Canada believes that we have....

• (1615)

The Chair: You have one minute left, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: So I just laid out how these things are. It's a challenge, but you know what? As you answer others, you can always go back to answering my questions—the things that I raised—when the Liberals ask you a question; you don't have to answer specifically NDP questions.

Mr. John Siebert: To the extent that I heard a question?

I take your caution about the difficulty and complexity, in that it is a Muslim country and there are things that we don't know. What we have tried to do is partner and work with Afghans in country and also Afghans who now live in Canada—whether they're Canadian citizens or more recently arrived—to ask how it is that we can support civil society in an appropriate way.

How do we balance the very difficult set of questions about civil human rights on the way to a negotiated settlement with Taliban and other insurgents? We don't have a direct answer, and it will be Afghans who need to resolve those things ultimately.

I just say, in response to the comment about development aid, that Canadian development organizations or international arms of Canadian.... For example, CARE Canada, who were providing development assistance before the Taliban, during the Taliban period, and since the Taliban period, have commented that it has been most difficult post-2001, because there's been too close an identification of security forces and delivery of aid.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rae, please. I believe you're next on my list.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): I appreciate the brief and I appreciate a lot of the information and research that you provide us with.

One of the difficulties in any reconciliation that people are now talking about a lot more is the fact that whatever one thinks of the interventions by the United Nations and by NATO and the Bonn conference, the London conference, the Paris conference, there have been some very clear commitments to women's rights, to human rights, to the principles of the rule of law, which have not always been observed in the years since 2001. We certainly know they weren't observed before 2001.

How do you reconcile those things? Everybody wants peace. I think everybody recognizes how very difficult it is to imagine how an exclusively military solution could be achieved in the current context. There's internal peace within Pakistan. There's peace and reconciliation between Pakistan and Afghanistan itself. There's a question of the role that other regional powers will play, not just very benign powers like India, but also other powers that have a clear interest in the region, like Iran.

I will come back to the nub of this question. One of the pressure points I'm getting is from a number of women's groups, both inside Canada, who are Afghan diaspora organizations, as well as from organizations that we met with in Afghanistan, saying whatever you do, don't trade our rights away in the hope of a reconciliation with the Taliban. The Taliban's record on women's issues is not exactly good; their record on human rights is not exactly good. So the question then becomes how do we proceed? I'm a little concerned that the sense not simply be that the fault's entirely on the side of the west and Karzai as to why there isn't peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

I know that's not your point, but my point is that you have to understand some of the hurdles as to why we've had such trouble getting to the table. I think this is one of the reasons it has been so difficult to imagine what a reconciliation that is ultimately going to work is going to look like.

• (1620)

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: You've heard testimony at this table from both CARE Canada and from the ambassador. Both of them were quite articulate on this point. One particular passage that I reviewed this week from CARE Canada is very instructive; that is, their concerns about the vulnerability of women's rights and so forth are addressed or at least mitigated in an incremental way by careful consultation with local-level elders. That kind of grounded village-by-village-based approach is what we're hoping would be part of the increment of the generational project towards peace that we're talking about. Human rights and peace are a long-term endeavour,

and protection of women's rights in that context through a careful deliberation with those local-level elders is a way to entrench those things and create a momentum.

Mr. John Siebert: I'd like to add that Islam is not monolithic, and there are experiences in many Islamic countries where the role of women and women's rights are viewed differently from the predominantly rural, very conservative Taliban or village elder type of person. So part of the solution is not in our hands, either as NGO, church, and civil society organizations, but it can be in the hands, quite properly, through a dialogue within the Islamic world, which already is engaged, whether it's Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Indonesia, where there are very different experiences.... We can't look elsewhere, other than our own experience and our own paralysis. Frankly, that's how I feel about that question. I feel paralyzed.

Hon. Bob Rae: Well, yes, but the difficulty is, Mr. Siebert, we're not negotiating with Islam. Afghanistan is an Islamic country. The point is that within the context of Islam and within the context of a country, from a religious perspective, that is still quite conservative, very significant advances in human rights have been made in the last decade.

Mr. John Siebert: In certain parts of the country.

Hon. Bob Rae: They have been made in certain significant parts of the country, yes, and certainly, in terms of the formal constitution, undeniably so.

The difficulty we have, and I think it's something one really has to wrestle with a little harder, is that the people with whom one is trying to reconcile are a group that has had a consistently profoundly negative view of the role of women in their society and the role of human rights in their society.

The Chair: We'll have to have a question.

Hon. Bob Rae: That is a real problem as we go forward in trying to actually get to a reconciliation. It's not easy to reconcile with somebody whose views it's hard to say are actually compatible with modern notions of human rights, the participation of women, and equality of people. It's not easy to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Dechert, please.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, thanks for being here today and for sharing your views with us. Thanks for your concern for peace and democracy, human rights, and women's rights in Afghanistan.

Before I ask you a question, I want to just correct the record. I believe that earlier, Mr. Dewar suggested an amount the government has proposed for Canadian support for civilian projects going forward in Afghanistan. My understanding is that it's approximately \$300 million per year for all of Afghanistan.

An hon. member: He said \$100 million.

Mr. Bob Dechert: That's just in Kandahar.

My understanding, and Mr. Dewar can check it, is that what we're proposing is approximately \$300 million for all of Afghanistan.

Mr. Siebert, you mentioned a number of things in your remarks.

If we take the Canadian troops out of the field in Kandahar, as the government has proposed, and we don't train the Afghan army to replace them, who will protect all the Canadian civilian aid workers you suggest we should continue to have there and will continue to have there?

• (1625)

Mr. John Siebert: The delivery of humanitarian and development aid in most parts of the world is done on the basis of neutrality and delivery of aid to all comers, regardless of various categories: religion, ethnic, and what have you. Properly done, the security of NGOs delivering aid comes from the confidence built among the people who exist in that society.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Let me ask you a question. Do you have the confidence that today, in Kandahar region, western NGO aid workers would have that security without a replacement of the Canadian Forces and without an Afghan army that's properly trained to do what the Canadian troops are doing there today? Do you think they would be safe today?

Mr. John Siebert: I think it would be extremely difficult. I take your point. But there were Canadian and other aid agencies delivering aid during the Taliban period. In effect, they negotiated with the Taliban for access and security.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Some of them have been kidnapped and some of them have been killed.

Mr. John Siebert: It is a dangerous operation. Along with Canadian Forces and other militaries, Canadian aid and other aid workers have also suffered losses that are substantial and horrific.

Mr. Bob Dechert: How can we be assured that the gains made, with considerable Canadian investment, effort, and funding, with respect to girls in schools, women's rights, and women's participation in government, will remain if the Afghan army cannot sustain the same level of peace and security that ISAF is maintaining today?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: That's where a level of local engagement in security solutions is critical. Security is a comprehensive basket that certainly includes the participation of security forces but also good governance delivery at that local level. It's a chicken and egg scenario in certain cases. Nevertheless, having that foundation of security at the local level, in terms of governance and competent delivery, is indeed a significant element.

All that said, the presence of international forces and the ANSF in Kandahar could well facilitate security for aid delivery, certainly keeping John's concerns about aid neutrality in mind.

Mr. Bob Dechert: So do you believe the ANSF is at a level capable of doing that today, or do they need further training and assistance?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: I can't evaluate that.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Okay.

I understand that when CARE Canada was here, they made a good case for the continuation of training of the police forces in Afghanistan to ensure that women are not abused and to secure the gains that have been made in terms of women's rights. What do you say to CARE Canada on that point?

Mr. Mike Hogeterp: Again, security is an augment of this full factor that we're talking about. We're concerned, again, with a full balance of a mission. Security forces are one element of that. But concentrating, again, at the local governance level all the way up the chain, where civil society is fully engaged, can contribute to that, both the micro- and the macro-level solutions that we're envisioning, including the incremental protection of women's rights.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Okay.

I believe Mr. Siebert had said that Canada should advance a "diplomacy surge", I think was the term, on a financial scale equal to our current military investment.

What do you think is required over what period of time?

• (1630)

Mr. John Siebert: A significant contribution and focus.

You know, I will certainly grant that the nature of the engagement of the military requires a certain amount of equipment and training and those things. Military options are always expensive. The good news is diplomatic options, compared to them, are relatively inexpensive.

And if I could just drop that "financial" but say—

Mr. Bob Dechert: But you did say that, I think.

Mr. John Siebert: I did, but if the same political energy were given to diplomacy and in trying to seek a way—political support from the Prime Minister on down—to Canada contributing to a diplomatic resolution, if that happened, and my ideal world came to be, we're still talking about many years of engagement.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you very much, gentlemen.

Mr. Hogeterp and Mr. Siebert, we appreciate the presentation you've given to us and all the commentary. Thank you very much.

We're going to suspend for a minute while we go—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Chair, just a point of order, because I think there was a challenge on my numbers, and before they leave—

The Chair: Okay, I've just—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Just if I may, on a point of order, I'm quoting from the minister—

The Chair: I've already adjourned the first part of the meeting and we're now in camera.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Just because there was a challenge to my numbers, Chair, I think it's important—

The Chair: You're out of order.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Well, I'm not. I'm just on a point of order. I have a point of order.

The Chair: We've already suspended.

Mr. Paul Dewar: The \$100 million a year is Minister Oda's, and I wanted to know from the government where they're getting their numbers from. Because it was yesterday that the minister announced \$100 million a year, not in Kandahar, as Mr. Dechert says.

So I just wanted to clear the record here, Chair, and I'm wondering if we can do that.

The Chair: We're going to clear the room at this point and go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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