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Friday, March 6, 2015

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Chair

Mr. Daryl Kramp

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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•(1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC)): Colleagues, we'll give the media time to leave the room, please, with the cameras.

Welcome to meeting 52 of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. I welcome my colleagues back from their ridings. Certainly we welcome Commissioner Paulson here today.

Just as a little backgrounder for my colleagues, on Tuesday evening, March 3, I received a request from Commissioner Paulson to convene this committee meeting on Friday, March 6, at 11 a.m. for a period of one hour, to publicly display and discuss a video connected to the terrorist event here on October 22. As this had previously been requested with a motion passed by this committee, early on Wednesday morning I had a brief discussion with the clerk and subsequently sent out a notice of this meeting. I should also note, of course, just from a point of interest, that a similar motion had been passed in the Senate.

Today we will allot Commissioner Paulson approximately 15 minutes to make the presentation, offer some comments, and present the contents of a video. For the balance of the hour, we will have committee Qs and As in our traditional period of questioning: a first round of seven minutes, split however the committee membership decides, and then five minutes to committee members until the expiration of that hour.

The chair would also note that as per the request of Commissioner Paulson and as is also contained in the original motion, today's meeting is public and will be televised. Of course it is carried on the House of Commons broadcasting network. That is for everybody's information.

I will now turn the floor over to Commissioner Paulson for his presentation.

Welcome again, sir.

•(1105)

[Translation]

Commr Bob Paulson (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

[English]

I appear before you this morning in response to your request to release the video related to the attack of October 22, 2014. We seized

this video as evidence from the cellphone recovered from the car driven by Michael Zehaf-Bibeau after he murdered Corporal Cirillo and then stormed the grounds of this Parliament armed with a rifle. Of course, we all know he was killed by our brave RCMP and parliamentary security personnel, including the Sergeant-at-Arms, who actively pursued him inside.

I would also like to update Parliament, and through you, Canadians, on the state of our investigative response to this unprecedented attack on our Parliament.

First, permit me to say clearly that the RCMP is engaged in an active criminal investigation to either establish or refute whether anyone aided, abetted, facilitated, counselled, or conspired with Zehaf-Bibeau to commit the crimes he did.

Let me also say that if Zehaf-Bibeau had not been killed but rather taken into custody, we would have charged him with terrorist offences. The Criminal Code provides the definition for terrorist activity at paragraph 83.01(1)(b). The RCMP believes, on the evidence, that Zehaf-Bibeau was a terrorist.

[Translation]

Anyone who aided him, abetted him, counselled him, facilitated his crimes or conspired with him is also in our view a terrorist and where the evidence exists, we will charge them with terrorist offences.

[English]

Not relevant to us or our investigation is what kind of a terrorist Zehaf-Bibeau was, or if he was a particularly intelligent, sophisticated, influential, or personally disciplined terrorist. To us, it all turns on the evidence we collect, which we compare against the statute: what was he doing and why was he doing it?

The RCMP is not, nor should we be, in the habit of publicly discussing evidence or evidence collection during an active investigation. The RCMP asserts and zealously defends its operational independence in the conduct of its affairs. I am departing slightly from that practice in this case, having regard for the enormous public interest attached to this case and this committee's request of me.

To tell you a bit about this video now, and what accounts for the delay between October 2014 and today, I first learned about the video when I was briefed on its discovery during the forensic examination of the cellphone seized from the suspect's vehicle. It was the Sunday following the attack. I directed that a press release be issued that day. My thinking was that announcing the existence of the video would, while we were examining and assessing it, ensure against any subsequent criticism that we were concealing the existence of this evidence.

What followed were dynamic discussions within the RCMP about the evidentiary value and the operational utility of this video. We also had to carefully consider what impact its public release could have not only on this investigation, but also what impact it might have on others. We weighed the video's release against the knowledge that it could serve to further radicalize and ultimately incite more violence.

We considered that the video will be used by terrorist elements and sympathizers to facilitate recruitment, financing, and action. On this point, we remain concerned but frankly speaking, that's not our place. It's not our role. But as one of my officers put it to me, if not us, then who? We have the video, and I think it's a fair question.

This video is plainly evidence; of that there is no question, but just what criminality it is evidence of can only ultimately be decided by a court having jurisdiction to weigh and assess it. We aren't there yet, so we in the RCMP have to ask ourselves how we can maximize its utility and probity at bringing forward a criminal case, if ever we do.

Initially, I was inclined to release the video in its entirety, but I was persuaded by the operational decision-makers in the investigation not to do so. Even today, as I show you the video, I must point out that it is not the entire video. There are in total 18 seconds edited from the beginning and the end of the video: 13 seconds at the beginning and 5 at the end.

I am satisfied that there are reasonable and sound operational reasons for these edits, and you will no doubt want to understand these reasons too. Unfortunately, for the very same reasons that we have edited the video, I cannot explain to you at this point why we have done so.

It is not lost on me either that the government is bringing forward new laws to strengthen the fight against terrorism. The release of this video at this time could be seen as seeking to influence that process. I assure you that I have no such motive. The video speaks for itself. It is what it is.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

It is not lost on me either that the government is bringing forward new laws to strengthen the fight against terrorism. The release of this video at this time could be seen as seeking to influence that process. I assure you I have no such motive. The video speaks for itself. It is what it is.

[*English*]

You must understand that I have teams of dedicated professional investigators and specialists working tirelessly to pursue this very

case to its conclusion, and it's in everybody's interest to let them do what they do best: investigate.

Through our INSET structure, the RCMP has over 130 full-time investigators and staff presently working on this case. We've interviewed over 400 individuals, from the people he associated with in British Columbia, to the people with whom he rode the Greyhound bus, to the people who saw him at the shelter in Ottawa.

We know now that Zehaf-Bibeau became increasingly aligned with terrorist ideology in the last years of his life while living in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia and for a short period in Alberta.

We know that in August 2014 he applied for a Canadian passport at a Vancouver location, where he was later informed that a passport would not immediately be forthcoming and that his application was subject to further review. Beginning on September 23 and continuing to October 2, Zehaf-Bibeau made his way to Ottawa by hitchhiking and travelling on a Greyhound bus. During at least one leg of the bus trip he told other passengers that his purpose for travelling to Ottawa was to secure a passport.

We now know that within two hours of arriving in Ottawa, Zehaf-Bibeau went to the Libyan embassy to renew his then-expired Libyan passport. He was a dual national. He was told that his application would have to be sent to Libya due to discrepancies in identification documents. This process was expected to take three to four weeks to resolve.

Two days later, on October 4, surveillance cameras on Parliament Hill captured Zehaf-Bibeau on the grounds as he took a guided tour of Centre Block. From our review of the video and speaking to people on the Hill that day, there was nothing remarkable about his participation in that tour that ought to have led either RCMP members deployed on the Hill or other security personnel to be suspicious of his presence.

Throughout his time in Ottawa, Zehaf-Bibeau used publicly available Internet and pay phones in various locations across the city. We now know that he used this as a means to stay in contact with individuals both in the Ottawa region and in British Columbia. We have been able to identify some of these individuals and we continue to pursue this avenue.

We have a full understanding of his finances and the disbursements he made prior to this attack. On the days leading up to October 22, Zehaf-Bibeau made arrangements to buy a car. On October 21 he finalized the deal and used cash to purchase the vehicle. Upon taking possession he drove to Mont Tremblant to visit a relative, where he was seen with a long knife.

Very early the next morning, October 22, he was observed by witnesses placing a rifle in the trunk of his car. Hours later he shot and killed Corporal Cirillo, got back in his car and then stormed Parliament. I've shared with you his approach to this building.

We have not been able to confirm the origins of the gun. We are releasing a photo of the gun, which seems unique, in the hope that someone might recognize it. I can confirm that he had a long knife tied to his wrist when he was killed. We did not find any other guns or weapons in his car, among his possessions, or at any of the other locations we now know he visited in the hours leading up to the attack.

I have been advised that he was shot many, many times, but exactly how many times I can't say because I don't know. We await the detailed findings of the OPP, who were engaged to independently investigate the police-involved shooting inside Parliament. The video from inside this building forms part of that line of inquiry and is with the OPP.

I can confirm that the autopsy toxicology screen on Zehaf-Bibeau's remains was negative for drugs and alcohol. Neither did we uncover any evidence of drug or alcohol used by him in the period leading up to his attack.

It was during the search of his vehicle following the attack that we found Zehaf-Bibeau's mobile phone. Our forensic analysis, which began immediately and progressed quickly, revealed the video.

We have been able to determine with exact precision the time and location where Zehaf-Bibeau made this video. As you will see in a moment, Zehaf-Bibeau filmed himself in his car with the phone immediately prior to the attack at the National War Memorial. We have established that he did this while parked at a lot near 464 Metcalfe Street. He looks directly into the camera, appears very purposeful and lucid, and talks about his motivations for the attack to come.

The audio is not great. It is sufficient, though, to understand what he says. I am providing copies of a transcript in both languages of what he says.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Commr Bob Paulson: I am at your disposal to answer any questions I can. Having regard for the ongoing nature of this case, there may be information I cannot share.

[*English*]

Here's the video.

[*Video Presentation*]

That concludes my presentation, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner Paulson.

We will now go to our rounds of questioning.

We will turn to the parliamentary secretary, Ms. James, for up to seven minutes.

Are you splitting your time?

• (1120)

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): I'm probably taking my whole seven minutes, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner Paulson, for being here today. I just want to say that we respect and recognize the independence of the RCMP and the ongoing investigation into this matter.

I have to tell you I almost need to take a breath after seeing that video and reading the transcript of what we just saw. It's rather disturbing.

I want to go back to the attacks against our Canadian Armed Forces in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and those on October 22 at the National War Memorial and right here in Parliament, which we witnessed.

These were not random attacks against an individual or a place of employment. These were attacks against our national security and our institutions of governance, so there's a clear difference here.

I'm glad that in your opening remarks you clearly indicated that it was a terrorist attack. I know you came out shortly after the incident had happened and said that it was a terrorist attack. You have reiterated that here.

For all the members here in committee today and for people who may be watching from home, I know you are very familiar with the Criminal Code. In your opening remarks, you referred to paragraph 83.01(1)(b) on the definition of terrorism, but I'd like to just read it for a moment:

(b) an act or omission, in or outside Canada,

(i) that is committed

(A) in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause, and

(B) in whole or in part with the intention of intimidating the public, or a segment of the public, with regard to its security, including its economic security, or compelling a person, a government or a domestic or an international organization to do or to refrain from doing any act, whether the public or the person, government or organization is inside or outside Canada, and

(ii) that intentionally

(A) causes death or serious bodily harm to a person by the use of violence,

(B) endangers a person's life,

(C) causes a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or any segment of the public.

According to the testimony you have provided, what we just witnessed through the video that you provided, and the transcript that I read, this was a barbaric killing of an unarmed Canadian soldier. It was an attack against the very thing that represents Canada—the Government of Canada—and clearly what we saw on that particular day falls into the definition of terrorism.

Could you confirm that the definition applies very clearly to what we witnessed here on October 22?

Commr Bob Paulson: Mr. Chair, I guess I would say this. In the course of our duties in an investigation, we collect evidence. As I said in my opening remarks, we put that against the statute. It seems squarely to fall within those parameters.

Ms. Roxanne James: We have seen a number of attacks around the world recently, in Copenhagen, in Paris, in Sydney, and also, of course, on October 22 and two days prior, right here on Canadian soil. There are a lot of similarities in all of these attacks, regardless in what country they happened. They're very clearly anchored in religion, in beliefs that are opposite to what we here in Canada believe: openness and tolerance of others.

Witnessing this video and again reading the transcript you provided and hearing your testimony clearly show that there's a link between all of these attacks that we're seeing around the world. Could you comment on that, please?

Commr Bob Paulson: Thanks again for the question.

When you say "link", in the police vernacular we look for plain linkages: knowledge, relationships, and connections. In that sense, there is not, but obviously, to go to the heart of your question, in terms of the motivations and the driving sort of ideology, they seem to be similarly motivated.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you. I wasn't referring to the individuals maybe connecting to one another, so I'm glad you clarified that and specified motivation.

Commr Bob Paulson: Oh, I'm sorry.

Ms. Roxanne James: I perhaps used the wrong word and I appreciate your correcting that for me. Thank you so much.

I think there's a question we have to ask in seeing this, knowing that many people have allegedly left Canada to travel overseas to possibly engage in terrorism to join ISIL. Can I ask if the RCMP is at a heightened state in general?

• (1125)

Commr Bob Paulson: Yes, we are. Of course, we have said previously that we're at a very heightened state in terms of having to address the risk that we assess attaching to the individuals who have been identified as what we refer to as high-risk travellers or high-risk individuals within this counterterrorism framework.

As I've said, I have not seen a tempo and a pace of operations like this. We have refined our practices in terms of priority management of some of these targets, but it is an unprecedented realignment of our resources to address that.

Ms. Roxanne James: In your opening remarks, you indicated that there was an autopsy performed to see if there were any drugs or alcohol present and clearly the evidence indicates that it was not the case. This is not someone who was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of this incident. Is that a fair statement?

Commr Bob Paulson: To continue in the cop vernacular, none of the intoxicants that we screen for were noted. They are typically alcohol, most of your common drugs, and opiate-based stimulants and so on. It's limited by the scope of the tox screen.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. James.

We will now go to Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Paulson, for being here today.

I think that having seen the video, all of us find it a bit chilling. I do understand that there are reasons for not being able to show the

entire video. I look forward to that being possible at some point in the future.

What it reminds me of first of all is the death of Nathan Cirillo here. All of us, I think, have him in our hearts and minds as we go through this incident. The second thing it reminds me of is the day after the incident when we as parliamentarians came back into the House and were sitting again to send that very strong signal to the world that we would not be cowed by this incident or the incident in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu that resulted in the death of Patrice Vincent.

We will be looking forward to seeing the final report. As a former police board member, I know that you can never ask the police when the report is done, because it's done when it's done.

I do have two questions for you.

In your presentation, you mentioned the issue of resources and the large number of people you have working on this case. I'd like to ask you about a statement you made to the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence on October 27, when you said that you had to transfer 300 resources over to national security from other areas of policing. This raises the question of whether you have adequate resources to actually deal with the nature of the threats we're facing at present. Do you have any comments on that today?

Commr Bob Paulson: The answer to that question is, yes, we have enough resources to deal with the threat we're facing, but again, as you've referenced in my testimony at the Senate and again today, we're taking now a little over 600 resources from other areas of our federal responsibility to transfer those full-time equivalent positions into the counterterrorism world.

As I say, it's a question of prioritizing. We have enough people who are working these cases, but they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Could you give us some idea of where those resources are coming from, in other words, what are you shifting from in order to focus on counterterrorism?

Commr Bob Paulson: Right. We're shifting our federal resources, so things from organized crime cases, drug cases, financial integrity cases, the federal mandate. I should also say that we are relying on the great partnerships we have with police forces across this country. We have about 60 resources brought in from other police forces to work with us. Some of the major city police forces have been great in terms of stepping up and taking some of the load. I think it's a phenomenon that is affecting all of the police community across Canada.

That's the short answer.

• (1130)

Mr. Randall Garrison: My second question has to do with counter-radicalization programs. You said in your statement that Mr. Zehaf-Bibeau had become influenced by extremist ideology.

I'm really asking about the progress of the RCMP's strategy for counter-radicalization, which some have characterized as sitting on the shelf for a very long time. Can you advise us on what progress is being made on working with communities in particular to counter radicalization?

Commr Bob Paulson: I don't think that's a fair characterization. It's not sitting on a shelf.

Let me just start by saying that in terms of our responsibility as the RCMP, our mandate, established by the RCMP Act, contemplates us doing a couple of things. One of them is to pursue and apprehend offenders. The other thing is to prevent crime. In that sense we have, and always have had, a very robust crime prevention approach to our responsibilities. It's perhaps trite to say that if you can prevent crime, you don't have to investigate it. It's getting to be very complex and very labour intensive to investigate, to a criminal justice outcome, crime.

That said, as I've testified at this committee several times, we have talked about some of the things we are doing in our terrorist prevention regime, from our counterterrorism information officers to our community outreach programs to now the application of what is commonly referred to as a hub kind of approach to dealing with opportunities, because not all of these offenders, not all of these individuals, present as high-likelihood success stories for an intervention, for a prevention action.

Within our high-risk-individual framework, we have developed a system whereby individuals are identified. If they present a risk, our primary responsibility is to keep Canadians safe, so we have investigative measures that we apply. Judicial interventions are sought—a peace bond is one of the issues in this new legislation—to try to bring conditions to mitigate the threat. For those people where we assess that they are good candidates for intervention, we will bring together a host of resources that already exist within many communities to try to intervene, to try to engage with family members, and to bring in counsellors, religious authorities, and others who can intervene to try to dissuade the individual from pursuing this path of radicalization.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

I'd like to turn my last minute over to Madam Doré Lefebvre.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Paulson, thank you for being with us at this committee. I think it is important that we review the events that took place on October 22.

I want to ask you a brief question on a particular aspect and I hope you will be able to talk about it. I know that you are carrying out an investigation, but can you tell me whether Mr. Zehaf-Bibeau had a history of mental illness? Are you considering that aspect in your investigation of the events of October 22?

Commr Bob Paulson: Thank you for your question.

We are considering all aspects of his life. We have not found that he had had any particular mental health challenges. I know that there were interventions.

[English]

Nevertheless, the evidence that we have acquired does not speak to any mental health issues. As I said in the first part of my answer,

there is a history of mental health issues for him, but we're not pursuing that in the sense of your question.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Doré Lefebvre.

Mr. Norlock, you have the floor, sir.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, thank you very much for the job that you and your members are doing for Canadians.

I know my friends across the way like to talk about process, but they skirt around the edges of the real issues here and that is the alarming increase in terrorist activities in Canada. I know that you and your members have one of the greatest responsibilities, and that is keeping the citizens of Canada safe.

At this stage of the investigation, is it your opinion that of the 400-plus people you have interviewed, had anyone taken the advice of police forces, law enforcement agencies across Canada, and some members of Parliament like myself who have stated that if they see something that they think is wrong, or that someone's exhibiting terrorist-type behaviours, or there's something suspicious, that they should contact the local authorities? Without jeopardizing the investigation, did any of that occur during the statement taking, or even before?

•(1135)

Commr Bob Paulson: Thank you for the question.

I would say this: I think that there were opportunities for some people to have recognized behaviours that ought to have been reported to the authorities, so yes, I think there were opportunities where some of the individuals who were close to Mr. Zehaf-Bibeau could have reported him. I would say also that it's important to understand that our active investigation is not simply focused on establishing the timeline of Mr. Zehaf-Bibeau. The active investigation is pursuing those who may have actively contributed to his development and his radicalization. In that sense, I just wanted to sort of frame up the investigation, that we are actively investigating individuals who may have contributed to his crimes.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Would I be correct in saying that you and the members of the RCMP, as well as other law enforcement agencies, and anyone else would recommend to Canadians that if they see something, or hear something that makes them suspicious that they will not be criticized by their local law enforcement authorities, and as a matter of fact, they would welcome the information to help thwart something terrible from happening down the road, like what happened here on October 22?

Commr Bob Paulson: Absolutely. I think I would even go a bit further to reassure people, particularly family members, and I think that's where the greatest opportunity and confusion arises. I'll use the drug analogy, that if parents see their children beginning to experiment in drugs, I have experienced personally parents being reticent to engage authorities or community resources to intervene to try and dissuade their children from using drugs because they're afraid that we're going to put their child in jail. That sentiment is prevalent in some communities, particularly in the counterterrorism operations that we are doing. Part of our outreach is to try and have some credibility and some positive relationships with community members so that they know that at an early intervention we can bring to bear and marshal resources to get in front of some of these things, because as we've seen with this attack, this is how it ends, and it's not acceptable.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Would it be correct to say that by doing that, by coming out and identifying, that you can actually prevent someone from having to go to jail because they followed through with some action?

Commr Bob Paulson: Absolutely.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Falk.

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes, Mr. Falk.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Commissioner, for attending here this morning.

Based on the information we saw in the video, would you agree that Mr. Zehaf-Bibeau clearly identifies or affiliates himself with known terrorist organizations?

Commr Bob Paulson: I think he identifies himself as "we the mujahedeen of this world".

Mr. Ted Falk: What he is about to do is clearly a terrorist act, and he identifies it as that?

Commr Bob Paulson: Yes, he is going after soldiers.

Mr. Ted Falk: I was in this room on that day with my colleagues, and that event is very real. It has been burned into my memory. I would certainly envision it as an act of terrorism as well.

In your testimony, sir, you stated that he applied for a passport in Vancouver and was told it would not be coming forthwith. He then made his way to Ottawa, and within a couple of hours of coming to Ottawa he went directly to the Libyan embassy and applied for a passport there. He was again told that there were discrepancies and that there would be a time delay.

In instances like that, are there mechanisms in place so that when an individual is not approved for a passport, that fact is communicated to law enforcement agencies or the RCMP?

• (1140)

Commr Bob Paulson: Yes. We have a standing task force that we created with other agencies—CSIS, CBSA, the military occasionally, CIC, and passport people—to do that very thing, because I think we recognize that in this case, an aggravating or triggering element to his experience was his frustration over the passport business. When we get in front of a high-risk traveller and say that a passport will be removed, the decision to do that has been made in this joint

operation centre with a view to the propriety and legality of taking the steps we want to take, but also to the impact that doing so may have on other investigations and processes. It's what we refer to as a deconfliction mechanism to say if we are going to take somebody's passport away from them, we need to assess that individual and his possible reaction to that act, and we need to be positioned to intercept any sort of adverse action. It's an elaborate and sophisticated assessment system.

The Chair: Mr. Easter, you have the floor, sir.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Commissioner, for appearing and showing the video.

For me, as for others, it does bring back very sad memories of the day this act of terror or violence happened.

I'll admit right up front that I am a little concerned—and to your credit, you said this—that the video is not complete and that 18 seconds have been edited out. I listened to your explanation.

I think that's going to raise some suspicions as to what was left out and why. I wonder if you can explain, without compromising the investigation in any way, why that part of the video was left out, or is what you have written in words the limit you can go to?

Commr Bob Paulson: I framed it as being the result of sound operational decisions or reasons.

Part of the challenge in this case and in others is to ensure that the integrity of the investigative process is preserved. That's not because we want to be secretive, but because at the end of the day, there's a whole big accountability hammer that comes down on us as to how we've conducted ourselves, how we've investigated, how we've behaved, and how we can demonstrate the purity of the evidence we are putting forward.

Believe me, we have worked through the reasoning. As I said, I was originally committed to having the whole video released, but the operational decision-makers began to engage me, as I do them, with regard to the reasons I would want to do this or not want to do this, not unlike the situation with other cases. The rationale is there. Hopefully it will be available for review.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'm not in any way questioning your judgment. We accept that. I do raise it as an issue.

We in Canada operate very differently in our terrorism-alert system than they do in the United States. They have their colour codes, etc. I've always maintained that government officials, police authorities, have to be careful not to raise the fear factor, but certainly to indicate to Canadians that they have to be vigilant. In Zehaf-Bibeau's statement he says, "So we are retaliating, the Mujahedin of this world." He goes on to say, "...we'll not cease until you guys decide to be a peaceful country and stay to your own...", etc. That's pretty serious language.

Can you give us any indication of where we are in terms of the terrorist threat level in Canada compared to the last number of years? We do have Bill C-51 coming up. I think we need to be brutally honest with Canadians about the concern, but not to exaggerate it and claim there's a terrorist under every rock.

Can you give us any indication in that regard?

•(1145)

Commr Bob Paulson: Formally, the Integrated Threat Assessment Centre and CSIS have set our threat level at medium. That has been widely distributed and understood. It is an elevated level from where it was before.

As I've said in response to some of the questions or perhaps in my remarks, I've not seen before the tempo, pace, and volume of counterterrorism investigations domestically as I've seen in this last year. It's been an *x* equals *y* kind of line going up. I made what I had, sort of tongue-in-cheek, referred to as a "rookie mistake" of sharing with you the number of high-risk travellers we were tracking, and there have been lots of questions about that. I don't know that giving a number is helpful. I just tell you that it's on the increase from the situation previously, when we had transferred 300 resources from other operations into counterterrorism, and now when we've transferred over 600 resources.

Hon. Wayne Easter: That leads me to something I think is also of great a concern, the operational resources, both human and technological, for the RCMP, CSIS, and others to do the job you're asked to do. Just passing a law without resources is not going to do the job.

The main estimates tabled recently show there's a \$132 million decrease in the RCMP's budget in 2014-15 from the year before. You've indicated in response to Mr. Garrison the switch in resources to counterterrorism.

There's no question that the RCMP would always like to have more money, as I'm sure other agencies would as well. However, is there a growing concern that on the operational side the resources are not being applied to both policing and RCMP and security agencies at the federal level to do the job you're asked to do?

Commr Bob Paulson: I think it all turns on your very last sentence regarding the job we're asked to do.

As I said in response to Mr. Garrison's question, we are addressing the counterterrorism threat with resources from other areas. We have now reached a point in the RCMP where we can be very transparent and very precise in demonstrating the impact this has. The RCMP has had a bad reputation around this town for lapsing money and not spending all of our budget. I tell you solemnly that we are in a year that's going to have a 0.5% lapse in our appropriation, which might be argued to be bad management. However, all of our money is being spent. I'm happy—wrong word—content to move resources around to address the greatest threat. I just don't think it's sustainable to maintain our programs in other areas when we are drawing resources from them to address this threat.

•(1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Again, I appreciate your being here today, Mr. Paulson.

I think our task as parliamentarians now is to try to learn from this incident, to learn what we can do as parliamentarians to try to help keep Canadians safe. If I understand you correctly, you said in your opening statement that you had enough information, and the

legislation that exists currently would have been adequate to charge Mr. Zehaf-Bibeau with terrorism.

Commr Bob Paulson: I didn't frame it that way, but I think I talked about charging him, so in that sense....

Mr. Randall Garrison: You would have had no difficulty under the existing legislation in laying charges as a result of this incident.

Commr Bob Paulson: No, based on the evidence that we've accumulated now, I would have no difficulty charging him with the terrorism offence that I spoke of.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

You say that you are still investigating individuals who may have contributed to the incident, or the acts, and I appreciate and understand that.

Have you found any legislative or statutory impediment to investigating this incident?

Commr Bob Paulson: You know, the investigation and presentation of evidence in a criminal context is a very complex and challenging environment, and....

No, I haven't. I haven't had any sort of statutory impediment.

What I want to say, and what I'm dancing around, is this. Let me use this recent peace bond example from Montreal. It was widely reported that a young man was brought before the courts to be placed on a peace bond. A peace bond is the lowest of state interventions in a person's freedom, and it has to be done on a demonstrable, articulable basis: the fear that he is going to do something bad.

To make my point quickly, we presented our case. We had the Attorney General's consent to do that. We brought him in to court and it was dismissed, put off for a month. In this environment, with the framework that I am managing, thinking that we are going to mitigate the threat that we say this individual poses by having him subject to a peace bond, we don't have that peace bond. There's a month before we decide whether there is a peace bond. What are we doing for a month on this guy? If he does something that we're afraid of, who's going to hold that can? That's going to be me.

My point is that while the legislation, and the proposed legislation, is adequate, and the proposed legislation would be helpful, I think we need to rethink in this country how we manage the courts, frankly.

Mr. Randall Garrison: In this case would it be a question of court resources?

Commr Bob Paulson: I don't know. I don't know what it is.

We brought him before the courts. The prosecution brought him before the courts. It was put off for a month. That doesn't seem reasonable. It doesn't seem consistent with what we're trying to advance.

Mr. Randall Garrison: But as far as you know, it had nothing to do with the ability to get a peace bond. It's to do with court functions, then.

Commr Bob Paulson: I don't know.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Okay.

I have just a minute left, so perhaps I can ask you this. You raised the issue of Mr. Zehaf-Bibeau's application for a passport. Did you run into any problems, or was there any problem, with information sharing around that from Passports to the RCMP?

Commr Bob Paulson: No.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I think you said in some media reports—I'm sure you may have to correct those, as we often do—that Mr. Zehaf-Bibeau appeared to be coming to Ottawa on the passport question. There were some who then characterized that as saying the incident that took place was his plan B. Can you comment further on that?

Commr Bob Paulson: I don't think we have enough evidence to conclude. I still think it's reasonable to suspect that when he was encountering difficulty getting a passport issued in Vancouver that... I'm not inside his head. There is some evidence to suggest that he wanted to come to Ottawa to get a passport and he was going to take this up with the various authorities that he wanted to take it up with.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Garrison.

Ms. Ablonczy, please.

• (1155)

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Certainly, today's broadcasting of this video brought back some very emotional memories, not just for those of us here but for the entire nation, which is outraged at what happened in the very seat of our Parliament and our government. I'm proud to say that it strengthened the resolve of Canadians to push back and to fight this kind of terrorism.

You mentioned that the terrorist was in contact with individuals both in Ottawa and in British Columbia, and that you've been able to identify some of the individuals. The terrorist himself says in the video that “we are retaliating” and suggests that somehow Canada is at fault here. I guess that would include countries like France, Denmark, and Australia, which have also experienced these kinds of terrorist attacks in very recent times. My question is, how broad a network was involved in this attack in Parliament?

Commr Bob Paulson: Well, that's difficult to say. I think that on the one hand I might say that the entire jihadist movement is an inspiring sort of state of being that is attracting and developing some of these individuals. I also think and I'm persuaded that Zehaf-Bibeau didn't come to this act alone. I think the broader network, if you can call it that, is the movement, and then there are individuals within that movement who are more tightly connected and would influence individuals like Zehaf-Bibeau and others.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Have you been able to identify some of the proximate actors in this act of terror and tie them definitively to the act?

Commr Bob Paulson: Well, no, because we haven't brought any charges yet. The objective of this investigation is to do just what you've asked.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: I guess we're anxious to get to the bottom of exactly who was involved and how broad the planning was.

Commr Bob Paulson: Well, hopefully we can deliver on that.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: I hope so.

Commr Bob Paulson: It's an uphill battle.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: I'll turn to my colleague Mr. Zimmer.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Thank you again for coming, Commissioner.

I'll follow up on one thing you said. Would it be accurate to say that legislation is only good if it's upheld by the courts?

Commr Bob Paulson: Well, yes, obviously.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I have another question. I guess I would follow along with my colleagues in saying it's interesting to be in the same room where, just feet away, the person came through with guns blazing. It's interesting to be in the same room and dealing with it on the other side. It's appropriate, too, in a lot of ways, that we're back.

I wanted to make a statement or ask a question on behalf of Canadians. Is terrorism a present danger in Canadian society? What would you say? What term would you use for it?

Again, for us, we want to keep our citizens safe, as you've just said. We want to do the same thing, but we want to live in a free society. I have kids and I want them to live a happy life, like most people and parents do. What would you say to Canadians today?

Commr Bob Paulson: What I do say to people is that it's a growing threat. People don't need to be afraid. People need to be engaged. People need to be aware. I think that's how I'd frame it.

Make no mistake, it's a growing presence, and it's not only in Canada but in most of our partner countries, at a level that is challenging us all.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Thank you.

The Chair: We have exhausted our time.

On behalf of our entire committee, Commissioner Paulson, thank you so much not only for attending here today and getting involved in the Qs and As, but also thank you very much for presenting the video.

I would like to thank the committee members for coming in.

We have also had significant media attention. I want to thank the media for being courteous and respectful, and for trying to work with us as we face what many, many people consider may be one of the greatest challenges of our generation. Thank you very kindly.

The meeting is adjourned.

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