



Department for
International
Development



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

AFGHANISTAN

MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT

April 2011

The UK is engaged in Afghanistan as part of a 48-nation coalition to prevent international terrorists including Al Qaeda from again using Afghanistan as a base from which to operate, threatening our security and that of the region.

The Government has committed itself to keeping Parliament informed about developments in Afghanistan on a monthly basis. This is the sixth monthly report and reflects the combined assessment of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development.

The Rt. Hon. William Hague MP
Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs

Overview

April saw a series of security incidents, notably the attack on the UN compound in Mazar-e-Sharif and the escape of about 500 prisoners from the Sarposa jail in Kandahar.

Such incidents attracted a high level of media interest and led to press speculation about the capability and reliability of the Afghan security authorities.

Insurgent activity in April did not increase significantly compared with that seen in March. Within Helmand levels of such activity remained particularly low compared to previous periods. However seasonal trends associated with the completion of the poppy harvest, the large number of weapons caches still being found and the Taliban's declared intention to begin their spring offensive all suggest that activity will increase over the coming months.

The strength of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) has grown again in April and this, combined with falling attrition rates, will help to ensure that the ANSF are increasingly able to meet this threat.

The troubled Kabul Bank was taken over by the Government and split into two.

The Special Court, established to investigate allegations of malpractice in the autumn Parliamentary elections, completed its provincial recounts of the disputed Parliamentary Election results.

As the Prime Minister stated on 3 May, the death of Al Qaeda founder and leader Osama Bin Laden, killed by US ground forces in Pakistan on 2 May, presents a new opportunity for Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together to achieve stability on both sides of the border. We should take this opportunity to send a clear message to the Taliban: now is the time to separate themselves from Al Qaeda and participate in a peaceful political process.

Political

The Prime Minister visited Pakistan on 5 April. He highlighted our shared interest in a stable and secure Afghanistan, and encouraged Pakistan to play a constructive role.

A Pakistani delegation led by Prime Minister Gilani, including Chief of Army Staff General Kayani and Director-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence Lieutenant General Pasha, visited Kabul on 16 April. During the visit Prime Minister Gilani stressed Pakistan's support for a stable Afghanistan and the Afghan Government's peace efforts to date. President Karzai made clear that Pakistan had a role to play in this process as it developed. In their discussions, President Karzai and Prime Minister Gilani agreed to upgrade the Afghanistan-Pakistan Peace Commission established during the Afghan High Peace Council's visit to Pakistan in January. It will now include Defence Ministers, Heads of their armies and intelligence chiefs, as well as Foreign Ministers.

Reconciliation and Reintegration

Minister Stanekzai led a High Peace Council visit to Helmand to brief Provincial Government and tribal leadership on President Karzai's peace and reconciliation programme. Meetings with Afghan Government line ministry officials and tribal elders focused on the importance of peace and security in Northern Helmand. Stanekzai urged the provincial Government to begin rolling out the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme across Helmand.

Parliament

On 25 April the Special Court, established to investigate allegations of electoral malpractice, completed its provincial recounts of the 18 September Parliamentary Election results. It is unclear when the Special Court will announce the results of its investigations and what the impact of this will be.

British officials in Kabul have focused on increased engagement with the Members and Chairpersons of the newly-formed Parliamentary Committees to help build their capacity and enhance their role in Parliament.

Regional developments

On 1 April Karen Pierce, UK Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Director for South Asia and Afghanistan, visited Ankara for talks on Afghanistan and Pakistan with the Turks. The UK and Turkey agreed to continue to work together closely, particularly within the Turkish-led Regional Working Group and in the run-up to the Istanbul international conference on Afghanistan to be held in late 2011.

Strengthening the Afghan State

Justice and Rule of Law

On 9-10 April, Canada hosted the sixth meeting of the Dubai Process Working Group on Border Management in Islamabad. The Working Group brought together senior and mid-ranking representatives from the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan. They discussed advancing mutual objectives on law enforcement, counter-narcotics, customs and the movement of people.

The Afghan and Pakistani delegations agreed a number of positive steps towards enhanced cross-border cooperation. Delegates agreed that good communication would be critical to future collaboration and committed to working with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to develop a proposal for a joint border patrol. They also recognised the need for greater regional focus, and discussed how to build on the joint operations undertaken between Afghanistan and Iran. Attendance was good on both sides and the delegations were well prepared.

Governor-led poppy eradication operations took place in nine provinces. According to UN reporting a total of 2,856 hectares of poppy had been eradicated by 25 April, of which 1,942 hectares were in Helmand Province. It therefore looked likely that the Governor's eradication target of 2,000 hectares would be met. However, sadly twelve Afghan police officers were killed and 37 injured during attacks on eradication teams.

The Afghan drugs trade remains a threat to the stability of Afghanistan, providing financial and logistical support to the insurgency. The UK continues to support the Government of Afghanistan in implementing its National Drug Control Strategy, including Governor-led eradication.

Development

During April another 424 local Afghan communities elected Community Development Councils (CDC), bringing the total number of elected Councils to more than 26,000. CDCs support local community-driven development projects, including road building, electricity generation and irrigation.

DFID helped communities in four provinces select 120 local people to monitor around 80 Government infrastructure projects to ensure they deliver what has been promised, including school building, roads, electricity supply, police stations and health clinics.

In Helmand, the UK-led PRT helped the Provincial Government complete District Development Plans in two more districts, Nawa and Garmsir. These plans help the Government of Afghanistan to deliver services in response to needs identified by community councils. In Nad Ali the government is cleaning canals, refurbishing schools, and providing drinking water for its people using UK and other international funds.

On 30 April a successful election was held for the Lashkar Gah Interim Municipal Council. 1500 registered electors from across the District voted to elect the 22 member Council. Working with the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, the UK-led PRT will now provide support and training to the Council as it establishes its role and functions.

The UK-led PRT is also supporting sustainable development of Helmand's agricultural sector through support to irrigation and water resource management. A public signing in Kabul on 16 April marked the start of the DFID and Asian Development Bank funded Helmand River Basin Master plan. This is a three year programme of work to analyse the Helmand River Basin, which covers 40% of the country, and produce a plan to develop and manage water resources. In parallel to this longer term process, the PRT is working with Afghans to identify priority irrigation needs to rehabilitate the system, prevent further degradation and structural failure and support increased agricultural development. This work is closely linked with wider PRT and international efforts to support private sector growth, particularly in agricultural and related sectors.

Economy

The International Monetary Fund and the Afghan Government continued negotiations towards a new IMF programme. The Afghan Government took some positive steps towards resolving the

current situation. On 20 April the Central Bank's Governor Fitrat announced the splitting of the Kabul Bank into two in order to manage the good loans and other assets and deposits separately from the bad ones. Governor Fitrat also said that the Afghan government will pursue the repayments of loans made to shareholders and major borrowers for the full amounts attributed to them, so that the people of Afghanistan can be reimbursed.

Construction started at Bost Agri-Business Park in April. This will provide potential investors with land and support infrastructure in Lashkar Gah. The UK-led PRT is also providing support and training to potential investors in the Park. Together with key infrastructure this programme will help support the development of Lashkar Gah as an economic hub, providing growth and employment generation across the province.

Security

Insurgent Threat

On 1 April, the UN compound in Mazar-e Sharif was attacked when a protest about the burning of the Qur'an in the US turned violent. Seven international staff members from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) were killed in the attack. This was a brutal act which the Foreign Secretary and other international leaders condemned. It is vital that UNAMA can carry out their work in a safe and secure environment.

On 8 April an ISAF spokesman said in a statement that Al-Qaeda was not staging a comeback as suggested by some reports and that militants remained under pressure in the country's east. ISAF pressure was maintained when senior Al Qaeda leader, Abu Hafs al-Najdi, was killed on 13 April in the Dangam district of Kunar province.

On 18 April two Afghan soldiers were killed and seven people hurt following an attack on the Afghan defence ministry in Kabul.

On 26 April about 500 prisoners escaped from Sarposa high security prison in Kandahar. About 70 escapees were later recaptured. The Taliban claimed responsibility for digging the tunnel that enabled the mass escape. The Afghan Minister of Justice admitted that the escape must have had inside help. The Prison Warden, along with his senior staff, were later arrested by Afghan security forces. This was a major, if short term, propaganda coup for the Taliban. The Afghan authorities are investigating the incident and will take corrective measures.

On 27 April eight US troops and a US contractor were killed by an Afghan air force pilot at Kabul Airport.

On 30 April the Taliban announced that their spring offensive would begin on 1 May. They indicated that they would start these operations with a range of asymmetric attacks against Afghan and foreign targets.

Troop contributions

The latest figures from ISAF on troop contributions are unchanged from the March report.

Table One: International Contributions to ISAF:

Country	Contribution	% of Total
US	90,000	68.2%
UK	9,500	7.2%
Germany	4,909	3.7%
France	3,979	3.0%
Italy	3,815	2.9%
Canada	2,900	2.2%
Poland	2,527	1.9%
Turkey	1,799	1.3%
Romania	1,726	1.3%
Australia	1,550	1.2%
Spain	1,499	1.1%
Others (37 nations)	7,907	6.0%
Current Total	132,203	100.00%

Above numbers are indicative of troop contributions as at 4 March 2011, actual numbers fluctuate daily. Source: ISAF

Progress towards Transition

On 9 April Governor Mangal hosted the first formal discussions between the Provincial Government, ANSF, ISAF, the UK-led PRT and US Regional Platform regarding transition in Helmand. Governor Mangal thanked the security partners in Helmand “from the bottom of his heart”, saying the inclusion of Lashkar Gah in the first tranche of transition was a reflection of their good leadership and co-operation. Detailed planning continues ahead of the formal start of transition in July.

ANSF Growth and Capability

Significant efforts to provide literacy training and education to the ANSF continue. Currently over 76,000 members of the ANSF have completed literacy training. Another 70,000 are currently being trained. 206 officers graduated from Afghan National Army (ANA) officer training programmes in April. Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) programmes produced 387 new sergeants. Another step was made towards ANSF professionalization and self-reliance when the first “Train the Trainer” Instructor course got underway at Regional Military Training Centre-Kandahar with 42 NCO instructor candidates.

The Afghan Air Force C-27 transport aircraft fleet exceeded 300 monthly flying hours for the first time and also surpassed 1,000 total sorties in April, the highest number of sorties generated in a single month, including the movement of more than 8,000 passengers and 96 tonnes of cargo.

The UK, at the request of Governor Mangal and district governors, has begun to establish an Afghan Local Police (ALP) presence in Central Helmand. We have worked with the Afghan authorities to identify and establish five ALP initiatives within our area of operations. UK support includes assistance with recruitment, training and mentoring. Afghan Local Police provide interim community-based defence against the insurgency in contested areas which are important to the campaign but where there are currently insufficient ANSF.

Table Two: ANSF Growth to 30 April 2011:

	Objective (31 October 2011)	Target Strength (31 April 2011)	Actual Strength (31 April 2011)	April Target Met
ANA:	171,600	157,400	164,000	Yes
ANP:	134,000	124,400	126,300	Yes
ANA Officers:	26,400	24,400	21,000	No
ANA NCOs:	59,000	51,900	42,600	No

Table Three: ANSF Attrition Rates:

	Target Monthly Attrition	Actual Monthly Attrition	April Target Met
ANA:	1.4%	1.9%	No
ANP:	1.4%	1.4%	Yes
Uniformed Police	1.4%	1.4%	Yes
Border Police	1.4%	1.5%	No
National Civil Order Police	1.4%	1.3%	Yes

Both the ANP and ANA have continued to grow this month with attrition rates in the ANP still meeting the target rate of 1.4% per month. Attrition in the ANA remains above the target rate although there has been a significant fall since last month (2.6%), it will be necessary to look at trends over a longer period before drawing too many conclusions from this but we hope that this reduction can be sustained.

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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