



**FOURTH REPORT FROM  
THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
SESSION 2010-11**

**THE UK'S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH  
TO AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN**

**RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR FOREIGN AND  
COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS**

*Presented to Parliament  
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs  
by Command of Her Majesty  
May 2011*

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## **FOURTH REPORT FROM THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SESSION 2010-11**

### **THE UK'S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH TO AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN**

#### **RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS**

The Government welcomes the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry 'The UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan' and the findings set out in the Committee's report published on 2 March 2011 (HC 514). Afghanistan and Pakistan remain among the Government's top foreign policy priorities. These issues deserve the widest possible engagement, and the Committee's report adds much to the debate.

The Government welcomes the detailed work which the Committee has undertaken. We welcome the Committee's conclusions about the importance of the political settlement process. The Government agrees that now is the right time to advance a political process in Afghanistan, and this work remains a top priority. We fully agree with the Committee that we will not bring about a more secure Afghanistan by military means alone. However, intensified military pressure is an important component of bringing about a political settlement. The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of the importance of security transition and agrees that our engagement with Afghanistan must continue once this process is completed. The UK is fully committed to supporting Afghanistan in the long term. The Government disagrees with the Committee's conclusions about the deadline for the withdrawal of British combat troops. Setting this deadline is consistent with President Karzai's stated goal, endorsed by NATO, that Afghan security forces will be in the lead for security across the whole of Afghanistan by the end of 2014. We also disagree with the Committee's conclusion that there is no longer a risk of Al Qaeda returning to Afghanistan. It remains the Government's considered assessment that a threat to the UK's security interests from terrorism does still exist and that without the current presence of international forces, Al Qaeda would be able to re-establish itself and the threat of terrorism to the UK from the region would rise.

This Command Paper sets out our response to each of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations. The Committee's text is in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to the Committee's report.

#### **PROGRESS AFTER THE MILITARY SURGE**

##### **The surge and civilian safety: losing hearts and minds?**

**1. We conclude that it is a matter of considerable concern that civilian casualties in Afghanistan have risen so sharply since the start of the military surge. While much of this can be attributed to insurgents as opposed to Coalition Forces, the overall effect of more troops on the ground, at least in the short term, has been one of heightened instability and suspicion of ISAF forces. We welcome recent attempts to modify rules of engagement to try to ensure both troop and civilian safety, but we are concerned that in**

**terms of Afghan perceptions this may amount to too little, too late. We are also concerned that some recent reports suggest that operations are becoming more, not less aggressive. (Paragraph 28)**

As the Committee found, the large majority of civilian casualties are caused by the insurgents. The UN's March 2011 report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan found that insurgents were responsible for three-quarters of all civilian deaths in 2010. The increase in civilian casualties over the past year is due to the insurgents' increasing use of tactics that put civilians at risk. The insurgency has also expanded a campaign of deliberate civilian intimidation and murder: in 2010 they assassinated 462 civilians, more than double the number in 2009. On 21 February, for example, at least 30 people died when a suicide bomber targeted a branch of the Kabul Bank in the city of Jalalabad.

ISAF and the UK take the strongest measures to avoid harm to civilians. Our tactical directives and standard operating procedures were revised last year to give greater protection to civilians and we constantly seek to learn the lessons from all civilian casualty incidents. In addition, when made aware of an incident or alleged incident, the UK follows the robust ISAF process to investigate it. Air-to-ground munitions and indirect fire are only used against residential compounds in an extremely limited set of conditions. Furthermore, international forces routinely work with Afghan forces that have local knowledge of residential areas and can assist with culturally sensitive searches and operations. The difference in approach between ISAF and the deliberate targeting of civilians by the insurgency was reflected in the London and Kabul communiqués and UN Security Council Resolutions 1917 and 1943, all of which condemned the Taliban's role in causing civilian casualties.

The strong measures ISAF and the UK take to protect civilians are having a positive effect: the UN's March report found that the number of civilian deaths resulting from pro-government forces fell 26 percent between 2009 and 2010. The Afghan Government and its international allies cannot allow the insurgents to go unchallenged. However we can, and will, do all that we can to reduce the risk that civilians are harmed during operations to enforce the rule of law and tackle the insurgency.

**2. We conclude that while large numbers of Coalition Forces may be able to clear areas of insurgents, and hold the territory gained, we are more sceptical about the efficacy of the 'build' phase of operations in which aid is distributed with a view to 'winning hearts and minds'. (Paragraph 29)**

The distribution of aid forms part of the build phase in operations and plays an important part in creating a stable and secure environment in Afghanistan. UK development aid is helping to build the Afghan Government's capacity by putting in place the building blocks for a viable Afghan state free from conflict and instability. UK support to a District Delivery Programme has sought to strengthen the capability, accountability and responsiveness of the Afghan Government through the delivery of basic services such as health, education and provision of agricultural infrastructure. The Programme has been rolled out in areas recently secured by the military, and local populations have been engaged in drawing up development plans based on their own needs. This has increased public participation in governance, and has enabled the Afghan Government to demonstrate that it is able to provide services and reach out to the population. For example, in Helmand, District Governors are now in place in 11 of the 14 districts, up from none in 2001. The approval of the Sub-National Governance

Policy by the Afghan Cabinet last year also represents a major step forward in enhancing the capability of local government.

### **Tactical rather than strategic success?**

**3. We conclude that although UK forces, alongside their Afghan and ISAF partners, may have achieved a series of tactical successes, the security situation in Afghanistan as a whole remains precarious. We have gained the impression that the focus on tactical military gains in specific provinces is in danger of obscuring the very real security and other strategic challenges which exist beyond the immediate military campaign elsewhere in Afghanistan and in other aspects of the economy, politics and the state. (Paragraph 35)**

The tactical military successes that the Committee identified in Afghanistan are one part of the Government's strategy. We are also implementing a plan to strengthen Afghanistan's security sector as part of the process of transition and are following a political strategy that was endorsed internationally at the London Conference on 28 January 2010. In support of this work, we are intensifying our development efforts, including through a 40 percent increase in UK development aid. But we are clear that this is not at the expense of obscuring other security challenges.

This multi-track approach is showing signs of success. The Committee notes the series of tactical successes that have been achieved in the South, where the Taliban insurgency itself has bases. It is significant that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have played an increasingly central role in these operations. The Afghan National Army has grown by 42 percent in the past year and is seeing the benefits of an intensive training programme; weapon qualification has increased from 35 percent in November 2009 to 95 percent today. As a result of the growth in the numbers and professionalism of the ANSF and supporting security structures, on 22 March 2011 President Karzai announced the provinces and urban districts that are now ready to begin transition. This announcement marked the start of a process, endorsed at the NATO Summit in November 2010, that will see a gradual, conditions-based transfer of security roles from ISAF to the ANSF, with the aim of the ANSF assuming lead security responsibility in all provinces by the end of 2014.

During his testimony to Congress on 15 March 2011, General Petraeus stated that:

Getting the inputs right has enabled our forces, together with Afghan forces, to conduct the comprehensive campaign necessary to achieve our goals in Afghanistan. Our core objective is, of course, ensuring that Afghanistan does not once again become a sanctuary for Al Qaeda. Achieving that objective requires that we help Afghanistan develop sufficient capabilities to secure and govern itself. And that effort requires the execution of the comprehensive civil-military effort on which we are now embarked.

Progress is also being made on the political track. The Afghan Government has established the High Peace Council to lead reintegration and reconciliation efforts. President Karzai made his commitment to reconciliation and the political process clear in his New Year speech of 22 March 2011, in which he reached out to the insurgents and invited the region to support Afghanistan in this process. 941 Afghans have fully registered for the reintegration programme and a further 2,000 are either in the process of registering or in negotiations to do so.

A diverse, stable and growing economy is vital for Afghanistan's future. Good economic progress is already being made in Afghanistan, with support from the international community. The economy is estimated to have grown by 22.5 percent in financial year 2009-2010 (driven by a bumper harvest and increased aid flows) and growth is forecast to be around ten percent next year. Revenue generation has experienced almost 20 percent growth year-on-year since 2002. Revenue collected by the Afghan Government exceeded US \$1.3 billion in financial year 2009-2010, a rise of over 54 percent in just one calendar year. Fiscal sustainability remains a challenge, but future revenues from mining will increasingly help Afghanistan to pay its way.

The Afghan Government is also increasingly able to provide basic services for the population. The World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund helped finance the salaries of almost 320,000 public servants (teachers and health workers) in financial year 2009-2010. In 2009-2010, 5.3 million children were attending school. This represents an overall increase of 0.9 million over the last two years. 37 percent of those attending are girls - up from virtually none under the Taliban when girls were not allowed to go to school. 85 percent of Afghans now live within one hour of a basic health facility, compared with nine percent in 2002. Today, there are more than four times as many trained midwives as there were in 2002.

#### **Helping or hindering the push towards political reconciliation?**

**4. The military surge remains at the heart of US policy in Afghanistan and it is one that has been strongly supported by the British Government. However, it is clear that the surge and military pressure alone are not enough to bring security and stability to Afghanistan. We are concerned that attempts to create the conditions for security transfer to Afghan forces have resulted in an escalation of the counter-insurgency campaign which has had a negative effect on Afghan civilians and prospects for political reconciliation. (Paragraph 38)**

The number of counter insurgency forces in Afghanistan, both Afghan and international, has increased significantly over the past year. ISAF troop numbers grew from 85,795 in February 2010 to 132,203 a year later. This has allowed the Afghan Government to expand the areas in which it is providing security and has supported a series of tactical successes that the Committee identifies in its report. It has not, however, resulted in an increase in the number of civilian casualties. As mentioned in our response to the Committee's first conclusion, the UN's March 2011 report on civilian casualties sets out that, the number of civilian fatalities linked to pro-government forces fell by a quarter from 2009 to 2010. ISAF and the UK are committed to taking the strongest possible measures to protect civilians and learning lessons from every civilian casualty incident.

We agree with the Committee that it is not possible to achieve a secure and stable Afghanistan by military means alone. The Government is fully supportive of the Afghan Government's efforts to reach out to the whole of the Afghan population. However, intensified military pressure is also an important element of bringing about a political settlement. Increased military pressure on insurgents is playing a vital role, alongside Afghan Government outreach, training of the Afghan security forces and high-level political negotiations.

## **A SELECTIVE PAKISTANI APPROACH TO THE INSURGENCY?**

**5. We conclude that it was inappropriate and unhelpful for the Prime Minister to have made negative remarks about Pakistan's record on counter-terrorism in India. Nonetheless, we further conclude that the substance of his concerns remain pertinent. (Paragraph 54)**

Pakistan has suffered more casualties from terrorism since 9/11 than any other country. Over the past year over 3,000 Pakistanis were killed in terrorist attacks. The presence of militant and terrorist groups poses a grave threat to the Pakistani state as well as to the stability and security of the region and beyond. We recognise the sacrifices made by Pakistan's military, civil law enforcement agencies and people in fighting violent extremism and militancy. Pakistan's recent action against militants has been of domestic and regional benefit, and has benefited the UK as well. We continue to urge Pakistan to do all it can to dismantle all militant and terrorist groups operating on, and from, its soil. For its part, Pakistan appreciates that there is more to be done in terms of cementing gains against militants. We continue to work with Pakistan to enhance its capacity to tackle these threats. During the Prime Minister's visit to Pakistan in April 2011, he called for a 'fresh start' in UK-Pakistan relations and made clear that 'terrorism threatens both our countries, Pakistan has suffered greatly from it and we have no higher shared priority than tackling terrorism together.' It was clear during the visit that both sides were keen to work together on their shared counter-terrorism priorities in the context of a deeper relationship.

### **The West's lack of political leverage**

**6. We conclude that the continuing existence of Pakistani safe havens for Afghan insurgents makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for ISAF's counter-insurgency campaign to succeed. It is of considerable concern that the UK is in a situation where, along with its key ally the US, it is reliant upon, but appears to have little influence over, Pakistan, considering the capacity of that country substantially to affect the longer-term prospects for peace in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 61)**

We are committed to a broad, long-term and strategic relationship with Pakistan that delivers a real exploration of and understanding of our mutual interests, including progress in Afghanistan. This commitment will be pursued through our enhanced Strategic Dialogue which the Prime Minister launched with Prime Minister Gilani during his visit to Pakistan in April 2011. Pakistan has a positive role to play in supporting an Afghan-led political settlement. Continued instability in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border areas is harmful to both countries and threatens wider developments. We agree with Pakistan that peace and stability in Afghanistan will not be achieved through force alone and that the key is a genuinely representative political outcome that addresses the political and economic aspirations of all Afghan citizens, and is supported by the wider region.

### **Direct US action in Pakistan**

**7. The ability of insurgents in Pakistan to carry out attacks against Western interests is a major concern. We conclude that drone attacks are already a high risk strategy and we further conclude that the use of ground attacks, without the express consent of the Pakistani government could significantly undermine the Pakistani government's authority, provide militants with an excuse for targeting Western interests, and have the unintended consequence of significantly escalating tensions between Pakistan and the West. We strongly urge the Government to do all that it can to ensure that future US**

**policy on Pakistan does not further undermine the stability of the Pakistani state. (Paragraph 64)**

The UK supports Pakistan's democratically elected government, together with the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan. Drone strikes are primarily a matter for the US and Pakistan. Both are key allies who are facing a shared and dangerous threat from violent extremists, who also threaten the UK. There is a need for effective action, and for Pakistani ownership of the fight against violent extremism. It is important that Pakistan and the international community continue to work together to combat this common threat.

**TRANSITION TO AFGHAN CONTROL**

**Progress on security transition**

**8. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government explains what planning is currently being undertaken across different Departments on scenarios for UK engagement in Afghanistan after 2015. (Paragraph 70)**

The UK is fully committed to supporting Afghanistan in the long term. A stable and secure Afghanistan capable of maintaining its own security is vital to our national security. From 2015 onwards, the international community will still have a major role to play providing support to Afghanistan, most likely including further training to Afghanistan's security forces. But we are clear that from 2015 the UK contribution will not take the form of a combat role. As the Prime Minister said during his press conference with President Karzai in March, 'Beyond 2015 Britain and Afghanistan will continue to have a very strong relationship. A relationship based on diplomacy, on trade, on aid, on development, on military training, above all on friendship, because Britain is an all-weather friend, not a fair-weather friend to Afghanistan.'

Planning for this more long-term and sustainable support to Afghanistan is co-ordinated and taking place across UK Government Departments, and marks a continuation of the Government's comprehensive approach in Afghanistan. During his visit to Afghanistan last December, the Prime Minister announced that the UK would refresh the 2005 UK-Afghanistan long term partnership document. Departments are currently working on this to set out in detail how we will normalise our relationship with Afghanistan up to and beyond 2015. Financial support will also play a role in our long-term support to Afghanistan. With help from the World Bank, the Afghan Government and its international partners are currently looking at Afghanistan's long-term financing needs. The UN also has a role to play in the long-term, as does the EU with whom we are working to intensify the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship.

**9. We conclude that in spite of substantial amounts of money being made available to train and develop the Afghan National Security Forces, and the obvious commitment and effort of UK and other personnel engaged in training and security transition, serious questions remain as to the quality of the force that will eventually emerge. It is regrettable that the issue of quality was not dealt with at an earlier stage in the international community's intervention and that it still appears to be playing second fiddle to force generation. Given that, despite considerable efforts, there can be no guarantee that the Afghan National Security Forces will necessarily be able to cope after ISAF withdraws, we further conclude that it is even more vitally important to pursue, swiftly, a process of political reconciliation. (Paragraph 77)**

We agree that improving the quality of the ANSF is vital to ensure the Afghan Government can take charge of its own security. General Caldwell's work as commander of the NATO Training Mission was fundamentally important to achieving our goal of handing over security across the country to the Afghans by the end of 2014. Delivering an enduring ANSF would require significant investment in non-military business, such as ensuring Afghan ownership, building literacy and institutional reform of the Afghan Ministries of Interior and Defence. ISAF strives to balance quality with quantity with all the support it provides to the ANSF. In the past, the police force has struggled with a poor reputation and poor retention rates. That is why the UK is providing £7 million over the next three years (2011-2014) to support the Afghan Ministry of Interior's efforts to improve the quality and performance of policing. We will also be working to build the capacity of civil society to hold the Government, including the police force, to account on quality and performance issues. This will complement existing UK work to train and retain police recruits.

In recognition of the important role quality training will play in the transition process, several ISAF partners – including the UK – have pledged additional contributions to the NATO Training Mission at, or since, the Lisbon Summit. Alongside international partners, we are supporting the development of specialist branches within the Afghan National Army to improve the quality of the services it provides, its self sufficiency and its retention rates. Schools have been established to develop a range of capabilities including improved literacy, intelligence, engineering, logistics, legal, military police, finance, and religious/cultural affairs. This work is an integral part of the Afghan Government and international community's ongoing efforts to create the right conditions for a political settlement.

**10. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government sets out what steps it is taking to ensure that the withdrawal of NATO allies from Afghanistan in the coming months and years, and after withdrawal in 2014, does not result in unacceptable and additional military and financial burdens falling upon the UK. (Paragraph 79)**

The Committee is right to consider this issue. Alliance cohesion is at the front of our minds in all our dealings with ISAF partners. At their informal meeting on 14-15 April 2011, NATO Foreign Ministers sought to reassure both ISAF and the Afghan Government of their continued commitment to the mission, including during the transition process. The UK emphasised that Libya did not mean Afghanistan received less attention. A number of partners (the Netherlands, Canada and Denmark) have recently had to make difficult decisions on withdrawing combat troops from Afghanistan earlier than 2014. The UK has engaged with them directly and through ISAF on the future force lay-down of combat troops in Afghanistan. What is crucial now is to ensure that any combat troops withdrawn as transition progresses are reinvested either as combat troops elsewhere in Afghanistan or as part of the training effort to build ANSF capability. Such contributions will help ensure that the ANSF is able to take over the security lead across the country by the end of 2014, and that this transition will be a sustainable process.

Looking further ahead to 2015 and beyond, the UK is supporting the development of a NATO enduring partnership to establish long term partnership arrangements between NATO and the Afghan Government.

**Civilian transition: bolstering the Afghan state?**

**11. We conclude that despite 10 years of international assistance designed to bolster the Afghan state, the international community has not succeeded in materially extending the reach and influence of the central Afghan government or in improving governance**

**more generally. We further conclude that the current international approach has yet to fully reflect Afghanistan's history, regional differences and realities on the ground, and is in danger of failing despite the vast sums of money expended. We believe that it is only right and proper that responsibility for Afghan affairs rests primarily with the Afghans themselves, and this should and will eventually reflect the complex and diverse nature of Afghan society. (Paragraph 97)**

Effective, inclusive and transparent governance is central to the goal of building a stable Afghanistan capable of taking responsibility for its own security. In 2001 the Afghan Government along with its international partners began the process of building an entirely new political system to replace the apparatus of the Taliban. This process has been difficult and there remains much to be done. The Afghan Government committed to making further progress in delivering to its people at the London and Kabul Conferences, and we disagree with the Committee's assertion that neither the reach nor effectiveness of the Afghan Government has been extended. Progress has been made at both the national and provincial level. For example, in Helmand, District Governors are now in place in 11 of the 14 districts, up from none in 2001. The approval of the Sub-National Governance Policy by the Afghan Cabinet last year also represents a major step forward in enhancing the capability of local government. The UK supports Afghanistan's efforts to build this capability, so that all provinces will have greater capacity to plan and oversee the delivery of services as determined by their particular needs and aspirations. Moreover, UK funds have helped increase school enrolment in the province from 55,000 in 2008 to 90,000 today, 22 percent of which are girls. In 2007 only 47 schools were in operation in Helmand, today there are 117.

There is an increasing willingness on the part of the international community to align development strategies with Afghanistan's unique historical and cultural context in addition to the specific needs of the Afghan people. We agree with the Committee that responsibility for Afghan affairs should rest primarily with the Afghans themselves. The Government of Afghanistan is already responsible for the majority of key governmental functions and works in partnership with the international community to deliver others. The Kabul Conference Communiqué of 20 July 2010 put in place a clear framework to transition leadership of all governmental functions to the Afghan Government. The support of contributing states for this goal is clear by their commitment to channel at least 50 percent of development assistance through the budget of the Afghan Government and to align 80 percent of their aid with the Afghan Government's National Priority Programmes.

## **PROSPECTS FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT?**

**12. We conclude that the predominance of the belief that negotiations cannot commence until the insurgency has been defeated militarily is a matter for considerable concern, particularly given that the prerequisites for such a defeat do not appear currently to exist. (Paragraph 116)**

We will not bring about a more secure Afghanistan by military means alone. However, intensified military pressure is an important component of bringing about a political settlement, and the Taliban should expect intensified military pressure in the absence of a settlement. This is an Afghan-led process, and President Karzai has already begun taking steps towards achieving a political settlement through the establishment of the High Peace Council. This process offers the opportunity to all those willing to build a better future for their country. We now need to take advantage of the military and civilian gains made by the

Afghan Government, and supported by the international community, to take forward reconciliation and transformation.

#### **What role for the UK?**

**13. We conclude that the US is facing a rapidly closing window of opportunity to push ahead with political reconciliation through which it can help to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan and the wider region and, in the process, ensure that the sacrifices made by allies and Afghans alike are not in vain. We further conclude that the UK Government is to be commended for its support of political reconciliation, but recommend that it re-double its diplomatic efforts to bring whatever influence it can to bear on the US to highlight the need for US leadership on the issue of reconciliation. (Paragraph 123)**

The UK is fully supportive of the Afghan Government's efforts to reach out to the Afghan population and bring about a political settlement. Serious engagement between the Taliban and the Afghan Government must be at the core of this process. The international community needs to work for a genuinely representative settlement with all the main Afghan groups, in which none has a disproportionate share of power. Secretary Clinton has made clear the US's commitment to this process in her speech of 18 February 2011. The UK has a regular dialogue with the US at Ministerial and official level on Afghanistan, including on reconciliation and the need for a political process.

**14. We conclude that the UK's influence and role in respect of Pakistan is probably limited when it comes to reconciliation in Afghanistan. However, it is in the UK's national interests, far more so than in those of the US, to see a strong and democratic Pakistan emerge. For this reason, it is imperative that the UK encourages the US to adopt a policy in relation to Pakistan which takes account of Pakistan's security concerns and which therefore may help to induce Pakistan's constructive role in reconciliation in Afghanistan. We are under no illusion about the difficulties involved in this, not least because the UK can only exercise limited influence over the US and because both the UK and US policies in the past have not resulted in significant shifts in Pakistan's position on the Afghan Taliban. (Paragraph 131)**

Both the UK and the US wish to see the emergence of a strong and democratic Pakistan that plays a constructive role in ensuring regional stability. There is broad agreement that Pakistan has a key role to play in achieving a settlement in Afghanistan, but not an exclusive one. As such, we are all aware that Pakistan's security concerns must be taken into account in any political settlement in Afghanistan. Through our National Security Dialogue with Pakistan, we have been exploring their concerns and their potential role in an Afghan-led political settlement process. The Prime Minister discussed this during his recent visit to Islamabad. We welcome the US' plans to hold a US-Afghanistan-Pakistan dialogue.

**15. We conclude that the UK Government is to be commended for its advocacy of a regional approach to political reconciliation, and we recommend that the FCO continues to make the case to its allies for their wholehearted support in this respect. (Paragraph 136)**

We work with Afghanistan's neighbours to achieve our shared goals of lasting stability and security in Afghanistan. A genuinely representative political outcome that addresses the concerns of all Afghans and that has the support of the region is key. We continue to hold regular discussions with our allies about the importance of supporting the political settlement

process in Afghanistan. We look forward to the Istanbul Conference in late 2011 which will bring together regional initiatives.

### **Prospects for success**

**16. We conclude that at present the conditions for a political settlement do not exist, not least because the international community's approach is incoherent, Afghan leadership is not sufficient, the US approach is overly focused on re-integration at the expense of reconciliation and, in the resulting political vacuum, regional powers and Pakistan in particular, are forging ahead with their own agendas on reconciliation, not necessarily in the interests of Afghanistan or the wider region. (Paragraph 142)**

We believe that the Afghan Government and international community are making progress towards creating the right conditions for a political settlement. We welcome the steps the Afghan Government has already taken, through the High Peace Council's work, which demonstrate their commitment to leading this process. We continue to urge all the key players to intensify progress. The High Peace Council visited Pakistan in January 2011 and has established an Afghanistan-Pakistan working group to discuss how Pakistan can contribute to a political process. The Peace Support Group mandated by the International Contact Group in Jeddah in March met for the first time in Kabul on 24 March. The group (UK, US, Turkey, Pakistan, Germany and Japan) will seek to improve coordination between international players and the High Peace Council and to ensure the Afghan Government is at the centre of the political process. President Karzai made his commitment to reconciliation and the political process clear in his New Year speech of 22 March 2011, in which he reached out to the insurgents and invited the region to support Afghanistan in this work. The UK is supporting the Afghan Government on this through work to build international consensus around the need for a political settlement and emphasising the need for regional support to the process. The US position on driving forward the political process in Afghanistan was clearly laid out in Secretary Clinton's speech at the Asia Society in February 2011.

### **THE DEBATE OVER DEADLINES**

#### **Who made the decision on the 2015 deadline?**

**17. We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government explains why the decision to announce a deadline for British combat withdrawal in 2015 was not taken within the National Security Council. (Paragraph 156)**

**18. We conclude that the Government's policy statements on the withdrawal of combat forces are inconsistent and we invite it to explain why there was such a sudden and dramatic shift in policy in favour of an arbitrary deadline. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government explains what political and international factors prompted the Prime Minister to decide upon 2015 as a deadline, what the security rationale is, what advice he received from the military in advance of this decision, and what consultations the UK had with the US on this specific issue. (Paragraph 157)**

We will respond to recommendations 17 and 18 together. The Prime Minister said to Parliament on 7 July 2010, "Let me be clear. Do I think that we should be there, in a combat role or in significant numbers, in five years' time? No, I do not. This is the time to get the job done, and the plan that we have envisages our ensuring that we will not be in Afghanistan in

2015 ... That is our goal, that is in our national security interest, and that is what we will do.”

The Government’s decision that UK troops will no longer be in combat or be in Afghanistan in significant numbers by 2015 reflects President Karzai’s goal, as announced at his inauguration in December 2009, that by 2014, Afghanistan’s own National Security Forces should be responsible for the security of the whole of Afghanistan. To realise President Karzai’s goal, NATO/ISAF developed, throughout the course of 2010, a sustainable plan for transition (i.e. the phased handing of security control from ISAF to Afghan forces). This plan was formally endorsed by the NATO Lisbon Summit of November 2010, which noted that the process of transition was on track to begin in early 2011 and that, looking to the end of 2014, Afghan National Security Forces would be assuming responsibility for security across the whole of Afghanistan. On 22 March this year President Karzai announced the first tranche of provinces and municipalities to transition, and this was endorsed by NATO/ISAF Foreign Ministers meeting in Berlin on 14 April. There is close co-operation between ISAF members, including the UK and the US, and the Afghan authorities and also with other bodies such as the UN and EU to help ensure transition is carried out effectively.

The decision that UK forces would be out of combat by 2015 was made by the Prime Minister following discussions with a number of senior Ministers and after his first visit to Afghanistan as Prime Minister.

### **The possible consequences of announcing deadlines**

**19. We are concerned that Pakistan may feel that its security interests in connection with Afghanistan are not being adequately addressed by the West, partly as a result of the US announcement that their troops will begin to draw down in July 2011. We therefore call on the FCO to work with its counterparts in the US State Department with a view to better understanding how to reassure Pakistan that the West takes seriously Pakistan's genuine concerns about the future stability of Afghanistan and the impact of what it perceives to be a precipitate withdrawal of Western military forces. (Paragraph 166)**

We work very closely with the US on all aspects of policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both the UK and the US have made very clear to Afghanistan and Pakistan that our drawdown of troops from Afghanistan does not represent a drawing down of our commitment to either country. We all have a stake in the future stability of Afghanistan. Gradually transferring responsibility for security to Afghan forces by 2015 is key to the future stability of the country and the region. However, after 2015, the international community will continue to play a major role in providing support to Afghanistan, and is fully committed in so doing. By openly discussing Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan, as we have been doing through our National Security Dialogue and as the US does in its own regular contacts with Pakistan and has done publicly in Secretary Clinton’s speech, we can reassure Pakistan that we take seriously its security concerns.

### **The debate over deadlines: assessment**

**20. We conclude that the security rationale behind the Government's decision to announce the 2015 deadline for the unconditional withdrawal of UK armed forces from combat operations in Afghanistan remains unclear and that there are a number of potential risks inherent in such an approach. We further conclude that as the decision has now been taken and could not be reversed without causing irreparable damage to**

**the UK's standing at home and abroad, the task must be to ensure that the 2015 deadline has the effect of focusing both Afghan and international minds on the core tasks at hand. It is crucial, in this respect, that if the risks of using deadlines are to be minimised, there must be a concerted UK and US push forward on a genuine process of political reconciliation and a more effective and co-ordinated campaign designed to reassure Afghans that the focus of international engagement in Afghanistan may change in 2015, but Afghanistan will not simply be abandoned. It should remain a place in which the international community has obligations and interests. (Paragraph 176)**

Setting this deadline is consistent with President Karzai's stated goal, endorsed by NATO, that Afghan security forces will be in the lead for security across the whole country by the end of 2014. The announcement of a deadline has already, as the Committee suggests it should, focused both international and Afghan effort on achieving effective transition and increasing self-sufficiency. We will not walk away from Afghanistan, but we do not want to be in a combat role or have significant troop numbers in Afghanistan for a day longer than is necessary. The UK is fully committed to supporting Afghanistan in the long term. A stable and secure Afghanistan capable of maintaining its own security and ensuring Al Qaeda does not return is vital to our national security. The Kabul Conference in July 2010 set out a clear roadmap, the Kabul Process, for what the Afghan Government, with the support of the international community, will achieve in the long term. From 2015 onwards, the international community will still have a major role to play providing support to Afghanistan, something to which the UK, alongside international partners, is fully committed.

## **ASSESSING THE SUITABILITY OF THE UK'S MISSION AND GOALS**

### **Protecting UK national security: the core mission in Afghanistan?**

**21. We conclude that there is evidence to suggest that the core foreign policy justification for the UK's continued presence in Afghanistan, namely that it is necessary in the interests of UK national security, may have been achieved some time ago, given the apparently limited strength of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Although the Government disputes this, we are seriously concerned that this fundamentally important assessment appears to be based on intelligence that has not been subject to parliamentary scrutiny. (Paragraph 184)**

Violent extremism in Afghanistan poses a threat to UK interests and to regional stability and claims the lives of thousands of civilians and security personnel. It remains the Government's considered assessment that, whatever may be the existing strength of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, without the current presence of international forces, Al Qaeda would be able to re-establish itself in Afghanistan and the threat of terrorism to the UK from the region would rise. Extremism and the instability it causes also hold back good governance, development and economic progress. It is in Britain's national interest to work with international allies and with the Government of Afghanistan to reduce the threat from violent extremism and shore up long term stability in the region.

Parliamentary oversight of the Secret Intelligence Service, GCHQ and the Security Service is provided by the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC), established by the Intelligence Services Act 1994. Parliament is kept fully apprised of the work of the ISC, including through publication of the Committee's annual report and the subsequent debate in the House relating to it.

## **Are the UK's goals appropriate and achievable?**

**22. We conclude that the evidence presented to us suggests that the current full-scale and highly intensive ISAF counter-insurgency campaign is not succeeding. We question the fundamental assumption underpinning this approach, namely the idea that success in Afghanistan can be 'bought' through a strategy of 'clear, hold and build'. The distinction between al-Qaeda and the Taliban, which is so often overlooked or confused in current debates, is crucial to generating appropriate policy responses in Afghanistan. We question the Government's logic that a full-scale counter-insurgency campaign aimed at the Taliban is necessary to prevent al-Qaeda returning or that it could ever succeed. (Paragraph 193)**

The Committee rightly points out that Al Qaeda and the Taliban should not be confused and considered as one and the same. However, it should also be noted the ISAF counter-insurgency strategy is not aimed solely at the Taliban or any other insurgent group. Neutralising the insurgency is neither the sole nor even the primary principle of a counter-insurgency campaign. The ISAF counter-insurgency campaign is focused on protecting the population and growing the capacity of the ANSF. Shape, clear, hold and build is a conceptual framework for counterinsurgency; it is a way of thinking about the practical tasks in counterinsurgency as a whole rather than being simply a sequence of operations. It is not, nor ever will it be a strategy.

The UK has endorsed the NATO position on Afghanistan and has agreed to work as part of a 48 nation military coalition. By doing so, we have accepted that UK activities within Afghanistan conform to a unified, integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency campaign controlled by NATO and executed by ISAF. That campaign is part of the international community's overall mission in Afghanistan to prevent the return of Al Qaeda and enable long-term sustainable security, governance and development. It remains the Government's considered assessment that denying the Taliban territory in Afghanistan is essential to preventing the return of Al Qaeda.

**23. We cannot overestimate the importance of direct US support for, and leadership of, a process of political reconciliation in Afghanistan. If the US wishes to disengage its forces from Afghanistan, it must first engage more fully, and swiftly, with the process of political reconciliation. Given that the pre-requisites for a successful military campaign are currently lacking, we conclude that the US should not delay its significant involvement in talks. Without the US's support for talks with the Taliban leadership, there can be no longer-term peace in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 197)**

The Government agrees with the Committee on the importance of a political process in Afghanistan. We will not bring about a more secure Afghanistan by military means alone. However, intensified military pressure is an important component of bringing about a political settlement. Reconciliation and the wider political process is being led by the Afghan Government with support from the international community. Secretary Clinton has made clear the US' commitment to this process in her speech of 18 February. The UK fully supports the US' position that now is the right time to advance a political process in Afghanistan. We need to take advantage of the military and civilian gains, made by the Afghan Government and supported by the international community, to make 2011 a year of reconciliation and transformation.

**24. Given the significant governance and security challenges which exist, and the limited timeframe in which the UK is seeking to achieve the key goal of political**

**reconciliation in conjunction with its Afghan and international partners, we recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government explains the basis upon which a political settlement can be reached which supports human rights and the rule of law, within the framework of the existing Afghanistan constitution. (Paragraph 198)**

We are working with the Afghan Government in support of their efforts to bring about a political settlement. This includes helping the Afghan Government develop and articulate a clearer vision of what a political settlement could look like, and working to build international consensus around this issue. Any political settlement should be inclusive and address the concerns of all Afghan citizens. President Karzai has clearly set out his conditions for concluding negotiations: the Taliban must renounce Al Qaeda; give up armed violence; and respect the Afghan Constitution. These are conditions for peace and the Taliban must start the journey towards them.

It is important that we ensure women have as full participation as possible in the political process. At the London and Kabul conferences in 2010, the Afghan Government committed to ensuring that the human rights of the Afghan people are promoted and protected as enshrined in the Afghan Constitution. The Lisbon Summit Declaration stressed “the importance of Afghanistan standing by its Constitutional and international obligations on human rights, particularly of women, and of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.” In addition at the summit, the Afghan Government and NATO members endorsed an Action Plan to mainstream the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 into current and future crisis management and operational planning, into training and doctrine, and into all relevant aspects of NATO’s work. The implementation of this resolution means that the Afghan Government and international community will work to ensure that in addition to protecting women’s rights in the conflict, women play a role in decision-making about the future of the country and in the wider political settlement process. Most recently President Karzai reaffirmed that women’s rights were central to the future of Afghanistan in his New Year speech of 22 March 2011.

**25. We conclude that of all the UK Government's stated goals, the pursuit of a political settlement is arguably the most relevant and most appropriately framed. Regrettably, we see few signs that progress is being made on this front but we continue to be of the view that an Afghan-led, but US driven, process of political reconciliation is the best remaining hope that the UK and others have of achieving an honourable exit from Afghanistan, of achieving an outcome that serves as a tribute to the sacrifice of British and other troops, and that helps to justify the billions of pounds and dollars that have been spent in and on Afghanistan. (Paragraph 199)**

The UK fully supports Afghan Government efforts to bring security and stability to the country through a political settlement. This is an Afghan-led process, and progress is being made, with the establishment of the High Peace Council. The work of the Council so far includes convening Governors' Roadshows in nine provinces to take forward the reintegration of former fighters into mainstream communities, and outreach visits to Pakistan and Turkey. President Karzai also made his commitment to reconciliation and the political process clear in his New Year speech of 22 March 2011, reaching out to the insurgents and inviting the region to support Afghanistan in this. We welcome these steps as evidence that the Afghan Government is making progress, locally and regionally, towards a political settlement.

**26. We conclude that the evidence presented to us suggests that despite the significant resources that have been invested in Afghanistan, and the enduring, wholehearted and**

**admirable commitment and sacrifices of British personnel, the UK has not yet achieved its stated goals. This is in no way a criticism of British personnel who are risking their lives on a daily basis in Afghanistan, and whose efforts are rightly described in so many instances as heroic. Nor does it mean that nothing has been achieved in the 10 years since the US-led intervention. There have, for instance, been significant improvements in education, especially for girls, and in the fields of health, telecommunications, human rights, and media freedom. However, at a strategic level, we seriously question whether the efforts expended towards these ends have a direct connection to the UK's core objective, namely the national security of the UK and its allies and we also question whether the ambitious aims of the Government and the international community more widely are achievable. (Paragraph 201)**

The reason why we are in Afghanistan is to ensure that Al Qaeda cannot again use the region as a base to plan terror attacks across the world. It is vital to UK national security that Afghanistan becomes a stable state that is capable of being responsible for its own security and preventing the return of Al Qaeda. The Government has always been clear that a stable, secure Afghanistan cannot be achieved by military means alone. This is why our strategy combines security with long-term political and development support. Progress has been made across a wide range of areas, which all contribute to our goal of ensuring that the Afghan Government can control the security and governance of the country enough to ensure that Al Qaeda cannot return.

## **COMMUNICATING THE CASE EFFECTIVELY?**

### **Communicating the campaign in Afghanistan**

**27. The importance of clearly communicating to Afghans why the international community remains in Afghanistan and what its role will be over the longer term is crucial, particularly given the announcement of deadlines for combat withdrawal by a range of ISAF countries. We are particularly concerned, therefore, that international efforts in this regard appear to be failing. We recommend that the Government stress to ISAF partners the importance of addressing this as a matter of urgency and of ensuring that the presence of international forces in Afghanistan is recognised as an important part of the problem. (Paragraph 205)**

We agree with the Committee's assessment that the international community needs to strengthen its messaging to the people of Afghanistan and explain clearly the international community's mission in Afghanistan. ISAF has clear communications objectives for the year ahead. These include communicating that stability in Afghanistan is crucial to global security, promoting NATO's long-term commitment to Afghanistan, and explaining and gaining support for transition in coordination with the Afghan Government.

In terms of the longer term relationship, the NATO-Afghanistan enduring partnership declaration at the Lisbon Summit re-affirmed NATO's long term commitment to a "democratic, secure and stable Afghanistan that will never again be a safe haven for terrorists and terrorism." NATO intends to provide sustained practical support to Afghan security institutions. During President Karzai's visit to the UK the Prime Minister confirmed that "Beyond 2015 Britain and Afghanistan will continue to have a very strong relationship. A relationship based on diplomacy, on trade, on aid, on development, on military training, above all on friendship, because Britain is an all-weather friend, not a fair-weather friend to Afghanistan."

**28. We recommend that in its reply to this Report, the Government reports on what progress has been made in improving its strategic communications in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 208)**

Solid progress on strategic communications has been made since the FAC took evidence for its Report. The National Security Council agreed a revised UK Afghanistan Communications Strategy in October 2010. The strategy now guides the Government's communications efforts in the UK and Afghanistan, including on countering the Taliban's narrative.

The Afghan population is understandably more receptive to messages that originate from their own Government and society than from that of other nations. To counter the Taliban's narrative the Afghan Government needs to be able to communicate effectively with the Afghan people. We therefore continue to work with the Afghan Government to help strengthen their ability to do so through our support for the Government Media and Information Centre (GMIC). In the two years since its launch it has transformed the Afghan Government's communication. The GMIC runs weekly press conferences by the President's spokesman and the spokespeople of other key ministries. It provides training for government press officers and to the independent media. It has a security news desk where ISAF, Afghan Ministry of Defence and Afghan Ministry of Interior press officers are co-located, enabling a faster and better coordinated response to security incidents. The GMIC has also demonstrated its significant capacity hosting the international and Afghan media at the Kabul Conference in July 2010.

This year the UK has contributed funding to a programme to establish an Afghan Government Information Service. This will build on the experience of the GMIC and embed good communications in all 25 Afghan ministries and 34 Provincial Governors' offices. This support has also been replicated at provincial level in Helmand, through building the Governor's communications capacity. We will continue to work with international partners to support the GMIC as it expands and matures in its role. The Government will continue to support the development of Afghan strategic communications over the coming years.

**Communicating the campaign to British audiences**

**29. We recognise the difficulties involved in trying to develop a narrative on intervention in Afghanistan that satisfies different audiences, both domestic and international. However, the Government's current national security narrative is out of step with the current situation and, in light of the announcement of 2015 as a date for combat withdrawal, now out of line with the general thrust of UK policy. The 2015 date jars with the Government's national security justification which signals something very different; namely that the UK must do whatever is necessary to secure the safety of British interests. The two positions are not compatible and send mixed messages to the public. We recommend that the Government review its strategic communications strategy as a matter of urgency to ensure that public messages provide certainty about future plans, but also highlight that the ultimate UK goal is a political settlement in the pursuit of peace. (Paragraph 212)**

The Government does not agree with the Committee's proposition that the current UK narrative is out of step with the current situation. The narrative accurately describes the Government's considered assessment that a threat to the UK's security interests from terrorism does still exist and that without the current presence of international forces, Al Qaeda would be able to re-establish itself in Afghanistan and the threat of terrorism to the UK from the region would rise. The date of 2015 set by the Prime Minister for British troops no

longer to be in a combat role is entirely consistent with President Karzai's and NATO's plan for security transition. As the Prime Minister has said, and as set out above in response to the Committee's recommendation eight, this date does not mark the end of British support to Afghanistan.

The Government's Afghanistan Communications Strategy is regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to represent both the most effective way to communicate UK policy objectives to a wide range of audiences and to support achieving them. Our public communications have consistently set out clearly the ultimate UK goal: an Afghanistan able to maintain its own security and prevent the return of international terror groups such as Al Qaeda.

### **Parliamentary engagement on current and future plans**

**30. We welcome the Government's attempt to engage more pro-actively with parliamentarians on Afghanistan. We therefore regret that the Prime Minister used media interviews to reveal the 2015 withdrawal date and to raise the possibility that British combat troops could begin to be withdrawn as early as 2011, rather than announcing this significant development in Government policy in the first instance to Parliament. We recommend that in future all such significant announcements should be made to Parliament first. (Paragraph 214)**

The Government is grateful for the Committee's acknowledgement of increased engagement with Parliament. In addition to answering parliamentary questions, participating fully in debates, providing monthly written reports and quarterly oral statements, and making announcements in Parliament on matters of interest, we will continue to provide members of both Houses invitations to briefings and opportunities to visit Afghanistan.

### **OVERARCHING ISSUES OF CONCERN**

#### **Who's driving British policy on Afghanistan?**

**31. We conclude that there are grounds for concern over the relationship between the military and politicians. We further conclude that this relationship has, over a number of years, gone awry and needs to be re-calibrated. Military advice is of course, vital, but it must be appropriately balanced against a full spectrum of advice from other relevant sources. In this respect, we welcome the creation of the National Security Council as an institutional mechanism through which the FCO has a greater opportunity to influence the strategic direction of the UK's Afghan policy, to work with other relevant Whitehall Departments, and more generally to ensure that there is genuine unity of effort within the Government's approach. However, we believe that problems in Afghanistan highlight the need for a corresponding cultural shift within Whitehall to ensure that those charged with taking foreign policy decisions and providing vitally important political leadership are able to question and appraise military advice with appropriate vigour. (Paragraph 224)**

To address the issues behind the Committee's concerns which were present when the Government took office, the Prime Minister set up the National Security Council (NSC) to coordinate and deliver the Government's international security agenda, including policy on Afghanistan across government. It provides a good strategic discussion point for substantial policy issues as well as regular updates on the situation in Afghanistan. The NSC provides an effective mechanism to bring together strategic decisions about foreign affairs, security, defence and development and to align national objectives in these areas. Through the NSC,

the FCO leads the foreign policy agenda on Afghanistan. Military advice, as the Committee recognises, does of course play an important role in the development of UK policy in Afghanistan but the NSC ensures military advice is not considered in isolation, but alongside policy advice in a cross-Government forum.

### **The need for realistic goals and honest assessments of progress**

**32. We accept the understandable desire to recognise progress in Afghanistan, but we conclude that some of the language used by the military, in particular, risks raising expectations beyond a level that can be sustained over the longer term. It is useful to remember that Helmand accounts for only 3.5% of the population of Afghanistan, and those living in areas under the control of UK armed forces make up only 1% of the population. Therefore, while successes in Helmand should be recognised, the overwhelming focus on this province in official British assessments inevitably obscures the challenges which exist elsewhere in Afghanistan, and in which the UK, as a coalition partner, has a considerable stake. (Paragraph 227)**

Demonstrating progress in Afghanistan is a vital component of the UK's strategic communications strategy. Where improvements are made, it is vital for support for the mission domestically and among Afghans, that we communicate and highlight this progress. We appreciate the fact that Helmand is only one province, but it is one of the most dangerous provinces in the country and remains a key part of the insurgency's heartland. Therefore, progress made in Helmand, alongside other provinces such as Kandahar and Kunar, is particularly significant. While UK military, local political and development efforts are based in Helmand, this does not overshadow the national work the UK is engaged in. 84 percent of UK development aid is spent nationally across Afghanistan.

### **Practical constraints on UK action**

**33. We are concerned about evidence that suggests that the impact that FCO staff are having in Afghanistan is severely constrained by a relative lack of language training and skills, short tour lengths, and the limited access that many staff have to ordinary Afghans. We are also concerned about the recent lack of direct country experience among FCO staff in London who are involved in directing and implementing policy on Afghanistan. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government sets out what it is doing to address these shortcomings. (Paragraph 234)**

Given the risks of working in Afghanistan, the FCO limits tour lengths. A posting to Kabul is 12 months, with the option to extend by another 12 months. In light of the additional dangers and discomforts in Lashkar Gah, a substantive posting to Lashkar Gah is six months, with the option to extend by another six months (though this is currently under review). Staff can work up to a maximum of 24 months in Kabul or 12 months in Lashkar Gah. For health and welfare reasons staff must spend a minimum of six months outside a conflict zone before returning to a similar posting. Afghanistan is a volunteer-only, unaccompanied posting and the tour lengths are kept under constant review. UK staff work alongside Afghan political officers who provide continuity across postings and valuable local knowledge and expertise. Ensuring the security of staff is paramount, and movements are restricted because of security reasons. Security measures are kept under constant review so that where possible staff have more freedom of movement and can meet Afghan people, and those officers that need to get out and meet Afghans are able to.

Following the expansion of the UK's footprint in Afghanistan over the last ten years Afghanistan Department in the FCO is increasingly staffed by people with direct experience of the country. All of Afghanistan Department's teams include staff who have visited or worked in Afghanistan, either temporarily or on a substantive posting. New staff joining the Department have the opportunity to visit or work temporarily in Afghanistan. In addition, researchers with specialised knowledge of Afghanistan form part of Afghanistan Department. The FCO is also introducing "linked postings" where staff spend a tour working on Afghanistan in London followed by a tour in Afghanistan (or vice versa).

Currently there are two Dari speaker slots filled in Kabul. There is another officer based in Southern Afghanistan who speaks both Dari and Pashtu. Six members of FCO staff have been given language training during the last five years, of which three completed training to extensive or operational level. 23 staff who have completed language training in Dari or Farsi have been posted to Afghanistan (19 Dari students and four Farsi students). Dari and Farsi are two forms of the Persian language and officers conversant in one form of Persian can easily adapt to the other. Improving language skills continues to be a high priority for the FCO. The Afghan languages are among the key languages that will be investing in further over the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review period to increase our capacity from the current base.

## **LEARNING LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE**

### **34. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the FCO sets out what specific lessons it has learnt thus far from its engagement in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 240)**

Constant monitoring and evaluation is an important area of our work. There is an increasing commitment to learning and sharing lessons both across government departments and between civilian departments and the UK Military. The Stabilisation Unit continues to collect, analyse and disseminate lessons gleaned from conflict and stabilisation environments, including Afghanistan, across all relevant Government Departments. The Stabilisation Unit provides policymakers and practitioners with lessons which convey the challenges of operating in complex stabilisation environments, and key insights into the pragmatic, practical and flexible approaches underpinning the UK's response.

A recent exercise identified the following lessons learned from the UK's engagement in Afghanistan so far:

- Approaches to stabilisation should be tailored to address the specific characteristics of the conflict. This requires knowing when and when not to apply lessons derived from other contexts.
- There is no such thing as an apolitical engagement in a conflict environment. Security, economic or development objectives should therefore complement and support efforts to promote a peaceful political process.
- Stabilisation activities need to respond to evolving circumstances on the ground and should be delivered in a way that builds upon local culture, context, and the operating environment.
- We need to monitor the impact of stabilisation activities in order to ensure they achieve their intended effects and reduce the impact of the negative unintended consequences.

**35. We conclude that there are numerous lessons that must be learned from the intervention in Afghanistan which are beyond the immediate scope of this Report. We recommend that, at an appropriate point in the future, when British combat operations have ceased, a full and comprehensive public inquiry into the Government's policy towards Afghanistan be conducted. It should include, but not be limited to, the decision to deploy to Afghanistan in 2001, and Helmand in 2006, civil-military relations both in Whitehall and on the ground, the efficacy of the comprehensive approach, the appropriateness of the counter-insurgency doctrines deployed, the adequacy of resources provided, the decision to set a timetable for withdrawal, and what conditions should apply in the future before the UK enters into a multinational military effort. (Paragraph 241)**

The Government agrees that it is vitally important that lessons be learned from the UK's engagement in Afghanistan, not least for the sake of any future conflicts. An inquiry may be one way of achieving this, and at an appropriate point in the future, the decision whether to hold one will need to be made by the Government of the day.





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