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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1555)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, meeting number 31.

We are again pleased to have this afternoon a briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. This is from a motion that came to our committee a number of weeks ago, a motion that asked that the foreign affairs and international development committee have regular briefings on Afghanistan. We have been pleased in the past to have had a number of experts on the situation in Afghanistan. We have had the department and the defence minister, and I think we as a committee are better off for the briefings we've had.

Today's witnesses are John Watson, the president and chief executive officer of CARE Canada; Najiba Ayoobi, who is the manager of Radio Killid; and Mihreya Mohammed Aziz, who is a camerawoman.

Also, we have with us at the table today an interpreter who will be able to let those witnesses know exactly what the questions are that we are asking them, so it's always good to have that.

We welcome you folks here. We apologize for the slight delay. There have been some fairly major announcements in the House of Commons with motions and other things that kept us there longer than we would normally have stayed.

To our friends here, welcome. We look forward to your comments, after which we will go into rounds of questioning. Because we are close to 30 minutes late in starting, we may extend the time a little bit. So please, the time is yours.

Perhaps, Mr. Watson, you would begin, followed by our other guests.

Mr. A. John Watson (President and Chief Executive Officer, CARE Canada, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to begin by telling people a bit about CARE. There is a one-page summary of CARE in Afghanistan, but in general, as most of you will know, CARE is a humanitarian as well as development agency. That is to say, we do emergency work and development work. We're currently programming about \$200 million annually. We are the largest partner for CIDA, receiving about \$30 million annually from CIDA on 40 separate projects.

Unlike many other Canadian NGOs, we handle a lot of funds from other agencies—DFID, USAID, and multilaterals such as WFP and UNHCR. So we have a good picture of how aid works around the

world. We're particularly good, I think, at war zone work, famine zone work, the emergency side of things, but we're also developing a solid expertise in the enterprise development side of things or how you use markets to do poverty alleviation work.

I think the other thing you should know is that it's typical of a CARE operation to have something in the order of 100 national staff for every expatriate we employ. So it's a heavily localized approach to both humanitarian and development work.

I've just returned from Afghanistan, literally last night. While I was there I met the Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, who will be here, I understand, on November 27. I don't know if your committee is going to see him. Certainly if he's not booked I would suggest strongly that you see him and his deputy minister, who in fact is a CARE Canada employee on secondment to the ministry for the last couple of years.

I also saw Brigadier-General Tim Grant and Brigadier-General Dickie Davis of ISAF. I was not able to see our ambassador. I did see the CIDA person. Despite trying to arrange a visit to Kandahar since last February, I was not able to do that.

CARE has been in Afghanistan since the early 1960s, so I think we have a pretty long-term perspective on what goes on there. We are currently programming \$33 million in aid from many donors, and we have 1,000 staff engaged in programming.

For us, security is a major issue. Our office was burned in June. Our project manager on the Canadian project was kidnapped the June before. These are only two major incidents of many that we find ourselves confronting.

I'm going to run through some slides. The first one gives you an idea of our program area and the security situation in the various provinces in which we work—probably hottest down by the Pakistan border and coolest in the middle of the country, with some hot spots up north.

There are two things I want to say to you today that have to do with the Canadian support for CARE in Afghanistan. One is that we have a very good flagship program called humanitarian assistance for widows of Afghanistan. This was started by CIDA, which made a very brave decision, when other donors were pulling out during the Taliban period, to support this program, which offers basic sustenance to, at its height, 45,000 widows and their dependants. With the program, we have managed to move all but 5,000 of the widows onto programs that allow for their own support, and we are now working on a plan to train 4,000 of those widows in vocational training.

This is the Canadian manager of the program. This happened about three days ago, in fact. It's essentially an assistance program using Canadian food aid to allow the women to survive. It's a very well-run professional humanitarian program that never makes the news because, quite frankly, well-run distributions make boring news.

We do some health training for the widows, and we are now designing a vocational program, which we understand from CIDA will be funded, but our concern is that the program is running out in March and we do have a residual of 1,000 women who will need ongoing assistance.

- (1600)

We have moved a lot of the women on, into some livestock programs. These are home-based programs for cows, for goats, and for poultry.

This is Bibi Jamula. She has five children. Her husband died 20 years ago, and in Afghanistan that's a very hard blow. She has been a beggar off and on since then. Not surprisingly, with the war and with her problems supporting her family, she has serious mental problems. She will not be able to be moved onto a program that will allow for her support.

This is just an example. You can see that her hands are dyed with henna. I asked her why, and she said, "They were so white, I kept thinking I was dying. My daughter got fed up with me and made me paint them with henna so I wouldn't bother her in the middle of the night."

So she has a really difficult time. She has a number of girls. She has—she wouldn't say it—essentially been obliged to sell off one of her daughters for dowry. I asked her what I should say to you on her behalf, in terms of the possible closure of the program and what would happen to her. She said, and I quote: "I will die or sell my daughter, so I pray for your help."

Again, I think that CIDA is disposed to continue this program, but it is running out in March, and we are looking for its continuance.

This is the Shomali Plain. We did a lot of work here in the past, with some CIDA money. We built 2,600 of the houses shown here. The plain was completely depopulated by the Taliban. Aside from doing the houses, we had to rehabilitate the irrigation systems.

This is a *karez*, a typical irrigation system, which brings a higher level of the water table from the upper rim of the valley to be used for agricultural irrigation. All of these had to be cleaned out. It was

dirty work; it was dangerous work. We lost some people, in cleaning out these underground tunnels, from anti-personnel mines.

We did a lot of resettlement work, and the farmers are all shown here. This was a very productive part of Afghanistan.

This is the second program I want to talk to you about. It was, I think, really well received by the minister of rural development. It is to establish an enterprise development program that will allow Afghan farmers and business people to recapture some of the markets they had before. Farouk Jiwa here has talked to these people. There seem to be all sorts of things that can be done in the Shomali Valley to get business going again and get Afghans selling the kinds of agricultural produce they sold in the past.

I'm particularly keen on this program, because one of the big problems is of course security, and an investment program depending on local entrepreneurs is one of the lowest-profile security programs you can do. So we plan to pursue it.

We have done other programs, and I mention these. They were not done with CIDA funds, but they give you some idea of what humanitarian agencies can do. We did a massive employment program for young men after the fall of the Taliban. This is an old picture that I took in January 2002. These are programs that have to be done in a post-conflict period, if you're going to mop up the young men, most of whom have never had jobs other than as fighters.

We also did a lot of girls' education programs. We kept 20,000 girls in school, essentially by tying ourselves into pretzels to keep operating during the Taliban regime, to separate our staff into male and female components, and to negotiate with the Taliban to keep open girls' community schools.

- (1605)

This has morphed into part of the overall education program now and has become a program for marginalized pupils who are not being reached by the formal education system, such as these girls who are too old to enter school. They have missed elementary school, and we are doing an accelerated course to allow them to enter at the late elementary level.

The other thing I wanted to show you was the Kabul water supply program. In essence, we ran the water supply for the city during the Taliban, and that has continued to the present day. I put this in because I think it indicates one of the main things we can do, which is to keep essential infrastructure running. I think that's one of the reasons Kabul has been a different story from Baghdad, as far as the post-conflict history is concerned.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The two things that concern me most right now are the continuation of funding for the humanitarian assistance for Afghan widows program and the establishment of the investment fund for business development in Afghanistan. I think both of those programs do Canada proud in terms of what we can do, practically speaking, in the current context in Afghanistan.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Watson.

Certainly this has not been your first appearance before this committee, and we appreciate your appearing today.

We'll go to the next group and Madam Ayoobi.

Ms. Najiba Ayoobi (Manager, Radio Killid, As an Individual) (Interpretation): I am trying to say hello to all of you and to pay my respects to everyone around here. I am trying to thank everyone who had a role in inviting and organizing this tour. Also, I am grateful to IDRC and to reporters near our borders for arranging our visit.

I feel proud that today I have a chance to meet representatives of the Canadian Parliament here.

I was told to speak briefly. It's very difficult for me to be brief concerning all the problems that are in our hearts. Then I decided to talk about two or three points in total. All I want to say briefly or concisely is this: I want to speak about the developments made since the Bonn conference about Afghanistan.

We have made leaps forward in the participation of women in work and in social life. We now have a constitution, whereas we had none in the process of war. We have experienced freedom of expression in Afghanistan for the first time. We have an elected government.

●(1610)

We could not have raised these valuable things without the help of the international community. We have undergone a war, which now, after three years, has left us with a lot of problems, whether financial or non-financial.

Five years ago, women could not walk out of their houses without being accompanied by a male relative, while now 25% of our representatives in Parliament are female. In the media in Afghanistan we show much progress for women, and women have important roles in the government today. This is a great advantage for Afghanistan under the present circumstances.

This does not mean that all our problems are over and we have no more problems to tackle. The press in Afghanistan are confronting many problems nowadays. We who are working in the press community are feeling that, little by little, our freedom is getting limited every day. Taliban people are putting us under pressure, and the government wants to limit our freedom gradually.

In Afghanistan live many people who like to have a community under law. We like to have systems for all aspects of our work and we have to copy these systems from the international community. People in Afghanistan today are depending on God first, and then on the help of the international community.

Whatever negative thing happens, people who like freedom and democracy are becoming disappointed. People who like to live by the law are getting depressed. I, who am working in the press community, know for sure that they are right.

We don't have the required nutrition or food in Afghanistan, the way it should be.

●(1615)

Trafficking in opium and other things are threatening us. People in Afghanistan are worried about the international community leaving Afghanistan to itself, and they do not know what will happen next, after the international community leaves us.

What I say is a short description of the problems of the people of Afghanistan, especially women in that country. Their first problem is that they are illiterate. They don't have economic freedom. They do not know much about their own rights, the way it should be.

Also, another problem that exists is the difference between cities and villages. These differences make a gap between the government and the people, and that's why the problems are rising.

The Afghanistan people feel that the international community has always been helpful in taking their hands. If this cooperation is removed, there will be problems for the people of Afghanistan, just as there will be for the whole international community.

There is a question that comes up: if the Afghanistan people like having the foreign forces stay in the country, then why every day do some of these forces get killed? Now that I am in the middle of news and I know about everything deeply, I want to tell you this. These soldiers who are killed are not killed by the people of Afghanistan. These soldiers are killed by the enemies of the civil community, the enemies of Afghanistan, and that's it.

I have many things to say, but the limited time I was given has almost expired.

Thanks.

●(1620)

The Chair: Thank you, madam, for your testimony.

Certainly, as committee members we always look forward to hearing those who are living right in the middle of the area, especially some of the most difficult areas in the world.

We're going to go to the opposition side first, to Mr. Wilfert, please, for seven minutes.

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

I thank all of our witnesses.

Mr. Watson, the most telling slide I think you presented was the first one, which was the map of Afghanistan that showed where the activity is currently taking place. Over three-quarters of the map is either heightened areas of risk, or extreme risk. After five years, that's very depressing.

The area I'd like to concentrate on, since you're here on the development issue, is that 44% of the development aid that goes to the Afghan government is spent. That means we are looking at 56% that is unspent, and some departments aren't able to spend at all.

In terms of your assessment on the ground.... When I was in Afghanistan in May, the problem was that the only safe areas, if you want to call them "safe", where you could actually see progress were in Kabul. We were ferried from one military compound to another. We weren't able to go out to really see any development projects, because of the heightened Taliban activity in the south.

Your organization clearly assists—you've talked about 10,000 women you were able to help, such as, for example, widows—but in terms of what you're seeing on the ground, and having just come back, what is your assessment of the coordinated efforts of not only your organization but others on the ground? There is criticism that much of the money and many of the projects are uncoordinated, that there is no focus, and that unfortunately at the end of the day we are barely able to tread water.

Mr. A. John Watson: This is a very large question, but let me say a couple of things.

I am concerned that there is an extraordinary degree of groupthink, both at the Canadian government level and among the international community, with regard to Afghanistan. I have never seen such a dense, self-referring realm of groupthink, if you like. I think it has given us an unbalanced aid program, in being focused on national programs.

Some of the earlier witnesses who have appeared before you have not satisfied you in terms of being able to tell you what Canadian aid is actually doing when we contribute as a minority player to these national programs. I have to say that some of those programs are doing very well. The national solidarity program is working at the village level in thousands of villages. The micro-credit program is doing very well too. In my view, these are aid dollars well spent.

I don't think it is balanced, because it is putting too much weight on programming that's going via the Afghan government. In my view, if the Canadian government is doing a national program, it should also be doing, at the same time, a program at the grassroots that funds a Canadian or Afghan NGO, so that a committee like this can get feedback as to what those top-down programs are doing at the grassroots level. We are in fact working with the national solidarity program, and I must say again that it is doing extremely good work.

As far as security is concerned and its impact on the programming, your going out to see these things is quite different from our national staff going out to see these things. It has to do with the security approach you use. If you're going out, you will be exposed to a force protection approach: you'll be traveling in an armoured vehicle and you'll probably have Canadian soldiers providing the security. If you're a national staff member of CARE Afghanistan, you're going out in a local vehicle, you are an Afghan, you speak the language, and you're not carrying anything that has to do with your work. You're virtually invisible, in the same way as the Taliban is invisible to our soldiers.

There is a lot that can be done, but you have to do it using a different security measure, and that is acceptance and invisibility, if you like, rather than force protection.

● (1625)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: If you could give this committee one recommendation in terms of improving capacity at the village level, what would you recommend? How could we do it better?

Mr. A. John Watson: I can only speak for the CARE point of view, but there is clearly—and I must say that the ministry of reconstruction and rural development responded to this very quickly—a gap in the aid that has to do with the space between micro-credit and formal business. It's what we call the enterprise development area, and it's certainly where we can be most useful in terms of putting in an investment fund that puts out capital, from \$20,000 to \$150,000 or \$200,000, to back the kinds of local entrepreneurs who are doing a myriad of things. This is not a new program; it is something we're doing all over the world. I think a fund for Afghanistan is the best thing we could do right now.

I say that because in terms of groupthink, you will hear from CIDA or DFAIT that you can't do business work in contexts in which there is no state or a weak state, and that you have to have the rule of law, etc. Our experience has been the opposite. When you have chaos develop—let's say when you have a refugee movement of hundreds of thousands of people crossing the border—the first thing that starts, even before we can get basic necessities to them, is local business. So what we're trying to do is develop, as an alternative to military interventions, an investment program that concentrates on making investments in what are admittedly high-risk areas, but high-risk areas that are full of entrepreneurs who need some capital to get on with their work. And because those enterprises are owned locally, they are one of the few things that will not be targeted by insurgency.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Watson, and thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

We will go to Madame Barbot.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be sharing my time with Ms. Bourgeois. She will put her question after me. Then, if you like, we can turn the floor over to our witnesses.

Ladies, Mr. Watson, thank you for joining us this evening. Welcome to all of you. On behalf of all committee members and my staff, I want to say how delighted we are to have you testify before this committee.

When we—

[English]

The Chair: *Excusez.* I'm not certain, but I think maybe you will want to give him more time to interpret it to her as well.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Are you listening in English?

Hooshang Riazi (As an Individual): Yes. I am the interpreter.

The Chair: He is the interpreter.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: He speaks both French and English?

[English]

Hooshang Riazi: This is not working. If you come close, I will be able to help you much better.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Do you speak French?

Hooshang Riazi: French, no. English.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I will speak English, then, and that will be easier for him.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Barbot, for that courtesy.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: What I was saying is that we appreciate your coming here to visit with us.

I was president of the Quebec Federation of Women when we agreed on sending the troops into your country, and the question of protecting women was the first reason we wanted people to go there and help.

Hooshang Riazi: Do you mean you met with people in Quebec who were talking about the situation of women and soldiers in Afghanistan?

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I said the situation of women in Afghanistan is very important to us. I want to know right now if women in Afghanistan are getting the help that is sent there. Also, what is the long-term perspective that all women, especially those in the country, can benefit from the help?

Ms. Najiba Ayoobi (Interpretation): I wanted to speak about the situation of women, but the limited time that I had did not allow me to do so.

The situation of women in Afghanistan can be divided into two classes, the situation for women in the cities and the situation for women in the villages or areas out of cities.

As far as women of the cities are concerned, there have been great developments: they can work; they can go to school; and they can benefit from medical services. I am sorry to say that for women who live even 10 kilometres away from cities, there has been no development made. If anything has been done, it has been a symbolic process.

The women in Afghanistan are in a very negative situation, and I have repeated these points in these visits here in Canada. Quite recently in Afghanistan, a girl 11 years of age was exchanged for a war dog; it is proof that in most parts of Afghanistan, women are not considered equal to human beings. Every day, many women burn themselves.

All kinds of violations of women's rights are experienced in Afghanistan these days. Raping of women quite often happens, and they are threatened that if they do anything, they will be killed. They are forced to marry certain people, and women are not given the right to say they are ready to marry or they are not; if somebody does not accept the advice of her relatives, they think she has violated the human values of the family. Women who are trying to defend other women are threatened to be killed or burned. Women's schools are closed down.

It seems that there is a big fight against women in Afghanistan. Even people who show that they are democrats violate the rights of

women. This is the situation of women in my country, and the women of Afghanistan wish ladies in the international community would give them a hand.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you for that answer.

We will go to the government side. Next is Mr. Obhrai, and then Mr. Van Loan.

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

Mr. Watson and Madam Ayoobi, Afghanistan went through a terrible war, and through that war all the infrastructure and everything collapsed. We are starting from ground zero coming up here.

You talked about a balanced approach to development. I just came back yesterday from the second annual reconstruction conference in New Delhi, organized by the Government of India and the Government of Afghanistan. Twenty-five countries, including NGOs, came over there to create a plan.

I'll tell you what impressed me in that conference. It was a regional conference with the regional countries surrounding Afghanistan. Everyone was at the table. They were at the table because they recognized that the instability in Afghanistan was going to affect them completely and that it was in their own interests, all the countries, that Afghanistan be stable.

They are ready now, and willing to put money. They're ready now, willing to put this thing. Yes, it'll take time. Yes, things are wrong. They talked about the national grid of electricity and they talked about building roads, but these are small incremental steps that are going to be taken.

Therefore, while we are going to paint a picture of Afghanistan—you paint this situation, and I remember it—as being very critical, and you comment to say that Canada is making a fatal mistake, I want to tell you that in the international community, every player over there.... Not a single country—neither Iran, nor Pakistan, nor China—was pulling out, but they were recognizing the fact.

When there is so much goodwill, when there is so much understanding that we've got to do something for Afghanistan, then I think we need to support it very strongly instead of coming along and looking at cracks and fissures. As I said, Afghanistan is starting from level zero, so let's work together there, because it is in the general interest of everyone, including that region.

Don't you think these steps that are being taken, including this one, are the future of Afghanistan and will make Afghanistan prosperous?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Watson.

• (1640)

Mr. A. John Watson: Well, I'm glad the conference went well, but I have to disagree.

Afghanistan's a very odd country. I can think of no other country that is surrounded by states that have an ethnic basis that bleeds directly over the border into Afghanistan. In my opinion, there is no chance that there will be a strong state in Afghanistan precisely because of that.

If you want to take one example—this is what I mean by the groupthink—it doesn't seem that we as Canadians, who used to be very good at putting ourselves into other people's shoes, can do that anymore. If you put yourself in the shoes of a Pakistani, you have to your south a budding superpower with whom you've gone to war several times in the fairly recent past. You have a very fixed border on that side. Ask one of our military men whether they, if they were in the position of a Pakistani general, would recommend that the border with Afghanistan be tightened up. They don't. It is in their interest to have an unstable Afghanistan, because they have a national policy of defence in depth because of the threats coming from India.

Let us be very clear about this. In the 1960s and early 1970s—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I don't understand what you're talking about.

Mr. A. John Watson: Well, if you don't understand what I'm talking about, I do not think you can put yourself in the position of a Pakistani.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I think we can quite well disagree. You're talking about the past, but I would seriously disagree with what you're saying, because the dynamics of what is happening in Afghanistan have already changed, and in that region it has changed, yet you want to live in the past and criticize that. So I would disagree with you.

Mr. A. John Watson: Mr. Obhrai, on this trip I spent a week in Pakistan. Whatever my position is, I think I understand that the Pakistanis do feel a threat from India. Whether it's justified or not, that is the way they feel.

Understand that in our position in the 1960s and 1970s, we were not involved in counter-insurgency efforts in Vietnam; we are now involved, all of us—the European powers and Canada—in counter-insurgency efforts in an unwinnable war in Afghanistan. We are caught up in the same sort of groupthink that pertained in the Vietnam era and that pertains with regard to Iraq, and the same thing is going to happen. So this committee—whether you're government or Liberal or NDP—is going to have to come to grips with a coming crisis in how we handle our aid, in how we organize our military, and in how we relate to our minority communities within Canada, and it's going to be a bigger crisis because you have very little dissent with regard to our policies in Afghanistan.

That's my position.

The Chair: Madam McDonough, please go ahead.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to our guests for being here today. I had the opportunity to welcome Ms. Ayoobi and Ms. Aziz in my home city of Halifax last week, and I'm very pleased you're here today.

I have to say I feel very constrained and conflicted about putting very strong, direct questions to you, because I respect your honesty and your courage in sharing with the committee. Actually, it feels as though press freedoms are being crowded, are being squeezed, in the last while. I'm wondering and worrying whether you would be put in a position of jeopardy if you speak very frankly here and then go back to Afghanistan.

Ms. Najiba Ayoobi (Interpretation): Thank you for your question.

For someone working in Afghanistan, media is always a risk. I am one of the people fighting for freedom of expression in Afghanistan. I am working in groups who want freedom of expression to become the standard in Afghanistan. I am sure that whatever I say here, when reflected in the press in Canada or throughout the world, would create problems for me when I go back, but I can assure you that whatever I say is required to be said. That's why I accept the risks and I want to explain everything formally.

● (1645)

Ms. Alexa McDonough: If I have a moment at the end, I'd like to come back for another question, but I'd like to just briefly speak to Mr. Watson.

I actually found it astounding for it to be suggested by a government member that you're living in the past and that somehow we're the future-oriented country as it relates to Afghanistan at this point.

I want to ask if you would expand a bit further on your wrap-up statement, because I know yours has been a clear voice of concern about the impact of the militarization of aid, and about the concerns with respect to our military actually performing development functions. Could you speak a bit further about that?

I don't know whether it seems like an artificial distinction, but when people speak just about Afghanistan in general, it seems to some of us that it's difficult to have a clear picture of what commentary and criticisms pertain to the Kandahar quagmire and what actually pertains to Afghanistan as a whole or Afghanistan in the north. So in your comments, if you could make any distinctions if they make sense to you or if you think we need to understand that there is some distinction, that would be very much appreciated.

Mr. A. John Watson: In terms of the military, first of all, let me say that I have benefited from being the NGO dissident voice at so many military training missions. One of the best things about the western military, and the Canadian military in particular, is that they have always made room for dissident points of view, if you like.

There are two problems with the current situation. Our guys are about as good as you get in terms of western militaries, but one problem is that in terms of western militaries coming out of the Cold War era, it's hard to think of a military that would be less suitable for fighting this sort of war. They are again coming out of a military culture that, for fifty years, had them preparing to fight battles in northern Europe. That means they are self-contained, they are very high-cost, they are tied to their computer screens, and they are the exact opposite of the kind of colonial military that could go in and do stabilization activities. So on the military side, we really need a long-term, if you like, JTF-3 that would concentrate on security and stabilization exercises.

This is not the old peacekeeping. This is robust military work. This requires some things that are not very palatable. For instance, they need slush funds to buy intelligence, to buy informers, to bribe people in these conflict zones, and they should get them. I want to be clear about that.

What I think is also the case is that, in this country, we have never had any funding for humanitarian aid agencies, no funding to develop the kind of stand-by capacity you need to mount these heavy programs for the employment of young fighters after the conflict is over. We are having discussions about that now with CIDA, and after thirty years, I think it is about time that we had, as they have in almost every other country, the kind of program funding for humanitarian aid agencies that we have for our development sector. But we haven't had that to date, so you're put in a ridiculous position where the military, which can't do stabilization work adequately, instead of addressing that, says the problem is that we're not doing humanitarian work.

My response would be that it's just wrong on both counts. The military must change, and there have to be resources put onto the humanitarian side.

•(1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Van Loan, for the second round.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): I'm going to start with Mr. Watson.

I understand CARE was in Afghanistan in 1989. Is that correct?

Mr. A. John Watson: We were not there during the Russian period.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: But you were in under the Taliban.

Mr. A. John Watson: Yes.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I heard you quite comfortably criticizing the Canadian military aid. Do you have any military training?

Mr. A. John Watson: Yes, I do, in fact.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: You're an expert in military matters?

Mr. A. John Watson: I wouldn't say I'm an expert, but yes, I've written a book on weaponry, I have studied military matters and military—

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Were you ever in the armed forces?

Mr. A. John Watson: Yes, I was.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: As what?

Mr. A. John Watson: I was a corporal in the 1960s.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Based on your work in Afghanistan under the Taliban, did that work out well for achieving security and helping the people of Afghanistan and helping the world's security situation?

Mr. A. John Watson: The point of humanitarian work is that, whatever context you are in, you must focus on helping people who need help at the bottom of the pile.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Let me rephrase it. Are the people of Afghanistan better off now or when the Taliban were there, when you were helping them then?

Mr. A. John Watson: The people of Afghanistan are far better off than they were under the Taliban.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I think that answers the question satisfactorily about military intervention.

I will now go to our journalist friends.

You spoke about freedom only coming because of the involvement of the international community. You've heard that there is a debate in this country about the appropriateness of our military being involved, together with 36 other countries, in Afghanistan. I heard in your evidence some concern that if the international community pulled out, there would be problems.

If we took the advice of some at this table and the Canadians and the rest of the international community pulled out in the next 12 months, what would happen in Afghanistan?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, it needs to be acknowledged that our guests have courageously made it clear that the restrictions on their freedoms put them at risk and that what they could say at this committee could in fact put them at further risk. We need to show some respect for that.

The Chair: Bearing that in mind, the question is still in order. If they at any point in time feel that, for their own security and safety, they cannot answer the question, we would encourage them to pass on the question. But I think it's a very good question.

Go ahead, Mr. Van Loan.

•(1655)

Mr. Peter Van Loan: My question was, if we took that advice and Canada pulled out in the next twelve months, together with all the other countries in the international community, what would happen in Afghanistan?

Ms. Najiba Ayoobi (Interpretation): I told you before that if the international community leaves Afghanistan, there will be a lot of problems. Whether it is now or in the next twelve months, if the international community withdraws their soldiers or powers from Afghanistan, there will be problems. That is not only my feeling, it is the feeling of all the people of the country.

We have two processes. These processes have not been carried out and people are still armed. In many parts of Afghanistan, commandos are in power still. These commandos are always afraid of the international community. They say that if they move against Afghanistan, the international community will come and beat them.

The bottom line is that the people in Afghanistan will be in danger if the international community leaves. The present democracy and freedom of expression that we have been able to get will be removed if we cancel. Afghanistan will revert to the situation of five years ago. All the troubles of your countries and our country will be vaporized.

The Chair: Thank you for that honest answer.

We are going to go to Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Sorenson.

Thank you very much, all, for being here. I especially want to thank you, Ms. Ayoobi and Ms. Aziz, for the courage that you show in your country.

Mr. Watson, I deeply respect the work that CARE does, but I have to fundamentally disagree with your assessment of our Canadian Forces. As former parliamentary secretary of defence, sir, I have to say that our forces are the best in the world and are doing exactly the type of work that you're suggesting needs to be done. They are multi-purpose. They are sensitive to people on the ground. They are not only engaging in critical security work, as you know, but because of their sensitivity and training, intelligence, and excellence, they're also able to deal with asymmetric threats in a way that is required there.

I just want to state that on the record as a matter of fact. It is not a question, sir.

I'd like to direct my question to Ms. Ayoobi.

Could you please tell us how we deal with the insurgency coming from outside Afghanistan? In your comments, you said the people who are killing Afghans are not from Afghanistan. This is a major challenge that we're trying to grapple with. How can we deal with the insurgency coming from outside of Afghanistan's borders?

Thank you.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

We will give time for the interpretation, and I remind all committee members that this is interpreted back into her language.

Ms. Najiba Ayoobi (Interpretation): It is not a new thing to say that the forces are attacking Afghanistan from outside. In the last seven or eight years, the people of Afghanistan have shed their blood because of the interference from outside. The people of Afghanistan,

who are helpless, are victims of these events, these incidents. People are killed. Suicide bombs are there, along with lots of other problems. People in Afghanistan are trying to fight off the situation. This is not always possible, but they are doing their best to defend themselves.

The remedy for Afghanistan is that Afghanistan should have a strong army of its own, as it had previously. To maintain the security of Afghanistan, 150,000 people would be required.

Hon. Keith Martin: Would a Loya Jirga that brings in the groups that were excluded from the Bonn agreement be helpful in furthering peace and security in Afghanistan? Would it be beneficial to internal security in Afghanistan?

Ms. Najiba Ayoobi (Interpretation): The best advance a Loya Jirga made in Afghanistan was that—we did not have a constitution—they managed to put a constitution in. It is a very solid foundation through which the people of the world found out that the people in Afghanistan really are looking forward to having democracy in the country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Bourgeois, please go ahead with a very short question.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): My question is for Mr. Watson.

First of all, I want to congratulate you. It took a great deal of courage on your part to share another vision with us. You spoke about helping Afghanistan in different ways, but never against military aid as such.

You've already stated that aid should be supplied on the basis of the needs of the people. Today, you said that we needed to develop alternatives to military intervention.

Mr. Watson, what kind of alternative approach do you have in mind? Furthermore, does Canadian aid, particularly aid targeting reconstruction in the southern part of the country, truly meet the needs of the Afghan people?

• (1705)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Bourgeois.

Mr. Watson, please go, ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. A. John Watson: If you don't mind, I'd like to answer that question in English, because my French isn't very good.

[English]

I want to start by saying first that I don't want to have words put in my mouth, and I think two committee members have done that. I do not believe the Canadian Forces should withdraw. They are going to be required to stay and to fight, and so they should. But in my view, this is an unwinnable war. What we should be looking for is a way to withdraw that gives us a weak central government and strong provincial power. This is what will happen.

As far as the Canadian Forces are concerned, I could have made the same statement Mr. Martin has made. There are no better armed forces in the western world. They're extremely good. They're the best at doing this sort of work—they and the British. That is true.

What I'm saying is that the western armed forces, as they are currently configured, are not very well placed to do counter-insurgency work. If you want to look at a military tradition that is better at doing that, then you have to go back in years, to the colonial era, and see how the military did things then. No military does that now, and we have to learn how to do it.

Now, as far as the question is concerned, the problem with Kandahar relates to what happened in 2002. Two things didn't happen that should have happened. One is that there was no stabilization program. The Americans announced that they were going to continue to fight al-Qaeda, and at that point there was no stabilization program. And by "stabilization", I mean the simple putting in place of security that allows normal people to function and to appeal to some force to redress their grievances on such things as rape or robbery or whatever else. The Canadian Forces could play that role and could play it very effectively, and they should have played that role in Kandahar in 2002.

The second thing that needs to be done whenever you have conflict ending is that you need to provide employment for young men who have, en masse, been doing the fighting. That was not done in Kandahar in the way it was done in Kabul, the way it was done in the Shomali Valley, and the way it can be done if we fund our humanitarian agencies adequately and put them to that task.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Watson.

Thank you to all who have come. Certainly, we appreciate your input. These Afghanistan briefings have helped us to understand the situation, but also to understand the importance of engagement and continuing a balanced approach to Afghanistan.

We will suspend, and we will then move into the second hour, which, I remind committee members and those guests here, is an in camera meeting.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

[Public proceedings resume]

• (1745)

The Chair: Order, please.

We have three motions. The first motion is Mr. Van Loan's motion.

Go ahead, Mr. Van Loan. Speak to your motion.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: The purpose of the motion is to give some structure to our democracy promotion study—which essentially follows the framework that was laid out by the researchers—and then to ensure that it keeps on track. My concern was exactly what we're seeing happening this week and next week. We're getting diverted and are not paying any attention to it, so we will basically have gone a month without any work on it.

However, in the interests of letting the rest of the day flow smoothly and getting the other motions dealt with, what I'm going to suggest is that we simply defer the discussion of this until next

Tuesday and try to get it dealt with then. That will also make the wording of any motion here easier, because then we're past next week, which is a short week anyway.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Loan. We appreciate the move to consider that on Tuesday.

We're going to go to the second motion, which is Mr. Wilfert's motion. I think we have some friendly amendments to it.

Mr. Wilfert, would you like to speak to this and maybe bring the rest of the committee up to speed on what we've agreed to?

An hon. member: Do the amendment first.

The Chair: In that case, Mr. Martin, do you have the friendly amendment there? Can you read the friendly amendment into the record?

• (1750)

Hon. Keith Martin: The joyously friendly amendment to Mr. Wilfert's motion is that the committee hear from witnesses from Foreign Affairs and Finance on Tuesday, November 28; and that the committee commence and complete clause-by-clause on the bill on Wednesday, November 29; and that the amendments of the government be submitted to the clerk by Monday, November 27; and that the government witnesses on Tuesday have prepared written text, relevant to Bill C-293, that will be submitted to the committee no later than Monday, November 27.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, I guess I'm a little disappointed, because that certainly does not reflect the discussions we had just previous to the former meeting.

Most of what we talked about was the concern that the government come with all their amendments before we hear from the final two committees. I don't think that's doable. If we have our amendments ready on the Tuesday after we hear from them, so that everyone will get them that night, right after the meeting, then that's doable. But to say to come with our amendments before we've heard from the final two committees certainly is not the way that I would suggest this committee start proceeding. If we're going to, there's a bigger problem down the road. For the set of amendments to be tabled, here they are even before you hear a department, I think that's problematic.

Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Ted Menzies (MacLeod, CPC): I would agree with that. That was certainly the discussion that I was part of. I think we need to remember that we're all here to try to make this bill, if it passes, the best it can be. I think that's our job as parliamentarians: to make sure this is the best it can be, because if it passes and it becomes law, then we want to make sure it's going to do the right things and that it's not going to provide the wrong direction in wanting to do what we need to do.

I think we're all here wanting to do the right thing. But to expect witnesses to come from Finance and Foreign Affairs to provide the input after they've given us the suggested amendments...I would suggest that's the cart before the horse.

The Chair: Mr. McKay.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): With the greatest respect to Mr. Menzies, these amendments are already written. They've already been in translation. There's not a doubt in my mind that this bill has gone through all three departments. If the motion goes through, we are committing ourselves to a specific date by which we will have dealt with the amendments and with the bill itself. It's not unreasonable for the opposition to at least have a look at the amendments in the context of whatever the department officials might say. Presumably, if they're just here for commentary, that's fine. They can have their commentary, but amendments are where it's at.

I appreciate that it's slightly out of order, but the commitment to have clause-by-clause by Wednesday, having essentially wasted yesterday with a mishmash presentation, is not unreasonable. If the government does in fact have amendments, put them on the table. We can talk about them, and we can talk about them with officials who can actually answer questions, as opposed to yesterday.

The Chair: I would disagree.

Go ahead, Mr. Van Loan.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: With regard to the amendments, I can understand some desire to see them in advance. I'm going to make a suggestion that I have no authority to make.

The problem is that we're asking witnesses to appear. The point is to test their evidence. The point is to hear what they have to say. Believe it or not, they may get some benefit from our questioning as well.

If the suggestion is that they submit their amendments without prejudice to bringing further amendments after the evidence, then I think that might be a reasonable common ground. Is that something people can live with, the idea of amendments without prejudice to bringing additional amendments afterwards? Otherwise, the whole process of taking evidence is a joke. Everybody has made up their minds and we aren't doing serious work.

• (1755)

Hon. John McKay: I'd also like to see their written submissions on Monday. It's not unreasonable to ask for witnesses to have their presentations. That was the problem yesterday.

The Chair: I've already talked about that former one. It could have been a lot better if there had been a written presentation. There wasn't. We can't say with certainty, but certainly we can encourage the two departments to come with written recommendations, a written version of what they're going to say.

Hon. Keith Martin: Could we just go through the amendment to make sure we have what Mr. Van Loan was—

The Chair: Yes, and I want to speak to that too.

Mr. Martin, with due respect, there are a couple of things that disappoint me in this, in that what we talked about is not reflected in that amendment. You have the right to do that. But for you to say that we commence and conclude that day, I think....

We will have this report well before Christmas. If we have to bring in another meeting, we're still open to doing that, because there's a motion. But in terms of saying we're going to start and conclude, we made it very clear that was not what we were willing to look at.

Hon. Keith Martin: I misunderstood our communications then.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: What's the amendment? I don't have the text of the actual motion. I'm just trying to get it down.

Hon. Keith Martin: I'll state it again. The first part is fine: that the committee hear from witnesses from Foreign Affairs and from Finance on Tuesday, November 21. Nobody has any problem with that, right?

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Keep going.

Hon. Keith Martin: The second part is that the committee commence and complete clause-by-clause on the bill on Wednesday, the 29th—

Mr. Peter Van Loan: We'll come back to that later, but keep going.

Hon. Keith Martin: —that the amendments of the government be submitted to the clerk by Monday night, the 27th—

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Without prejudice.

Hon. Keith Martin: —without prejudice to the bringing of additional amendments following the evidence of the witnesses on November 28.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: That's fine. I agree. That's great.

Hon. Keith Martin: And that the government witnesses, on Tuesday, have prepared written texts relevant to Bill C-293 that will be submitted to the committee members prior to Monday, the 27th.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: I have a question about other amendments. Are you talking about the government's amendments that may come out of the department, or anything else that may occur to us when we're sitting there doing clause-by-clause?

Hon. Keith Martin: Additional amendments, without prejudice.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: But when we sit down to go through clause-by-clause, I may be sitting here and we may be debating, and I may say, "Gee, you know, I think we should change this." I should not be constrained by that.

The Chair: You're part of the process of clause-by-clause. You have the right to do that.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: As long as that's clear and on the record.

And there's another question. Mr. McKay, I know, intended to bring some amendments. Have we seen those yet?

Hon. John McKay: I circulated them but I have not officially submitted them. They haven't been formally tabled.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: That satisfies me. If we've seen them, then I'm happy. I don't think we need to write that into the motion.

The Chair: Do you still want in here, Madam McDonough?

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I don't want to leave any confusion that I'm not absolutely committed to our moving ahead with this as quickly as possible. The government has had this bill for two years, for heaven's sake. It's not as if they have to decide now what they want to say about it.

An hon. member: The government has only been in for eight months.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: However, having said that, I'm wondering whether it wouldn't be a more honest and realistic thing for us to say that the committee should deal with clause-by-clause Wednesday the 29th, but not lock ourselves into "complete", because we may in fact be in a full discussion around a couple of aspects. Maybe it should say clearly that the committee proceed with clause-by-clause on Wednesday the 29th. It seems to me to short-circuit a process that, in good faith, hopefully we're all buying into. I think that's a bit of a mistake.

Secondly, we don't have it in writing, so could I just clarify the amendment that's coming from Peter? If I understand it, it's that the government should submit amendments...did you say "prior to Monday the 27th" or did you say "no later than Monday the 27th"?

• (1800)

Mr. Peter Van Loan: That was him, not me.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: I'm sorry.

Hon. Keith Martin: It's by Monday the 27th.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: So we would have them on Monday.

The Chair: Yes, it doesn't have to be the Sunday or the Friday.

Mr. Wilfert is going to shed some light on the—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I just want to say that I understand the rationale for clause-by-clause on Wednesday the 29th. We may not have a fixed date, but the chairman has indicated—and I stress this—in good faith more than once to me privately and now publicly that

before December 15.... That doesn't mean we're going to wait for two weeks to get it out of here.

I'm presuming, Mr. Chairman, that we have your commitment that we will get this bill out of here, that we will not try to filibuster, and the next thing you know, we're talking about February.

The Chair: No, we've already talked about the filibustering. I'm not going to shut down any debate on amendments from either side.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: But we'll work to get it out of here before the session ends.

The Chair: But I can tell you that there is no—

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: You won't, but everybody else will.

The Chair: Our intentions are very clear: that we have this thing so that it's delivered on time, and that will be in December.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: Was there an agreement to amend it in accordance with the suggestion of Madam McDonough? I just want to be clear on that. From the mover of the motion, was there agreement to amend it in accordance with the suggestion?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: We'll amend it on the 29th.

Mr. Ted Menzies: My only concern is having the amendments by Monday night. I'm not sure that's doable.

An hon. member: It is, Ted. Trust me, it is.

Mr. Ted Menzies: We will do our best.

The Chair: Well, you had better do your best, and you had better get as many amendments forward as you can. If there are extras that you're bringing in that day, that's all right, but I want to see amendments that night.

We have to have the question.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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