

## General mulls aiding Afghan interpreters

STEVEN CHASE

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OTTAWA — The general in charge of this country's overseas military missions said Canada should "absolutely" be doing something to protect Afghan interpreters and others who fear for their lives after helping Canadians in Kandahar province - and promised a Senate committee he'd look into concerns raised about them.

Lieutenant-General Michel Gauthier, head of Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM), told the Senate national defence and security committee that Canada "couldn't do what we are doing without" the interpreters and other Afghans helping the military mission there.

But he was very careful not to make any specific promises about strengthening the assistance Canada offers interpreters and other Afghans who help Canadian troops and officials.

Gen. Gauthier said he will take his cue from what those working with Afghans advise, saying discussions about protecting these people may have been taking place already.

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"[It] will be driven from those that are working closely with them right now to see what their support needs are and is there something more that we could be doing that we are not doing right now."

Interpreters stationed with Canadian soldiers follow troops wherever they go, often right into harm's way. Last week, an interpreter was injured along with three Canadian soldiers in Kandahar.

Gen. Gauthier acknowledged Canada has obligations to these people. "In principle, should we be doing something? Absolutely. What policy constraints are there that might get in the way of that [and] how many of those need to be looked at - are all good questions."

Senator Michael Meighen, a member of the Senate national defence and security committee, raised the matter with Gen. Gauthier yesterday.

He asked the soldier if there was a way the CEFCOM commander could discuss how best to protect "those Afghans who have co-operated and worked with the Canadian Forces." He asked if there's any way Ottawa could help them immigrate to Canada.

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