

Committees of the House

Foreign Affairs and International Development

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Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development presented on Thursday, February 26, 2009 be concurred in.

I thank my colleague, the member for [Sudbury](#) for his support.

The foreign affairs committee tabled a report on Afghanistan. We now have an opportunity to open up the debate on this report and, of course, on Canada's mission in Afghanistan but also perhaps, I hope, about where we are going.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have to tell you the concerns that Canadians have, that members of this Parliament should have and that the world community has in terms of what is going on, not only in Afghanistan but in the region.

The list of recommendations that came out of the foreign affairs committee report with regard to Afghanistan was fairly thorough. There were 35 recommendations.

We heard from people who had been in the field and had a military point of view, people who were there who had a diplomatic point of view, and certainly from people who were there who had a development point of view. We heard from Afghans themselves directly, through video conference. We also heard from people who have worked in Afghanistan, and who looked at it from a Canadian perspective.

Hopefully what the report did was give some helpful advice to parliamentarians as to where we should go in Afghanistan. In particular what was important about this report was that it actually talked about diplomacy, and it talked about the role of Canada when it comes to diplomacy in the region.

I think most Canadians have been seized with the mission in Afghanistan, but most recently with the concerns, the problems and the challenges. What they have seen is that the rhetoric we have heard in this place has fallen to the side and that reality has taken over.

We have seen a mission that has had many problems. I think the focus has been, with all due respect to the government, too one-dimensional. By that I mean that while the government was seized with the military option, the opportunity cost of that was that they forgot what the other options were.

Sadly, I think when we look at the Manley report and what was in the Manley report, certainly the testimony, the details of that report showed a cause for concern. The report said that if we carry on in the present manner without looking at the diplomatic side and doing development differently, we will find ourselves in a great muck and in a situation that will be hard to resolve.

That is where we are. I say this respectfully to those who have sat on the Afghanistan committee and indeed to my colleagues on the foreign affairs committee and certainly to those on the defence committee.

I do not think we have had enough debate in this country when it comes to Afghanistan. I do not think we have had all the options put in front of us. That has not served any of us well, be it those who are serving in the military who I have had the opportunity to visit when the defence committee went to Afghanistan, or especially those who serve in our diplomatic community.

What we are doing right now is a sad testament to the history of Canadian diplomacy, and it is because of a failure of imagination, a failure to listen to those who have said that we must do more when it comes to the region, not just focus on the country of Afghanistan but be seized with the region.

We have seen that the new administration in Washington has at least opened up the debate and looked at the region a little more. They have looked at Pakistan and Afghanistan. What I think is crucial, as we see in this report, is that we look at the entire region.

It is interesting to look back to 1998 and 1999, when the UN sent a special envoy to Afghanistan and to the region. Mr. Brahimi, who was instrumental in putting together the Afghanistan Compact in 2001, was sent to the region by the secretary general of the UN of the day. He was sent there with a gentleman by the name of Mokhtar Lamani, a Canadian.

  (1520)

At the time, they found three things that are very important to note for this debate today. They said that right then the Taliban were training foreign fighters. They said there was a problem with the drug economy and they said there was a problem with human rights in the country.

If one reads those reports, as I have, and puts their hand over the date, they could be representing exactly what is happening in Afghanistan right now. We have a problem with adherence to human rights. We more or less have a narco-economy and we have a problem in terms of foreign fighters. One simply looks at the growth of the Taliban in the last couple of years and it is hard to deny those facts.

I think those facts are certain. I do not think anyone disputes them. I think everyone from every side agrees on the proliferation of fighters. We agree that the drug economy has proliferated. We agree that there are problems with human rights. Certainly, we just have to look at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission's reports to look at the concern around human rights.

The problem is that we have not done anything different to seize an opportunity that is in front of us. The opportunity in front of us is to say that what we have done in the past has not worked. We need to set a new direction, a new course. I would ask the government to look at this report, look at what others have suggested and consider that new path.

Our party has said that what we should be focusing on right now is ending the war. Ending the war that is happening should be everyone's primary focus right now. The work that has been done by our military, development and diplomacy components has hopefully been to that effect. However, right now we are stuck.

I think we are stuck because the government is saying that when 2011 comes, we are out. That is what I hear. That is it, except for the odd time when we hear the Minister of National Defence say that we might stay in the PRTs and train military or police. However, we have not heard from the government about exactly where we are going.

I suggest a couple of things as a member of my party and caucus and as a foreign affairs critic. I think that the government should be pushing those who are saying that we need to have a Bonn II, so to speak. We need to take a look at the reality on the ground in Pakistan and Afghanistan but also in the region. We have seen the proliferation of insurgency beyond the south into the north. Right now, we should be engaging with countries in the region. We should be engaging with Russia, China and Turkmenistan. We need to talk to Iran. We need to make sure that we talk to Pakistan as well.

These are the countries in the region and we have done nothing to engage them. There are countries that want to engage those countries because it is in their self-interest. After the Taliban took over, the first people they went after were Iranians. There is no love lost between these two countries. Somehow, perversely, what has happened in this conflict is that refugees who fled the Taliban have safe refuge in Iran. Right now, the Iranians and Russians are sitting on the side, watching us spend our treasury and spill our blood. They are just waiting until we say that we need to do something different.

The time is now and I will explain why. Up until a year and a half ago, it was not a problem for those countries in the neighbourhood to watch the rest of us do the work that they had tried to do on Afghanistan before. They thought we would eventually learn the lesson. Right now, there is an opportunity because the threat to those countries is omnipresent. The insurgency is growing past the point of the south. It is going to the north. It is going to other regions of Afghanistan, which means it will effect those other countries.

I plead with the government to look to diplomacy to push for special rapporteurs like Mr. Brahimi, who knows the region, who can talk to pretty well everyone in the region, with the exception of al Qaeda, and who knows this file. He would be the person to help set dialogue in the region. The fact that we need to end the war has been missing in our policy. To end the war, it means that we have to set up negotiations.

  (1525)

One of our goals is reconciliation. The problem with that goal is usually reconciliation is after a conflict ends. The same goes for development. We set up PRTs and if we bend to them, they are fortified. There is not a lot of back and forth with everyday people. There is ongoing training. The problem is it is not spread out and integrated into the area. This is the reason a war is still going on.

From our perspective, we cannot have reconciliation in the middle of a war. We have to end the conflict first. To do that, we need to identify the people to whom we can talk. That is why Canada's policy should be pushing to have a special rapporteur, a group of imminent persons is how I put it before, or whatever we want to call it. We need to have someone to engage those countries in the neighbourhood.

We should also be offering our expertise and diplomacy. I already mentioned Mokhtar Lamani. He was working with Mr. Brahimi when he was there in 1998. Mr. Brahimi was the person who put together the Afghan compact that followed the Bonn conference. We need to seize these components.

In the list of recommendations, there are four or five that push the government to this direction, to say that we need to take a new direction, set a new course, put more resources into diplomacy and put Canada in its rightful place in the world, where we can take a leadership role when it comes to building a consensus toward diplomacy. We have the people and the knowhow to do it. As I just enumerated, we have people who have done this before.

Mr. Brahimi and Mr. Lamani have spoken out on this. They said that one of the challenges they saw after the Bonn conference was there was not enough attention paid to bringing in those who would be reasonable, to talk to those who would want to see an end to the conflict. That opportunity was lost. However, it is not too late. In fact, it is never too late, when it comes to ending a war.

The report states that Canada should re-calibrate its focus in Afghanistan, that when it comes to our role post-2011, we should put more resources into the diplomatic side, on a regional basis.

We should do this by identifying those countries in the neighbourhood. This war will not be ended by Parliament. I am certain of that and I understand it. However, the war can end if Canada pushes with like-minded countries to identify those who are willing to take up the cause of ending the war, of ensuring that the people in the region are going to be responsible partners. To date, this has not happened.

If we look at the recent events, as was mentioned by my colleague from Toronto Centre today in question period, we have concerns around the follow-up to the Afghan elections.

Mr. Galbraith, who has written extensively on Iraq, was being honest when it came to Afghanistan. He was clear in saying that if we were going to call this a free and fair election, then we were obviously sending the wrong message to the people of Afghanistan. Why?

When we have ghost polls that come through with results that show 90% support for the president, what message do we send to the people of Afghanistan? Do we think that will not be noticed by the people of Afghanistan? If we ignore the Galbraiths and others, we will basically tell the people of Afghanistan that all the rhetoric about democracy, that the notion they should be able to decide who runs their affairs, is something we did not mean, that we actually do not care.

When it comes to corruption, it is the same. There is rampant corruption going on right now in Afghanistan. It is totally linked to the drug trade. People are sitting in the cabinet of the present president who are part of that.

Do we think the people of Afghanistan do not know that? They are not stupid. They understand their country better than we do. If we do not heed their call, then what will happen to them? They will not be willing to listen to us. Nor will they be willing to work with us when we try to help them.

  (1530)

Sadly, one of our recent messages to the Afghans was that if they did not tell us all the facts of what was happening on the ground when it came to reporting on the insurgency, then we would withdraw aid. I guess that shows the fatigue of the mission. We send a message to the people we are trying to help, that unless they tell us what we want to know, then we will not help them.

I think that is the frustration of people on the ground right now. The direction we have taken has been one that has been the same over and over again. We say this is not a war that is won militarily speaking, but we add the same ingredients every time.

I plead with the government to read the report. I know in its dissenting report, it took issue with some of the concerns that were laid out by the committee. However, I look at some of the first recommendations that were made. They basically said that we needed to have NATO-led international security forces in Afghanistan, ISAF, continue to focus on avoiding Afghan civilian casualties and minimizing property damage. The government's response to that recommendation was that the Canadian Forces made every reasonable effort to do so.

That is not the point. It is not about the Canadian Forces. It is about what was happening in the whole mission.

We cannot look at this mission in isolation. It is not only about what we are doing. The fact is when we have our allies call in air strikes that take out civilians, every time that happens it sends not only the wrong message to the people we are trying to help, but it helps the other side because that is used to recruit members for the insurgency.

When we talk about recommendation 3, which states that the Government of Canada should reinforce efforts on the diplomatic military development levels to promote the creation of conditions favourable to a peace process in Afghanistan, I would hope the government would say, yes, that it believes this is a good idea.

Again, I go back to the goal the government has set out as reconciliation in its own reporting. It has not been able to make any real progress when it comes to reconciliation. I know there are some pilot projects ongoing on the ground. Those are important. We have to build that capacity. However, the key focus is how to end this war. If we try to have reconciliation before we end a conflict, it will be very difficult. Talk to any expert who deals with conflict and post-conflict. The reconciliation piece is after the conflict ends.

When we look at the report and recommendation 3, I hope the government takes this seriously and pushes beyond the notion of what it has set up as its goal for reconciliation and goes further to tell us how we end this war.

Again, I plead with the government. It needs to talk and work with our allies. It needs to talk to people in the neighbourhood. If we do not talk to the Russians, the Chinese, the Iranians and Pakistanis about what their self-interest is when it comes to Afghanistan and when it comes to Pakistan, then this will be ongoing for a very long time, much longer than we already have been engaged.

It is important to note how long we have been engaged.

In summary, I hope this place and our country will debate the war in Afghanistan more than we have. I hope we will provide solutions that come from all of us to ensure that when we get to the point of saying, "what's next", which is where we are at right now, we will have a plan, a consensus to take us from what we have had in the past and move to the future to end the war in Afghanistan, to use our diplomatic muscle and ensure that all is not lost, that in fact Canada can reclaim its rightful role in the world as a nation that ends conflict and builds societies in a post-conflict situation.

  (1535)

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Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):  

Mr. Speaker, I am sure my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, who was very much involved in this file, will have some pretty good questions for my colleague across the floor.

As a parliamentary secretary for three and a half years in Parliament, I have debated quite a lot on the Afghanistan issue.



First, I must remind every member that when it first started, the NDP opposed the mission completely and voted against sending any troops there or even bringing any peace and stability to this. Therefore, let us keep the record very clear.

Now the New Democrats talk about finishing the war and they want a withdrawal date. The point is if we do not provide security and a secure environment, where will we get the development about which he has talked? Let me give him a typical example of what is happening.

The neighbouring country of Pakistan has a democratically elected government. He says that the Taliban became strong in Pakistan, ultimately to provide security. They were blowing up schools and everything they could. There was no development taking place there until the Pakistani army went back in and provided a secure environment.

He knows that at this current time, the Afghan army cannot provide a secure environment, although Canada is training it. That is why this is a UN-mandated, NATO-led mission to provide a secure environment so the development he talks can take place.

The facts do not support the whole idea of withdrawal from the war and doing development there.

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Mr. Paul Dewar:  

Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question was. I think what the parliamentary secretary forgets is it is very difficult to do development in a war. We have seen that and we have heard it from development workers who have been frustrated. They were able to do development in the beginning of this war, but presently they have given up.

That is not odd. If we think about it, in the middle of a war, how can we look at the success rate of the schools, for instance, which they herald. Often they have been targeted again by the insurgents. That is just a fact. What I am saying to the government is that it is time we took a different direction on this. We have what we always consider on

saying to the government is that it is time we took a different direction on this. We have what we always consider on this side as an imbalance between where our resources are and putting more resources into trying to end this war. I think most Canadians are ready for that.

We heard Vice-President Biden say that there needs to be a different take. It might not be exactly what everyone is saying in this place, but at least they are asking that question. That is my whole point.

Let us have a debate about changing things. We have not had that in this place, certainly not from the government. We have had report cards that are questionable in what they assess, the results of which are even more questionable.

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Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):  

Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the initiative of my colleague from Ottawa Centre in initiating this discussion. I am quite happy to participate in it.

I have two questions for the member.

When there are talks of a political solution and a reconciliation, one of the things we have to ask ourselves is this. Who are the people we are reconciling with, what are the implications for human rights and for women's rights and for the kind of democracy that we might want to see emerge in Afghanistan if we are simply to walk away and say that we are prepared to do a deal with anyone?

The second question is this. Could the New Democratic Party imagine any kind of future presence by our military if that role were confined or focused exclusively on training and was not based in Kandahar?

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Mr. Paul Dewar:  

Mr. Speaker, my colleague's first question is extremely important. That is why I have said we need to have people who actually understand the region well. That is why I offered two names, Mr. Brahimi, and everyone on this file and the government's side will know who that is, and Mr. Lamani, a Canadian who is often brought to the White House in Washington to advise and who worked on this file back in 1998. These are the people from whom we need to find out to whom we can talk. The last thing we want to do is regress. We want to find people not only in Afghanistan but in the surrounding countries who are willing to be accountable for what is going on in the region as well.

That is the first step. We have to find and identify those people and start to set a table for dialogue, which then hopefully will lead to ending the war. I think it is pretty evident to everyone around that that is what is needed.

On his second question of what our party's position would be with regard to the military, we should get to the first point first, but we have always supported peacekeeping missions and ones where we are reinforcing what has been a peace negotiation. I could see us supporting that, just like we should be in the Congo and in Sudan.

  (1540)

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Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): 

Mr. Speaker, when we first went into Afghanistan, it was under a Liberal government, as I recall. At that time people in the public generally felt that we were there in a peacekeeping role. That was the role of our armed forces. Many people were surprised to find out that our role had changed to active fighting in the most dangerous area of the country.

Just today I heard a military source on the radio claiming that leaving in 2011 would be viewed as abandoning Afghanistan. We can see the campaign has already started to prolong our involvement in this war without end. We should not forget that this war has been going on for many, many years. The Russians were in there for a number of years and other countries have had deep involvement and it has never concluded.

I want to applaud the member for his excellent presentation and ask him whether he could review these options that he has talked about and explain them in a little more detail.



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Mr. Paul Dewar:  

Mr. Speaker, what we are hearing is more debate around Afghanistan, which is something I welcome. My concern, however, is that the reason we are hearing about Afghanistan again is because things are going so badly. There was an election that did not go well, to put it mildly, we have drug proliferation, corruption in government and recruitment

an election that did not go well, to put it mildly, we have drug proliferation, corruption in government and recruitment in insurgency in another country across the border. Some have made the comparison to an unpopular war fought back in the sixties.



Canadians and members of Parliament need to ask, what are we doing there? What can we do better? What can we assure Canadians that we can achieve that is realistic and within our tradition?

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Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): 

Mr. Speaker, I am having a little trouble following the line of reasoning. My colleague from Calgary asked about the role of the military, and I think we are getting into a bit of a discussion about what comes first, the chicken or the egg.

The issue is, how can these discussions that my colleague is talking about take place without any kind of stable civil or military presence? That is the question the House has to come to grips with. If we actually go to Afghanistan and ask the NGOs which one of them think that the military should be withdrawn from Afghanistan, not one of them would say they should leave. They understand the necessity for the military being there. I am just wondering what is wrong with leaving the military there while some of these discussions that the hon. member mentioned go on.

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Mr. Paul Dewar:  

Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised to hear that from someone who is at the cabinet table. Maybe we are hearing it from him first. I just heard about an extension beyond the deadline of 2011. I am not sure if that is what he was saying. That is what it sounded like to me. If he was trying to clarify, he has just confused.

The minister might want to tell his colleague, the Minister of National Defence and indeed the Prime Minister about that policy he just announced. However, if I cut through that, what he was getting at was how do we do development without security.



I was very clear. I have been to Afghanistan and I have talked to people on the ground. They want to see something change. If we cannot win a war militarily, as has been mentioned and he has heard that, then why do we continue with one option? Why are we not looking at other options? If he cannot think that one through, I would have to ask him to maybe debate--

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The Deputy Speaker: 

Order. Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

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Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):  

Mr. Speaker, this is a debate I have participated in on many occasions in the House in the past and the NDP keeps bringing the same old argument out when as a matter of fact many things have changed. I remember when this report was being prepared and the member was there. At that time the Prime Minister created the Manley panel which did an extensive review and came back with recommendations that were brought to the House. The House passed a motion on how to handle Afghanistan and what Canada's commitment would be.

Let me remind all members that it was the NDP which opposed that motion. Under the motion, the direction that Parliament gave was very clear. The NDP has been talking about the historic peacekeeping role that Canada has played. Yes, Canada has played many peacekeeping roles. It is our traditional role and we have earned an international reputation for that. As a matter of fact, I was in Congo to see how the peacekeeping forces under the United Nations work. It needs to be understood that peacekeeping forces are mandated by the United Nations. We do not pick up our guns and try to go and bring peace between two parties when it is not mandated by the United Nations.

I would like to remind my friend on the other side that this mission is also mandated by the United Nations. It is the United Nations that asked NATO to take on the role of providing security in that region. This needs to be understood. This is where the NDP keeps changing its tune.

This is not a war. We are providing a secure environment in a country in which there was a complete loss of security. Let us get it very clear so the NDP can understand what a secure environment is and what a war is.

A war is between two nations; a war is between two parties. There are not two parties there. This is a different kind of war. We are facing a terrorist organization that does not respect any rules of engagement. As a matter of fact, it has the most hideous way of running a government on record. It will provide no rights to its own citizens. That is why the citizens of Afghanistan want us to bring peace and security. Peace and security can only be provided by NATO forces.

The member keeps forgetting one thing. Every NATO member is providing assistance to the Afghan national army. The Afghan national army is being built, the Afghan police is being built, and an Afghan regional system is being built. They are all being built by NATO forces and native people.

We have debated this mission in the House on many occasions and this government knows where Canada is going. That is why the member and my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, are part of the special committee on Afghanistan. It meets regularly to view the progress being made by our forces. The member who just spoke is a member of that committee, so he is well aware of what our forces are doing. That committee is televised and we bring in everyone involved to see exactly what this successful mission has accomplished on the ground.

It pains every Canadian whenever there is the loss of life of Canadian soldiers. It pains every one of us to see that, but we must recognize that their death must not be in vain. It must finish in Afghanistan. Afghanistan must run under secure conditions, not by threats and terrorists who live in the dark ages in that country. Everybody knows the rule of the Taliban when it was in that country, what they did to the rights of women and the rights of citizens.

  (1550)

If there is anyone with any doubt, they can clearly see what is happening in the neighbouring country, Pakistan, where the government of Pakistan finally had to have the army go in and fight the Taliban because they were destroying all development that was taking place.

Let me say also this. Canada has a huge amount of development money pouring into Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, Afghanistan is our number one development strategy. We are very proud of all the development efforts taking place there. We would like to see more effort taking place there. There would be more money in that country if there was a secure environment there.



At the current time the most important aspect for our engagement in Afghanistan is to prepare the Afghan people to take over from ground zero. The national army is being trained by the Canadian army. Their police officers are being trained. The judicial system is up and coming.

As they take control of their own destiny, Canada will be more than happy to give all things back to Afghanistan and continue the way we are. That is why we have a motion in the House that says that 2011 will complete our military engagement. Thereafter, we do expect to be there, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs said today, in a development aspect in order to help that country because Canada stands for some basic human values. It stands for the basic values of human rights and the rule of law, and we should be there to help that country achieve those objectives.

I could go on and on, however, I do not need to go on and on because I do get an opportunity at the special committee to see the progress being made. My other colleagues today will elaborate on many of those things.

Nevertheless, I do want to say this to the NDP members. I was part of the report that they were talking about. That report had lost relevance because of the motion that came from Parliament. Indeed, there were some good suggestions. Good suggestions can always be taken, but the most important thing is to build an Afghanistan based on what the Afghan people want and we are helping them to do that.

We are helping the Afghan people. After years and years of fighting, years and years of terrorism in that country, the world is finally standing by and helping them. The NDP members should stand behind that motion and say, "Yes, we should do that". They should be proud to do that and not oppose when Canada wants to do something.

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Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):  

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could perhaps enlighten us and say what process he envisages the government following to determine what the future of Canada's mission will be after 2011.

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Mr. Deepak Obhrai:  

Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that when the mission is debated after 2011 by Parliament, he, as the Liberal foreign affairs critic, will have an opportunity to fully participate in that debate. The committee will participate. Canadians will participate to indicate how the mission after 2011 should go, while taking into account the strong values and past contributions.

I can tell the hon. member that we are looking forward to that debate.



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

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could enlighten us on one question that bothers me. It seems to me that the confidence of people in this country in the ability of Canada to achieve anything meaningful in Afghanistan has been seriously eroded. It is not surprising when we see the shifting sands in the kinds of commitments that are expected, that the international community expects to happen in Afghanistan.

The London compact of 2006 had an aim of expanding by the end of 2010 the Afghan national army to a ceiling of 70,000 personnel. Yet, we see in today's *Globe and Mail* reports of an expectation by the Americans that the Afghan national army would go from its current strength of 96,000 to 124,000 by next year. This is what U.S. General Stanley McCrystal wants. He wants it to be doubled by 2013. So we are talking double that number by 2013. We are talking, in four years, about an expectation of 250,000 troops in the Afghan national army. Then they will be able to take over security within four years.

If we are not dealing with a war in Afghanistan that people want to see an end to, what are we dealing with when we are looking at 250,000 troops to maintain this situation?



(1555)



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Mr. Deepak Obhrai:

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear so people understand. We are creating a secure environment so the development process can take place. The only way a secure environment can take place in that country is by building the Afghan national army so Afghanistan can make its own decisions about providing security. What is important here is that the army is starting from ground zero. We must make that very clear.

Canada is proud to help build the Afghan national army. We will continue to provide all the logistic support.

It is important to note that it is not war as the NDP likes to say because those members have this notion about peace building. It is by providing a secure environment so that development can take place.



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Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I would like to get my colleague's comments on reconciliation.

Our NDP colleague across the floor said there can be no reconciliation during conflict, and I frankly reject that. Even in a conventional war, like World War II, behind the scenes activity was going on, perhaps not with Adolf Hitler but with others, that could be called reconciliation. This is not a conventional war, obviously. The reconciliation that went on all through the conflict in northern Ireland was part of ending that conflict.

I would like my colleague's comments on that. Can reconciliation be part of any conflict? It does not necessarily have to follow after the conflict has ended.



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Mr. Deepak Obhrai:

Mr. Speaker, when does reconciliation take place? It takes place when both sides know they cannot win and they realize that going to the table is in both their interests.

The NDP wants us to get out and then go to the reconciliation table. To reconcile what? The Taliban would ask why it should reconcile. The Taliban would say it wants its old style of government, the dark ages, with no rights for women. That is what the Taliban is working for and what it is fighting about. Why would the Taliban come to the table to reconcile with us?

That is why it is important for the reconciliation process to take place. People would see that everyone would be a winner as a result of the reconciliation process.

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Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):  

Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify something with the government. If this is not a war we are in, I would like to know what it is. This is the first time I have heard the government say that this is not a war. I ask the parliamentary secretary, if this is not a war, then what in Heaven's name is it?

The NDP has taken the position that we need to change the direction of what we are doing in Afghanistan. If no one on that side of the House believes that we need to change direction, I think they are out of sync with most Canadians and the rest of the world.

This war is not going well; every indicator shows that. The elections have been called a fraud. There is drug proliferation. The parliamentary secretary talked about human rights. We heard at committee, and he heard it as well, that the human rights of women and others are not great and in fact are getting worse.

Does anyone want to go back to the Taliban? Of course not. I started off my speech by saying that we have reports from 1998-99 on the Taliban and they were dutifully ignored. It is time to change the way we do things.

If this is not a war, what does the government call what we are doing in Afghanistan? A tea party?

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Mr. Deepak Obhrai:  

Mr. Speaker, about this issue of war and a secure environment, there is no question that Canadian soldiers are dying, Afghan soldiers are dying, as are other coalition soldiers. People are dying. It is important to understand that we are trying to make it a secure environment.

The House passed a motion stating its principles as to what is to be achieved. The Parliament of Canada set its priorities through that motion.

The member and I sit on committee and we measure on a quarterly basis the progress made.

That is the real success in Afghanistan.

  (1600)

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Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): 

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to downgrade the importance of this debate because it is a debate about the fate of our armed forces, the people currently serving and those who have given their lives.

I do however want to raise the cover on why the debate is happening right at this second. The NDP wants to delay Parliament because those members do not want the free trade bill to proceed. The second thing is they asked for--

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Mr. Paul Dewar:  

Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, it is the right of every parliamentarian to bring forward a concurrence motion on a committee report. He is impugning motive and that is unfortunate, but that should not be allowed. Mr. Speaker, you should be ruling in fact that this type of motion is allowed in Parliament.



For a member, whether he is on the government bench or not, to stand and suggest that we cannot do what we are doing I take issue with, and so should you, Mr. Speaker.

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The Deputy Speaker:  

That is not a point of order. The member for Ottawa Centre is correct that he has the procedural right to move a concurrence motion and other members have a right to agree or disagree with that decision, but we will go on with the question.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

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... .. 

Hon. Jim Abbott: 

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments.

The second thing is that the NDP wants to slow down the EI bill so that we can remain in the House, which is a good thing because, indeed, that is what the Conservatives and the Prime Minister want to do.

That said, having raised the cover as to why this is happening, I would like the parliamentary secretary again to underscore why in the world the NDP thinks that we can achieve the rebuilding of Afghanistan without first creating security for the people of Afghanistan.



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Mr. Deepak Obhrai:  

Mr. Speaker, that is a question everybody is asking: How does the NDP expect development to take place when there is no security? In the meantime, the NDP wants us to withdraw, providing an insecure environment.

Events are taking place in Pakistan and Afghanistan even now and reports are saying it is a difficult mission and the insurgency is gaining ground. All of this indicates why it is important to ensure there is a secure environment and that the Afghan national army is built so that it can take care of its own country and destiny.



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Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):  

Mr. Speaker, I want to express my thanks to the member for Ottawa Centre and my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for participating in this discussion.

Historians will argue for generations the reasons that the New Democratic Party moved the motion on this particular day, and I do not take anything away from that. It is important for the House to take the opportunity to reflect on the Afghan mission and, certainly, if there are families of soldiers whose lives are at risk and families of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, we, as members of Parliament, owe it to them to provide some reflection on the mission in Afghanistan.

First of all, as a member of the Liberal Party, when I participated in some discussions before I was elected to the House with respect to the mandate of the mission, I appreciated very much the efforts that were made by the Prime Minister and others to involve a number of people in those discussions. I certainly have never regarded this mission as a matter of partisan politics or as a matter of partisan debate. There is no more important decision for a member of Parliament, indeed for a government and certainly for a prime minister, than the decision with respect to Canada's putting its military and civilian operations in a theatre of conflict, putting their lives at risk and asking them and their families to make the ultimate sacrifice. When we go back to our constituents and we argue and debate these questions, it is not a matter of political philosophy or a matter of abstract ideology; it is a matter of very real questions for the people of Canada and certainly for those families.

Those who were in the House last week would know that I did not hesitate to give what I hoped would be a fairly lively partisan intervention in a debate on the confidence motion. This will be a very different kind of intervention, simply because of the nature of the subject, and I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

It is important for the House to continue to keep its eye and focus on the most important and difficult questions which we have. The first one is that while we as a country have this debate, we should never make the mistake of thinking that this is somehow a conflict in which Canada alone is involved. There are over 40 members of the United Nations that are engaged in some way or other with respect to their activities in Afghanistan in support of the United Nations mandate and in support of the mandate which flowed from the London conference. Canada, Canadian troops, Canadian CIDA workers and Canadian diplomats are engaged in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, and in the neighbouring region, and we are not engaged in it alone. Our troops are not alone. Our diplomats are not alone. Our aid workers are not alone. Somehow, that reality has to filter down more powerfully into the discussion in the House of Commons.

Of course, all of us are responding to national mandates from national parliaments.



 (1605)

[Translation]

It is only natural to have a discussion on such an important mission in the House of Commons, but we have to remember that Canada is not alone and that Canada will not resolve the conflict in Afghanistan alone. It is not a Canadian mission. It is a UN mission and a NATO mission. It is not just a mission for our army and our military forces, but a mission for our diplomats and our CIDA workers.

We as Canadians have to better understand that we cannot be the solution alone. We are in Afghanistan with all

we as Canadians have to better understand that we are not in this mission alone. We are in this mission with all our allies. It is an effort that is both difficult and important.

[English]

Let us go back and remember, because somehow we seem to need to do this over and over again, and remind ourselves as to how we got there, what NATO and the United Nations is doing there and what we are trying and attempting to accomplish.

Let us recall that is a country that has been at the centre of a conflict that has been under way for over 30 years, initially a civil war, a conflict within Afghanistan which proved to be difficult and violent, then in 1979 an invasion from the Soviet Union in which, by the end of the invasion, over 100,000 Soviet troops were in Afghanistan, in which literally hundreds of thousands of Afghan civilians were killed, in which thousands of Soviet troops themselves were killed, and which invasion was resisted. It was resisted by mujahedin fighters who were based in southern Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan and who were supported by the intelligence and military forces in Pakistan, as well as by our friends in the United States.

Ultimately, the Soviets decided to withdraw and after their withdrawal there was a continuation of a civil war. There was another civil war and conflict. Out of that conflict, came a regime known as the Taliban regime. One of the ironies of life is that there were elements in the Taliban regime that were supported by the Pakistanis, by the Americans, by ISI and by the CIA. This has been widely documented. It is not a wild assertion by anyone. It is well-known, well-documented and thoroughly researched and understood.

It is that Taliban regime that harboured al-Qaeda and allowed Osama bin Laden to operate within the country and within its jurisdiction and which provided harbour, support and allowed free rein to al-Qaeda and bin Laden to launch his attacks initially in the region and then ultimately the attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade towers.

NATO invoked the doctrine for the first time in NATO's history that said that an attack on one is an attack on all of us. This is our attack. The United Nations was engaged because of the nature of the conflict and because of the risk that was posed to the entire security of the region by the regime that was in place in Afghanistan. As a result of that, Canada, as a member of NATO, became involved. We became involved through our work at the United Nations and through our work at NATO.

A decision was made by the Canadian government to support the decision of NATO, which was sanctioned by the United Nations, that we would remove the Taliban regime, get rid of that government and launch a military attack that would allow that to take place, which is exactly what happened.

Canada participated in the initial conflict in Afghanistan. We supported the NATO operation. As a result, the Taliban regime left the major cities of Afghanistan and the rebuilding operation began. The rebuilding operation began under the aegis of the United Nations, of which Canada was a strong member and supporter, and NATO was asked and sanctioned by the United Nations to continue to provide the security services that would be necessary to rebuild Afghanistan.

At the time the rebuilding started, it is important to remember the level of destruction, the physical destruction that had taken place in Afghanistan, the level of poverty that affected the country of tens of millions of people and the extent to which we were starting from the most difficult and tragic of circumstances.

Hundreds of thousands of people had been killed, indeed, deaths in the millions, refugees in the millions and homeless in the millions. Poverty was at the very lowest levels of income and ability to survive of any country in the United Nations. It was a country that had been literally devastated by 30 years of violent conflict, to say nothing of the psychological and physical trauma; the number of people without arms, hands, legs and limbs; the number of people who were disabled; and the number of people who were absolutely devastated by the extent of this conflict.

  (1610)

The Taliban was not defeated. It left Kabul and Kandahar and the major cities of Afghanistan but it did not disappear as an organization. For reasons that historians will debate, the United States decided that it would not focus solely on the question of rebuilding Afghanistan but would extend the war on terror, as it described it, to Iraq.

In my opinion, which is an opinion I have expressed on a number of occasions, that was a mistake of historic proportion. When Richard Clarke, the security advisor to President Clinton, was called to the Senate to testify he said that this was an absolutely fatal mistake because it did two things. He said that it first let Osama Bin Laden and his cohorts off the hook and gave them the ability to regroup in the mountains of southeastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan, which they have obviously done to a tremendous extent. Second, he said that it meant that the destabilization of the world was passed through to Iraq and Iraq itself became a major training ground for terrorist and guerrilla activity, making life more difficult all around.

and genuine security, making me more confident in a general

It must be said that many mistakes have been made, both tactically and strategically, by all of us, including NATO, in how we thought we would solve this problem. The Prime Minister came into office and asked Mr. Manley and others to look at the war. They looked at the war and said that there had to be a change in strategy, that we had to get the whole of government involved and that we had to get CIDA, our defence effort and our development effort working together. We had to understand that there would not be a classic military victory. We would not have a VA day the way we have a VE day or VJ day. They said that this was not that kind of conflict and that it required a different approach altogether.

I think it is fair to say that the report that Mr. Manley chaired has had an impact today and at other times in saying that there needs to be a refocus of our efforts. We need to continue to refocus those efforts. I think it is fair to say that the report that the New Democratic Party has suggested we debate today is a report that points to that change in direction.

We are now in the middle of a national debate under way in the United States. The President of the United States has said that he wants to continue to discuss with General McChrystal and his other advisors as to how they will proceed. The Americans have increased substantially the number of troops that they have in Afghanistan, but we understand that there is now a request for even more troops with respect to the next two-year period for creating greater stability in the country.

I have been able to get to Afghanistan twice as both a private citizen and as a member of Parliament. On the basis of those trips, it is not possible for me to say that I am in any sense an expert or that I have any particular dramatic insights that are greater than those I have read.

For my colleagues in the House, I want to say that I find the membership on the special committee on Afghanistan; the foreign affairs committee work that I have done; the amount of reading I have been able to do; the travels we have been able to take to Washington; the discussions that I have had in New York, Washington and other discussions with other countries that are engaged; the very late night discussions I have had with several ambassadors in Kabul who were kind enough to come around and agree to an off-the-record conversation; the conversations I have had with our military officers and with members of their families; and the discussions I have had with our aid workers and NGOs in Afghanistan have all been fascinating, important and interesting. I think we all need to figure out how we go forward and the best way to move forward.

  (1615)

I am convinced that we have suffered a little from what I call mission creep in Afghanistan. Too many people started out with the rhetorical ambition that we would turn Afghanistan into a liberal democracy in relatively short order.

I am trying not to be too partisan here but part of the difficulty I had with the Bush doctrine was that it talked a lot about how we take freedom to other countries, we impose it, it is there and it will be quickly embraced, but my entire experience in life is that life does not work that way.

This is a deeply feudal, tribal society. This is a divided society, a badly damaged and traumatized society. This is a society with very high rates of illiteracy and very low levels of economic development. It is a narco-economy with over 50% of its GDP coming from the production and manufacture of highly illegal drugs. It is a society in which what we define and see as corruption is widespread.

We are having a great challenge now with respect to the election, which I asked the minister about today, and there will continue to be serious issues on this side of the House about the conduct of that election and what more needs to be done to ensure credibility for the national government in Afghanistan. There is a serious issue with respect to the credibility of that government in the eyes of a great many of its people, let alone the allies who are making such a significant contribution to the life, safety and security of Afghanistan.

This is not a crusade for anything. This is about providing security. It is about ensuring that that country and that region will not become a base from which terrorist activity can threaten the security of the world. That is what it is all about. The more we can do to advance freedom, to advance the rule of law and to advance equality, the better off we will all be. However, let us not lose our focus on what must be the central activity. The central activity is not a crusade. The central activity is security and it is a security that cannot be achieved in Afghanistan alone. It is a security that must be matched by the security we find in Pakistan.

People talk about Vietnam or other conflicts and say, "Wait a minute, let me understand. If there is a full scale retreat, there is a Taliban government in Kabul, there is greater destabilization in Pakistan and the possibility of a more radical fundamentalist government in Pakistan which has access to nuclear weapons and is an ally of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, what is the effect of that on the security of the world?"

No thoughtful person can look upon that result and say that we have peace. If we have peace, then why do we worry? Our troops are not there so no one is getting killed, so we will be at peace. However, what kind of peace will it be? If it is a peace in which the security of the rest of the world is deeply threatened, then we are simply putting our heads in the sand and pretending as if we found a solution.

I have never been one who felt that going to war or taking military action was something that could be taken on lightly. I have certainly never thought of myself as somebody who believed that democracy comes at the end of the barrel of a gun.



  (1620)

[Translation]

Nonetheless, I am certain that Canada has a vital interest in the security of the world. We must first find a way to ensure the security of the area around Afghanistan, so the people of that region and the people of the world, including Canada, are no longer subject to terrorist attacks. That is why I believe it is important for us to continue to provide the necessary focus and support to a mission that can work and that will have the chance to succeed.

[English]

In conclusion, I simply want to say that the Liberal Party and the Liberal caucus will continue to be, as much as we can be, a constructive and, I hope, effective voice in the House with respect to this mission. I do not see it as an ideological mission. I do not see it as exclusively a military mission, and we do not see it as one that is carrying on a crusade for anything. We see it as something that we hope will provide greater security for Afghanistan, greater security for the region, and yes, greater--

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The Deputy Speaker:  

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul.

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Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for his intercession. As informative as it was on the history of Afghanistan, I would like to ask him some questions on what he sees for the future of Afghanistan.

I have the privilege of representing men and women from both CFB Edmonton and 4 Wing Cold Lake who have served in Afghanistan. When I talk to these men and women, they do not obsess about the past in Afghanistan. They do not obsess about past military ventures they have been on in Afghanistan. Truly this is not Vietnam. This is not Afghanistan in the 1970s. This is Afghanistan in 2009.

These men and women tell me more often than not about the amazing difference they have made in this country from the beginning to the current date. When I talked to the development and aid workers who have been there, all they talked about was the future of Afghanistan. They are not weighed down about the past, as others are, though I do not want to be too partisan with this question.

The member talked a lot about the past and the history. I would like to know about his vision and how he sees Canada's engagement moving into the future, past 2011. Surely from the sounds of it he sees Canada being engaged in some role. I would like to know exactly what he foresees for us and what vision he has for Canada's role in Afghanistan past 2011.

  (1625)

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Hon. Bob Rae:  

I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker. I have difficulty collecting my thoughts in 20 minutes, so I can assure the hon. member that I would gladly have spoken more had I been given the opportunity.

Let me just say as briefly as I can that I think there is a very important role for us, an ongoing role for us in Afghanistan. I do not believe that Canada's commitment to Afghanistan can, in any way, shape or form, end in 2011. I do not believe our commitment to the region can end in 2011. We are beginning to understand better that what happens in Pakistan, particularly in the northwest but in fact in the whole country, is every bit as important as what happens in Afghanistan. and I think Mr. Manley helped us do that.

happens in Afghanistan, and I think that many people do do that.

I noticed Ambassador Holbrooke said the other day that it is only when we deal with these two questions together, only when we see them together, that we will be able to succeed as we go forward.

First, from my visits to Afghanistan, my sense is that there is still a major role for us to play in the whole field of development. There is a major role for us to play in the rule of law and the governance of the country. There are significant issues with respect to how the government of Afghanistan actually operates and how the governance can operate. Finally, there is a very significant role for us to play in training the military and in training the police.

There is a very strong consensus, which I found for example in the speeches by Prime Minister Brown of the U.K. last week, in what has been said by many others, and indeed, in what has been said in the House. There is a tremendously important role for us with respect to making sure that the Afghan army and the Afghan police are in a position to do the job, which simply has to be done. If hon. members accept my argument that security is the key, then those institutions are obviously key and critical.

My visits with General Formica and with the Canadian military in Kabul persuaded me that there will absolutely be a strong role for Canada in the period after 2011. We have to take a long hard look at that as we look at what our role has to be in order to be useful. The resolution is clear that our military deployment in Kandahar will come to an end, but I certainly do not see that our role in Afghanistan with respect to development will come to a conclusion.

Let me give just one example: the whole question of polio eradication. We need to see this as a long-term campaign, one that involves Pakistan as well as Afghanistan.



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Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): 

Mr. Speaker, the other day, at the economic club dinner at the Chateau Laurier, four-star General Wesley Clark was there and was asked a question on Afghanistan. He said basically two things.

First, he said that anyone who believes we are not in Afghanistan or Iraq for energy security is sadly mistaken. I am paraphrasing now. That is not exactly what he said. However, he indicated one of the major reasons we were there was for energy security.

Second, he said that if we do not deal with Pakistan, we cannot deal with an Afghanistan.

When I spoke with him on a more private level, he indicated he meant to elaborate more on the region, not just on Pakistan.

As my colleague from [Toronto Centre](#) has said, the reality is there are many countries in that region that need to be taken into the dialogue.

And, yes, the hon. member for [Toronto Centre](#) is absolutely correct. Canada will have some role to play in Afghanistan. The question is this House and this country have to decide in a thoughtful manner what that role should be after 2011.

My question for the hon. member is, does he think that General Wesley Clark was correct in his summation on energy security of Iraq and Afghanistan?

Also, I would like to give him an opportunity to elaborate more on what Canada's role, not just with Pakistan but with the other countries in the region, should be, as he says, in going forward on this very serious issue.



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Hon. Bob Rae:  

Mr. Speaker, from a factual point of view, I do not know what the energy security issues in Afghanistan would be in relationship to Canada.

Certainly with respect to Kazakhstan, which is not a neighbour but which is reasonably close by, there is obviously an issue with respect to the energy question, and obviously the supplies of oil and natural gas that come from that part of the world are of interest to all of us.

However, if the member were to ask me if I think that is the reason Canadian troops are in Afghanistan, I would have to say, no, I do not think it is. And I do not think that is why NATO is there either.

I am sorry that time did not permit me to respond to the broader diplomatic issues that were raised by my colleague from [Ottawa Centre](#). I am very much in agreement with him. I think we need a stronger diplomatic presence in Islamabad, Delhi and Kabul, as well as whatever we can bring to Iran and the neighbouring countries. I think it is

in Islamabad, Bonn and Kabul, as well as whatever we can bring to them and the neighbouring countries. I think it is critical for us. I think it is critical that Canada be able to play a stronger role in those diplomatic discussions and in those development discussions.

I certainly would agree, and I think I said in my speech, that I believe very strongly that we cannot solve the security situation in Afghanistan until the security situation in Pakistan is addressed. As long as that border is as porous as it is, which it will be forever, we will have to deal with all of the issues around Pashtun instability in the northwest of Pakistan and also in Balochistan. There are serious internal questions in Pakistan that we have to deal with. I do not think our diplomatic capacity is as great as it could be given the strength and the quality of the people that we have.

The last point is that when we take something as basic as polio eradication, we cannot eradicate polio in Afghanistan alone because that population is travelling back and forth between Pakistan and Afghanistan all the time. So, unless there is a major public health intervention in Pakistan, we are not going to be able to solve a major public health issue in Afghanistan. That is just a living proof--

  (1630)

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The Deputy Speaker:  

Order, please. There is enough time for one more question. The hon. [Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence](#).

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Mr. Laurie Daniel Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): 

Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to thank my colleague from [Toronto Centre](#) for an excellent intervention.

I have two quick questions. One is philosophical and one is a little more specific.

We talk about progress or no progress; the glass is half full or the glass is half empty. Would he agree that the glass is at least fuller than it was when we started? Anybody can decide what that means, but is it at least fuller?

Now, I have a more specific question. General McChrystal in his recent well-publicized report basically said that we should be putting more forces on the ground, concentrating on stabilizing an area and then staying there. That is precisely what the Canadian Forces have been doing now for a number of months. What is the hon. member's view on General McChrystal's strategy and the fact that we have in fact been doing that ourselves and perhaps leading the way again?

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Hon. Bob Rae: 

Mr. Speaker, first of all, when we ask if it is getting better, we have to ask better than what when? My own judgment is that if we look at the situation, as I have tried to describe it, when we first went in there, it was absolutely devastating in terms of basic infrastructure, schooling, public health, or access to anything. So there are many respects in which things have improved in Afghanistan and many parts of the country in which things have improved quite dramatically. However, we also have to recognize that in the last while, the security situation in a number of parts of the country has not gotten better. Just on an anecdotal basis, I found that the security situation in Kabul when I went there last June was significantly more difficult than when I went there three years before, and that is just a fact of life.

General McChrystal's strategy from what I know, and I am not a military strategist, has a lot of common sense to it. It makes a lot more sense than just whacking away at a few people and then leaving, and then they come back--

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The Deputy Speaker: 

Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for [Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine](#), Social Programs; the hon. member for [Elmwood—Transcona](#), Product Safety.

[*Translation*]

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Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): 

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this difficult debate.

This mission has cost the lives of 131 young Quebeckers and Canadians. We always hear about how these young men and women were the pride of the troops they shared their lives with, and the pride of their families and hometowns. This is a high price to pay. We must find that this is a necessary and appropriate price. Canada has lost 131 soldiers in Afghanistan, while all other countries, excluding the United States, have lost 426. That means that our losses represent well over 25% of the combined losses of all the other countries.

I am not saying this to imply that we have regrets, but to explain that the Bloc Québécois did not support the proposal to extend the mission to July 2011. The Bloc would have liked the mission to end at the start of 2009. Is that because we do not believe in the mission? Absolutely not. But we think that other countries could have taken over. I will even say now that they should, because Canada will withdraw its troops in July 2011, and other countries will have to step in. Afghans will still need help from other foreign armies to ensure that they are safe.

Having asked representatives of other countries on a number of occasions—at parliamentary meetings in various European locations or during missions to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)—to come to the assistance of those in Afghanistan, and having seen that there was little enthusiasm, I know that the Government of Canada, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence must continue to search for support to have others replace the Canadian Forces when they leave.

I said that it is not true that we do not believe in this mission. Rather, we want other countries, who have not yet stepped up, to share this difficult task as they should. I would like to spend some time discussing what I believe should be done in Afghanistan and why it is such a difficult task.

I would start by pointing out that President Obama's advisors are divided, as reported by the *New York Times* on Sunday. It is the only paper I read; it is substantial and I have the time to read on Sundays. Some advisors, such as General McChrystal who was just appointed, say they would like to have 40,000 more soldiers. Others say that it is futile and there would be nothing to gain from it. They are also experienced people.

  (1635)

I have not yet gone to Afghanistan—I may go and I would like to—but I have read a great deal and thought long and hard about it. A few weeks ago, either in the *Globe and Mail* or in the *National Post*—I know it was an English-language paper—there were two full pages about women who were pleased with the 2001 mission, not just ours but the mission in general. However, they were still afraid to intervene and to live, just as they felt when the Taliban were there.

Thus, there is something wrong. I heard Ms. Soraya Sobhran, the chair of the human rights committee, say in her concluding remarks that Canada was doing good things and that the people were telling her so. But they were also telling her that they were afraid they would not be alive the next day.

I know that by saying that I am raising the issue of security. Does anyone in this House believe that we can get to the bottom of this issue simply with weapons or soldiers? I do not think so. I think the Taliban and all these young people and not so young people are prepared to give up their lives to chase out the foreigners and go back to their old way of life. We have not spoken with them, as a matter of fact, but there needs to be more than security to deal with the situation in Afghanistan.

I heard the drug issue get mentioned. It is awful, but the Taliban have resumed responsibility for 90% of all heroin production. The numbers I have read indicate that. I have heard in conferences that eradication is not possible. It was possible in some countries where security was widespread and where those who continued to produce heroin could be punished. But what can we do about Afghanistan at this time? Some propose convincing farmers to grow profitable fruit and vegetables that are sought after abroad. To do so, the farmers would need to be protected during that time and they would also need infrastructure, roads and the means to transport these products and sell them abroad. They would also need security. Indeed, it still boils down to security, which cannot be provided by soldiers alone.

Some say we have to get along with the Taliban. Some have said that. Women there say we cannot get along with the Taliban because the Taliban want to take away from women all the rights we want to give them.

  (1640)

Moreover, others are saying—I have also heard this—that, among the Taliban, some of them are at times farmers and at other times, Taliban. Not all Taliban are Taliban all the time. Indeed, we could probably convince some people.

This brings me to the country's structures. Many wanted Afghanistan to become a democratic country, and the UN

has worked very hard in that regard. A great deal has been accomplished and we are told that some progress has been made, but President Karzai's entourage seems to be showing signs that it could be less than squeaky clean. At this very moment, the ballots of the last election are being recounted, with the knowledge that, there too, there was a major split between two groups. Some were convinced that ballot box stuffing was so obvious that there was no way that President Karzai was democratically elected. Others said that it was not that serious, that some of the ballots would be recounted and that President Karzai could then be recognized. However, we know that President Karzai has some allies who do not necessarily make good friends, and those allies have tainted his entire government, or a large part of it.

I am going over all these points because I think they will be important to knowing what to do in the coming years. Of course, the Liberal critic, whom I cannot name, was right when he said—and I think almost everyone agrees at this point—that the United States made a serious mistake when it abandoned Afghanistan after defeating the Taliban and went to Iraq to attack Saddam Hussein, who, by the way, was the only non-religious figure to defend the Sunni Muslims and allow the Iranian Shiites complete freedom. Not only are they responsible for the disaster in Iraq vis-à-vis the Iranians, for example, but they also brought about a disaster in Afghanistan by abandoning the mission just when more support was being solicited.

The people believed that they were going to have a country, that they would be allowed to participate, and that there would be rules. Unfortunately, since the necessary efforts were not made at the outset, we now find ourselves forced to operate in a situation that is much less favourable, because the Taliban are back and fear has again taken hold, particularly of women.

We have to start over. That is what we are doing, and I know that Canadians and Quebeckers are doing it well, but, as I said, at a high price. They are doing it well, but it means that they have to train Afghans so that they can begin to withdraw. They have to train the police and the Afghan national army, and that is a good thing.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs is gone. He would not have liked me.

I reread the motion—I will read some excerpts—that was passed to say that we would stay until July 2011, on the condition that

Canada's contribution to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan should:

(a) be revamped and increased to strike a better balance between our military efforts and our development efforts in Afghanistan;

  (1645)

That is what we have to do.

(b) focus on our traditional strengths as [nations], particularly through the development of sound judicial and correctional systems and strong political institutions ... [People are trying, but it is not always easy to get involved in] ... addressing the chronic fresh water shortages in the country;

(c) address the crippling issue of the narco-economy...;

(d) be held to a greater level of accountability...;

I have to skip nearly a page, but I want to get to this:

that with respect to the transfer of Afghan detainees to Afghan authorities, the government must:

(a) commit to meeting the highest NATO and international standards with respect to protecting the rights of detainees, transferring only when it believes it can do so in keeping with Canada's international obligations;

(b) pursue a NATO-wide solution to the question of detainees through diplomatic efforts that are rooted in the core Canadian values of respect for human rights and the dignity of all people;

(c) commit to a policy of greater transparency with respect to its policy on the taking of and transferring of detainees including a commitment to report on the results of reviews or inspections of Afghan prisons undertaken by Canadian officials.

I am pleased to have read that because we are in the middle of a debate on this issue. I am not sure that what has been passed here has actually been done.

  (1650)

[English]

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Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):  

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, whom I have known for a long time, has served with me in a foreign affairs capacity for many years. I respect her judgment and we have good working relations. The member is on the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan as well.

During her speech, she mentioned a very good point, which was we were not going to win a military war. She is absolutely right. Everybody understands that. The military war is just one component to provide the security aspect. However, we must not leave the impression in the debate that this is what the Canadian Forces or NATO forces are doing. That is not their primary purpose.

The most important purpose there is to provide the institutions for nation building. As many have stated, this is at ground zero. She has rightly alluded that the NATO mission's main object is to train the national army, train the police, train the judicial system, put in the relevance of an administration in that country, which will be the key element in running the country and which will allow all of us to leave Afghanistan and provide security to Afghanistan and its people.

The NDP members keep talking militarily to end the war. We can only do that if the other institutions are there to take over, the Afghan army, the military, the institutions.

Is that not what the member agrees with us on in the special committee? Is that not what our primary focus is? Is that not what we are there for? Is it not what the member supports we do?

[Translation]

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Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):  

Mr. Speaker, could the hon. member repeat the question?

[English]

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Mr. Deepak Obhrai:  

Mr. Speaker, does the member support what I said, that our main mission over there is to build the administration of Afghanistan, which is the army, the police, the judiciary and the remnants of an administration? Is that not what our main purpose is? Does she not agree with that and not with what the NDP members keep talking about of stopping the war, getting out of it? Does she agree that this is the main reason why we are there?

  (1655)

[Translation]

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Ms. Francine Lalonde:  

Mr. Speaker, of course, and I made that point a number of times during my speech. It is important that Afghanistan be able to administer and manage itself and be a country. That is what the people who believe in what we have done expect. Yes, that is what is important. I believed in that when I said we had to leave Afghanistan in 2009 because there are other things to do and we have to be there. Other countries have to agree to provide security, and this is something I have called for at meetings of parliamentary associations. Some countries have not done their part. In my opinion, Canada has done its part, and other countries must do theirs. We know that the army has had enough. There is a military base in my riding, and that is what I hear from the people there. So I am pleased to answer yes to the parliamentary secretary.

[English]

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Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):  

Mr. Speaker, the member rightly said that the solutions are in a complex use of our three tools of defence, diplomacy and development. I would like to ask her three questions related on that.

First, how does the member see coordinating those? How does she see that working and coming to a solution?

Second, does the member think we have not been successfully supporting all those tools equally, perhaps more on just the defence?

Third, because she is an experienced member of Parliament, the structure of government having these three tools in different departments, does that make it more difficult to coordinate those efforts?

[*Translation*]



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Ms. Francine Lalonde: 

Mr. Speaker, I may have experience, but not in government. I am sure that it is difficult to coordinate, but at the same time, it is absolutely necessary. The member's question is valid, but I believe that the answer should come from Parliament.

[*English*]



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Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): 

Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I sit on both the Afghan committee and the foreign affairs committee.

She made one point that was extremely important, and that was sharing the burden. In my comments I tried to underline the importance of having those other countries in the region take responsibility for the conflict, the war in Afghanistan and certainly the challenges in Pakistan.

Does she not think it is time that Canada push as our primary focus right now, looking at post-2011 in policy terms, to have all those other countries in the neighbourhood, China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, et cetera, take responsibility for what is going on there?

The member quite rightly mentioned that Canada had been there a while. Our military is absolutely fatigued. In terms of changing things and doing something positive, should we not be pushing to have those countries seriously involved, particularly in the area of diplomacy and negotiations?

[*Translation*]



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Ms. Francine Lalonde: 

Mr. Speaker, yes, Canada should push, but I would say that all parliamentarians that belong to international associations could do so as well. It is not necessarily easy to do, because taking part in missions like the one in Afghanistan is not an attractive prospect. But all parliamentarians must also make a compelling case to convince other countries that, using the proper means, they need to help the Afghans out of this terrible life they are forced to lead.

[*English*]



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Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): 

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate this afternoon in the debate.

First, both as the vice-chair of the national defence committee and vice-chair of the special standing committee on Afghanistan, I want to salute the great work our soldiers do there.

I visited our troops in Kandahar on two occasions and from personal experience, every one of them believes, as and this side of the House believe, and I am sure all sides of the House believe, that they are making a significant difference to the lives of Afghans.

I want to talk a lot today about re-engaging particularly with the population, which I think is the key.

The point we have to look at first is that we live in an age of instant gratification. We all expect suddenly that things will happen. Obviously in Afghanistan the road to a political solution that is meaningful in terms of empowering Afghans, to improving the economy, to improving the living standards, to improving the social networks in that part of the world is not going to come overnight. A country that has been ravaged by war for many years will

in that part of the world is not going to come overnight. A country that has been ravaged by war for many years will not be able to find a solution overnight.

Canada is certainly part of the work going on there, but an Afghan solution must be found. In fact, the Department of National Defence, in a very important document in October of 2007, talked about the 3D Soviet-style approach on the issue that national reconciliation and not military victory was the likely outcome, that if we really wanted to see peace in Afghanistan, we must do it by working with all parties effectively to establish a long-lasting peace.

Stability is obviously imperative. We cannot do all the other things we would like to see done unless we have stability on the ground.

Canada, along with 40 other NATO countries, is working with the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police to try to bring stability on the ground in Afghanistan. We see that in northern parts of Afghanistan. Some areas are certainly much more tranquil than others. We happen to be engaged in the Kandahar region, a very volatile area and an area that is the home to the Taliban.

We currently have a crisis of governance. Are we going to get success or are we going to get failure? How we approach this is extremely important.

I commend the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for its report, which contains 34 recommendations. For quite a while I was a member of that committee and happened to contribute to a number of those recommendations, and they are worth reviewing.

The role of the special committee on Afghanistan is to inform Canadians as to the progress or lack thereof that we have achieved in terms of the benchmarks we have established. It is important that we have established certain benchmarks to see where we are in terms of, for example, the training of the Afghan National Army.

By turning that country back over to the Afghans without really being able to provide security, nothing will happen. We need to engage local Afghans. We need to ensure they have a reason to support the ongoing efforts both by the Afghan government and the international community.

There have been significant changes on our strategy and the way we operate. One of them is the issue of the training of the Afghan National Army. When I was there in May of 2008, I learned of a particular Afghan mission in which Afghan-led forces went out into the field. Canadians were supporting that effort, but did not take the lead. We saw, for example, a unit that was able to go out and with the right tools, the right morale and the right support, they were able to engage and inflict significant casualties on the Taliban.

The effectiveness of the Afghan National Army and that of the police, which is one of the benchmarks we are looking at in the House, is extremely important. The Afghan National Army is much further ahead for many reasons. One of them has to do with pay and one has to do with the resources that are put in the Afghan National Army. However, the police force is absolutely the critical element because it is in every town and village. Often the only contact people have with the government is through the police force.

 (1700)

What is required is a police force trained both in terms of dealing with crime but also dealing with the issue of human rights and respecting the local Afghans in that community. To ensure that respect is the key element is extremely important in being able to not only get the support of the men and women in the community but also to hold on to that support within a community.

The change is obviously in terms of the operational culture that we are involved in. We went into Kabul in 2001. When we rotated out, the Turks came in. Part of the debate we had before the resolution of March 13, 2008 was passed was on the issue of future direction and clearly the issue of rotation, informing NATO that we will not be there after December 2011 in a combat role in Kandahar. It is very clear.

One of the debates we are going to have to have, and I will touch upon some of it later, is a healthy debate as to post-2011 in terms of a reconstruction role. Some people say we cannot have reconstruction without having a military presence. The provincial reconstruction team, the PRT, has 150 Canadian soldiers. We cannot have a PRT unless we have 150 Canadian soldiers there, otherwise the chances are it is going to be overrun.

Do we want to continue that? That would be a question. Do we, in fact, engage in the training of the Afghan national army if we are there after 2011? Canadians have to understand that our soldiers are going to be outside the wire. In other words, they are not going to train them in a parade ground. They are going to be outside and they are going to be subject to enemy fire. People need to know that training does not mean that there will not be casualties because unfortunately there will be.

If we are going to do governance, we do not need soldiers. We could have governance in terms of different ministries: ministry of health, ministry of justice, ministry of foreign affairs. We could have advisers assisting in Kabul.

If we are going to deal with support, one of the organizations which we have not used, and it was going to go to Afghanistan in June but due to a number of factors it did not go, is the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I can tell members, as a former president of the FCM, that it does outstanding work internationally. It must be because CIDA funds it on a five year basis.

For capacity-building at the village level, we could bring in Canadian experts in the fields of engineering, rudimentary health care and the development of laws. We have a resource called the Federation of Canadian Municipalities which has put forth a proposal to actually engage in Afghanistan, to be part of the solution.

We need to look at those kinds of solutions which will help the men and women in Afghanistan. It is really important because without that kind of engagement, we cannot have success.

The field of education is another area, and of course we have witnessed over six million young Afghan children, particularly young girls, going to school for the first time. That is a great success.

We have experts on the ground here, so much so that the government of Vietnam, in an unrelated matter, is going to be looking for 15,000 teachers from the province of Ontario because it is going to mandate English in Vietnam from grade three on. What does that mean? It means that Vietnam realizes that Canada has tremendous resources in terms of expertise which it needs.

The Afghans need that too. One of the biggest resources we have in this country is the diaspora. The largest Afghan diaspora outside of Afghanistan is here and quite frankly we have not been very effective in utilizing it. These people know the language and the culture. They could be that bridge to assist us in ensuring the kind of development that we would like to see and that certainly the Afghan government would like to see.

Using that diaspora effectively is an important element that we need to utilize not only post-2011 but right now. We need to engage it effectively. These people want to be engaged and that is an element that we should be doing immediately.

 (1705)

There is no question of our contributions both on the military side and on the development side. On the military side we know that we clearly are making a difference. On the development side the creation of clinics or schools cannot necessarily be measured because if six months later they are destroyed, that is not very effective. When a clinic is built, it is not simply a building, it is the training of individuals to work in that clinic. How do they give shots, how do they deal in terms of cleanliness, dealing with making sure the floors are clean, making sure that everything is spic and span, because without that, the clinic itself is of no value, so we need to do that.

We need to be much more effective with our Afghan allies particularly in the area of corruption which is still a major problem. That was one of the issues with the police. The money was not going to the people on the ground, it was going through their commanders. Fortunately that stopped, but what is the incentive if people are not getting the proper dollars? That is an important issue.

There is clearly a crisis of confidence in Afghanistan, particularly in the government and in the international coalition. Therefore, we need to again engage Afghans to ensure that they understand and that we are able to provide them with a better way of life. We are seeing for the first time that more wheat is being grown than poppies. Afghanistan actually is a major producer of wheat. The people get a lot more money for that. It is the drug lords who get all the money for the poppies.

The Dahla Dam, which the government identified as one of our signature projects, when it is up and running, it will provide needed hydroelectricity but also irrigation to hundreds of thousands of Afghans. The question of course is defending that dam because it is going to be a clear target. Whether it is done by Canadian soldiers, by Afghan soldiers, by contract, or whoever, we need to ensure, that with Canadian taxpayer dollars being put in, that the dam is operational and continues to be operational.

The resolution that the House passed did not give the government a blank cheque. The special Afghan committee's role is to hold the government accountable on the benchmarks. It is to hold the government accountable so that Canadians understand where we are on this mission and to ensure that we are delivering. In regard to the training of the Afghan national army we have not delivered. At the moment only one out of eight units would be up to snuff. Unfortunately, we are behind and that is one of the concerns that we have on this side of the House. Canadians expect results with the resources in that regard, so why are we failing in that area?

We are going to ensure that the appropriate witnesses come before committee. As a clear explanation, we reported on this just before the summer recess, again informing Canadians of where we are.

This is not and has never been a Canadian mission, therefore, NATO and all our partners need to be there and to step up. Some countries like the Germans have certain caveats. That is pretty hard and is pretty rich. I remember meeting with members of the German defence committee urging us to continue the fight and stay longer which is very nice, except when we are not allowed to go out at night because the Germans are not out there, then that seemed to be a bit much.

We met with members of the Pakistan parliament in May. We had some very frank discussions with Pakistan and the Pakistani government, over the last few months, certainly recognized the fact that the main threat was not to its east in India, but that earlier this year the Pakistani Taliban elements had come together. They were very close to Islamabad until the Pakistan government had the political will and political courage to take them on.

  (1710)

Without a regional approach and without the support of regional players like Pakistan, any kind of approach for peace or some kind of national reconciliation among some of the more moderate elements out there would fail, and President Karzai has made attempts in that regard.

Pakistan is a key player and Iran is another key player to the west. And of course there is Russia, China and others, but we need to have a regional approach. We on this side have been pushing to ensure that we have that because diplomacy is a critical part of this whole issue.

We are not going to win militarily. The national defence department clearly showed that from the Russian situation. It is on reconciliation. We need to have building blocks there.

We have to do that not only at the diplomatic level to ensure that we are all on the same page but if it is a NATO mission we have to say to our NATO allies that they need to step up and take some responsibility. Countries like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have maybe 150 to 200 troops there on a per capita basis. They have more troops in Afghanistan than some of the other countries. They realize what we realize and that is, if we do not deal with this Afghan situation effectively, then those elements who would come back to Kabul and other cities would be quite a threat not only in the region but obviously in the export of terrorism around the world.

A deeds-based information environment is important. What perceptions do the Afghan people have of NATO, of the government? We hear of tragic bombings in which civilian casualties occur because someone has bombed from the air. The immediate reaction is not only negative but it turns people who otherwise may not be pro-Taliban into supporting the Taliban.

In terms of deeds-based, how has the average Afghan's life improved because of the intervention of the international community in support of the government?

The government of Afghanistan has a lot to do. It faces a long road ahead in areas of corruption and in the area of governance. We have heard of the disputed issues with regard to the election, and that is very disturbing.

As much as 40% to 45% of the international aid has not been spent because the Afghan government cannot spend it. The government does not have the capacity. So capacity-building in terms of governance and at the village level is important in terms of ensuring that the lives of individuals are improved with clean water, with health care, with a job. Obviously, employment is extremely important.

How do we interact with that population? Canadian soldiers have done an outstanding job working in the local villages and befriending local Afghans and children. They need to see Canadians and others not as a threat or as the enemy but as their friends. How quickly things will improve if that kind of engagement goes on.

What is Canada's role, if any, in terms of Afghanistan? Are we going to be there at all? If we are going to be there, are we going to be in another part of Afghanistan? How can we contribute? Our contribution needs to be based on the needs of the Afghan people. This Parliament has to have that debate and we have to have it for more than six hours.

The Conservative government is fond of saying that we have had this debate, but the reality is that we have to have a debate which involves Canadians. We have to ensure that as the representatives of Canadians in this Parliament that we clearly speak.

The one thing we can assure Canadians is that every member of the House supports our military as long as it is actively engaged overseas. We support our military 100%.

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  (1715)[\[Table of Contents\]](#)**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):**  

Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member for Richmond Hill talk about what is happening in Afghanistan. Of course we support all of our troops and every Canadian in Afghanistan who believes they are providing something important to the Afghan people.

However, I have a problem and perhaps the member can help me. We do have some very knowledgeable people. I will quote Scott Taylor, who is a well-known military writer, who recently said:

IT WOULD SEEM that even the most hawkish of pundits have now come to the conclusion that the war in Afghanistan is unwinnable, and that this conflict is fast becoming a quagmire akin to the American fiasco in Vietnam.

The second point I would put to him is the suggestion today by the spokesman for the Afghan national army that it will be four years before they can take over security. General McChrystal has said that he would like to see 124,000 Afghan troops by next year and to have that doubled by 2013, which is four years from now, to 250,000 troops.

The third thing I would put to him is the incident that happened in Dand last week where General Vance berated the local villagers because of a roadside bomb incident. It seemed to me that he was saying that it was up to the Afghan villagers to provide security to the Canadian forces and not the other way around.

Those three facts put together seem to indicate that we are heading in the wrong direction there and that this is not going the way we would like to see it go. I would like to know whether he thinks that Canada could be doing more to achieve peace instead of figuring out how to continue to fight a war that cannot be won.

  (1720)[\[Table of Contents\]](#)**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:**  

Mr. Speaker, in his report of 2009, General McChrystal very clearly said that the direction they were taking was not simply about more troops. The solution is not more troops. The solution is better engagement with the local populations.

With regard to my colleague's comments about General Vance, clearly we need to do more engaging. I hate to use the term "winning the hearts and minds", but I will use it because it does bring up certain images. There is a need get people on board and the only way we can do that is to show progress on the ground that affects local Afghans.

I do not know if it is true that General Vance berated the local population, but we will not win the hearts and minds if we do that. We will win the hearts and minds by the deeds that we do. We need to do more, particularly in the areas of better development and diplomacy. We also need to look at why the Afghans have announced that it will be four years before they can take over. In another two years they could say that it will be another six years.

Some of our allies in NATO need to do more on the training aspect and they have not done so. Obviously we have concerns with the Dutch and their decision to leave and what this will mean for us? The Italians have already indicated that they will go.

We not only need to ensure we do more on the training aspect, but that we are also much clearer in terms of using our diplomatic leverage in the region. We will be hearing very shortly on those issues at the Afghan special committee. However, we need to be very frank and say that we are not going to win, but we are trying to create the conditions for not only national reconciliation but also for better development.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):**  

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Liberals, with whom I have had the opportunity to go to Afghanistan and be on the Afghanistan committee as well.

I have two very quick questions. One of the things we have raised during the debate and that all members have talked about with regard to what happens post-2011 is the role of training the Afghan military and police. I want to point to the recent publicity that was covering the police in particular and the fact that there had been an instance where the Afghan police had been handing over their arms in a very cordial manner. They were not cornered or taken hostage by the Taliban. If that is what is happening, we really need to look at what is going on here.

My second question is on human rights. He knows that I have raised this in committee. We have the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission documenting the abuse of citizens by law enforcement officials who we happened to train. If our role is training police after 2011, does he think that is a worthy thing, in light of these instances? What needs to change in light of what I have just mentioned?

  (1725)

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Hon. Bryon Wilfert:  

Mr. Speaker, my colleague referenced our trip in May 2008. We did see Canadian police on the ground doing training. One of the key elements is on the issue of respect for human rights. I do not think we can preach human rights at home unless we practice it abroad.

This is not just about giving a police officer a gun or giving him the basic training of how to enforce the law. This is about the respect for human rights aspect and ensuring they understand that. We need to know how that impacts in terms of getting to the hearts and minds of individuals in the community.

By doing that, then we can be successful. The training of the police is probably one of the most paramount roles that we can play because it is the people in the communities, in those villages and towns, who, unfortunately, have the highest casualty rates. Having met some of them, I must say that what they are going through is really moving.

The human rights aspect of training and then ensuring it is carried out is absolutely essential.

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Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, a lot of Canadians are very supportive of this mission and back up our troops to the maximum degree. However, when we start talking to them, they get a little concerned that we do not seem to be winning the hearts and minds of the Afghani population. They see the election irregularities, the vote rigging, the things that are clearly corrupt practices and they see some of the difficulties raised by the hon. member for Ottawa Centre about basic human rights standards. They see progress being made on one front with aid and then progress being rolled back entirely with a Taliban raid or something of that nature. We have been there a fair bit of time.

I would be interested in the hon. member's comments on how he sees us changing that perspective, changing that dynamic within the next two years where we have committed withdraw.

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Hon. Bryon Wilfert: 

Mr. Speaker, one of the ways is certainly through the special standing committee on Afghanistan, which is televised. We need to begin looking at very specific examples of development, for example, microcredit. Microcredit has been one of the most successful programs, particularly with young Afghan women, that we have had. It has made a major impact on the lives of those individuals. That is a success story we have not really talked a lot about.

We have not talked about the fact that last year 600 doctors graduated in Afghanistan and, for first time in Afghanistan, half of them were women.

Real progress is going on but the difficulty is that the progress is often overshadowed. When we lose a soldier in the field, then we tend to focus on that, understandably, because a Canadian has lost his or her life.

We need to give Canadians a sense that we are making progress in certain areas but that there is much more to do. Again, those kinds of issues and reports need to come out.

We need to engage the NGO community more. Our own NGO community is an example in terms of what it can do over there. I mentioned the FCM as an example of one that could have a very good news story because it has done it in places like Durban, South Africa after apartheid, and in Chile after Pinochet, et cetera.

However, those are the kinds of things that I would like to see dealt with more.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this report today.

I will start by saying that since we first started our debates on Afghanistan, the Bloc Québécois has been disappointed over and over. Things did not get off to a bad start. After the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, everyone agreed that something needed to be done; we needed to take action. The international community needed to join forces to fight terrorism.

Shortly after the 2001 attacks, all eyes turned to Afghanistan, because everyone agreed that terrorist training camps, al-Qaeda and the Taliban made for a very dangerous mix for western countries, and we needed to take action.

I remind members that this was the first and only time until now in NATO's history that article 5 was invoked. Article 5 is a NATO provision that states that if one of the 28 NATO countries is attacked, it will be considered an attack on all the countries. The day after the attacks of September 11, 2001, on American soil, NATO rightly invoked article 5, which forced all the nations to join forces to help the Americans eradicate this terrible evil.

In the beginning, we agreed. We told ourselves that the UN had held discussions and agreed that the United States had a legitimate defence and that they could counterattack. There was a period of about one month when George W. Bush asked Afghanistan to hand over al-Qaeda leaders or else the Americans would launch a military attack. One or two months after the September 11, 2001, attacks, the United States intervened in Afghanistan. The war was not a difficult one. It was not very long. But the United States and Canada felt that we needed more than a whirlwind war to get the job done. In fact the war was far from being over; it was just getting started. In the end, it was more of an insurrection than an actual war.

There is nothing very complicated about an insurrection. People who think the Taliban is cowardly because it does not engage in full-frontal attacks on NATO tanks have a misguided interpretation or view of what fighting is. The Taliban can certainly not compete with conventional arms like NATO's tanks, bazookas and firearms. So they resort to an insurgency where anyone can attack NATO forces. For example, a 15-year-old child may approach a soldier and blow himself up. Tensions are high, and no one knows where the next strike will come from.

So the Bloc Québécois became disillusioned. We supported this measure in the beginning, but when Parliament was asked to extend the mission until 2009, we added some conditions. The government did not agree to those conditions and the mission was extended until 2009.

So the mission continued. As 2009 approached, the Conservative government began suggesting that the mission should be continued until 2011. We were somewhat disappointed, because in the end, the Liberal Party—which had been saying for a year that it did not want to extend the mission, that Canada had done enough and that the mission should end in 2009—decided to get into bed with the Conservatives and to extend the mission again, this time until 2011.

We objected for the same reasons as the first time. There was no exit strategy, or any fundamental strategy as to where we were headed with Afghanistan. What benchmarks would be used to measure the success of the mission? All they were offering was a day-to-day approach. Just find the Taliban and kill as many of them as possible. Then we would see.

  (1730)

The longer this insurrection went on, the less sure we were of the results. That is why, in late 2008, we decided that the mission should not be extended until 2011. We did not agree with extending it until 2009, and we agreed even less with extending it until 2011. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party agreed with the Conservative Party, which is why we are still in Afghanistan today.

I would also remind the House that the title of the American mission in Afghanistan was "Enduring Freedom". The Americans were the first to go in. When they decided to send some of their troops to Iraq, they asked for NATO support. NATO became involved and in 2005 it began playing a systematic role in Afghanistan. Initial efforts were directed at trying to stabilize the capital, Kabul. They then continued counter-clockwise, in other words, they began in the north, and then headed west, south, and then east. That is where the problems really began.

I should point out that some 40 nations are involved in Afghanistan, each with its own chain of command. On top of that, there is some confusion about the chain of command. The Americans have always said that they would command their own troops. For example, take what is going on in eastern Afghanistan, where the Americans said that they would take charge of the fight against terrorism, which is happening in the eastern part of the country. So there was a NATO chain of command and an American one. That caused huge problems. Not to mention that the 40 nations all had their own exemptions because their legislative bodies said that their troops' participation in Afghanistan was contingent on certain conditions, such as not leaving camp after 8 p.m., or rules of engagement that varied from country to country. In the end, the situation got so complicated that Afghanistan is now in a state of chaos and

confusion.

These are serious problems. I have often attended NATO meetings, where I have suggested that troops be rotated through Afghanistan. I mentioned the four points of the compass earlier. It is much less dangerous in northern Afghanistan right now than in the south. Why are Canadians always the ones based in the south? Why does NATO not have some kind of rotation scheme? Those based in the south are sure to suffer losses, and it will cost more. So there should be a rotation to ensure that the bulk of the burden is not always borne by the same countries. But that idea has always been rejected out of hand. I am sure that the Prime Minister has asked for this too, but has also been turned down.

Speaking of the cost of the mission, the Parliamentary Budget Office estimates that by the end of 2011, the mission will have cost \$16 billion. That is more than \$1 billion a year. I can tell the people who ask me how much the conflict in Afghanistan is costing Canada that it costs between \$3 million and \$4 million a day. Why does it cost so much? Because we are still not sharing the cost with NATO. That is another major problem. Each nation is responsible for its own troops there. It costs much less to have troops in the north than in the south.



It is going to cost us a lot. However, the greater cost is in the loss of human life. So far we have lost 131 soldiers. I think this is a very dear price to pay. Just go to the funeral of one of these soldiers to understand the human cost. It is not just the soldier that is lost. His comrades dissolve in tears at the sight of the coffin followed by the family members choked by emotion. It is almost unbearable to be in those churches during a military funeral. That is the toll we must pay and I do not think we can keep it up much longer and not just because of our lost soldiers and the expense, but because we are far from certain that we will succeed in Afghanistan for the reasons I have just mentioned.

There are all manner of aggravating circumstances with respect to Afghanistan. I will start with the first, which involves the Canadian Parliament. We have a problem in the Canadian Parliament. We had to fight tooth and nail to be briefed on what was happening in Afghanistan. I remember that the minister at the time told us he could not brief us because we could not be told in advance where they would be the next week. That would be giving away their position to the enemy. That is not what we wanted. We wanted to know what had happened in the previous two weeks. Was progress being made in Afghanistan?

We were given all kinds of briefings like the following: we were shown a C-17 aircraft arriving in Kabul, we were shown its cargo which consisted of crates, and we were told what a beautiful aircraft it is. That is not a briefing. Similarly, we were shown a bridge and told that it had taken one month to erect and that it connected the two shores. That is not what we wanted to know.

Have Canadian MPs, elected by the citizens to be their representatives, been kept informed? I say the answer to that question is no. We have not been given the facts and we are still not getting them. We ask for all kinds of additional information and the people in Canadian intelligence, a division of national defence, give us the nonsense I just mentioned. We are not told if we are making progress. We are not told if victory is close at hand. We are not told if people are happy in Afghanistan. Has the quality of life improved for the Afghan people? The answer is no. It is not the Canadian government telling us this. MPs are forced to obtain information from all kinds of other sources. We are forced to consult others to ensure that we get the straight goods.

I have to constantly tell the defence committee that we are members of a Parliament that makes decisions about the mission, that decides how much it will cost, and that must bear the burden of the loss of soldiers.

First of all, not only should we be consulted but we should be kept well informed. And yet, that is not happening. I call that an aggravating factor.

There are other aggravating factors. Pakistan is an aggravating factor. Even recently, the American army fought in the east against people who came from Pakistan. When we receive delegates from Pakistan, members of Parliament from Pakistan, I always tell them that it is true that their government seems to be taking the situation seriously. I remember that Musharraf told us that he had lost some 800 soldiers in one year. His problem is not necessarily his political will to put soldiers on the front lines, it is also his problem with the ISI, Inter-Services Intelligence, the Pakistani intelligence service, which gives arms to the Taliban and helps them to such an extent that the Pakistani delegation told us the other day that the ISI is a government within the government. There are certain problems, and Pakistan is certainly an aggravating factor. I am not saying that the Pakistanis are not making any effort, but there is a segment within Pakistan that is not helping the cause of the alliance troops, because everyone knows that the attacks are coming from Pakistan. When things get too hot, the attackers retreat to Pakistan, so the Americans have started attacking certain places in Pakistan using drones, because the Pakistani government does not seem to be addressing the problem in that country.



  (1740)

We may not solve the problem militarily—I will talk about this later—but it is significant that the Americans are intervening directly in Pakistan and are not even telling the Pakistanis what they are doing.

Poppy cultivation is another aggravating factor. How can we prevail in a conflict when we take away people's means of survival? There have been discussions at NATO. My colleague spoke earlier about the importance of infrastructure and the importance of growing different crops. Poppy growing must be replaced with something else. But it takes more than infrastructure and different crops. It also takes a market.

A few years ago, I witnessed discussions where Afghanistan was guaranteed a share of the European Union market. It is all well and good to substitute another crop for poppies, but if farmers produce cucumbers, tomatoes or melons, the domestic market in Afghanistan will not be enough. The European Union, the United States and Canada should perhaps make an effort to welcome Afghan products. If we want to substitute something else for poppy cultivation, infrastructure will not be enough. There will have to be markets.

But we must realize that the poppy trade is currently feeding the insurgency in Afghanistan. There is a problem, and we must address it. These are aggravating factors in the current crisis. So are civilian deaths. How can we win?

I hear my colleagues saying that we must win over the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. But does it help us when we kill civilians? Afghans have lost friends and parents in other conflicts. I am willing to believe that the allied forces now are not occupation forces. The Russians were occupation forces because they truly wanted to take over the country. The allied forces are not occupation forces, but when we needlessly drop bombs, when the lives of young men, young women and children are lost, that does nothing to help us earn the trust of the Afghan people.

In their own surveys, Afghans are saying that security has deteriorated since 2001. That shows that it was better under the Taliban than the current regime. That is a very aggravating factor. The government is corrupt. There is disappointment after disappointment. An election was just held, and its legality and legitimacy are being called into question.

The other day, at the Standing Committee on National Defence, I talked about Mr. Karzai's fellow candidate, one of the bloodiest warlords who ever lived in Afghanistan. Western democracies close their eyes and allow such things. This cannot be tolerated very long.

Afghans understand that there is a major problem when President Karzai brings one of the worst warlords in the history of Afghanistan into his fold. There have been some ballot boxes in which the number of ballots was some four or five times the number of names on the list of voters. There were some problems. Some people added ballots to the ballot boxes.

So this is an extremely difficult situation and we are again stuck between a rock and a hard place. We supervised the vote at arm's length, but would it be possible to hold another one if necessary? There are all kinds of aggravating factors. The government is corrupt. What has happened to the billions of dollars the international community has given to help the people?

I recall hearing that a ton of stone to build a road might cost \$8. Yet when people went to buy it from the warlords, they demanded \$80 for a ton of stone to build a road. Clearly, there is a problem there.

We have to review the situation and take a more diplomatic approach. Afghanistan's neighbours need to get involved. We are all affected by what is going on in Afghanistan. We have to talk to Iran, China, Russia and the countries bordering Afghanistan, who are in the thick of the events, because they can have an influence.

It would probably be a good idea to have an international conference in order to refocus. We have to continue providing reconstruction assistance and protecting what has been rebuilt and we have to enhance the diplomatic side of things. Everyone knows that this conflict will not be won by adding more soldiers. The Russians once had 150,000 soldiers there. Now there is talk of a build-up to 120,000 soldiers. The Russians did not resolve the situation in Afghanistan and they left disappointed and defeated.

It was important to the Bloc Québécois to take part in the debate today. The Bloc will continue to keep a critical eye on this mission and will continue to support the soldiers who are under orders and doing excellent work in Afghanistan.

  (1745)

[English]

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 [Table of Contents]**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):**  

Mr. Speaker, the member covered the subject rather well in his speech.

It is really hard to have confidence in the government when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs basically said that there is no war going on over there. Clearly, he is a bit confused. Maybe he should let the troops in on that piece of information from the government.

Canadians deserve to be consulted on this whole question. From listening to the media reports lately I think that the fix may be in on this and the government, supported by the Liberals, may move at some point to extend the mission. Canadians should be consulted on this subject either through a referendum or an election before Canada signs on for a never ending commitment.

I liked the member's statement about the rotation of troops within Afghanistan. It seems to me that we are in the worst position within the country and we should move our troops around.

I did have some things to say about the poppy trade, because it seems to me the member asked for a market for the poppies. I have read articles about the fact that Africa could use the drugs as painkillers to help millions of people who are without painkillers. There is a market for the poppy crop in Africa.

I would ask if the member would like to elaborate on any of these points.

  (1750)

[Translation]

 [Table of Contents]**Mr. Claude Bachand:**  

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

I would like to clarify one thing. Earlier, I spoke about the poppy crop. I am familiar with the position of certain NGOs that would like to see it used for therapeutic purposes. I agree with that, but we cannot buy the entire supply. The heroin produced in Afghanistan represents 90% of the international illegal trade. Even if it were to be used for therapeutic purposes, there would be too much. We have to replace poppy crops, keeping only part for therapeutic purposes. If they decide to grow other crops, as we have in our own country, they will need a market. My colleague spoke of infrastructure and of changing the crops.

Europe has talked about reserving part of their market to help Afghans sell their goods. Perhaps the U.S. and Canada could do the same thing. But we have to do something about the poppy trade in Afghanistan because it is fuelling the insurgency.

[English]

 [Table of Contents]**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):**  

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc is the defence critic for his party and has studied the issue of Canada's role in Afghanistan over the years. I would like his comment on what seems to be emerging in the debate in the United States, which of course is important to all of us because it will affect what we do, I would think, in terms of the present and post-2011.

There is the McChrystal view and the Biden view. The McChrystal view is a troop surge and the idea of clear, hold and develop. The Biden view is to take a step back and not do the troop surge, but treat this more like a different mission, doing the special ops and rooting out al Qaeda, and focusing on that.

I would like to get the hon. member's feedback on that. Does he think that one is better than the other? How might this affect Canada in the future?

[Translation]

 [Table of Contents]**Mr. Claude Bachand:** 

Mr. Claude Bachand:

Mr. Speaker, I came to the same conclusion as the member for Ottawa Centre.

Just the other day, I heard Barack Obama say that he would be very skeptical if any of his generals asked for more soldiers. I think that the American administration understands that we will not put an end to this conflict by sending more soldiers and bulking up military contingents. We have to find another way. Everyone is looking for solutions.

The other day, I noticed that Canada has adopted an interesting approach. It was decided that when troops go to a village, they will not rush in and immediately rush out again, making way for the Taliban to retake the village a couple of days later. Instead, they will stay and show people that they can help with reconstruction and protect them.

Earlier, someone was talking about General Vance's temper tantrum. The other day, a vehicle was blown up and the general told the people of the village that they had to take responsibility for their own security too. That is the kind of approach we need to take now. We have to go to these villages, support them, help them and protect them until finally, the Afghan people realize that it all serves a purpose. We cannot rush in, carry out an aggressive military operation, chase all of the Taliban out of town, and then take off, because a day or two later, the Taliban will be back. We have to come up with original solutions.

  (1755)

[English]

  [[Table of Contents](#)]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):  

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate on the motion to concur in the report from the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs on Canada in Afghanistan, a report that was originally tabled in the last Parliament but because it was still valid, was reported to the current session as well. I am glad that we have this opportunity to speak about what is happening in Afghanistan and what the future holds for Canada's efforts in that part of the world.

As a member of the NDP, I still believe that our mission in Afghanistan is the wrong mission for Canada. I have believed that consistently in my time here in the House of Commons and before. If I could do so, I would bring our troops home now because I think that the role they are playing departs from the role Canadians believe our armed forces should be playing around the world.

Our role in this combat mission is the wrong mission for this country. It is a departure from the values of peacekeeping, of separating combatants, of putting ourselves between those who are solving disputes through violence. I believe Canadians firmly believe that is the role Canada should be pursuing in the world. Our ongoing combat mission in Afghanistan is something that has not upheld those kinds of values in which Canadians firmly believe.

I also believe that this is a war that cannot be won. We have heard many others who are far more skilled in military operations than I make that same statement. It is not a statement that comes from someone who is unaware of the situation or the difficulties of engaging in war. Many people now firmly believe that that is the case.

I also believe that pursuing a combat role and a war in Afghanistan was never a way of ensuring security for Afghanistan, ensuring security for the people of Afghanistan, for making sure that human rights were upheld in that country and for ensuring women's rights. We have often heard that this was a war that had establishing women's rights as one of its goals. I do not think that any of those things can be established by military means. It takes a lot more and a lot of other kinds of efforts to make all of those important things possible.

We have seen a turn in the opinion about the war, even from people who initially supported it, even from those who have made it their career and their business to understand how wars are fought and won. This is a war that cannot be won.

We are there and I doubt that is going to change before the date of February 2011, which was set in this House a number of years ago, but if there is an opportunity to discuss bringing the troops home as another possibility, I will be there to discuss that possibility.

What do we do in the meantime? The report is very clear. It mentions in at least three of its recommendations the need for a new focus on diplomatic efforts.

Recommendation three talks about the need to set the conditions within Afghanistan for the possibilities of peace and reconciliation, of how the folks within the communities in Afghanistan need to work together to find that place where another possibility can be explored. That is a very key recommendation of this report.

where another possibility can be explored. That is a very key recommendation of this report.

Recommendation four talks about the role of the United Nations. Clearly the United Nations needs to be a key player in whatever the future of Afghanistan is. That was a very significant recommendation from the committee as well.

Recommendation five talks about the importance of regional diplomacy and the importance to have other countries of the region, the neighbours of Afghanistan, directly involved in finding a solution to this situation. We have heard that talked about this afternoon already.

New Democrats have long advocated for a diplomatic effort, have long advocated that Canada should be making more efforts on diplomacy. The leader of the New Democratic Party, the member for Toronto—Danforth, was very clear that Canada needed to be pursuing every diplomatic means possible and needed to be talking with all of those who could bring about a different kind of solution than a military one in Afghanistan.



There was some derision for that, but it is interesting now to see that many of allies, that many military experts are also saying we need this kind of diplomatic effort, that it is not an option but a necessity to bring this situation to a conclusion.

I am proud of my leader for having been there earlier on and clearly in favour of Canada taking a role in that area.

We know the region is one that lacks a certain security. The insurgency in southern Afghanistan, which is now spreading to the north, also affects the security of the countries surrounding Afghanistan. Those countries have a direct interest in seeing a diplomatic resolution to what is happening in Afghanistan. They also need to be involved in pursuing that resolution. Canada should be talking with them to encourage their participation in finding that diplomatic solution. Countries like Russia, China, Turkmenistan, Iran and Pakistan all have a very clear interest in what is happening in Afghanistan and their security is all very much bound up in that.

Others have said that this diplomatic effort is absolutely crucial. The United Nations special envoy to Afghanistan has called for a political surge, which is his phrase, to match the kind of military surge about which we have often heard. We need that kind of political surge to ensure a satisfactory solution to this conflict can be reached. That is important to realize and the UN can play a very important role in that.

We also know that involving those other countries will lead to a sharing of the burden of responsibility for what is happening there. Canada has had a very large share of that burden and our men and women in the armed forces have disproportionately, in many ways, shouldered the burden of our involvement there, of the activities and of the war in Afghanistan. It would be good to involve the other countries of the region in sharing that burden.

Also Canadians have been involved in the region in negotiating earlier agreements. They are experts in understanding that part of the world, in particular Afghanistan. In particular, Mokhtar Lamani has been very involved over many years, working in Afghanistan and with the people of Afghanistan and in the region. He certainly should be involved in any future efforts to find a peaceful or a diplomatic solution to what is happening. He worked together with his colleague, Lakhdar Brahimi, the former Algerian foreign minister, on many of these issues. They did a report in 1988 and they were also involved with the Bonn conference report in 2001.

It is interesting to look back at those reports which came out of both Mr. Brahimi's and Mr. Lamani's original report. They also came out of the Bonn conference. The issues that were delineated are still with us today in Afghanistan. In 2001 they noted that the Taliban was training foreign fighters and it was a very destabilizing kind of effect. The drug issue in Afghanistan was still very destabilizing and the narco economy was a very serious problem for any effort in that region. There were very serious human rights problems as well.

Sadly, none of that has changed today. None of the efforts that have been expended in Afghanistan so far have been successful in addressing any of the concerns identified before the conflict began. Mr. Brahimi said that the Bonn conference process needed the participation of those in Afghanistan who were willing to talk, who were willing to be part of a diplomatic solution, which could include elements of the Taliban who were willing to participate in that kind of process.

Therefore, we saw in other instances where we needed that kind of broad diplomatic effort, a diplomatic effort that did not only include NATO countries and the UN, but included regional partners and the people of Afghanistan as well as the political groups there. Surely it is only common sense to believe that this is the way to a solution to this conflict.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has made it very clear that it is a very necessary piece of what needs happen and what needs to be on Canada's agenda as we move forward and that there

is much more we could do as a country is that regard.

  (1805)

We know we have excellent diplomats who are very capable. We have experts in the region who are from Canada. There are ways for us to take advantage and play a very key role in a diplomatic solution, not just in our current military role in Afghanistan.

There are very serious issues related to the ongoing conflict there, serious issues that point to a lack of progress, which would cause many of us to question what has been happening there, what our role is and what success we can point to, if any, in that region.

I think many of us were disappointed in the outcome of the recent elections in Afghanistan. The ghost polls, the electoral fraud that seems to have been documented so far, and more reports will likely be coming out about that, is a huge disappointment. It must be a huge disappointment to the people of Afghanistan, who have been told time and time again that their future lies in the establishment of a true democracy in Afghanistan. They must be incredibly disappointed that their ability to have a say about how their country proceeds into the future seems to have been manipulated, that this does not seem to be working as it should and that their say in choosing their leadership has been altered in some way. That is a very serious problem and it is very disappointing. It again points to the question of what has been accomplished in Afghanistan.

There are very serious concerns, as well, about rampant corruption within Afghanistan and within its government. There is no doubt that much of this may be linked to the narco economy and the drug trade, which is a very serious ongoing problem. Other solutions to this have been proposed but they have never been taken up seriously by who those do that kind of work to establish a cleaner regime in Afghanistan. There are other suggestions and proposals out there that would try to deal with the narco economy in Afghanistan, yet very little progress has been made in those areas.

That is a very significant concern about our ongoing participation in this war in Afghanistan and one that does need our attention.

In recent days my colleague, the member for St. John's East, and in previous months and years the former member for New Westminster--Coquitlam, raised very serious concerns about the operations of the Afghan police and armed forces and about the detention centres and prisons in Afghanistan and what exactly happened in those organizations and institutions.

We have heard the very disconcerting stories about the sexual abuse of boys by members of the Afghan police and the Afghan armed forces, serious charges that are a huge concern to us all.

We have also heard the concerns regarding torture against detainees in those prisons in Afghanistan. In fact, in the past this is one issue that I have raised in our debate on Afghanistan, the Canadian policy of turning those who are captured in the course of Canadian military operations in Afghanistan over to the Afghan authorities, to Afghan prisons, where we know torture has been practised and is practised.

I have often said it is an inappropriate policy of Canada to turn over detainees to Afghan authorities after they have been captured in a Canadian military operation. I still believe it is a dereliction of our responsibility to the people we capture in the course of war. These ongoing allegations about torture in the Afghan prison system concern me greatly.

Some of these complaints have gone before the Canadian Military Police Complaints Commission. Yet in recent days we have also become concerned as to whether that body will have the ability to fully report on these very serious concerns. My colleague from St. John's East again raised that in question period today, to try to get the government to commit to the ongoing mandate for those who are currently working at the Military Police Complaints Commission on this report. This is a very serious report. It needs to be completed and they need to have the resources to fully finish that work before there is a change in leadership. I would heartily support the concerns and the suggestions made by the member for St. John's East in that regard.

  (1810)

We need to be fully clear about what our role has been with regard to these very serious allegations. If Canadians did not take responsibility for information they knew about the abuse of boys by the Afghan police or Afghan armed forces, we need to know that. We need to know what is happening in Afghan prisons. I hope a way can be found to ensure that important work is not interrupted or delayed.

Shortly after I was elected as a member of Parliament, I raised a concern during a take note debate on Afghanistan. I remember asking the minister and colleagues how Canada was planning to deliver development aid to

Afghanistan and noted the fact that the aid was being delivered by the Canadian military. I had very serious questions then and I continue to have very serious questions about trying to deliver development aid by the military. It is utterly ineffective, it is the wrong way to go and it is a complete departure from how Canada has delivered military aid in the past.

We know that when a combatant military force is also responsible for delivering development aid, especially in an area where conflict is still possible and still regular, it sets those development projects up as targets of the opponents of our military forces. It is not an effective way to ensure that the development aid, if it is building a school or some other community facility, is not targeted by the enemies of our armed forces due to our combat role in the region. It is not a good way of delivering that aid.

In fact, if we look at the statistics, it seems our ability to deliver that aid has been extremely limited. It is my understanding that we have committed to building 50 schools in the Kandahar region for the period we are in Afghanistan. However, at this point only five of those schools have been completed. It is not a very good record given that there is only a limited time left in the mandate of the armed forces there. It is not looking promising that the commitment, that delivery of very important aid to the people of Afghanistan will be met. We have been unable to deliver on those schools as a key piece of that commitment.

A lot of question are being raised about the cost of the military mission in the war in Afghanistan, the cost in human terms, the number of Canadian men and women in the armed forces, the diplomat who have died in service in Afghanistan. We know their families, friends and communities mourn and grieve their losses, we all do. There has been a huge human cost.

We also know there has been a huge human cost on the part of the Afghan people. We do not often hear about the human cost to Afghan civilians. In fact, sometimes that information is kept from us. I applied to have those statistics a number of years ago. I was told that it could not be released. There is a very limited response in that way and it would be good to know what the true human cost of this conflict is. There is also the huge military spending involved in this mission in Afghanistan.

There is no doubt that significant taxpayer dollars are going to fight this ongoing war in Afghanistan. Given the many questions about it, one wonders about that huge financial commitment. We want to ensure that when we ask men and women of the Canadian armed forces to undertake this kind of work, they are well equipped to do that. There is no excuse to send them to battle without giving them the appropriate resources. However, we need to be very clear about the cost.

  (1815)

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The Speaker:  

I am afraid it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)