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Chair: Mrs. Karen McCrimmon





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• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.)):** Thank you everyone. We will call this meeting to order.

I'd like to express a welcome from all the members of the committee to our very esteemed guests who are here with us today. Thank you.

We have a bit of business to do before we get into the testimony, because we have not approved the subcommittee minutes. I wanted to ask permission to deal with the subcommittee recommendations at the end, during committee business time.

Is everyone all right with that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for that.

I will therefore hand it over to our esteemed guests and welcome them to make their opening statements.

Thank you.

[Translation]

**MGen Jocelyn Paul (Director General, International Security Policy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Department of National Defence):** Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I am Major-General Jocelyn Paul, and I am the Director General of International Security Policy at the Department of National Defence.

[English]

This means I am responsible for managing our defence and international security relationships and providing advice on international defence relations.

[Translation]

I am here with Lieutenant-General Mike Rouleau, Commander of the Canadian Joint Operations Command.

[English]

I am also joined by Sandra McCardell, director general of the Middle East bureau, and Mr. Giles Norman, the executive director of security and defence relations, both from Global Affairs.

It's a pleasure to be here today.

My intent is to provide you with a high-level overview of Operation Impact before turning to General Rouleau, who will provide you with more details on the dynamics in theatre.

[Translation]

Operation Impact is the military component of Canada's whole-of-government response to Daesh in Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

[English]

Through this strategy, Canada is investing up to \$3.5 billion over five years to help set the conditions for security and stability and to reduce human suffering.

Under this strategy, the Canadian Armed Forces contributes to the Global Coalition against Daesh. We contribute to NATO mission Iraq, and we also provide bilateral training and assistance to both Jordan and Lebanon. While distinct, these activities all work towards the common objective of strengthening the capacity of regional security forces, so that they can contain the threat posed by Daesh.

[Translation]

Let me take a few minutes to walk through each of these activities.

The Coalition was established in 2014 and includes 82 member countries and organizations committed to tackling Daesh on all fronts.

[English]

In addition to military operations, it includes four civilian-led lines of effort. The first one is stabilizing liberated areas. Second is preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters. Third is dismantling Daesh financing and economic infrastructure. Fourth is countering Daesh propaganda.

Countries may contribute to one or more of the coalition's lines of effort based on their expertise and capabilities. Canada is one of the few coalition members that contributes to all five lines of effort: military and civilian.

[Translation]

While NATO had been working with the Iraqi security forces for some time, NATO Mission Iraq was established in 2018 to complement the Coalition's counter-Daesh operations.

[English]

NMI, the NATO mission in Iraq, is a non-combat training mission focused on strengthening the capacity of Iraq's Ministry of Defense, the office of the national security adviser and relevant national security institutions. More than 20 countries contribute to NMI. We are proud to have led that mission for its first two years.

[Translation]

Canada also deploys training and assistance teams to Jordan and Lebanon to strengthen their capacity to withstand Daesh and the spillover effects of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria.

[English]

This regional capacity building includes the delivery of training, infrastructure development and equipment. In all of these efforts, we respect the sovereignty of our partner nations. I would emphasize that we are in Iraq at the invitation of the government.

[Translation]

Since we first deployed to Iraq in 2014, the Coalition and the Iraqi security forces have made tremendous progress in the fight against Daesh. But our mission is not over, and the Coalition and NATO are at an important juncture.

[English]

As the threat landscape in Iraq changes and the needs of our partners and forces evolve, both missions will have to adapt together. In February, NATO defence ministers agreed in principle to expand the NATO mission in Iraq so that it can take on some of the coalition training activities. We expect that these deliberations will be iterative and Iraqi-led.

I would like to close with a reminder that, while we are here to talk about Operation Impact, the military is only one piece of the puzzle. Through our whole-of-government initiatives, and in collaboration with allies and partners, we are working to set the conditions for long-term success so that our regional partners can tackle the maligned ideology that has created so much suffering in the region.

• (1535)

[Translation]

I trust that this context is helpful, and I thank you for your attention. I will now turn the floor to General Rouleau.

**LGen Mike Rouleau (Commander, Canadian Joint Operations Command, Department of National Defence):** Good afternoon, Madam Chair, honourable members.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today alongside Major-General Paul and my colleagues from Global Affairs Canada to provide you with up-to-date information on Operation Impact.

I commend the committee for wanting to learn more about this complex, rapidly evolving mission on behalf of Canadians and I am eager to provide whatever clarity and understanding that I can from my perspective as the operational commander.

[English]

Before taking your questions, I'd like to briefly address three points to help frame the discussion.

First, I'll describe my role as the commander of Canada's joint operations command and what topics I can and cannot speak to from that position.

Second, I'll speak to different elements of Operation Impact, as described by Major-General Paul, and clarify which are under my direct command and control and which are not.

Third, I will provide you with an update on the latest developments on the ground, what's been happening there and where I believe the mission is headed in the near run.

[Translation]

Let's talk about my role as Commander Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC). First, regarding my roles and responsibilities, let me say that I work on behalf of the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Vance, to provide leadership and alignment of over 20 Canadian Armed Forces operations at home and around the world.

I do not get to pick which operations I command or the ends they are meant to achieve. These are given to me through chief of the defence staff direction, which is in turn shaped by Government of Canada policy.

[English]

Within that context, I'd be more than pleased to speak to you, at a level of detail that does not risk the security of our military capabilities or deployed personnel, about how the forces under my command are executing Operation Impact, as it was assigned to me.

There are currently up to 850 military personnel assigned to Op Impact and, as Major-General Paul noted, these forces are divided into three parts. There is our U.S.-led coalition conducting Operation Inherent Resolve. The second one is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's mission in Iraq, commonly referred to as NMI. Third, there are two Canadian training and assistance teams, CTATs, that are deployed to Jordan and Lebanon. In the discussion, we sometimes lose sight of these Jordan and Lebanon elements when we talk about Operation Impact. We tend to focus exclusively on Iraq, but it's a regional piece.

The defined joint operations area for this operation includes the countries of Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. It is important that the committee understand that, while I am ultimately responsible for all Op Impact personnel from a national perspective, I do not exercise daily command and control of all of these elements. Specifically, although the NATO training mission in Iraq is currently led by a Canadian officer, Major-General Carignan, she and the approximately 200 Canadian Armed Forces personnel working in NMI answer to a NATO chain of command and not to the Canadian chain of command. In addition, the majority of activities conducted by Canadian special operations forces in Iraq are commanded by the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command.

[*Translation*]

Let me now go over an operational update.

Now, Madam Chair, having clarified those few points, allow me to provide you with a quick overview of the situation on the ground for Operation Impact, which remains somewhat fluid, particularly in Iraq.

Currently, most of the enhanced force protection measures that we put in place following the U.S. airstrike that killed Iranian General Qassem Soleimani on January 3—including the pause in training operations and the relocation of Canadian personnel—remain in place.

Nevertheless, despite ongoing tension and uncertainty, the multinational commitment to defeating Daesh remains, and military operations are gradually returning to normal.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Under coalition leadership, joint military operations against Daesh have resumed, and I have authorized the redeployment of certain Canadian personnel from Canada to Kuwait in anticipation of moving them into Iraq in the coming days to ultimately resume their training mission as the situation permits. To be clear, these moves are conditions-based, not time-based, and I cannot predict exactly when the resumption will take place.

A very short few days ago, it appeared that we would be in a position to resume operations imminently, but now the latest source of uncertainty affecting the timeline of the mission is the spread of novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. I can assure you that we are monitoring the situation closely, taking steps to protect our personnel and maintaining the operational flexibility to get back to our core business as soon as the situation allows.

In looking ahead, at this point, as a result of force protection and various other considerations, the immediate future of Operation Impact is not clear. However, what is clear is that the operational mandate to support the coalition and NMI and to conduct capacity building in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon extends until March 31, 2021. I intend to do everything with my team and within our capacity to fulfill that mandate until the CDS directs me otherwise.

I've been very fortunate to witness the Canadian Armed Forces and their partners make tremendous progress against Daesh over the past few years. I got promoted to general in 2014. Shortly thereafter, when I was commanding, we put special forces into Iraq, so I've personally been involved in this mission since September of 2014 as a commander of either a special forces command or, now, CJOC.

We now find ourselves in a crucial phase of the mission where, having helped defeat Daesh militarily, we must now help consolidate that defeat and ensure that Daesh cannot return. Achieving this will require a nuanced understanding of various regional dynamics and close collaboration with civilian partners. It will also require strong leadership on the ground, along with flexibility and agility to respond to challenges and changing circumstances.

I am proud to say that the commanders and forces under my command exhibit all these qualities. I saw these on display in early January as we successfully adapted to the very rapid changes on January 3, as a result of the strike, to protect our forces and preserve our operational capabilities.

[*Translation*]

If we can retain this level of leadership and collaboration going forward in Operation Impact, then Canada will continue to make a contribution we can be proud of.

I thank you for your time and welcome any questions you may have.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I thank the witnesses for their testimony. That was very helpful.

We'll move on to the questions now, with Monsieur Martel.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Thank you for being here today.

Mr. Rouleau and Mr. Paul, I would like to talk about the lack of ground air defence, which hinders our operations.

Given that the Iranian regime has demonstrated a willingness and ability to attack allied bases with missiles, do we plan to have such a system?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** In terms of protection and ground air defence, all our bases in Iraq are protected by the U.S. We are looking at possibly consolidating our bases, but I can assure you that every base has air defence protection, and beyond every base, the tactical sector has some protection, more broadly, from the U.S. forces.

As for acquiring new systems for Canada, Madam Chair, I cannot comment. The commander of the army would be able to do so.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** If the Iraqi government formally asked the Americans to leave Iraq, what factors would Canada have to consider in order to continue Operation Impact?

• (1545)

**MGen Jocelyn Paul:** As I mentioned in my presentation, we are there because the Iraqi government invited us. There is currently a dialogue between NATO and the Iraqi government about extending the NATO mission in Iraq. The discussion is ongoing. There have been exchanges between the Secretary General of NATO and the current Prime Minister.

We are hopeful that, with the Iraqi government, we will be able to clarify the future of the mandate. Having said that, the resources that the U.S. is bringing to the region are essential to the conduct of both missions.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Some U.S. personnel have suffered brain injuries. Have members of the Canadian Armed Forces suffered similar injuries?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** No. To my knowledge, there have been no cases of traumatic brain injuries among Canadian Armed Forces personnel. However, it should be pointed out that our people in Erbil were not as close to the explosions as they would have been at Ain al-Asad air base, for example.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** After the attacks, additional protections were clearly put in place. Will they remain in place permanently?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Thank you for your question.

Even before the attacks, we made adjustments on the ground, because we had information suggesting the possibility of an attack. After the attacks, we took other measures, and we will actually maintain some of them forever, or for as long as we are there. However, for reasons of operational security, I cannot specify what those measures are.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Spengemann.

**Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all four of you for your service and, through you, my thanks to the men and women you represent, your teams.

I've had the privilege of spending a substantial amount of time in Iraq as a UN official. It's always an extremely welcome opportunity to circle back and to receive an update, so thank you for being here.

I would like to use my time to focus on—you mentioned this, General—the concept of “whole of government” and to start out with a bit of the regional context from an Iraqi perspective, but also from a regional perspective. I'll ask you and also your colleagues from Global Affairs this. If you were to diagnose what led to the rapid ascent of Daesh, what were some of the security-related factors that permitted this organization to become what it was, and what factors need to be put in place to prevent its renaissance or potentially even another organization taking its place?

**MGen Jocelyn Paul:** This is an extremely complex region. You've been out there. You've seen it yourself.

From a military perspective, when Daesh emerged, the Iraqi security forces ended up having a few challenges. I think everybody was extremely surprised to see the speed at which Daesh grew. It was extremely fast.

This is why our mandate is so important—the NATO mandate, the coalition mandate. A key aspect of it is training local security forces. We need to do our best to ensure that the Government of Iraq and its security apparatus are going to be in a better position to tackle that type of threat if it emerges in the future.

The root cause of the emergence of that threat is multi-faceted. There is a cultural aspect and a historical aspect. There's a faith aspect to it, and there's also an economic aspect. We could be talking about it for quite a long time.

Given the complexity of what's going on, this is why it was so important for us to work in the region with that whole-of-government mandate. There's no doubt in my mind that the military instrument alone will not be sufficient at all.

That may be a good segue for letting my colleagues from GAC expand a little more.

• (1550)

**Ms. Sandra McCardell (Director General, Middle East, Middle East Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me the opportunity to answer that question beyond the security aspects.

What is clear is that the rise and success of Daesh, the Islamic State, not only in Iraq but across the world, is something that will be preoccupying us for a very long time. This is an ideology, an organization, that has found expression across the world, to the shock of most democratic societies where it has taken root.

There are a number of causes that have been identified, and you're likely familiar with them. Some of them speak to exclusion from society, a lack of acceptance in the societies where those who espouse this ideology have been living. At some point, too, there is a lack of hope, a lack of economic opportunity. There is a wide range of reasons that draw individuals to espouse an ideology as heinous as that of the Islamic State.

To link up with the work of Operation Impact, I think we need to look at why this group found footing, particularly in Iraq and Syria, and was so successful in attracting individuals from literally across the world. In that, I think there is much to speak about in terms of governance. The ability of Daesh to take root finds itself in the weakness of the Iraqi government and its inability to secure its territory and provide services for its people.

With that, one of the areas in which we work with our partners from the Department of National Defence is in looking at strengthening the state. Part of the work that they do is with Iraqi security forces. There are others who work with reinforcing police capacity as well, to be able to provide the security that the country needs.

As well, we see that there's a need to support the unity, stability, diversity and democracy of Iraq and to provide a governance structure that allows all Iraqis to find their place in their society.

Finally, we'd also point to a lack of respect for human rights, which was present in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and through.... With that, we're working to promote human rights, particularly with minorities, women and girls, so that overall we can provide a society that is resilient to the ideology of Daesh, not only by the capacity of the state to protect its citizens but also because of the strong governance and respect for human rights that the Iraqi government is meant to espouse through our efforts.

**Mr. Sven Spengemann:** I think I'm just about out of time, though there may be a chance to circle back.

Thank you very much for those answers.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Boudrias, it's your turn.

**Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ):** Thank you.

I would like to talk about protecting the forces deployed in the region as part of the operation as such. At the beginning of the year, we were all concerned and surprised by the Iraqi attack on various places, which is largely unknown.

In the event of new attacks or new tensions, or for medical reasons—think of the coronavirus—would we have the depth and the flexibility to be fully autonomous, whether logistically or in terms of occupying bases and different locations, meaning with no possibility of co-operation with other partners?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Thank you for your question.

The short answer is no.

When we joined the coalition, we became dependent in various ways, to some extent, but we are mostly dependent on the United States. In terms of basic communication systems, of course we have our own systems, but the architecture of the intelligence system is based on the American system. I am thinking in particular of C4I, which stands for “command, control, communications, computers and intelligence”, in terms of surveillance, air strikes and protection of the forces at the various bases. This is done by the Americans. In terms of logistics, many contracts are done through U.S. forces.

So we are dependent on the United States, or the coalition, if you like, in some respects. Having said that, we try to be as self-sufficient as possible. For example, this week, because of COVID-19, we sent more personal protective equipment to our medical forces in Iraq and Kuwait.

We believe we are able to continue the mission under conditions such as those of January 3, the worst night of the mission to date. For example, after the attack, we made sure that we had enough munitions on the ground. We increased Canada's munitions in Iraq. I am more comfortable today than I was on January 3. I think we are in a good position.

In terms of COVID-19, within Joint Task Force-Iraq we are able to do four things.

• (1555)

[*English*]

We can do the screening. We can do the treatment. We can do the quarantine, if necessary, and we can do the evacuation.

[*Translation*]

If our troops contract COVID-19, we have the medical resources to take care of them. This morning, I asked our forces in Iraq whether we have the medical resources we need if the worst predictions of the number of people infected were to materialize, and I was told yes, without hesitation. So I'm not worried about that.

**Mr. Michel Boudrias:** That's reassuring. I would also like to congratulate you on all the efforts currently being made in the re-

gion. I actually had the opportunity to visit Kuwait shortly before Christmas. That gave me a good picture of the situation. I was satisfied that our forces are in good hands.

I will continue on another topic: the enemy force, in this case Daesh. As we know, we cannot kill ideas with bullets.

Are we conducting counter-insurgency operations, psychological operations or public education operations in Iraq and Syria, either with our partners or on our own? Are you aware of such measures?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** The special forces, both from Canada and elsewhere, are working with the Iraqi forces to contain what's left of Daesh. It's no longer a coherent military force with its own territory as it was in 2014-15. It is a group of people trying to lead an insurgency. So the job of special forces is to contain Daesh to prevent it from restoring itself.

We are aware of the threat posed by Daesh. Whenever there is political instability and our missions are not progressing is a good time for the people of Daesh because it gives them a chance to communicate with each other and to move around.

However, Daesh is not the only threat on the ground. There are also Shia groups. We are aware that they are not completely controlled by the government of Iraq and that they can take orders from Iran. We are also concerned about the threat posed by Shia militia groups.

**Mr. Michel Boudrias:** Thank you, General.

I have finished, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bachrach.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for being here today. I'd like to echo the comments of my colleague in thanking you for your service. If you could convey that to the men and women who also work on behalf of our country it would be much appreciated.

My question has to do with your remarks at the beginning about military operations gradually returning to normal. I'm curious if you could inform the committee as to whether the scope of the mission has remained the same, and whether changes to the scope would be required to ensure its success moving forward.

• (1600)

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** From the ground up, if you will, the scope has not changed. The essential fabric of the mandate is absolutely as it was, and that is to stabilize the region, to improve security, to assist with other partners in inclusive governance and to isolate and counter the VEO threat. From an Operation Inherent Resolve perspective, again it's unchanged: degrade Daesh, enable Government of Iraq security and governance—OIR does the same for Syrian security and governance—and finally, to provide for partner nation defence.

There has been no change to the core mandate. Of course, all of the activities were suspended immediately after the strike, because we were very uncertain of what was happening on the ground. I implemented a full stop. We call it “get in the squat”. It's a “hunker down, look out to make sure you're not going to be attacked and defend yourself” sort of thing. In the days that immediately followed, we started repositioning non-essential people out of Iraq into Kuwait to minimize the footprint of how many people were in certain locations if other missiles were going to be launched. I can say that staying in the squat only lasted for a number of days for the Lebanon and Jordan missions, and then I allowed them to resume their core training. In Iraq, we remained in that posture. At the end of January, the chief of the defence staff for Iraq sent a letter to the coalition saying they were prepared to have us resume counter-Daesh operations.

I would hasten to add that, while we were not helping the Iraqis, they were prosecuting certain counter-Daesh operations alone, which is in itself a metric for some success that we should all be reminded of.

There has been limited work that has recommenced in the counter-Daesh space since the end of January, but we are still not in the space where we have recommenced core training and capacity building. That remains suspended for the time being.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** If I may, you mentioned one measure of success. I'm wondering if you could expand a little on what other measures of success you look at when evaluating the impact of the overall operation.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** In my headquarters, we've put an emphasis on our ability to measure and adjust, and we're wrapping our heads around exactly what that means. I am hopeful that in the next six months we'll start to see the fruit of some of that renewed focus, not just focusing on the execution but actually assessing what we're doing and adjusting.

Here are a few examples. In Lebanon, we have trained the Lebanese forces to operate in winter environments, and there has been a clear enabling of their ability to do that in the Beqaa Valley. We were training ISF in Qayyarah West on wide area security tasks and we have worked ourselves out of a job. In the next three months, it'll be done. We've trained the Iraqis and they will now train themselves. Just this week, the Iraqis conducted a mission in Anbar province, where 1,000 Iraqi security forces operated in Anbar to root out elements of Daesh. That was an exclusively Iraqi mission. We have the female engagement team in Jordan, which has clearly elevated the Jordanian armed forces' ability to assimilate, adequately train and leverage female troops.

Those are just a few touch points.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Madam Gallant.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Turkey's difficult relationship with the rest of NATO and its relationship with Russia are complicating factors to operations in the region. How has that impacted, if at all, our ability establish the conditions for peace and stability in the region?

**Ms. Sandra McCardell:** Certainly, the situation that has brought Turkey into this question around Operation Impact is, of course, the situation in Syria, specifically in Idlib. Certainly, there have been discussions under way at NATO to look at how that organization can work with Turkey.

There have been many challenges. I think you will recall that when Turkey launched Operation Peace Spring into northeast Syria, Canada responded to that and criticized Turkey, as did many of our like-minded colleagues. Obviously, the situation has evolved since then, and with the number of migrants Turkey has taken in and is supporting in Turkey, clearly they have engaged in an effort to protect their borders.

How it has engaged with Russia to do that has resulted in a ceasefire. While we welcome any step that will end the violence against civilians in Syria and Idlib, that ceasefire does not give confidence that we will be enduring the efforts to bring the direct confrontation between Syria and Turkey to a close. It was much more about the relationship between Russia and Syria than it was about the civilians of Idlib.

While we've welcomed that step thus far, we're not certain how long it will last. We can remain committed to the political process led by the UN, although many are frustrated by the lack of progress on that track. We will continue to work strongly with our NATO allies, but we're very conscious of the suffering of the civilians in Syria.

• (1605)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Then it's not going to have an impact on what our women and men over there are doing.

**Ms. Sandra McCardell:** I will leave that part for the general to respond to.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** From my perspective, with regard to the forces I command in Iraq, there's no material impact to the business we're doing in Iraq because of what's happening in Idlib. At the operational level, I am not feeling that at this time.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** While the terrorists have been diminished, they're still there and they're putting up a more ferocious counterattack now that they are being smoked out. Apparently the United States had its first casualties as a consequence of the heightened work that's being done to get rid of the terrorists.

How is Canada preparing the Iraqi military for the counterterrorism and counter-insurgency tactics that will be required to permanently destroy them?



**LGen Mike Rouleau:** I would just disagree a little with the premise of the question in the sense that these are not the first casualties the U.S. has taken in the fight against Daesh. There have been troops killed in action before this. I think it just broke in the open press a couple of hours ago that the U.S. had suffered two killed in action in a counter-Daesh operation in the area of the Hamrin mountains just to the west of Kirkuk. We're tracking that.

How are we helping them from a counterterrorism perspective? I would say that's the work of, very specifically, Canada's special forces command working with the wider coalition special forces organization, which is doing train, advise and assist work with Iraqi special forces or special-purpose forces to train them in the best practices and the best tactics, techniques and procedures, and on how to conduct the right sorts of operations based on strong intelligence, strong governance of the mission and strong application of the laws of armed conflict regarding how you use force in those situations.

Broader than that, general purpose forces are contributing at some level in the small "c", small "t" counterterrorism by trying to elevate the rest of the Iraqi security force capability to a higher level. It takes more than just a small group of special forces people, ultimately, to get through this problem. It takes aircraft, helicopters, medical people and a whole enterprise behind those folks. We're contributing in that sense.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Are our forces—

**The Chair:** I'm afraid that's it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robillard, you have the floor.

**Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.):** Good afternoon.

Thank you for coming to share some quite important things with us.

I understand that, following the NATO ministerial meeting on defence, progress has been made with respect to our training mission in Iraq. Can you explain the next steps from now on?

**MGen Jocelyn Paul:** Thank you for your question.

Indeed, when we had the NATO ministerial meeting, the ministers agreed in principle to continue with the first part. This is what we call stage 1 of the expansion of the NATO mission in Iraq.

Right now, in terms of NATO, military staffs are looking at what training activities currently conducted by the coalition could be carried out under the NATO umbrella with short and medium notice.

So the staffs are looking at all that. This is being done in close co-operation with the Iraqi government. The acting Prime Minister has agreed that NATO will continue to work in this area in co-operation with his government. That's stage 1.

The strategic staffs are having discussions at NATO with respect to stage 2. What training activities beyond NATO's current mandate could it possibly take on in the future? Right now, in terms of stage 2, we are at the discussion stage.

NATO military staffs, in co-operation with the various missions, are studying the whole thing. The result of the deliberations will be presented at the next meeting of NATO ministers of Foreign Affairs, which will take place in early April, if I am not mistaken.

A report will therefore be provided to the various ministers. We will then continue to do some planning in terms of time and space. There will certainly be a follow-up at the ministerial meeting of defence ministers, which is scheduled for June.

• (1610)

**Mr. Yves Robillard:** What are our troops doing right now?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Thank you for your question.

Mr. Robillard, we have sent some troops back to Canada. Even though there were troops who had two weeks left on normal rotations, they were sent back to Canada and told that it was over.

The troops that were supposed to replace those troops were kept in Canada. Recently, they were sent to Kuwait because we thought the time was right to send them to Iraq. The troops in Iraq have stayed there, and they are helping to protect our areas. Our vehicles need to be maintained and they need to move. We have to maintain all the logistics, as well as contacts with our Iraqi and coalition partners.

So the few troops left in Iraq are working. In addition, the troops in Kuwait are doing their normal work. People are busy. The troops that remain to carry out the training mission will be sent to Iraq as soon as the conditions are right.

**Mr. Yves Robillard:** I have one last question.

If possible, could you comment on the role of Major-General Carignan as commander of the NATO mission in Iraq? She's one of the highest ranking women in the Canadian Armed Forces, isn't she?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Major-General Carignan is the commander of the NATO training mission in Iraq. Like Major-General Fortin before her, she commands all NATO forces working in Iraq to carry out the NATO mission in Iraq. She is a tactical commander of the approximately 100 forces working in Iraq. That's absolutely true.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Dowdall.

**Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, would like to echo the earlier comments. Thank you for being here today. This is my first committee meeting, so I'm honoured to have you here as guests and to hear these updates today. I want to also thank you for allowing us the freedoms we have here in this country. Hopefully, one day other countries can enjoy what we have here, so thank you very much.

Was there anytime during this mission that any of our Canadian soldiers might have felt they were lacking the tools necessary to do their jobs? Was there anything we could have done from an organizational perspective to be more effective in our role?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Thank you for your question. It's an excellent question.

I've been doing this going on 33 years and I've never once asked a group of soldiers if they're lacking anything and had them mute and not say anything. As the operational commander, my job is to ensure I'm giving viable options to the chief of the defence staff as we're planning—things that we can actually do. Then he brings those to government and ultimately selections are made. There is no single, big thing that we're missing that makes us unable to complete the task we're given. I can assure you of that, sir. Where there are gaps, we have processes to identify those gaps and to try to remediate them, but there are no big ticket items that I could tell you about today where I'm disabled from completing my task because we're missing those.

When we work with a coalition, though, part of the magic is to know when the coalition can help out and where others can offset some of our weaknesses, as we can sometimes offset others' weaknesses. That's the beauty of the coalition. We're pretty adept at finding those points and making sure it's complementary while allowing us to complete our job nationally as we should.

• (1615)

**Mr. Terry Dowdall:** Is there nothing that would make it easier, though? You're saying you have enough to get by, but I'm wondering if there's anything we could do as an organization.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** That would all be expressed, for example, in the supplementary estimates that come forward and whatnot, so your full support in the supplementary estimates would be....

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** No, there's nothing, sir, that I could say today that we would need.

**Mr. Terry Dowdall:** As a follow-up to an earlier question that we had here about the traumatic brain injury and what happened over there, I was really glad to hear in your comments that we had none on the night of January 8, which is good news. I'm wondering in general about the military. I come from Simcoe—Grey. We have the largest training base at Base Borden. Some of the injuries you have are sometimes definitely visible injuries, but a lot are emotional or psychological. In your analysis of the individuals from any of the events there, are they analyzed by our own doctors or do they go outside? Are they outsourced?

I just want to make sure we have the supports for the men and women not only today but when they're back from their missions. I wonder if you could speak to that.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** As someone who has suffered from physical and non-physical injuries over my 33 years, I can tell you that where we're at today in the Canadian Armed Forces is manifestly different from when I joined in 1984, or where we were when I did three tours to the Balkans in the mid-nineties. We're in a different space. It's not a bumper sticker. I'm legitimately saying from the

heart that I feel like a lot of the stigma that existed in the eighties and nineties around things like the invisible injuries has dissipated.

I pay a lot of attention to the medical side of things and how we care for our people, not only during the mission but post-mission, when we do a week of reintegration before they come back to Canada and where we have mental health experts, medical staff and padres. We allow the people to vent and reacclimatize before they see their families back home. The work the surgeon general and his team have done, the leadership the chief has given in this space are such that I'm very confident with where we're at in looking after our people from a medical perspective, absolutely.

**The Chair:** Very good.

Mr. Baker.

**Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you all for being here.

I'll echo what some of my colleagues have said on both sides in thanking you for your service and for the difference you're making, not just to our security but to global security and prosperity.

I represent a community called Etobicoke Centre. It's a suburban riding in the city of Toronto. When I talk to my constituents about the Middle East and the Canadians who are serving there, they are curious about some of the issues that you've been asked about and spoken to around global security and the progress being made at a macro level, but they're also curious about the specific role that Canadians are playing and how they're making a difference. I know you touched on that a little in your earlier remarks, but I'm wondering. If we had some of my constituents from Etobicoke Centre here today listening to you and they asked you a question about the biggest difference Canadians were making on the ground, what would you tell them?

**Ms. Sandra McCardell:** There's a lot we can say. Let me start with a broader framework and then we'll take it back to some of the security issues.

I think it's clear. The general mentioned earlier on that we've had a commitment of \$3.5 billion from 2016 through to 2021. It's a very significant commitment, and I think it demonstrates what you'll likely hear in your respective ridings from your constituents about how the Middle East is affecting them directly, whether that is because they have family there or because of other things.

We've been working across a number of pillars, security being one but also humanitarian, development—as I was alluding to earlier—and improving governance. There are a couple of things that I think would resonate with your constituents back home. Since 2018, we've reached an average of 780,000 people every single month with food assistance. That's 780,000 people every month who are not hungry. In co-operation with the UN, we have provided 297,000 women and girls with gender-based violence services. That's almost 300,000 women and girls who have been traumatized who now have access to help to address both their physical and, as you were saying, non-physical injuries. We've provided 450,000 people in Iraq with safe water infrastructure. You can now take a drink out of the tap and not get yourself sick.

I'm sure that the generals would be proud to mention as well that, in co-operation with the global coalition, we've cleared explosives from 12.7 million square metres of land. Now people can farm. They can walk safely. Kids can go to school without being afraid. As well, with regard to police officers, 7,400 Iraqi police officers have been trained on community policing and other law enforcement: basically getting in touch with their communities, understanding what's happening and making people feel safe.

As a final note, I'd just say that there is now in Iraq an anti-domestic violence law, which didn't used to be there. That's also due to Canadian efforts.

• (1620)

**MGen Jocelyn Paul:** I'll maybe just give you some additional background in terms of the difference that we make out there. I wanted to bring that up when Mrs. Gallant asked a question earlier.

What we are doing right now in Jordan is something that we're not talking enough about. Canada has been heavily involved—the CAF, DND, Global Affairs Canada—in helping the Jordanians secure their border with Syria. We just completed a project that was aimed at rehabilitating the road that basically separates Syria from Jordan. Let me assure you that our Jordanian colleagues are extremely grateful.

The issue along the border is multi-faceted. It's not only about Daesh. It's also about some Shia militia groups and so on and so forth. We are truly helping Jordan as an ally, as a nation, with securing its home border. This is a great example of what a few million dollars can do in helping secure a key ally in the region. Jordan is at the pivot of what's going on in that space.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Sir, from my perspective on the ground, whether it's our two C-130Js that are flying or the troops themselves—the training teams in Jordan, Lebanon, Q-West—we have really good troops. They're good people, and they're great fighters and operators when they have to be, as well. However, the good people part is the part that makes it special. They're ferocious defenders of our flag and all that, but they're people who get the context, so I'd say that they give 110%.

Sunday was the fifth anniversary of the loss of our own Sergeant Drew Doiron, who was killed in action. He was from Madam Gallant's riding. We've paid for the work that we're doing there in national treasure. We've done it with great honour, I think.

**Mr. Yvan Baker:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Boudrias.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Boudrias:** When we talk about a war context, we are talking about refugees, a large number of displaced persons and displacements.

Considering that we have troops in Syria and Lebanon, I would like to know whether, following the fall of Daesh, this situation is under control or resolved as far as refugees are concerned.

**Ms. Sandra McCardell:** Thank you for your question.

As far as refugees are concerned, Syria unfortunately continues to produce refugees on a daily basis. On our screens and in the newspapers, we are seeing the harmful effect of what is currently happening in Idlib. The flow of refugees continues, with all the trauma and regret it may cause.

That said, we continue to support refugees. We are major donors. Through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UNHCR, we are providing significant amounts of money to Jordan and Lebanon to support countries that are hosting displaced persons.

I also want to tell you that it isn't only the refugees themselves who receive support from Canada, but also the communities that welcome them. If we didn't help the poor people in Lebanon, very significant tensions could arise between the refugees and the host communities. At present, our support includes humanitarian aid, medical care, basic education and food in the communities where refugees from Syria have settled. I can assure you that this support continues.

• (1625)

**Mr. Michel Boudrias:** Thank you.

With regard to Kurdistan, I would like to know whether the Iraqi portion is relatively under control and protected. I'm talking about the forces that helped us liberate Mosul, in particular.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Thank you for your question.

We are there under the policy of one Iraq. The Kurdish security forces, or KSF, are part of the Iraqi security forces. It is a force, as far as we are concerned.

Yes, northern Iraq is safe, as long as it is largely controlled. There are no areas there that are beyond the control of the government. There are enclaves occupied by Daesh, but the job of the special forces is to recognize and target them. That's good in the north. I've been there recently. It's going to take a long time, but there's a feeling, even in the city of Mosul, that life is returning to normal.

**Mr. Michel Boudrias:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Garrison.

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP):** I'll pass, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** You'll pass, all right.

Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here, and a big shout-out to our Canadian Armed Forces and the great work they're doing. I'm sure Michel referenced that we got to visit our troops in Kuwait before Christmas, and it was good seeing the operations on the ground and how they're providing the supportive role to everything going on in both Operation Inherent Resolve and the NATO mission in Iraq.

I'm interested in the bigger dynamic with the Iranian influence. We have Shia militia being supported by Iran, and I know we're probably crossing paths with them on a daily basis. How has that changed operations and the training that we were doing before things went off the rails when the terrorist Soleimani was killed? How does that impact our training of Iraqi security forces?

**MGen Jocelyn Paul:** Like many other countries in the region, Iraq is a little complex. As you know there's a majority of Shia in the country, and obviously one of the key positions, the one of prime minister, is always occupied by a Shia leader.

I would like to offer to you that not every Iraqi Shia, obviously, is under Iranian influence. Even within the population not everybody divides themselves along sectarian lines. I would like to point out that during many of these demonstrations we ended up having before Christmas, you had people from every faith in the street in Iraq: Shia, Sunni, Kurds and so on. I'm not saying that because I want to minimize the Iranian influence, but when it comes down to Iranian influence obviously it's going to be a decision that Iraqis themselves are going to have to make.

• (1630)

**Mr. James Bezan:** With the Shia militias and the Iranian influence, a lot of the Shia militias are being trained by Quds Force and, of course, Canada recognizes Quds Force as a terrorist organization. How do we handle that interaction?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** There are in the order of 70,000 PMF Shia militia groups. There's a significant number of them. The ones that concern us the most number about 30,000, groups like Kataib Hezbollah and those sorts of groups that are very closely aligned with Iran. They are a very big concern. In fact, they're my number one concern. At the moment, relative to force protection, I am more concerned about that swath of Shia militia groups than I necessarily am about Daesh, because Daesh has been defeated militarily. They're off balance. They're reorganizing. They're spending time on themselves more than they are spending time on attack planning.

These Shia militia groups that we're concerned about are very well equipped. They have tube artillery. They have multiple launch rocket systems and armed UAVs. They have air defence equipment. They are equipped. They are a proto-state entity equipped like a state military, so yes, I'm very concerned about them, but we're monitoring very closely from an intelligence perspective what their intent is.

We know what their capabilities are, and when you add capability and intent, you have the probability of something happening. They have been muted since the attacks and since the U.S. threat that, if any coalition or U.S. serviceperson dies at the hands of these groups, there will be an outsized response. That has muted somewhat the potential, but on the ground we are taking every possible precaution to make sure that we're safeguarded against that threat that I just described and not just a light fighting Daesh threat. We're paying very close attention to this.

**Mr. James Bezan:** General, when you first went over to Iraq, it was to work with the Kurdish Peshmerga. Are any of those relationships still ongoing? They definitely did their job in securing the north. Canada can take a big pat on the back for helping them out in that process, but is Operation Inherent Resolve still working with the Peshmerga, or have they been left by the wayside ever since their separation vote?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** I would echo your comments. The Kurds led the fight, and we helped them at the time and, you know, the Barzanis and the rest of it. We enjoyed a special relationship with them over the four-plus years that we fought alongside them and advised and assisted to push ISIS back.

The first time I went there, they were 900 metres from the Kurdish trench lines, and then they were pushed off and into a plain. Then they were pushed out of the city of Mosul. It has been an amazing thing to watch, and the Kurds deserve a great deal of credit for that.

The relationships that we enjoyed with the Kurds have not evaporated. They still exist, and I think are paid into from time to time with personal contact and can be mobilized, but I don't know specifically what actual relationships CANSOFCON keeps on a week-to-week basis with KSF. We could find that out, sir, if you wanted that as a follow-up.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I'd love to find out how things are going.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Bagnell.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

As all the other members have said, thank you very much for your service. I was on the defence committee about a dozen years ago, and it has been tremendous what you have done for our country.

Just before I ask my question, you said we don't talk about what we do in Lebanon and Jordan, so go ahead.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**MGen Jocelyn Paul:** Thank you for your great question.

Actually, what we do in both countries is not only focus on the military instrument. Under the other line of operation, there are great effects being delivered by the Canadian government. If I can make some links here, we were talking earlier about refugees. Through our programs, there are a lot of refugee children who are given access to school when they're living in Lebanon or Jordan. This is a very good example of what we're doing.

With respect to Lebanon, we've been training them in terms of a winter type of environment. We've been making some interesting segues out there. Also, if I'm not mistaken, we ended up delivering a bit of medical training, but I don't want to go too much into the details. General Rouleau masters that much more than I do.

Project management is a key aspect of it. Right now we're working, for instance, on additional projects in Jordan aimed at increasing the level of security inside the country. We are still studying what these projects can be, but this is something we're working on hand in hand with our Global Affairs colleagues. It's a mix of infrastructure, training and specific military training, and on that, maybe General Rouleau can expand a little.

• (1635)

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Today we have about 40 people in Lebanon and just under 30 in Jordan. That's today, but these numbers flex. The thing I would point out is that for all of these environments, whether it's Iraq, Jordan or Lebanon, they're never static. They're always evolving.

When we think of the work we're doing in Lebanon and Jordan, in Jordan we have a combat service support training team that is there. We have a female engagement team element there. We just wrapped up chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear TTP work with CBRN specialists. In Lebanon, we're doing a logistics enhancement piece so that they can better sustain their force further back from the front, if you will. It's more of an institutional sustainment thing. Also, of course, there's the winter training.

When we think about what we're doing there, we're really enhancing the security and promoting increased security capacity in these countries. That's what we're doing. We're fundamentally trying to increase the depth and, in some cases, the capabilities, but we can't think of this training in terms of just people.

It takes people and expertise to train another military to do something, but those people need to have the right permissions and authorities from people like the CDS and me to make sure that they can adjust on the ground and do the things they have to do. Also, we need access to funds and resources in many cases to help enable that training and to buy things or build things. It's a system that comes together in order to be able to do this.

I would close by saying that we send young people on these missions, people with, in some cases, very little operational experience. We've reduced a bit the ranks that we're sending there to try to empower the youth a little more and to try to husband some of our key ranks for the long run. These young people step up and they do a great job with it. I'm proud of what they're doing.

Thank you, sir.

**MGen Jocelyn Paul:** If I may give you an additional example, it's not only about sending Canadian soldiers abroad. It's also about bringing some of these people to Canada.

One of the programs that is falling under my purview is the military training capacity program. In Saint-Jean, Quebec, at the military base there, we have people from the regions coming to Canada to learn French and English, so obviously we are enhancing the operational capability of our allies in the regions.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Dowdall was wanting to know about the report you referenced, Ms. McCardell. It was on what exactly?

**Mr. Terry Dowdall:** There was a question on the other side about what you could say to your residents about the improvements that have been made in that area. It would be nice if we could get a copy of that.

**Mr. James Bezan:** If you can share that with me, that would be great.

I'm intrigued, General Rouleau, by your comments on the concern about the Shia militia that are being armed up and trained by the Quds Force. What role do they have right now in Iraq? There's no question that they played a part in getting rid of ISIS, but what's their long-term strategy there? Who is their support? Is it the Iranian government or is it the Iraqi government?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Thank you for the question.

I'd respectfully say that's beyond my purview and operational command.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Perhaps Global Affairs might want to shed some light on any concerns they have with that evolving situation.

**Ms. Sandra McCardell:** Thank you.

If I may say so, "evolving" is probably the key word for this. As the general alluded to earlier, a few months ago we saw demonstrations in Iraq. They were cross-sectarian and, quite frankly, in those, consular generals of the Iranian government were attacked. That is just to say that there are many Iraqis who have been frustrated and resentful of the foreign influence in their country and who have been disappointed by what their government has provided them in terms of both the unity and coherence of the structure and also the ability to deliver the services they are expecting.

What we have seen more recently, particularly since the killing of Qasem Soleimani, is that there has been pressure to return again to sectarian camps a bit, compared with what we had seen before, which was much more of a unified demand on the government to govern appropriately.

How it will go from here remains to be seen. I think there is a need at this point to select a prime minister who can run the country. The country has been under a caretaker prime minister for several months now, and the most recent candidate was unable to form a government. I think that speaks to the profound differences you're seeing in the parliament itself.

Going forward what will Iran try to do in Iraq? Obviously, there are many people who can speculate on that. What I will say is that clearly Iran is in difficulty right now. The economic situation, as you're likely aware, is very poor. A number of very strict sanctions have been put in place by the American government. The joint comprehensive plan of action, which was to contain the nuclear program of Iran, is currently under a dispute resolution mechanism because of a lack of compliance by Iran. Finally, as the news will tell you every morning, the situation with coronavirus is a very grave domestic health concern for the Iranian government.

If I may close where I began, the situation is very much evolving, and I think it will need to be watched. Certainly, there will continue to be a need for Operation Impact and also for the work we're doing on the development and humanitarian fronts across the region.

• (1640)

**Mr. James Bezan:** On the NATO mission in Iraq, as that winds down, are the Canadians going to be handing off leadership of that operation to some other NATO member?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Yes, sir. I can tell you our commander is going to be there until December 2020 and General Carignan is going to hand off to the Danes, I think, to Denmark, at that time.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Will Canada still be involved in the mission and stay on?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Yes, sir, we will. There will be some adjustments to what we committed to when we commanded the mission—the helicopters, the additional three helicopters in Taji and the force protection company in Baghdad. We will take a fresh look at all of our commitments in light of no longer having command and maybe make some local adjustments.

**The Chair:** Ms. Vandenbeld.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Thanks very much.

I would like to echo the words of my colleagues in terms of thanks for your service and the service of our women and men who are over there, and also for the answers you are giving today and the information you are providing, which I think is very helpful to the committee.

Something that has been mentioned is that even with the suspension, within days and certainly now, a number of the core training activities have continued. We spoke about Jordan and Lebanon and the Canadian training advisory teams.

You mentioned the female engagement training that's happening in Jordan. As we know, Canada is committed to the action plan on women, peace and security. We have a woman, Major-General Carignan, who is the commander of the NATO mission.

Can you tell us a little more about what is happening in terms of training the women in Jordan and whether or not there's a cascade effect to that training? I understand we're training trainers who are then going out and training others.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** I can't speak in excruciating detail about that. I command 20 missions and that is one small part of one mission, but when I was there a month or two ago, I sat and had lunch with our officer who is in charge of the FET element, a PPCLI lieutenant, and I walked away very impressed.

She is mentoring a platoon of Jordanian females and mentoring them in their ability to wage essential combat arms and basic infantry tactics. They are taking well to it. It's a bit of a slow thing, the progress we're going to be able to make, because a lot of these militaries are not as advanced as the Canadian Armed Forces are. They have pressing concerns in many areas, so our ability to influence that one particular area that you speak of might not always advance as quickly as we would want, and in all capacity building, we can't foist on them what they don't want or what they don't need. In fact, it should be quite the opposite, where we're addressing their challenge areas.

This is one of those cases where we are and it's going to progress. We're going to keep pushing, but ultimately we will progress at the speed the Jordanians decide on. It's off to a good start. We're sending good people and we're making good progress.

• (1645)

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** What would you say are the advantages of having women in the military and having women as part of these missions? Are there advantages in terms of the actual operation of the missions and successful outcomes?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** From my experience, I'll tell a story about diversity from where I grew up in JTF2. A diverse force in the military improves the possibility of successful mission outcomes. There's no question about that. It's not just gender diversity. There are many forms of diversity: operational diversity, educational diversity, linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, experiential diversity, and the list goes on. Gender diversity is one of those areas.

The day I joined, and having a lot of people like me, that got us something. What we get now is a much richer, more complete set of solutions, because when I look around, the teams are more diverse, and it comes from that.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** Speaking of linguistic diversity, you mentioned there are also those who are coming to Saint-Jean and other places for French and English language training. Can you elaborate a bit on that?

**MGen Jocelyn Paul:** We've been working on that program for many years. I visited the classroom for the first time a few months ago, and I was really impressed. I ended up presiding over the graduation ceremony. Here we have people coming from Southeast Asia, the Middle East. They show up in Canada almost incapable of speaking both official languages. As I was presiding over the graduation, we had two keynote speakers. Both of them were making amazing, outstanding remarks in both French and English. One of them was a lady from Southeast Asia. She couldn't speak French at all when she came. There's no connective tissue between the language she was raised with and French, but that young lady, within six or seven months, ended up almost mastering French. I was impressed by her. I reflected on my own challenges learning English as I was growing up. I was a little bit embarrassed to be honest with you.

This is a fantastic program, and the beauty of it, from a long-term perspective, is that you now have leaders in multiple armed forces around the world who went through Saint-Jean 10, 15, 20 or 25 years ago. This is a fantastic military diplomacy instrument. We are making friends around the world and it's a long-term investment.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Paul.

Mr. Boudrias, you have the floor.

**Mr. Michel Boudrias:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

There's a lot of talk about fairly standard training in the mission. I don't have the list with me, but I remember having already consulted it with regard to transmissions or specializations by trade. However, in the current context, do we have what in the good old days was called operational co-operation and mentoring directly at the front line in support of the Iraqi army?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Thank you for your question.

The answer is no. Even our special forces aren't doing what we call in English

[English]

“accompany”. They train, advise and assist.

[Translation]

They don't accompany.

On the side of the traditional armed forces, we obviously do not carry out operations with the Iraqis. We train them on different bases. Then they join battle groups and carry out their own operations, but not with the Canadian Armed Forces. So the answer is no.

• (1650)

**Mr. Michel Boudrias:** Thank you, General.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a quick question about military intelligence. We have operations in Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. We have eyes and ears on the ground. Are we collecting good intel on Hezbollah,

Hamas and especially ISIS? I'm interested in our operations and the protection required for our forces in Jordan and Lebanon. What type of intel are we collecting and sharing with our allies?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** That's a very broad question, and I wouldn't be able to do it complete justice.

At the tactical level, there is an enterprise that exists on the ground. It's called Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve. The nations that form that coalition share intelligence. Intelligence is created and shared at the tactical level. That's all governed by how we are allowed to share Canadian intelligence, information sharing agreements, etc., which we follow rigorously and to the letter. Intelligence is also shared within more bespoke groups, like the Five Eyes coalition.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Yes, I was just going to say the Five Eyes too.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Yes, and we have a special relationship and we share special intelligence, if you will, and that's extremely helpful. That's probably among the most valuable.

I am always concerned about the level of sharing, especially with our American counterparts. I have asked General McKenzie on a number of occasions to ensure that he is doing everything possible to ensure the American enterprise is sharing as much as they can with us, and not reverting to “no foreign” as a reflex. I think that's constant pressure and I'm happy with where central command is at. I think we could always be better and that's why we're putting pressure on.

Intelligence is lifeblood to military operations. Especially in periods like now, when situations may be a little more uncertain than usual, intelligence has to be as good as it can be. It's lifeblood for us as we try to figure out what's happening and how we're going to readapt. I'm very pleased with where we're at, so the sharing is good.

The last point is that for the first time we are distributing some key intelligence functions back to Canada. There are certain things we're doing that we used to put people forward and do that function forward. Now by dint of advanced technologies and smarter ways of doing business, some things we're doing back in my headquarters building in Ottawa directly support the mission forward.

That's an interesting thing to think about—how we can save some of the workforce from having to deploy by leveraging better technology at home and distributing the job.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Is CSE still playing a part in that intelligence gathering and sharing it with National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Yes, exactly. It's a whole-of-government effort ultimately and goes right to the intelligence assessment organization within the Privy Council Office. It's absolutely more than just a military thing.

**Mr. James Bezan:** That's fantastic.

It's interesting when we look at the destabilizing effects going on right now between Turkey and Syria and the Russian influence, and we have Hezbollah, of course, operating throughout the region. It's critical that we have those agreements and the robust sharing of intelligence with the Five Eyes partners, and the Two Eyes.

That's good. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Spengemann.

**Mr. Sven Spengemann:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to take a moment to reposition some of the conversation we had about Iran-Iraq relations. These are two countries that historically, culturally, religiously and economically are highly interdependent, with periods of conflict. One of the holiest sites in Shia Islam is in Najaf, Iraq. There are significant pilgrimages from Iran to Iraq. There are high-ranking officials in the current Iraqi government who have spent substantial periods of time in Iran. There are, of course, concerns about Shia militia, and I am very grateful, Lieutenant-General Rouleau, for your comments.

Shia militia have been a live issue since at least 1991, the Shia uprising in the south. If you're telling us that you're concerned about large-scale Shia militia I think this committee should take very careful note of that, potentially even greater note than the current state of Daesh. I think the more successful periods of Iraqi stable politics since 2003 have been periods where the Iraqi Shia militia have been able to stand down through calibrated negotiations at various tracts. The risk now is whether they will stand up again. Is there dissatisfaction? Are there reasons for them to become more active, and if so, what does that mean for Canada, for NATO?

We're currently in a stalemate in Baghdad, with Mohammed Allawi having stood down a week ago, saying he's not going to be their guy.

Are there mechanisms to go to the regional level, to the governor level, to the provinces of Iraq to build relationships on security and governance and human development? If things aren't moving in Baghdad, do we have other channels to reach out to other parts and micromanage—if that's the right term—relationships with commanders of Shia militia, or other channels that could be constructive or do us harm? Is there a strategy or capacity for that?

• (1655)

**Ms. Sandra McCardell:** I'll start and then my colleagues can continue on the military aspects.

We do have relationships at the regional level in Iraq. Much of our programming since 2016 has taken place outside the capital city. We have worked with governance, particularly on decentralization of power and trying to share the example of our federalist structure with regions in Iraq and seeing if that might be a mechanism to try to bridge the sectarian divides with which we are so familiar. We do have those networks.

We have mechanisms to improve the quality of life of Iraqis. We have our development funds and we are providing humanitarian assistance.

I think you'll likely agree that's no substitute for a functioning state-level government or a prime minister who is empowered to take decisions on the fate of his country. On that, regrettably, we remain unable to persuade the Iraqis to come together behind a single leader, as others are.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** On the ground the Canadian Armed Forces, in Operation Impact, don't have responsibility for a geographical area or a functional area. We're not in charge of fires for the whole coalition. We don't have to look after Anbar province. It's not structured that way, so we're working on a number of different bases in a number of different areas.

I would say the answer to your question is no. We don't engage with regional governors because we're more or less within the coalition construct. The Combined Joint Task Force-OIR has, on behalf of all of us coalition members, a responsibility to have relationships below the federal level. That I can assure you, but it doesn't fall to the Canadian Armed Forces per se.

**Mr. Sven Spengemann:** Is there anything else you want to say about the Iraqi militias and the level of your concern? Is there anything this committee could pick up on or potentially assist with?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** No, sir. You're obviously very *au fait* in what's happening there. There's nothing that jumps to mind beyond what I said about being very concerned about that particular group.

**Mr. Sven Spengemann:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right.

Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

**Mr. Yvan Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

You've talked about a number of threats to peace and security in the area. What would you say is the biggest threat to peace and security in the region?

**Ms. Sandra McCardell:** The biggest threat for peace and security in the Middle East.... This will give me the opportunity to just inform you that, as we mentioned earlier, the Middle East strategy through which we have been working will come to a conclusion at the end of fiscal year 2020-21. In fact, we are doing reflection now on what we think is at the core of what would bring stability to the Middle East.

It will escape no one's notice that it remains an area that has been unstable for a long time, unable to provide services to its people, which has brought us and our Canadian Armed Forces partners back repeatedly to the region.



There are some things we cannot change. The geography of the Middle East we cannot change. The battle for influence amongst regional powers we cannot change. What we can work on, I think, is strengthening the countries within the region. That's what our partnership under the Middle East strategy has been about.

Global Affairs, for our part, is focused on programming, either to strengthen the governance of the countries involved or to work on, specifically, stabilization programs to give them the capacity to provide security to the limits of their borders—in some cases very much so, with the road in Jordan that the general mentioned. We're also trying to make sure there are the tools to govern properly.

As far as what Canada can do from the outside is concerned, we really need to focus on building the capacity of these states to govern effectively, including all of their diverse populations and in a way in which they can manage relationships with their neighbours.

In summary, although there are many who could write their Ph.D. dissertations on it, allow me to say that there is a range of reasons, but what's important is that Canada find its place where it can contribute to peace, long term.

• (1700)

**Mr. Yvan Baker:** During your opening presentations, I believe there was a comment about countering propaganda by Daesh, if I'm not mistaken. Could you just talk a little about what is being done to counter propaganda, if anything, whether it's through our mission or more broadly through the coalition?

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** Thank you for the question. It's a very topical question.

One thing I'm seized with is the information theatre being the central theatre of conflict, essentially, in a way that it wasn't even 20 or 30 years ago. While I didn't say anything in my opening comments about countering any propaganda or whatnot, we are always concerned with the disinformation that may flow from an opponent. We're always looking for ways where we can, as speedily as possible, counter that disinformation with accurate information so that we're not put in a negative light, or that people don't start buying into a perspective that we're somehow doing something that's against the laws of armed conflict, or whatever.

We are trying to sharpen up our game in that sense. We don't have CIMIC or psy-ops teams deployed. That is not part of what we're doing in Operation Impact, but we obviously pay very close attention to the strategic communication and narrative piece. At the operational level, we're always looking for as much clarity as possible and the platforms to deliver that clarity.

**The Chair:** Mr. Garrison and Mr. Boudrias, are you good?

I'll hand it over to Ms. Vandenbeld for the last question.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm cognizant that right now, as we speak, a lot of the family members of our troops are probably listening. I can only imagine that there's some concern about COVID-19 and the safety of their loved ones. I just wonder if there's anything you'd like to say to those family members who might be listening, or if there are other methods of communication—many of us have people in our own constituencies who may be calling to ask us about this—if you have

anything you'd like to communicate to them about the precautions being taken.

**LGen Mike Rouleau:** This is not specific to Iraq, but four or five days ago I instituted for my command, which includes all deployed operations, very stringent mitigation measures. For example, all non-essential travel that's not directly related to a core mission's output is cancelled until further notice. There are restrictions like that, all in an effort to preserve the force. If there is going to be a spike in COVID-19 infections, we want to try to minimize the amplitude of that spike and push it out to the right so that our force does not get sick all at once. We're trying to husband the force.

I would tell the families that we're taking all of the strongest precautionary measures we can while still realizing that we have to be postured to deliver on a mission. It doesn't mean we can lock ourselves in isolation and hide from something. We're not only putting mitigation measures in place. We're also doing due diligence so that, not if, but when, it hits—at some level, we will likely have people affected by this—we have the right resources and expertise in place all the way to evacuation. I am heartened by the fact that if you listen to the experts, the vast majority of the demographic in the Canadian Armed Forces should do okay because of their age, but we're leaving nothing on the table.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** With that, we will call our testimony to an end.

I just want to say how refreshing it was to hear from the four of you and to be able to see this from a big, strategic point of view. Talking with our Global Affairs colleagues and the liaison and the relationships between the two and the military, I think that's huge. I think that will put us in such good stead if we set that example here at home and for the rest of the world.

From me and all of the rest of my colleagues on the committee, thank you so much for your time today. It was amazing.

We'll suspend for a few minutes to thank our guests in person. Then we'll reconvene.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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