House of Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee

The UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan

Fourth Report of Session 2010–11

Volume I

Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

Additional written evidence is contained in Volume II, available on the Committee website at www.parliament.uk/facom

Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 9 February 2011
The Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated agencies.

Current membership

Richard Ottaway (Conservative, Croydon South) (Chair)
Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth (Labour, Coventry North East)
Mr John Baron (Conservative, Basildon and Billericay)
Rt Hon Sir Menzies Campbell (Liberal Democrats, North East Fife)
Rt Hon Ann Clwyd (Labour, Cynon Valley)
Mike Gapes (Labour, Ilford South)
Andrew Rosindell (Conservative, Romford)
Mr Frank Roy (Labour, Motherwell and Wishaw)
Rt Hon Sir John Stanley (Conservative, Tonbridge and Malling)
Rory Stewart (Conservative, Penrith and The Border)
Mr Dave Watts (Labour, St Helens North)

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during the parliament:

Emma Reynolds (Labour, Wolverhampton North East)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including news items) are on the internet at www.parliament.uk/facom. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the front of this volume.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume.

Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Dr Robin James (Clerk), Mr Eliot Barrass (Second Clerk), Ms Adèle Brown (Committee Specialist), Dr Brigid Fowler (Committee Specialist), Mr Richard Dawson (Senior Committee Assistant), Jacqueline Cooksey (Committee Assistant), Mrs Catherine Close (Committee Assistant) and Mr Alex Paterson (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6394; the Committee’s email address is foraffcom@parliament.uk
# Contents

## Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusions and recommendations</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>List of key abbreviations</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART 1: A SNAPSHOT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The inquiry</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent developments</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK engagement in Afghanistan</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs and spending</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK support for Pakistan</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Progress after the military ‘surge’</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background and context</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The surge and civilian safety: losing hearts and minds?</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical rather than strategic success?</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping or hindering the push towards political reconciliation?</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The extent of Pakistan’s support for the counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sanctuary for Afghan insurgents</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A selective Pakistani approach to the insurgency?</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The West’s lack of political leverage</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct US action in Pakistan</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Transition to Afghan control: creating the conditions for withdrawal?</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress on security transition</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK contribution</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International efforts</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burden sharing</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian transition: bolstering the Afghan state?</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A climate of disaffection</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of a solid local partner</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The legacy of international disunity</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The British contribution</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Prospects for a political settlement?</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The international context</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The key players, their positions and roles</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The insurgents</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The role of the Afghan government 53
The US role 54
  Divisions in the US position over reconciliation 55
What role for the UK? 56
  Pakistan’s role 58
  The wider region 60
The terms of a negotiated settlement 62
Prospects for success 63

PART 2: ASSESSING THE UK’S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH TO AFGHANISTAN 64

6 The debate over deadlines 64
  Background 64
  Chronology of a changing British position 65
  Why the change in policy? 67
  Who made the decision on the 2015 deadline? 67
  The possible consequences of announcing deadlines 69
    Potential risks—the downside 69
    Potential benefits—the upside 71
  Helping to prevent a future escalation of the counter-insurgency campaign 73
  Assessment 74

7 Assessing the suitability of the UK’s mission and goals 76
  Protecting UK national security: the core mission in Afghanistan? 76
  Are the UK’s goals appropriate and achievable? 78
    A more stable and safer Afghanistan 78
    Creating the conditions for withdrawal including capable Afghan Security Forces 81
    An Afghan-led political settlement that represents all Afghan people 82
    Regional political and security co-operation that supports a stable Afghanistan 83
  Conclusion: the UK’s four goals and the core mission 83

8 Communicating the case effectively? 84
  Communicating the campaign in Afghanistan 84
    The international effort 84
    Assessing the UK’s efforts 85
  Communicating the campaign to British audiences 86
    The national security narrative 86
  Parliamentary engagement on current and future plans 87

9 Overarching issues of concern 89
  Who’s driving British policy on Afghanistan? 89
  The need for realistic goals and honest assessments of progress 91
  Practical constraints on UK action 93

10 Learning lessons for the future 96
Summary

On taking office in May 2010, the Coalition Government placed Afghanistan and Pakistan at the top of its list of foreign policy priorities. As a Committee we chose to do likewise and have been inquiring into this vitally important issue since July 2010.

At the very outset, we wish to pay tribute to all the British personnel, both military and civilian, who are serving in Afghanistan but in particular to those who have lost their lives in Afghanistan, and the many more who have sustained life-changing injuries as a result of the conflict there.

We are mindful that some of the conclusions in this Report, because they are critical of Government policy may, by implication, be interpreted as a criticism of the men and women who are applying it in the face of extremely hazardous, hostile and difficult conditions. We wish to place on record that nothing could be further from the truth. They have our full support in tackling the challenges before them and their efforts are rightly described in so many instances as heroic. It is our hope that this Report will be received in the constructively critical manner in which it is intended, and regarded as a contribution to the wider debate which is taking place on how to improve a situation to which there are no easy solutions.

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. There is also 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.

These criticisms do not mean that nothing has been achieved in the 10 years since the US-led intervention. 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.

Ten years after its initial intervention, the international community’s involvement in Afghanistan is now being heavily influenced by an ISAF-agreed 2014 deadline, when plans to transfer security and civilian control back to Afghans are due to come into force. Yet, the security rationale behind the UK Government’s decision to announce the 2015 deadline for the unconditional withdrawal of UK combat forces remains unclear and there are a number of potential risks inherent in such an approach. We recommend that the Government clarify why the decision was taken and why it was not taken in the National Security Council. However, given that the decision to announce a deadline 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.

Although the current international emphasis favours intense military pressure aimed at defeating the insurgency, it is clear that military pressure alone is not enough to bring security and stability to Afghanistan. There is a danger that without appropriate political leadership, the current military campaign is in danger of inadvertently de-railing efforts to secure a political solution to what is essentially a political problem. As the dominant international force in Afghanistan, the US’s role in this respect is crucial to ensure that the sacrifices made by the West and by Afghans alike are not in vain. We cannot overestimate the importance of direct US support for, and leadership of, a process of political reconciliation in Afghanistan. Indeed, 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 with the Taliban leadership because, without the US’s support in this respect, there can be no longer-term peace in Afghanistan. As a key Ally, the UK has an important role to play in encouraging the US to adopt a more pro-active approach in this respect.
Conclusions and recommendations

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)
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)

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)

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)

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)

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)
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)

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)

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)

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)

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)
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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

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
The UK’s foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

**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)

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)
## List of key abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANA</td>
<td>Afghan National Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANP</td>
<td>Afghan National Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSF</td>
<td>Afghan National Security Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COIN</td>
<td>Counterinsurgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATA</td>
<td>Federally Administered Tribal Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>Foreign &amp; Commonwealth Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIG</td>
<td>Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security Assistance Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISI</td>
<td>Inter-Services Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRT</td>
<td>Provincial Reconstruction Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction

The inquiry

1. On taking office in May 2010, the Coalition Government placed Afghanistan and Pakistan at the top of its list of foreign policy priorities. As a Committee, we resolved to do likewise, and immediately after the Committee’s membership was elected in July 2010 we launched an inquiry into the Government’s policy in this vitally important area. We have taken both written and oral evidence from a wide range of individuals, experts, analysts, officials and Ministers. We heard oral testimony from the following:

- 13 October 2010: Michael Semple, Fellow, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard University; James Fergusson, author and journalist; Jolyon Leslie, independent Afghan analyst; Matt Waldman, independent Afghan analyst.

- 20 October 2010: Dr Sajjan Gohel, International Security Director, Asia-Pacific Foundation; Dr Farzana Shaikh, Associate Fellow, Asia Programme, Chatham House; Sir Hilary Synnott, Consulting Senior Fellow for South Asia and the Gulf, International Institute of Strategic Studies.

- 9 November 2010: Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, former British Ambassador to Kabul and former Special Representative on Afghanistan to the Foreign Secretary; Gilles Dorronsoro, Visiting Scholar, Asia Program, Carnegie Foundation; Gerard Russell, Fellow, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard University.

- 15 November 2010: Rt Hon William Hague MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and Karen Pierce, Director South Asia and Afghanistan, FCO, and Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

2. We also travelled to the region in late October 2010, visiting Islamabad, Kabul, Herat and Helmand to enable us to gain additional insights into the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The report that follows is the product of these investigations.

3. We made a conscious decision to avoid replicating the work of our predecessor Committee which published a major report on the same subject in August 2009.1 This Report does not set out to assess the totality of UK and international efforts in either Afghanistan or Pakistan. In parallel to our inquiry, other Parliamentary Committees have been scrutinising various aspects of Government policy in Afghanistan.2 Where it was relevant we have drawn on testimony from these Committees’ inquiries and we await their ultimate conclusions with interest. Although references to previous policies and practices are inevitable, our inquiry is deliberately not retrospective in nature and instead focuses on a series of foreign policy issues that we believe are of current parliamentary and public concern and which fall to us given our remit to scrutinise the policies of the FCO. With this

---

1 Foreign Affairs Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2008–09, Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan, HC 302

2 See for example, the Defence Committee’s inquiries into “Operations in Afghanistan”, and “Ensuring success in Afghanistan: The role of the UK Armed Forces” and the inquiry by the House of Lords EU Sub-Committee C - Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy into The EU’s Afghan Police Mission, Afghanistan.
in mind, we have sought throughout the Report to consider how appropriate and effective the UK’s current foreign policy approach is towards both Afghanistan and Pakistan, how that should be measured, whether the FCO has made an effective contribution to the overall Government effort, and finally whether there are any broader lessons that could be learned for the UK’s future foreign policy approach to insecure states.

4. We would like to place on record our thanks to all those who have contributed to this inquiry and helped to inform it by offering their views either orally or in writing, at Westminster and during our visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan. We also wish to thank the FCO and Ministry of Defence (MOD) staff for their assistance in connection with our visit. A full list of witnesses can be found at the end of this Report, along with a list of the key interlocutors whom we met during our visit.

5. Finally, we would like to pay tribute to all the British personnel, both military and civilian, who are serving in Afghanistan but in particular to those who have lost their lives in Afghanistan, and the many more who have sustained life-changing injuries as a result of the conflict there.

**Recent developments**

6. A series of international and domestic events have shaped the policy debate since our predecessor Committee last reported on Afghanistan in August 2009. In that month, Hamid Karzai was re-elected as President of Afghanistan, amid considerable controversy. While the international community had hoped the election would be a showcase for progress in Afghanistan, the reality proved wholly different, with widespread fraud, contested results, ballot-rigging and high-level corruption. Just over a year later, in September 2010, elections for Afghanistan’s parliament, which had been delayed from May because of security concerns, proved equally problematic, with large numbers of candidates disqualified as a result of serious and endemic voting irregularities. Corruption remains widespread, the security situation is precarious in many provinces, disaffection with the government is high and Kabul’s control over the rest of the country is limited at best. Afghans in many areas still only have limited access to the most basic of government services, despite the longstanding promises of the international community to bring peace, stability and development to the country, and the vast sums of money which have been expended to that end. In many areas where progress has been made, for example in health and education, there is a risk that gains will be reversed because of the deteriorating security situation and the rapid expansion of the Taliban’s network of shadow government structures.

7. In January 2010, shortly after President Obama announced the United States’ updated ‘AfPak’ policy, and as the US-led military action continued to intensify, Heads of State and Government with an interest in Afghanistan met in London, ostensibly to agree on a political strategy that would complement the surge and bring more unity to what up until then had often been a disjointed and uncoordinated international effort. With hindsight,

---

3 In Transparency International’s 2010 Corruptions Perceptions Index, Afghanistan was ranked 176 out of 178 countries for corruption.

4 See below, at paragraph 83, for further discussion of this issue.
behind the rhetoric of a sustained commitment to Afghanistan, there was little doubt that
the gathering marked the first formal stage towards an international ‘exit strategy’ for
Afghanistan, particularly given falling public support for the intervention, the decision
of some ISAF countries to withdraw from Afghanistan and President Obama’s statement
that the prospect of assigning security responsibility to Afghan forces would enable the US
“to begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July of 2011.” As a result of the
London Conference, political reconciliation was supposed to rise up the agenda and the
Afghan government and the international community agreed to achieve specific objectives
on security, governance, and economic development within agreed timeframes. Discussions subsequently continued in July in Kabul, where representatives of
governments assessed what progress had been made since January and agreed on more
commitments for the coming months under the Afghan-led Kabul Process, which aims to
accelerate Afghanistan’s ability to govern itself, to reduce dependence on the international
community, and to enhance Afghanistan’s security forces. Key to this was a commitment
by NATO and international partners to support President Karzai’s ambition that Afghan
National Security Forces (ANSF) should take responsibility for security in Afghanistan by
the end of 2014.

8. From a British perspective, although the Government changed following the May 2010
General Election, much of its approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan did not. As with the
previous Government, the new Coalition Government’s support for the International
Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan continued to shape British policy.
There were some key changes, not least the use of the new National Security Council to co-
ordinate Whitehall’s Afghan war effort and, crucially, the decision publicly to set 2015 as a
deadline for withdrawing British combat troops. Nonetheless, the Government’s key
objective in Afghanistan mirrors that of its predecessor, namely that Afghanistan should
not again become a place from which al-Qaeda and other extremists can attack the UK and
British interests. According to the Government’s written evidence, achieving this objective,
is said to depend on the achievement of four main goals:

i. a more stable and secure Afghanistan;

ii. the conditions for withdrawal of UK combat troops by 2015, including capable
Afghan National Security Forces;

iii. an Afghan-led political settlement that represents all Afghan people; and

iv. regional political and security co-operation that supports a stable Afghanistan.

5 Decisions to withdraw from Afghanistan had already been taken by the Netherlands and Canada while discussions
about possible withdrawal had also taken place in several other ISAF countries. See Chapter 6 for further discussion
of this issue.

6 Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan, United States
Military Academy, West Point, New York, 1 December 2009.

7 Ev 3

8 Ev 3. See also comments made by President Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,
Inaugural Speech, 19 November 2009.

9 Ev 1
In subsequent chapters in Part 1 of this Report, we look at the progress made towards each of these ‘goals’ before turning in Part 2 (specifically Chapter 7), to discuss concerns about their underlying validity. In particular, we assess evidence which questions whether the four goals outlined above, which reach far beyond the stated mission objective of defeating al-Qaeda, actually support that objective and whether the core mission itself is appropriate given the current level of threat from al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

9. We are mindful that some of the conclusions in this Report, because they are critical of Government policy may, by implication, be interpreted as a criticism of the men and women who are applying it in the face of extremely hazardous, hostile and difficult conditions. We wish to place on record that nothing could be further from the truth. They have our full support in tackling the challenges before them. It is our hope that this Report will be received in the constructively critical manner in which it is intended, and regarded as a contribution to the wider debate which is taking place on how to improve a situation to which there are no easy solutions.

UK engagement in Afghanistan

Costs and spending

10. The scale of the UK’s civilian commitment is considerable. In the financial year 2010–11, the UK’s total civilian programme expenditure related to Afghanistan is expected to be in excess of £220 million. This is made up of Department for International Development (DFID), MOD and FCO funds with contributions from the jointly managed Conflict Pool. But civilian spending is dwarfed by the cost of the military campaign. The latest outturn figure shows that £3.8 billion was spent on operations in Afghanistan in 2009–10. The current forecast for 2010–11 is for £4.5 billion, although some studies suggest that when the cost of supporting injured war veterans is taken into account, the figure could be significantly higher. The Government states that since the General Election, additional funding has been made available for a campaign to counter improvised explosive devices (£67 million), as well as £189 million for a range of protection equipment, including surveillance, communications and logistics resources. DFID states it has also increased UK aid to Afghanistan by 40% to £700 million, and has pledged to intensify and reinvigorate its civilian effort focusing on: stabilising insecure areas; stimulating the economy; and improving the effectiveness of the Afghan government.

Personnel

11. UK civilian representation in Afghanistan is based in the British Embassy in Kabul (around 300 staff) and in the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) based in Helmand’s provincial capital, Lashkar Gah (24 FCO positions plus 30 staffed by the Stabilisation Unit

---

10 Ev 1
11 Figures provide by the House of Commons Library.
14 Ev 2
of which FCO, MOD and DFID are joint parent departments). FCO staff in Afghanistan (both UK based and locally engaged) work alongside UK civil servants from a range of government departments, and contracted specialists working as governance, rule of law, justice, counter-narcotics, infrastructure and economics advisers. In military terms, the UK’s contribution is exceeded only by the US in terms of troop numbers. Currently some 9,500 British personnel are part of ISAF on an enduring basis, the majority (approximately 80%) of whom are based in Helmand and located alongside the Helmand PRT. The UK also has 1,300 troops located at Kandahar Air Field and 500 in Kabul.

UK support for Pakistan

12. Nuclear-armed Pakistan is about three-and-a-half times the size of the UK and is the world’s sixth most populous country.\(^{15}\) It shares borders with four countries: India to the east, China to the north east, Iran to the south west and Afghanistan along the western and northern boundaries (the mountainous border is known as the Durand Line and is not formally recognised by Afghanistan). It is considered by both the British Government and the US administration to be crucial to success in Afghanistan.

13. The UK’s connection to Pakistan is both deep and long-standing and there are a multiplicity of British connections to Pakistan by virtue of both history and family ties. In 1947, on independence from Britain, the subcontinent was split into two successor states: the Dominion of India and that of Pakistan, both with the UK Monarch as Head of State and represented in each by a Governor General. East and West Pakistan was created from the frontier areas of British India. Subsequently, Pakistan became independent in 1947 as did India in 1950. Nowadays, the UK is home to more than 900,000 UK citizens of Pakistani origin with close and continuing family connections to Pakistan. There is also, in the view of one witness, “a skilful and far-reaching Pakistani lobby”, many of whom are wealthy and some of whom constitute an important—perhaps even decisive—political constituency in some marginals”.\(^{16}\)

14. The UK is the second largest bilateral overseas investor in Pakistan and the fourth largest trading partner (over £1 billion of bilateral trade annually).\(^{17}\) The UK currently contributes £665 million over four years (2009–10 to 2013–14) in development assistance, and further amounts in support of counter-terrorism, conflict prevention and defence assistance. Total assistance spending to Pakistan for the financial year 2009–10 was £158.8 million.\(^{18}\) The British High Commission has just under 500 staff in Islamabad and 85 in Karachi. This also includes representatives from DFID, MOD and other Whitehall departments.

15. Following its return to democratic rule in 2008, Pakistan remains a democracy in transition. As recent events have shown, the civilian government faces significant challenges in dealing with political, social and economic instability as well as a rising

---

\(^{15}\) In 2010 Pakistan’s population was estimated to be 184,404,791 million, behind Brazil and ahead of Russia (CIA World Factbook. Estimates as at July 2010). By 2050 it is expected to be close to 268 million.

\(^{16}\) Ev 84 [Professor Shaun Gregory]

\(^{17}\) Ev 28

\(^{18}\) Ev 1
extremist Islamist terrorist threat. As the popular response to Pakistan’s devastating floods during 2010 showed, the military remains both popular with ordinary Pakistanis and institutionally powerful; it recently saw a significant uplift to its funding in the current Budget agreed by the government. We discuss the military and its current role in more detail below in Chapter 3.

16. Since 2001, the British Government’s security strategy towards Pakistan has in many respects followed the lead of the US. In Professor Shaun Gregory’s view, the FCO has operated a “reasonably consistent Pakistan policy for decades [which] prefers minor and reversible adjustments of policy to more substantive, risky, and perhaps irrevocable changes”. In December 2004, the Government stated that the UK and Pakistan shared close strategic ties and that Pakistan was a key ally in the ‘war against terror’, a stance that the British Government continued to maintain publicly for the duration of the Musharraf era. In December 2006, the UK Government signed a long-term Development Partnership Agreement with the government of Pakistan. As a result, UK aid to Pakistan doubled, from £236 million for the period 2005–2008, up to £480 million for the period 2008–2011, making Pakistan one of the UK’s largest aid recipients.

17. Recent bilateral relations have been dominated by the issue of terrorism in Pakistan which the British Government states poses a substantial threat to UK national security, and to UK troops and objectives in Afghanistan. The most serious international terrorist threat to the UK continues to come from al-Qaeda core and associated militants, located in the border areas of Pakistan. Many of the groups which seek to harm Western interests also have links to terrorist groups which have targeted Pakistani interests with devastating effects. The FCO states that reducing the threat emanating from within Pakistan is a top foreign policy priority and that in its engagement with Pakistan it continues to urge Pakistan to dismantle all militant and terrorist groups operating on, and from, Pakistani soil, and highlights that it is committed to working with Pakistan to enhance its capacity to focus on and tackle these threats.

18. The FCO states that because of the enduring nature of the UK’s relationship with Pakistan, the UK has a particular role in supporting Pakistan’s democratic future. To this end, the British Government states it is committed to “a long-term, productive partnership with Pakistan based on shared interests and mutual respect”. On 6 August 2010, the Government announced its commitment to an “enhanced UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue” which is intended to cover: people-to-people links and public diplomacy; business and trade; financial, macro-economic and political governance; service delivery; defence and security; and regional stability. As we note below in Chapter 3, Pakistan’s foreign policy is heavily influenced by its relationship with India.

19. Our discussion of Pakistan in this Report is largely undertaken in the context of the UK’s engagement in Afghanistan. However, we recognise the enduring importance of UK-Pakistan relations and, more generally, Pakistan’s strategic importance in the region, and

---

19 Ev 84
20 HC Deb, 5 February 2009, col 1040
21 Ev 31
22 Ev 27
its significance as a nuclear-weapons state. It is our intention therefore, at an appropriate point in the future, to consider in more detail the strategic challenges which Pakistan faces in its own right as well as the UK’s relationship with such a key partner.
PART 1: A SNAPSHOT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

2 Progress after the military ‘surge’

Background and context

20. One of the UK’s main goals is to ensure Afghanistan is safer and more secure by contributing to the international effort to roll back the insurgency, thereby facilitating the extension of the Afghan government’s area of control throughout the country. From a British perspective, it is hoped that this in turn will help to create the conditions for a political settlement and, ultimately, facilitate the withdrawal of UK combat troops by 2015.

21. The UK’s military goals are being pursued in conjunction with NATO’s ISAF which, under General David Petraeus’s command, has been bolstered by a military surge involving the deployment of an additional 30,000 US troops and some 9,000 troops from other ISAF contributing countries. This has taken the total number of ISAF troops in Afghanistan to just under 118,000 (with a further 26,000 US troops in Afghanistan as part of United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A)). The following chart shows the troop contribution levels of different ISAF nations.23

### International Security Assistance Force: Troop Contributing Nations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Troop Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>9500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>78430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>119,819</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23 ISAF “Placemat” (Contributing nations and troop numbers), as at 14 December 2010
22. The increasing number of US forces in particular has also led to a significant change in British operations, with US forces taking responsibility for areas where the UK previously took the lead military role. The British Government has been a strong supporter of the surge and the ‘population-centric’ strategy initiated by the former Commander of ISAF (COMISAF), General Stanley McChrystal, and endorsed by his successor, General David Petraeus. In accordance with this approach, ISAF troops have been instructed to “secure, serve and live among the population, build relationships, confront impunity, help build accountable governance, hold what is secured and conduct themselves with discipline”, all whilst pursuing “the enemy relentlessly”. In NATO’s view, this so-called ‘comprehensive approach’ to counter-insurgency will help to establish a “sovereign, independent, democratic, secure and stable Afghanistan that will never again be a safe haven for terrorists and terrorism.”

23. As part of an international coalition, the UK does not have, nor is it in a position to have, a wholly distinct foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Therefore it is impossible to measure UK success or otherwise in isolation. In addition, the sheer scale of the US effort in Afghanistan since the surge and the transfer of a number of areas from UK to US control has further shifted the balance of power and influence in favour of the US. As James Fergusson stated, “to judge the effectiveness of UK foreign policy in the region is to judge the effectiveness of US policy.” As the surge remains at the heart of US policy, we consider below the impact it has had, in a variety of areas. We return to consider the overall value of this approach vis-a-vis the UK’s core goal of preventing the return of al-Qaeda to Afghanistan, in Chapter 7.

The surge and civilian safety: losing hearts and minds?

24. It is widely argued that the most important aspect of a counter-insurgency campaign is the security of the population. As former COMISAF, General Stanley McChrystal, stated in 2009, the “measure of effectiveness will not be enemy killed; it will be the number of Afghans shielded from violence”. The prospects, in this respect, are not encouraging according to a number of sources which suggest that rather than improving security conditions for Afghans, the surge has created more insecurity and led to more civilian casualties. In November 2010, The Washington Post reported that the US’s operations in the latter part of 2010 were “more intense and had a harder edge” than at any time since 2001, despite the overall counter-insurgency campaign. In December 2010, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated that security in Afghanistan was worse than at any point in the past thirty years. The ICRC stated that violence had spread, civilian casualties had increased, access to medical care had deteriorated and an increasing number of people were being forced out of their homes because of more intense fighting...
than at any point since 2001.\textsuperscript{30} Richard Haas of the US think-tank, the Council on Foreign Relations, stated that “while the situation on the ground in Afghanistan should improve in areas where US military forces are operating in strength, the gains are likely to fade in the wake of their departure”.\textsuperscript{31}

25. In evidence to us, Matt Waldman quotes findings from the International Council on Security and Development which state that 68\% of respondents said NATO was failing to protect the local population, while 70\% said military operations in their area were bad for the Afghan people, a figure which rose to 99\% in Marjah.\textsuperscript{32} During the period January to June 2010, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported a 31\% increase in the number of civilians who were killed or injured in fighting in Afghanistan compared to the same period in 2009. In the South, during the same period there was a 136\% increase in civilian deaths.\textsuperscript{33} UNAMA’s most recent report from December 2010 states that “civilians continued to bear the brunt of intensified armed conflict as civilian casualties, including deaths and injuries, increased by 20\% in the first 10 months of 2010 compared with the same period in 2009”.\textsuperscript{34}

26. In a bid to undermine the surge, insurgents have stepped up their campaign of assassinations of Afghan civilians and government officials, creating further instability in the process. Although insurgents and anti-government forces are responsible for most civilian casualties, research conducted by the Open Society Foundation in 2010 showed that many Afghans believe that international forces have directly stoked the conflict. Respondents were also said to be suspicious of the international community’s motives because of the Coalition’s perceived (and actual) support for militias and warlords in some areas.\textsuperscript{35} As Michael Semple told us:

> The civilian casualty rate, apart from being bad in itself, makes things all the more difficult in the political process and certainly the Taliban capitalise on it. It also reduces the moral authority of both ISAF and the Kabul government. [...] Overall, the reporting of civilian casualties has a tendency to make people think “a plague on all their houses”.\textsuperscript{36}

27. Concerns were also raised about the vastly increased use of night raids by special forces as the “primary kill/capture mechanism” since the surge started.\textsuperscript{37} The US military states that raids of this sort are one of its most potent tactics for weakening the Taliban, by depriving the movement of seasoned commanders, draining its morale and forcing fighters to remain constantly on the move for fear of capture.\textsuperscript{38} However, critics say that the

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{The Times}, 17 December 2010
\textsuperscript{31} “Let’s un-surge in Afghanistan”, \textit{The Wall Street Journal Online}, 20 December 2010
\textsuperscript{32} Ev 49
\textsuperscript{33} Ev 21
\textsuperscript{34} “The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security”, Report of the UN Secretary General, A/65/612–S/2010/630, 10 December 2010
\textsuperscript{35} “The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan”, \textit{Open Society Foundation}, 7 October 2010
\textsuperscript{36} Q 19
\textsuperscript{37} “The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan”, \textit{Open Society Foundation}, 7 October 2010, p 4
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Financial Times}, 17 December 2010
opposition caused by the raids is undercutting the West’s broader goal of winning the hearts and minds of the population. When we met President Hamid Karzai, he expressed concern about the negative effect that some military tactics were having on the Afghan people, and the extent to which they were adding to the anger and alienation of Afghans and decreasing the legitimacy of the Afghan government. The Open Society Foundation’s report states that “each incident of abuse, whether caused by international forces or insurgents, reinforces these negative perceptions and further undermines any remaining Afghan trust”.

Similar points were made in written submissions to our inquiry, with one stating that “civilian casualties […] have fostered negative attitudes towards the UK, often deemed guilty by association if not by direct involvement”. In the light of concerns of this nature, General Petraeus has reportedly revised a directive on night raids to ensure that communities affected are given more information about why operations are taking place.

28. 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.

29. 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’.

**Tactical rather than strategic success?**

30. ISAF’s main effort in the south, Operation Moshtarak, began in November 2009 and aimed to improve freedom of movement along the main transport routes around Kandahar city. In February 2010, the focus of operations switched to central Helmand where a second phase of Operation Moshtarak aimed to clear the insurgency out of Nad Ali district, including the Taliban-controlled area of Marjah, and establish Afghan local governance and socio-economic development. In September, Coalition Forces began a combat phase of anti-Taliban operations in Kandahar’s Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai districts, involving some 8,000 US and Afghan troops. Simultaneously, special forces are reported to be engaged in a programme of targeted assassinations of key Taliban figures, including night raids, on an “industrial scale”. James Fergusson stated that at the heart of the surge is the goal of dominating the city and environs of Kandahar—the spiritual capital of Islam.

---

39 “The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan”, Open Society Foundation, 7 October 2010

40 Ev w12

41 Financial Times, 17 December 2010

42 The Guardian, 8 November 2010, see also Stephen Gray, Operation Snakebite, (Viking, 2009).
of the Pashtuns and the birthplace of the Taliban—and in so doing, “to place the US and her Coalition allies in a position of strength from which to negotiate with the insurgency”.43

31. Both the US and British military have been keen to show that the surge is delivering positive results and, in President Obama’s words, is “break[ing] the Taliban’s momentum”.44 Speaking in December 2010, General Sir David Richards, Chief of the Defence Staff, said that progress in the preceding three months had been “quite astronomical”,45 while the US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said that “there is no denying that the security climate is improving”.46 The Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, meanwhile told the Defence Committee in December that the Taliban’s command structure has been substantially disrupted.47 Finally, the US’s December 2010 strategy review of Afghanistan stated that “considerable gains” are being made towards military objectives,48 an assessment which the British Government stated was consistent with its own view of the conflict.49

32. These assessments chime with the optimistic progress appraisals we heard from some military and official sources during our visit and recent comments made by the Prime Minister.50 The impression we gained from these interlocutors was that they believed that since the surge and the arrival of additional resources, the security situation had improved. The metrics of success most mentioned were those of the number of insurgents captured or killed and the seizure of territory. We heard far less about the security of Afghans. On this basis, we took away a sense that although the situation remained precarious in the most heavily militarised areas of the south and east of the country, tactical gains were being made in Helmand and the longer-term prognosis for the counter-insurgency campaign as a whole was promising.

33. However, according to a number of non-military sources, while some tactical gains may be taking place in the South (although the Kandahar campaign is widely reported to be behind schedule), the security situation across Afghanistan as a whole is deteriorating. Some interlocutors, as well as those who gave evidence, attributed this in part to the decision to focus military counter-insurgency activity on the south and east which has allowed the Taliban to expand its presence and control in other previously relatively stable areas in Afghanistan.51 Gilles Dorronsoro told us that it is “clear that the Taliban have the momentum—especially in the east and north. In the last year, the last six months, they have made a lot of progress. So, altogether the surge is not working the way that it was meant to. There is no change in the overall balance of power and the Taliban are still making problems”.52 Overall, in light of the concerns outlined above, most witnesses were

43 Ev 49
44 “President Obama’s remarks on the strategy in Afghanistan”, New York Times, 17 December 2010
45 Daily Telegraph, 7 December 2010
46 The Times, 10 December 2010, p 43
47 Oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 15 December 2010, HC 554–v, Q 322.
48 “President Obama’s remarks on the strategy in Afghanistan”, New York Times, 17 December 2010
50 Ibid.
51 “Don’t change course now”, The Times, 10 December 2010, p 43, Ev w8, w20
52 Q 117
sceptical about whether the surge would bring strategic success and longer-term safety and security to Afghans. Dr Sajjan Gohel stated that "the Taliban believe that they are in the ascendancy. They feel they have the strategic advantage, durability and resources to outlast the West in Afghanistan".\(^{53}\) He added that, “success in defeating them militarily anytime soon appears remote”.\(^{54}\) Likewise, Matt Waldman stated, “NATO is not winning, or even beginning to win in Afghanistan”.\(^{55}\) He observed that the insurgents are "fatigued, and have been weakened by special forces’ operations, but they remain confident, and have no shortage of manpower or resources”.\(^{56}\) Gerard Russell stated:

> One of the things that concerns me [...] is whether we were right to think that it was ever going to work to put foreign troops into Afghan population centres—towns and villages—and keep them secure. It often seems to have been the stimulus for confrontation rather than the resolution of it, and for me that points to a much greater potential than existed for foreign forces in Afghanistan to have been all along in a position where they acted as a weapon of last resort, rather than being the front line of engagement with the Taliban.\(^{57}\)

34. Finally, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, former British Ambassador in Kabul, who was also Special Representative on Afghanistan to the Foreign Secretary, stated:

> We mustn’t forget that according to the strategy that we have signed up to, we are supposed to have stabilised 40 districts in southern and eastern Afghanistan by the end of next month [December 2010]. We are nowhere near achieving that—that performance measure has been forgotten. Forty districts next year and forty the year after is an almost impossible target, and it certainly won’t be done by garrisoning these areas and putting men in forts. For the Pashtuns, seeing a man in a fort is a provocation not a pacification.\(^{58}\)

35. 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.

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

36. Giving oral evidence to us, the Foreign Secretary explained that it was the FCO’s view that “military success and intensified military pressure are important components of bringing about a settlement, and the Taliban should expect intensified military pressure in the coming months in the absence of a political settlement”.\(^{59}\) However, some interlocutors

---

\(^{53}\) Ev 80

\(^{54}\) Ev 81

\(^{55}\) Ev 51

\(^{56}\) Ev 52

\(^{57}\) Q 119

\(^{58}\) Q 109

\(^{59}\) Q 133
and witnesses warned that the intensity of the military surge and some of the tactics being deployed, risked undermining the prospects for a political solution to the conflict by compounding enmity and mistrust between the warring parties.\textsuperscript{50} Specific concerns centred upon the fact that some of the insurgent commanders who might otherwise have been persuaded to enter into reconciliation have been targeted for assassination under the counter-insurgency strategy, leaving new militants in their place who may be more radical and less willing to negotiate.\textsuperscript{61} Michael Semple stated that the surge had convinced the Taliban that the West had “obviously decided to fight this one through rather than settle it”. He explained that “what they are saying is, ‘As you escalate and generate both civilian and military casualties, you undermine your claim to be interested ultimately in a settlement’”.\textsuperscript{62} He added that in these circumstances, “we are not giving the process a chance”.\textsuperscript{63} Others stated that US public statements supporting the reconciliation process are often undermined, in the Taliban’s view, by action on the ground, including targeted assassinations. James Fergusson stated that, “Quetta has not unnaturally concluded from all this that the US is not serious about wanting to negotiate”.\textsuperscript{64}

37. Gerard Russell, like others who submitted evidence,\textsuperscript{65} argued that the large-scale presence of troops, particularly in the south, is one of the main causes of the conflict and that it specifically impedes Afghan peacemaking efforts, in four ways:

\begin{itemize}
  \item First, because it reduces pressure on the Afghan political elite to achieve peace;
  \item second, because the Afghan government cannot deliver on any peace deal for as long as security strategy is in the hands of the US government;
  \item third, because the Taliban are less likely to make peace with a government that they denounce as being under foreign domination;
  \item and fourth, because the Taliban believe that the current balance of power is a temporary one and that when US forces leave, they will be able to get a better deal.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{itemize}

Finally, when we met President Hamid Karzai, he also told us of the longer term benefits to stability that he believed would derive from a lighter military footprint.

38. 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.
3 The extent of Pakistan’s support for the counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan

Background

39. Bordering the Afghan border to its south and east, Pakistan is considered by the British Government to be crucial to success in Afghanistan. Due to its latent conflict with India, for most of its history Pakistan has sought to assert control in Afghanistan through a policy known as ‘strategic depth’, by fostering friendly regimes in Kabul and supporting and providing sanctuary to insurgencies, including the Afghan Taliban, in a bid to prevent Afghanistan falling under Indian influence.67

40. Although India and Pakistan used to meet regularly though the Composite Dialogue, which provided for formal political dialogue on a range of issues including regional security, talks were suspended following the 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai. Bilateral political meetings to build confidence have since taken place, apparently with the assent of the Pakistani military, but there has been little substantive change in the overall position, and the belief within large sections of the Pakistani military that India continues to represent an existential threat to Pakistan continues to dominate Pakistani thinking on military, foreign and Afghan policy. They are particularly anxious about what is perceived as a strong Indian presence in Afghanistan and future Kabul-New Delhi alliance. This has been reinforced by concerns about the disputed ‘Durand Line’68 that divides not just Afghanistan and Pakistan but a sizeable Pashtun population on both sides of the border.

41. Prior to 2001, overt Pakistani support in the form of diplomatic recognition to the former Taliban government was combined with more clandestine backing for proxy terrorist groups in Afghanistan, in many instances created and shored up by the ISI, Pakistan’s powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency, which continues to drive foreign policy, in spite of the existence of a civilian government.

42. Today, Pakistan’s border areas with Afghanistan provide ungoverned space from which al-Qaeda and other militant and organised crime groups operate. Governance and security are weak, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The populations of the border areas are among the poorest in Pakistan, with the lowest literacy rates and limited access to public services. This allows space for radicalisation, and the Taliban has used violence, intimidation and terror to gain control over civilian populations in areas of northwest Pakistan.

---

67 HC 302, para 166. About two-thirds of Kashmir has remained with India since the 1947–1948 war and for many Pakistanis, this represents the unfinished business of Partition.

68 Named after Sir Mortimer Durand, Foreign Secretary of British India in 1893 when the boundary was drawn up.
A sanctuary for Afghan insurgents

43. In December 2010, Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff reiterated ISAF’s longstanding position in respect of Pakistan, namely that ISAF could not succeed in Afghanistan without first shutting down safe havens in Pakistan. Our witnesses were agreed that the ability of insurgents to seek support and sanctuary in Pakistan imposes limits on the extent to which ISAF’s current counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan can ever be successful, or to which insurgents can be persuaded to embrace a political settlement.

44. There is no doubt that the Afghan Taliban continue to receive support and sanctuary from within Pakistan, as Dr Gohel explained: “Taliban factions, such as the Quetta Shura, led by Mullah Omar, and the Haqqani Network continue to operate unhindered from safe havens within Pakistani territory and use these sanctuaries as a launch pad for cross-border attacks on US, British, Afghan and ISAF troops in Afghanistan”. As the Government’s written evidence makes clear, “Pakistan’s commitment to tackling this threat is important both for regional stability and the security of the UK, in denying operational space to both domestic and international terrorists”.

45. In contrast to the longstanding US and ISAF position outlined above by Admiral Mike Mullen, in January 2011, Lieutenant General David Rodriguez, Deputy Commander, US Forces-Afghanistan, argued that the US could succeed in Afghanistan even if Pakistan refused to shut down the border with Afghanistan: “This is not a mission-stopper in my mind”. However, several witnesses stated that the Afghan Taliban will not be defeated militarily without Pakistan’s help, while Dr Gohel argued that ISAF’s military strategy “will always remain hampered and flawed as long as the porous and badly manned border, the Durand Line, into Pakistan remains open”. On any given day, significant numbers of people are said to cross Pakistan’s formal boundary with Afghanistan, the so-called ‘Durand Line’ which runs for much of its length through mountainous and often highly inhospitable areas. Pakistan’s ability to stem the flow of insurgents across its border is very limited. Policing and securing such terrain would require resources that most countries would struggle to provide, and would require a far closer working relationship with the Afghan authorities than exists at present. Although regular discussions now take place between Pakistan and Afghanistan and there is said to be increased technical co-operation between the two countries’ armed forces, police and border management officials, it remains to be seen whether this can be translated into practical co-operation on the ground. For its part, the UK is supporting the development of border co-operation

---

69 The New York Times, 2 February 2011
71 Ev 32
72 The New York Times, 2 February 2011
73 Ev 48 [James Fergusson], Ev 50 [Matt Waldman]
74 Ev 81
75 Ev 21
centres designed to promote co-ordinated operational planning between ISAF and the Afghan and Pakistani security forces.\textsuperscript{76}

**A selective Pakistani approach to the insurgency?**

46. Although witnesses expressed disquiet about the lack of cross-border co-operation, they were more concerned about Pakistan’s approach to tackling the Afghan insurgency within its own borders. The FCO states that Pakistan is “increasingly recognising that it has suffered, particularly in the border areas, from instability in Afghanistan” and that this has prompted Islamabad to increase military and security co-operation with Kabul.\textsuperscript{77} The UK’s official position, as put to us by the Foreign Secretary, is that “we have seen a greatly increased willingness on the part of Pakistan to confront insurgencies on its own territory and to take action against terrorist groups. I would like to emphasise that […] rather than be critical”.\textsuperscript{78}

47. Witnesses and a number of interlocutors disagreed with the Government’s official position. Dr Gohel stated that “the rhetoric by the Pakistani military has not been translated into any substantive action with only half-hearted measures against the various Taliban factions headquartered in the country”.\textsuperscript{79} Pakistan has conducted an intensive counter-insurgency campaign within its borders over the last two years, sustaining considerable casualties in the process. However, its military offensives have not targeted the Afghan Taliban or its former proxies in Afghanistan including the Jallaludin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar militants, or Kashmiri separatist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, which have been responsible for attacks on Western targets and the terrorist strikes on Mumbai in 2008. Looking ahead, Sir Hilary Synnott told us that Pakistan was unlikely to change its strategy in respect of the Afghan Taliban”.\textsuperscript{80} Dr Gohel concurred:

> The [Pakistani] military spent an enormous amount of time and effort in the ’90s to support and assist the Afghan Taliban, giving them strategic depth in Afghanistan. […] They are not going to give up something that they invested so much time in just because the West is getting angry.\textsuperscript{81}

48. Official Pakistani statements reject claims that Pakistan is not willing to tackle the Afghan Taliban, and the Pakistani military argues that action is simply prioritised according to threat and its limited counter-insurgency capabilities, which it states have hindered its ability to tackle certain groups, particularly in the more inaccessible border areas in the north west of the country. Indeed, President Zardari reiterated this point to us in October, when he called for the UK to support the provision of military hardware that he said would allow Pakistan to target groups of concern to the West. Certainly, Pakistan’s military, although the sixth largest in the world, has not until recently been configured for

\textsuperscript{76} Ev 31
\textsuperscript{77} Ev 20
\textsuperscript{78} Q 185
\textsuperscript{79} Ev 61
\textsuperscript{80} Q 82
\textsuperscript{81} Q 82
counter-insurgency. It has instead been designed for conventional warfare and a perceived existential threat from India.82

49. However, it is worth noting that since 2001, Pakistan has received in excess of $12 billion of overt military-related aid from the US alone. In addition, in October 2010, to mark the end of the US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue process, the Obama administration announced a $2 billion military aid package for Islamabad. As Sir Hilary Synnott explained to us, the US decision to open its arms markets to Pakistan “has allowed Pakistan to use its own domestic money to buy big-ticket military items that have no relevance to the war on terror or Afghanistan, but are relevant only in relation to India”. Sir Hilary added that while “Britain has not fallen into that trap”,83 it has nevertheless provided significant financial and other assistance to help Pakistan improve its counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism capabilities. Indeed, as part of its wider programme of defence engagement, the UK has provided assistance to build the capacity of the Pakistani Army to conduct effective operations in Pakistan’s north-western border areas.84

50. Consequently, witnesses were largely of the view that the failure to tackle the Afghan Taliban in Pakistan was less to do with capabilities and more to do with will, or lack of it. The Henry Jackson Society’s written evidence states: “The reluctance of the Pakistani authorities to collaborate in disrupting the activities of the Afghan Taliban operating from within their country has been enormously damaging to the counter-insurgency effort in Afghanistan”.85

51. As noted above, in spite of the return of a civilian government in 2008, the military and one branch of its intelligence agencies, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI),86 retain a pivotal role in Pakistan’s defence, foreign, nuclear and internal security policy and drive Pakistan’s current policy towards Afghanistan. In August 2009, our predecessor Committee expressed concerns that there was a lack of uniform and widespread support within the military and ISI for the need to tackle the Afghan insurgency from within Pakistan. A number of subsequent reports, including that authored by Matt Waldman for the London School of Economics, have highlighted concerns about the Pakistani military’s approach to, and control over, the Afghan Taliban. Mr Waldman concluded that “Pakistan appears to be playing a double game of astonishing magnitude” in Afghanistan.87 Despite repeated statements by some officials in the Obama administration in Washington that Pakistan is working hard to crack down on militants, a private White House review used unusually strong language to suggest the Pakistani military is not doing nearly enough to confront the Taliban and al-Qaeda, according to a leaked report to Congress. The report notes that from March to June 2010, the Pakistani military “continued to avoid military engagements that would put it in direct conflict with Afghan Taliban or [al-Qaeda] forces in North Waziristan. This is as much a political choice as it is a reflection of an under-resourced
military prioritizing its targets”. The December 2010 White House review of progress in Afghanistan also concluded that consolidating gains in Afghanistan “require[s] that we make more progress with Pakistan to eliminate sanctuaries for violence, extremist networks”.

52. Professor Shaun Gregory told us: “with respect to the Afghan Taliban our interests and our objectives in Afghanistan are at odds with Pakistan’s and co-operation has been meagre. At best Pakistan has not significantly retarded the Afghan Taliban’s return to dominance in the Afghan Pashtun belt from safe havens in Pakistan; at worst—and more plausibly in my view—it has aided that process”.

53. Speaking last August in Bangalore, the Prime Minister said, “we want to see a strong and a stable and a democratic Pakistan […] But we cannot tolerate in any sense the idea that this country is allowed to look both ways and is able in any way to promote the export of terror, whether to India or whether to Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the world”. The FCO’s written evidence stated:

   In our engagement with Pakistan we consistently maintain that 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. […] The most serious international terrorist threat to the UK continues to come from al-Qaeda core and associated militants, located in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.

54. 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.

The West’s lack of political leverage

55. Previously, under the Bush administration, US effort was largely focused on targeting al-Qaeda operatives and networks in Pakistan. To this end, between 2001 and 2007, the US gave more than $10 billion in traceable aid to the Musharraf regime, the vast majority of which went directly to the military. In his book ‘Descent into Chaos’, Ahmed Rashid reflects the views of many commentators who believe that the US’s strategy of offering aid with few, if any, conditions attached, produced few strategic returns.

56. The change of emphasis under the Obama administration towards seeing Pakistan as both part of the problem in relation to Afghanistan, and potentially part of the solution has, in the view of witnesses, been only partially successful at best. Under the new strategy, both countries are treated as a single ‘theatre’ (dubbed ‘AfPak’, a term and concept which infuriates many Pakistanis). There are regular trilateral US-Pakistan-Afghanistan talks and

---

88 Ev 75 quoting Ed Henry, “White House report critical of Pakistan’s activity against militants”, CNN, 6 October 2010
89 “President Obama’s remarks on the strategy in Afghanistan”, New York Times, 17 December 2010
90 Ev 82
91 Speech given by the Prime Minister in Bangalore, India, 28 July 2010
92 Ev 31
an ongoing “strategic dialogue”. In addition to diplomatic initiatives, the US has committed to providing the Pakistani security forces with operational and development support to improve their ability to mount successful counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations. Non-military aid to Pakistan also tripled to $7.5 billion over five years, but was conditional upon Pakistan demonstrating its commitment to uprooting al Qaeda and other violent extremists.

57. Although Pakistan has come under sustained pressure from the US to turn against the Taliban since 2001, receiving significant rewards in the process for doing so, the underlying fundamentals of Pakistani security policy have not changed and the Pakistani state’s ongoing preoccupation with India and Kashmir and its belief that India represents an existential threat, continue to underpin and drive Pakistan’s foreign and security policy and its policy towards Afghanistan.94

58. Professor Shaun Gregory’s written evidence concluded that “over the past nine years—despite billions of dollars of military and civilian aid and much diplomatic attention—the US, UK and NATO have been unable to pressure Pakistan into serious downward pressure on the Afghan Taliban, something General Petraeus has said would be critical to NATO success in Afghanistan”.95 He attributes the West’s inability to “force Pakistan to act in our interests” to “the counter-leverage they hold over us”, namely that up to 80% of NATO’s main logistics lines flow through Pakistan, that ISAF relies on Pakistan for base infrastructure and over-flights to prosecute the war in Afghanistan, that the West relies on Pakistan for intelligence particularly on al-Qaeda, and that the West relies on Pakistan’s Army and ISI to “keep Pakistan’s estimated 60–100 nuclear weapons out of terrorist hands”. Professor Gregory concludes:

In other words we are too dependent on Pakistan in too many grave security areas to seriously question their Army/ISI. We know Pakistan are—from our point of view—duplicitous with respect to the Afghan Taliban, but there is little or nothing we can do about that and we should not expect Pakistan to work against what it perceives to be its own interests.96

59. Our other witnesses were also of the view that the UK, and even the US, with its ability to offer considerably more aid, have little leverage over the Pakistanis. The only way this could change, Sir HillarySynnott told us, is “if their strategic interests could be brought closer to ours. At the moment, they are convinced that we are about to leave because of what President Obama said last December [2009] about the start of the withdrawal [in July 2011]. As long as they have that conviction, they have got us over a barrel”.97

60. We received evidence that the UK should make its support for Pakistan more effective and heard accusations that “in the past, there has been a failure of connecting aid, loans, and grants to specific policy goals”. Dr Gohel argued that the UK should be “linking
economic and military aid to performance on those areas we judge to be most important. In addition, the aid process must be far more transparent”.98

61. 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.

Direct US action in Pakistan

62. Allegedly because actionable intelligence was sometimes being passed to terrorists and because the US lost faith and trust in the ISI to round up al-Qaeda affiliates and target those providing sanctuary to the Afghan Taliban, the US has in recent years used unmanned aerial vehicles, or ‘drones’, equipped with missiles to eliminate members of al-Qaeda.99 More drone attacks are said to have been authorised under the presidency of Barack Obama than during the entire presidency of George W. Bush.100

63. While the drone attacks appear to have been successful in eliminating large numbers of senior members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and are perceived by the military to be necessary to improve security conditions in Afghanistan, they have been tremendously controversial among the majority of the Pakistani population. Professor Gregory’s written evidence stated that “the US would like to expand its drone operations into northern Balochistan—and perhaps elsewhere in Pakistan—but this is likely to be resisted by the Pakistan Army/ISI and government”.101 During December a number of media reports emerged which suggested that US military officials were seeking to expand the “flight box” for drone attacks, but that this had been rebuffed by the US Department of State which was concerned about the potential backlash in Pakistan.102 Following the White House’s December review of the situation in Afghanistan, the New York Times reported that senior US military figures were pushing the Obama administration to expand cross-border commando raids against Taliban and al-Qaeda militants in Pakistan.103 The US administration denied that there was any substance to this and other similar reports.

64. In spite of the US’s attempt since 2009 to re-calibrate its policy towards Pakistan, considerable tensions remain, and relations are often fractious at best. Pakistan strongly resents being viewed by the US predominantly through the prism of the Afghan conflict and what it perceives to be the transactional relationship that the US has imposed, with little apparent regard for Pakistan’s own strategic interests. 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

98 Ev 81
99 Ev 60
100 The Guardian, 7 October 2010
101 Ev 82
102 Wall Street Journal, 22 December 2010
103 New York Times, 21 December 2010
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.
4 Transition to Afghan control: creating the conditions for withdrawal?

65. The success of the Government’s strategy and of the broader ISAF counter-insurgency campaign depends on more than just the military campaign. The other two key components are the creation of Afghan National Security Forces capable of maintaining security after ISAF withdraws, and a governance structure which is equally capable of withstanding pressure and, crucially, of delivering justice and fairness for Afghans. We consider the prospects for each below.

Progress on security transition

66. As we noted above, one of the UK’s key goals in Afghanistan is to help create security conditions that will enable the withdrawal of UK combat troops by 2015. This necessitates the establishment of Afghan National Security Forces that are capable of maintaining security when ISAF withdraws. The UK’s position is broadly in line with President Karzai’s desire, as set out in his 2009 inaugural address, to ensure that Afghan forces are capable of taking over lead responsibility from ISAF for security in all of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces by 2014. The UK supports plans for a phased security transition by 2014 which received formal international endorsement at the Kabul Conference in July 2010 and at NATO’s Lisbon Summit in November 2010.104

UK contribution

67. To this end, the UK provides, or is the process of providing, 160 military personnel and three civilian secondees to the 1,300-strong NATO Training Mission Afghanistan (NTM-A) which is in charge of generating and building the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces.105 The UK leads the Combat Arms Directorate, as the principal nation supplying the Infantry Branch School. It also provides personnel to the Afghan Defence University, the Officer Cadet School, the Counter Insurgency Academy, and the Non-Commissioned Office Training School. As a contribution to improving the quality of the Afghan National Police, the UK provides three police officers to NTM-A who provide strategic level advice on all aspects of civilian policing, including the implementation of the Focused District Development (FDD) programme and the development of police training curricula.106 As of January 2010, the total size of the ANP was 116,856 officers. The UK also contributes to the EU’s police reform mission (EUPOL), with 13 serving or retired officers currently deployed in Kabul and Helmand.107 Officers perform a wide range of duties including advising the Deputy Minister of the Interior on police reform, leading the

104 See for example, Declaration by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on an Enduring Partnership signed at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, Portugal.
105 NTM-A currently has around 1,300 international trainers, but is set to expand to over 2,500 trainers by March 2012.
106 Ev 6
107 EUPOL, the EU’s police training mission, provides strategic advice and mentoring for senior officials in the Ministry of the Interior and ANP, as well as providing training in specialised areas such as criminal investigation and forensics. EUPOL also works to strengthen wider rule of law institutions such as the Attorney General’s Office.
development of a Police Staff College, heading all of the ANP’s anti-corruption work and mentoring the Head of the Counter-Terrorism Police.\textsuperscript{108}

68. In Helmand, personnel are helping the Provincial Chief of Police develop a provincial policing plan and are building the criminal investigation department’s capabilities at the provincial headquarters.\textsuperscript{109} The UK has also developed a comprehensive approach to supporting police development, using resources drawn from EUPOL, the MOD, police and the military. The Government states that this has allowed influence to be exerted at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of policing (provincial, districts and local communities). Direct training to patrolmen and NCOs is delivered at the Helmand Police Training Centre in Lashkar Gah, where over 1000 patrolmen and 25 NCOs have graduated since it opened in December 2009. The UK military mentors the ANP across the province and UK civilian police provide strategic advice and mentoring to senior police leadership in District Police headquarters.\textsuperscript{110} During our visit we were able to see for ourselves training of Afghan National Army and police recruits in both Kabul and Helmand, and to speak to British mentors whose work is clearly highly valued by a wide range of Afghan and ISAF partners. We commend their efforts.

69. It is not yet clear what roles UK forces will play in the post-2015 period and what shape and form British engagement will take, particularly in respect of military training and the recourse that may be had to the use of Special Forces. Giving evidence to the Defence Select Committee, the Secretary of State for Defence said that it was not possible to decide upon this at the moment as it would depend upon the situation and conditions at the time.\textsuperscript{111}

70. \textbf{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.}

\textit{International efforts}

71. Although the international community has been engaged in Afghanistan since 2001, it was not until 2007 that efforts to build Afghan forces began and, even then, those efforts prioritised force quantity over quality. In August 2009, our predecessor Committee detailed a series of criticisms and raised serious concerns about the quality of recruits, their training and a lack of appropriate resources, which the Government at the time stated would be addressed by NTM-A.\textsuperscript{112}

72. During our visit we were briefed on the work of the multi-national, US-led NTM-A team responsible for training and developing the ANSF. The message was cautiously upbeat. We were told that in a bid to achieve quality and not just quantity, increased resources were now being diverted to army training (including that for non-commissioned officers) and that the US was said to be spending \$2 billion a month through NTM-A for

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{108} Ev 7
\textsuperscript{109} Ev 7–8
\textsuperscript{110} Ev 7
\textsuperscript{111} Q 364, Q 366
\textsuperscript{112} Foreign Affairs Committee, \textit{Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan}, paras 66–79 and Response of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, October 2009, Cm 7702, p 3
\end{flushleft}
both ANA and ANP development.\textsuperscript{113} The number of foreign trainers has doubled (ensuring better instructor-pupil ratios), army and police pay has also increased, literacy rates are improving, and attrition rates are better.\textsuperscript{114} Meanwhile, the Foreign Secretary told us that the Government is confident of achieving the goal of creating an army of 171,600 troops (currently 149,553)\textsuperscript{115} and 134,000 police (currently 116,856)\textsuperscript{116} by 31 October 2011. Speaking recently, Lieutenant-General (retd) Sir Graeme Lamb, former Commander of the Field Army at Land Command, said that “there are absolutely Herculean efforts going on out there to improve the quantity and the quality of the forces, and they will make a significant difference”.\textsuperscript{117}

73. However, the longer-term challenges facing trainers are of a significant magnitude. As the Foreign Secretary acknowledged, achieving quality, not just quantity is going to be difficult:

[…] Is the level of training the same level that you would get in a European or American army? No, it isn’t, because the emphasis here is on driving up the strength as rapidly as possible, but […] the quality of training, the quantity of training and the way in which the troops in the Afghan forces then gain experience alongside NATO troops are all gathering pace and improving.\textsuperscript{118}

74. Witnesses pointed to other intractable problems such as the lack of ethnic balance in the ANA and ANP. At present less than 3\% of recruits are from the Pashtun south. As Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles observed, this can result in a situation in which the Afghan army “is almost as alien to the farmers of the Helmand valley as the 3rd Battalion, The Rifles or the 82nd Airborne Division of the United States Army”.\textsuperscript{119} General Sir Nick Parker, the former Deputy Commander, ISAF, recently told the Defence Committee that it is “incredibly important to the credibility of the ANSF in the south to get more recruits from the south”.\textsuperscript{120} Achieving ethnic balance in the Afghan National Police (ANP), which is widely regarded as a Tajik-dominated force, is proving equally problematic. As Gerard Russell commented, it is “very hard for those who do not speak Pashtun to do the job that particularly the police are meant to do, which is to integrate themselves […] and establish co-operative mechanisms with the community”.\textsuperscript{121} The Foreign Secretary accepted that achieving ethnic balance was an issue and said it would be important to address this “over time”. However, he added that “it has to be seen against the context of the very rapid build-up of the Afghan National Security Forces and the huge improvement in the training of officers and non-commissioned officers that we have seen over the past year”.\textsuperscript{122}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{113} Ev 35
\textsuperscript{114} Q 152
\textsuperscript{115} As at 28 December 2010
\textsuperscript{116} As at 12 January 2011
\textsuperscript{117} Oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee, 17 November 2010, HC (2010–11) 554–iv, Q 290.
\textsuperscript{118} Q 152
\textsuperscript{119} Q 91
\textsuperscript{120} Oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee, 17 November 2010, HC (2010–11) 554–iv, Q 238.
\textsuperscript{121} Q 121
\textsuperscript{122} Q 136
\end{flushleft}
75. A recent survey commissioned by the UN suggests that the ANP is only slightly more popular than the Taliban in the south of Afghanistan. It also found that the ANP’s popularity has dropped over the past year from 67% to 48%. Nationwide, 60% of Afghans reported a significant level of corruption among police officers, and a quarter reported police favouritism on the basis of personal connections in the investigating of crimes.\(^{123}\) The FCO maintains that whilst the ANP continue to suffer from serious problems such as corruption, low levels of education, lack of training, and heavy casualties as a result of fighting the insurgency, “progress is being made”.\(^{124}\) However, it also acknowledges “strong leadership from within the Ministry of Interior is essential to tackle embedded problems of corruption [...] as well as in providing a clear vision of the reforms required to build a national police force”.\(^{125}\)

76. Overall, in spite of the progress identified by the Government and the hard work which is clearly being undertaken by those in the field to improve standards, many of those who submitted evidence were unconvinced that the Afghan National Security Forces would be capable of taking lead responsibility by the end of 2014.\(^{126}\) Gilles Dorronsoro told us that it was going to be “extremely difficult” to create an Afghan National Army and an Afghan National Police in the next three or four years, and said he was doubtful that the Afghan National Army will be able to stop or contain the Taliban in two years.\(^{127}\) Gerard Russell stated:

> If you think about the Afghan National Army as a way to contain the Taliban, it’s not going to work—first, because the Taliban are already penetrating the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police [and] secondly [because], the ethnic composition of the army is a real, serious problem. I don’t see how you can train officers in two or three years, considering that the overall state structure is truly disappearing in a lot of places in Afghanistan. That is the problem. How can you build an army without a state?\(^{128}\)

77. 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.

\(^{123}\) Reuters, 3 February 2011
\(^{124}\) Ev 7
\(^{125}\) Ev 7
\(^{126}\) See for example written evidence from The Post-War Reconstruction Unit, Matt Waldman, James Fergusson, Oxfam GB.
\(^{127}\) Q 119
\(^{128}\) Q 121
**Burden sharing**

78. As with so many other aspects of the UK’s involvement in Afghanistan, when it comes to training the Afghan National Security Forces and transitioning security control, the UK is dependent upon its allies to contribute towards the achievement of common goals. At NATO’s Lisbon Summit, allies agreed to a district-by-district phased transition of security control to Afghan forces; and yet, during our visit, we heard about the very real problems the NTM-A continues to face filling vacancies for military trainers. In order for it to sustain its training commitment and remain on schedule to reach NATO's agreed goals, an additional 760 trainers are needed. The UK provides seven of the Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs)\(^{129}\) required and has lobbied allies to provide additional OMLTs to meet the existing shortfall. There are now 22 countries that either contribute to or have pledged to contribute to OMLTs. However, as the ANA expands and starts to take the security lead, there will be an increasing requirement for more. Speaking in December 2010, the Prime Minister stated that if security conditions continue to improve, the UK might be willing to re-assign some combat troops into training roles, helping to plug the shortfall.\(^{130}\) As the ANA and ANP grow there will also be additional costs involved in sustaining both forces, which the Afghan government will not be able to sustain given its limited revenue stream.\(^{131}\) On current estimates, it is thought that $6 billion a year would be needed simply to sustain the Afghan National Security Forces.\(^{132}\) As yet, the Government has not provided any details as to what contribution the UK might be reasonably expected to make and what form, financial or otherwise, that may take.

79. 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.

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

80. For many years in Afghanistan, following the West’s intervention in 2001, the majority of resources made available by the international community have been deployed to support military attempts to defeat al-Qaeda and the insurgency instead of seeking to use these considerable means to tackle the conditions that gave rise to, and sustained, the insurgency in the first instance. Yet the importance to the success of the counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan of leaving in place a legitimate, functioning government when the West withdraws, cannot be underestimated. As Gerard Russell states “even if foreign forces could secure Afghanistan today, they would not be able to secure it forever. In the long-term, it is the Afghan government which has to achieve the social and political equilibrium

---

129 OMLTs provide training and mentoring to the ANA. They also serve as a liaison capability between ANA and ISAF forces, co-ordinating the planning of operations and ensuring that the ANA units receive necessary enabling support (including close air support, casualty evacuation and medical evacuation).

130 Ev 84

131 Ev 7

132 Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable with Army Colonel John Ferrari, Deputy Commander for Programs, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A), 16 December 2010
which can sustain permanent peace. [...] The presence of foreign forces may therefore be a necessary condition for peace in Afghanistan but it is obviously not a sufficient one.”

**A climate of disaffection**

81. The current situation is of considerable concern. Disaffection with the Afghan government has been, and continues to be, high, despite 10 years of international assistance designed to bolster the Afghan state. A recent editorial piece in *The Independent* stated that:

> Again and again in Kabul one hears Afghans say that the Taliban may not be liked, but that the Afghan government and its US Allies are increasingly distrusted, even hated, by the mass of the population. It is this rapidly increasing disaffection, underestimated by foreign governments, that enables a maximum of 25,000 Taliban to hold their own against 140,000 US-led foreign troops in addition to the Afghan government’s army and police.

82. In many parts of the country, the Afghan government continues to be perceived to be corrupt and ineffective, and its officials unjust, predatory and benefitting from impunity. Second only to insecurity, bad governance is the issue that most troubles Afghans who were polled by the Asia Foundation. Its 2010 survey found that of those who believed the country was moving in the wrong direction, corruption was cited as a reason for pessimism by 27% of respondents (up from 17% in 2009). The other main reasons for pessimism identified by respondents included bad government (18%) and unemployment (16%). A Western diplomat quoted recently in the *New York Times* stated, “We have metrics that show increased progress but those positives are extremely fragile because we haven’t done enough about governance, about corruption. 2010 was supposed to be a year of change, but it has not changed as much as we hoped.”

83. A November 2010 report on progress in Afghanistan by the US Department of Defense stated that within the 124 districts considered to be key by the Coalition, only 38% of the population live in areas rated as having “emerging” or “full authority” Afghan governance. This reflects no substantial change since March 2010 when the previous report was published. In key “swing areas”, including Kunduz, Badghis and Ghor, the lack of effective state structures have allowed power vacuums to develop which Taliban, local, and other insurgent forces have ruthlessly exploited, stepping into the breach, and creating powerful systems of shadow government where none previously existed. With no-one else to turn to, many Afghans tolerate the Taliban who “have more staying-power and determination than the Afghan government’s civilian officials and police”. As one commentator stated, “Here’s the fragility: the Afghans don’t trust the Americans or the

---

133 Ev 57. See also Q 117 [Gerard Russell].

134 *The Independent*, 18 December 2010

135 “Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People”, *Asia Foundation*, 9 November 2010

136 *New York Times*, 17 December 2010


138 Q 49

139 Ev 57
The UK’s foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan

Afghan government yet. They supported the Taliban for years because it provided a kind of rough justice and security, and they don’t know if the new power structure will last.” The result, as Christian Aid stated, is that “the Taliban have de facto control of many districts in the South and the East and have a strong presence in all the Southern provinces”.141

According to Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, “for many southern Pashtuns [The Taliban] represent a less bad alternative—a fairer, more predictable alternative than a corrupt and predatory government”.142 Jolyon Leslie told us that the international community’s response had been to “vilify that and [say] “No, that isn’t real government. What we can do is bring you real government.” Yet this approach, as Mr Leslie explained, “does not cut any ice with Afghans at all, because we have not shown them real government, or we have not delivered it when we promised it, as they see it. Even where there is not head-on kinetic conflict between foreign forces and Afghan opposition, that is often what might swing it”143.

In the north of the country, Ahmed Rashid writes that Tajik and Uzbek warlords are reported to have become so “rich and powerful that they barely listen to Karzai”. He adds that Governors of northern provinces have created their own fiefdoms that are left alone by NATO forces based there, because removing them would create further instability”.144

The importance of a solid local partner

A successful counter-insurgency campaign depends upon a solid local partner. As Gerard Russell states, the major challenge for the stabilisation effort is that of Afghan leadership: “Can the country’s leaders inspire its people to risk their lives to defeat the insurgency? If they cannot, then it is hard to imagine that foreigners can inspire them to do so—especially when those foreigners are present so briefly, and are not perceived as having delivered on past promises”.145

The Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit observes that “it is increasingly evident that the absence of a credible Afghan partner and senior Afghan leadership poses the greatest threat” to good governance, and that key elements of the Afghan administration feel that “preventing the discovery of corruption, criticising Afghanistan’s foreign partners, and perpetrating electoral fraud are the most effective means of clinging to power”.146 In a recent article, Richard Haas, of the Council on Foreign Relations, concluded that “two years of sustained investment and multiple but flawed elections suggest that the Afghan central government will not reach the point where it is considered effective and legitimate”.147 Others speak of the fundamental conundrum facing the UK and other states, insofar as they are committed to working with an administration which

---

141 Ev w8
142 Q 101
143 Q 52; see also Ev w23.
145 Ev 57
146 Ev 23
147 “Let’s un-surge in Afghanistan”, The Wall Street Journal Online, 20 December 2010
appears to be loathed by many ordinary Afghans. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles told us that “President Karzai is a much better man than he is made out to be. He’s gone from hero to zero, but the truth is somewhere in between. He’s a great king, but a poor chief executive”. He added:

Many of his instincts about civilian casualties and private security contractors are right. He is a true politician, a true retail politician, who feels what his people feel. He is just an absolutely hopeless administrator, and he doesn’t realise that governing means choosing. He thinks that governing means avoiding a choice.

The legacy of international disunity

A solid local partner may be a pre-requisite for success but so too, argued witnesses, are co-ordinated, and coherent international policies grounded in the realities of Afghan society which do not inadvertently undermine any progress that the Afghan state may make. Most were critical of the international community’s track record thus far in these respects. Oxfam pointed to the problems that had arisen because of the international community’s imposition of a “highly centralised, top-down government that lacks responsiveness and accountability to Afghans across the country”. It added that, “at the same time, the role of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in conducting development activities (which should properly be carried out by national or local state institutions and their civil society partners) has, in general, contributed to the undermining of the state’s role and perceptions of its legitimacy”. Gilles Dorronsoro stated that Washington’s “gravest error” had been its lack of interest in shoring up the Afghan central government:

Whatever the official word about fighting corruption, the international coalition is bypassing Kabul in favour of local strong-men, on whom it is growing more and more dependent for protection and logistics, especially in the south. Worse, the population rejects the militias, which are often brutal toward civilians, and do little to increase support for Karzai or the coalition.

Mr Dorronsoro added that even inside the Afghan legal system, “the coalition is choosing its partners at a local level, skirting the political centre, and that NATO’s Provincial Reconstruction Teams act with total independence from Kabul, which is often not even informed of their actions”. Matt Waldman argued that it is unsurprising that the Afghan government has failed to tackle corruption, given that the West has failed to challenge corruption and has “channelled millions of dollars to Afghan power-holders it deems politically expedient, regardless of their records. Many Afghan officials, including those suspected of corruption, continued to receive large sums of money from various international actors, including the US Central Intelligence Agency.” He continues:

148 Q 102
149 Q 106
150 Q w13
151 “A London fog on Afghanistan”, foreignpolicy.com, 5 February 2010
152 Ibid.
153 Ev 52
Graft has been compounded by the allocation of vast reconstruction funds to Afghan and Western contracting companies that are wasteful or ineffective, with limited oversight. These factors have led to a conspicuous and increasing inequality between a rich elite and impoverished population.\(^{154}\)

Transparency International lists Afghanistan as the second most corrupt country in the world. However, written evidence from the British Aid Agencies Group (BAAG) argues that “given that every year billions of dollars are directly spent by donor and troop contributing countries through contracts with private (international and national) security and construction companies totally bypassing the Afghan government systems, the international community is also to blame for the rampant corruption that exists in the country.”\(^{155}\)

**The British contribution**

90. The UK Government’s strategy for Afghanistan has long acknowledged the importance of helping the Afghan state to extend its control and improve its effectiveness. Giving evidence to the Defence Committee recently, the Secretary of State for Defence stated that “the Afghans have an unequalled tradition of fighting spirit, as Britain discovered during its long historical engagement there, but a very limited history of competent and honest government”.\(^{156}\) Working via the FCO in some instances and the Department for International Development (DFID) in others, the UK Government has provided support and funding (£175 million, 2010–14) to the Afghan government via the World Bank-managed, multi-donor Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). This contributes to the salaries of civil servants, teachers, doctors and nurses, and to national priority programmes funded via the ARTF, in education, health, human rights, community investment and development, infrastructure, and governance. The Government’s written evidence points out that continued support will help to increase the number of schools in Afghanistan from just under 11,000 to 16,500, and to increase youth literacy rates from 39% to 50%.\(^{158}\) The Government also provides support aimed at improving economic policies, tax systems and access to finance and is working with the private sector to develop key markets.\(^{159}\) There has also been a heavy investment in developing the rule of law and the UK is regarded as a key advocate of working with the Afghan grain as much as possible and using traditional styles of justice where appropriate.\(^{160}\) The FCO’s written evidence acknowledges that “strengthening the rule of law across Afghanistan is a long-term endeavour. It will require significant financial and human resources for many years to come.”\(^{161}\)

---

\(^{154}\) Ev 52
\(^{155}\) Ev w11
\(^{156}\) Uncorrected transcript of oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 15 December 2010, HC (2010–11), 554–v, Q 309
\(^{157}\) Detailed fully in the FCO’s written evidence. See Ev 13 et seq.
\(^{158}\) Ev 13
\(^{159}\) Ev 12
\(^{160}\) Ev 12–14
\(^{161}\) Ev 14
91. In Helmand, where much of the British effort is focused, the Government is keen to show progress is being made and states that the number of district governors “installed” has doubled from five to 10 in the past two years, and that there are 26 Afghan Ministries now represented in Lashkar Gah.\textsuperscript{162} Giving oral evidence to us, the Foreign Secretary argued that in “very difficult areas of the country such as Helmand”, the fact that state institutions are “there at all” amounted to a measure of success. He added that it was “vital that Afghans are able to have confidence that the government are not corrupt, that they work in the interests of the people”, but acknowledged that “there is much more to do there”, particularly in relation to corruption.

92. During our visit we heard about a range of projects supported by the UK Government which are having a tangible effect on the everyday lives of Afghans. These include support for micro-finance initiatives which have allowed Afghans, including a high proportion of women, to set up in business and its attempts, through the PRT in Helmand, to support justice through community-based dispute resolution mechanisms such as the Justice Sub-Committees of District Community Councils and the Prisoner Review Shuras in those districts without prosecutors. The Government told us this helps increase access to the statutory system and promotes respect for rights and constraining abuse in both sectors. In addition the UK is building, equipping and providing training for Lashkar Gah prison which will conform to international standards. It also run projects for women and juveniles in prison and has plans to implement a vocational training programme.

93. However, Oxfam GB’s written evidence expressed concern that “the FCO and others are increasingly prioritising funding for short-term security activities, using Conflict Pool funds in Helmand at the expense of longer-term conflict prevention projects which the funds are intended for.” They state that while there is evidence to suggest that “tackling fundamental issues such as poverty and injustice can contribute to improved security and stability in the long term, there is scant evidence to support the notion that using aid for short-term counter-insurgency objectives, force protection, or to win hearts and minds is actually effective”.\textsuperscript{163} A similar point was raised by Matt Waldman in his written evidence.\textsuperscript{164} Oxfam adds that “aid used this way tends to be spent inefficiently and fails to bring real benefits to recipient communities. This short term, politicised focus also means that less UK aid money is being spent on programmes that meet Afghan needs and in ways that can sustainably alleviate poverty and address the underlying causes of chronic crises.”\textsuperscript{165} We asked the FCO to respond to these claims and were told that it did “not know what Oxfam are referring to”. It added:

The FCO, through its contribution to the Conflict Pool uses funds to help counter the insurgency and reduce and ultimately prevent conflict in Helmand. Providing the people of Helmand Province with security from intimidation and violence is an absolutely critical element of counter-insurgency and long term conflict prevention. The Conflict Pool fund has increased funding for long-term security in Helmand from approximately £6 million spend in 2008–09 to approximately £12 million

\textsuperscript{162} Ev 154
\textsuperscript{163} Ev w14
\textsuperscript{164} Ev 53
\textsuperscript{165} Ev w15
scheduled spend in the current financial year. Over the same period expenditure on short term security activities in Helmand has decreased steadily, from approximately £2 million in 2008–09 to approximately £600,000 committed spend this financial year. Long term security projects funded by the Conflict Pool in Helmand include training the Afghan police in detective and community policing techniques, upgrading police checkpoints, building prison accommodation in Lashkar Gah that meets international standards, and the Helmand Police Training Centre.166

94. At a national level, the UK Government’s current approach, like that of its international partners, is to encourage ‘Afghanisation’, by accelerating the speed at which power and decision-making is transferred to the Afghan government. To this end, and as recommended in the communiqué of the January 2010 London Conference, it is progressively to align development assistance behind national priority programmes, as well as channeling at least 50% of assistance, through the Afghan government’s core budget by the end of two years. The Afghan government has been working on a “cluster” system which draws together working groups of Ministries, to finalise priority programmes. The Foreign Secretary told us that in terms of progress “some of the commitments entered into at the time of the Kabul conference in July [2010] are being met”.167 However, other witnesses, such as Jolyon Leslie, were more sceptical as to whether the intense system of international conferences, compacts and benchmarks were appropriate for the current Afghan situation, stating that “people sometimes feel that they are being frogmarched into a process that will unravel inevitably if it is not on their terms”.168 BAAG stated: “there is a growing scepticism among many people in Afghanistan of the value of such conferences, which seem to make little difference to their lives, or adequately recognise the challenges that they face”.169 Oxfam GB warned that the programmes seemingly failed to acknowledge the mistakes of the past, and stated that the process “is already faltering”, while Jolyon Leslie told us:

My worry is that we are beginning to believe our own assumptions. It is going round and round and becoming a self-fulfilling delusion. I don’t mean this in a particularly negative sense, but someone needs to have the courage of their convictions and say, “Stop, let’s put a spotlight on some of these goals, on the benchmarks that we have set in the London conference and on the other milestones”, and ask whether we are doing well enough. We need to have a radical re-look at how to get out of it. Because it’s becoming a hole—it is very difficult to back out of.170

95. Gerard Russell stated that:

The array of international interlocutors that engage with President Karzai—Ambassadors of the five or six most important troop contributors, especially of course the US Ambassador; the military and civilian chiefs of NATO in Afghanistan; the UN and EU special representatives, the special representatives of 15 nations, and

---

166 Ev 86
167 Q 153
168 Q 29
169 Ev w18
170 Q 54
apparently the head of the Central Intelligence Agency—can [...] cause confusion. When those individuals fail to deliver the same message to President Karzai, not only is the message itself undermined but so is the credibility of the international community.\footnote{Ev 56}

96. Oxfam also stated that although the amount of information that the British Government had submitted to the Afghan Ministry of Finance on its disbursements had been more than that of most other donors, comprehensive data on where and how funds are spent, are yet to be published. It added, “given rising concerns about corruption, timely and accessible information will go a long way towards reassuring the public in the UK and Afghanistan that British funds are spent appropriately”.\footnote{Ev w20}

97. 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.
5  Prospects for a political settlement?

The international context

98. With a date for British combat withdrawal now set firmly for 2015, the UK Government is keen to see the start, as swiftly as possible, of an Afghan-led process of political reconciliation that “seeks to address the concerns of the insurgency and its support base”,\textsuperscript{173} provided that the eventual settlement “is representative; gives no one group disproportionate influence; upholds human rights and the rule of law and is in accordance with Afghanistan’s Constitutional framework”.\textsuperscript{174} However, like so many other aspects of policy in Afghanistan, this is an area where the UK is heavily reliant on the actions of others, not least the US, to see its goals come to fruition.

99. In theory, the policy of political reconciliation has the support of a range of key players. In his inaugural address in November 2009, President Karzai offered his commitment to it, saying that security and peace cannot be achieved through fighting and violence. This was subsequently reinforced at the London Conference in January 2010 when the Afghan government committed to take this forward and to “offer an honourable place in society to those willing to renounce violence, participate in free and open society and respect the principles that are enshrined in the Afghan constitution, cut ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and pursue their political goals peacefully”.\textsuperscript{175} Then in June 2010, some 1,600 Afghan participants at a Consultative Peace Jirga held in Kabul endorsed plans to negotiate with elements of the Taliban leadership.

100. Although a number of prominent Afghans disagreed with the process and outcome of the Jirga, opinion polls and surveys appear to show a level of support among Afghans for negotiating with the Taliban. In a recent survey by the Asia Foundation, 83% of respondents supported the Afghan government’s attempts to negotiate, compared to 71% in the previous year.\textsuperscript{176} To this end, the international community has offered funding and other resources to facilitate the process; at the London Conference over £100 million was pledged from nations including Japan, Germany, Australia, Spain and Greece. The UK pledged to contribute £5 million in 2010–11.\textsuperscript{177}

101. Many witnesses indicated that the international community’s approach remains incoherent in several respects. Matt Waldman stated: “Some military officials see reconciliation as a tool of counter-insurgency to induce high-level insurgent defections, and thus weaken and divide the enemy. Some see it as a way of cutting deals with the Taliban in order to facilitate foreign forces’ departure. Others see it as a process to address grievances between hostile groups, especially the government and Taliban, in order to resolve the core conflict and achieve a more inclusive political settlement”.\textsuperscript{178} Similarly,

\textsuperscript{173} Ev 9
\textsuperscript{174} “Quarterly report on progress in Afghanistan”, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 27 October 2010
\textsuperscript{175} London Conference communiqué, January 2010
\textsuperscript{176} “Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People”, Asia Foundation, 9 November 2010
\textsuperscript{177} Ev 9
\textsuperscript{178} Ev 54
James Fergusson stated that “dialogue is blocked by international incoherence and insurgent mistrust of the coalition, which is compounded by the military surge.” Others pointed to the international community’s focus on re-integration at the expense, perhaps, of political reconciliation. While re-integration aims to provide economic incentives and opportunities, including vocational training and community projects in agriculture or reconstruction to persuade insurgents to desist from violence, reconciliation focuses more on negotiations about future political structures and attempts to reach out to those more focused on, and motivated by, political goals.

102. Crucially, according to our evidence, two key players, the insurgents and the US government, appear to be less than wholehearted in their support for moving forward swiftly with reconciliation. Also of concern is the fact that Pakistan, whose position will be crucial in the success or otherwise of any negotiations, shows no intention of revealing its hand over reconciliation to its Western allies. We consider these issues, and what role the UK can play in this area, below.

The key players, their positions and roles

The insurgents

103. For the purposes of propaganda, the Taliban is keen for the insurgency to be regarded as a unified movement under the banner of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is ostensibly controlled by Mullah Mohammed Omar and the Rahbari Shura (Supreme Council). In reality, the Afghan insurgency is a mix of Islamist factions, power-hungry warlords, criminals and tribal groupings all pursuing their own economic, political, criminal and social agendas and interests, from local feuds to establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate. Three major groups operate under the banner of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: Mullah Omar’s Taliban, the Haqqani Network and the Hizb-e-Islami faction led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. While the latter two sometimes co-operate with the Taliban leadership, they are considered autonomous factions. Thus, whilst official Taliban statements maintain that there can be no reconciliation talks with the Afghan government until foreign troops leave Afghanistan, in reality the situation, involving a range of groups with different motives and backers, is far more complex and nuanced, and has previously spawned preliminary discussions under the patronage of various interlocutors including Saudi Arabia and the United Nations.

104. Having recently inflicted more casualties on coalition troops and Afghan security forces than at any time since late 2001 when it was ousted from power, and in many cases having extended their grip on Afghans’ daily lives, there are those within the Taliban who argue that insurgents have little to gain from accepting an offer of reconciliation. We were told that although the movement was suffering, and many commanders were being killed, the insurgents have taken succour from the knowledge that the government is widely loathed and that they have a plentiful supply of recruits and a sanctuary inside

179 Ev 50
180 Ev 5
181 The Guardian, 9 March 2009
Pakistan. Others, including many coalition military sources, adopt a different perspective, arguing that military pressure is causing a degree of battle fatigue and forcing many insurgents to re-think their position and consider reconciliation. Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 2009, Fotini Christia and Michael Semple observed:

> The idea that large groups of armed men bent on killing Americans and other Westerners can be persuaded to change sides may seem fanciful at first. But it is not—at least not in Afghanistan. After continuing uninterrupted for more than 30 years, war in Afghanistan has developed its own peculiar rules, style, and logic. One of these rules is side with the winner. [...] Afghanistan’s recent history is replete with examples of commanders choosing to flip rather than fight.

105. What remains unclear is which elements of the insurgency might ‘flip’, and under what conditions. Michael Semple told us that most of the Taliban leadership might be pragmatic enough to consider entering peace talks if it was felt to be in their interests and would have little hesitation, as part of a deal, in agreeing to sever all ties with al-Qaeda. Similarly, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles said:

> They hate foreigners, and among foreigners they include not just Americans and Brits, but Arabs and Pakistanis. They are primitive, conservative, religious nationalists. They want what you and I want, which is a better education, a better future for their children and to get back to their farms. They want honourable recognition that they weren’t defeated in 2001; they were pushed aside. They want to be dealt back into the political settlement.

106. We were told by Michael Semple that “a lot of people will show their true colours when the time is right”, but that already “there is a significant level of interest among the original Taliban leadership with the “make-or-break role in any reconciliation process [resting] with the Khost Talibs and the Kandahari Talibs”. He added:

> That is not to say it is all easy and that it is going to happen tomorrow, but those are the people with whom we assume it is possible to sit down and have a very sensible discussion. They understand a lot more about the world than they are often given credit for, and they have a vision of a political settlement.

107. The Haqqani network, which is most closely associated with al-Qaeda, and which operates out of Waziristan in Pakistan, appears to be less inclined than the Taliban to negotiate, and Michael Semple told us that it was “generally assumed that it would be impossible for them to go along with a negotiated settlement”, although he added that he had “heard a few signals saying that that’s not actually the case”. Indeed, since we heard

182 Q 33 [Matt Waldman]

183 Fotini Christia and Michael Semple, “Flipping the Taliban: how to win in Afghanistan”, *Foreign Affairs, July/August* 2009

184 *Financial Times*, 5 February 2010, *Irish Times*, 3 June 2010

185 Q 103

186 Q 13

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.
Mr Semple’s evidence, a number of media reports have indicated that the Pakistani military has been exerting pressure on the Haqqani network to enter into reconciliation negotiations.  

The need for confidence-building

108. Asked about the conditions that need to exist before insurgents might be persuaded to take part in negotiations, Michael Semple told us that they might be prepared to, “if they realised that they had no realistic military prospects of toppling the government in Kabul and taking over the country.” However he qualified this by saying, “but what I really don’t buy is this notion that this means that those on the international side and the government of Afghanistan have to sit back and wait for a transformation of the military situation”. Mr Semple said that “before you get anywhere near negotiations, a lot of Taliban say, ‘what kind of protection or guarantee can you provide for us when we eventually enter a reconciliation stage?’” Others too, cited the importance of taking low-profile actions to boost confidence and combat the mistrust which exists on both sides. Thus far, with a view to doing this, the Afghan government has established a Detention Release Committee to review cases of suspected insurgents detained without evidence or charge. The Committee is part of the Afghan government’s efforts to foster goodwill and trust and, in what was seen as a further “sweetener” for a future deal, the UN Sanctions Monitoring Committee also agreed in late July 2010 to remove a number of individuals from its sanctions list. Although the de-listing was generally welcomed in Afghanistan as a practical step towards reconciliation some human rights activists have warned it might lead to impunity for alleged perpetrators of war crimes. We were also told that mistrust is being created by the coalition’s emphasis on reintegration of fighters at the expense of genuine high-or mid-level talks.

The role of the Afghan government

109. The task of confidence building is made more complicated by the fact that, as Michael Semple told us, the Taliban “do not particularly trust President Karzai” and are “unconvinced” that either he or the Kabul administration exercise real authority or have staying power. Added to this is the fact that many non-Pashtuns are said to mistrust President Karzai’s attempts to reach out to the Taliban and are deeply suspicious that any Karzai-Taliban deal will only strengthen Pashtun hegemony in the country and further reduce minority rights. Mr Semple explained that the insurgents “vary in their degree of allergy to Kabul. They certainly do not expect that a process where exclusively the Taliban talk to Karzai, who talks to the Kabul government, would be terribly fruitful. In my contacts with the Taliban they have been pretty consistent in saying that they expect an

---

189 Daily Telegraph, 13 December 2010, Guardian, 7 October 2010
190 Q 7
191 Q 16
192 Q 7, Q 33
193 Ibid.
194 Ev 50
international role”. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles told us that President Karzai is “never going to be seen as the credible interlocutor for the Taliban”. He was of the opinion that President Karzai “is a man who symbolises his country’s rebirth”, and as such what he could bring to a settlement was “quasi-monarchical leadership”. However, Sir Sherard stressed that what was really needed was “a four-way conversation—America, Pakistan, the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan. The key link in that is a serious discussion between quiet and muscular American diplomacy and the Taliban we can find.”

The US role

110. The problem for those, like the British Government, who seek a swift start to negotiations is that while the US has said it supports “re-integrating” low-level Taliban fighters, it has not declared whether it is willing to negotiate with the Taliban leadership. Indeed, it has previously declared that Mullah Omar is ‘irreconcilable’. As the author and journalist Ahmed Rashid notes, “The United States still sees the battle in Afghanistan as a two-sided counterinsurgency, and its focus is on the military situation”. Yet all of those from whom we took evidence were convinced that the US’s direct endorsement of, and participation in, talks was essential if a peace settlement is to be brokered and the conditions achieved to facilitate the withdrawal of western troops and ensure the longer-term stability for Afghanistan and the wider region.

111. Speaking in December 2010, President Obama stated that “we will [...] fully support an Afghan political process that includes reconciliation with those Taliban who break ties with al-Qaeda, renounce violence and accept the Afghan constitution”. However, there was no mention of what the US is looking for in a deal, what it is willing to do to bring about that peace or, crucially, when that process might commence. Many in the US, particularly in the military, are reported to believe that talk about reconciliation is premature and that Coalition Forces must first gain the upper hand over the Taliban before even considering reconciliation. For many witnesses, American thinking on reconciliation remains incoherent and contradictory, a point which is also apparent from Bob Woodward’s recent book Obama’s Wars, which details the positions of key US individuals and institutions on Afghanistan. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles told us that “the Woodward book doesn’t give the half of what is really going on between them all”. He concludes that the US is essentially, “a house divided—in Kabul and in Washington”.

196 Q 17
197 Q 106
198 Q 102
200 “Why the US must talk to the Taliban”, Washington Post, 18 March 2010
201 Ev 54 [Matt Waldman]
202 Statement by President Obama on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Annual Review, 16 December 2010
204 Washington Post, 23 January 2010
205 Q 112
There are two key consequences of a failure to engage swiftly and launch serious negotiations between the US and elements of the Taliban. The first is that the Taliban will be more likely to try and outlast the international community and “fight it out” once Coalition Forces have gone. The second is an increased risk that the regional situation will deteriorate as key neighbours try to use the vacuum left by the US’s reluctance to promote reconciliation to push ahead with a political settlement which favours certain countries or interests, at the expense of others. Ahmed Rashid has written extensively about this. He states that the Obama administration must start asserting major diplomatic pressure to ease regional tensions and persuade all of Afghanistan’s neighbours to agree on a common position of non-interference. Many Afghans fear that if the US waits too long to decide about talking to the Taliban, control of the situation will fall to Pakistan’s ISI, as happened in the 1980s and 1990s. Such a state of affairs would be poorly received by most of the regional powers, particularly India, Iran, Russia and the five central Asian republics. In the wider conflict that could follow, al-Qaeda and other extremist groups could benefit. Rashid adds that Pakistan and Iran in particular want to ensure that by the time the United States is ready to talk to the Taliban, the region’s future will already be shaped by local powers, limiting Washington’s options. He states that Afghanistan’s ethnic and sectarian divisions are being exacerbated in the process.

**Divisions in the US position over reconciliation**

During our visit we gained the impression that the sheer size and power of the US military ensured that the US military remained largely in control of US Afghan policy, a point which is also detailed in Bob Woodward’s book ‘Obama’s Wars’. We also sensed that with the July 2011 deadline looming, its priority was creating the conditions for troop withdrawal and that it sought to use overwhelming force to defeat the Taliban rather than using the surge as a tool to induce peace and reconciliation.

Indeed, although we heard repeated references during our visit to the number of insurgents killed, captured or considering ‘re-integration’, we heard little recognition within military circles of the importance of higher-level political reconciliation. Gilles Dorronsoro was one of those who told us it is “clear” that reconciliation “is not supported by the US military”. He added that the “dynamic” inside the military is “never to say, ‘Okay, we have to negotiate’, it’s always to ask for more resources”. He stated that President Obama “doesn’t seem to be able to stop these demands”. Several witnesses were of the view that because of the change in the political balance of power in the US House of Representatives following the 2010 mid-term elections, and the difficulty in creating the conditions for security transition, it would be increasingly difficult for the US President to refuse further resource and troop increases if the US military issued such a request.

---

206 Q 104 [Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles]; Q 7 [Michael Semple]; Q 124 [Gilles Dorronsoro]  
207 “Why the US must talk to the Taliban”, *Washington Post*, 18 March 2010  
210 See also “History is repeating itself in Afghanistan”, *Independent*, 18 December 2010.  
211 Q 124  
212 Q 120
Dorronsoro stated, “What we could very well have [in 2011] is demands for more troops in Afghanistan to compensate for the withdrawal of the Europeans and, very likely, the degradation of the security in the north and east of Afghanistan”. 213

115. There appears to be little doubt that many within the US military do not consider it appropriate for the international community to negotiate with insurgents until Coalition Forces have gained the upper hand on security. However, in contrast, Sir William Patey, HM Ambassador to Kabul, has said that “the history of conflict tells you it is possible to fight and talk at the same time”. 214 Likewise, James Ferguson told us, “many senior British figures believe it is time to start trying to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban [...] yet official policy is simply to go on supporting the US’s military strategy—even while this is demonstrably stuttering”. 215 Sir Sherard stated: “As with strikes by our special forces, you need to strike with one hand and offer a political process with the other. [...] In my view, the tragedy of NATO policy in Afghanistan is that we have had far too much of the right hand and not enough of the left hand. You need both: you need the political process to harvest politically the success that the military is delivering”. 216

116. 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.

What role for the UK?

117. In an Afghan-led process, the UK’s direct role in reconciliation should by right be a limited and supporting one. The UK could, as the Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit suggests, use its experience from Northern Ireland and elsewhere, to support Afghan leaders in designing their reconciliation strategy and enforcement arrangements. 217 It may also have a role to play in encouraging regional neighbours to act in Afghanistan’s interest, as we discuss below at paragraphs 132–136. However, arguably its most strategically important task is to convince the US of the merits of moving swiftly towards an endorsement of, and involvement in, talks with the Taliban leadership, and to highlight the significant risks to the West of not doing so.

118. We were encouraged to hear from a number of sources during our visit that the FCO’s thinking on the timing of a political settlement appears to be more sensible than that of the US. However, the decision of the UK’s Secret Intelligence Service to spend more than a year nurturing contacts and paying significant sums of money to a man whom they thought was one of the most senior commanders of the Taliban, only to find out he was a...
fake, inevitably took up resources that, over a period of 14 months, could have been spent on other endeavours.218

119. On the positive side, as Gerard Russell’s written evidence noted, the UK’s longstanding openness to the possibility of reconciliation with the Taliban is gradually becoming orthodox doctrine among commentators in America.219 However, it is yet to become official US policy, and, as we discussed previously, official statements still tend to focus on the need to push ahead with ‘re-integration’ rather than high level political reconciliation.

120. James Fergusson said that influencing Washington’s thinking on direct talks with Quetta should be central to the UK’s strategy and that “as the second largest troop contributor in Afghanistan, the UK is surely better placed than any other NATO ally to steer the US in the direction of negotiations”.220 Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles said, “Only the United States can succeed in this venture. […] One of our chief roles, and one of the chief benefits of our massive contribution is the influence that it gives us with the American military and in Washington.”221

121. A number of recent media reports suggest that the US position may be beginning to soften somewhat and Gerard Russell suggested that there is “more pragmatism” in the US administration that might be apparent publicly, but for it to be exploited, “it requires continued argument from commentators and from those countries and governments that see the need for it”.222 Sir Sherard explained that the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke fully understood the nature of insurgency and the need for a political settlement, but he added that the problem often lies elsewhere in Washington. He continued:

> Sometimes, if the only or main tool in the toolbox is a hammer, every problem can look like a nail. […] It is about encouraging all the good instincts of the Obama administration […]. Moving America in that direction, when many Americans think that the Taliban were somehow directly responsible for 9/11—they were indirectly, but they were actually horrified immediately after the event at the way their hospitality had been abused—is difficult in American politics. Britain can help do that.223

122. In Gerard Russell’s view, “It is a big leap for a Democrat President to make, and it carries a lot of risk. […] There are a lot of political bear traps in the reconciliation process and, particularly, in public declarations of a desire for negotiation”.224 Michael Semple told us:

> [P]reviously it was very difficult for the US to contemplate something as radical as entering into a political accommodation with the Taliban. It is very difficult—it goes

218 See for example, Daily Telegraph, 26 November 2010.
219 Ev 56
220 Ev 49
221 Q 92
222 Q 125
223 Q 92
224 Q 125
against many of the received narratives. That is why, as things have moved on over the past two or three years, publicly the US has moved [into] the position of being supportive of reintegration but hasn’t been taking public stances in support of reconciliation with the Taliban leadership. I believe that there is an inherent logic in reconciliation that ultimately is bound to appeal to the US, and I would expect a significant change from the US to be supportive of reconciliation on the right terms. [...] Maybe there has been US foot-dragging, but I think there is a pretty serious prospect that the US, as part of its commitment to try to wind down the military entanglement in a sensible way that will lead to a stable Afghanistan, will come out more clearly in favour of reconciliation.225

Both Michael Semple and Gerard Russell suggested that at this stage it might be sufficient for the US to adopt a more low-level practical approach which would avoid the political pitfalls associated with grand and public declarations supporting the reconciliation process.

123. 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.

Pakistan’s role

124. Pakistan is not the only regional player that has a critical role to play in Afghanistan’s future, but given that elements of the Afghan insurgency continue to receive sanctuary and support from within Pakistan, a constructive Pakistani role in the Afghan reconciliation process is crucial. Michael Semple told us that of all the regional powers, Pakistan probably has the potential to help most in reconciliation and also “to spoil it if it were to so choose”.226 Witnesses were also in agreement that the arrests in early 2010 of the Taliban’s military commander, Mullah Baradar (who is reported to have pursued unauthorised negotiations with the Afghan government), and others, amounted to a shot across the bows to demonstrate that the Pakistani military would obstruct talks unless they were fully involved in the negotiation process. As James Fergusson concluded, “Pakistan, through the ISI, controls what the Taliban do. It is the puppet master in many ways”.227 According to Michael Semple, Pakistan’s influence lies not in choosing proxies in the insurgency and pushing them towards the negotiating table but rather, “in dealing with the US, Kabul and the other people involved, [it] gets a chance to say, ‘Look, we’re concerned about A, B and C and who can help us’”.228

125. The FCO states that Pakistan “seems to be taking a greater interest in a political settlement in Afghanistan through offering support for an Afghan-led reconciliation
effort”, and as we noted above, there are some reports which suggest that the ISI are starting to exert some pressure on particular insurgent groups in this regard. What Pakistan might push for in talks remains unclear. Sir Hilary Synnott told us that if Pakistan’s constructive support is to be secured, it is important that “we look at these issues through their perspective, not ours, and realise that their interests are not the same as ours. If you look at it very coldly in that way, that gives you lots of indications and limits your expectations about the art of the possible”. Witnesses suggested that Pakistan’s first concern is that there should be viable stability inside Afghanistan so that Afghan problems do not affect Pakistan, and that its second concern is to ensure that there should not be adverse Indian influence in Afghanistan, to the point where Pakistan worries that the Afghan frontier is a hostile one.

126. While Dr Gohel stated that the Pakistan army wants to see a settlement that brings the Taliban back to Kabul in a power-sharing deal which would take Afghanistan back to the pre 9/11 position, Gerard Russell told us he had “some optimism” that although parts of the Pakistani establishment support the insurgency, the overall national interest “will not drive them to seek the fall of the entire country, as the Taliban did in the ’90s”. Pakistan will be particularly keen to make sure that the interests of its most important and reliable ally and neighbour, China (which in December agreed to a $35 billion trade deal with Pakistan) are not endangered. China has already invested considerably in Afghanistan, including some $4 billion in the Aynak copper mine, which is vital for China’s growth. As Gerard Russell explained it seemed “improbable” that Pakistan under these circumstances would “be interested in pushing for a Taliban victory that would include the fall of Kabul and the north [...] if they felt that it would ultimately destabilise their investments and China’s investments in southern Afghanistan”.

127. Although witnesses were unanimous that Pakistan must be involved in a political settlement, they argued that Pakistan’s long-standing support for insurgent groups, especially the Haqqani network, meant that their inclusion in talks must be handled carefully. From an Afghan perspective, too, there is said to be “deep ambivalence about Pakistan’s role in negotiations given the long memories of Pakistani connivance in the destruction of Afghanistan in mujaheddin times”.

128. In spite of the risks, witnesses were of the view that the international community had no alternative but to trust and work with the Pakistani military. Dr Shaikh told us that the international community knows that they will “ultimately work for its own interests” and that often these interests are “at cross-purposes with the interests of the international community”. However, she added that as long as it depends on Pakistan to help it prosecute the war in Afghanistan, the international community has no choice but to rely

---

229 Ev 20
230 Q 85
231 Q 21
232 Ev 80
233 Q 126
234 Q 126
235 Q 52
on Pakistan.\textsuperscript{236} Matt Waldman argued that a careful balance had to be struck between expediency and Afghan sovereignty”. He added:

If Pakistan believes its influence is insufficient, it will not support the process, yet the perception of excessive influence could trigger opposition within Afghanistan and countermeasures from regional states. Concerted efforts are required to reduce the extent to which Pakistan perceives a threat from India, and to improve the two countries’ relations.\textsuperscript{237}

129. Michael Semple told us that “we should never forget that Pakistan is the second largest beneficiary from successful reconciliation, peace in Afghanistan and a movement towards getting back on track—second only to the Afghan people themselves”. He added that it is “important to deal with Pakistan in such a way that you encourage the good and discourage the bad, so that they actually take a positive stance towards reconciliation, let the space be used for pursuing reconciliation—after all, that is what they say they want [...].”\textsuperscript{238}

130. Whether this can be successful or not will depend to a great extent on the US’s current and future posture towards Pakistan. As we discussed above at paragraph 57, this has not always elicited many rewards and therefore, in this context, we welcome the tone and content of the remarks made recently by the US Vice-President, Joe Biden, during a visit to Islamabad when he explicitly rejected the idea that the US would abandon Pakistan in the aftermath of the Afghanistan war, stating that this was “one of several widely held ‘misconceptions’ about US intentions in the region”. He added that both democracy and stability in Pakistan are in the “vital self-interest” of both countries and that “the only productive way forward is a long-term, enduring partnership”.\textsuperscript{239}

131. \textit{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.}

\textbf{The wider region}

132. There was strong consensus amongst witnesses that Afghanistan’s longer term security, and that of the broader region, meant that a strong regional element to any future political settlement would be required. With all of Afghanistan’s major ethnic groups,
including the Hazaras, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Pashtuns, having ties to neighbouring countries, international recognition of the importance of regional co-operation in support of Afghan stability has grown since 2001 and regional co-operation was a major theme of the London and Kabul Conferences. 240 As the FCO’s written evidence states:

None of Afghanistan’s neighbours have an interest in either a return to Taliban rule or absolute chaos in Afghanistan. They have all, in different ways, suffered as a result of Afghanistan’s varying levels of instability during the past 20 years (drugs, refugees, border management, economic impact). Some, such as Iran, are sensitive to any long-term Western military presence in Afghanistan. Russia and China do not want NATO to fail, because of the risk of extremist contagion. But they, too, are sensitive about the prospect of a long-term western military presence in Afghanistan. 241

133. As has been well-documented in a range of publications, Iran’s influence in Afghanistan has increased significantly of late. We saw for ourselves in Herat the positive effects that benign Iranian influence can have on security and prosperity. However, on the other hand, reports of Iranian support for the Taliban and of Afghan politicians show the dangers in the unfettered influence of a single regional neighbour. The challenge for the international community will be in ensuring that the benign elements of Iran’s support can be maximised whilst minimising those aspects of Iranian policy which are known to have had a malign effect. China too, as we discussed above at paragraph 126, having made significant investments in Afghanistan, also has a potentially important and positive role to play. As Gerard Russell explained, “It might not look like stability of the kind that we originally imagined, but they do need to protect their investments”. 242

134. Regional diplomacy would also provide an opportunity to ensure that Pakistan’s concerns about adverse Indian influence in Afghanistan are dealt with separately rather than via Afghan proxies. As Michael Semple told us, “It would be absolutely inappropriate to think of India being talked out of Afghanistan […] but there have to be some guidelines about what crosses the red line in terms of constituting a threat to Pakistan. […] The practical way probably to deal with this would be somebody taking forward a reconciliation track, particularly something like an international mediator, who would probably need a regional support group to work with them and to provide mutual reassurances”. 243 Harnessing regional support, and the unique benefits that each neighbour can bring to bear, is therefore crucial, as Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles stated:

The key question […] is how you accompany a military draw-down with a serious political process. The analogy that I have used […] is of a double-decker bus. You need an American chassis, an American engine, an American driver and an American sat-nav system. The passengers on the lower deck of the bus will be the internal parties. This is about far more than just talking to the Taliban; the Tajiks are increasingly alienated. On the top deck of the bus, you have all the external parties. The largest passenger will be Pakistan, but India, China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia,
Turkey, the emirates and the lower tier of the -stans will all be there. The bus will be
painted in Afghan colours and have a UN conductor on each floor and, with luck, a
British back-seat driver.244

135. The UK has been a strong advocate of a regional (yet Afghan-led) approach to
tackling Afghanistan's problems. The Government’s written evidence states that the UK
continues to encourage Afghanistan’s neighbours and influential international actors, like
Saudi Arabia, to play a constructive role in reconciliation.245 In 2005, the UK was
instrumental in setting up the Regional Economic Co-operation Conference on
Afghanistan (RECCA), the only regional economic initiative with Afghanistan at its centre.
The UK continues to support regional co-operation in support of Afghanistan through
funding the establishment of a Centre for Regional Co-operation (CRC) in the Afghan
government’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). This Afghan-led centre is tasked with
promoting economic integration between Afghanistan and the broader region.246

136. 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.

The terms of a negotiated settlement

137. The ultimate shape of a potential negotiated political solution to Afghanistan’s conflict
is impossible to predict. However, most analysts are in agreement that there will have to be
a power-sharing agreement, and constitutional or legislative changes. As a result, there are
fears that this could jeopardize civil and political liberties, and the rights of women and
minorities in particular.

138. The Taliban’s oppression of women in Afghanistan from 1996–2001 is well
documented. With the fall of the Taliban regime, some headline improvements could be
seen: girls began to return to school in larger numbers, women became more visible in
public life, many returned to work and the Afghan Constitution was drafted in a way
designed to guarantee women equal rights and a quarter of seats in parliament. However,
there are concerns that these limited improvements are in danger of receding if the Taliban
and other insurgent groups who are said, in many instances, to hold similar views about
women, regain power under a future negotiated settlement.247 Oxfam GB is one of many
NGOs which argue that it is vital for the UK and others to ensure that ordinary Afghan
men and women’s voices are effectively represented in negotiations, and that any future
political settlement guarantees their rights.248 Michael Semple told us:

I can feed back from some discussions I have had […] with various figures in the
Taliban whom it is possible to get access to, at which I have asked […] what is likely
to be their attitude to women moving into some kind of roles—whether it be in

---

244  Q 97
245  Ev 10
246  Ev 20
247  See for example the discussion of this issue in “The Ten-Dollar Talib’ and Women’s Rights - Afghan Women and the
Risk of Reintegration and Reconciliation”, Human Rights Watch, July 2010.
248  Ev w16
negotiations, or into future relationships or roles in the political system? The sensible ones say quite clearly that they realise that there are bottom lines. They also generally make a point of saying that they have moved on, and that they have recognised some of their failures during their period in government.\textsuperscript{249}

139. Giving evidence to us, the Foreign Secretary stated that the UK strongly encourages and has funded projects that encourage the participation of women in Afghan society and politics, and pointed to the improved participation of women in the peace jirga in June.\textsuperscript{250} The issue of women’s human rights in Afghanistan is an important issue and one that we will return to cover in more detail in our forthcoming inquiry into Human Rights.

140. Michael Semple told us that it would be wrong to think that “the western powers [...] will somehow be sole guarantors of the rights of Afghan women”. He explained:

The way I understand it is that the pragmatists in the Taliban would see benefits of being part of the political system and benefits of being accepted by the international community. Then you realise that they have to move on this themselves. They would probably prefer to be seen, in a sense, to be making that move themselves, rather than having their arms twisted the whole way. I think that there is a prospect for a positive outcome, but going about it the wrong way could undermine it.\textsuperscript{251}

141. Michael Semple told us that, “They understand a lot more about the world than they are often given credit for, and they have a vision of a political settlement”.\textsuperscript{252} However, as Matt Waldman stated, the extent to which the Taliban seek administrative, as opposed to political, power is not entirely clear.\textsuperscript{253}

**Prospects for success**

142. 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.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{249} Q 10
\item \textsuperscript{250} Q 154
\item \textsuperscript{251} Q 10
\item \textsuperscript{252} Q 13
\item \textsuperscript{253} Ev 52
\end{itemize}
PART 2: ASSESSING THE UK’S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH TO AFGHANISTAN

6 The debate over deadlines

Background

143. The West’s exit from Afghanistan has already begun.254 The Dutch were the first to announce their plans to withdraw in 2009, with the decision taking effect as of August 2010. However, with US public support for the war in Afghanistan falling, and under pressure from his party and Congress for troop withdrawals, it was President Obama’s announcement in December 2009 that the US planned to begin to start troop withdrawals from mid-2011 onwards that substantially altered the international debate on Afghanistan.255

144. Several allies followed suit. In early 2010, the Spanish government said it would be reasonable to expect Afghanistan to provide its own security by 2015, although it stopped short of setting out a formal timetable for its own withdrawal. The UK was next in June, with an announcement by the Prime Minister that British forces would not stay in Afghanistan in a combat role beyond 2015, regardless of the conditions on the ground. The Prime Minister subsequently stated in July 2010 that the process of bringing British troops home could begin in 2011.256 Although the Government’s position is that British combat forces will not remain in Afghanistan after 2015, it is keen to stress that the withdrawal will not signal the end of the UK’s engagement in Afghanistan and that civilian and economic support will intensify as Afghanistan stabilises further.257

145. Then in July 2010 Poland stated its intent to complete its withdrawal by 2015, followed swiftly by an announcement by Italy in October 2010 that it would start a gradual drawdown of troops from summer 2011 with the intention completely to withdraw in 2014. After much domestic opposition to its continued presence in Afghanistan and protracted speculation as to what its role there should be, Canada announced in November 2010 that it would withdraw combat troops in July 2011, although it will maintain a force of 950 non-combat personnel for a further three years to train the ANSF. Although no official announcements have yet been made, Germany is also expected to announce that it will start to drawdown troops later this year.

---

254 For a more detailed examination of the withdrawal timetable of individual ISAF countries see, Claire Taylor, The Timetable for Security Transition, House of Commons Library, Standard Note 5851, 2 February 2011.

255 Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 1 December 2009.

256 Ev 84

257 Ev 1
Chronology of a changing British position

146. As Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron stated on a number of occasions that he was opposed to setting “artificial timetables” for withdrawing British troops and said that any timetables would have to be conditions-based. He is quoted in the Daily Telegraph in December 2009 as stating that “we all want to make progress and bring British troops home as soon as possible but any timetable has got to be based on success and results”. Just over a year later, in January 2010, less than four months before the General Election, Mr Cameron continued to reject the idea of setting artificial deadlines for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, stating, “We want to withdraw troops on the basis of success—on the basis of an Afghan National Army that’s able to take control of parts of the country—rather than believing there are artificial deadlines where we can do these things automatically”.

147. This continued to be the Government’s position in the weeks immediately after the General Election. On 23 May 2010, during a visit to Afghanistan, the Foreign Secretary William Hague said, “I don’t think it’s possible and I don’t think it’s wise to set a date”. He added that British troops should be “here for as long as we need to work towards that objective of Afghans being able to look after their own security. [...] I don’t think setting a deadline helps anybody. I think so much of what we’re doing in Afghanistan, setting targets for people then to jump through hoops doesn’t help them in their work, because of course sometimes things take longer than you expected.”

148. In the same week, the Defence Secretary, Liam Fox, spoke out in the House against an arbitrary deadline for the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan, arguing that this must be done “when the time is right and not to some arbitrary deadline. [...] We will not turn Afghanistan into a self-sustaining country if we advertise an early departure”. On a later date in June, the Defence Secretary stated: “I would love to be able to tell people exactly when we can bring our troops home, but the decision to do so has to be conditions-based rather than calendar-based”. On 14 June, in response to a question in the House, the Prime Minister sent out a similar signal when he stated that “it is right not to set an artificial deadline about when troops will leave”.

149. However, less than two weeks after this statement, and three weeks after holding a seminar on Afghanistan at Chequers, the Prime Minister’s position shifted when, during a visit to Canada, he stated his desire to see troops home by the next General Election in 2015: “I want that to happen. We cannot be there for another five years having effectively been there for nine years already”. Seeking to clarify the Prime Minister’s position the following day, Armed Forces Minister Nick Harvey stated that David Cameron was “not
committing to a firm timeline” and that it would “depend on the conditions on the ground”.265

150. In July, shortly before the Kabul Conference was due to be held, the Prime Minister again stated in response to a parliamentary question that he did not see a combat role for British troops in Afghanistan beyond 2015: “let me be clear. Do I think 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”.266 Confusingly, therefore, on 21 July, the Deputy Prime Minister told the House that “no timetable can be chiselled in stone”.267 Yet, by November 2010, Ministers again appeared to be stating that conditions were irrelevant to the decision to withdraw troops. Giving evidence to us, the Foreign Secretary made it clear that the timetable for combat withdrawal was fixed regardless of what the situation is in 2015. When asked if there was any conceivable way that the deadline would be altered, the Foreign Secretary told us: “It won’t be changed. The Prime Minister is being very clear about that”.268

151. The situation was further confused by the Government’s written evidence to us which stated that “since Transition is conditions based, timelines cannot be made and it is important that transition planning does not interfere with the primary task of providing security to the Afghan people”.269 We asked the FCO to explain this apparent contradiction and its response was as follows:

In 2009 President Karzai set an objective that transition of the security lead across the country should be completed by the end of 2014. The NATO/ISAF Lisbon Summit in November 2010 endorsed this objective. The Lisbon Declaration said “The process of transition to full Afghan security responsibility and leadership in some provinces and districts is on track to begin in early 2011, following a joint Afghan and NATO/ISAF assessment and decision. Transition will be conditions-based, not calendar-driven, and will not equate to withdrawal of ISAF-troops. Looking to the end of 2014, Afghan forces will be assuming full responsibility for security across the whole of Afghanistan…” This means that identifying individual priorities and districts for transition to ANSF lead will be conditions-based and ISAF and the Afghan authorities have established mechanisms for this process. The process is intended to be completed by 2014. The Government has made clear UK forces will be out of combat by 2015. The latest ISAF assessments are that the 2014 objective is achievable.270

265 Today Programme, BBC Radio 4, 26 June 2010
266 HC Deb, 7 July 2010, col 367
267 HC Deb, 21 July 2010, col 343
268 Q 148
269 Ev 6
270 Ev 86
Why the change in policy?

152. Of all the changes made to the UK’s Afghan policy following the election, the volte-face on conditions-based combat withdrawal outlined above is perhaps the most significant. It not only has the potential to significantly affect UK mission goals and British military efforts on the ground but also to influence the UK’s relationship with key allies, particularly the US. It is therefore imperative that the Government explains what prompted such a significant change in policy.

153. The Government’s response has been to focus less on the rationale behind the change and more on the benefits it believes the 2015 deadline can bring about. For instance, the Prime Minister contends that it is important to send a signal to both domestic and Afghan audiences “that we won’t be in Afghanistan forever” to give “people some certainty”.271 The Foreign Secretary told us that by 2015 the UK will “have been in Helmand for much longer—50% longer—than the entire second world war, so we feel it right to say that, by then, we will not be involved in combat operations”.272 He added that the deadline would send a clear signal to allies and the Afghan government about the UK’s intentions.273 The Government has also argued that it is “safe” to say combat troops will be out in 2015 because the coalition forces planned to hand over to Afghan forces by 2014.274 Meanwhile, FCO Minister, Lord Howell, speaking on 21 July had stated that the deadline amounted to “a firm harness of pressure on the Karzai government and the Taliban”.275 In November, the Prime Minister claimed that the 2015 deadline was an “alternative” to “endless pressure to set very short-term deadlines for transitioning this province or district at this time.” He added, “I would rather we had a proper-worked out process and plan to deliver that”.276

Who made the decision on the 2015 deadline?

154. In spite of the justifications outlined above, which emerged in a piecemeal fashion after the announcement, we were still no closer to understanding the basis upon which this decision was made and the security rationale behind it, particularly given that the mission is supposed to be about UK national security. Therefore, in November, we asked the Foreign Secretary about the decision-making process that led to this wholesale policy shift. In response, the Foreign Secretary told us that the decision was taken by Ministers in the National Security Council and the Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister.277 We then asked who took the decision:

Mr Hague: The decision was taken by Ministers in the National Security Council and the Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister.

Mr Ainsworth: Was it taken in the National Security Council?

271 BBC News Online, 21 July 2010
272 Q 148
273 Q 148
274 “Cameron denies mixed messages on Afghan pull-out”, BBC News Online, 21 July 2010
275 HL Deb, 21 July 2010, col 985
276 HC Deb, 22 November 2010, col 983
277 Q 142
Mr Hague: It was taken by the Prime Minister in consultation with other senior Ministers, including me.

Mr Ainsworth: Were you consulted?

Mr Hague: Yes.

Mr Ainsworth: When were you consulted?

Mr Hague: Before the Prime Minister made his announcement.

Mr Ainsworth: Was the Defence Secretary consulted?

Mr Hague: I am sure the Defence Secretary was consulted, but I cannot tell you when everybody was consulted. You would have to ask the Prime Minister.278

155. In a subsequent evidence session with the Foreign Secretary, we asked for further clarification as to whether the decision was taken in the National Security Council:

Chair: ...[I]t would appear that although the decision to withdraw troops by 2015 at the latest might have been made by members of the National Security Council, it wasn’t made in the National Security Council. Could you confirm that it wasn’t made in it, and tell us why not?

Mr Hague: Members of the National Security Council have all discussed and debated that, and the Prime Minister will be familiar with all their views. He spoke about our intentions for 2015, with my, the Defence Secretary’s and the Deputy Prime Minister’s readiness to support and implement them; so, the decision was made in that way.

Chair: Fine, but you can confirm that the decision wasn’t actually made in the Council.

Mr Hague: It wasn’t a formal item in the National Security Council.279

156. 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.

157. 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.

278 Qq 143–47
279 Uncorrected transcript of oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 7 February 2011, HC (2010–11), 665–v, Q 259
The possible consequences of announcing deadlines

**Potential risks—the downside**

158. In the course of our inquiry we discussed at length with witnesses and interlocutors whether it was prudent for ISAF countries to announce deadlines for withdrawal from Afghanistan. We heard a variety of concerns in response. Some of these were based on the belief that deadlines provide insurgents with succour, thereby degrading the appeal of reconciliation and providing an incentive to attempt to outlast international forces. For instance, while Matt Waldman accepted that “there will inevitably be some sort of phased withdrawal”, he said he did “not believe that it is sensible from a strategic point of view to lay out your plans for the future before the enemy”.280 Others argued that the decision had provided a psychological boost to the Taliban by signalling a lack of long-term western commitment to the mission.281 Others again were concerned that securing the trust of the Afghan people would be difficult if the West was perceived to be on the verge of leaving Afghans to fend for themselves.

159. On this point, the British Government has countered that ISAF is training the Afghan National Security Forces precisely to avoid this scenario. It adds that even after 2014 the international community will retain a large presence in Afghanistan to ensure its longer term stability and development. We were also told during our visit that any US drawdown would be slow and shallow, and would therefore avoid the risks inherent in a precipitate withdrawal.

160. We also heard more general concerns about the potential message that deadlines could send to the West’s enemies beyond Afghanistan, to the effect that when faced with failure, the West capitulates.282 The Henry Jackson Society stated it was important that self-imposed deadlines were not capable of being perceived to amount to an admission of failure: “The message that failure would send out both to terrorist movements and hostile state actors worldwide—that the West can be taken on and overcome by violent means—is not one that anyone with a care for safeguarding British national security should wish to send”.283

161. Yet, it is worth noting that although the debate in the UK is very much focused on the 2015 date, most of the views we heard suggested that it was the Americans’ 2011 deadline for the beginning of draw-down that was of greater strategic concern. In many respects this is unsurprising given that, as Gerard Russell notes, “The United States is providing 80% of the Coalition troops in Afghanistan and a very substantial part of the overall international expenditure there. Other countries are in charge of PRTs in at most two provinces each. The United Kingdom meantime provides a fraction of the troops and development assistance in Afghanistan and is in charge of only one PRT.”284 In a similar vein, Matt Waldman noted, “In a sense, what Britain does with its troops—we are a fraction of the

---

280 Q 58. See also Ev 81 [Dr Gohel].
281 Ev 81
282 Ev w3–4
283 Ev w2
284 Ev 56
international force in Afghanistan—won’t be decisive either way. As you’ve seen, we are pulling out of areas of Helmand and we are being replaced by the Americans”. In this context, it is worth recalling, as the Secretary of State for Defence stated recently, 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.285

162. Although the 2015 deadline may be of less strategic significance within Afghanistan than the US announcement that it would start to drawdown troops in 2011, it does not necessarily follow that it is not of wider importance. Indeed, concerns have been raised in the House about how the UK can reconcile its unconditional 2015 position with that of NATO which continues to state that the deadline is “aspirational”, that security transition to Afghan control in parts of the country could go into 2015 and beyond, and that 2014 is a goal which is realistic but not guaranteed.286

The impact on Pakistan

163. The other major concern that we heard from witnesses relates to the effect that the US’s decision to announce the drawdown of troops has had on regional powers and, in particular, Pakistan. At the time, Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry said: “Pakistan looks forward to engaging closely with [the] US in understanding the full import of the new strategy and to ensure that there would be no adverse fallout on Pakistan.” Media reports suggested that Pakistani officials were concerned that a dramatic increase in US troops in Afghanistan would push militants and refugees across its borders and complicate its own battle against the Taliban.287

164. We were told by both interlocutors and witnesses that the announcement of the 2011 date led Islamabad and Kabul promptly to start planning for a post-US future. Professor Shaun Gregory stated that “there is much evidence that Pakistan has supported the return of the Afghan Taliban from Pakistan in order to have a strong hand in Afghanistan post-NATO, to [... ] avoid the kind of chaos into which Afghanistan was plunged when the Soviets withdrew in 1989 and the US abandoned the region [which had appalling consequences for Pakistan], and to keep Indian influence in Afghanistan to a minimum and away from the Af-Pak border”.288 Given this historical context, and in light of increased drone attacks, the US’s increasingly close relationship with India and what some Pakistanis perceive to be bribery in the form of conditional aid packages, some witnesses suggested that the deadline had given the Pakistani population and authorities further cause to resent the US. Others argued that news of a US drawdown was seen as “absolute confirmation that the United States” [would be] “turning its back” on Pakistan and was showing itself to be the fickle friend that many Pakistanis believe it to be.289

165. We gained the impression from witnesses and interlocutors that as long as Pakistan felt it would be left to pick up the pieces after an American withdrawal from Afghanistan,

285 Uncorrected transcript of oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 17 December 2010, Q 312
286 Daily Telegraph, 19 November 2010
287 The Nation, 2 December 2009
288 Ev 83
The UK’s foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan

71

its inclination to promote Western interests, as opposed to its own, would be low. Indeed, Dr Gohel stated that unless Pakistan has confidence in NATO’s commitment to winning in Afghanistan, it will continue to hedge its support for the Afghan Taliban and tolerate terrorist groups linked to al-Qaeda. In this context, we welcome not only the recently initiated Strategic Dialogue between the US and Pakistan but also the comments made in January by the US Vice-President in which he stated that “the only productive way forward is a long-term, enduring partnership,” as well as his pledge that the US would not abandon Pakistan in the aftermath of the Afghanistan war.

166. 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.

Potential benefits— the upside

The impact in Afghanistan

167. The debate over deadlines is far from one-sided. In remarks made in December 2010, President Obama argued that much of the progress that the US states has been made in the past year is

the result of us having sent a clear signal that we will begin the transition of responsibility to Afghans and start reducing American forces next July. This sense of urgency also helped galvanise the coalition around the goals that we agreed to the recent NATO summit in Lisbon—that we are moving towards a new phase in Afghanistan, a transition to full Afghan lead for security that will begin early [2011] and will conclude in 2014, even as NATO maintains a long-term commitment to training and advising Afghan forces.

168. Indeed, during our visit, a wide variety of Afghan interlocutors ranging from senior policy-makers to ordinary Afghans who, understandably, wish to see Afghans decide upon Afghanistan’s future, voiced their strong support for a 2014 transition date, the natural corollary of which is the gradual withdrawal of troops in the run-up to that period. This was echoed by a number of the witnesses we heard from at Westminster, including James Fergusson and Jolyon Leslie, who both argued that deadlines would give Afghans the space to come up with their own solutions to the current situation. Mr Leslie told us that withdrawal could not come “a day too soon”. He explained that, “we shouldn’t forget that the 2014–15 date was immensely relieving to the Afghan people. It didn’t come across

290 Ev 81
291 Washington Post, 13 January 2011
292 Statement by President Obama on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Annual Review, 16 December 2010
293 Q 59
as [...] ‘Oh my God, they are cutting and running.’ It came across as, ‘Thank goodness, we can get beyond this and we can work things out for ourselves’’. He added:

As things stand at the moment, [...] we need to back off and give Afghans some space to work things out themselves. [...] The hope is with the kind of Afghans that I have worked with for years and years, not necessarily with combatants. At the moment, they are feeling very confined by the international military who tell them what to do day and night, and who intrude on their space. I do not think that we should underestimate that [...] in terms of losing hearts and minds.

Mr Leslie also said:

I believe that we should also pull back militarily, and face the consequences. I think that Afghans will work it out, much more than we would wish to acknowledge after our investments.

169. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles also said it was a “courageous” decision and the “right thing” to do. He explained his reasoning thus:

Most Afghans believe that we and America are there to seek some long-term military presence, some kind of neo-colonial, long-term hegemony over the area. They don’t believe that rationally [...] but they do believe it, so announcing that we are going, that we are getting out of combat, is a good thing, in my view.

He added:

I support the idea of deadlines. I didn’t initially when I first arrived there, but the Taliban can read the politics of the western troop-contributing democracies as well as anybody. They are perfectly aware that American troops are due to start leaving in July next year and that the next British General Election, all being well, will be in May 2015.

170. Others, such as Gerard Russell, also supported the idea of an “early move by the international community towards a long-term, smaller, sustainable presence—oriented towards training and air strikes in support of Afghan ground forces, rather than direct combat”, and argued that, in the long run, this would benefit Afghanistan given that one of the main causes of the conflict was the large-scale presence of troops, particularly in the south.
Helping to prevent a future escalation of the counter-insurgency campaign

171. As we noted earlier, there is a risk that come 2014, the US military may still not be ready to negotiate and may wish to push ahead with the counter-insurgency campaign, calling for more resources and more time, at the very point when the UK is set to leave. A divergence of this sort, in a relationship already shaken militarily in recent years by the legacy of British action in Basra, would in the view of Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, “have a major impact on the transatlantic relationship”.300

172. Matt Cavanagh, formerly a Prime Ministerial Special Adviser to Gordon Brown, is one of those who believes that it is likely that “the military will ask for more time to get it right”.301 Some of those who gave evidence to us thought likewise.302 From a British perspective, given that the UK’s strategy is closely tied to that of the US, pressure could be put on the British military to support the US. According to Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, conversations between the US and British military “end up with things being pre-cooked between the US and the UK militaries before they are subject to political approval back in London, and/or you get different parts of the military lobbying for their own hobby-horses without clear political approval”.303 Sir Sherard added that to avoid this situation it would be necessary to

gradually [...] move the British Army and British forces [...] from a ground-holding territorial operation to a functional operation, to switch them out of holding territory into a training role, which could be in the south as well as in the north, and to do that by evolution, rather than by revolution, always taking the Americans with us, but being very firm with them about what we want and what we don’t want.304

173. In light of this, there is an argument to be made that by setting out the Government’s position now, and making clear the plans of ISAF’s second largest troop contributor, the UK’s action could conceivably help President Obama deliver on his commitment to set an end-point for combat involvement. This is particularly important given the opposition the Administration faces domestically, not least from some quarters of the US military, who may make the case for additional troops, risking an ongoing escalation of the conflict, rather than the longer-term de-escalation that ISAF governments have opted to pursue.305 Arguably, therefore, the British deadline of 2015 could help to reinforce the message that the way forward is to address the root causes of the conflict through a political settlement, rather than suppressing the symptoms, which as we noted above, in isolation, can only bring temporary relief at best.

300 Q 104
301 Matt Cavanagh, “Inside the Anglo-Saxon war machine”, Prospect, December 2010
302 See for example Q 120 ff.
303 Q 104
304 Q 104
305 Q 120 [Gerard Russell], [Gilles Dorronsoro]
Assessment

174. There were no easy choices available to the Government when it came to deciding upon whether to announce a combat withdrawal deadline in Afghanistan. There are undoubtedly risks in pursuing such a strategy, not least that they may embolden the insurgency or encourage a more general perception among the West’s enemies that its foreign policy commitments are wholly at the mercy of domestic public opinion. It is worth noting, however, that these risks are not entirely of the British Government’s making. The current situation is a legacy of NATO’s desire to conduct out of area operations, the UK’s relationship with the US, and an international effort that has proved itself to be deficient in many respects, over a number of years, leaving little prospect of the Government achieving its stated goals. Successive British Governments must take their share of responsibility for these collective failings. It is, however, important to recall that the decision has been taken at a time when the UK faces a range of critical foreign policy challenges ranging from Iran and the Middle East to terrorist threats from the Arabian peninsula, in light of an economic challenge of almost unprecedented proportions, in the face of genuine concern about casualties and the success of the war in Afghanistan on the part of many people in the UK and in view of the desire of Afghans to take control of their own affairs.

Reconciliation: a pre-condition for reducing deadline-related risks

175. According to several witnesses, the best way to mitigate the potential risks that are associated with using deadlines is to ensure that the international community’s combat withdrawal is accompanied by an urgent and wholehearted push forward towards a political settlement. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles told us that a deadline “is a risk, and it needs to be accompanied with a vigorous political process and strategy”, otherwise, “every day that goes by without us launching a serious negotiation, the more likely it is that [the insurgents] will say, “we’ll just sit this out and once the foreigners have gone, we’ll fight it out”.306 Jolyon Leslie made a similar point when he stated, “I don’t think that it should be rapid, but we should withdraw. We should pull back and, as I have said, we should give space, but […] [w]e also really need to push the political track, rather than just twiddling our thumbs while President Karzai, bless him, appoints the High Peace Council. There has to be, of course, an element of sovereignty in all this, and I wouldn’t want to propose cutting deals more than they are being cut, but there are other tracks to follow”.307

176. 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.
7 Assessing the suitability of the UK’s mission and goals

Protecting UK national security: the core mission in Afghanistan?

177. When UK forces entered Afghanistan in October 2001, they did so in support of the United States, and in direct response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. In a statement to the House on 4 October 2001, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair outlined the UK’s objectives, placing them firmly in the context of a limited counter-terrorism operation:

We must bring Bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders to justice and eliminate the terrorist threat they pose. And we must ensure that Afghanistan ceases to harbour and sustain international terrorism. If the Taliban regime will not comply with that objective, we must bring about change in that regime to ensure that Afghanistan's links to international terrorism are broken.

I believe the humanitarian coalition to help the people of Afghanistan to be as vital as any military action itself. […] The international community has already pledged sufficient funds to meet the most immediate needs. […] We will give Mr Brahimi [Lakhdar Brahimi, former United Nations representative for Afghanistan and Iraq] all the support we can, to help ensure that the UN and the whole of the international community comes together to meet the humanitarian challenge. […]\(^{308}\)

178. Yet, as our predecessor Committee concluded in August 2009, in the period between 2001 and 2009, the UK’s mission took on a significantly different, and considerably expanded character, moving from its initial goal of supporting the US in countering international terrorism, far into the realms of counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics, protection of human rights, and state-building.\(^{309}\) The previous Foreign Affairs Committee stated that it was “struck by the sheer magnitude of the task confronting the UK” and concluded that there had been significant mission creep in the British deployment, resulting in the British Government being “committed to a wide range of objectives.” The Committee recommended that the Government set out, in unambiguous terms, its first and most important priority in Afghanistan.\(^{310}\)

179. For the previous and current Government, that stated priority remains British national security. As we noted above, the current Government’s key objective in Afghanistan, like that of its predecessor is that Afghanistan should not again become a place from which al-Qaeda and other extremists can attack the UK and British interests. Giving evidence to the Liaison Committee in November 2010, the Prime Minister was asked whether 10 years after the initial intervention, the Government was still receiving advice that al-Qaeda will return to Afghanistan if troops were withdrawn. In response, he said:

---

\(^{308}\) HC Deb, 4 Oct 2001, col 675

\(^{309}\) Foreign Affairs Committee, Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan, para 225

\(^{310}\) Ibid.
That is the advice, yes [...] Is it the case that if we literally left now, and Afghanistan was left as a basket-case country with the Taliban controlling part of it, with all the bad people we know are in the tribal areas of Pakistan, al-Qaeda could return to Afghanistan and re-establish a base there? Yes, I think that is the case. [...] If you pull back on either side, either in Pakistan or in Afghanistan, you create a larger amount of space for al-Qaeda to exist in. Part of that could be in Afghanistan if we weren’t there.311

180. In a similar vein, General Petraeus, in an interview with The Times, stated that “there have been and are attempts by some [...] groups, including al-Qaeda, to seek sanctuary in Afghanistan. We see it in north eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Kunar province and Nuristan, because of the pressure that the Pakistan military and other campaigns have put on al-Qaeda in the FATA”.312

181. This argument is not without its critics. Some argue that the al-Qaeda threat emanates from Pakistan rather than Afghanistan. Indeed, while it is difficult to assess the true scale of al-Qaeda’s presence in Afghanistan from open-source material, it may be noted that in a speech delivered in September 2010, the Director of the Security Services made references to the al-Qaeda threat from Pakistan’s tribal areas, but made no mention of Afghanistan.313 In October 2009, US National Security Adviser James Jones was reported as saying that the “maximum estimate” of al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan itself was less than 100 and there were no al-Qaeda bases there.”314

182. Other reports, including one published in September 2010 by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), as well as some written evidence received, claimed that defeat of the Taliban has become virtually synonymous with the defeat of al-Qaeda and questioned the view that al-Qaeda would return to Afghanistan if foreign forces withdrew. We heard similar views from senior Afghans during our visit. James Fergusson told us that there is “absolutely no evidence that al-Qaeda even want to come back or that the Taliban would have them back if they did. I’ve had this conversation so many times in Afghanistan and I have not come across one Afghan who gets this justification for our presence there at all. They do not believe it”.315 Jolyon Leslie stated that there is an “element of scaremongering in the thought that if we take our finger out of the dyke, it’s all going to come down and get us. That is unhelpful, because that is not what many Afghans are thinking”.316 He added, “we should also bear in mind that there is a real ambivalence among Afghans about Arabs in their midst, because of the mujaheddin history. Most ordinary Afghans, who are not even necessarily educated, don’t want them there any more than we do.”317

311 Q 117
312 The Times, 23 September 2010
313 Speech delivered by Jonathan Evans, head of MI5, to the Worshipful Company of Security Professionals, 16 September 2010
314 “State of the Union” programme, CNN, 4 October 2009
315 Q 35
316 Q 38
317 Q 38
183. Certainly, there are elements of the insurgency that are known to be closely connected to al-Qaeda, particularly some parts of the Haqqani network, but as Matt Waldman told us, “If you talk to the Taliban there is no love lost between them and al-Qaeda. They know that ultimately al-Qaeda was responsible for their downfall. Indeed, Mullah Omar in his last public statement [...] said, ‘We want to conduct our foreign policy on the basis that we will not harm foreign countries if they do not harm us.’ There is not a strong alliance between the Talibs and al-Qaeda. Could you get solid guarantees that they would not work together in the future? Probably not, but this time they will know what the consequences would be were they to support and to harbour extremists of that kind”.318

184. 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.

Are the UK’s goals appropriate and achievable?

185. The Government states that it has four main ‘goals’ in Afghanistan and that achieving these are necessary if the Government is to achieve its core objective, as discussed above, of preventing the return of al-Qaeda to Afghanistan. We return to assess this statement below at paragraph 201, following a discussion of the four ‘goals’, which are as follows:

i. a more stable and secure Afghanistan;

ii. the conditions for withdrawal of UK combat troops by 2015, including capable Afghan National Security Forces;

iii. an Afghan-led political settlement that represents all Afghan people; and

iv. regional political and security co-operation that supports a stable Afghanistan.319

In preceding chapters we have discussed the progress that has been made towards the achievement of these goals. In this section, we consider their overall appropriateness in light of the evidence we have received.

A more stable and safer Afghanistan

186. The British Government’s desire to create a more stable and safer Afghanistan is supposed to be achieved by the implementation of a full-scale counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy based on the doctrine of ‘clear, hold and build’. Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon explains the rationale behind counter-insurgency campaigns in the following terms: “in counter-insurgency operations, the job of the soldier is not to chase the enemy, but to help win the support of the population. Their principal task is not to seek out and kill, but to take ground so that the reconstructors can move in and establish the rule of law,
effective governance, [...], a basis for economic livelihoods and the framework of a peaceful life, supported by the local population. The short-hand term for this strategy is ‘clear, hold and build’, with the soldiers clearing and holding, while the re-building takes place in the secure space they have created”. Although top military commanders have always been at pains to say that the Iraq 'surge' solution does not apply in Afghanistan, in reality, thinking on the 'Iraq surge success', has indeed had a significant impact on thinking throughout the chain of command in both the US and UK military. Although the COIN strategy is being implemented through the multinational ISAF, it was the UK that was instrumental in advocating this approach and ensuring that it was adopted by its ISAF partners.

187. Looking at the situation as a whole, and according to the evidence we received, success appears to be eluding ISAF and by implication, the UK: insecurity and civilian casualties are reported to be higher than ever before and the insurgency is gaining momentum in areas previously considered to be stable. Meanwhile, rural areas in Afghanistan remain far more alien, isolated, conservative and resistant to change than is often publicly acknowledged. We also heard that the focus on population, which is so central to the counter-insurgency campaign, may actually be making the situation worse. Gilles Dorronsoro stated, “advocates of a continued push will argue that only now are the resources in place for the counter-insurgency strategy to be effectively carried out and more time is needed to assess results. But this line of reasoning ignores reality that the strategy has already failed on the ground and there is no evidence that the situation can be reversed in strategically decisive ways”.

188. When it comes to economic development and the aim of winning hearts and minds, our witnesses were equally sceptical that the strategy being deployed is, or ever will be, successful. Jolyon Leslie, who has more than twenty years experience of international development in Afghanistan, perhaps best summed up the views of other witnesses on this strategy when he said, “I often feel very disappointed that we are still peddling this mythology to some extent about the fact that we can go in and hold, clear and build an area. It is so patently clear at the village level [...] that outsiders cannot do that. Even if you can clear, you are unlikely to hold, and you certainly cannot build”. Meanwhile, Matt Waldman stated:

Consider that many Afghans, especially in southern Afghanistan, are profoundly Islamic, conservative, and have an understandable mistrust of foreign forces. In their perception western forces, garrisoned in fortified compounds, launch attacks which kill, injure or antagonise Afghan civilians (often without proper, visible accountability or redress); collude in the empowerment and enrichment of abusive strongmen and a corrupt regime; maladminister assistance funds; and herald the commencement of their departure. Most Afghans live in difficult conditions and will accept what support they can get, but in light of the above considerations, and in the face of systematic Taliban intimidation, it is increasingly unrealistic to expect western soldiers to win Afghan hearts and minds.

320 The Independent, 22 July 2009
321 “Worsening Outlook in Afghanistan”, foreignpolicy.com, 9 September 2010
322 Q 30
323 Ev 52–53
189. The idea, also central to the current counter-insurgency campaign, that “money is ammunition”\textsuperscript{324} was also criticised by a number of those who submitted evidence. We saw for ourselves in Herat the extent to which ISAF funds, controlled by the Italian-led PRT, and supplemented significantly by the US through its Commander’s Emergency Response Fund (CERF), were used to fund projects in a bid to ‘buy’ support. In areas like Herat, where the situation is more stable, there may arguably be some merit in this approach. However, in areas where the surge has resulted in widespread destruction and instability, witnesses found it difficult to imagine that success could be ‘bought’ by aid delivered in conjunction with military effort. Mr Leslie, for instance, said he was worried that “one of the central planks of winning hearts and minds is delivering aid”. He added:

We have obviously failed at that, because we have not won hearts and minds through culverts, irrigation channels, shuras, [or] training programmes [...]. It is just not going to work like that. In the middle of Marjah, where most of the population has been forced out, areas have been laid waste, vineyards have been laid waste and houses have been blown up, how can we dare to talk about development? It is a scorched earth policy, a lot of it.\textsuperscript{325}

Gerard Russell made a similar point when he relayed comments made by an elder in Khost Province. The elder said: “You can give us all the aid you want to build the schools, as many as you wish, and we welcome that, but if somebody comes and puts a knife to my throat in the night, what am I supposed to do?”\textsuperscript{326} As Gerard Russell stated, “That isn’t actually something that a military operation can easily address”.\textsuperscript{327} Jolyon Leslie concluded:

We need to be honest that we cannot do development in full-body armour. [...] The Afghans are beginning to move on from being sceptical to actually being angry about some of these issues, because they are having to swallow some of these resentments. It’s making them very cynical about everything that we do as a result. That is a sadness, because the will is there and the intention is good, but we need to be more brutally honest about what we cannot do.\textsuperscript{328}

190. In the area of governance, the British Government has initiated a series of programmes which in many instances are regarded internationally as models of good practice. However, in spite of these good intentions, overall progress has been slow in some cases and completely lacking in others. The fact that 40 districts in the South were supposed to have been stabilised and transferred to Afghan government control during 2010 (but have not been), that there continues to be full Afghan authority in only a minority of districts, and that warlords continue to hold sway in many northern areas, highlight both the intractable nature of the problem in Afghanistan and the inappropriateness of the international solutions being implemented as part of the ISAF counter-insurgency strategy. As Matt Waldman told us, “we need to reframe our objectives, minimising the harm that we cause. It would be a legitimate objective, while at

\textsuperscript{324} COMISAF Counter-insurgency (COIN) Guidance, August 2010
\textsuperscript{325} Q 56
\textsuperscript{326} Q 117
\textsuperscript{327} Q 117
\textsuperscript{328} Q 30
the same time making greater efforts to listen to Afghans, to appreciate their interests and their aspirations for the future, and to try to adapt our policy and international policy accordingly”.329

191. Simultaneously, the international approach is being undermined by parallel decentralising structures created by individual states and a continuing lack of co-ordination and wasteful use of resources. Even if it were possible to overcome these issues, the fact remains that the Afghan government is not able to provide the leadership necessary to tackle corruption or to address the lack of legitimacy which flawed elections and widespread official corruption have engendered. We also note a report by the International Institute of Strategic Studies which stated that the counter-insurgency tactics being used are “too ambitious, too removed from the core security goals that need to be met, and too sapping of diplomatic and military energies needed both in the region and elsewhere”.330

192. As President Obama has stated, the US’s goal is:

not to defeat every last threat to the security of Afghanistan, because, ultimately, it is Afghans who must secure their country. And it’s not nation-building, because it is Afghans who must build their nation. Rather, we are focused on disrupting, dismantling and defeating al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and preventing its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.331

We are concerned, however, that this vision of a limited and focused counter-terrorist campaign is at odds with the full-spectrum counter-insurgency campaign which is unfolding today in Afghanistan.

193. 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.

Creating the conditions for withdrawal including capable Afghan Security Forces

194. In the past year in particular there have been tremendous efforts expended trying to improve the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces. Yet, while headline goals for the size of the ANSF look likely to be met, overall there are real concerns as to whether capabilities can be sufficiently improved in the time available, particularly given that the starting baseline for quality is so low. The issue is not one of funding; in spite of the US

329 Q 57
330 “Strategic Survey”, International Institute of Strategic Studies, September 2010
331 Statement by President Obama on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Annual Review, 16 December 2010
spending $2 billion a month on training the Afghan National Security Force (a sum which exceeds the entire annual income of the Afghan state), the evidence we garnered suggests that the quality of training remains low, ethnic imbalance remains a considerable problem and corruption in the police is a major hindrance to its effectiveness and credibility. In light of these concerns, we are concerned as to whether Afghan forces, which are capable of taking lead responsibility from ISAF by 2014, can be created.

An Afghan-led political settlement that represents all Afghan people

195. Regrettably, we have seen little sign of progress on the Government’s third goal. Although many hopes are rightly being pinned on the prospect of a political settlement, as yet the parameters and conditions for starting substantive negotiations do not appear to exist. Creating these conditions is a major challenge. NATO’s policy on political reconciliation needs to be more coherent and a way of inducing the positive buy-in of a wide range of regional players has yet to be found. Nor is it clear how Pakistan will approach a political settlement given its enduring preoccupation with the perceived threat from India, or how Afghans will receive Pakistan’s involvement given the animosity many of them feel towards Pakistan. It is of great concern, too, that neither the UK nor even the US have been able to persuade Pakistan to move to a position which more closely reflects Western interests. We also heard evidence that the surge, rather than improving the situation, is actually making such a settlement less likely and is counter-productive because it reduces pressure on the Afghan elite to negotiate and creates a situation that the Taliban thinks it can outlast.

196. We were told repeatedly that direct US involvement in talks is crucial if negotiations are to have a chance of success. However, we were also told that supportive voices in the US administration are in danger of being drowned out by a powerful chorus of military and domestic opposition to political reconciliation, arising in some instances from a mistaken conflation of the threat posed to Western interests by the Taliban as opposed to al-Qaeda.

197. 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.

198. While there is common ground between the Afghan government and the West as to the desirability of foreign troops leaving Afghanistan, the gulf of difference over many other issues, not least the protection of human rights, is treacherously wide. Many organisations, both international and Afghan, as well as the US Administration have expressed concern about the negative impact that a return of the Taliban to government could have on human rights and in particular women’s rights. As we have stated elsewhere in this Report, the Government is committed to a political settlement which “is representative; gives no one group disproportionate influence; upholds human rights and
the rule of law and is in accordance with Afghanistan’s Constitutional framework”.

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.

199. 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.

Regional political and security co-operation that supports a stable Afghanistan

200. Although we understand the Government’s desire to see a regional political and security operation that supports a stable Afghanistan, we have seen little evidence of progress on this, the fourth and final UK goal. Our witnesses insisted that there is no evidence that Pakistan has now been brought into a stable and constructive relationship with Afghanistan. Equally, Pakistan’s failure to tackle the Afghan insurgency from within its own borders is of significant concern, as is the evidence which suggests that this attitude is unlikely to change. While the UK, for historical and other reasons, may be in some respects in a better position than the US to encourage Pakistan to adopt a more constructive role, in reality, Pakistan’s counter-leverage is arguably far stronger.

Conclusion: the UK’s four goals and the core mission

201. 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.

332 “Quarterly report on progress in Afghanistan”, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 27 October 2010
Communicating the case effectively?

Communicating the campaign in Afghanistan

The international effort

202. After the attacks of 11 September 2001, the international justification for Western intervention in Afghanistan was clear: it was in the interests of international security to remove the Taliban regime because of the sanctuary it provided to al-Qaeda. However, as the Government acknowledges, in the interim period, “unity of message has been more difficult. ISAF nations have had differing experiences [and] confusion grew about whether the international community’s efforts were aimed at tackling international terrorism, countering insurgency, humanitarian relief or promoting democracy”.

Over the same period, the Taliban has shown itself to be adept at using a full range of media successfully to tap into strains of Afghan nationalism and has cleverly exploited policy failures by the Kabul government and its international backers. The result is weakening Afghan public support for the international effort, even though few actively support the Taliban.

203. The Government argues that coherence of communications improved in mid-2009 when ISAF nations publicly endorsed the new population-centric counter-insurgency strategy drawn up by the then Commander of ISAF, General Stanley McChrystal. His replacement, General David Petraeus, has publicly asserted his commitment to the counter-insurgency strategy albeit with some tactical adjustments, which we discussed above in paragraph 27. The Government adds that international community messages are now broadly consistent, focusing on the importance of building the Afghan National Security Forces, combating corruption and improving governance in Afghanistan to enable the Afghan government to take the lead on security throughout the country and so that ISAF combat troops can begin to drawdown towards 2015.

204. However, witnesses were not convinced that ISAF’s message is resonating with ordinary Afghans. Michael Semple stated that “we have a fundamental problem in the narrative of what all these countries are doing in Afghanistan”. Matt Waldman stated that “we have to accept that international forces inside Afghanistan are part of the problem. There is no doubt that their presence is energising the insurgency”. He added that there had been a “colossal failure by the international coalition to empathise with ordinary Afghans and act accordingly”. According to a report by the Open Society Foundation, it is only recently that Western policymakers have begun to accept that civilian casualties, detention operations, and other activities that harm Afghan communities have engendered
The UK’s foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan

205. 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.

Assessing the UK’s efforts

206. The UK has also been criticised for its approach to communications with Afghans. In its written evidence, the Henry Jackson Society states that the UK must “greatly improve the quality and coherence of its public messaging efforts” and concluded that it “is one of the most serious failures of Afghanistan that in many respects the United Kingdom and its allies are losing the war of information with the Taliban”. It continued:

In spite of the fact that the Taliban are responsible for more than three-quarters of civilian casualties; in spite of the fact that their interpretation of Sharia law allows for the stoning of women, the murder of homosexuals and the slicing off of limbs for even the most minor offence; and in spite of the fact that genuine improvements in security and development are taking place across central Helmand, nonetheless the UK and its allies are too easily painted as the aggressors and the culprits, who are failing to bring anything positive to Afghanistan.

Dr Gohel also expressed his concern that the Taliban have propagated a “well-rehearsed narrative on the notion that the British army is in Afghanistan to seek revenge for 19th century defeats”. He stated that “there is no effective counter-narrative to dispel the myths and half-truths aimed at undermining the British presence. If there is no policy for a

339 “The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan”, Open Society Foundation, 7 October 2010

340 Ev w7
strategic communication approach then Afghans will only be hearing one perspective and that is from the Taliban”.341

207. Giving evidence to us, the Foreign Secretary conceded that strategic communications has been “a weak area” and that the UK “ought to be able to do better over the coming months and years in the strategic communication of what our objectives are, how we are achieving them and how the nations of ISAF—and indeed the Afghan government—are working together”.342 The Foreign Secretary told us that it was being addressed in the National Security Council and that he had recently raised it with the NATO Secretary-General as something that requires better international co-ordination.343

208. 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.

Communicating the campaign to British audiences

The national security narrative

209. Within the UK, the Government’s primary communications objective is to improve public understanding of, and support for, the campaign in Afghanistan.344 As noted above, between 2002 and 2008 the Government provided a series of reasons for the UK’s presence in Afghanistan. In 2009, partly in a bid to stem dwindling public support for the war effort, and also to ensure consistency with the US’s approach, the previous Government opted to return to a single “narrative”. Official statements focused heavily on the link between a “crucible of terrorism” in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border area and terrorist threats and attacks on British soil. The Government’s argument was that al-Qaeda would return to Afghanistan if international forces were not present or if the Afghan state was weak.

210. As we discussed above in Chapter 7, the current Government’s strategy is similarly based on the view that a British presence is necessary to ensure British national security by ensuring that Afghanistan never again becomes a haven for terrorists who attack the UK. It may be more accurate to say that if Western forces left prematurely the immediate threat would be one of civil war. As we also noted above at paragraph 181, the threat, in the form of al-Qaeda and international terrorism, can be said more properly to emanate from Pakistan. In reality, there is a strong argument to be made that Afghanistan, and the Taliban insurgency, does not currently, in itself represent an immediate security threat to the UK. This would suggest that in public messaging terms, there has been an inappropriate conflation of the threat posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Matt Cavanagh states: “The decision to sharpen the message by shifting the emphasis from nation-building to preventing the return of al-Qaeda [raised] as many questions as it answered”. He asks, “Couldn’t we achieve that in a different way with fewer troops and casualties, and less

341 Ev 59
342 Q 163
343 Ibid.
344 Ev 23
money? Indeed, if it’s all about al-Qaeda, why are we in Afghanistan at all, rather than Pakistan, or even Somalia and Yemen?"  

211. Michael Semple told us: “I had naively thought early on that we were supposed to be about promoting peace in Afghanistan after an excessively long war. Even after listening to all the attempts to sum up national security interest in terms of the hunt for al-Qaeda, I think that the pursuit of peace in Afghanistan best sums up the common interest between countries such as the UK, the US, Afghanistan and even Pakistan”. He added, “The issues of taking care of the terrorist threat can be nicely parked inside the overall agenda of peace. When you say that your primary business is promoting peace—with a robust element to it as well—you do not have to be frightened of showing weakness by being prepared to come to accommodation, because accommodation is fundamental to the pursuit of peace.”

212. 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.

Parliamentary engagement on current and future plans

213. As part of its strategy to keep the public informed, the Government has made particular efforts to engage with Parliament by providing quarterly oral reports and monthly updates to the two Houses which it hoped would provide an opportunity for parliamentarians to “help assess progress in Afghanistan, providing a regular and transparent method of judging the success of UK policy”. However, one significant development in Government policy, the possibility that British combat troops could begin to be withdrawn as early as 2011, was announced by the Prime Minister in media interviews rather than in Parliament. As we discussed previously, there is, as yet, apparently little clarity on what roles UK forces will play in the post-2015 period and what shape British engagement will take. Giving evidence to the Defence Select Committee, the Secretary of State for Defence said that it was not possible to decide upon this at the moment as it would depend upon the situation and conditions at the time. We note that the Prime Minister referred in media interviews last year to the possibility that troops could start to be drawn down as early as this year. Such decisions have the potential to have a marked impact on British troops, the UK effort more generally, ISAF’s campaign and the UK’s relations with key allies including the US. Along with planning for the post-2015

345 Matt Cavanagh, “Inside the Anglo-Saxon War Machine”, Prospect, December 2010
346 Q 20
347 Ev 3
period, we consider this to be a crucial issue and conclude that it is vital that Parliament is kept fully informed of any developments relating to the drawdown or re-shaping of the UK effort in Afghanistan in a timely manner.

214. 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.
9 Overarching issues of concern

Who’s driving British policy on Afghanistan?

215. According to the “comprehensive approach” adopted by Britain in Afghanistan, military and civilian agencies are supposed to work closely together in pursuit of the same strategic goal. This approach is also meant to ensure that all the relevant parties address security, stabilisation, governance and development together.348 However, James Fergusson told us that “the effectiveness of the FCO on the ground in Afghanistan has been much debated, particularly within the Army” and that civilian-military co-operation in Helmand, particularly, has often been fraught. He added:

Since 2006, Britain’s engagement in Afghanistan has been dominated by military rather than civilian thinking. This is the opposite of what happened in Malaya, Britain’s last successful foreign [counter-insurgency] mission—the lessons of which the UK seems to have forgotten.349

216. In Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles’s view, the war in Afghanistan gave the British Army a raison d’être it has lacked for many years, new resources on an unprecedented scale and a chance to redeem itself in the eyes of the US following criticisms about the army’s performance in Basra, Iraq. Sir Sherard recounted an incident in the summer of 2007 when the then Chief of the General Staff, Sir Richard Dannatt, said that if battlegroups being withdrawn from Iraq were not used in Afghanistan, they would be lost in a future defence review. He quoted Sir Richard as stating, “It’s use them, or lose them”.350 Sir Richard disputes this version of events.351

217. In Sir Sherard’s opinion, “the army’s ‘strategy’ in Helmand was driven at least as much by the level of resources available to the British Army as by an objective assessment of the needs of a proper counter-insurgency campaign in the province”. Matt Cavanagh, a Special Adviser to Gordon Brown when he was Prime Minister, states that by the summer of 2009, although some senior military figures had realised that things were not going to plan, their reaction was to press for greater resources and urgency. Defeat was said to be unthinkable, “even if the more thoughtful and intellectually honest of them weren’t sure if victory was achievable either”.352 Sir Sherard argued that this “supply-side policy” had a knock on effect on the campaign in Helmand with new Brigades “re-inventing the wheel” every six months. He added, “each brigadier would say that he understood the “comprehensive approach”, and planned to work with DFID and the FCO, as well as with the Afghan authorities. But each brigadier would launch one kinetic operation, before returning with his brigade to Britain after the best six months of his professional life. And then the whole cycle would start again.”353

348 Ev 15
349 Ev 50
350 Ev 85
352 Matt Cavanagh, “Inside the Anglo-Saxon War machine”, Prospect, December 2010
353 Ev 85
218. Sir Sherard told us that in his experience Ministers and officials often did not have the confidence or knowledge to question some of the very optimistic advice they were receiving from the military and also because they were fearful of leaks to the press suggesting that they were not sufficiently supportive of troops. He added that officials and Ministers who questioned them “were accused of being defeatist or disloyal in some way.” Sir Sherard recounted one specific incident in which a Minister felt unable to question a military decision because of a lack of technical knowledge.

219. On 21 January 2011, Rear Admiral Chris Parry, former Director-General, Development, Concepts and Doctrine, at the Ministry of Defence, told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme: “I think the army a few years ago saw that the future would be slewed in their favour as a result of the experience in Iraq and Afghanistan.” He went on:

I think politicians trusted their military experts. What you have to ask yourself, I think, is the motives behind certain military officers giving that advice. [...] It’s the size and shape of the armed forces, their recruiting rate, their equipment and their conditions of service which matter, and we have to remember that some of the people giving advice to politicians have other agendas and other pressures on them that don’t always lead to a complete, shall we say, strategic assessment. [...] I think there was a general feeling and a mood in the Ministry of Defence that the Army’s moment had come and that the future should be cast in their image.

220. Sir Sherard also said:

We have got, on both sides of the Atlantic, extremely capable and enthusiastic, unquenchably optimistic and fiercely loyal—to their institutions and countries—military machines, which have naturally adopted a can-do attitude and driven forward. This has distorted the understanding of the problem, because the real problem is much deeper.

221. Following the General Election in May 2010, the institutional arrangements within Whitehall for dealing with Afghanistan changed with the creation of the National Security Council (NSC). Under the new NSC structures, Afghanistan is discussed every fortnight and Pakistan frequently. The Government states that 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. It also states that it does not replace decision-making in departments but ensures that these decisions are aligned where appropriate and that they support clear national objectives. The secretariat which supports the NSC and co-ordinates its work is based in the Cabinet Office. The Government departments with key security-related functions are all represented on the NSC. Member departments include: FCO, Treasury, Home Office, MOD, Department of Energy and Climate Change, DFID, and the Cabinet Office.

354 Q 99
355 Ibid.
356 Ev 85–86
357 Q 91
358 Ev 4
222. We asked the Foreign Secretary whether he agreed that the military had previously driven the strategy in Afghanistan, rather than Ministers. He told us:

You may need to direct that to members of the previous Government [...] rather than the current Government. It is very important on an issue such as this that military and political leaders work well together and that political decisions are well informed by military assessments, otherwise, of course, politicians may make rash decisions without sufficient military awareness. I certainly think that the way we now conduct our National Security Council in the UK—with the Chief of the Defence Staff, senior Ministers and the heads of the intelligence agencies sitting together on this and other subjects on a very regular basis—provides the correct balance in making decisions.359

223. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles told us that because the problem in Afghanistan is fundamentally a political and regional one, it is vital that politicians take charge of the project, “as I believe the new coalition Government is doing”.360

224. 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.

The need for realistic goals and honest assessments of progress

225. One overarching theme that has emerged in the course of our inquiry is the extent to which the international community and to an extent, the British Government, continue to paint an optimistic picture of progress in Afghanistan when so many other non-official assessments from a variety of authoritative sources see the situation quite differently. Witnesses too, pointed to an apparent disconnect between official assessments of progress and the situation on the ground. As Matt Waldman stated, there needs to be more honesty about “the fact that we are not winning, and that events are not going in our favour. I’ve been going to ISAF for four years, and every year I have heard the same refrain, which is that we are degrading the enemy, they are really feeling the heat, and we are turning the corner. However, if you look at the facts on the ground, and if you talk to ordinary Afghans, you get a very different picture.”361 Mr Leslie suggested it was important to “cut to the chase and be honest about what we have achieved, even if it is very partial. To some
extent, we should fall on our collective mandates, pens or whatever and be honest that progress is very limited, and have a no-nonsense approach as to how to get out of it”.362 Giving evidence to the Defence Committee, the Secretary of State for Defence acknowledged that “we have tended to be over-optimistic and have over-assessed, for the best motives, how we see things”.363

226. We discussed the issue of optimistic assessments of progress, particularly from military sources, with Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles who was of the view that “almost by definition, good soldiers are irrepressibly enthusiastic”, and “unquenchably optimistic”.364 He added, “I’m not in any way blaming the military—you couldn’t have a serious military unless they were incurably optimistic—but I saw in my three and a half years papers that went to Ministers that were misleadingly optimistic”.365 The Foreign Secretary concurred when he told us that “over-optimistic assessments have sometimes been made, and the current Government are trying to avoid that.”366 He added, “We will not encourage false optimism, but we will not be blind to good news, either. There are often more successes to talk about than feature daily in our media. Being realistic in our assessments is important, and hopefully we are getting it right.”367

227. In spite of these assurances, both the tone and substance of the Government’s written evidence was criticised by several witnesses. For instance, Jolyon Leslie declared that he was “dismayed” at the Government’s “mixture of triumphalism and delusion”.368 He stated: “[T]he whole Helmand issue is a case in point, in the sense that we have presented a very difficult campaign in rather triumphalist terms, consistently for months if not for years. When the going gets tough, we are not honest enough about whom to blame it on [...]”369 In this context, we were particularly struck by the comment from the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards in December last year when he described the progress being made as “quite astronomical”.370 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.

362 Ev 16
363 Oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 15 December 2010, HC 554–v, Q 314.
364 Ev 85
365 Q 99
366 Q 132
367 Ibid.
368 Q 54
369 Q 30
370 Daily Telegraph, 7 December 2010
Practical constraints on UK action

228. Some of the written evidence we received contested that problems with the British effort in Afghanistan may be partly due to the fact that British non-military personnel, including diplomats and officials, do not have sufficient access to the wider Afghan community to counter the Taliban’s highly effective propaganda machine.371 In his written evidence, Matt Waldman stated that it is difficult for diplomats to build trust with, and influence, key partners under current conditions when “most live in heavily fortified compounds with little access to the field, and have minimal contact with Afghans”. He noted that, “given these constraints, civilian achievements are impressive” but argues that “a highly challenging counter-insurgency campaign, which by definition requires non-military efforts which match those on the battlefield, will not be won by fluctuating personnel who are detached from the population and excessively shielded from risk”.372

229. Gerard Russell stated that because the UK cannot rely on national structures to deliver development or political goals, knowledge of the language, history, politics and culture of a country are essential. In the case of Afghanistan, this “makes Dari and Pashto language skills, and the ability to move around the country, particularly important”.373

230. Our predecessor Committee concluded in its report of August 2009 that the “ability to engage with Afghans in key local languages is crucial to the UK’s effort in Afghanistan”. It raised concerns that nearly eight years after intervening in Afghanistan, the FCO had no Pashto speakers.374 In its response to the Report, the previous Government stated that language training requirements were kept under review and that for many jobs which required little or no contact with external Afghan stakeholders, no language skills are necessary. It added that it employed locally-recruited Afghan staff in many positions that require local language skills and that where the FCO needed to engage in Helmand Province at high levels, it uses one of its 10 qualified Pashto interpreters to ensure that both sides understood the issues being discussed.375 Giving oral evidence to us, the Foreign Secretary said, “In an ideal world everybody would be able to speak the local language. That would have required being able to prepare hundreds of diplomats long in advance for this.”376

231. In mid-July 2010, one report suggested that just six UK diplomats have been trained in Pashto, and of the roughly 160 diplomats at the Embassy, only three speak Pashto or Dari fluently.377 We asked the FCO to clarify the position and were told that there are “two Dari speaker slots filled in Kabul. There is another officer based in Southern Afghanistan who speaks both Dari and Pashto. Six members of FCO staff have completed language training in the last five years, of which three completed language training to extensive or

372 Ev 53
373 Ev 58
374 Foreign Affairs Committee, Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan, para 250
375 Cm 7702, October 2009
376 Q 167
377 Ray Furlong, “Knowledge of Afghanistan ‘astonishingly thin’”, BBC Radio 4, Broadcasting House Programme, 31 July 2010
The UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan

operational level. 23 staff who have completed language training in Dari or Farsi have been posted to Afghanistan (19 Dari students and 4 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”. The FCO added, “As the Foreign Secretary made clear during the recent evidence session, improving language skills is a high priority for the FCO. The Afghan languages are among the key languages that we will [be] investing in further over the forthcoming CSR period to increase our capacity from the current base”.

232. The other issue of concern that was raised with us was the relatively short length of postings and the difficulty in attracting more experienced staff to postings in Afghanistan. We also note with concern that in 2010, no member of staff in the UK Foreign Office Afghan team in London, directing Afghan policy had actually served in a posting in Afghanistan. Tours are generally for one year, rarely more than two, with rest breaks taking place for two weeks in every eight, not including holidays. Commanders of British Forces in Helmand province have rotated every six months, and civilian staff at the PRT likewise can move on after six months. Gerard Russell argued that “because consistent strategy and building relationships of trust is so important, personnel should be encouraged to stay involved with Afghanistan for as long as possible”.

233. Concerns about the length of posting were also raised by our predecessor Committee in their Report into Afghanistan and Pakistan, published in August 2009. The Government’s response to that Report stated that the length of postings is influenced by specific security threats, the limitations and stress of working and living on a compound, and the restrictions of travelling out of the compound and in-country. It added that extensions beyond 24 months are rare because of health reasons and are only granted if there are compelling operational reasons. The FCO did not believe it would be right to move away from the current volunteer-only deployments with a limit on the time spent in country and regular decompression breaks. It added that it would review these arrangements when there are significant and lasting changes to the security situation. Giving oral evidence to us during this inquiry, the Foreign Secretary stated, “Of course, these are difficult postings, where people usually serve for a year in Kabul with the option of another year, or six months, in Lashkar Gah, with the option of another six months. They are difficult, hardship postings, so it is necessary to turn over the personnel pretty regularly. Does that have the disadvantage that new people have to learn local culture and get to know the locals leaders well? It does, but I think that you can see that that is the only practical way in which we can do this.”

234. 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

---

378 Ev 87
379 Ev 53
380 Ev 58
381 Ibid.
382 Foreign Affairs Committee, Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan, paras 251–252
383 Q 167
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.
10 Learning lessons for the future

236. We have focused in this Report on a selection of current issues of UK foreign policy concern in Afghanistan. However, we have been struck by the number of witnesses and Afghans who have indicated the extent to which the international community still, after nearly 10 years in Afghanistan, seems unable to learn from some of its past mistakes. Witnesses were adamant that these must be taken on board in the future. Many spoke of the need to ensure a co-ordinated approach within Government where the FCO takes a firm lead in making clear the strategy and objectives for any foreign operation of this kind, “to avoid lack of continuity and operational disconnect”. Some witnesses also suggested that a review of the merits of the Comprehensive Approach may be advisable. Continuing lack of co-ordination at an international level, too, was cited as an ongoing problem which the Government must be mindful of in any future multinational intervention.

237. Others spoke of the importance of ensuring that missions are properly resourced from the outset and that, in multinational ventures, objectives are clear and burden sharing is equitable. We also heard about the need for more modesty about the international community’s ability to build governance structures. Gerard Russell’s written evidence states that the UK’s “post imperial capacities and inclinations” are more suited to encouraging slow and gradual reform and “avoid[ing] the ironic dilemma we face in Afghanistan—where the scale of our political investment has made the Afghan government feel that its international allies need it more than it needs them.” Finally, we heard about the importance of the UK’s relationship with the US and how it must continue to be seen as an effective and dependable, but not slavish, partner.

238. The Government states it is committed to learning lessons from its experience in Afghanistan. In the last year, a Conflict Lessons Working Group has been created to identify lessons from a number of conflicts, including Asia and the Balkans, and to disseminate information as appropriate. This Working Group is chaired and supported by the Stabilisation Unit, and is attended by DFID, FCO and MOD, with additional representation from the military. The FCO states that there has been a “significant increase in civil-military co-operation around lessons, an increase in joint de-briefing of officers and officials returning from the field, and an increase in joint investigations of themes of further interest”. Recent examples of joint lessons work include: a Joint Civil-Military Doctrine Note on Security Transitions, Joint Civil-Military investigation of the use of Money for Security Effect, and Lessons from the Pakistan Post Crisis Needs Assessment (PCNA). There are currently plans to carry out further investigation into community engagement, informal justice and dispute resolution and the factors which enable or impede stability at district level in Helmand. The Stabilisation Unit is developing its “Top
Ten Lessons on Stabilisation”, and is developing both public and restricted access repositories where lessons and key documents can be easily accessed.388

239. We asked the Foreign Secretary what lessons from Afghanistan could be learned to improve British foreign policy in the future. He told us that he was certain that there will be many lessons to be learned and that some of them “will require the wisdom of being able to look back on all this in the future”. He added:

To start with the lessons at the highest level, this country needs to put as many resources as possible into conflict prevention around the world, since we can see how expensive it is and how it costs us dear, in human life as well as in financial terms, to engage in long-term, substantial conflict. [...] There will no doubt be other lessons about how a military intervention should be handled, if it has to take place. There will be lessons from Iraq, which the Chilcot inquiry is looking into at the moment. I am sure there will be lessons about Helmand as well, about the initial deployment and about many decisions taken since then. We have to concentrate in Government on finding out ways of success in this situation, and that has to be our prime concern.389

240. 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.

241. 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.
Annex

Foreign Affairs Committee visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan

23–29 October 2010

Participating Members:
Richard Ottaway (Chair), Mike Gapes, Andrew Rosindell, Mr Frank Roy, Sir John Stanley, Rory Stewart, Mr Dave Watts

Sunday 24 October

ISLAMABAD

- Briefing with Peter Tibber, Deputy High Commissioner, Islamabad and senior British High Commission officials
- Briefing with Deputy Chief of US Mission, Mr Stephen Engelken
- Meeting and discussion with the organisers of, and participants in, Offscreen Expedition (UK-Pakistan student exchange programme)
- Briefing with Pakistani commentators, civil society activists, journalists and international partners, with the theme 'Civil Society Perspectives on Pakistan and Afghanistan'

Monday 25 October

ISLAMABAD

- Meeting and briefing with British Consul-General Ms Sheena Lavery and staff including those working in the Forced Marriage Unit
- Meeting with Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, National Assembly of Pakistan
- Meeting with General Khalid Shameem Wynne, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Pakistan

KABUL

- Briefing with HMA Kabul, Sir William Patey, and senior Embassy officials
- Meeting with Mohammad Younis Qanooni, Speaker of the Wolesi Jirga
- Meeting with members of Afghan civil society
Tuesday 26 October

THE GROUP DIVIDED:

HERAT

- Briefing from the Provincial Reconstruction Team
- Meeting with Governor of Herat Province, Mohammad Daoudshah Saba
- Meeting with the Chancellor, Herat University and roundtable discussion with university students
- Visit to Herat industrial park and motorcycle factory

HELMAND

- Briefings from Michael O’Neil, Head of the Civilian-Military Mission, Helmand; Brigadier James Chiswell, Task Force Commander and officials
- Briefing with Governor of Helmand Province, Gulab Mangal
- Visit to, and briefing at, the Helmand Police Training Centre

Wednesday 27 October

- Visit to, and briefings at, NATO Training Mission, Afghanistan Headquarters (Duralaman)
- Meeting with Dr Omar Zakhilwal, Minister of Finance
- Meeting with H. E. President Hamid Karzai
- Meeting with Mark Sedwill, Senior Civilian Representative, NATO
- Meeting with Lt. Gen. Bucknall, Deputy Commander, ISAF
- Meeting with Afghan parliamentarians and Ministers

Thursday 28 October

KABUL

- Visit to the Women’s Park, Kabul, a Microfinance project supported by DFID
- Briefing with Lieutenant William B. Caldwell, Commander, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan and senior team
- Briefing with Mr Mohammad Daud Rassoul, Deputy Country Director, and staff British Council, Kabul
ISLAMABAD

- Mr Nasrullah Khan, Director General—Europe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Mr Nawabzada Malik Amad Khan, Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Meeting with H.E. President Asif Ali Zardari
- Briefing with key Pakistani officials, commentators and analysts
The UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan
Formal Minutes

Wednesday 9 February 2011

Members present:

Richard Ottaway, in the Chair

Mr Bob Ainsworth
Mr John Baron
Sir Menzies Campbell
Ann Clwyd
Mike Gapes
Andrew Rosindell
Mr Frank Roy
Sir John Stanley
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts

Draft Report (The UK’s foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 7 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 8 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs—(Mr John Baron)—brought up and read, as follows:

We recommend that the Government retains focus on its stated key objective: to prevent Afghanistan once again becoming a place from which al-Qaeda and other extremists can attack the UK and British interests. Achieving this objective is said to depend on four main goals, as highlighted above.

We recommend that attaining these ‘goals’ must always be directed at the key objective. We are concerned that there has been a disconnection between the key objective and the attainment of these ‘goals’ so that they become ends in themselves giving rise to “mission creep” and loss of focus. This has produced a confusion of purpose which unintentionally has become accepted thinking – talk of ‘nation building’ and concern over human rights are two examples. However, this acceptance permeates this report which is why it assesses progress against each of these so called ‘goals’ instead of focusing on the key objective.

We recommend that the Government in pursuing its key objective against al-Qaeda is mindful of and explores further the distinction between al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The relationship between al-Qaeda and the Taliban is complex and not well understood. The key objective which is defined in terms of al-Qaeda has resulted in engagement with the Taliban and the Afghan insurgency. The threats from al-Qaeda and the Taliban have become conflated, and the two have become almost synonymous.

Question put, That the new paragraphs be read a second time.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 2

Mr John Baron
Andrew Rosindell

Noes, 8

Mr Bob Ainsworth
Sir Menzies Campbell
Ann Clwyd
Mike Gapes
Mr Frank Roy
Sir John Stanley
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts
The UK’s foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan

Paragraphs 9 to 27 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 28 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 29 to 37 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 38 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 39 to 42 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 43 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 44 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 45 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 46 to 53 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 54 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 55 to 63 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 64 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 65 to 74 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 75 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 76 to 154 read and agreed to.

Paragraphs—(The Chair)—brought up, read the first and second time, and inserted (now paragraphs 155 and 156).

Paragraph 155 (now paragraph 157) read.

Amendment proposed, in line 3, after “deadline” to insert “The imposition of an arbitrary deadline explicitly contradicts 1) the four main ‘goals’ which are conditions based and 2) the achievement of the key objective which is to prevent once again Afghanistan being used by al Qaeda to attack UK and Allied interests.”.—(Mr John Baron.)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 3

Mr John Baron
Andrew Rosindell
Sir John Stanley

Noes, 7

Mr Bob Ainsworth
Sir Menzies Campbell
Ann Clwyd
Mike Gapes
Mr Frank Roy
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts

Paragraph agreed to.

Paragraphs 156 to 163 (now paragraphs 158 to 165) agreed to.
Paragraph 164 (now paragraph 166) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 165 to 173 (now paragraphs 167 to 175) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 174 (now paragraph 176) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 175 to 181 (now paragraphs 177 to 183) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 182 (now paragraph 184) read, as follows:

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 concerned that this fundamentally important assessment appears to be based on intelligence that has not been subject to parliamentary scrutiny. We recommend that the Government makes this intelligence available to the Intelligence and Security Committee, which should then report, as appropriate, to the Foreign Affairs Committee on its veracity.

An Amendment made.

Another Amendment proposed, in line 5, to leave out from “scrutiny” to the end of the paragraph. —(Sir John Stanley).

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 6 Noes, 4
Mr John Baron Mr Bob Ainsworth
Sir Menzies Campbell Mr Frank Roy
Ann Clwyd Rory Stewart
Mike Gapes Mr Dave Watts
Andrew Rosindell
Sir John Stanley

Another Amendment proposed, at the end, to add “The Prime Minister has suggested that al-Qaeda would return to Afghanistan if our troops were withdrawn. This view is not universal and needs to be examined further.” —(Mr John Baron).

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 5 Noes, 5
Mr John Baron Mr Bob Ainsworth
Andrew Rosindell Sir Menzies Campbell
Mr Frank Roy Ann Clwyd
Rory Stewart Mike Gapes
Mr Dave Watts Sir John Stanley

Whereupon the Chair declared himself with the Noes.

Paragraph, as amended, agreed to.

Paragraphs 183 to 190 (now paragraphs 185 to 192) read and agreed to.
The relationship between al-Qaeda and the Taliban is complex and not well understood. The distinction between al-Qaeda and the Taliban is the key to understanding the nature of the conflict in Afghanistan. It should be explicitly stated. We have common interests with the Taliban: We both want foreigners out of Afghanistan. These interests should form the rational basis of a negotiated settlement with the Taliban to achieve a peaceful withdrawal from Afghanistan, free of al-Qaeda.

Question proposed, That the paragraph be read a second time: —Paragraph, by leave, withdrawn.

Paragraphs 192 to 195 (now paragraphs 194 to 197) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 196 (now paragraph 198) read, amended and agreed to.

Amendment proposed, in line 4, to leave out “but US driven”. —(Sir John Stanley.)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 1

Sir John Stanley

Noes, 9

Mr Bob Ainsworth
Mr John Baron
Sir Menzies Campbell
Ann Clwyd
Mike Gapes
Andrew Rosindell
Mr Frank Roy
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts

Paragraph 197 (now paragraph 199) read.

Paragraph agreed to.

Paragraph 198 (now paragraph 200) read and agreed to.
Paragraph 199 (now paragraph 201) read.

Amendment proposed, in line 10, to leave out from “question” to “whether” in line 12. —(Sir John Stanley.)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 2
Ann Clwyd
Sir John Stanley

Noes, 8
Mr Bob Ainsworth
Mr John Baron
Sir Menzies Campbell
Mike Gapes
Andrew Rosindell
Mr Frank Roy
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts

Paragraph agreed to.

Another paragraph—(Mr John Baron) —brought up and read, as follows:

There appears to be a fundamental incoherence between the “key objective” and the “four main goals”. Our operations in Afghanistan are described as “goals”. This vocabulary is unfortunate, suggesting that these are somehow free-standing ends in themselves, however, desirable. They are not: instead, they are the means to an end. Our objective is essentially a military one. There is “mission creep”; the endeavour to attain these goals has resulted in suggestions to widen the operations to “nation building” of Afghanistan; there is concern about human rights and in particular women’s rights. However, the goals as presently constituted are unrealistic and cannot be achieved. The “key objective” must be clarified and narrowly defined in terms of our national security and al-Qaeda, not the Afghan insurgency – the insurgency itself is difficult to characterise. Our operations in Afghanistan should not be characterised as “goals” but rather as the means to an end.

Question put, That the new paragraph be read a second time.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 2
Mr John Baron
Andrew Rosindell

Noes, 8
Mr Bob Ainsworth
Sir Menzies Campbell
Ann Clwyd
Mike Gapes
Mr Frank Roy
Sir John Stanley
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts

Paragraphs 200 to 209 (now paragraphs 202 to 211) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 210 (now paragraph 212) read.

Amendment proposed, in line 9, after “public” to leave out to the end of the paragraph and add “There is little point in the Government reviewing its strategic communications strategy given that the mission itself is incoherent – there is little point in shooting [or reviewing] the messenger.”. —(Mr John Baron.)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.
The Committee divided.

Ayes, 2

Mr John Baron
Andrew Rosindell

Noes, 8

Mr Bob Ainsworth
Sir Menzies Campbell
Ann Clwyd
Mike Gapes
Mr Frank Roy
Sir John Stanley
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts

Paragraph agreed to.

Paragraphs 211 to 238 (now paragraphs 213 to 241) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs—(Mr John Baron)—brought up and read, as follows:

Incoherent mission

There is a fundamental incoherence between the “key objective” and the “four main goals”. We recommend that the Government retains focus on its stated key objective: to prevent Afghanistan once again becoming a place from which al-Qaeda and other extremists can attack the UK and British interests. However, achieving this objective is said to depend on four main goals:

• a more stable and secure Afghanistan;
• the conditions for withdrawal of UK combat troops by 2015, including capable Afghan National Security Forces;
• an Afghan-led political settlement that represents all Afghan people; and,
• regional political and security co-operation that supports a stable Afghanistan.

The use of the term ‘goals’ is unfortunate, suggesting that these are somehow free-standing ends in themselves. However desirable, they are not. Instead, they are the means to an end. We recommend that attaining these “goals” must always be directed at the key objective. We are concerned that there has been a disconnection between the key objective and the attainment of these “goals” so that they become ends in themselves giving rise to “mission creep” and loss of focus. This has produced a confusion of purpose which unintentionally has become accepted thinking – talk of ‘nation building’ and concern over human rights are two examples.

The key objective must be clarified and narrowly defined in terms of our national security and al-Qaeda, not the Afghan insurgency. Our operations in Afghanistan should not be characterised as ‘goals’ but rather the possible means to an end.

Exploring the relationship between the Taliban and Al Qaeda

If the key objective is to secure us from attack by al-Qaeda in this country, the question arises as to why are we engaged just in Afghanistan and against the Taliban? Al-Qaeda has a stronger presence in Somalia and Yemen. The central paradox seems to be that an intended conflict with al-Qaeda has resulted in a conflict with the Taliban as the principal insurgents.

The Afghan insurgency itself is not readily characterised. There is evidence that the insurgency is heterogeneous, each group pursuing its own economic, political, criminal and social agendas and interests. Moreover, the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda is complex and not entirely understood. Michael Semple said in evidence: “...most of the Taliban leadership might be pragmatic enough to consider...”
entering peace talks if it was felt to be in their interests and would have little hesitation, as part of a deal, in agreeing to sever all ties with al-Qaeda.” Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles said: “They hate foreigners, and among foreigners they include not just Americans and Brits, but Arabs and Pakistanis...”. Jolyon Leslie stated: “...there is a real ambivalence among Afghans about Arabs in their midst...”. Matt Waldman stated: “If you talk to the Taliban there is no love lost between them and al-Qaeda. They know ultimately al-Qaeda was responsible for their downfall...”

Other reports, including one published in September 2010 by the International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], as well as some written evidence, claimed that defeat of the Taliban has become virtually synonymous with defeat of al-Qaeda and questioned the view that al Qaeda would return to Afghanistan if foreign forces withdrew. There has been also an “inappropriate conflation” of the threat posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban. This confusion is fundamental and substantive.

US sources have suggested that there are fewer than 100 al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan and no al-Qaeda bases there. The key objective of ridding Afghanistan of al-Qaeda would appear to have been achieved. The Prime Minister has suggested that al-Qaeda would return to Afghanistan if our troops were withdrawn. This view is not universal. James Fergusson stated that there was “absolutely no evidence that al-Qaeda even want to come back or that the Taliban would have them back if they did”.

The distinction between al-Qaeda and the Taliban is key to understanding the nature of the conflict in Afghanistan. It should be explicitly stated. We have common interests with the Taliban: We both want foreigners out of Afghanistan – 1) they want us out of Afghanistan and we want to withdraw 2) evidence suggests the Taliban may want al-Qaeda out of Afghanistan, as do we. These common interests should be examined more closely as they could form the rational basis of a negotiated settlement with the Taliban to achieve a peaceful withdrawal from Afghanistan, free of al-Qaeda. This possibility needs to be explored much more rigorously which is why the Americans should be talking with the Taliban. The British proved in Northern Ireland that one can talk and fight at the same time.

**The Military campaign**

The British experience in Malaya suggests that the pre-conditions for a successful counter-insurgency campaign are simply not in place – control of the borders, a credible Government, support from the majority of the people, and good troop density numbers. None of these conditions exist in Afghanistan today. ISAF will not beat the Taliban. At best, we can create a stalemate. It is against this backdrop that the negotiations with the Taliban mentioned above should proceed.

This view has been given added weight by the US Department of Defence’s latest report to Congress. This states that the Taliban’s strength lies in the Afghan people’s perception that Western forces will be leaving and that the Taliban will ultimately be victorious.

**Shooting the messenger**

There is talk of a need for the Government to review its strategic communications strategy to ensure that public messages provide certainty about future plans. However, there is little point given that the mission itself is incoherent. The imposition of an arbitrary 2015 deadline explicitly contradicts 1) at least three of the four main ‘goals’ which are conditions based and 2) the achievement of the key objective which is to prevent once again Afghanistan being used by al-Qaeda to attack UK and Allied interests. There is little point in shooting the messenger.

**Conclusion**

The distinction between the key objective and the four main goals, and the need to examine more closely the differences between the Taliban and al-Qaeda are important. If we are in Afghanistan to build a more stable and secure country, then we will probably have to defeat the Taliban. If, however, we are in Afghanistan to prevent al-Qaeda returning, then we may not have to do so.’

Question put, That the new paragraphs be read a second time.
The Committee divided.

Ayes, 1  
Mr John Baron

Noes, 9  
Mr Bob Ainsworth  
Sir Menzies Campbell  
Ann Clwyd  
Mike Gapes  
Andrew Rosindell  
Mr Frank Roy  
Sir John Stanley  
Rory Stewart  
Mr Dave Watts

Annex agreed to.

Summary amended and agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 8  
Mr Bob Ainsworth  
Sir Menzies Campbell  
Ann Clwyd  
Mike Gapes  
Mr Frank Roy  
Sir John Stanley  
Rory Stewart  
Mr Dave Watts

Noes, 1  
Mr John Baron

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for printing with the Report, together with written evidence reported and ordered to be published on 20 October and 3 November 2010, and 12 and 19 January, and 2 February 2011.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 2 March at 2.00 pm.]
List of printed written evidence

1. Foreign and Commonwealth Office  Ev 1; Ev 86
2. James Fergusson  Ev 48
3. Matt Waldman  Ev 50
4. Gerard Russell MBE  Ev 56
5. Dr Sajjan M. Gohel  Ev 58
6. BBC World Service  Ev 43
7. Professor Shaun Gregory  Ev 82
8. Correspondence between the Chair and the Prime Minister  Ev 84; Ev 85
9. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles KCMG LVO  Ev 85

Witnesses

Wednesday 13 October 2010

Michael Semple, Fellow, Harvard University  Ev 88

James Fergusson, Author and Journalist, Jolyon Leslie, Independent Analyst, and Matt Waldman, Independent Analyst  Ev 93

Wednesday 20 October 2010

Dr Sajjan Gohel, International Security Director, Asia-Pacific Foundation, Dr Farzana Shaikh, Associate Fellow, Asia Programme, Chatham House, and Sir Hilary Synnott KCMG, Consulting Senior Fellow for South Asia and the Gulf, International Institute of Strategic Studies  Ev 106

Tuesday 9 November 2010

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles KCMG LVO, former HM Ambassador to Kabul, and former Special Representative of the Foreign Secretary for Afghanistan and Pakistan  Ev 120

Gilles Dorronsoro, Visiting Scholar, South Asia Program, Carnegie Endowment and Gerard Russell MBE, Afghan specialist, Carr Center, Harvard Kennedy School of Government  Ev 126

Monday 15 November 2010

Rt Hon William Hague MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State, and Karen Pierce CMG, Director South Asia and Afghanistan, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan  Ev 132
List of additional written evidence

(published in Volume II on the Committee’s website www.parliament.uk/facom)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Henry Jackson Society</td>
<td>Ev w1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Christian Aid</td>
<td>Ev w8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Oxfam GB</td>
<td>Ev w10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group</td>
<td>Ev w17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Professor Sultan Barakat &amp; Mr Steven A. Zyck</td>
<td>Ev w22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Professor Philip M. Taylor</td>
<td>Ev w26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Andrew Watt</td>
<td>Ev w28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Chris Coverdale</td>
<td>Ev w32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Roman Solodchenko</td>
<td>Ev w38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Written evidence

Written evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

SUMMARY

WHY AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN MATTER TO UK INTERESTS

1. Afghanistan and Pakistan are this Government’s top priorities in Foreign Affairs. Violent extremism in both countries poses a threat to UK interests and to regional stability and claims the lives of thousands of civilians and security personnel. Extremism and the instability it causes also hold back good governance, development and economic progress in both countries. It is in Britain’s national interest to work with international allies and with the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan to reduce the threat from violent extremism and shore up long-term stability in the region.

Afghanistan

2. The UK’s objective is to prevent Afghanistan once again becoming a place from which al-Qaeda and other extremists can attack the UK and our interests. Our policy has four main goals:
   1. A more stable and secure Afghanistan;
   2. The conditions for withdrawal of UK combat troops by 2015, including capable Afghan National Security Forces;
   3. An Afghan-led political settlement that represents all Afghan people;
   4. Regional political and security co-operation that supports a stable Afghanistan.

3. The UK will work with the Afghan Government, regional partners, international allies and multilateral institutions to achieve these goals. From 2015, UK forces will no longer have a combat role in Afghanistan. But this will not signal the end of our engagement in Afghanistan. Our civilian and economic support will intensify over the next five years as we move away from international military intervention and Afghanistan stabilises further. We will also continue UK training and support for the Afghan National Security Forces.

4. It is for the Afghan people to shape a political settlement which reflects the needs and aspirations of all Afghan people. Britain will support an eventual settlement that is representative, gives no one group disproportionate influence, upholds human rights and the rule of law and reflects Afghanistan’s culture and Constitution.

5. On Afghanistan the total civilian programme expenditure is expected to be in excess of £220 million in 2010–11. This is made up of Department for International Development (DFID), Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) funds with contributions from the jointly managed Conflict Pool.

Pakistan

6. The UK is committed to an enhanced, long-term strategic Partnership with Pakistan with four key strands:
   — To help Pakistan overcome its short and long-term challenges from violent extremism, reducing significantly the threat to Pakistan and UK citizens.
   — To help Pakistan tackle her longer-term structural challenges, relating to governance, the economy and development, including tackling the significant problems of accelerating population growth and limited educational opportunities.
   — To work with Pakistan to make the region safer and more secure, taking account of Pakistan’s legitimate interests but also those of others.
   — To deepen our bilateral ties, acknowledging the very strong historical and cultural links between the UK and Pakistan, as exemplified by the million strong Pakistan community in the UK.

7. In particular, the Government will work to help Pakistan entrench a democratic, accountable and functioning civilian government. In support of the Strategic Partnership, the Government has re-invigorated the UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue and is committed to advocating international support for Pakistan through engagement with the US and multilateral fora such as the Friends of Democratic Pakistan.

8. The UK and Pakistan also share strong economic, cultural, and familial ties. The UK is the second largest bilateral overseas investor in Pakistan and the fourth largest trading partner (over £1 billion of bilateral trade annually). There are around one million British people of Pakistani heritage in the UK, and there is substantial migration from Pakistan to the UK. In 2009–10, 79,222 visas were issued to Pakistani nationals globally. The positive potential of the Diaspora links is enormous and it is important that we continue to support these connections. We welcome the establishment of the British-Pakistan Foundation.

9. The UK currently contributes £665 million over four years (2009–10 to 2013–14) in development assistance, and further amounts in support of counter-terrorism, conflict prevention and defence assistance. The UK’s total spending on assistance to Pakistan for financial year 2009–10 is £158.8 million.
Effectiveness of UK Policy Towards Afghanistan and Pakistan

Afghanistan

10. The Government in coming into office undertook a stock take of UK policy towards Afghanistan and endorsed the current strategy. The Government fully supports the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the International Security Assistance Force’s (ISAF) strategy in Afghanistan: to assist the Afghan Government in exercising its authority and influence throughout the country, paving the way for reconstruction and effective governance. That requires the protection of the population, the provision of more effective governance at every level and the creation of an Afghan security force that is able to maintain security and prevent the return of al-Qaeda.

11. We believe that, alongside the Afghan Government and international partners, we are pursuing the right strategy in Afghanistan. Work on increasing the size and capability of the Afghan National Army (ANA) is ahead of schedule. The right and necessary number of forces are now deployed in Afghanistan. There have been two sets of Afghan-run elections in two years, giving Afghan people a say in the future of their country.

12. The London Conference on 28 January marked a clear commitment to a political strategy to complement the military surge. The Kabul Conference on 20 July—the first international conference on Afghanistan in Afghanistan—followed this up. It set out the Afghan-led Kabul process, which aims to accelerate Afghanistan’s ability to govern itself, to reduce dependence on the international community, to enhance Afghanistan’s security forces and to provide better protection for the rights of all its citizens. The international community will need to support the Afghan Government in delivering this. The UK is intensifying and reinvigorating our development efforts in line with the Afghan Government’s priorities. This includes a 40% increase in UK development aid. We will work closely with the Afghans, the United States and others to accelerate the stabilisation effort in central Helmand and the 81 key districts identified under the ISAF plan. It is right to maintain the effort because any lesser alternative would have serious consequences for Afghanistan, Pakistan and for our own national security.

13. The Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), headquartered in Lashkar Gah, is a UK, civilian-led, multinational team helping the Afghan Government deliver effective government and security across Helmand Province. The PRT works to a single Helmand Plan agreed with the Afghan Government and international partners in 2006. The plan is structured around seven themes: Politics and Reconciliation; Governance; Rule of Law (Justice, Police and Prisons); Security; Economic and Social Development; Counter-Narcotics; and Strategic Communications.

Pakistan

14. Our bilateral relationship with Pakistan is central to the delivery of our policy. The priority attached to Pakistan by the UK Government is evident from the number of high-level visits to the country since the general election in May 2010: there have been visits from the Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary in September 2010 and June 2010, respectively; and the International Development Secretary and Baroness Warsi, Minister without Portfolio at the Cabinet Office, have both visited twice. The Prime Minister also hosted President Zardari at Chequers in August 2010 and there have been numerous inward visits by Pakistani Ministers.

15. One way an effective approach will be expressed is through a two-way strategic relationship founded on increasing levels of trust between our two peoples and governments across an increasing span of business. We believe that this can only be achieved by deeper, honest dialogue and stronger practical collaboration. The UK Government has sought to enshrine the breadth of this relationship in an enhanced UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, announced by the Prime Minister and President Zardari at their meeting on 6 August 2010. The Dialogue is thematic and covers: people-to-people links and public diplomacy; business and trade; financial, macro-economic and political governance; service delivery; defence and security; and regional stability.

16. We intend that this enhanced Strategic Dialogue build and deepen the bilateral ties that our two countries share, including existing interactions through the Pakistan Education Task Force; the Defence Co-operation Forum (DCF), the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, Counter-Narcotics and Organised Crime (JWG); the Joint Judicial Co-operation Working Group and the Counter-Proliferation Dialogue.

17. We also work closely with key partners, in particular the US and EU. Through our influence in multilateral fora, such as the EU, UN, NATO and the International Financial Institutions, we have sought to galvanise the international response to the recent flooding, and to ensure that Pakistan has both immediate and long-term support from the international community to meet the enormous humanitarian, reconstruction and development challenge posed by the disaster. We have sought in particular to encourage the EU to see its response to the disaster as an opportunity to show international leadership in responding, with an ambitious package of support for both immediate and long-term needs. This includes through immediate tariff reduction on key Pakistani products and increased trade access in the medium and longer-term. Increased market access would be worth substantially more than the EU’s current development assistance programme.
Measuring success

Afghanistan

18. One of the key mechanisms for monitoring the progress of UK, international and Afghan efforts in Afghanistan this year has been the international conferences held in London in January 2010 followed by Kabul in July 2010. The London Conference committed the Afghan Government and international community to achieve specific objectives across a number of areas: security, governance, and economic development. The Kabul Conference provided an opportunity to assess the progress made and to lay out further commitments for the coming months. An indicator of some success is that of the Afghan Government commitments made at the London Conference which were due to be completed before the Kabul Conference, the majority were achieved on time.

19. At the Kabul Conference, NATO and international partners supported President Karzai’s ambition that Afghan National Security Forces should take responsibility for security in Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Transition of security will be a phased process, with the Afghans taking the security lead in selected districts and provinces as conditions on the ground are met. ISAF are in the process of drawing up a plan, overseen by General Petraeus, Commander ISAF and Ambassador Seddwill, the NATO Secretary General’s Senior Civilian Representative. As the Prime Minister announced in Parliament on 7 July this year, he does not foresee the UK providing any combat forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014 and the Transition process will allow this objective to happen.

20. The Afghan Government is now working on follow-up to the Kabul Conference. Through a “cluster” system which draws together groups of Ministries, it is finalising the priority programmes it set out. The UN, backed by donors, is monitoring progress through the Joint Co-ordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB). We are supporting the Afghan Government in delivering on their commitments and working closely with international partners in support of the Afghan Government to hold it to account.

21. The Helmand Plan measures progress achieved by all international partners and the Provincial Afghan Government across seven themes (outlined at paragraph 13 above). The Plan enables all partners to prioritise and co-ordinate their activities and resources to deliver stabilisation. Partners review the Helmand Plan on a quarterly basis, monitoring the delivery of work and updating the plan in light of lessons learned.

22. The Government’s quarterly oral reports and monthly updates to Parliament will also help assess progress in Afghanistan, providing a regular and transparent method of judging the success of UK policy.

23. All aid given to Government, UN agencies and civil society by DFID is accounted for according to UK accounting and audit requirements. The success of projects and programmes funded by UK development aid to Afghanistan is measured against the DFID country business plan on a six-monthly basis.

Pakistan

24. Pakistan is not the subject of an international process endorsed by the Security Council. Unlike Afghanistan, there are no agreed international outcomes for Pakistan against which to measure success. We do, however, have a shared understanding with partners (US, EU, IFIs, and key partners in the Friends of Democratic Pakistan group and with Pakistan itself)—on what success looks like: a stable, secure Pakistan playing a constructive role in the region and co-operating on international security, development and foreign policy priorities. We are working to refine and refocus this following the floods. This is complemented by the UK specific objectives for British engagement with Pakistan agreed by the National Security Council. We therefore measure success by reviewing progress against significant milestones en route to both our objectives and the shared objectives of the wider international community. A commitment to addressing corruption is one of the “principles” agreed on signing the 10 year UK-Pakistan Development Partnership Arrangement in 2006. We track progress regularly with the Pakistan Government.

25. One measure has been the scale of the international response to the floods. As outlined above, the UK has led the international response to the flooding, both bilaterally, and by galvanising others to contribute to the UN appeal and increasing long-term support to Pakistan. The result has been a marked increase in funding against the UN appeal. Securing EU agreement to pursue a step-change in its engagement including through increased trade concessions has also been an important milestone, as has a new IMF loan for emergency flood relief, and an offer from NATO to assist the UN with delivery of humanitarian aid. The EU commitment on trade and humanitarian relief will be supported by an EU-Pakistan Engagement Plan, which will support a stronger EU-Pakistan relationship and provide a framework to measure progress in a number of key areas.

26. Other recent significant milestones over the period against our broader regional objectives include a bilateral agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan on a Trade and Transit agreement. We have also welcomed India and Pakistan’s discussion to resume ministerial level talks.

27. On our bilateral agenda, we measure success by the strength of the relationship and by the willingness of Pakistan to pursue closer bilateral ties. The commitment to enhance and deepen the Dialogue made by the
Prime Minister and President Zardari on 6 August 2010 is significant in this regard. Work is now underway to build on this with a regular flow of ministerial visits on both sides, and to take forward work on individual strands of the Dialogue. On migration, improved co-operation between the UK and Pakistan has seen an increase in the number of illegal immigrants returned from the UK to Pakistan year on year. This close bilateral co-operation includes our joint work on tackling violent extremism.

LESSONS LEARNED

28. An important area of our work is constant monitoring and evaluation. There is an increasing commitment to learning and sharing lessons—across government departments and between civilian departments and the UK military. Progress over the last year includes the establishment of a Conflict Lessons Working Group, which identifies lessons from a number of conflicts, including Asia and the Balkans, and undertakes a range of activities to ensure that these lessons are effectively disseminated to appropriate stakeholders. This Working Group is chaired and supported by the Stabilisation Unit, and is attended by DFID, FCO and MOD, with additional representation from the military. There has been a significant increase in civil-military co-operation around lessons, an increase in joint de-briefing of officers and officials returning from the field, and an increase in joint investigations of themes of further interest.

29. Recent examples of joint lessons work include: a Joint Civil-Military Doctrine Note on Security Transitions, Joint Civil-Military investigation of the use of Money for Security Effect, and Lessons from the Pakistan Post Crisis Needs Assessment (PCNA). There are currently plans to carry out further investigation into community engagement, informal justice and dispute resolution and the factors which enable or impede stability at district level in Helmand. The Stabilisation Unit is developing its “Top Ten Lessons on Stabilisation”, and is developing both public and restricted access repositories where lessons and key documents can be easily accessed.

30. The MOD also conducts independent assessments of capability. Every six months, the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff proposes subjects for audit to Chiefs of Staff. Previous studies conducted on operations include reviews of the UK’s contribution to ISAF and the UK’s initial deployment to Helmand.

31. The quarterly reviews of the Helmand Plan also identify more immediate lessons, which can be applied directly by the PRT. For example, the PRT recently noted that the unclear boundaries of Lashkar Gah were making it harder to co-ordinate the command of Afghan Uniformed Police with local government and with international mentors. The PRT has therefore worked with the Mayor of Lashkar Gah and the provincial government to establish the registered boundaries of the municipality.

EFFECTIVE CROSS-GOVERNMENT CO-ORDINATION

32. The security of the UK and its people is the first duty of Government. On the first day of the new Coalition Government the Prime Minister established the National Security Council (NSC) to oversee all aspects of the UK’s security. 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. It does not replace decision-making in departments but ensures that these decisions are aligned where appropriate and that they support clear national objectives. The secretariat which supports the NSC and co-ordinates its work is based in the Cabinet Office. The government departments with key security-related functions are all represented on the NSC. Member departments include: FCO, Treasury, Home Office, MOD, Department of Energy and Climate Change, DFID, and the Cabinet Office.

33. The discipline of systematic, weekly consideration of national security priorities in a ministerial forum chaired by the Prime Minister is already driving a more coherent approach to strategy across government departments. A series of inter-departmental committees at official level culminate in a weekly meeting of NSC departments at Permanent Secretary level, chaired by the National Security Adviser. This allows strategic priority-setting, a closer alignment between strategic policy making and the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and agreement on issues which do not need ministerial attention. Strategy Units across Whitehall are working more closely on national security issues.

34. The FCO has led the foreign policy agenda of the NSC which has covered a range of priorities, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. Under the new National Security Council structures, Afghanistan is discussed every fortnight and Pakistan frequently. The fact that, on his first visit to Afghanistan in May 2010, the Foreign Secretary was joined by the Defence and International Development Secretaries underlines the joined up approach of this Government towards Afghanistan.

35. UK representation in Afghanistan is based in the British Embassy in Kabul (around 300 staff) and the PRT in Lashkar Gah, Helmand (24 FCO positions plus 30 staffed by the Stabilisation Unit of which FCO, MOD and DFID are joint parent departments), FCO staff in Afghanistan (both UK based and locally engaged) work alongside UK civil servants from a range of government departments, and contracted specialists working as governance, rule of law, justice, counter-narcotics, infrastructure and economics advisers, as well as UK military and US, Danish and Estonian civilian and military staff. In Islamabad, the High Commission has just under 500 staff and 85 in Karachi. This also includes representatives from DFID, MOD and other Whitehall departments.
36. In addition to the normal departmental support provided by officials to Ministers, there are three cross-governmental Cabinet Office-chaired committees which meet weekly at Head of Department or Director level on Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to clearly co-ordinate work between departments. The Groups have oversight of the delivery against objectives and the prioritisation of efforts and co-ordinate the formulation of policy advice to Ministers. They comprise officials from the Cabinet Office, FCO, MOD, DFID, Stabilisation Unit, and the Home Office. The cross-governmental Afghanistan Communications Team, the British Embassy in Kabul, the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Lashkar Gah, other UK Embassies and delegations attend meetings as necessary.

37. There are a number of cross-governmental teams working on Afghanistan in Whitehall: the Afghanistan Drugs and Justice Unit (FCO, DFID, HMRC, SOCA and MOD), the Afghanistan Communications Team (FCO, MOD and DFID) and the Foreign and Defence Policy Secretariat in the Cabinet Office (FCO, MOD and DFID). Cross-governmental Sub-Groups have also been formed looking at countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs), Taliban financing and counter-Taliban messaging.

AFGHANISTAN

AFGHANISTAN: SECURITY

Security Situation

38. Three hundred and thirty nine UK troops have lost their lives in Afghanistan (as of 5 October 2010). We commend their courage, dedication and professionalism.

39. In 2001, a US-led coalition (Operation Enduring Freedom) deployed to Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. After the Taliban were removed from power, the United Nations Security Council passed a Chapter VII Resolution authorising the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help the new Afghan Government maintain security in the country. This mandate, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1386 of 20 December 2001, is renewed annually, most recently with UNSCR 1890 on 8 October 2009. In August 2003, NATO assumed command of ISAF and its mandate was incrementally expanded to allow it to assist in the maintenance of security beyond Kabul.

40. The size of both the ISAF and Afghan forces has grown steadily since 2001. ISAF now has approximately 120,000 personnel, the ANA 136,000 and the Afghan National Police (ANP) 115,000. There are large portions of the country that see relatively few security incidents. However, the insurgency still poses a serious challenge in a number of areas, most significantly the South and East, where it is able to derive income from the narcotics trade and take advantage of porous borders with Pakistan.

41. The insurgency consists of several groups, without a single command structure or strategy. In the South, the main element of the insurgency is the Taliban, whose traditional power base is Kandahar. In the East, the insurgency is more fragmented and consists of several groupings, including the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HiG), supported by a small number of foreign fighters. Throughout the country, there are strong connections and overlap between the insurgency and other criminal activities, such as the narcotics trade.

42. Over time, the nature of insurgency attacks has evolved from mainly conventional assaults to a greater reliance on IEDs. The vast majority of those killed or injured in these attacks are Afghan civilians. A recent UN report on civilian casualties found that over 70% are caused by the insurgents. The insurgents have also shown a greater willingness to attack humanitarian and development projects, and non-government organisation (NGO) workers. Former Commander ISAF General McChrystal proposed a new counter-insurgency strategy for Afghanistan that was endorsed in December 2009. It included a surge of 30,000 US troops and approximately 9,000 troops from other ISAF contributing countries. The US troop surge is now complete and ISAF have just under 118,000 troops in theatre (and there are a further 26,000 US troops in Afghanistan under USFOR-A).

43. This surge has enabled ISAF to consolidate gains it made in rolling back Taliban influence in Helmand and Kandahar provinces and to continue to gradually expand the area under Afghan Government control. ISAF’s main effort in the South, Operation Moshtarak, began in November 2009 with an effort to improve freedom of movement along the main transport routes around Kandahar city. In February 2010, the focus of operations switched to central Helmand where Operation Moshtarak phase two began to clear the insurgency out of Nad Ali district, including the Taliban-controlled area of Marjah, and establish Afghan local governance and socio-economic development. While operations in central Helmand continue, ISAF’s main effort has now shifted back to Kandahar where a civilian-military effort is now focused on improving Afghan governance and reducing Taliban influence in Kandahar city and the surrounding areas. The US will review the success of their uplift in troops and their current strategy in December 2010, with a view to begin drawing down surge troops by July 2011.
Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

44. The UK Government fully supports President Karzai’s ambition to have ANSF assume lead responsibility for security across the country by 2014. Achieving this depends on making the necessary progress in building ANSF capabilities that will pave the way for security transition. Transition will be a phased process, with the Afghan Security Forces taking the lead initially in selected districts and provinces as appropriate conditions on the ground are met. Since Transition is conditions based, timelines cannot be made and it is important that Transition planning does not interfere with the primary task of providing security to the Afghan people. On 2 September, the North Atlantic Council received the first of ISAF’s monthly transition assessment updates. The NATO Summit in Lisbon in November and US Afghanistan Strategy Review, expected in December, will also set the pace for the Transition process. The Afghan Government and ISAF are giving Transition a high priority, ensuring that the process receives the support and resources it needs.

Afghan National Army

45. The ANA has already reached its 2010 growth objective of 134,000, well ahead of schedule and is on-track to achieve the 2011 goal of 171,600. All UK ground-holding troops are available to support ANA development through partnering. UK and ANA ground-holding troops live and operate together throughout the UK areas of operation. Alongside partnering there are small teams, made up of 206 personnel for the ANA and 75 personnel for the ANP, which provide coherence to partnering by offering liaison, advice and continuity of relationships with security force units.

46. ANA training is conducted by the NATO Training Mission—Afghanistan (NTM-A). The NTM-A’s mandate is to generate and build the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces. It currently has around 1,300 international trainers, but is set to expand to over 2,500 trainers by March 2012. The UK provides, or is in the process of force generating, 160 military personnel and three civilian secondees to NTM-A headquarters and its institutions. The UK leads the Combat Arms Directorate, as the principle nation supplying the Infantry Branch School. We also provide personnel to the Afghan Defence University, the Officer Cadet School, the Counter Insurgency Academy, and the Non-Commissioned Officer Training School.

47. The UK also supports the building of capacity within the security sector at the Ministry level, through training and with in-theatre partnering and mentoring. The FCO and MOD fund and provide two British civilians who work within the Afghan Ministry of Defence to enhance its capacity. One is an advisor and the second is a Private Secretary to the Minister of Defence.

Afghan National Police (ANP)

48. Afghan police development since 2006 has focused largely on countering the insurgency. In practice, the role of the ANP has been to undertake guard duties and man checkpoints during the “hold” phase of counter-insurgency operations. Going forward there is a need to improve the connection between the police and citizens, ensuring that they are able to respond to the most pressing needs and concerns of the majority of Afghan people, law enforcement and ensuring public safety.

49. The Ministry of the Interior (MoI) has a dual function: as the national police HQ, and the policy and management institution for the ANP. The MoI continues to play an active role in tactical operational matters. However, its institutional capacity to direct and manage the ANP, and to hold them to account, remains weak. The international community is providing assistance to the MoI and DFID is currently discussing ways of helping them to address these institutional issues over the longer-term, in line with other international assistance to the MoI.

50. The NTM-A plays the lead role in police force generation and the large majority of NTM-A effort is driven by the objective of increasing the quantity of ANP personnel. The UK provides three police officers to NTM-A who provide strategic level advice on all aspects of civilian policing, including the implementation of the Focused District Development (FDD) programme and the development of police training curricula. As of September 2010, the total size of the ANP is just over 115,000 officers. At the London Conference in January 2010, the Afghan Government and international community agreed a target of 134,000 ANP personnel by October 2011.

51. The US provide by far the most support to police development, channelling the majority of their effort through the NTM-A, to which they provide $2 billion a month (for both ANA and ANP development), hundreds of military trainers and strategic leadership through NTM-A Commander Lt Gen Caldwell. Alongside the US, other significant contributors to NTM-A include Germany, Italy and France.

52. EUPOL, the EU’s police training mission, provides strategic advice and mentoring for senior officials in the Ministry of the Interior and ANP, as well as providing training in specialised areas such as criminal investigation and forensics. EUPOL also works to strengthen wider rule of law institutions such as the Attorney General’s Office. As of September 2010, there are 258 policing and rule of law experts from 25 different countries in EUPOL, and the mission is delivering training and mentoring in 12 Provinces. The EUPOL and NATO Police Missions are increasingly working together on a range of projects, including supporting the reform of the Ministry of Interior, strengthening the police and security forces in Kabul and developing
mechanisms for police engagement with their local communities. UK personnel in the two missions are playing a key role here.

53. The UK remains a significant contributor to the EUPOL police reform mission, with 13 serving or retired officers currently deployed in Kabul and Helmand. These officers perform a wide range of duties including advising the Deputy Minister of the Interior on police reform, leading the development of a Police Staff College, heading all of the ANP's anti-corruption work and mentoring the Head of the Counter-Terrorism police. In Helmand they are helping the Provincial Chief of Police develop a provincial policing plan and are building the criminal investigation department capabilities at the provincial headquarters.

54. In Helmand the UK has developed a comprehensive approach to supporting police development, utilising resources drawn from EUPOL, the MOD, police and the military. This has allowed influence to be exerted at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of policing (provincial, districts and local communities). Direct training to patrolmen and NCOs is delivered at the Helmand Police Training Centre in Lashkar Gah, where over 1000 patrolmen and 25 NCOs have graduated since it opened in December 2009. The UK military mentors ANP across the province and UK civilian police provide strategic advice and mentoring to senior police leadership in District Police headquarters. Through EUPOL, the UK is also building Criminal Investigation capability across the province.

55. The UK has played a major role in the establishment of the Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA) which is the lead drug law enforcement agency of the Afghan Government with a presence in all 34 provinces. The UK has provided equipment, training and mentoring at the provincial level to the CNPA to improve its abilities to interdict narcotics smugglers. In Helmand, largely thanks to this support, the CNPA recorded more seizures of drugs and precursor chemicals (over 150 kilograms of heroin and 14 tonnes of chemicals) in the first three months of this financial year than in the whole of the previous twelve months.

56. Whilst the ANP continue to suffer from serious problems such as corruption, low levels of education, lack of training, and heavy casualties as a result of fighting the insurgency, progress is being made. In March 2010, the Ministry of Interior published a five-year National Police Strategy and a National Police Plan which were subsequently endorsed by the international community. These provide, for the first time, clear Afghan direction for the development of the ANP, setting challenging long-term goals as well as initial plans for how to achieve them. The Afghan Government reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the Afghan National Police Strategy at the Kabul Conference in July 2010, and in addition committed to supporting institutional development in the Ministry of Interior and strengthening of ANP leadership. Good progress is being made towards the agreed ANP strength of 134,000 by October 2011, and at July 2010 almost 1,000 Afghan trainers were EUPOL ‘Train The Trainer’ certified.

57. Despite this, there is still more to do. Huge challenges remain in building the capacity and capability of the ANP. Strong leadership from within the Ministry of Interior is essential to tackle embedded problems of corruption within the Ministry itself, the police and other parts of the criminal justice system, as well as in providing a clear vision of the reforms required to build a national police force. There will be an ongoing requirement for continued strategic and technical (and funding) support from the UK for the ANP. This forms part of the international community’s wider effort to develop a capable, legitimate and sustainable police force which is able to respond to the security needs of citizens, by protecting, preventing and investigating all forms of criminal activity.

58. The international community’s effort needs to balance the requirement to build the ANP’s security capability with the longer-term reform objectives. The short to medium-term aim is to enable the Afghan Government to lead and support the ANP to provide basic security and policing functions, and in the longer-term to link into sub-national government mechanisms. Overall, the challenge is to build a fully functioning, accountable police force that operates without international support.

**ISAF**

59. The ISAF mission consists of 47 nations (the troop numbers are based on broad contribution and do not reflect the exact numbers on the ground at any one time). A table giving the complete list is at Annex 1.

60. ISAF was initially mandated to deploy in Kabul city and was initially a coalition of the willing, under a rotating national command, until NATO formally took command of ISAF from January 2003. In October 2003, the UN Security Council authorised the expansion of ISAF in UNSCR 1510. Under this plan expansion throughout the country took place in four stages beginning in the North (in 2003) and finishing in the East (in 2006).

61. Building the capacity of Afghan National Security Forces is essential to improving security across Afghanistan and both ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom are heavily involved in this process. The Combined Security Transition Command—Afghanistan, under Operation Enduring Freedom control, leads on the training of the ANA, and also runs a number of large police training programmes, while ISAF also commands a number of Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OML Ts) embedded within an Afghan military unit. The OML Ts provide training and mentoring in support of operational deployments for units from the ANA, also providing a liaison capability between the army and ISAF forces. The OML Ts co-ordinate planning and ensure the army units receive enabling support, including on active missions.
62. ISAF will continue to be the main focus for the international community’s support for security in Afghanistan. At the NATO Tallinn Summit in 2009, Heads of State reaffirmed their commitment to ISAF and its mission, setting out the four principles guiding ISAF’s actions: a firm and shared long-term commitment; support for enhanced Afghan leadership and responsibility; a comprehensive approach by the international community, bringing together civilian and military efforts; and increased co-operation and engagement with Afghanistan’s neighbours, especially Pakistan.

**Burden Sharing**

63. When the UN first authorised the deployment of an international force, following the Bonn Conference in December 2001, there were 19 troop contributing nations, led by the UK. There are now, as at August 2010, 47 countries contributing almost 120,000 troops. 94,000 of those troops are located in the less stable Regional Commands South, South West and East. The UK is the second largest troop contributing nation, with 9,500 troops.

64. The UK recognises the need for greater burden sharing by all partners and allies, shifting our emphasis from short-term stabilisation to long-term development. To that end, the UK diplomatic effort has been deployed in encouraging others to increase their share of the military, civilian and financial burden in Afghanistan. A cross-Whitehall burden sharing strategy continues to identify partners who can and should provide more resources (including combat troops) for Afghanistan. Our focus is increasingly on the provision of military and police trainers and on filling gaps in the NATO training mission.

65. NATO, through the Combined Joint Statement of Requirements identifies the troops and material required to conduct the mission. This was updated prior to a Global Force Generation Conference on 22–23 September 2010. Amongst others, there are currently shortfalls in the required numbers of trainers for the NTM-A. The UK provides seven of the OML Ts required by the Statement of Requirements and has lobbied allies to provide additional OMLTs to meet the existing shortfall. There are now 22 countries that either contribute to or have pledged to contribute to OMLTs. However, as the ANA expands and as the ANA starts to take the security lead, there will be an increasing requirement for more.

**UK Contribution**

**UK Military Contribution**

66. The UK currently contributes 9,500 troops to ISAF on an enduring basis. The majority (approximately 80%) of these are based in Helmand, with the British commander of the UK-led Task Force Helmand located alongside the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team in the provincial capital Lashkar Gah. The UK also has 1,300 troops located at Kandahar Air Field and 500 in Kabul. In addition, we hold several key command positions, including Deputy Commander ISAF (on a permanent basis) and Commander Regional Command South (on a rotational basis until November 2010).

67. On 26 January 2006, the UK announced the first deployment of troops to Helmand and in May 2006 we took over the lead for the Helmand PRT from the US. The UK troop presence in Helmand has grown from an initial deployment of 3,150 to approximately 7,700 troops. Until spring 2008, the UK-led Task Force Helmand (TFH) held lead security responsibility across the whole province. However, from April 2008, the arrival of increasing numbers of US troops in Helmand has enabled security responsibilities to be shared between TFH and US Marine Air Ground Taskforce (MAGTF). The MAGTF has taken over security responsibility for the north, east and south of Helmand, including Kajaki, Musa Qala, Sangin and Garmsir. This has allowed TFH to focus on the central area of Helmand, including the largest population centres in Lashkar Gah and Gereshk.

**Civil-Military**

68. The PRT, headquartered in Lashkar Gah, has some 260 staff, approximately half of whom are civilian. It has some 21 civilian police staff and 30 Afghan staff. It also has UK, US and Danish District Stabilisation Teams in 10 of Helmand’s 14 Districts. A Stabilisation Team typically consists of civilian stabilisation advisers (STABADs), civilian specialists (e.g. in agriculture), a political adviser and either a UK Military Stabilisation Support Team (MSST), a US Civil Affairs Team, or a Danish CIMIC (Civil Military Co-operation) Support Team. The teams bring together people with a range of backgrounds including development, politics, engineering and project management. The Stabilisation Teams work hand in hand with the District Regimental, Battle Group or Battalion HQs to co-ordinate civil and military activity. DFID staff, who manage the UK’s bilateral, long-term development programme in Helmand, are co-located with the PRT in Lashkar Gah.

**Detentions**

69. Since July 2006, UK forces have been detaining suspected insurgents in Afghanistan in fulfilment of the ISAF mandate. If not released, these detainees are transferred to the relevant Afghan authorities for investigation and prosecution under Afghan criminal law: usually the National Directorate for Security (NDS) in Lashkar Gah and Kandahar (the most appropriate Afghan Authority). ISAF guidelines state that such transfer should be completed within 96 hours of capture wherever possible.
70. In late 2009, the UK announced that in exceptional circumstances and with ministerial approval, such detention could be extended beyond 96 hours for the purposes of intelligence exploitation.

71. Written arrangements governing conditions of detention combined with monitoring detainees once in Afghan custody, together with well-established contacts with Afghan representatives, are key elements of the UK’s strategy for mitigating the risk of mistreatment. The robustness of these arrangements has been increased through the establishment of the Detention Oversight Team (DOT), headed by Force Provost Marshall and comprising a Royal Military Police officer and a legal adviser, whose role is to liaise with Afghan authorities to ensure regular and private access to post-transfer UK-captured detainees, who are also visited by the ICRC. Officials from the British Embassy accompany the DOT to visit detainees in Kabul.

72. The UK policy to transfer detainees to Afghan custody withstood judicial scrutiny by way of judicial review. In June 2010 the Divisional Court found that UK transfers can continue to NDS Kandahar and NDS Lashkar Gah without a real risk of torture or serious mistreatment provided that existing safeguards are strengthened by observance of certain conditions relating to monitoring and access. These safeguards are in place.

73. As of 1 October 2010, the UK has detained 1,399 individuals, of which over 480 have been transferred to the Afghan authorities.

ASSAFGHANISTAN: POLITICAL PROCESS

74. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 laid out the political road map for Afghanistan, which led to the Emergency Loya Jirga (traditional Afghan Grand Council) in June 2002. The UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established shortly after to assist in the implementation of the Bonn Agreement.

75. After an interim Berlin Conference in April 2004, the Afghan Compact was drawn up at the London Conference in February 2006. This sought to define the principles of co-operation between the Afghan Government and the international community for the period 2006–11. Donors pledged a further $10.5 billion in aid. The Paris Conference in June 2008 launched the Afghan National Development Strategy, which recognised the leadership of the Afghan Government in setting development priorities during 2008–13, whilst securing pledges of $21 billion.


77. While our troops will be out of combat by 2015, this will not mean the end of our engagement in Afghanistan. Rather we expect to see over the next five years a gradual shift from international military intervention to greater international civilian support, including economic support, as Afghanistan stabilises further and moves closer to international norms. We expect to continue our security co-operation eg through training and support to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). This will be a complex and lengthy process given what Afghanistan has suffered from conflict and poverty over the last 30 years.

REINTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION

78. As part of any sustainable political settlement, there should be a peace process that seeks to address the concerns of the insurgency and its support base.

79. President Karzai made clear his commitment to delivering peace and reconciliation during his inaugural address in November 2009 when he said “It is a recognised fact that security and peace cannot be achieved through fighting and violence. This is why the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has placed national reconciliation at the top of its peace-building policy”. This was reinforced at the London Conference in January 2010 when the Afghan Government committed to take this forward and to “offer an honourable place in society to those willing to renounce violence, participate in the free and open society and respect the principles that are enshrined in the Afghan constitution, cut ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and pursue their political goals peacefully”. Karzai also announced his intention to hold a Peace Jirga to take this policy forward. The international community also demonstrated strong commitment to the policy. Over £100 million was pledged from nations including Japan, Germany, Australia, Spain and Greece. The Republic of Korea has since also pledged to contribute funds. The UK pledged to contribute £5 million in 2010–11.

80. The Afghan Government held the Consultative Peace Jirga (CPJ) on 2–4 June 2010 in order to secure the support of the Afghan people for peace and reconciliation. The CPJ brought together 1,600 representatives from across Afghanistan, drawn from the Government, Parliament, civil society and women’s groups. Participants drew up a declaration, which gave the Afghan Government a mandate to take work on reintegration and reconciliation forward, calling on the insurgents to put an end to the fighting and begin a process of negotiation. It also called for the creation of a High Peace Council to help deliver this. The membership of the Council was announced on 29 September 2010 and currently comprises 68 members, including members of the Government and opposition, women and former Taliban. We now look forward to the appointment of the Council’s chairman to allow this work to progress.
81. At the Kabul Conference, the Afghan Government published the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP). The international community endorsed the principles of the APRP and reiterated their commitment to support the peace process.

82. Afghanistan’s neighbours will have an important role to play in ensuring the success of any reconciliation policy. At the London Conference, President Karzai asked all of Afghanistan’s neighbours, particularly Pakistan, to support the peace and reconciliation endeavours. The UK continues to encourage Afghanistan’s neighbours and influential international actors, like Saudi Arabia, to play a constructive role. We are in close contact with the Afghan Government and our international partners as this develops (further detail on regional policy is set out in paragraphs 158–166).

Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme

83. The Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) will be divided into three stages:

— Social Outreach, Confidence-Building, and Negotiation: Provincial and district leaders will conduct outreach to individuals and their communities that demonstrate their intent to join the peace process and will facilitate confidence-building activities, negotiations and grievance resolution among the Government, communities, victims and ex-combatants as necessary.

— Demobilisation: Those who join the peace process will be demobilised through a social and political process that will begin with an initial assessment, vetting and weapons management and registration. Immediate humanitarian assistance may be provided, if necessary.

— Consolidation of Peace: Following the political and security processes of the first two stages, a standard needs assessment tailored to the requirements of the APRP will be used to assist communities, districts and provinces to select from a “menu of conflict recovery options”. Not all options will be available to every community due to the challenge of access, capacity and security, and the diverse needs of different communities.

84. The menu of options available to participants in the programme includes but is not limited to: improving access to basic services, civic education, literacy, technical and vocational education/training, and the provision and development of employment opportunities.

85. The provinces that the programme will target initially are Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Khost, Baghlan, Badghis, Kunduz, and Herat. However, the programme is flexible and will respond to emerging opportunities in any province depending on the availability of resources and capacity.

Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

86. Given that Afghanistan has emerged only recently from a generation of conflict, the fact that four sets of nationwide elections have been held is a significant achievement. Afghanistan’s first Presidential elections were held on 9 October 2004. Around 8.5 million voted. Parliamentary and Provincial Council elections were held on 18 September 2005. Around 6.8 million Afghans (51.5% of those eligible) voted.

87. The second Presidential and Provincial Council elections were held concurrently on 20 August 2009. They were the first elections in over 30 years to have been run by Afghans, with international support. The Presidential elections were contested by 41 candidates. The legitimacy of these elections was undermined by widespread, systemic fraud. After the removal of (millions of) fraudulent ballots by the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC), no candidate had received over 50% of the vote and a second round run-off ballot between the top two candidates (the incumbent Hamid Karzai and Former Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah Abdullah) was scheduled. Before the run-off was held, second placed candidate Dr Abdullah withdrew citing widespread fraud. Hamid Karzai was inaugurated for a second five-year term on 19 November 2009.

88. At the same time Provincial Council elections took place in each of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. 420 Provincial Council seats across the country were contested by 3,180 candidates. Over 4.6 million votes were cast in these elections. This drop in turnout was expected, as the first elections of a new democracy generally have a higher turnout than subsequent ones.

89. In 2010 the first Afghan-run Parliamentary elections since the 1960s were held on 18 September. The Afghan authorities ran these elections in difficult circumstances, successfully overcoming major security and logistical difficulties. Over 2,500 candidates stood for election and turnout is estimated to have been around four million. It is widely agreed that these elections were better run than in 2009. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) worked hard on their preparations and learnt many of the lessons from 2009. They put in place a number of anti-fraud measures which look likely to have prevented the systemic fraud witnessed in 2009. There is nevertheless widespread reporting of fraud and malpractice. But the tally process is ongoing and if the IEC resists the inevitable political pressure from candidates and power brokers, these elections will have been more credible than those in 2009. The Electoral Complaints Commission will also play an important part ensuring the legitimacy of the election over the next few weeks and will need to be seen to take all complaints seriously. We expect the IEC to announce provisional results on 9 October and final results on 30 October.
90. The UK and the international community supported the 2009–10 Afghan-led elections. Financial support was primarily channelled through the UN Development Programme’s Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow programme (UNDP ELECT), the multi-year funding mechanism to which 24 donors contribute. In 2009–10 the UK provided £26 million to ELECT. In comparison, the US committed $120 million, Japan $36 million, Germany $22 million and Canada $12.9 million. Alongside other donors the UK allocated a further £2.5 million to the 2010 election budget from within the existing 2010–11 Aid Framework.

91. In Helmand, voter turnout was down on last year’s vote (which was artificially inflated by fraudulent ballots) but the elections were largely deemed successful: 120 polling centres of 129 were able to open (compared with 107 last year) and the logistic and administrative process worked well on the day. Only one polling station was forced to close for security reasons. No voters or elections workers were killed or injured during the vote and there were no significant security incidents. The insurgents’ inability to disrupt voting allowed the provincial authorities the space to focus on incidents of fraud, making multiple arrests across the province. The most obvious cases of ballot-stuffing have been identified and recorded by the provincial election authorities. The challenge will be to ensure that these irregularities are acknowledged and adjusted for at the national level.

92. The UK has supported the deployment of international election observers for the elections in 2009 and 2010. In 2009 Election Observation Missions from the EU and the OSCE monitored the elections. In 2010 both organisations deployed smaller teams, mainly for security reasons, with the aim of producing recommendations on longer-term electoral reform. British Embassy staff also participated in diplomatic election observation, co-ordinating with other embassies in Kabul.

AFGHANISTAN: DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Economic Growth

93. Following 30 years of civil war, Afghanistan is extremely poor and ranks 181st out of 182 countries on the Human Development index. Although there has been some progress since 2001, Afghanistan is still at the early stages of its economic development and progress to a fully functioning economy is only achievable over the long-term. There are many challenges, including weak infrastructure, low human capacity and corruption. Nevertheless, significant achievements continue to be made:

— Economic growth rose to 22.5% in 2009–10 on the back of a strong harvest. Industrial and service sector gross domestic product (GDP) have doubled since 2005. Afghan business revenue grew on average 220% between 2005 and 2008.2

— Domestic revenue generation has exceeded 20% growth year-on-year since 2002. Tax revenue reached $1.2 billion in 2009–10, up from almost nothing in 2002, through improvements in the Afghan Government’s tax system and collection rates, such as by opening provincial tax offices, and reducing opportunities for corruption.

— The Afghan Government has embarked on a range of important economic policy and governance reforms. The Ministries of Mines and of Commerce and Industry are undergoing significant structural and capacity changes to facilitate investment and growth and create a better policy and regulatory environment for private businesses.

— Policy and regulatory efforts to improve the investment climate have resulted in Afghanistan’s rise by eight places (from 168 to 160 out of 183) in the World Bank’s Doing Business rankings in 2010, a rise principally attributable to new laws allowing firms to access credit.

— Negotiations on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) have been concluded and a two-month road map towards ratification signed. A fully ratified APTTA will pave the way for better-regulated, more open trade routes, and is expected to give a major boost to Afghan exports.

— The financial sector has seen significant improvements, with 17 banks now operating in Afghanistan and the Central Bank playing a strengthened role in oversight and supervision. Nevertheless, the case of Kabul Bank, which recently went into administration following revelations that shareholders had corruptly obtained loans, shows that banking regulatory systems remain weak and need to be rigorously addressed.

— On a smaller scale, improved access to microfinance has been a successful tool in Afghanistan with microfinance institutions issuing over £460 million worth of small loans to over 800,000 Afghans.

94. Economic development will continue to be a key priority of the Afghan Government for the years to come, President Karzai reiterated its importance at the 20 July Kabul Conference, and it is reflected in the UK’s development programme in Afghanistan.

2 2008 World Bank Afghanistan Investment Climate Survey
UK Support

95. The UK is working with the Afghan Government to improve economic policies, regulations and services, to strengthen institutional capacity to formulate and implement them; to increase accountability, encourage financial management reforms in the public sector, and to build institutions with the ability to tackle corruption over the longer-term. The UK also works with the Afghan private sector, facilitating market development, access to key inputs such as finance and skilled labour, and by investing in the private sector to come up with innovative solutions to Afghanistan’s investment climate and development concerns.

96. In alignment with the Afghan Government’s economic development priorities, the UK supports the following programmes:

— Support to the Ministry of Finance to continue the reform and development of an effective, modern and broad-based tax system (£11 million, 2007–11); and to lead implementation of Public Financial Management (PFM) reforms in key Afghan line ministries and at the provincial level; to improve co-ordination of external funding through the National Budget; and to build greater levels of PFM capacity in key line ministries (£7 million, 2007–10). The percentage of the Government operating budget (excluding security) covered by domestic revenue should rise from 58% in 2010 to 100% in 2015 and expected improvements in Public Financial Management include a 10% year on year improvement in budget execution.

— Supporting Employment and Enterprise Development (SEED) (£36 million, 2008–13): SEED is expected to create 20,000 new permanent jobs by 2013, and to increase the monthly income of at least 200,000 men and women by 10% by strengthening the private sector’s ability to invest and compete. It will improve the local business environment, improving access to finance (including for SMEs), supporting skills development and innovative business models with pro-poor benefits.

— Harakat—the Afghanistan Investment Climate Facility (£30 million, 2008–13): This is an independent Afghan-led non-governmental organisation, supported by DFID and overseen by a private sector board, which gives grants to the Government, civil society and private sector organisations for projects to remove institutional and regulatory barriers to doing business in Afghanistan. Harakat will contribute to Afghanistan increasing its growth rate from 7% to 9% per annum, and increasing its overall ranking on the World Bank’s ease of Doing Business index from 160 to 140.

— Support to the Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility (CARD-F, £30 million, 2009–13), undertaking district-based integrated rural development that provides stronger incentives to sustain the move away from opium production implemented in provinces where poppy production has fallen.

— The Helmand Growth Programme (£28 million, 2010–13) will increase the capability of businesses and producers in selected districts of Helmand to generate economic growth, by developing an Agriculture Business Park in the provincial capital. It is expected that 50,000 people will directly benefit from the programme from skills development, business support or access to markets through improved infrastructure.

— A programme of infrastructure investment in Helmand province, through support for Helmand roads (£16 million, 2009–13), hydro-electric power (£14 million, 2009–13), irrigation (£3 million, 2009–13) and air transport (£7 million, 2009–10). Investments include constructing the road between Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, and the Bost airfield.

97. New UK interventions to be established by early 2011 include:

— The UK’s new Afghanistan Business Innovation Fund (ABIF) (£6 million, 2011–13): as part of SEED, ABIF will provide matching grants to the private sector to catalyse innovative, commercially viable and pro-poor business models that improve access to markets for the poor and contribute to income and employment generation. ABIF is expected to create 5,000 new jobs and leverage up to £9 million in pro-poor investment by 2013.

— Technical and Vocational Education and Training support (TVET) (£36 million, 2011–14): A comprehensive UK TVET programme, aligned to the Afghan Government’s TVET priority programme under the Human Resource Development Cluster, aims to help increase the number of TVET graduates and resulting jobs, thereby contributing to the Government’s target of 300,000 trainees by 2013.3

— Increasing Agricultural Potential in Afghanistan (£18 million, 2010–14), supporting change management in the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock and generating evidenced-based policy making and planning, as well as specific interventions to support the needs of herders and farmers. This programme will support outcomes such as the increase by 5% per year of the licit agricultural economy in Afghanistan.

3 The Government may revise the target downward in an exercise to revise its bankable programmes and associated budgets and targets by the end of the year.
— The UK provides substantial funding (£175 million, 2010–14) to the Afghan Government via the World Bank-managed multi-donor Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). This contributes to the salaries of civil servants, teachers, doctors and nurses, and to national priority programmes funded via the ARTF; in education, health, community investment and development, infrastructure, and governance (see paragraph 131 for the safeguards to our funding). The ARTF has already helped the Afghan Government to increase enrolment in primary and secondary education from less than 1 million in 2001 to 6.7 million in 2010 and to extend micro-credit and saving facilities to over 625,000 Afghans, 60% of whom are women and support will continue to pay for. Continued support will help to increase the number of schools in Afghanistan from just under 11,000 to 16,500, and to increase youth literacy rates from 39% to 50%.

98. Note that the results listed above are those we expect to see from Afghan or multilateral programmes that benefit from DFID support. It is inevitable that as the programmes unfold actual results will differ.

DEVELOPMENT

Millennium Development Goals

99. The availability of reliable data to track the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) progress for Afghanistan is constrained but is improving. Afghanistan starts from a very low base—36% of people live on less than $0.9 per day, which is the official poverty line in Afghanistan. Following thirty years of civil war, all of the MDGs are off track, and the UN has agreed an exceptional extension until 2015. There has been some progress, for example achieving universal education (MDG2) and gender equality (MDG3), with 5.3 million children now attending school regularly, 37% of which are girls, and 25% of parliament seats reserved for women.

100. The Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) estimated that a projected $50.3 billion will be required to address Afghanistan’s reconstruction and development needs in the period to 2012–13. The Kabul Conference was using a budget of $10 billion over three years of donor funding for development initiatives in order to prioritise programmes. The UK is the second largest bilateral contributor to the portion of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)—an internationally managed fund created in 2002 to support the Afghan Government’s running costs and investment needs—which covers the Afghan Government’s recurrent spending and supports a number of national priority programmes such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) that supports small-scale infrastructure in around 23,000 communities. The UK has pledged to deliver at least 50% of our total aid to Afghanistan through government channels, ensuring it has the maximum opportunity to ensure Afghan ownership of the prioritisation process; and to enhance the co-ordination of donor funding.

RULE OF LAW

101. In 2001 there were virtually no statutory rule of law institutions or processes in Afghanistan. The Afghan Government has made significant progress in developing rule of law institutions since then. The Afghan Government made important commitments to strengthen the rule of law at the London Conference, including increasing numbers of ANP, improving access to justice and strengthening the role of civil society. The London Communiqué recognised the Afghan Government’s increasing efforts to implement the Afghan National Justice Programme with a view to making the provision of justice more transparent, fair, and accessible.

102. At the Kabul Conference, the Afghan Government acknowledged that the rule of law, good governance and human rights form the foundation of the strategy to achieve a stable and prosperous Afghanistan and made further commitments to improve delivery of justice throughout Afghanistan and build a strong, professional police force. The UK is working with the Afghan Government as they translate these commitments into concrete action.

103. The UK continues to support the justice sector in Afghanistan. At the national level we are helping to build the capacity of the Criminal Justice Task Force (CJTF), a multi-departmental Afghan detention, investigation, prosecution and judicial team to target the narcotics trade, taking cases from investigation right through to conviction. The UK provides specialist lawyer mentors and administrative support to the task force. In 2009 the CJTF Primary Court convicted 440 people accused of drugs related offences. The Appeal Court convicted 599 defendants on different serious narcotics crimes, and the CJTF General Prosecution Directorate sent 362 narcotics cases to the Supreme Court of Afghanistan resulting in the conviction and life imprisonment of 435 drug traffickers. These convictions included a number of heads of Afghanistan’s largest drug trafficking rings. In Helmand, in addition to support for the CNPA, the PRT is helping to develop the investigative capacity of the NDS, and the prosecutorial capacity of the relevant specialist police agencies, to help the Government to address insurgency and other serious crimes.

104. Progress has been made in reforming the Afghan prisons system, and the UK is supporting the Afghan Government in this work. Our team from the National Offender Management Service promote a fair and robust Afghan prison sector by sharing UK best practice through training and mentoring, for example providing

training at Pol-i-Charki for High Security Staff tailored for those working in a high security environment and
with high risk prisoners.

105. Progress has also been made in developing Afghanistan’s prison infrastructure, with improvements to
the Pol-i-Charki prison near Kabul. We are also working closely with the US who run a wider programme of
prison building across Afghanistan. In addition, the UK is building, equipping and providing training for
Lashkar Gah prison which will conform to international standards. We also run projects for women and
juveniles in prison and have plans to implement a vocational training programme.

106. We estimate that over 90% of justice in Afghanistan is delivered through the community-based system
and it is vital for the international community to engage more actively here, especially in developing linkages
with the statutory system. We are working with the Afghan Government to support their Kabul Conference
commitment to complete an Afghan informal justice strategy aligned to the National Justice Sector Strategy.
Here we can build on our work in Helmand, where we are working with both the statutory and community-
based systems. The PRT provides support for both community-based dispute resolution mechanisms and
“bridging mechanisms” such as the Justice Sub-Committees of District Community Councils and the Prisoner
Review Shuras in those districts without prosecutors. This helps increase access to the statutory system and
promotes respect for rights and constraining abuse in both sectors.

107. In Helmand, the UK also works with local and national justice officials to encourage the expansion of
statutory justice to communities outside Lashkar Gah. There are now prosecutors allocated to and operating in
Gereshk, Garmsir, Nawa, Marjah, Sangin and Nad Ali. Other initiatives we support include a women and
children’s justice group, the Independent Commission for Women and Children’s Rights, and support, through
an NGO, for defence representation.

108. The Afghan judicial system still needs to expand its capacity and capability to prosecute high value
targets in corruption and insurgency cases. Key priorities include developing Afghan capacity, in terms of
investigative, prosecutorial, and judicial capabilities (especially for the security of judges and prosecutors) and
penal facilities, to take on corruption cases; and encouraging the Afghan Government to become more
transparent and address the concerns of Parliamentarians and civil society.

109. Overall, strengthening the rule of law across Afghanistan is a long-term endeavour. It will require
significant financial and human resources for many years to come. Urgently required resources include civilian
expertise to improve the capacity of Afghan Government institutions to manage and lead reform programmes
themselves; skilled and experienced police officers to advise the Afghan police through the EUPOL and NATO
police reform programmes; and in the justice sector civilian expertise is needed to help develop a justice sector
that serves a greater proportion of the Afghan population fairly and transparently. Alongside additional
resources, enhanced co-ordination between all of the government and NGO actors engaged in rule of law
reform can improve delivery of reform projects and help identify priorities.

Human Rights

110. Despite the difficult security situation, some progress continues to be made on human rights protection
in Afghanistan. But divisions still exist in Afghan society over issues such as women’s rights, religious freedom
and freedom of expression. New laws on media freedom and violence against women have been passed but
implementation of these is weak.

111. The Kabul Conference communiqué contains clear commitments on human rights including
implementing a National Priority Program for Human Rights and Civic Responsibilities, mainstreaming gender
equality across all its programmes, and undertaking human rights, legal awareness and civic education
programmes targeting communities across Afghanistan. The communiqué develops and strengthens
commitments to implement the National Action Plan for Women and Elimination of Violence Against Women
law made initially at the London Conference. The UK has also provided financial support to the Afghan
Independent Human Rights Commission and is supporting a Human Rights Support Unit based within the
Ministry of Justice.

Institutional Support

112. Our Strategic Programme Fund project on support for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights
Commission has helped the country’s key human rights institution to effect real change for the Afghan people,
such as having human rights added to the school curriculum. This project has also enabled the UK to influence
the Commission’s reform. We have also helped to develop the capacity of the Commission, for example through
funding training for one of the Human Rights Commissioners at the University of Nottingham. On return to
Afghanistan, the Commissioner played a lead role in joint monitoring with the UN Assistance Mission to
Afghanistan of the observance of political rights during the Presidential and Provincial Council elections.

113. The UK has also provided financial support for a Human Rights Support Unit in the Ministry of Justice
including international human rights law training. We continue to provide support for the IEC’s Gender Unit
to ensure that gender was an IEC focus as for the 2010 election, and continues to be so as UNDP ELECT
encourages medium-term electoral reform. We are also working to ensure that the Afghanistan Sub-National
Governance Programme delivers a sustained and sustainable increase in female civil servants.
Women’s Rights

114. Many women in Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas, still face significant hardships and unequal treatment in part due to poverty and insecurity, and in part due to deeply held cultural views. A lack of legal protection and inadequate access to justice increases the risks women face in a society where the rule of law is still weak. Despite Afghanistan’s welcome national and international commitments to promoting and protecting women’s rights, implementation is weak. Women’s NGOs are growing in confidence and are beginning to understand the benefits of working as co-ordinated networks but suffer from lack of capacity to provide strategic leadership and support for women’s rights. The UK is working to improve the situation of women in Afghanistan. Our comprehensive approach ensures that we address security, stabilisation, governance and development together. The vast majority of our programmes contribute to improving the economic, social, cultural and political rights of the Afghan people. Gender equality is mainstreamed throughout these programmes, which routinely consider the impact on, and perspectives of, women. For example, through our contribution to the ARTF we have helped Afghan girls to realise their right to education.

115. The UK also supports many targeted projects and programmes to raise awareness of women’s rights, protect women and improve their status in Afghan society. We funded a five-year women’s empowerment programme implemented by the NGO, Womankind, and between 2007 and 2009, DFID supported UNIFEM’s programme to support women’s peacebuilding and prevent sexual violence in conflict and crises. Afghanistan was one of six focus countries. We are also financially supporting one of Afghanistan’s first legal aid centres for female victims of violence in Kabul. We continue to target our recruitment for the Chevening programmes to attract more credible, female candidates. In Helmand, where the situation for women is particularly difficult, we are building the capacity of women’s civil society, encouraging the development of a female police cadre, and working with justice providers to ensure that they recognise women’s rights as central to the development of Afghanistan.

116. It is important that we ensure women have as full a participation as possible in any political process. We welcomed the levels of women’s participation in June’s Consultative Peace Jirga, where nearly 25% of the 1,600 attendees were female. Gender equality is enshrined in the Afghan Constitution and 25% of the seats in the Lower House of Parliament are reserved for women. We continue to press for the Afghan Government to implement the human rights legislation that it has committed to, including the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Death Penalty

117. Afghanistan retains the death penalty under its Constitution. All death sentences require the approval of the President. No executions have been carried out in Afghanistan since November 2008, when a number took place in a short space of time (the Supreme Court has not been open about the exact number, giving us figures varying from nine to sixteen). Since then President Karzai has not signed any death warrants, but there remain around 400 prisoners on death row. The UK is strongly opposed to the use of the death penalty by any state and we have raised our concerns in concert with European Union partners and bilaterally with the Afghan Government.

Freedom of Religion

118. Article two of the Afghan Constitution provides for freedom of religion, stating that, “Followers of other faiths shall be free within the bounds of law in the exercise and performance of their religious rituals”. But discrimination continues to occur against Afghans who convert from Islam. The Afghan legal framework itself does not criminalise conversion or proselytising, but it is a separate constitutional provision for Sharia Law that allows the death penalty for conversion. Proselytising can carry a prison sentence of up to three years. In May 2010, a debate took place in the Afghan Parliament over a television documentary showing Afghans converting to Christianity. The clip caused much anger and a number of MPs called for converted Afghans to be executed. With EU partners, we investigated reports from international Christian organisations about the persecution of Afghan Christians following this debate, but were not able to confirm any cases where Afghan had been arrested or prosecuted because of their faith. Two international organisations were suspended pending investigation by the Afghan Government but have since recommenced work. One American national and one South African national were arrested for proselytising and detained for a brief period before being released and deported.

119. The FCO recently arranged for ten Afghan Imams (religious leaders) to attend a very successful study course on applying Islamic thought and tradition in modern situations at Al Azhar in Egypt. The Imams saw Christians and Muslims living side by side in Egypt, and equality between women and men. On return to Kabul the Imams reported that they now believed Muslims and non-Muslims could live peacefully together, and would share what they had learned with their communities. The UK has also run a series of successful exchanges between British and Afghan religious leaders aimed at countering radicalisation and building understanding of the compatibility of Christianity and Islam. As part of this programme, a group of religious leaders from Helmand recently visited London where they were impressed by the breadth of Muslim life, the diversity of British culture, and the warm and respectful welcome they had received.
Education and Health

120. A total of 5.3 million children now attend school regularly\(^5\) 37% of whom were girls (up from 1 million in 2001, where none were girls). The Ministry of Education has developed a comprehensive National Education Strategic Plan for 2010–14 which has ambition to have 10 million children enrolled in school and to increase the adult literacy rate to 40% from 26%. The Asia Foundation’s 2009 survey of the Afghan people found that 67% of respondents believed the availability of children’s education to be good, and 40% thought that access to schools had improved over the last two years.

121. UK funding for education sector is provided via the ARTF, contributing to the salaries of over 320,000 civil servants, of whom more than 168,000 are teachers. In Helmand, Danish colleagues in the PRT lead the implementation of a programme of immediate stabilisation in the education sector. But challenges remain. About half the school-age population is still out of school, with significant gender and provincial disparities. The UK will continue to support the Afghan Government’s development priorities. We expect that a significant portion of that support will continue to be used for teachers’ salaries, and we will develop a programme to help young Afghans access more technical and vocational education in order to stimulate jobs and growth in the Afghan economy.

122. In the immediate post-conflict period, Afghanistan’s health services were in a deplorable state. Availability and quality of health services were highly variable across provinces and between urban and rural areas. In response, the Ministry of Public Health and the major donors developed in early 2002 a new Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS). Independent evaluations show that the Ministry of Public Health has made considerable progress in making the BPHS accessible to most Afghans. By 2009, 85% of districts had access to the BPHS. 24% of women have access to skilled antenatal care (compared to only 5% in 2001), and estimates of the under-five mortality rate have declined from 257 to 161 per 1,000 live births. UK funding for health is provided via the ARTF.

Sub-national Governance

123. Decades of conflict, poverty and poor service delivery have led to a breakdown in traditional governance institutions in many parts of Afghanistan. This has undermined the relationship between communities and government institutions and has weakened the ability of both state and community-based governance structures to deliver social stability and peace. In constitutional terms, Afghanistan has a centralised administration under a powerful head of state. But progress is being made on increasing the effectiveness of governance at the local, or sub-national level. Provincial Council elections took place in 2005 and 2009. District Council and Municipal Council elections were originally scheduled to take place at the same time as Parliamentary elections in September 2010. However, these have been postponed indefinitely because district numbers, boundaries and population figures have yet to be determined. The absence of coherent district-level political structures continues to hamper longer-term development.

124. Sub-national governance structures are essential to provide basic services like health care, education and justice to the population. Because of this, effective local governance is key to overall stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan. But for most Afghans their encounters with local government are disappointing. A survey by the Afghan Independent Directorate of Local Government (IDLG) found that some district governors receive only the equivalent of six US dollars a month for operational expenses, and many are semi-literate. 184 governors out of 364 do not have an office, 288 have no vehicle, and 318 have no electricity.

125. Improving local governance in Afghanistan will be a long-term process, and one that presents considerable challenges. The IDLG is leading on this agenda, and in June 2009 outlined a set of “priority programmes” to bring coherence to local government reform. These programmes address capacity building and institutional development, social outreach, and infrastructure at provincial, district and municipal levels. UK and international community support to local governance is co-ordinated around these priority programmes as a single framework for action.

126. One of the key priority programmes is the Afghan Social Outreach Programme (ASOP), which has been piloted in Helmand Province since January 2009. The programme establishes community councils in districts where there is little or no local governance in place to help connect citizens to the Government and enable the delivery of some basic services. Each community council appoints three sub-committees covering security, justice and economic and social development. The sub-committees design plans to improve the local situation, reflecting local needs and priorities. Examples of community council achievements to date include resolving local disputes over commercial property, land and irrigation issues, facilitating compensation claims for local people and supporting wheat seed distribution. The justice and security committee in Gereshk, the only council so far to have female members, has also successfully dealt with disputes involving domestic violence, divorce and forced marriage. Nine other provinces, including Kandahar, are now planning to introduce this programme.

127. Following strong commitments made on sub-national governance at the London Conference, the Afghan Government approved a Sub-National Governance Policy in March. This demonstrated its commitment to local governance in many parts of Afghanistan. This has undermined the relationship between communities and government institutions and has weakened the ability of both state and community-based governance structures to deliver social stability and peace.
governance reform. At the Kabul Conference the Afghan Government committed to implementing the policy over the next 12 months. The Afghan Government also detailed a National Programme for Local Governance that included consideration of transitioning community development councils, district development assemblies, and ASOP shuras to elected village and district councils with legal status within the Constitution. While it is still early days these developments are all positive signs.

**Anti-Corruption Efforts**

128. Corruption is a serious and endemic problem in Afghanistan. It hampers socio-economic development and undermines the legitimacy of the Afghan Government and its ability to deliver services to the Afghan people. The UK is a key partner for the Afghan Government on tackling corruption across a range of areas, including accountability bodies, law enforcement, public financial management. We are also one of the biggest donors to the anti-corruption oversight body, the High Office of Oversight.

129. At the London Conference, the Afghan Government made key commitments to address corruption, a number of which have been delivered. For example, increased powers and independence for the High Office of Oversight and the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Tribunal have both been delivered. The Afghan Government has also begun compiling asset declarations of government Ministers and officials.

130. At the Kabul Conference the President committed to a number of anti-corruption measures. The Government set out its key plans via the National Transparency and Accountability Programme. This includes several elements: further legal and institutional development; strengthening accountability mechanisms; and introducing transparency initiatives. However, there has been limited progress in implementation to date.

131. There are arrangements in place to ensure that DFID funding to the Afghan Government is well protected against misuse. It is channelled through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). This is a multi-donor fund, managed by the World Bank, which provides funding to the Afghan Government to support Government delivery. Expenditure through the ARTF conforms to strict eligibility criteria and is provided on a reimbursement basis, after the Government has proven legitimate expenditure. The ARTF is subject to an annual audit by an international company.

132. The IMF is leading on the response to the problems with the Kabul Bank, and the US Treasury is heavily involved. The UK stands ready to support their recommendations through our influence with the Afghan Government and with the IMF.

**Migration**

133. The return and reintegration of refugees is priority for the Afghan Government and a key component of the Afghan National Development Strategy, which the UK is committed to assist. Since 2002, over 5.6 million Afghans have returned home from all over the world: a 20% increase in the estimated population, and a major challenge for Afghanistan’s weak infrastructure.

134. In the UK, Afghans are the second highest asylum intake nationality (around 3,330 cases in 2009, approximately half of which were from unaccompanied minors primarily young men. As part of its wider Afghanistan and immigration policies, the UK supports members of the Afghan diaspora to return home from the UK through the Returns and Reintegration Fund (RRF), which is positioned to increase numbers of returnees and improve their reintegration, for a sustainable return as well as incentivising return through projects that deliver shelter/housing and livelihoods programming. As well as increasing the capacity of the Afghan Government to take back returns for example, by providing funding for a purpose built, guesthouse for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation which provides temporary accommodation for returnees.

**Counter-Narcotics**

135. The threat from drugs to Afghanistan ranks alongside the threats from corruption and the threat to security from the Taliban. The drug trade undermines security and has a corrosive effect on governance. Achievement of a sustainable reduction in the production and trade requires effort over a number of years. Experience in other countries such as Thailand has shown this. Recent successes are tempered by the relatively high levels of cultivation that still exist and its increasing concentration in southern Afghanistan. Helmand is, and is likely to remain, the main cultivating province for the foreseeable future.

**Cultivation Levels**

136. Poppy cultivation has remained steady in 2010, following significant decreases in 2008 and 2009. In Helmand, cultivation has fallen for the second successive year, down 7% in 2010. The number and location of poppy-free provinces remains stable at 20 in spite of unprecedentedly high global opium prices. Beyond Helmand, the picture is mixed; there were decreases in Uruzgan and Badgis but there was a significant increase in Nangahar. The drugs trade continues to flourish in conditions of insecurity and weakest governance. In Kandahar Province, there was an increase of cultivation in insecure areas but decreases around urban centres.
Drugs and the Insurgency

137. There is now a clear link between the drugs trade and the insurgency in the south and, to a degree, in the east and west of Afghanistan. The narco-barons and the insurgents share a common interest in resisting the authority of the Afghan Government and international forces. The UNODC estimates that the insurgency extracted $100 million income from the trade (largely in the form of a tax, which was, in effect, protection money). There is growing evidence of weapons caches and heroin laboratories being co-located and the same routes and vehicles are often used to transport drugs and weapons. There have been many operations where narcotics, weapons and bomb-making equipment have been seized together. In July 2010, an Afghan-led operation seized 15 tonnes of drugs (including 5,700 kilograms of heroin) and chemicals. In the same operation, a large number of weapons and bomb making equipment (and two narcotic labs) were destroyed with the arrest of 10 insurgents and drug traffickers.

UK efforts

138. The UK has been at the forefront of efforts within NATO in pressing for ISAF to target the nexus between the drug trade and the insurgency more effectively. The UK supports the Afghan security forces in targeting those elements of the insurgency where there is a clear link to the illegal drugs trade. It is now important to ensure that ISAF has a positive effect in supporting Afghan work to tackle the narcotics-insurgency nexus. UK forces also provide support to Afghan-led operations within the legal parameters as set out in the NATO Operational Plan. Over the longer-term, the need to build up Afghan-led interdiction and disruption operations remains important, together with the expansion and training of the ANA.

139. The UK has been the G8 Partner Nation for Afghanistan since 2002 and will be until 2011. We are therefore ostensibly responsible for leading the international effort to engage in tackling illicit narcotics in Afghanistan, in particular in lobbying for support. To this end, we have regular dialogue with key members of the international community, particularly the US. The UK’s role as G8 lead has been a mixed blessing. It has allowed us to pursue priorities on the counter-narcotics agenda (for example, the establishment of the Criminal Justice Task Force and the Food Zone Programme). But it has also possibly limited international involvement, with many partners taking more of a back seat, confident that the UK would do the brunt of the work. It has also led to criticism of the UK for slow progress on a complex issue where many factors are beyond our immediate control.

140. The UK, along with the international community at large, supports the Afghan Government’s National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) which we helped establish in May 2003. Following the establishment of the NDCS, our immediate goal has been to enable the Afghans to work towards a drugs trade divided from the insurgency and prevented from undermining security, governance and the economy, to the point where the Afghan Government can take responsibility for its own counter-narcotics effort and create a credible risk to the drugs trade. UK activity is therefore concentrated on:

— targeting the narcotics networks, especially those that support or facilitate the insurgency;
— maximising Governor outreach and access to markets for farmers in Helmand; and
— building effective institutional and international development arrangements to sustain and expand reductions in cultivation.

141. From 2004 to 2009, the UK spent nearly £180 million on counter-narcotics programmes in Afghanistan. We intend to spend around £17 million in 2010. This directly supports the implementation of the NDCS.

142. The UK has also supported the institutional infrastructure which supports that strategy. The Ministry of Counter-Narcotics was established in December 2004, supported by a UK £12.5 million capacity-building programme. The ANP was established in April 2002, the CNPA in early 2003, the Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF) at the end of 2003, the CJTF and the Counter-Narcotics Tribunal (CNT) in May 2005, and the Afghan Government’s Anti-Corruption Commission in September 2008. The CNPA, the CJTF and the CNT have all received UK support. The ASNF is UK-mentored and has been scoring significant successes against the narco-barons, for instance, in seizing 238 tonnes of cannabis in June 2008.

Poppy Eradication Policy

143. Poppy eradication policy and its implementation is the responsibility of the Afghan Government, as set out in the NDCS. This makes clear that the policy on eradication is that it should be targeted towards farmers who have access to alternative licit livelihoods. The UK does not directly eradicate poppy, but we do provide support for the planning and targeting work of the provincial Governors.

144. The Good Performers Initiative (GPI) was established in 2007 and is a powerful incentive for Governors to reduce poppy cultivation in their provinces and become “poppy free”. The initiative operates at local community level, offering high-impact development assistance directly to villages and communities leading the fight against poppy cultivation. The GPI primarily rewards poppy-free provinces, but also rewards those provinces which make significant progress in decreasing cultivation levels.
145. Helmand is the chief opium poppy-growing province of Afghanistan. Typically, Helmand has produced between 30% and 50% of Afghan opium since the 1990s (with the exception of 2001, when there was no cultivation there). It is likely to remain the main cultivating province for the foreseeable future. In 2010, poppy cultivation in Helmand fell by 7% (therefore better than the overall national picture) to 65,000 hectares—53% of all poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. This builds on the 33% reduction in Helmand in 2009.

146. In 2008, Helmand’s Governor Mangal launched the Food Zone Programme (FZP). It aims to comprehensively tackle narcotics in Helmand without seriously disadvantaging the poorest farmers or driving people further into criminality or towards the insurgency. The FZP covers four key pillars of Afghanistan’s NDCS: promoting alternative livelihoods; law enforcement; public information; and drug demand reduction. In its first year, 32,000 households in Helmand benefited from the distribution of wheat seed. Last year, the FZP distributed wheat seed, fruit saplings, grapevines and spring/summer crop seeds to 65,000 farmers. Now entering its third year, the FZP will see the distribution of subsidised agricultural inputs (packages of wheat seed, non-wheat and forage crops, and fertilizer). Inputs will be distributed to 48,000 farmers in the Food Zone (prime land) in 10 districts of Helmand, including farmers in some of the most insecure districts such as Sangin and Marjah, between September and end-October. The FZP is making good headway, even within a challenging security environment. This is combined with a credible threat that farmers in the Food Zone who grow poppy may have their crops eradicated. The effect has been that, in addition to the overall 7% reduction in poppy planting, poppy has been moved away from good land towards marginal, arid areas where yields are much lower.

147. In addition to its counter-narcotics effect, the FZP has had an impact on stabilisation and governance. It has allowed the Governor to provide practical help to farmers in a highly visible way and in so doing extend his influence into areas where the Government has had little control. This year’s distribution of agricultural inputs is funded by the UK (£9.1 million), Denmark (£1.1 million) and contributions from farmers (£2.8 million).

148. Achieving a sustainable reduction in poppy cultivation in Helmand will remain a challenge until farmers have a predictable security environment, as well as access to markets, irrigation, agricultural support and alternative long-term employment. Other external factors still influence the decision-making of farmers in whether to plant poppy, most notably the relative prices of opium and of licit crops. The concentration of narcotics cultivation and production in Helmand and other southern provinces in Afghanistan demonstrates the need for greater action in tackling insecurity and weak governance—conditions which allow the trade to flourish.

149. It continues to be important that our approach in Helmand is comprehensive and sophisticated, since an over-emphasis on wheat would threaten the sustainability of the emerging market in wheat and create an over-dependency on previously buoyant wheat prices. Crop diversity is crucial.

A Regional Approach to the Drugs Trade

150. The UK recognises that the problems of the Afghan drugs trade are not confined within the borders of Afghanistan—the effects of the trade are felt throughout the region and have a potentially destabilising effect on fragile states.

151. The UK supports the UNODC’s “Rainbow Strategy” on Afghan drugs, which acknowledges that this “national problem demands a regional solution”. Significant proportions of Afghan-cultivated drugs are consumed by regional drug markets. Furthermore, key logistical support to the trade, such as drug-related money-laundering and precursor chemical sourcing, can be found within the region. Tackling these logistical elements of the trade, whilst at the same time progressing the Afghan Government’s comprehensive domestic approach is the only enduring option for reducing the impact of the trade in the longer-term.

152. The UK sees the UNODC as the natural long-term partner in the region and is increasingly working to support the work of UNODC-led regional counter-narcotics co-ordination and capacity-building mechanisms. For example, the UK applied for observer status of the Central Asian Regional Information and Co-ordination Centre in 2010 and is sharing expertise on best practice with the Secretariat.

153. Though the effectiveness of these regional co-ordination mechanisms is yet to be fully proven, the UK is working hard to encourage and support key partners in the region to co-ordinate under these projects. The region, working with Afghan partners, needs to co-operate at a policy and operational level, to tackle the trafficking of Afghan-cultivated drugs and to take action against key logistical elements, such as money-laundering and precursor chemicals.

Future Challenges

154. Consistent with the process of “Afghanisation”, the UK is looking to transition out of its G8 role, as the mechanism comes to its natural end. Instead, our focus from 2011 will be to help establish the UNODC as the main partner with the Afghan Government. The UNODC is working closely with the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics in the development of a sustainable Afghan-led counter-narcotics policy, including currently...
supporting the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics to refresh the NDCS for 2011. This is not the UK pulling out of
counter-narcotics, just looking to do it differently, consolidating and building upon the progress that has been
made. We will continue to provide direct support to successful US and UK programmes to build Afghan
capacity in the law enforcement field.

AFGHANISTAN: REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

155. Afghanistan’s region has an important role to play in supporting Afghanistan to become a stable and
secure state, as well as to face major challenges including combating extremism and terrorism, illegal migration,
narcotics, and to promote economic and social development. Afghanistan is actively seeking to improve its
bilateral relations within the region. It is also working to develop strategies for improved regional co-operation,
with support from the UK and other international partners and institutions.

156. The UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan is the main lead on co-ordinating international support. The
UK has actively supported the UN’s role and encouraged greater co-ordination between the UN, EU and NATO,
particularly on joined up political messaging. The UK is also engaging with other international bodies including
the OSCE to explore ways to improve co-ordination.

157. When he was appointed US Special Envoy on Afghanistan and Pakistan in January 2009, Richard
Holbrooke established an SRAP (Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan) network which has now
grown to some 40 strong, covering G8, several EU, P5 and regional countries. The network meets several
times a year to share and discuss ideas for political and occasionally economic progress in Afghanistan and
Pakistan. A caucus of EU SRAPs help support the EU Presidency in driving forward internal EU Afghanistan
and Pakistan business. The SRAP network is not a policy formulation or decision-making body.

REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

158. Afghanistan’s neighbours have a political as well as an economic stake in co-operation and the major
ethnic groups such as Hazaras, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Pashtuns all have ties to neighbouring countries.
International recognition of the importance of regional co-operation in support of Afghan stability has grown
since 2001. None of Afghanistan’s neighbours have an interest in either a return to Taliban rule or absolute
chaos in Afghanistan. They have all, in different ways, suffered as a result of Afghanistan’s varying levels of
instability during the past 20 years (drugs, refugees, border management, economic impact). Some, such as
Iran, are sensitive to any long-term western military presence in Afghanistan. Russia and China do not want
NATO to fail, because of the risk of extremist contagion. But they, too, are sensitive about the prospect of a
long-term western military presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan and India regard their ability to exert an influence
in Afghanistan and the wider region as an important way to deliver their own enduring security and stability.

159. Regional co-operation was a major theme of the London and Kabul Conferences. To help address this
fear of instability and encourage a supportive and coherent response from the region, Afghanistan and
participants at the Conferences reaffirmed that they would, among other objectives work actively for Afghan-
led peace, reintegration and reconciliation; to combat terrorism; develop trans-regional trade; and support
people-to people contact. In addition, Afghanistan is now a member of several regional organisations, including
the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), the Economic Co-operation Organisation
(ECO) and Central Asia Regional Economic Co-operation (CAREC). A number of international donors and
financial institutions finance the development of regional transport and energy infrastructure.

160. The UK advocates a regional (yet Afghan-led) approach to tackling Afghanistan’s problems. In 2005, the
UK was instrumental in setting up the Regional Economic Co-operation Conference on Afghanistan
(RECCA), the only regional economic initiative with Afghanistan at its centre. The UK continues to support
regional co-operation in support of Afghanistan through funding the establishment of a Centre for Regional
Co-operation (CRC) in the Afghan Government’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). This Afghan-led centre
is tasked with promoting economic integration between Afghanistan and the broader region.

Pakistan

161. Improved relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are in the mutual interest of both countries, as
well as our own. Problems in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region are shared and represent a global threat.
Continued military operations on both sides of the border are vital to maintaining pressure on the Taliban. The
UK encourages both countries to work together on security, stability, and prosperity with closer co-operation
between key institutions.

162. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have peaked and troughed since 2001. During a visit to
Islamabad in March 2010, President Karzai described the two countries as “conjoined twins”, symbolising a
gradual shift towards a more co-operative relationship, with both sides trying to tackle a shared problem.
Pakistan is increasingly recognising that it has suffered, particularly in the border areas, from instability in
Afghanistan. This has prompted Islamabad to increase military and security co-operation with Kabul. Pakistan
also seems to be taking a greater interest in a political settlement in Afghanistan through offering support for
an Afghan-led reconciliation effort.
163. Despite these encouraging signs, there remains much to do to build trust between the countries. The UK is committed to supporting this. We welcome the regular discussions that now take place between Pakistani and Afghan politicians and officials on subjects ranging from counter-terrorism to counter-narcotics and economic growth. Increased technical co-operation between the two countries’ armed forces, police and border management services is also vital. Progress is being made, but whether implementation is effectively followed through remains to be seen.

**Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA)**

164. Pakistan is Afghanistan’s largest (and a growing) trading partner. Pakistan and Afghanistan signed a road map towards ratification of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA) on 18 July after four years of negotiations. The agreement is designed to improve trade links by facilitating imports and exports across Pakistan’s land routes to the coast (Karachi) and India (Wagah). Experts believe implementation could double annual trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is also a symbol of increased co-operation between the two countries.

**Afghanistan Pakistan Border Region Prosperity Initiative (APBRPI)**

165. The UK has been working within the G8 to support initiatives focusing on bilateral trade across the border. This culminated in the launch of the Afghanistan Pakistan Border Region Prosperity Initiative (APBRPI) during the 2010 G8 Summit under the Canadian presidency. In its first year, the APBRPI is expected to focus on two infrastructure projects identified as priorities by the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, a Peshawar-Jalalabad Expressway and a feasibility study for a Peshawar-Jalalabad rail link. Efforts are now focused on working closely with Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank on implementation, which is likely to take several years.

**Dubai Process**

166. The Dubai Process is a Canadian-led initiative that brings together officials and experts at a working level from Afghanistan and Pakistan to address issues of mutual interest, including counter-narcotics, migration and customs. Recent rounds of talks have led to agreement on practical steps including on harmonising plans for development at the border crossing points, and on a biometrics pilot project. The UK has pledged £350,000 in the current financial year from the Pakistan Conflict Prevention Pool to support work on enhanced border management, including through cross-border collaboration. This forms part of the UNODC’s new country programme for Pakistan which supports the Dubai Process.

**International Co-ordination**

167. The UK has been at the forefront of the international community’s lobbying for closer co-operation and co-ordination between the UN, NATO and EU and the Afghan Government. 2010 has seen a real improvement in this relationship. UN Secretary General’s Special Representative to Afghanistan (UN SRSG) Staffan De Mistura, the NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) Mark Sedwill and the EU Special Representative (EUSR) Vygaudas Usackas now meet on a regular basis. The broader international community also has a role to play. Many of our international partners have chosen to focus on regional issues—Canada, Germany and the US are focusing on processes that bring together Afghanistan and Pakistan, such as the Dubai Process. Others, such as the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank, are playing a key role in improving transport and energy infrastructure, whilst NGOs like the Aga Khan Development Network are implementing development projects and building up relations between communities in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.

**United Nations**

168. The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), currently under the leadership of the SRSG Staffan De Mistura, was established through UNSCR 1401 on 28 March 2002 in support of the Bonn Agreement of the same year. Since 2002, the Mission’s mandate has been expanded to include political outreach, support for sub-national governance (including human rights), humanitarian aid, elections, co-operation with ISAF, providing support for an Afghan-led peace process and promoting international engagement with Afghanistan. UNAMA currently operates from eight regional offices and 15 provincial offices throughout Afghanistan.

169. In recent months UNAMA has increased the size of its mission in Kabul. UN Security Council Resolution 1917 (2010) stresses the importance of expanding and strengthening the presence of UNAMA and other UN agencies, funds and programmes in the provinces of Afghanistan. Security concerns have, in recent months, made this difficult for the UN. Following an attack on a UN guesthouse in Kabul in November 2009, extra security restrictions have been imposed on UN staff. In the run up to the September Parliamentary elections in September 2010, 600 non-essential staff were, as a precaution, temporarily evacuated from the country. Despite this, UN specialist agencies, including the World Food Programme, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organisation now
have permanent operations across the country. UN operations have greatly increased the amount of humanitarian assistance reaching ordinary Afghans in need.

170. We have welcomed the UN’s co-ordinating role at major international conferences on Afghanistan, such as co-chairing the London and Kabul Conferences. We have lobbied for our international partners to provide additional resources to UNAMA and to offer support to the Mission and to SRSG De Mistura. We remain strongly supportive of the UN’s central role in Afghanistan and continue to work closely with UNAMA in Kabul and the provinces of Afghanistan. We continue to offer and look to provide practical support where possible.

**European Union**

171. The overall EU funding in Afghanistan is around €1 billion per annum on average. This comprises European Commission (EC) plus individual Member States’ bilateral programmes. In 2010, the EC spend under the Development Co-operation Instrument (DCI), which is the main country programme for Afghanistan, is projected to be around €168 million. This will be spent on programmes for local development, health, governance, and regional co-operation. In addition to spending under the DCI, around €41 million is projected to be spent from other EU instruments, including Humanitarian Aid, Food Security, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.

172. The European Commission is in the final stages of preparing a new National Indicative Programme for 2011–13, with an increased allocation of €200 million per year for the Afghanistan DCI country programme. Projects will focus on rural development, governance and rule of law, including justice and police reform, and health. In addition to these main focal areas, EC assistance will also be channelled into programmes for vulnerable groups such as street children, orphans and abandoned women, continuing the EC de-mining programme in partnership with the UN, and support for initiatives to build regional co-operation in trade, border management and co-operation on counter-narcotics.

173. The EU Action Plan for enhanced engagement in Afghanistan was adopted at the 2009 October European Council. It is a road map for a strengthened, more co-ordinated EU effort which also aims to align EC programmes with those of other Member States. EU Special Representative (EUSR). Lithuanian former Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas, took up position in Kabul on 2 April in a double-hatted role, combining head of the EU delegation in Afghanistan and head of the EC’s technical assistance operations with oversight of all EC managed assistance programmes. The UK welcomed Usackas’s focus on accelerating implementation of the EU Action Plan and urged Member States to do all they can to ensure Usackas had all the support he needed to deliver. The UK also welcomed Usackas’s position as Head of a strengthened and streamlined EU Delegation, bringing together the offices of the EC and EU Special Representative as a signal that the EU was increasing its focus in Afghanistan.

174. There are a number of other International Institutions and International Financial Institutions involved in Afghanistan including the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Asia Development Bank (ADB)/Central Asia/Regional Economic Co-operation (CAREC), the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

**AFGHANISTAN: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS**

*International community communications*

175. In 2001, post-11 September 2001, the message was clear: it was in the interests of international security to remove the Taliban regime.

176. Since that time, unity of message has been more difficult. ISAF nations have had differing experiences, depending on resources and geographical deployment, and this has been reflected in differing messages being conveyed to domestic audiences. Those engaged in relatively secure and stable areas, for example, communicated a more upbeat message of reconstruction. Confusion grew about whether the international community’s efforts were aimed at tackling international terrorism, countering insurgency, humanitarian relief or promoting democracy. This confusion—together with increasing investment required by counter insurgency, inevitable setbacks in progress including civilian casualties and insurgent propaganda—led many, in Afghanistan and internationally, to question the international community’s strategy.

177. NATO/ISAF and the wider international community recognised these challenges and the obstacles such communication presented to the success of our engagement in Afghanistan. Resource was invested in strategic communication to achieve a more coherent explanation of the international engagement in Afghanistan, including prioritising support to Afghan Government communication efforts.

178. Coherence of communications improved in mid 2009 when ISAF nations publicly endorsed the new population-centric counter-insurgency strategy drawn up by the then Commander of ISAF, General Stanley McChrystal. This strategy allowed ISAF nations to coalesce around one political-military counter-insurgency strategy which, in turn, encouraged communicators across NATO/ISAF to focus their messaging on countering the insurgency whilst protecting the population and reducing civilian casualties to help build a stable and secure Afghanistan, able to take responsibility for its own security and prevent the return of al-Qaeda. The current
Commander of ISAF, General David Petraeus, has firmly and publicly asserted his commitment to the counter-insurgency strategy. International community messages are now broadly consistent, focusing on the importance of building the Afghan National Security Forces, combating corruption and improving governance in Afghanistan to enable the Afghan Government to lead the security responsibility throughout the country and ISAF combat troops can begin to draw down towards 2015.

179. Although the message is clearer, the international community continues to contend with waning public support for its engagement in Afghanistan. Media attention focuses on ISAF and civilian casualties, allegations of fraud in Presidential and Parliamentary elections, corruption and difficulty in improving the capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces.

180. The UK is recognised within NATO as a nation which is driving improvements in NATO/ISAF strategic communications. The British Embassy works closely and successfully with international communicators in Kabul to harmonise messaging. A clear example of this was the way in which the Embassy worked with the UN, ISAF, SCR’s Office, EU, US and Canadians on recent Parliamentary elections. We will continue to work with our international partners to ensure we maximise the effect of joint efforts, including working with NATO/ISAF to find new ways to communicate evidence of nation-wide progress. The international community also needs to do more to build the Afghan Government’s capacity to communicate with its domestic, and with international, media. All of these efforts must inform a coherent and persuasive narrative to ensure Afghan and international audiences lend their support to, and share the burden of, the international community’s continued engagement in Afghanistan.

181. Stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan are inextricably linked. A widening of the international strategic communications effort is needed to try to reduce misunderstandings and suspicion between Afghanistan and Pakistan, by establishing a better ISAF narrative for Pakistan. This must recognise the unique political, social and security structures in Pakistan whilst reinforcing the requirement for co-operation and coherence between Pakistani and Afghan political and military strategies to defeat the shared challenges of terrorism and militancy, and set the conditions for regional security and stability.

UK APPROACH

182. The UK’s primary communications objective is to improve public understanding of, and support for, the campaign in Afghanistan. Additional priorities include: demonstrating commitment to, and the commitment of, our troops (equipment; care and support; recognising achievements and sacrifice); highlighting progress; and ‘internationalising’ our message. We aim to achieve this through a cross-governmental approach, which co-ordinates departmental efforts and ensures all activities are consistent with the overall strategic narrative. The PUS of Government Communications chairs a weekly meeting of Communication Directors and officials from key departments. Day to day co-ordination at working level is led by the Cross-Government Afghan Communications Team (ACT), based in the FCO and reporting to Number Ten. A weekly meeting of the Afghan Information Strategy Group brings together officials from the ACT, FCO, MOD, DFID, Stabilisation Unit, British Embassy Kabul, ISAF, Provincial Reconstruction Team Lashkar Gah and the UK Delegation to NATO to discuss current issues.

183. Departments and Posts work together to engage the domestic, Afghan and international media and opinion formers, and improve Afghan communications capacity and impact. These efforts aim to deepen public and international understanding of why we are in Afghanistan, explain the national security angle, broaden coverage beyond military operations and present a clear, realistic picture of Afghans taking increasing responsibility for their own security.

184. Activities include: a programme of cross-Government Ministerial/Senior Official media briefings; a media embed programme to Helmand; quarterly meetings with key interest groups, including Parliamentarians, the Diplomatic Corps in London, NGOs and the Afghan diaspora; digital diplomacy (websites, Twitter Q&A); outreach events; seminars; debates and visits. Specific activities are also carried out around significant events, such as the London Conference in January, the Kabul Conference in July, security operations (e.g. Moshtarak), and Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

185. The media focus on the security challenge and continuing British casualties, with relatively little attention paid to progress in other areas, impacts upon public opinion on the international campaign. For now the UK public remains supportive of UK forces involvement in Afghanistan (source: MOD polling), but less supportive of overall UK involvement (source: various polling). Opposition has grown over recent years at the same time as any perception of progress has diminished. Our principal challenge, therefore, is to demonstrate more effectively the real progress that is being made across the country, particularly on governance, justice and economic development.

186. The UK Government operates a system of embedded reporting slots, or ‘embeds’ to showcase the progress being made in Helmand. A cross-Government group, consisting of representatives from DFID, the FCO, and MOD, meets regularly to discuss which reporters to engage on visits to the PRT. Depending on their intended focus—military, political or development—the reporters are then taken on a tailored programme to meet people, and visit sites, which will be of interest. This embed programme has resulted in significant, sustained coverage in print and broadcast media for the UK’s efforts in Helmand, across a broad spectrum of
military and development work. There is also an active, Kabul-based press corps that represents a number of UK media outlets, including the BBC, The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian and The Independent.

187. The focus on Helmand and the ongoing military operations there is understandable given the scale of the UK military effort and the concentration of our presence in southern Afghanistan. However, it has presented a significant challenge in terms of communicating progress and stabilisation, both in Helmand and in Afghanistan as a whole. Communicating non-military progress will be an essential element of the transition process. Part of the communications challenge will be to demonstrate that Afghanistan has the capability to manage its own security and governance.

188. Work continues to co-ordinate further the international communications effort, to provide systematic messaging for the UK public on progress and to encourage the media to broaden its focus to include reporting of progress across Afghanistan as well as Helmand. As part of this work we are reviewing whether our current embed system, which facilitates a Helmand focus, should be reconfigured. Regarding the political track, the international community is agreed that this must be Afghan-led. Our primary objective is to support the Afghan Government’s delivery of commitments to the Afghan people, with the international community playing a discreet role in support of this.

Parliamentary Engagement

189. The FCO is committed to strengthening its links with Parliament. To this end, after the current Government was formed, the FCO held open days for Parliamentarians, including a specific session on Afghanistan and Pakistan. The FCO also organised a briefing for MPs by key Ambassadors in the South Asian region, including the Ambassadors to Kabul, Islamabad and Washington, enabling Parliamentarians to debate the issues in-depth.

190. The Prime Minister has undertaken to keep Parliament regularly informed on progress in Afghanistan, which will ensure that there is regular opportunity to debate these important issues in the House.

191. The Government holds quarterly roundtable meetings for Parliamentarians, hosted by Ministers, with senior officials from across government departments. FCO and other government officials regularly attend APPG (All-Party Parliamentary Group—for Afghanistan) and other relevant meetings held in Parliament, and speak at these events if invited. The FCO, alongside other government departments has also facilitated visits to Afghanistan for parliamentary committees.

The extremist narrative

192. Through the overseas counter-terrorism PREVENT strategy, the UK is countering the ideology and narrative that terrorists use and tackling radicalisation in countries that represent the most significant threat to the UK and UK interests. Examples of the work we are doing in this area include redrafting foreign policy public lines to rebut the conspiracy theories articulated by al-Qaeda and linked extremists.

193. Military intervention by international forces in Afghanistan was a cause of concern to many in Muslim communities both in the UK and overseas. Extremists including al-Qaeda and the Taliban have exploited this concern since 2001 when calling for attacks against the West, by arguing that military intervention in Afghanistan was part of some wider campaign against Islam. The objective of our work on Afghanistan is to undermine the (large) role that the Afghan insurgency plays in the global, extremist narrative. A wide range of commentators within the Islamic world do recognise the important role the international community is playing in Afghanistan.

194. Since March 2008 the FCO’s PREVENT team has driven an outreach programme aimed at opening up spaces for informed debate with British Muslim communities around foreign policy. To date, over 100 events have taken place across the UK involving Ministers and officials.

195. Ministers have taken part in discussions with Muslim opinion formers as well as debates with young Muslims. These have provided the Government with opportunities to engage at grass roots level and have been extremely successful in allowing us to communicate our policies around issues such as Afghanistan. The programme has been well received and audiences have made clear their appreciation for our willingness to engage, especially on the harder issues. We have received positive feedback from participants after events, many of whom comment that the outreach events have made them think more critically about how foreign policy is formed. Since its inception, the appetite for these outreach events has grown substantially—a further measure of success.

196. In addition, the UK has put in place a programme of “Projecting British Muslims” (PBM) visits by prominent British Muslims to Muslim-majority countries. The aim is to provide a platform for British Muslims to share their experiences as Muslims in Britain today and engage in constructive dialogue and debate.

197. Two PBM visits to Afghanistan in October 2009 and September 2010 were intended to counter the narrative propagated by violent extremists, including insurgents in Afghanistan, that the UK is hostile to the Muslim world. These visits have also helped to undermine extremist propaganda in the UK. During the most recent trip the delegates acknowledged that they arrived in Afghanistan with preconceived ideas of the challenges faced by all parties in bringing about a peaceful and stable solution. One of the delegates said he
had been very sceptical of UK Government policy in Afghanistan. However, by the end of the trip, their views had changed. One delegate said: “Coming here and seeing with your own eyes what’s happening with the training and the resources shows you how committed everyone is to making Afghanistan a better place”. Upon return to the UK the delegates have been active within their communities (in schools, with fellow scholars and in local mosques) in sharing their experiences, helping to correct possible misconceptions about the UK in Afghanistan.

198. To break down Afghan misconceptions about UK life and the reasons for UK involvement in Afghanistan, the UK strategy will continue to include public diplomacy and outreach efforts, such as bilateral visits by prominent Muslim opinion-formers. The visit by the Director of Hajj to the UK, accompanied by two Helmand journalists at the Government’s invitation, (March 2010) was a good example of the power of showing the diverse face of modern Britain to Afghan influencers. The delegation was able to meet a broad range of people in the UK.

199. The FCO has worked hard to explain our foreign policy to the UK and international public in order to address inaccurate perceptions. We do this through media and public diplomacy work, including putting Arabic and Urdu-speaking spokespeople forward to media outlets such as Al Jazeera, and speeches, interviews and articles by Ministers and Ambassadors.

AFGHANISTAN COMMUNICATION—BUILDING GOVERNMENT AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA CAPACITY

UK aims

200. There are four areas of focus to our communications activities in Afghanistan: increasing the Afghan Government’s ability to communicate credibly and authoritatively with the Afghan people, particularly in the Pashtun Belt; helping the independent media in Afghanistan to increase its capacity; disseminating UK messages to the Afghan public via the Afghan media; and working closely with the international community to harmonise messaging around key events (eg Kabul Conference, Elections) as well as encouraging the Afghan Government to adopt effective Afghan-facing communications plans for these events.

Afghanistan media environment

201. Under the Taliban, the Afghan media was extremely restricted. Today, although still in its infancy, there is a growing independent media sector. According to BBC Monitoring data, there are around 140 radio and 65 television stations operating across the country, although many of these are broadcast only at the local or provincial level. There are thought to be around 200 urban-based press titles with around 30 considered to be significant. Around 80% of Afghanistan’s urban population has access to a television, a figure that falls to around 30% in rural areas. Almost 90% of Afghans listen to the radio at least once a month. Internet penetration is small but growing.6 Mobile phone ownership and use is increasing and various international partners are looking into ways to exploit this for messaging purposes. However increasing access to television in rural areas may be a more effective means of reaching key audiences.

202. The principles of free speech are included in the Afghan Constitution and defined in a media law passed in 2008 by the Afghan Parliament. The law has, however, yet to be implemented. Ensuring that the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Afghan Constitution is delivered is a challenge. Journalists are still sometimes subjected to intimidation and restrictions (both from the insurgency and the Government).

Building Afghan Government Communications Capacity

203. The Afghan Government’s own capacity to communicate credibly and authoritatively has improved since 2007. The Government Media and Information Centre (GMIC) established in 2008 by the UK with support from international partners hosts several ministerial press conferences per week, including a weekly update from the President’s spokesman and a weekly joint Afghan MOD-ISAF press update. The GMIC recently moved to new premises close to the MFA with larger and more substantial briefing facilities. It played a key role in the communications effort for the Kabul Conference when its new facilities met the needs of the international and Afghan press. The GMIC also provides training to ministerial and provincial government press officers. In the last year a new regional GMIC has opened in Kandahar and plans are being formulated for another to open later this year. The Office of the President’s Spokesperson has falls under the remit of this office.

204. Although the GMIC is a positive start, institutionalising the GMIC communications approach within the Afghan Government and standardising best communications practice across government departments will require reliable, long-term international funding and support. The Office of the President’s Spokesperson has improved its role in providing leadership on government communications. Likewise certain ministries, such as the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior, are improving but the communications performance of other ministries is varied. Ministries face practical communications challenges ranging from defunct press offices to intermittent electricity supply and lack of IT. Some ministries which are central to the quality of peoples’ lives fail to communicate with the Afghan public. There is currently no coherent international effort to help the

6 Source—BBC Monitoring, Media Environment Guide: Afghanistan July 2010
Afghan Government address this situation, and the ANDS (Afghan National Development Strategy) does not encompass government communications.

205. To address this, the UK is seeking the co-operation of the Afghan Government and international partners to set up an international trust fund in 2010–11 for the development of an Afghan Government Information Service (AGIS). This would seek to develop the GMIC into a government communications service with common standards across ministries and provincial governors’ offices. The fund would support the training and deployment of professional communicators to each of the 25 ministries and 34 provincial governors’ offices. The project seeks to improve donor co-ordination so that all major international donors supporting Afghan Government communications work to the same plan and the same standards. This is a long-term endeavour likely to require three to five years of funding. If successful, it would considerably improve the ability of the Government to communicate with the Afghan people, which should boost its credibility in the eyes of the Afghan public whilst undermining that of the insurgency.

**Developing effective communication between the Government and the population in Helmand**

206. In Helmand, Governor Mangal is making impressive efforts to communicate with the Helmandi population, both in person at shuras and over the radio, enabling him to interact directly with them, and highlight progress in the province. He has become increasingly effective at getting positive messages out through both local and national media. His press team is supported and mentored by the PRT Strategic Communications team.

207. The strategic communications priorities for the Helmand PRT this year are: to continue to build Helmand Government capacity and capability to engage; to support the development of a stronger and larger independent media sector; to mentor the Helmand Government in the delivery of a series of campaigns to highlight progress in Helmand to seek to achieve behaviour change which undermines the insurgency.

208. Government capacity building is focused on developing the ability to engage beyond the provincial centre and on increasing the number of provincial officials who are capable of media engagement. A provincial information network has been established through the appointment of District Communications Advisors. They will engage with the media where opportunities arise, act as a conduit for messaging from Lashkar Gah, will pass information back to the Government Media Centre and help the Government to engage through informal, traditional Afghan communication methods such as shuras. A professional training course is being provided to ensure the District Communications Advisers are capable of filling their roles. Media training will also be provided for officials from a range of departments.

209. Work to support the independent media sector is focused on establishing a media presence beyond the provincial centre through a training and mentoring programme for journalists based in the districts. The PRT is also providing refresher training to journalists based in Lashkar Gah. With no Lashkar Gah-based print media, and no physical distribution capacity, the focus is on radio. The PRT and TPH are supportive of the private FM channels, including a female-oriented station and are supporting them through funds for the Government Media Centre for public information campaigns. The programming capacity of the stations is still very limited. There is a huge demand for Pashtu language content. The PRT is considering how to establish a media production college in the Southern Pashtun belt that would train producers to meet this demand.

210. The PRT is also working to encourage the Helmand Government to adopt a campaigning approach to communication. Through improved message and product development by the Government Media Centre, effective use of all available delivery mechanisms, (including media relations, bought broadcast, print media and formal and informal networks for word-of-mouth communication) and measurement of effect, the Government will be more able to engage with the population and demonstrate progress throughout Helmand. Communicating that progress, authentically through Helmandi channels, will build government credibility and help to undermine the insurgency.

**Improving Afghan Independent Media**

211. In parallel to the AGIS, the UK is also working with international partners in 2010–11 to try to develop an international trust fund to develop the Afghan independent media. As with the AGIS, this would seek to improve donor co-ordination in support of the Afghan media and help it develop into a useful democratic tool to hold the Government to account, whilst providing an independent (from either Government or Taliban control) source of information. This should weaken the insurgency by challenging Taliban propaganda and, gradually and in concert with progress in areas such as anti-corruption, increase public confidence in the Afghan Government.

212. The UK continues to provide financial support for media development projects delivered by organisations such as the BBC World Service Trust (BBC WST). In 2008–09 and 2009–10 we provided around £340,000 of funding to BBC WS to establish and broadcast the Pashtu language news show, Stasu Naray, which received good feedback during audience polling in the summer of 2009. In 2009–10 we continued our support for Straight Talk, a youth-oriented news show, with £60,000. This developed its output to include live broadcasts as well as syndicated repeat transmissions on over 20 radio stations across Afghanistan. Limited qualitative evaluation indicates that the show is popular in the south of Afghanistan (a key audience) and
amongst women. We also allocated £100,000 to the popular BBC show New Home, New Life, which has an audience of around 14 million.

213. The UK has also provided support for developing Afghanistan’s communications infrastructure. In 2009–10 the FCO allocated funding to the BBC WST for three extra FM radio transmitters to be constructed in southern Afghanistan. The BBC WST has identified suitable sites, bought the equipment and is in the process of erecting the transmitters.

Future Priorities

214. The Afghan Government increasingly has to contend with the insurgency’s ability to wage sophisticated information warfare. The insurgency propaganda machine is highly reactive and not bound by the complexities of fact. “Traditional” communications channels (i.e. word of mouth) remain powerful, especially in the south of the country. In the absence of timely and authoritative government information, rumour and propaganda can easily dominate.

215. The Afghan Government needs also to improve the delivery of security, justice and essential services if it is to enhance its credibility and gain the confidence of the people. Communications can help to amplify successes in these areas and build momentum, but communications need to be underpinned by actual progress in these areas.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan: Bilateral Engagement

Strategic Dialogue

216. The British Government is committed to a long-term, productive partnership with Pakistan based on shared interests and mutual respect. The multiplicity of British connections to Pakistan through families and history gives Britain a particular role in supporting Pakistan’s democratic future: we are committed to strengthening strategic and co-operative ties between both countries, including through an enhanced UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue.

217. The UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue was launched in May 2009 by then PM Gordon Brown and President Zardari to provide a framework for the UK’s high-level engagement on a range of shared interests. UK priorities under the dialogue include closer co-operation on counter-terrorism and education. Pakistani priorities are greater trade access to the EU, migration and visas, and access to UK technology and funding.

218. The Prime Minister and President Zardari publicly committed on 6 August 2010 to deepening and enhancing the UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue, during President Zardari’s visit to London. The first substantive meeting under the enhanced Dialogue will take place during the visit of Foreign Minister Qureshi to London in October. The Prime Minister has committed to visit Pakistan for the first annual Summit under the enhanced Dialogue.

Internal Political

219. Pakistan’s democracy is in transition, following a return to democratic rule in 2008. The ruling Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) is led by President Zardari. Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League—PML (N)—is the main opposition party and there are a variety of other vocal regional parties. The military remains both popular with ordinary Pakistanis and institutionally powerful: it recently saw a significant uplift to its funding in the current budget agreed by the Government. The judiciary also wields significant influence. Tensions remain between the Supreme Court and the Executive, particularly surrounding a number of high profile corruption cases involving members of the Government.

18th Amendment

220. Over the past year the Government has made progress towards a more embedded civilian democracy. In April 2010, President Zardari signed the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, the result of long-term negotiations between all political parties, and passed by both the National Assembly and the Senate unanimously. The 18th Amendment is one of the most complex pieces of legislation passed by the Pakistani Parliament. It provides for a re-balancing of power from the Presidency in favour of the Prime Minister and Parliament, in line with the provisions of the 1973 Constitution. Many powers reserved by the federal government have been devolved exclusively to the provinces, which will help to restore the balance between the centre and the periphery and begin to address longstanding grievances. Additional measures include a new judicial commission created to reduce political interference in the judicial system and the renaming of North West Frontier Province as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The cross-party consensus achieved during the consultation and ratification process represented a significant step forward for Pakistan’s democracy.

221. The Supreme Court has taken up the 18th Amendment with specific regard to the judicial commission and the appointment process, which it feels allows too much power to the executive. They have yet to rule on the legislation but until they do, progress on implementation cannot be made. Effective implementation will be the key challenge. This includes ensuring that provincial authorities have the human and financial resources
to perform their new functions and establishing an effective form of local government in the provinces, which is likely to take several years. Pakistan’s floods have highlighted issues with the capacity of the provincial governments, who will become responsible for delivering the majority of state services following the implementation of these constitutional reforms.

Electoral Reform

222. The federal elections of 2008 were important for Pakistan’s democracy. The EU and other election observation bodies made a number of recommendations to make elections in Pakistan fully fair and free. This is an important indicator for Pakistan’s transition to a stable and democratic civilian state. The next federal elections are scheduled for 2013. The UK is working with the international community to support electoral reform via an international co-ordination group, the Electoral Support Group, with IFES (a respected international election organisation) as the secretariat and advisers. There has been significant progress, resulting in the recent launch and steps towards implementation of a five-year strategy to tackle the problems highlighted by the international community in the last elections.

UK Trade and Investment

Bilateral Trade

223. The UK and Pakistan are partners in business and we are looking to build on the strong commercial links between both countries. The UK’s Deputy High Commission in Karachi is the centre of UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) activity in Pakistan. We are focused on facilitating better trade between the two countries, which we will support with a number of measures, including the UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue. Trade between the UK and Pakistan is worth £1 billion per year and we are working to ensure that this increases. In 2009, the UK exported £458 million in goods and services and the UK imported £646 million in goods and services from Pakistan. The UK is the second largest bilateral overseas investor in Pakistan with over 100 UK companies now operating there. Major players include Unilever, Shell, BP, GlaxoSmithKline, Standard Chartered Bank, International Power, HSBC and Barclays. Thanks to its pro-business regulatory regime, which allows 100% remittance of capital and profits in many sectors (top in South Asia on the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business survey), experienced international firms are comfortable doing business in Pakistan and make impressive profits. Six of the 16 foreign petroleum companies and two of the 16 private independent power producers are British. British pharmaceutical firms have a 31% share of the market. There is a substantial and growing presence in the health, education and retail sectors.

Trade Capacity Building

224. The EC have committed to providing €15 million for trade co-operation, 2011–13, and the UK will work closely with the EC and other partners such as the Asian Development Bank to ensure the most effective trade capacity building measures are implemented.

Imports and Exports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK Exports to Pakistan</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010 (Jan-June)</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£489.9m</td>
<td>£426m</td>
<td>£464.9m</td>
<td>£458.7m</td>
<td>£205m</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Imports from Pakistan</td>
<td>£523.3m</td>
<td>£515m</td>
<td>£596.3m</td>
<td>£646.1m</td>
<td>£360.1m</td>
<td>+19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

225. Major Pakistani imports from the UK are specialised industrial machinery, power generation machinery, Telecom and Broadcasting Equipment, chemicals, pharmaceutical and medical products, and metalliferous ores and metal scrap. Major Pakistani exports to UK are textiles (yarn, fabric, garments, towels and bedding), rice, leather and leather products, carpets and fruit. The UK is the fourth largest trading partner among OECD countries.

British-Pakistan Foundation

226. The British-Pakistan Foundation was first proposed by Foreign Minister Qureshi in July 2009. Following an initial consultative meeting in the UK in January 2010, a steering board was established and has since led on progress with the FCO and the Pakistan High Commission working together in a supportive role, where required. The Foundation’s senior board members are James Caan, Khalid Darr, Mahnaz Malik, Faisal Mian, Asif Rangoonwala, Kashif Zafar.

227. The Foundation will be formally launched on 16 October in an event largely focused on fundraising for Pakistan’s flood appeal. It will be a self-funded, non-political, independent organisation that aims to promote
cross-cultural and economic links, with a focus on youth, and to celebrate and deepen the strong UK-Pakistan bilateral relationship.

Migration and Visas

228. Migration is a high profile issue for the Government of Pakistan, media and British-Pakistanis as well as being a high priority for the UK Government. The UK welcomes all genuine visitors from Pakistan, who can demonstrate that they meet the UK’s entry requirements. Visa application numbers are the fourth highest in the world. Pakistan has one of the highest refusal rates due to concerns around security, fraud, forced marriage and economic motivations.

229. A number of projects support the UK’s migration policy in Pakistan, including under the Returns and Reintegration fund. Examples of these projects include a capacity building project within the Federal Investigation Agency and the development and maintenance of the Managed Migration Cell, which has been used to conduct migration research projects. These initiatives have helped facilitate the development of an effective relationship with the Pakistani Government which has in turn seen an increase in co-operation on migration issues. The UK also supports projects which allow illegal migrants the opportunity to return to Pakistan voluntarily.

The Visa Operation

230. The UK is committed to providing an efficient and effective visa service for our customers. Applications submitted in Pakistan are assessed in the same manner and against the same immigration rules as applications from every other nationality. UKBA process applications from Pakistan across three locations: Islamabad, Abu Dhabi and the UK Visa Section. The Islamabad and Abu Dhabi visa sections process Pakistani non-settlement applications, and are currently assessing applications within the global customer service standards. The problems of 2009 have been overcome; the UK Visa Section currently processes Pakistani settlement applications and is also operating within customer service standards.

English language requirement for spouses

231. The UK Government announced on 9 June 2010 that it would introduce an English language requirement for non-European nationals seeking to enter or remain in the UK as the spouse or partner of a British citizen or person settled here. This is a new requirement for the marriage visa route and will be brought in on 29 November 2010. Until then, there is currently no English requirement for those entering the UK on spouse visas or as a partner of a British citizen or permanent resident. Spouses are currently required to demonstrate English language ability and knowledge of life in the UK before being granted indefinite leave to remain (following completion of two years’ leave in the UK). The aim is to promote integration into British society and ensure that migrant spouses are equipped to play a full part in British life. We will review language requirements across the immigration system in the future to ensure requirements are being set at the right level.

Managed Migration

232. We have had a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Managed Migration between the UK and Pakistan for the past five years. A new EU Readmission Agreement (EURA) with Pakistan has been negotiated. The European Parliament gave its consent to the Agreement on 21 September 2010 and the Agreement now needs to be formally adopted by the Council.

Illegal migration from Pakistan to the UK

233. Migration drivers, primarily high unemployment and poorly paid employment, remain a significant issue for Pakistan, and its remittance economy continues to grow substantially. Illegal clandestine migration poses serious risks to the safety of illegal migrants: we discourage people from taking the decision to attempt to work in the UK illegally.

Consular

234. The majority of British nationals in Pakistan are dual nationals either living in Pakistan or visiting family members (estimated to be approximately 80,000 at any one time). Consular assistance is only offered to dual nationals in exceptional circumstances. The High Commission deals with a number of complex and sensitive cases; many of which attract substantial media and parliamentary attention. These include forced marriages, international parental child abduction, kidnaps, detainees and subsequent allegations of mistreatment and/or death penalty sentences, vulnerable adults being held against their will and a range of personal disputes including about property ownership.

Forced Marriage

235. The Forced Marriage Unit (a joint unit of the Home Office and FCO) was set up in 2005. It is the central point in Government for forced marriage policy, undertakes an outreach programme of over 80 events a year, and runs a helpline to provide support and assistance to victims of forced marriage and to professionals
who come across cases. In 2009, the Unit dealt with nearly 1,700 reports of possible forced marriage. 56% of these were linked to Pakistan and the majority of those to Mirpur in Kashmir. The Unit's assistance ranges from simple advice, right through to rescues, overseas. It also helps those who are being forced to sponsor a visa for their unwanted spouse to come to the UK.

236. In Pakistan we work very closely with the police and other agencies to provide support to British national and dual nationals—for example, the police accompany our consular staff on rescues or other visits. It is substantially easier to do this work in Pakistan than in other countries where we do not have this relationship.

237. The Forced Marriage Act was passed with cross-party support in 1997 and provides for forced marriage protection orders which can be used to prevent a forced marriage taking place or to protect someone who has already been forced into marriage. So far over 150 orders have been taken out. In 2008, we raised the age at which someone can sponsor a spouse to come to the UK from 18 to 21, in part to give young people more time to mature and stand up to those seeking to force them into marriage. This policy is currently being tested in the courts.

Kidnappings

238. The kidnapping of British citizens is a growing strategic threat. There has been a rise in the number of kidnaps-for-ransom and associated offences involving UK citizens in Pakistan over the period 2006–09.

239. The UK law-enforcement response is co-ordinated by SOCA’s Anti Kidnap and Extortion Unit (AKEU). SOCA Liaison Officers in Pakistan, in consultation with the FCO Consular Division, are responsible—together with AKEU—for providing the link between Pakistani investigating agencies and relevant UK police forces.

International Parental Child Abduction

240. More British children are abducted by parents to Pakistan, or retained there after a visit, than to any other country. Over 200 cases have come to our attention since 2003. Cases will usually involve a child being abducted contrary to a court order (or the wishes of the other parent) or retained after a holiday visit. If parents cannot reach an amicable agreement they need to start legal proceedings in Pakistan. Cases can be difficult to resolve.

241. The UK/Pakistan Protocol is a judicial understanding and was signed in 2003 to provide a mechanism between jurisdictions to better handle child abduction cases. It aims to secure the return of an abducted child to the country where they normally live for custody issues to be decided there without regard to the nationality, culture or religion of the parents. The Protocol is not legally binding. The 1980 Hague Convention is generally regarded as the best means of resolving parental child abduction cases as it aims to return an abducted child to the country where they normally live, so the courts there can decide on issues of custody and access.

Mistreatment/torture

242. Mistreatment whilst detained is considered an “exceptional circumstance” in relation to our policy on dual nationals and we will provide consular support. A number of British nationals have complained of mistreatment/torture whilst in custody in Pakistan, including both physical and verbal. We raise the individual cases with the Pakistani authorities only when requested to by the detainee, in line with our usual policy on providing consular assistance.

Death Penalty

243. Receiving the death penalty is considered an “exceptional circumstance” in relation to our policy on dual nationals and we will provide consular support. There are more British nationals on trial with charges carrying a potential death penalty in Pakistan than in any other country. As well as bilateral action, we have regularly raised the abolition of the death penalty more generally with the Government of Pakistan together with EU partners. No British nationals have been executed recently and there are currently discussions about a moratorium on executions.

Prisoners general

244. The UK and Pakistan have a Prisoner Transfer Agreement ratified in August 2008.

Held Against Will (HAW) case

245. There are an increasing number of Held Against Will cases in Pakistan. These are usually within the same family and are related to drug rehabilitation or religious schooling. We deal with Held Against Will incidents on a case by case basis. There are limits to what the UK can do to help resolve them, particularly in cases involving minors.
246. There are strong historical and personal links between the UK and Pakistani Armed Forces. These links are maintained through regular liaison visits, bilateral meetings of senior officers, and a personnel exchange programme. Routine defence relations activity with Pakistan also includes the provision of funded courses, including places at the Royal College of Defence Studies and the Advanced Command and Staff Course.

247. As part of our wider programme of defence engagement, the UK is working to build the capacity of the Pakistani Army to conduct effective operations in Pakistan’s north-western border areas. The UK continues to support the development of border co-operation centres designed to promote co-ordinated operational planning between ISAF and the Afghan and Pakistani security forces. Pakistan remains a top priority for the MOD.

Military support during floods

248. The UK has responded to Pakistan’s floods by providing urgent lifesaving aid to those affected. The UK military has contributed to this effort. At DFID’s request, the RAF has provided five aid flights, using both C17—the UK’s largest transport aircraft—and C130 Hercules planes to bring in essential items such as tents and shelter kits. The MOD has also supplied a bridge which will replace one destroyed by the floods.

Pakistan: Security

Counter-Terrorism

249. The people of Pakistan bear a heavy burden of terrorism—in 2009 over 3,000 were killed and a further 7,000 injured as a result of terrorist activity. Terrorist activity emanating from within Pakistan also poses a substantial threat to UK national security, to UK troops and objectives in Afghanistan, and to the Pakistani state itself. Reducing the threat emanating from within Pakistan is a top foreign policy priority. In our engagement with Pakistan we consistently maintain that 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. The UK continues to urge Pakistan to dismantle all militant and terrorist groups operating on, and from, Pakistani soil and we are committed to working with Pakistan to enhance its capacity to focus on and tackle these threats.

250. We have a duty to the British public to ensure that no country is used as a base to launch terrorist attacks, either at the UK or our interests overseas. It is essential, therefore, to address not just the symptoms of violent extremism but also its causes. High levels of radicalisation and extremism in Pakistan provide the breeding ground for terrorist activity.

251. The most serious international terrorist threat to the UK continues to come from al-Qaeda core and associated militants, located in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. According to open source reports several al-Qaeda senior figures have been killed by missile strikes in FATA. In addition, Pakistani military action against militants in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas has weakened violent extremist groups there and has also put al-Qaeda under increasing pressure. But the threat from al-Qaeda and associated militants is still very real. Al-Qaeda also continue to seek to inspire and direct other groups, networks and individuals to attack the West. The threat to the UK and UK interests is increasingly diverse, including from groups that have associated themselves with al-Qaeda such as the Pakistani Taliban (TTP).

252. The UK recognises the sacrifices Pakistan has made in the fight against militancy and we welcome the increased responsibility Pakistan is taking to tackle violent extremism within its borders. Both Pakistan and the UK have benefitted from action that Pakistan has taken against militants, including through the operations that the Pakistan military has conducted in the border areas. It is vital that we continue to work closely with the Pakistani Government to reduce the threat posed to both our countries by terrorist groups.

253. We are forging a strategic partnership with the Government of Pakistan on counter-terrorism. Our intensive diplomatic efforts, bilaterally, multilaterally, and in concert with key partners such as the US, are complemented by a comprehensive programme of counter-terrorism assistance to Pakistan. This involves:

(a) high level diplomatic engagement with the key players within the Pakistani establishment and across the political spectrum;
(b) operational co-operation, ensuring that we are working together effectively to disrupt terrorists and bring them to justice;
(c) building key Pakistani capabilities (e.g. military, police, judicial) through training, capacity building and provision of equipment;
(d) working with the Pakistani Government, media, civil society and others to build resilience to violent extremism and tackle the grievances that drive radicalisation;
(e) deepening our understanding of the links between counter-radicalisation in Pakistan and in Pakistani communities in the UK; and
(f) supporting the development of strong institutions and machinery of Government.
254. Bilateral counter-terrorism co-operation between the UK and Pakistan is an important part of the UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue. Counter-terrorism was a central element in the recent Joint Statement delivered by the Prime Minister and President Zardari in August 2010.

255. PREVENT, which aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremists, is one of the four components of the Government’s counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) and forms an important part of the UK’s counter-terrorism efforts in Pakistan. We continue to work with the media, civil society and others to build resilience to violent extremism and tackle radicalisation. We are also trying to undermine extremist ideology and disrupt activity which has an impact on the radicalisation of Muslims in the UK.

Borders Areas

256. Pakistan's border areas with Afghanistan provide ungoverned space from which al-Qaeda and other militant and organised crime groups operate. Governance and security are weak, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The populations of the border areas are among the poorest in Pakistan, with the lowest literacy rates and limited access to public services. This allows space for radicalisation and the Taliban has used violence, intimidation and terror to gain control over civilian populations in areas of northwest Pakistan. Pakistan's commitment to tackling this threat is important both for regional stability and the security of the UK, in denying operational space to both domestic and international terrorists.

Military Offensive

257. We welcome the Pakistan military's efforts to tackle militancy in tribal border areas. Pakistan has a vital interest in rooting out violent extremism. As well as threatening the Pakistani state and people, militant and terrorist groups threaten regional stability and the security of the UK. In May 2009, Pakistani military action succeeded in pushing the Taliban back from areas close to Islamabad, including the Swat Valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North West Frontier Province). The Pakistan Army has also taken the fight to the militants in their traditional heartlands through a major ground offensive in FATA in October 2009. Military operations of varying scope began in South Waziristan and have continued across the FATA tribal agencies. This has helped reduce the Taliban's ability to operate in FATA. The UK welcomes this action but urges Pakistan to take care to minimise impacts on the civilian population and meet its humanitarian obligations.

Humanitarian response to the military conflict in KP and FATA

258. The UK remains concerned about the estimated 1.3 million people who are still displaced following the recent fighting in the border regions. Over one million people have now returned. Returns should be informed, voluntary and conducted in safety and dignity, in line with agreed international principles. The UK and its international partners will continue to lobby the Government of Pakistan and the humanitarian community to uphold these principles. Our humanitarian support responding to this crisis has provided protection and humanitarian assistance to 800,000 people; supplied food aid for up to 1.4 million people, as well as healthcare, education, and water and sanitation; given up to 2 million people short-term recovery assistance, including providing seeds, tools and livestock to rebuild their livelihoods; and provided protection services including access to healthcare and education for vulnerable people including women and children. This funding now stands at £54.5 million since September 2008. The UK has also supported an enterprise credit guarantee scheme following the World Bank and Asian Development Bank’s Damage Needs Assessment for border areas affected by the conflict. This scheme will rebuild 26,000 family businesses.

FATA Reform

259. Lasting peace and security in the region will require military gains to be followed with reconstruction, development and commitment to a long-term political strategy for improving governance, justice and services and addressing the roots of militancy. The UK has pressed Pakistan to adopt a comprehensive approach to stabilisation in the border areas, covering development, governance and security. The UK welcomes President Zardari’s August 2009 announcement of political reform in the FATA as a positive step towards addressing these issues. But one year on, FATA reform has yet to be implemented. The UK continues to urge the Government of Pakistan to make progress on this issue. The key elements of the proposed reforms are: the extension of the political parties act to the FATA; administrative reforms to better audit funds received and disbursed by Political Agents (who are appointed by the President); and a series of judicial reforms including the creation of a FATA appeals tribunal and reform of the Frontier Crimes regulation.

UK Approach to Border Areas

260. The UK’s approach to the areas bordering Afghanistan requires working closely together, combining both diplomatic and development interventions. Political dialogue with the Government of Pakistan and the international community is led by the FCO through the Friends of Democratic Pakistan. The UK is working with the Government of Pakistan and other donors, to ensure that the analysis from a recent International Financial Institutions-led post crisis needs assessment (PCNA) in the areas bordering Afghanistan is translated into action.
261. DFID’s support to Pakistan’s border areas focuses on service delivery and reducing grievances that lead to insecurity and instability. Within this, DFID is providing support to the federal and provincial governments to extend the reach of the state in those areas of the country bordering Afghanistan—Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and FATA. For example, DFID support contributed to government deployment of 22,000 Lady Health Workers in FATA, KP and Balochistan; and training of community midwives in addition to 8,270 rural water supply and sanitation schemes implemented in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reaching 1.6 million people.

Post Crisis Needs Assessment (PCNA) and Multi-Donor Trust Fund for KP, FATA and Balochistan

262. In June 2009, the Government of Pakistan asked the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UN and EC to lead a PCNA to identify the underlying drivers of conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA. This will lead to a programme of action to tackle these drivers. DFID has supported the PCNA as well as a newly established World Bank-led Multi Donor Trust Fund for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and FATA. This Trust Fund will respond to the analysis in the PCNA and other government strategies and will provide support for the restoration of basic services, livelihoods, improved justice, governance reforms and crisis recovery in the conflict affected areas. Following the recent flooding, the Trust Fund’s remit has been expanded to include reconstruction needs resulting from the floods. DFID has committed £30 million to the Trust Fund.

Balochistan

263. Balochistan is Pakistan’s largest province and shares a porous, 1,000 kilometre border with Afghanistan. This has enabled Taliban and criminal networks to exploit ineffective controls in order to move militants, weapons and narcotics across the border. Combined with a separatist movement, this instability in Balochistan impacts on UK objectives for regional stability, counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics.

264. We recognise that the Government of Pakistan faces a difficult law and order situation in Balochistan, but we continue to urge that any military action in the region should take place within the parameters of international law.

265. The UK welcomes Prime Minister Gilani’s announcement of 24 November 2009, for a comprehensive package of economic and development reforms to help support a political settlement in Balochistan. Implementation of these reforms has been slow. Through Conflict Pool project activity, we are encouraging support for political reform and stability in Balochistan. The recently-established Multi-Donor Trust Fund will extend its support for Balochistan to facilitate recovery from conflict and, more recently, the recovery in flood-affected areas. Balochistan also benefits from DFID’s national programmes, such as health.

266. Cyclone Phet affected Balochistan in early June 2010. There were no casualties. The provincial government provided a relief package to help 150,000 people who were displaced by the effects of the cyclone.

267. Pakistan and Iran have been in negotiations over a pipeline to carry natural gas from Iran through Balochistan and into Karachi. This was agreed on 14 June 2010 and Iran will now construct the pipeline to carry 21 million cubic metres of gas to Pakistan daily.

Nuclear

Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT)

268. Pakistan is outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The UK, in co-operation with international partners, continues to encourage Pakistan to engage constructively on the issue of nuclear disarmament. We believe that a global ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices is vital to international non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.

269. In 2009, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva (CD) agreed, by consensus, a Programme of Work which included the start of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT). Pakistan then blocked the start of work, citing regional security concerns, and resisted UK and US attempts at engagement. Continued blockage in 2010 led the UN Secretary General to call a High-Level Meeting on 24 September 2010 to focus attention on and support the CD with a view to it returning to work. The Pakistani delegation, under pressure from within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), did not speak. The UK continues to try and impress on Pakistan that its concerns can be addressed during negotiations and we reinforce this message through the EU.

Nuclear Security

270. We welcome the constructive role that Pakistan played at the Washington Nuclear Security Summit in April 2010. It will be important that all participants translate Summit principles, outlined in the Communiqué, into concrete action in the form of a Work Plan.

271. The UK Government currently assesses that there is no reason to believe that Pakistan’s nuclear technology is likely to fall into the hands of violent extremists. The Government of Pakistan is well aware that the security of its nuclear technology is of vital importance. Pakistan continues to work towards ensuring internationally recognised controls of its weapons and nuclear materials, in line with global momentum towards making nuclear security a cornerstone of the international security apparatus.
272. In May 2009, Pakistan’s Strategic Export Control Division (SECDiv) issued new licensing and enforcement regulations to further tighten the export of nuclear technologies, material, and equipment.

PAKISTAN: DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

DEVELOPMENT

273. The priorities for the UK’s development programme in Pakistan, which is administered by the Department for International Development, are currently to support accountable and effective governance, and support Pakistan to deliver macro-economic stability, growth, jobs and services. Key results to date include: helping to increase the number of six to nine year-olds in school from 42% to 55% since 2001; supporting health services that have prevented 340,000 children and 19,000 maternal deaths since 2003; supporting the creation of 300,000 new jobs in Punjab and helping to change the government budget process in Pakistan so that it now links budgets to outputs.

274. Through DFID we are providing £665 million (89 billion rupees) in development assistance to Pakistan (2009–13) as part of a ten-year Development Partnership Arrangement signed in 2006. The arrangement affirms the long-term development partnership between the Government of Pakistan and the UK. It sets out shared and individual commitments and provides a transparent framework for mutual accountability for implementation of the partnership. The programme is currently undergoing a strategy review and all the country programmes in DFID are being assessed within the Bilateral Aid Review. The focus of the programme may therefore change in the near future. The need for support and reconstruction following the recent floods will be a particular challenge. The FCO supports DFID’s work on governance through political engagement and its own project spend, which is closely aligned with DFID’s objectives.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

275. Pakistan has made some progress against development goals, for example poverty reduced from 34% of the population below the line in 2001–02 to 22% in 2006–07. But this trend is at risk from a weakened economy and the impact of conflict and a number of MDGs remain off-track especially in education and health. Education indicators in Pakistan are among the worst in the world. Half of the adult population and two-thirds of women are illiterate. Only 55% of children are enrolled in primary school—six million children do not go to primary school. Despite recent progress, health indicators are also off-track. There are too many maternal deaths (12,000 a year) and child deaths (400,000 a year). More than nine million children are malnourished. Maternal and reproductive health is a particular challenge.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

276. The UK remains committed to supporting Pakistan to deliver macro-economic stability, growth, jobs and services for its citizens, Pakistan’s economic potential is vast. To encourage jobs and growth, DFID is working with the Ministry of Finance to improve its budgeting systems, helping to promote economic stability and a greater focus on poverty reduction. Inflation declined from 25% to 13% since October 2008; foreign exchange reserves increased from two weeks to four months of import cover; social sector spending has doubled since 2006. DFID is also supporting the micro-finance sector in Pakistan to increase its outreach from 1.2 million borrowers in 2008 to three million by 2013. The UK is also responding to a request from Pakistan to support forming a new economic growth strategy, which will focus on medium-term inclusive growth by prioritising the investments in sectors with higher economic and social returns.

277. However, the need for reform is pressing. The cost of domestic debt is particularly high, economic activity has been damaged by power shortages, rising costs of production, and increasing cartelisation in key markets. Pakistan’s flooding disaster has compounded the situation: around 13% of Pakistan’s cropland has been flooded, and the International Monetary Fund has lowered its growth forecast by two percentage points, which will hit government revenues, while needs arising from the recent flooding will place considerable pressure on the Government to spend more.

278. While Pakistan’s floods have increased the challenges the country is facing, they also provide an opportunity for further reform. We welcome the commitment shown by the Government of Pakistan to tackle the economic crisis of 2008 and their progress in putting the economy back on an even footing. Foreign exchange reserves have stabilised at around $15 billion and the current account deficit is now under control. We welcome the progress that Pakistan has made under its IMF programme with the Government of Pakistan, having passed four reviews, albeit with some exemptions. Like many other emerging and developing economies Pakistan faces a difficult global economic environment. Robust implementation of Pakistan’s economic policy plans as part of the IMF programme will be essential for ensuring a swift and sustainable recovery for the Pakistan economy.

279. The challenge going forward is sustainable growth. Pakistan’s population is expected to increase by 85 million over the next 20 years and Pakistan’s economy will require sustained growth above 6% per year to accommodate new workers. Key to growth is maintaining macroeconomic stability and, in turn, raising government revenues. Raising revenue will require a commitment to tax reform and to widening the tax base. The introduction of a reformed General Sales Tax is an important early revenue raising reform. To enable
Pakistan to reap a demographic dividend from its rapidly growing working-age population, the availability of physical and social infrastructure will be critical. On physical infrastructure, the priorities must be power sector reform, and water security. Education must also be a priority.

**Education and Health**

280. DFID’s past investments have helped to increase the number of six to nine year-olds in school from 42% to 55% since 2001. Last year, UK aid provided stipends that kept 300,000 poor girls in school and, with the World Bank and government of Punjab, recruited 34,000 new teachers, provided further training for 300,000 others, and provided free textbooks for 15 million students.

281. The UK welcomes the Government of Pakistan’s support for education reform. We are providing £250 million to support education over five years. The focus is to increase enrolment, improve standards and provide young people with the skills they need to get jobs. By 2013, our support will help 5 million more children attend primary school.

282. At the federal level we are supporting the Pakistan Prime Minister’s Education Task Force, co-chaired by Sir Michael Barber, former head of the Number 10 Delivery Unit, and Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Gilani on the social sectors, to help drive implementation of the new National Education Policy. It will focus on getting the basics of structure and accountability into the system—from teacher training to school management. We continue to support the national assessment of learning outcomes and we are working closely with the Government of Pakistan on a variety of community projects and through provincial-level support to Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

283. In health, DFID helped increase the child immunisation rate from 53% in 2002 to 73% in 2008, and helped ensure 340,000 fewer child deaths and 19,000 fewer maternal deaths since 2003. UK aid has trained and deployed 14,000 female health workers since 2003 and is currently training 5,700 community midwives. DFID is investing £182 million on the health sector support programme, polio eradication, HIV/AIDS, and maternal and child health.

**Governance and Rule of Law**

284. Democracy and the rule of law are allies of stability and development in Pakistan. A strong institutional framework based on the rule of law is a necessary condition for a sustained democratic transition in Pakistan. BHC Islamabad has established a cross-departmental working group to focus on rule of law issues. We are currently considering how we can support future rule of law programme activity in Pakistan, in line with the recommendations of the NSC-led review of the UK’s policy on Pakistan. DFID and FCO work closely together on a number of programmes and projects, both with the Government and civil society, and at community level to embed democracy from federal to district level. These focus on addressing weak existing systems, empowering marginalised groups and encouraging citizens to demand their rights from the state with increased interaction between the two. For example, DFID’s support on gender justice and protection has helped 6,000 women victims of violence by providing them with counselling and legal aid. We have also helped over 43,000 people —of whom over half were women—participate in training and awareness raising and capacity building work on issues such as honour killings, legislation on Violence against Women, women’s rights in marriage and under-age marriage.

**Floods**

285. Pakistan is facing a huge crisis. Twenty million people have been directly affected by the floods (14 million critically) and more than 1.9 million houses have been damaged or destroyed. Over 3.2 million hectares of standing crops (16% of Pakistan’s cultivatable land) have been damaged or lost. The long-term economic and social impact of the floods has yet to be calculated. The Revised Floods Emergency Response Plan for Pakistan, launched by the UN Secretary-General in New York on 17 September, is appealing for $2 billion for relief and early recovery interventions.

**UK Response**

286. The UK was one of the first countries to respond to Pakistan’s floods crisis. We will continue to stand by Pakistan, and help its people affected by the floods, both during the critical humanitarian phase and longer-term as work begins to rebuild the country. UK aid has so far provided: twelve planes (five Royal Air Force) carrying vital aid; emergency shelter for more than 100,000 families; safe drinking water for millions of people; help for half a million malnourished children and pregnant/breastfeeding women. The UK Government has now committed a total of £134 million while the UK public has donated a further £56 million (approximately 6.3 billion rupees) through the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. In addition, a £10 million (approximately 1.3 billion rupees) bridge project has been brought forward. Our support is being provided to both the UN and NGOs directly.
Ensuring aid is well spent

287. Ensuring that aid is being used effectively and doesn't fall into the wrong hands is essential. The UK is working in support of the Government of Pakistan's efforts to distribute aid to all those who need it. We closely monitor and evaluate how our funding is used and undertake strict checks on organisations we fund to ensure that our aid money is spent properly and delivers what is intended. We encourage all donations by the UK’s private citizens to be made responsibly through reputable organisations.

International Response

288. The UK is also committed to supporting the Government of Pakistan in mobilising the international response to the ongoing flood disaster in Pakistan. We are lobbying international partners to provide Pakistan with humanitarian relief as well as long-term support to meet the challenges Pakistan faces. A series of international meetings through the autumn will pave the way towards a Pakistan Development Forum in Islamabad in November, which will be a key opportunity for donors and the Government of Pakistan to come together and discuss the international response and domestic reform agenda. Reconstruction efforts need to be focused on the long-term; on economic recovery, livelihoods and on the priorities that will be identified in the forthcoming Damage Needs Assessment, led by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, on behalf of the Government of Pakistan.

289. We believe that the EU can play a leading role in helping Pakistan recover. In advance of September’s European Council we led the way in urging EU partners to agree a package of short and medium-term measures to underpin Pakistan’s recovery. Following intensive lobbying—including by the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Foreign Secretary—the European Council announced on 16 September a substantial package of immediate and longer-term support for Pakistan. A core component of the support was a commitment to grant exclusively to Pakistan increased market access in the EU “through the immediate and time limited reduction of duties on key imports from Pakistan” and a commitment to look favourably to Pakistan’s eligibility for GSP+ for 2014.

Reform agenda

290. The UK has also been clear that a situation that requires an exceptional response from donors also requires an exceptional response from the Government of Pakistan. This includes commitment to the agreed long-term reform agenda focused on delivering better and effective services to its citizens. The reforms we are looking for progress on include: reducing inefficient spending by Government (in particular subsidies to public enterprises); raising additional revenues (through an enhanced Government Sales Tax) and widening the tax net (currently a small proportion of Pakistan’s population pays income tax); and to “make markets work” by deregulating markets, and tackling commodity market cartels. These reforms will require sustained commitment from the Government of Pakistan; and the UK stands ready to help Pakistan to deliver better services for its citizens.

Human Rights

291. Although the Government of Pakistan has made some progress on the human rights situation, serious concerns remain and we continue to urge the Government to fully guarantee the fundamental rights of all Pakistani citizens, as laid out in the Pakistani Constitution.

292. The UK engages with Pakistan on human rights in a variety of fora. We have a regular human rights dialogue with the Government of Pakistan alongside our EU partners, in which we raise particular human rights concerns. These concern several priority issues including: strengthening safeguards to protect those given the death penalty; violence against women, which is particularly high in Pakistan; the need for stronger monitoring mechanisms including a National Human Rights Commission; and the ongoing persecution of religious minorities, and the misuse of the blasphemy legislation that allows this to happen. We also raise human rights at a senior level on regular occasions, particularly after specific acts of persecution, such as the killings of Christians in Punjab in 2009 or the attacks on the Ahmadiyyah Mosques in Lahore in May 2010.

293. The UK remains concerned about media reports of extra-judicial killings by the Pakistani security forces. We have raised the importance of proper investigation of these claims with senior military and government figures. We believe that in fighting terrorism it is vital also to maintain human rights and the rule of law.

294. In June 2010, President Zardari announced that he had signed the instrument of ratification for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention Against Torture (CAT), which allows the ratification of these two human rights agreements. This is a significant step forward, since these agreements were originally signed by Pakistan more than two decades ago. Their ratification is also a key criteria in Pakistan being eligible for enhanced trade access with the EU under the GSP+ regime. However, in signing the instruments Pakistan introduced a large number of reservations, which serve to reduce the effectiveness of the instruments' ratification. The EU is in the process of registering its concerns with the Government of Pakistan over the number and extent of these reservations. To ensure Pakistan is working within the global framework on human rights, we strongly encourage the Government of Pakistan to remove its
extensive reservations against the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture.

295. The vast majority of parliamentary and public correspondence on Pakistan is concerned with human rights. In 2010, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received 227 letters from MPs, and over a thousand letters from members of the public, most on human rights. We also regularly receive Parliamentary Questions on this subject. The APPG on human rights has visited Pakistan in the last twelve months.

296. Pakistan was listed as a country of concern in the 2009 FCO Human Rights Report and ranks low on many credible global indexes which look at specific human rights.

COUNTER-NARCOTICS

297. Afghanistan is the source of over 90% of the world opium market. This trade, which has a logistical hub in Pakistan, has recognised financial and logistical links with the Afghan insurgency—UNODC estimates that the Afghan drugs trade provides the insurgency with around $100 million per annum. It is recognised that a national problem requires a regional answer.

298. Pakistan is a significant consumer, transhipment point and operating base for the Afghan drugs trade and thus an important player in the regional solution to the drug trade. There are approximately five million drug users in Pakistan. Furthermore, a significant proportion of heroin found on the UK streets (originating predominantly from Afghan opiates) is trafficked to the UK via Pakistan. Countering the threat from criminal groups engaged in the narcotics trade and breaking the link with insurgent groups is important to UK objectives for stability in South Asia, including in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It will also help reduce the impact on UK citizens of opiates trafficked via Pakistan. The porous Afghanistan-Pakistan border, as well as Pakistan’s limited historical engagement on counter-narcotics issues, has impinged on Afghan and ISAF efforts to contain the drugs trade and divide it from the insurgency, by providing the drugs trade with an operating base.

299. We welcome the Government of Pakistan’s recent efforts to address the problem of the drugs trade, including the adoption of a new counter-narcotics strategy and “Master Plan”. The UK will continue to work regionally, with partners, to tackle the problems caused by the drugs trade and to reduce the impact on UK citizens from the upstream heroin trade. In recognition of Pakistan’s key role in tackling the regional drugs trade, the UK is seeking to support the implementation of the Master Plan, including by raising the profile of Pakistan's CN efforts with the wider international donor community.

Pakistan: Regional and International Engagement

India-Pakistan

300. India and Pakistan are longstanding and important friends of the UK. We have many significant links to both countries through Indian and Pakistani Diaspora communities living in the UK. We have strong bilateral relations with both countries. Pakistan’s relationship with nuclear neighbour India is important for stability in the region. We want Pakistan to play a constructive role in the region, at peace with her neighbours, in line with the UK’s long-term interests in stability and security in South Asia.

301. India and Pakistan used to meet regularly though the Composite Dialogue, which provided for formal political dialogue on a range of issues including regional security. Following the Mumbai attacks of 2008, dialogue between both countries was suspended. India has made it clear that it needed to see firm Pakistani action against those responsible for Mumbai—the terrorist network LeT (Lashkar-e-Tayyiba)—as a pre-condition for dialogue. The UK has strongly encouraged Pakistan’s commitment to bring the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks to justice.

302. Early this year, Indian Prime Minister Singh signalled his desire to re-engage with Pakistan. This led to a meeting between Foreign Secretaries (PUS equivalent) in February 2010, and a meeting between Prime Ministers Singh and Gilani in April 2010. A significant outcome from the meeting between Foreign Secretaries was the agreement that both sides would identify measures to build confidence. Both Prime Ministers agreed to take forward political dialogue to restore a climate of trust and confidence to pave the way for substantive dialogue. The Pakistani military has publicly said that it supports the diplomatic engagement.

303. In July 2010, Foreign Ministers Krishna and Qureshi met to explore confidence building measures. But according to media reports, this meeting failed to deliver substantial progress. The media reported Pakistan wanted to see clear timelines for restoring dialogue on all issues without first acceding to Indian requests for prosecution of those responsible for the Mumbai attacks. However, we understand both sides are committed to maintaining dialogue.

304. We welcome the renewed engagement between India and Pakistan. Ultimately, the relationship between India and Pakistan is one that they themselves will need to build. We recognise that India and Pakistan are sensitive to third party involvement in their bilateral relationship. The UK continues to help broaden the consensus for rapprochement through initiatives supported by the cross-departmental (FCO, MOD, DFID) Conflict Pool. Our project activity includes support for schools and campaign against forced marriage in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and support for youth development initiatives in Indian-administered Kashmir. We also support the strengthening of civil society networks and media capacity-building to support peace
initiatives on both sides of the Line of Control. The British Council has also expanded its operation in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and DFID met the immediate needs of 175,000 homeless people, constructed 34 schools and provided 50 Bailey-type bridges for a total of £137 million in response to the 2005 Kashmir earthquake.

305. We also work in both Pakistani Administered and Indian Administered Kashmir. Our project activity includes support for schools and a campaign against forced marriage in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and support for youth development initiatives in Indian-administered Kashmir. We also support the strengthening of civil society networks and media capacity-building to support peace initiatives on both sides of the Line of Control. The British Council has also expanded its operation in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and DFID has provided £137 million for emergency support and reconstruction since the 2005 Kashmir earthquake.

306. Kashmir remains an extremely sensitive political issue for both India and Pakistan. The longstanding position of the UK is that it is for India and Pakistan to find a lasting resolution to the situation in Kashmir, one which takes into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people. It is not for the UK to prescribe a solution or to mediate in finding one. We welcome the positive steps being taken by Pakistan and India to build trust and confidence.

FRIENDS OF DEMOCRATIC PAKISTAN

307. The Friends of Democratic Pakistan (FODP) was established in September 2008 following a UK/US initiative. It was designed to bring together Pakistan’s traditional allies (such as China and Saudi Arabia) and western supporters to provide political and practical support at a time when the country faced the twin challenges of violent extremism and a collapsing economy. The group aims to galvanise international support to help Pakistan’s Government tackle the serious development, security and economic problems it faces. It is not a donor group, but works in strategic partnership with the Government of Pakistan, currently focusing on the following areas: security; development; energy; institution building, trade and finance. FODP meetings are chaired by the Government of Pakistan.

308. The current members of the FODP are: UK; US; Japan; China; Saudi Arabia; UAE; Australia; Canada; Iran; France; Germany; Spain; Netherlands; Denmark; Italy; Norway; Sweden; Turkey; Republic of Korea. The following international institutions have observer status: EU (Presidency and Commission); ADB; Islamic Development Bank; UN; and the World Bank.

309. Aside from the inaugural meeting, the FODP has met twice at ministerial level (Tokyo and Istanbul) and once at summit level—on 24 September 2009 in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York. Progress on commitments from New York, including on border areas stabilisation, has been mixed. We need active engagement from the Government of Pakistan in order to accelerate progress.

September 2009 Summit

310. Key outcomes of the Friends of Democratic Pakistan Summit held on 24 September 2009 in New York, and co-chaired by then Prime Minister Gordon Brown, President Zardari and President Obama, were:

— Endorsement of a comprehensive reconstruction and stabilisation strategy for the Malakand district. This covers the Swat area in which much of Pakistan’s recent military actions against the Pakistani Taliban took place.
— A commitment from the Government of Pakistan, with FODP support, to quickly develop and implement an integrated and comprehensive approach to address issues of security and development in FATA.
— Establishment of a Multi Donor Trust Fund for the border areas to provide a co-ordinated financing mechanism for donor support of areas affected by terrorism, militancy, and extremism.
— FODP members agreed to support Pakistan’s efforts in formulating a sustainable, integrated energy plan. The Asian Development Bank will help to mobilise the Friends for energy sector assistance and report at the next ministerial meeting of the Friends.

15 October Ministerial meeting

311. The next Ministerial will be hosted by the EU in Brussels on 15 October. Foreign Minister Qureshi is due to attend. The focus of this meeting will be to ensure a strong commitment of political support to Pakistan following the floods, with substantive discussions on: the Post Crisis Needs Assessment (which looks at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas); institution-building in areas where governance and delivery of services are of particular concern; and energy. Ongoing shortfalls in power production pose a significant threat to political and economic stability in Pakistan. The FODP’s Energy Task Force steering committee has approved a work programme and outline for the task force. The task force report will include: (i) diagnosis (ii) options for solutions (iii) recommendations. The latter will probably include recommendations to the Government for structural reform and to FODP members for more investment in the sector.
EU-Pakistan

312. The EU is a significant player in Pakistan. It is already the largest trading partner, one of the largest investors, and enjoys a relationship with Pakistan that covers CT, governance, humanitarian aid and development. The UK wants to see a deepening and more visible EU-Pakistan relationship.

313. The EU-Pakistan Summits in 2010 and 2009 have helped to enhance the EU’s commitment to Pakistan. The two key deliverables from the June 2010 Summit were a 50% increase in EU funding from development. The UK wants to see a deepening and more visible EU-Pakistan relationship. The need for investments, and enjoys a relationship with Pakistan that covers CT, governance, humanitarian aid and development. The UK wants to see a deepening and more visible EU-Pakistan relationship.

314. Pakistan’s main aspiration from the EU is for agreement on significant trade concessions. The UK has continued to make the case for the EU to develop a trade as well as an aid relationship with Pakistan, especially in light of the floods disaster. We have repeatedly pressed both the Commission and Member States to revisit the issue of granting early GSP+ access for Pakistan or other multilateral trade concessions.

315. On 16 September 2010, following intensive diplomatic efforts by the UK and other like-minded Member States, the European Council announced a substantial package of immediate and longer-term support for Pakistan. A core component of the support was a commitment to grant exclusively to Pakistan increased market access in the EU “through the immediate and time limited reduction of duties on key imports from Pakistan” and a commitment to look favourably to Pakistan’s eligibility for GSP+ for 2014. The UK will continue to work with EU partners, the WTO and the Government of Pakistan to ensure early delivery of these commitments, and on the agreement of a five-year EU-Pakistan Engagement Plan to ensure a long-term, deeper and more strategic relationship between the two partners.

Pakistan: Communications and Outreach

UK Approach

316. The cross-Whitehall Strategic Communications Strategy for Pakistan lays out the UK Government’s approach to strategic communications for Pakistan. The strategy is primarily designed to build support for the UK and UK policies—both in the UK and Pakistan—in order to help us deliver UK objectives. The strategy is being delivered through sustained high-level UK government engagement with the Pakistan Government and military, public diplomacy and outreach, parliamentary engagement, targeted messaging through a wide range of media channels, and co-ordination with key partners. Communication of a broader narrative designed to promote the UK’s long-term commitment to and historical friendship with Pakistan is a key element of this approach.

317. In Pakistan, communications activity in support of UK objectives is delivered jointly by the cross-departmental team based at the British High Commission in Islamabad and the British Council. Communications activity includes work focused on reducing the terrorist threat to the UK; encouraging Pakistan to consolidate democracy; generating closer relationships between the UK and Pakistan including through educational links; helping UK business to grow in Pakistan; building regional stability; discouraging illegal migration to the UK and providing advice and assistance to those at risk of forced marriage. We are also using strategic communications to improve understanding of and support for UK visa arrangements and the significant UK/Pakistan trade relationship. We work with the media, civil society, charities, business, NGOs, and the Government of Pakistan to deliver these objectives.

318. Our approach to strategic communications places specific focus on engagement with Parliament. In the UK, we actively seek engagement with All Party Parliamentary Groups, and promote engagement with MPs and Lords with an interest in Pakistan. We are working to build a strengthened bilateral relationship between the UK and Pakistan Parliaments to facilitate the sharing of best practice and to improve our ability to engage and influence key Parliamentarians in Pakistan. In country, we have begun to focus on building the legislative capacity of key agents for change within the Pakistan Parliament and we will increase activity in this area of our bilateral work in the months ahead. Internationally, we are seeking to gain better leverage over international community resources in support of strengthened parliamentary capacity.

319. We place significant emphasis on the importance of co-ordinating communications activity across government. This is being pursued through the framework of the Pakistan Information Strategy Group (PISG) which meets regularly to discuss ongoing and planned government communications activity both in the UK and Pakistan. The PISG is also working to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our communications campaigns.
COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

320. Our communications activity crosses the various strands of UK policy. Through the PREVENT programme overseas, the FCO is leading efforts to reduce the threat from violent extremism in Pakistan and tackle radicalisation, in co-ordination with the Government of Pakistan, the media, and civil society. Project work is focused on those communities which have strong ties to the Pakistani diaspora in the UK. The Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) is also working to build the Government of Pakistan’s strategic communications capacity from within the framework of the Joint Working Group (JWG), and is helping to build the capacity of civil society to promote informed debate about the nature of terrorism.

321. This is complemented by the British Council’s work to build trust between the UK and Pakistan and strengthen the consensus against extremism by offering opportunities to young people. It does this through school, vocational college and university partnerships between the UK and Pakistan, through developing youth leadership in the community, by improving English language teaching in schools and by offering young people access to high quality educational opportunities in the form of UK qualifications and information about study in the UK. With PREVENT funding it has extended three of its core programmes into Mirpur Division, in which 70% of Pakistani Diaspora in the UK find their heritage communities. New networks in Pakistan and amongst Pakistani Diaspora communities in the UK are helping to break down barriers between communities in both countries.

322. Through DFID, the British Government is using strategic communications to help Pakistan to stimulate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, to raise awareness and understanding of the UK’s role in reducing extreme poverty and in providing emergency humanitarian assistance, to improve the quality of access to education, to increase popular awareness of and demands for basic services and rights, and to help engage Diaspora communities through promoting UKaid and its impact.

323. We also pursue a wide range of communications activities to support other objectives. For example, we work to build the capacity of young people and the media as vehicles for socio-economic change and to facilitate civil society dialogue and debate on the issue of human rights, governance and economic development. We have also trained young Pakistani filmmakers and journalists to build a culture of more investigative reporting into the issues affecting Pakistan’s development. Our Chevening scholarships provide valuable people-to-people exchanges between the UK and Pakistan, as well as developing the talent of young Pakistanis in government, media and trade sectors.

6 October 2010

ACRONYMS

ABIF Afghanistan Business Innovation Fund
ACT Afghanistan Communications Team
ADB Asia Development Bank
AGIS Afghan Government Information Service
AKEU Anti Kidnap and Extortion Unit
ANA Afghan National Army
ANCOP Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANDS Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ANP Afghan National Police
ANSF Afghan National Security Forces
APBRPI Afghanistan Pakistan Border Region Prosperity Initiative
APPG All Party Parliamentary Group Afghanistan
APTTA Afghanistan Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement
AQ al-Qaeda
ARTF Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
ASNF Afghan Special Narcotics Force
ASOP Afghan Social Outreach Programme
BBCWST British Broadcasting Company World Service Trust
BHC British High Commission
BPHS Basic Package of Health Services
CARs Central Asia Republics
CARD-F Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility
CAREC Central Asia/Regional Economic Co-operation
CJTF Criminal Justice Task Force
CIMIC Civil Military Co-operation
CMMH Civilian M
CNPA Counter-Narcotics Police Afghanistan
CNT Counter-Narcotics Tribunal
COMISAF Commander of ISAF
CONTEST Counter Terrorism Strategy
CRC Centre for Regional Co-operation
CT Counter-Terrorism
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DCF</td>
<td>Defence Co-operation Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCI</td>
<td>Development Co-operation Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOT</td>
<td>Detention Oversight Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>District Reintegration Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECO</td>
<td>Economic Co-operation Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EITI</td>
<td>Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUPOL</td>
<td>EU Police Mission to Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EURA</td>
<td>EU Readmission Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUSR</td>
<td>EU Special Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATA</td>
<td>Federally Administered Tribal Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>Foreign &amp; Commonwealth Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDD</td>
<td>Focused District Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMCT</td>
<td>Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOB</td>
<td>Forward Operating Bases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FODP</td>
<td>Friends of Democratic Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FZP</td>
<td>Food Zone Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>The Group of Eight (UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, US, Canada and Russia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMIC</td>
<td>Government Media and Information Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNIRD</td>
<td>Good Neighbourly Relations Declaration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoP</td>
<td>Government of Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPI</td>
<td>Good Performers Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSP</td>
<td>Generalised System of Preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAW</td>
<td>Held Against Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMRC</td>
<td>HM Revenue and Customs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAEA</td>
<td>International Atomic Energy Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Islamic Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEC</td>
<td>Independent Election Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFES</td>
<td>International Foundation for Electoral Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFIs</td>
<td>International Financial Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security Assistance Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCMB</td>
<td>Joint Co-ordination and Monitoring Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JWG</td>
<td>Joint Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KP</td>
<td>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGTF</td>
<td>US Marine Air Ground Taskforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSST</td>
<td>Military Stabilisation Support Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCO</td>
<td>Non-Commissioned Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDCS</td>
<td>National Drug Control Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDS</td>
<td>National Directorate of Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSP</td>
<td>National Solidarity Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTM-A</td>
<td>NATO Training Mission—Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMLT</td>
<td>Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBM</td>
<td>Projecting British Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCNA</td>
<td>Post Crisis Needs Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM</td>
<td>Public Financial Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISG</td>
<td>Pakistan Information Strategy Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PML (N)</td>
<td>Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Pakistan People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREVENT</td>
<td>Prevent is one of the four strands of the Government’s counter-terrorism strategy. Its aim is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRT</td>
<td>Provincial Reconstruction Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RICU</td>
<td>Research, Information and Communications Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECCA</td>
<td>Regional Economic Co-operation Conference on Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAARC</td>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCO</td>
<td>Shanghai Co-operation Organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ISAF TROOP CONTRIBUTIONS

International Security Assistance Force:
Troop Contributing Nations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Troops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>9500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>78430</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 119,819
Written evidence from BBC World Service in Afghanistan and Pakistan

1. Executive Summary

BBC World Service is the world’s foremost provider of independent and authoritative news, offering radio, web and mobile services in 32 languages and two flagship television channels in Arabic and Persian. Broadcasts are funded through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by a Parliamentary Grant-in-Aid. It has a weekly audience of 180 million—the highest of all international broadcasters. Operating under the BBC’s Royal Charter, the World Service has full editorial and managerial independence.

— BBC World Service, through its provision of independent and trusted news and analysis, has and continues to make a significant impact in Afghanistan and Pakistan and a major contribution to building an informed society in these fragile and unstable countries, both prominent in HMG’s international priorities.

— It stands apart from domestic media for its depth of analysis and complete impartiality and makes this an inclusive process through expanding participatory tools. In rural areas where its services are most relied upon, BBC World Service acts as a bulwark against insurgent communications strategies through its values of impartiality, accuracy and independence.

— Through this, it brings credit to the UK as audiences appreciate the BBC for what it does and in turn have a more positive view of the UK.

However, to maintain this impact and to continue to be a relevant contribution to Pakistani and Afghan societies, the BBC must adapt to changing trends in media consumption. To be able to do this, dedicated funding will be required and BBC World Service has outlined proposals for how this may be achieved.

2. About BBC World Service

BBC World Service is the world’s foremost provider of independent and authoritative news, offering radio, web and mobile services in 32 languages and two flagship television channels in Arabic and Persian. Broadcasts are funded through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by a Parliamentary Grant-in-Aid. It has a weekly audience of 180 million—the highest of all international broadcasters, larger than all the US state-funded international broadcasting services combined at less than half the cost per user. Operating under the BBC’s Royal Charter, the World Service has full editorial and managerial independence.

Afghanistan

The Persian/Pashto Service broadcasts a schedule of 15 hours daily in Dari and Pashto. There is a news bulletin every hour plus current affairs analysis, audience talk shows and educational programming including the popular AEP soap opera New Home New Life, as well as cultural and music programmes. There are also two daily news and current affairs programmes in the Uzbek language for Uzbek speakers mainly in the North of the country. The programmes are broadcast on short wave throughout the country, as well as via a network of 21 FM relays in main cities. BBC Persian television is also available on satellite in Afghanistan.

In addition, the BBC World Service Trust—the BBC’s international charity—runs the Afghan Education Projects (AEP), producing educational programming covering health, education, governance and human rights and including addressing the underlying causes of radicalisation and conflict through drama. AEP is the largest media-for-development initiative in Afghanistan, working with a wide variety of organisations and institutions, including the Afghan Government, Afghan broadcasters, non-governmental organisations and schools. AEP programmes are broadcast by the BBC World Service. They are then re-broadcast on 40 private FM radio stations and on the state broadcaster Radio Afghanistan (RTA).

Pakistan

BBC Urdu broadcasts two hours of daily news and current affairs on short wave plus news bulletins on 37 FM partners. BBC Urdu also operates a fully multimedia online service with news, analysis, forums, video reports, blogs, live/on-demand audio, plus video reports available via online partners (e.g. YouTube).

As well as its Persian, Pashto and Urdu Service offices in London, BBC World Service has bureaux in Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and employs nearly 100 locally-engaged journalists, producers and other staff in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The BBC’s correspondent in Tehran was expelled following the elections in Iran, and it has not yet been possible to replace him.

3. The Media Environment in Afghanistan and Pakistan

3.(a) Access and trends in media technology

In Afghanistan, radio access is the principal source of information, with access around 85% to 90% in all areas. Other media technologies are expanding but there are broad disparities between urban and rural areas (where over 70% of the population lives). This is leading to an increasing urban-rural media divide for local media access.
TV access is growing, especially among the new urban middle class for whom over 90% have access in urban areas as opposed to circa 50% in rural areas. This growth is being spurred by increasing provisions in electricity, currently 42% of Afghan households have an electricity supply; as this increases, TV viewership will rise too, and replace radio as the main source of information in main cities. Already 21% say television is their main source of information for national news—51% say radio.

Mobile phone access has expanded rapidly. In May 2010, the Afghan Government estimated mobile phone reach was around 85% of the population with 13.5 million mobile phone subscribers, an increase of 4.5 million subscribers in a year. 65% of users send text messages according to the Asia Foundation.

Afghanistan has limited access to internet (6%) and is hampered by poor infrastructure. Websites, blogs and social networking sites such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook are still a long way from becoming fully developed means of communication inside Afghanistan. The Taliban still however post music videos on YouTube “to raise morale, patience and sentiments of the nation”. Internet access should grow considerably once the extension of the fibre optic cable, which connects Afghanistan with the outside world, is completed, with this expected to increase internet access from the current 5% to 20% by 2012.

In Pakistan, television has already become the dominant media platform. A BBC World Service survey at the end of 2008 found that over 90% of the adult urban population and 67% of the rural population watch at least once a week. Cable and satellite TV access was 61% in urban areas (up from 45% in the previous year), in rural areas it had risen from 4% to 8%. Audiences in rural areas however are more reliant on state-run TV channels and radio broadcasts on medium or short wave. Qualitative research indicates that TV consumption has become part of family culture for many as an integral part of the Pakistani household—one focus group participant responded that: “without TV, I would feel as if someone very dear in the family has died.”

Internet access in Pakistan is growing slowly but its reach is still below the average for Asian countries, with a penetration rate of 11.3% estimated in December 2009. This figure may neglect the political impact that the internet has, as demonstrated by the role of Pakistani bloggers in by-passing domestic media restrictions imposed during the state of emergency in 2007, spreading news about demonstrations and arrests. Mobile subscribers have been growing more rapidly, from fewer than one million in 2001 to nearly 100 million as of December 2009.

3.(b) Character of the domestic media environment

In Pakistan, state-controlled television has a dominant position with the government-owned Pakistan TV as the most watched station, but this is now being challenged by rapid growth in satellite and regional-language TV channels.

However, this growth has not yet led to improved quality in news and analysis. Most private broadcasters’ offerings remain relatively unsophisticated and under-funded. Their journalists lack training, and their independence is compromised by media owners’ affiliation with political parties and individual politicians. Pakistanis complain about repetitive formats, poor quality and ambulance chasing. An analysis by Human Capital undertaken for BBC Global News in December 2009 registered concerns in Pakistan in relation to domestic standards of journalism, with commercial pressures felt to be leading to a decline in serious news provision and a tendency towards sensationalism.

On commercial radio, private FM stations mostly broadcast music and talk shows as there are restrictions on broadcasting news and current affairs. Pakistan's regulator PEMRA rules state that stations may only broadcast local news and rebroadcast news and current affairs of the national broadcasters (PTV and PBC) and BBC Urdu. In recent years, the BBC has faced difficulties with PEMRA in maintaining FM news broadcasts in Pakistan. The service launched in June 2007, was disrupted and the BBC was taken off air by the PEMRA; the BBC subsequently challenged this in the Pakistani courts, and the situation was further complicated when the state of emergency was declared, although short wave services were unaffected. FM news broadcasts were restored in May 2009, but there were more difficulties in March 2010 which resulted in stations being allowed to carry a maximum of three ten minute bulletins daily, now provided by the BBC to 37 stations.

The operational environment for journalists also has an impact—Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries for journalists to work in. In 2009, according to the Pakistani media resource centre Intermedia, 10 journalists were killed, 10 kidnapped and 70 assaulted and there were a total of 163 cases of direct attacks on the media, including murders, assaults, kidnappings, explicit threats, censorship cases and attacks on media properties and establishments. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and large parts of Baluchistan are effectively no-go areas for journalists.

In Afghanistan, the rapid growth of the media industry following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, has slowed in recent years, with only a handful of new radio and television stations launched since May 2009. There are now about 100 radio stations and more than 40 television channels operating across Afghanistan. Media ownership ranges from the Afghan Government—which includes provincial political-military powers—and privately-owned media, to media funded with the help of foreign assistance programmes. Local strongmen control much of the area, including the media, and reporters are divided along ethnic, linguistic and political lines. Most TV channels promote their own particular political, religious, ethnic or tribal interests.

7 Taliban Cultural Commission’s guidelines for singers and poets, May 2008
Pressure from insurgents, powerful former warlords, drug dealers and officials has meant that journalists are afraid to touch on controversial subjects such as national unity, crimes committed by specific warlords, and corrupt practices. In its 2010 annual survey of media freedom in 195 countries and territories, the US-based media watchdog Freedom House described Afghanistan as “Not Free”, placing it at 165 out of 196 rankings. Acts of violence against journalists rose by 70% in 2009, the majority committed by government agencies, according to the Afghan media development organisation Nai. This has contributed to the lack of impartial and authoritative analysis and editorial depth in the domestic media.

4. BBC World Service’s impact in Afghanistan/Pakistan

BBC World Service has had a presence in the region for nearly seventy years and now broadcasts language services in Urdu, Persian, Pashto, Uzbek and Urdu. It has had a historic role as the de facto national broadcaster and a lifeline service when no independent media existed there. There has since been an explosion in local media in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but BBC World Service leads as the most trusted source of news, information and analysis on TV or radio in the region. The impact of this service was acknowledged in the Afghan Government’s National Development Framework in 2002: “Our people are poor; the majority is illiterate, but the sophistication of political debate and awareness is remarkable, in great part due to the international media”.

BBC World Service has a weekly audience in Afghanistan of 6.5 million, and over nine million Pakistanis listen weekly. Its importance in Pakistan is greatest in rural areas which deliver 78% of our audience. A survey in early 2009 interviewed a sample of 4,000 adults in the Pashtun tribal areas of Pakistan: 30% rated radio as the most valuable source of information, with 13% saying television. When asked about which stations they listened to regularly, 25% said BBC Pashto, followed by Voice of America’s Radio Deewa at 16%. One indication of the value of the BBC comes from the rural areas and villages of southern Afghanistan, where local people have asked the Mullahs in their mosques to adjust the evening prayer times so that they can listen to the BBC programmes.

BBC World Service achieves this impact in Afghanistan and Pakistan through a schedule of domestic and international news with a strong emphasis on discussion, and interactive debate on civil society and democratic politics. There are also education and development focused-programming provided by the World Service Trust including the popular drama serial New Home New Life. Some examples of the regular analytical and participatory programmes that BBC World Service provides to facilitate and inform public discussion in the region include:

Talking Point: live weekly phone-in programme dealing with important political, social, cultural and economic issues in the context of News & Current Affairs. Listeners ring in and put questions to a studio guest, usually a government minister, regional governor, politician or other well-known public figure. It has proved very popular with our listeners and generates a big audience response, examples of subjects discussed recently include “Is it possible to separate the Taliban and al-Qaeda from each other?” and “How can the future Afghan Government win the public confidence and trust?”

Investigative reports: weekly 12–15 minute investigative report slot on a topical issue, discussed with relevant people and analysts.

Jirga: weekly 10-minute slot in the Pashto programme for southern Afghanistan, usually recorded locally by our stringer, discussing important local issues with local people. Examples include the problems of education in Helmand or taxes and revenue in Kunar.

There are strong examples of the effect of this discursive and analytical approach in BBC World Service’s stories that have had a major impact on informing the public agenda. For example:

Pakistan Floods: As the worst floods in the region’s history submerged one-fifth of the country, BBC Urdu collaborated with the BBC World Service Trust to start broadcasts three times a day aimed at providing vital information to flood victims. In many instances, officials conceded that they came to know about the gravity of the situation in a particular area from our broadcasts. These Lifeline Pakistan broadcasts proved so popular that when we planned to end them after one month, several government officials, ministers and aid agencies requested us to continue them as a result of which we are still on air. More funding has been provided for at least two months.

Plane crash in Afghanistan: After a Pamir Airways passenger plane crashed in May 2010 and 44 lives were lost, BBC World Service’s Afghan stream broadcast reports, interviews, a Talking Point programme and challenged Afghan officials about the demand for stringent air safety regulations. The issue was then taken up by the Afghan Government, with the President ordering a review of air safety regulations as well as reviewing the air transport companies.

Missing People: In the years following 9/11, thousands of political activists were picked up by Pakistani intelligence agencies as terror suspects and never heard of again. Their families petitioned every avenue from government officials to courts of law with little result. Because of the sensitivity attached to the issue, the local media were just not reporting the story. BBC Urdu developed some very high profile programming highlighting

---

8 National Development Framework, Afghan Government 2002
the plight of the families of these missing people. From setting up live webcasts to carrying out independent investigations, we kept the issue in focus till the Government came under enough pressure from international human rights agencies to respond. Encouraged by our coverage, the families formed an association and the matter was eventually taken up by the country's Supreme Court and led to the release of hundreds of such detainees.

Alongside this, educational programmes funded by the BBC World Service Trust and broadcast on BBC World Service have a powerful effect on informing people’s decisions. For example, the flagship radio drama, *New Home New Life*, is Afghanistan’s most popular cultural programme with a huge following. Its educational value has been demonstrated by a United Nations report showing an association between listenership and lower casualties from landmines, suggesting that regular listeners were only half as likely to be involved in a mine incident as non-listeners, because they acted on well-researched advice embedded in a number of long-running storylines.

Surveys in the region confirm a role of providing a vehicle for an informed society and the value attributed to that by audiences, as indicated by the results of a 2010 Human Capital report (below). Net strength of agreement is based on the weighted average score after assigning scores of +2, +1, 0, -1 and -2 to responses of “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree” respectively:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The BBC stimulates discussion and debate on important issues</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The BBC provides a valuable alternative voice on world issues</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The BBC has a positive influence on media organisations in this country</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The BBC has had a positive effect on politics and democracy</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The BBC raises awareness of important global issues around the world</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The BBC helps to create a more stable, secure world</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The BBC provides independent and impartial news where nobody else can</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The BBC helps people from different cultures and different parts of the</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world understand each other better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was strong agreement in this survey over these positive characteristics compared to other international media organisations, which included:

— The standards of balance, fairness, authority and trust, backed up by an extensive newsgathering resource and the highest editorial values, resulting in highly informative and edifying content.
— The perception that the BBC is independent from the UK Government and truly international in outlook.
— The breadth and depth of the BBC’s coverage.
— An important history of providing trustworthy, accurate and credible journalism.

Providing this brings credit to the UK. The survey demonstrated that 84% of respondents who had listened to BBC World Service in Pakistan said it made them think of the UK more positively. Nearly 90% considered that the UK’s provision of BBC World Service to be essential or very important.

This is also an area where the UK has a comparative advantage over its ISAF partners on trust and cost effectiveness. Qualitative research by Kantar media in February 2010 suggested listeners perceive Voice of America as more biased and having an American agenda, although they describe it as an innovative, challenging and informative station. This is important to note as the US Government places increasing emphasis on media and communications. The US Regional Stabilization Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, revised in 2010, commits to an increase in communications supporting media from £50 million in FY 2009 to £140 million in FY 2010:

“The Taliban and al-Qaeda use information as a weapon, dominating the information space. While our previous strategy focused largely on traditional public diplomacy and communications tools, we are now elevating our communications efforts in importance and innovation. New programs will empower Afghans and Pakistanis to challenge the extremist narrative and offer their own vision for Afghanistan and Pakistan’s future.”

9 See the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan’s Regional Stabilization Strategy revised in 2010.
Professor Paul Collier’s view is that building an informed society is an essential requirement to effective development. Access to information enables citizens to hold Governments to account and helps establish an informed partnership between Government and society. By creating fora for exchange of ideas and views, BBC World Service helps Governments develop policies that benefit the many, not the few, rather than being driven by sectional or ethnic interest. With a focus on dispassionate and informed analysis, and its use of participatory tools, BBC World Service, through its output, news agenda leadership and qualitative impact, helps grow informed societies in areas where effective development is most difficult and corruption prevalent.

5. Proposals

BBC World Service has outlined the proposals below as part of its submission to the UK Spending Review (July 2010). These would only be possible if dedicated additional funding is available. One option would be to consider whether they could be funded through ODA.

We propose to provide TV programming in Urdu targeted towards Pakistan’s growing middle class, distributed via partners—or, if budgets permit, a full BBC channel.

— In Pakistan, despite huge pressures, a middle class has emerged that is more politically confident than before, which has driven demand for democratisation and respect for human rights in recent years—and has the potential to act as a major internal stabilising force in the country. Most urban households now have access to cable television, and the middle class is hungry for news which is independent of political bias and has a quality of insight and analysis that no Pakistani news provider currently provides. Market research undertaken by BBC World Service indicates dissatisfaction with the level of insight currently provided by TV and over-emphasis on breaking news—considered to be sensationalist, inaccurate, biased in presentation and forced to toe the government line.

— BBC World News, the BBC’s English language international news channels, ranks well in market research with its TV competitors such as CNN on credibility and accuracy, but audience research indicates that an offer in Urdu specifically targeted for the Pakistani audience is in demand. Furthermore, the 2010 qualitative research prepared for the BBC Trust by Kantar media reveals that the use of local correspondents and the Urdu language by the BBC Urdu Service is a real area of strength. It is generally perceived as authentic, clear and simple for all Urdu speakers. It helps to make the service relevant to opinion formers and even more, in their view, for the wider Pakistani population—and is felt to help people speak better Urdu.

— BBC World Service’s research indicates that launching a TV version of the BBC Urdu Service would be universally very popular and provide much needed depth of leadership in news and analysis on Pakistan’s dominant medium, constituting a long lasting and powerful contribution to the welfare and development of Pakistani society, something that would substantially contribute to HMG’s ‘particular emphasis to helping Pakistan transform itself into a more stable, prosperous and democratic state’.

— Programmes would offer detailed analysis, searching interviews and debates, giving citizens a unique opportunity to call their politicians to account. They would offer a wider, international perspective, explaining how global developments are affecting Pakistan, and how events in Pakistan are seen by the rest of the world. Programmes have a broad agenda, covering a wide range of topics such as culture, religion, IT, business and economy, technology, health and sport.

We propose to increase hours of broadcast for Pashto radio, and to explore opportunities to launch TV programming in Pashto when funding and market conditions permit.

— In Afghanistan and in Pakistan’s tribal areas, radio remains the main source of news, and BBC World Service leads on trust and audiences in these areas. However, competition for these audiences and communities in vital areas comes from insurgency communications campaigns. The influence that these communications have in increasing violence and instability inhibits the welfare and economic development of fragile states. As the insurgency agenda uses targeted mobilisation to influence communities and individuals to participate in and support the insurgency, both locally and globally, and shifts the perception of the conflict through partisan portrayal of victories and defeats. As David Kilcullen has written: “In military terms, for AQ the main effort is information; for us, information is a supporting effort. Al Qaida is highly skilled at exploiting multiple, diverse actions by individuals and groups, framing them in a propaganda narrative to manipulate local and global audiences. This propaganda capability is central to the objective of creating and manipulating local allies and portraying itself as the vanguard of the resistance”.

10 Dr David Kilcullen, The Accidental Guerrilla, 2009
As part of a broader communications strategy, the Afghan Taliban intermittently run a number of unlicensed FM radio stations from areas where they feel confident they can broadcast without interference from the US-led coalition or hostile Afghan groups. Reports of this activity have been found in the southern and south-eastern provinces of Helmand, Ghazni, Nurestan, Khost and Paktia. Radio Shar’iah has been described as a typical example, with reports of content including commentaries, pro-Taliban songs, exhortations to Afghans to stay away from the election process and threats to kill those who co-operate with international forces. The Afghan Taliban also operates a multi-lingual website via which a half-hour daily radio broadcast can be listened to.

In Pakistan’s tribal regions, the Taliban have been broadcasting on FM stations since 2004. Many of these were run by local notables and clerics and some, most notoriously that operated by Maulana Fazlullah in Swat, openly acted as instruments of Pakistani Taliban control of their localities.

Unlike these partisan communications, our audiences know that the BBC is completely independent and impartial—and that is precisely why it is central to diffusing their impact. It earned the trust of the population decades before the insurgency, by honestly and impartially reflecting a plurality of viewpoints and political persuasions. The values that the BBC upholds therefore—accuracy, impartiality, independence, fairness—are a bulwark against the use of media and communications to present distorted and hostile perspectives. It is those values that have enabled BBC World Service to retain global trust and credibility. We propose this expansion to our services therefore as a fundamental contribution to HMG’s development priorities on ‘stabilising insecure areas’ and ‘improving the effectiveness of the Afghan Government’.

11 October 2010

Written evidence from James Fergusson

James Fergusson is an Edinburgh-based author and journalist who began writing about the Af-Pak region in 1996. He has written three books on Afghanistan. His second, A Million Bullets, a study of the British deployment in Helmand in 2006, was the British Army’s Military Book of the Year (2009). His latest book, Taliban, examines the origins of that movement and argues that it is now time to negotiate a settlement with its leadership. This is the second time that he has given evidence to the FASC on this subject.

Executive Summary

— The regional approach is crucial. But with Special Envoy Sherard Cowper-Coles no longer in post, who is now driving the UK’s Af-Pak policy?
— Many senior British figures believe it is time to start trying to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban, and that this outcome is inevitable. Yet official policy is simply to go on supporting the US’s military strategy—even while this is demonstrably studdering.
— The US has still not made its mind up about the Taliban: “part of the fabric of society”, or a “scourge” and a “cancer”?
— The West has so far failed to reach out to moderate elements of the Taliban. Far more co-ordination and purpose are required if negotiations are ever to succeed.
— It is past time for civilian agencies to take back the initiative on negotiation. The UK could have a key mediating role to play in the settlement—and should perhaps make better use of its influence with the US to help shape this outcome.

How Appropriate and Effective is the UK’s Current Foreign Policy Approach Towards Both Afghanistan and Pakistan?

1. In January 2009 Richard Holbrooke was appointed as the US’s first ever “Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” This was an important, if belated, acknowledgement that Afghanistan’s troubles require a regional solution. The Afghan Taliban will not be defeated militarily without Pakistan’s help, and nor are they likely to be persuaded to the negotiating table unless Pakistan is included in that process. It was therefore entirely appropriate that Britain quickly followed America’s lead, recasting the Kabul Ambassador Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles in an equivalent role, as Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

2. However, Sir Sherard was removed from his post this summer, reportedly for speaking out in favour of talks with the Taliban; and he has apparently not been replaced. Instead, the focus of senior British representation in the region has shifted, with the appointment of Mark Sedwill as the NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan.

3. This seems a pity. Pakistan remains integral to a solution in Afghanistan; nothing has changed in this respect, and Anglo-Pakistani relations are as important as ever to British interests. (They certainly need careful handling: consider Prime Minister Cameron’s remark in July that Pakistan “looks both ways” on terrorism; or Pakistani prickliness over British flood relief efforts in August; or the cricket match-rigging scandal last month). Yet who, now, is really in charge of the important “Af-Pak” brief?

11 DFID Structural Reform Plan, 2010
4. Relations between Pakistan and NATO hardly seem better. Despite NATO claims that they and Pakistan have “significantly expanded political relations and practical cooperation” since 2005, Islamabad recently blocked a NATO fuel supply convoy in retaliation for a friendly fire incident in which three Pakistani soldiers were allegedly killed by Coalition aircraft.

5. Sir Sherard’s argument that the Coalition now needs to negotiate a compromise with the Afghan Taliban leadership is a strong one, and I support it. I laid out the case for negotiations in a lengthy cover article for *Prospect* magazine last month (see: http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2010/08/meet-the-taliban-not-as-bad-as-you-think/).

6. There is a widespread view among senior British officials, civilian and military, that the time for talks is nigh. For instance, Sir David Richards, the CGS, told the BBC in June: “I think there’s no reason why we shouldn’t be looking at that sort of thing [talking to the Taliban] pretty soon.”

7. But pursuing talks is still not official policy in Afghanistan. Instead, Britain has committed itself to supporting the American strategy. Britain is just one member of an international coalition in Afghanistan that is dominated by America. We do not have (nor are we in a position to have) our own, distinct foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Our policy rather is to support the American policy, and to hope that it works. Britain has adopted what one senior government official described to me recently as a “wait and see” posture. To judge the effectiveness of UK foreign policy in the region is to judge the effectiveness of US policy, therefore.

**How Can, and Should, UK Foreign Policy Performance and Success in Afghanistan and Pakistan be Measured?**

8. The heart of the US strategy remains General McChrystal’s “surge.” This is designed to dominate the city and environs of Kandahar—the spiritual capital of the Pashtuns and the birthplace of the Taliban—and in so doing, to place the US and her Coalition allies in a position of strength from which to negotiate with the insurgency. The military surge got off to a bad start in Marjah in Helmand, which is still not pacified; and McChrystal, the architect of the strategy, is no longer in post following his firing in the summer. The push towards Kandahar, now ongoing under General Petraeus, appears to be well behind schedule; NATO troops are facing stiff opposition as they advance.

9. President Obama’s accompanying “civilian surge” has sought to eradicate corruption and to establish proper governance. Neither goal has yet been achieved. Kabul was recently rocked by a major banking scandal that may yet engulf the President’s own brother. In the district of Marjah, where General McChrystal promised to introduce a “government in a box,” governance is still failing, according to polling in the region in June by ICOS, (the International Council on Security and Development). ICOS’s findings are worth repeating:

- 70% said government officials in their area were profiting from drug trafficking;
- 64% said local officials were linked to the insurgency;
- 74% worried about feeding their families;
- 68% said NATO was failing to protect the local population; and
- 70% said military operations in their area were bad for the Afghan people; a figure that rose to 99% in Marjah itself.

10. Meanwhile, the program to train up new security forces—the key to NATO’s exit strategy—is in severe difficulties, particularly the program to train the notoriously corrupt Afghan National Police. Last December, the annualized attrition rate of the ANP was said to be about 100%. The US’s Lieutenant General William Caldwell, who runs the ANP training program, has raised their pay to the same level as Taliban recruits—a move that has slowed but failed to stop this rate of attrition, which was still running at nearly 50% in July.

11. The US strategy is clearly not working as it should. President Obama is committed to reviewing his strategy at the end of the year. Those hoping for a change of direction are likely to be disappointed, however. Petraeus has moved recently to downplay expectations, calling the strategy review little more than “a midcourse assessment.” The White House, too, has indicated that it wants “fine tuning, rather than changing the channel.”

12. This sounds like bad news in particular for those hoping for a switch of emphasis to a civilian-led, negotiated settlement with the Taliban. American thinking on this remains incoherent and contradictory. In Islamabad last March, Defense Secretary Robert Gates publicly described the Taliban as a “cancer” and a “scourge.” Yet the following day, he said the Taliban were “a part of the fabric of society these days.” It cannot be both! General Petraeus, similarly, has publicly encouraged President Karzai in his efforts to negotiate with the Taliban leadership. Yet the US is not yet ready to hold direct talks with the Taliban. At the same time US Special Forces, with Obama’s full approval, have stepped up their “decapitation” program of targeted assassinations of Taliban leaders.

13. Quetta has not unnaturally concluded from all this that the US is not serious about wanting to negotiate. The Taliban leadership have repeatedly and consistently refused to deal with Karzai, whom they regard as a Western stooge and irredeemably corrupt. Only direct talks between Quetta and Washington are likely to have any value, senior ex-Taliban figures say; but the prospect of these remains far off while we continue to kill the people with whom we will eventually have to negotiate with. (The self-defeating nature of the decapitation...
strategy was spelled out by Major-General Andrew Mackay who told his staff in 2008: “We’re at risk of killing the Gerry Adams or Martin McGuinness of the Taliban.”

14. Influencing Washington’s thinking on direct talks with Quetta should be central to the UK’s Af-Pak strategy. As the second largest troop contributor in Afghanistan, the UK is surely better placed than any other NATO ally to steer the US in the direction of negotiations. For reasons of history, the UK may also be particularly well-placed to help mediate these talks. “The British are special to us,” as a senior ex-Taliban put it to me in March. “Our relationship with you was so good during the Jihad. You have been coming here for 170 years. We feel we know you.”

HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE OVERALL UK GOVERNMENT EFFORT IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN?

15. In a keynote speech in March 2010, Foreign Secretary David Miliband remarked: “Now is the time for the Afghans to pursue a political settlement with as much vigour and energy as we are pursuing the military and civilian effort... Dialogue is not appeasement, and [granting the Taliban] political space is not the same as veto power or domination.”

16. This enlightened speech, delivered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was clearly aimed at Washington listening? The speech was, of course, Miliband’s last as Foreign Secretary in America. The new Foreign Secretary has spoken of a “solid but not slavish” Anglo-American relationship—although what this will mean in practice in terms of British Af-Pak policy is not yet clear.

17. The effectiveness of the FCO on the ground in Afghanistan has been much debated, particularly within the Army. Civilian-military co-operation in Helmand, particularly, has often been fraught. The military, always in a hurry, feel the civilian agencies (essentially the FCO and DFID) could have done/could do more; the civilian agencies retort that they have a duty of care to their employees, and that the military misunderstand the nature of sustainable development.

18. Since 2006, Britain’s engagement in Afghanistan has been dominated by military rather than civilian thinking. This is the opposite of what happened in Malaya, Britain’s last successful foreign COIN mission— the lessons of which the UK seems to have forgotten.

19. According to the “comprehensive approach” adopted by Britain in Afghanistan, the military and civilian agencies are supposed to work closely together. The way the military and government relate to and understand each other urgently needs to be improved if the comprehensive approach is to have a chance of working in future.12

6 October 2010

Written evidence from Matt Waldman, Independent analyst

SUMMARY

1. NATO forces are not winning in Afghanistan. The insurgency is expanding and becoming more powerful and more deadly. The majority of Taliban are neither extremists nor mercenaries: despite the use of extreme tactics, most insurgents believe they are fighting a just war against aggressive invaders and a degenerate proxy regime.

2. Counter-insurgency in Afghanistan cannot succeed without two elements essential for success: a legitimate, functioning Government, and insurgents that are deprived of external sanctuary and support. Transition—efforts to build Afghan forces and transfer responsibilities to them—faces major obstacles and will take longer than anticipated.

3. Despite some improvements, there continue to be major constraints in the effectiveness of international assistance to Afghanistan. In particular, it is impeded by the drive for rapid physical results, lack of Afghan ownership, and overuse of contractors and consultants. Operational rules heavily constrain the effectiveness of UK and other diplomats. A highly challenging counter-insurgency campaign, which requires non-military efforts that match those on the battlefield, will not be won by fluctuating personnel who are detached from the population and excessively shielded from risk.

4. Efforts to “reintegrate” insurgents are unlikely to be successful due to widespread mistrust of government officials, the strength and reach of the insurgency, and because the programme does not address the principal reasons why Afghans fight.

5. Most Afghans support talks with the Taliban, and some insurgent objectives converge with wider Afghan and international interests. Given this, and the constraints of counter-insurgency and transition, the potential for negotiations with the Taliban should be explored. But dialogue is blocked by international incoherence and insurgent mistrust of the coalition, which is compounded by the military surge. The process requires careful handling. It is jeopardised by numerous potential spoilers on all sides. There are questions about the feasibility

12 Mr Fergusson appended to his written evidence an article he wrote for Prospect Magazine, Issue 174, September 2010, “Meet the Taliban—not as bad as you think”, together with the editor’s letter in the same issue.
of power-sharing, and an agreement could lead to constraints on civil and political freedoms as well as the rights of women and minorities. To endure, any peace process and prospective settlement must be widely seen to be inclusive and just. Any settlement must also seek to address some of the root causes of the conflict, especially the abuse of power.

6. Largely due to its rivalry with India, Pakistan provides sanctuary and considerable support to the Afghan Taliban, which it sees as an instrument for achieving strategic influence. Talks require Pakistan’s support, but giving its officials excessive influence over the process could trigger opposition within Afghanistan and countermeasures from regional states. Concerted efforts are required to reduce the extent to which Pakistan perceives a threat from India, and to improve the two countries’ relations.

INTRODUCTION

7. This statement seeks to highlight, briefly, issues related to the effectiveness of the UK and other foreign powers in Afghanistan about which there are often misplaced assumptions. Given Afghanistan’s complexity, the observations forgo detail and nuance, for the sake of lucidity. It addresses: conflict conditions and the Taliban; constraints of transition and counter-insurgency; aid effectiveness; practical constraints on effective UK engagement; reintegration; reconciliation; and Pakistan (as it relates to Afghanistan).

CONFLICT CONDITIONS AND THE TALIBAN

8. NATO is not winning, or even beginning to win in Afghanistan. For each of the last four years military officials and politicians have said that they are starting to turn the corner in the conflict. In each of the last four years the insurgency has grown larger, more powerful, and more deadly.

9. Over the four years from 2006 to 2009 the number of insurgent attacks on Afghan and international forces has increased by 48, 52 and 43% respectively.\(^{13}\) (This is reflected in the chart below, which shows actual and attempted insurgent attacks against the Afghan Government or foreign forces from 2004–2010.) In the first half of 2010, there were some 3,500 insurgent attacks, up by 51% on the same period for 2009.\(^ {14}\) This August ISAF recorded 4,919 “kinetic events” (security incidents, predominantly involving insurgents), an average of over 150 incidents a day, which is up 49% on last August.\(^ {15}\)

Insurgent attacks in Afghanistan per week, 2004–2010; source: NATO.

10. Insurgents are using increasingly effective asymmetric tactics against coalition forces. From 2006–2009 international military casualties increased by 21, 27 and 77%.\(^ {16}\) There were 489 coalition deaths in the first eight months of 2010, up by 58% on the same period for 2009.\(^ {17}\)

\(^{13}\) Figures derived from the annual reports of the Afghan NGO Safety Office (ANSO).
\(^{14}\) Figure derived from the reports of the ANSO.
\(^{16}\) Figures derived from iCasualties.org.
\(^{17}\) Figure derived from iCasualties.org.
11. Over the last three years civilian casualties have increased by 39 and 14%.\textsuperscript{18} (Comparative figures are not available prior to 2007.) In the first half of 2010 there were a reported 1,271 civilian casualties (mainly due to indiscriminate attacks by insurgents), a 21% increase on the same period for 2009.

12. Insurgents are conducting a systematic campaign of threats and intimidation against the population. In the first half of 2010 insurgents assassinated an average one civilian per day, usually due to their actual or perceived association with the Afghan Government. News reports suggest that in Kandahar alone there are currently an average of four or five such killings a day.

13. The insurgents have expanded their presence from the south and south-east, to parts of the north, centre and west, and they now have control or influence in over half of the country. Government officials can barely access one-third of the country and there are districts outside government control in almost all of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. In the first half of 2010 there were 14 provinces in which there were over 100 insurgent attacks, and another eight provinces in which there were over 50 attacks.\textsuperscript{19} And as the Taliban have extended their territorial presence they have also expanded their rudimentary structures of governance and justice.

14. The Afghan insurgency comprises seven main groups, which are supplemented, variably, by foreign militants. There is considerable segmentation within, and mistrust between, different insurgent groups, and an uneasy relationship between field commanders and the Pakistan-based leadership. The Quetta Shura-led Taliban is by far the largest bloc, which also comprises various groups, but is relatively hierarchical and cohesive. Links between the movement and al-Qaeda are minimal. On the whole, insurgents do not appear to be popular with the Afghan population, but in many areas they are seen as preferable to the Afghan Government. They are fatigued, and have been weakened by special forces’ operations, but they remain confident, and have no shortage of manpower or resources.

15. Despite false and contradictory claims by some western officials, the majority of Taliban insurgents are neither extremists nor mercenaries. Many groups use extreme tactics, including organised violence against civilians; and social and economic deprivation helps to explain why foot-soldiers fight. But most Talibs are fighting what they consider to be a just war against aggressive invaders and a degenerate, proxy regime. They have multiple motivations, which usually involve: retaliation against perceived military aggression (especially airstrikes that kill civilians, or abusive raids and detentions); resistance to a perceived foreign invasion and threat to Afghan and Islamic values; opposition to abuse of power and impunity; and exclusion from power or resources, especially at local level. Recruitment is reinforced by expediency and opportunism.

16. Some western officials assume that Taliban objectives are intrinsically antithetical to western interests. Some goals would rightly be considered objectionable by parts of Afghan society and the international community, such as further constraints on the rights, freedoms and opportunities of women and girls, or extreme punishments for violations of Islamic social codes. But other stated goals, such as the withdrawal of foreign forces, enforcement of law and order, and better governance, are consistent with Afghan and international aspirations and interests. The extent to which the Taliban seek administrative, as opposed to political, power is not entirely clear.

\textbf{Constraints on Transition and Counter-insurgency}

17. Two principal strategies govern current operations in Afghanistan: transition and counter-insurgency. The former will be difficult to accomplish in the anticipated timeframe; the latter may simply not be achievable.

18. ‘Transition’, meaning efforts to build Afghan forces and transfer responsibilities to them, faces huge obstacles. The current goal is to generate 171,600 troops, and 134,000 police by October 2011. Sustaining a force of this size, however, would heavily depend on significant, long-term foreign assistance. The annual cost of salaries alone is likely to exceed the Government’s total annual revenue. International efforts to build Afghan forces began in earnest only in 2007 and have prioritised force quantity over quality. Given weaknesses in logistics, training, and leadership there are serious questions about the capability of the Afghan Army to conduct independent operations. Afghan police are poorly equipped and widely seen as ineffective, corrupt or abusive. Both the police and army suffer from a high attrition rate (including casualties, desertions and discharges it amounts to 16 and 23%, respectively), which poses continual recruitment and training challenges.\textsuperscript{20}

19. Separately, counter-insurgency in Afghanistan will not succeed without two of the \textit{sine qua non} for success: a legitimate, functioning Government, and insurgents that are deprived of external sanctuary and support. The Afghan Government is corrupt and ineffective; its officials are often seen as unjust, predatory and benefitting from impunity. In many parts of the country there is widespread looting for officials. At the same time, insurgents benefit from safe havens in Pakistan and a significant level of support from parts of the Pakistan intelligence service and military.

20. Afghanistan suffers from a ruling mafia elite and industrial-scale corruption. Yet reportedly no senior Afghan government figure has been successfully prosecuted for corruption, and current investigations have\textsuperscript{18} Figures derived from UN reports.\textsuperscript{19} ANSO Quarterly Data Report, June 2010.\textsuperscript{20} See, for example, Elisabeth Bumiller, “US General Cites Goals to Train Afghan Forces”, \textit{The New York Times}, 23 August 2010; and Brookings Institution, “Afghanistan Index”, 31 August 2010.
stalled. This is hardly surprising: for years the West has not only failed to challenge corruption, but has channelled millions of dollars to Afghan power-holders it deems politically expedient, regardless of their records. Many Afghan officials, including those suspected of corruption, continue to receive large sums of money from various international actors, including the US Central Intelligence Agency. Graft has been compounded by the allocation of vast reconstruction funds to Afghan and western contracting companies that are wasteful or ineffective, with limited oversight. These factors have led to a conspicuous and increasing inequality between a rich elite and impoverished population.

21. There has been a colossal failure by the international coalition to empathise with ordinary Afghans and act accordingly. Consider that many Afghans, especially in southern Afghanistan, are profoundly Islamic, conservative, and have an understandable mistrust of foreign forces. In their perception western forces, garrisoned in fortified compounds, launch attacks which kill, injure or antagonise Afghan civilians (often without proper, visible accountability or redress); collude in the empowerment and enrichment of abusive strongmen and a corrupt regime; maladminister assistance funds; and herald the commencement of their departure. Most Afghans live in difficult conditions and will accept what support they can get, but in light of the above considerations, and in the face of systematic Taliban intimidation, it is increasingly unrealistic to expect western soldiers to win Afghan hearts and minds.

22. This is underscored by countless discussions this author has had with ordinary Afghans which suggest that a majority of the population no longer believes that the coalition actually wants to defeat the insurgents. The explanations for this vary but they are often connected to the failures of such a powerful military coalition, America’s on-going support to the Pakistan military, whom they know are supporting the Taliban, or America’s alleged ambition for regional dominance and resources. However mistaken the scepticism of foreign intentions may be, it is deeply entrenched and spreading, making it even more difficult for foreign soldiers to win the support of the population.

Constraints on Aid Effectiveness

23. There have been improvements in health and education services, and many rural areas have benefitted from community-based development programmes. The capacity of certain ministries is improving. But there continue to be major constraints in the effectiveness of international development assistance. Three significant factors, described below, are the drive for rapid physical results, lack of Afghan ownership, and overuse of contractors and consultants.

24. Aid has suffered from a perpetual short-termism. The complex, challenging and insecure environment requires lengthy project timeframes. Yet foreign donor contracts tend to be short-term, and implementing agencies often face pressure to deliver rapid results. To achieve social and economic sustainability it is essential to build the capacity of Afghan individuals and institutions, rather than focusing predominantly on physical capital.

25. An essential ingredient for successful development is “ownership”—the buy in or active participation and engagement of those involved. It is required both nationally and locally, and helps to ensure that aid is relevant, builds capacities and has a substantial, lasting effect. Yet much aid to Afghanistan has been supply—rather than demand–driven, which undermines efforts to achieve ownership. This has led to projects that seek to replicate western models of development that have little or no relevance to Afghanistan. The extensive use of foreign soldiers or contracting companies to deliver aid has also limited the potential for achieving local ownership.

26. Private contractors are essential for reconstruction, but many make huge profits, often through several tiers of sub-contracts, while delivering mixed or unsatisfactory results. Local contracting companies, in particular, are seen as wasteful, corrupt and delivering low quality work. Expatriate consultants are also essential for technical assistance and capacity-building, but many are insufficiently experienced or qualified, and absorb costs that are wholly disproportionate to their value-added. Concerted efforts by foreign donors to address these issues could significantly enhance the impact of aid and potentially improve the long-term prospects for stability.

Practical Constraints on Effective UK Engagement

27. UK ability to influence events in Afghanistan is extremely limited. At this stage in the conflict it is difficult for any foreign actor to achieve major shifts in direction, and what foreign influence there is lies principally with the US.

28. Nevertheless, UK influence is greatly diminished by operating practices that heavily constrain our personnel. British diplomats are expected to conduct sophisticated, in-depth analysis of Afghan affairs; to build trust with, and influence, key partners; and to support and oversee major assistance programmes. Though often of high-calibre, it is difficult for diplomats to accomplish these tasks under current conditions. Most live in heavily fortified compounds with little access to the field, and have minimal contact with Afghans. Tours are
29. Given these constraints, civilian achievements are impressive. But a highly challenging counter-insurgency campaign, which by definition requires non-military efforts which match those on the battlefield, will not be won by fluctuating personnel who are detached from the population and excessively shielded from risk.

30. Impediments to transition, counter-insurgency and foreign assistance have led policy-makers to turn their attention to other policy areas, such as reintegration and reconciliation.

**Reintegration**

31. Considerable emphasis has been placed by the coalition on the new Peace and Reintegration Programme, which offers economic incentives and opportunities, including vocational training and community projects in agriculture or reconstruction, to persuade insurgents to desist from violence. A ‘High Peace Council’ is being established, along with provincial and district level committees, to oversee and direct the programme.

32. Despite commendable efforts by ISAF and Afghan officials involved, the plan faces severe challenges of implementation. The programme relies heavily on local government officials that insurgents are unlikely to trust. It envisages large-scale projects but the Government has little presence or capacity outside district centres. It will be especially difficult to implement in Taliban-dominated areas, where it is most relevant, and insurgents are likely to target participants or their families.

33. There are indications that insurgents are tired of fighting, and recently a number of insurgent groups in the north and west have either surrendered or expressed an interest in reintegration. Thus, if implemented incrementally, by competent, credible officials (of whom there are few), the programme stands a chance of achieving small successes.

34. However, many potential “reintegrees” doubt that the Government will fulfil its promises of assistance or protection. Moreover, the programme does not address the principal reasons why Afghans fight, as noted above, such as the abuse of power and the perceived aggression of foreign forces. It is therefore unlikely that many fighters will abandon the insurgency, and the number who do so is likely to be matched or exceeded by the number of new recruits. The priority is to ensure that the programme does not exacerbate the conflict or undermine future possibilities for reintegration. Sibghatullah Mojadidi’s Peace and Reconciliation Commission, which the programme replaces, was so corrupt and ineffective that it diminished the prospects for insurgent reintegration.

**“Reconciliation”**

35. There is international incoherence on the issue of “reconciliation”. Some military officials see reconciliation as a tool of counter-insurgency to induce high-level insurgent defections, and thus weaken and divide the enemy. Some see it as a way of cutting deals with the Taliban in order to facilitate foreign forces’ departure. Others see it as a process to address grievances between hostile groups, especially the Government and Taliban, in order to resolve the core conflict and achieve a more inclusive political settlement.

36. Assessing the risks, opportunities and implications of negotiations with insurgents is acutely difficult. That said, there are major flaws and constraints of counter-insurgency and transition; an increasing number of western policy-makers see the current course as politically and financially unsustainable; and the idea of talks is widely supported by the Afghan population. In addition, there is a degree of convergence of Taliban, Afghan and international interests, especially in terms of the presence of foreign troops, Afghan sovereignty, law and order, and arguably, governance.

37. Thus, the international community should ensure greater coherence on “reconciliation” and actively seek to facilitate government-Taliban dialogue. For talks to begin, the international community, in particular the US, needs to demonstrate a genuine interest in talks. It should modify its insistence on stringent preconditions which may be blocking talks altogether. But the process should proceed with caution: a rush to negotiate would be self-defeating and any negotiations process would involve major risks and challenges.

38. Presently the biggest obstacle to talks is mistrust between the warring parties. Confidence-building measures, such as removing former Taliban figures from the UN blacklist, have been unilateral and comparatively insignificant. The coalition’s military surge appears to be intensifying the conflict, and compounding enmity between the parties, and is therefore reducing the prospects of negotiations. Mistrust is reinforced by the coalition’s emphasis on the reintegration of fighters, rather than genuine, high- or mid-level talks.

---

39. The process could be disrupted by powerful spoilers within the Government, political factions, the insurgency, or the region: strategies are required to ensure they are integrated, marginalised or contained. There are numerous questions about the form, scope, and guiding principles of the process; identity of mediators; and even which actors are represented in talks given the segmentation and fragmentation of the parties.

40. Negotiations could ultimately lead to a power-sharing agreement, but implementation would be highly challenging, especially due to multifarious factional and other power struggles, at local, national and regional levels. An agreement could involve constitutional or legislative changes that jeopardise civil and political liberties, and the rights of women and minorities. It could also provoke a backlash by groups who fear losing their current power.

41. For legitimacy and viability, any settlement must be both inclusive and just: it should therefore seek to reflect the aspirations of Afghanistan’s diverse society. It should also seek to address underlying causes of the conflict, especially the abuse of power. It must be reinforced by genuine peace-building and reconciliation efforts to build better relations between hostile groups.

Pakistan

42. Due to its latent conflict with India, parts of the Pakistani military and ISI have long aspired to significant influence, or “strategic depth” in Afghanistan. They are anxious about what is perceived as a strong Indian presence in the country and a Kabul–New Delhi alliance. This is reinforced by concerns about the disputed Durand Line that divides Afghanistan and Pakistan, along with an enduring insurgency in Balochistan. They see the Taliban as an instrument of strategic influence, and therefore provide them with sanctuary and significant support. This puts Pakistan in the powerful position of a potential facilitator or spoiler of negotiations.

43. In early 2010 the ISI arrested the Taliban’s supreme military commander, Mullah Baradar—who is believed to have had independent contacts with the Karzai regime—as well as other members of the Taliban leadership council, known as the Quetta Shura. The arrests were a demonstration by Pakistani officials that they would obstruct talks unless they were fully involved in the process. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that negotiations could succeed without Pakistan’s backing.

44. There are indications that the ISI and military are inclined to support negotiations in Afghanistan. They are increasingly concerned about a possible future alliance between Afghan insurgents and the Pakistani Taliban, who could benefit from “reverse strategic depth” inside Afghanistan.

45. However, given the longstanding role of Pakistan’s military and ISI in supporting insurgents, especially the Haqqani network, their inclusion in talks must be handled carefully. It requires a difficult balance to be struck between expediency and Afghan sovereignty. If Pakistan believes its influence is insufficient, it will not support the process, yet the perception of excessive influence could provoke opposition inside Afghanistan or countermeasures by neighbouring countries.

46. The best means to bring about Pakistan’s constructive engagement is to address the underlying causes of its conduct, especially the perceived threat from India. Ultimately, this depends on improved relations between the two adversaries, which requires persistent encouragement, pressure, and support from the international community. It could be reinforced by more effective use of US incentives and disincentives in Pakistan; modifications and perhaps a diminution in the scope of India’s presence in Afghanistan; and, conceivably, Afghanistan’s commitment to geo-political nonalignment.

47. Equally, any negotiations process must involve consultation and engagement with other states in the region—not least India, Iran, Russia, and China—who are manoeuvring to protect their interests in anticipation of US withdrawal. It will require concerted efforts to identify, and as far as reasonably possible, accommodate their legitimate geo-political interests.

CONCLUSION

48. The outlook for coalition forces in Afghanistan is worse than often portrayed by officials. There are major constraints on existing strategies, especially counter-insurgency and transition, the insurgency continues to grow, and some analysts fear a new civil war.

49. Too many western officials see the Afghan conflict as a Manichean struggle. Neither side is benign. Arguably, the repugnance of Taliban ideology is matched by the degeneracy of the Government, and Taliban–al-Qaeda links are exaggerated.

50. Foreign powers should seek to improve state-building and transition efforts, and maintain a robust military presence. But they must also support direct or indirect talks with the insurgency, as part of a wider, inclusive political process, reinforced by efforts to mitigate Pakistan–India hostility. Negotiations and prospective power-sharing in Afghanistan are fraught with risk, but they constitute a narrow opportunity to resolve the core conflict. Efforts to defeat the insurgents are highly unlikely to succeed, and could pave the way to a more deadly, internecine war.

3 October 2010
THE UNITED KINGDOM’S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

1. The United States is providing 80% of the Coalition troops in Afghanistan and a very substantial part of the overall international expenditure there. Other countries are in charge of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in at most two provinces each. The United Kingdom meantime provides a fraction of the troops and development assistance in Afghanistan and is in charge of only one PRT.

2. Clearly therefore the UK’s goals in Afghanistan are going to be delivered through its relationship with the United States. Indeed the most obvious benefit that the UK derives from its deployment in Afghanistan is a strengthening of that relationship.

3. Seen in this light, the United Kingdom’s strategy has had some notable successes. It has been identified for some time as a relative pessimist on the prospects for a purely military solution in Afghanistan, and an advocate of localised solutions and openness to the possibility of reconciliation with the Taliban. These are gradually becoming orthodox doctrines among commentators in America, though not yet official US policy.

4. On the other hand the approach taken in Afghanistan of allocating provinces and issues to “lead nations”—the UK was responsible for drugs, and the security of Helmand province—was bound to introduce tension into the US-UK relationship. The system also has other flaws: it has encouraged the perception of the Coalition effort in Afghanistan as one that was divided between different nations, all with their own separate policies. Not all nations have capabilities appropriate to their particular provinces. Aid disbursement has been skewed, with more resources going to provinces adopted by larger donors, and other provinces being wholly neglected.

5. The array of international interlocutors that engage with President Karzai—Ambassadors of the five or six most important troop contributors, especially of course the US Ambassador; the military and civilian chiefs of NATO in Afghanistan; the UN and EU special representatives, the special representatives of 15 nations, and apparently the head of the Central Intelligence Agency—can likewise cause confusion. When those individuals fail to deliver the same message to President Karzai, not only is the message itself undermined but so is the credibility of the international community.

6. As Ambassador Eikenberry has suggested in two leaked cables published in November 2009 in the New York Times, there should be one main civilian interlocutor with President Karzai to ensure one clear message from the international community—with the power to deliver on what they promise. The idea of having Paddy Ashdown as a UN “super-envoy” was one way to have arranged this. As an alternative, the US Ambassador himself could fill this role—Ambassador Eikenberry’s own suggestion. Although it would mean some loss of our bilateral national clout in Afghanistan, I believe that if the US ever chooses to pursue this idea, the UK should endorse it for the sake of the success of the wider mission.

Gerard Russell, MBE was Political Counsellor at the British Embassy in Kabul 2007–8 and Senior Political Affairs Officer at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in 2009. He is now a Research Fellow in the Afghanistan/Pakistan programme at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Carr Center for Human Rights Policy.

Siobhan Gorman, Wall Street Journal, 24 August 2010

OPTIONS FOR FUTURE STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN

7. Even if foreign forces could secure Afghanistan today, they would not be able to secure it for ever. In the long-term, it is the Afghan Government which has to achieve the social and political equilibrium which can sustain permanent peace.

8. This means that the major challenge for the stabilisation effort is that of Afghan leadership. Can the country’s leaders inspire its people to risk their lives to defeat the insurgency? If they cannot, then it is hard to imagine that foreigners can inspire them to do so—especially when those foreigners are present so briefly, and are not perceived as having delivered on past promises. The presence of foreign forces may therefore be a necessary condition for peace in Afghanistan but it is obviously not a sufficient one.

9. Ambassador Eikenberry (again, in his leaked cables) said that “an increased US and foreign role in security and governance will increase Afghan dependency”. He suggests that the failures of the Afghan Government in confronting corruption and improving governance are failures not just of capacity, but also of will. In his assessment, “Karzai continues to shun responsibility for any sovereign burden... He and much of his circle do not want the US to leave.”27

10. The widespread perception—which President Karzai himself has sometimes seemed to share—that the United States and not the Afghan Government is responsible for the fight against the Taliban, must inevitably detract from Afghan willingness to sacrifice their lives in that fight. Perhaps it is for this reason that President Najibullah is sometimes regarded as having succeeded better after the 1988 withdrawal of Soviet forces than before—surviving for over two years against an insurgency that had both Pakistani and Western backing.

11. A large-scale international presence in Afghanistan specifically stands in the way of Afghan peacemaking efforts, in four ways: first, because it reduces pressure on the Afghan political elite to achieve peace; second, because the Afghan Government cannot deliver on any peace deal for as long as security strategy is in the hands of the US Government; third, because the Taliban are less likely to make peace with a Government that they denounce as being under foreign domination; and fourth, because the Taliban believe that the current balance of power is a temporary one and that when US forces leave, they will be able to get a better deal.

12. My belief therefore is that an early move by the international community towards a long-term, smaller, sustainable presence—oriented towards training and airstrikes in support of Afghan ground forces, rather than direct combat—will probably on balance, in the long run, benefit Afghanistan.

13. It carries significant risks—of increased insecurity and internal conflict, and of the Taliban taking over the territory vacated by international forces. The Coalition’s current strategy, however, can no more than postpone these risks. It does not eliminate them. They are risks that are better faced while international troops remain in Afghanistan—before security there grows even worse, and publics in troop-contributing nations lose patience with continued losses.

14. The Taliban are already extending their influence over territory across southern and eastern Afghanistan—not primarily because the Afghan military lacks capacity (it always did), but because the Taliban have more staying-power and determination than the Afghan Government’s civilian officials and police. Ceasing to contest this space with them would not necessarily mean that their movement would become a greater threat to the Kabul Government. With new responsibilities, their perspective will change and they will themselves realise that they have something to lose from continued conflict; they will have the genuine prospect of gaining something from peace.

15. Meantime the Afghan army could concentrate on protecting pro-Government areas, and strategic locations (main cities, border crossings and the highways) and be backed up by Coalition airpower and Special Forces. If the UK wished, it could also be part of this continued effort.

16. When there are fewer casualties being sustained in Afghanistan, perhaps we could hope that financial aid to the Afghan Government will be made more truly conditional on improvements in the way it runs Afghanistan.

17. Whatever strategy is adopted, much power will probably remain with or devolve to local power-brokers at the expense of the central government. This gives rise to some concern. Ambassador Francesc Vendrell has said: “Having failed dismally to make the Afghan people our allies, we will inevitably abandon them to a combination of Taliban in the south and the warlords in the north.”28 It seems to me very likely that warlords will dominate the north of Afghanistan; they already do. That is highly dispiriting for those who know how their behaviour was in the 1980s and 1990s and, in many cases, how it has remained since 2001. But the international community has rarely acted in concert to offer them effective incentives to improve their behaviour—or taken action against those who continue to abuse human rights or engage in criminal activity. This is one approach that should surely be tried.

18. I have made little reference here to Pakistan, because I know that other witnesses will speak with more authority than I on that subject. The overall goal must be to induce Pakistan to act against the Afghan Taliban

27 Paragraph 1 of the first cable, ibid
28 Quoted for example in the New Republic, 23 August 2010.
and actively to deny them shelter; or, at least, for Pakistan to intervene in favour of a peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan Government. Without this, peace in Afghanistan will be considerably less likely.

**LESSONS LEARNED FROM AFGHANISTAN**

19. The single biggest lesson that I learned from my own experience in Afghanistan, and prior to that in Iraq, is that knowledge of the language, history, politics and culture of a country is essential for the kind of mission that Coalition members have undertaken there. In both cases the US, UK and other countries have attempted to build or rebuild or reform the political structures of the country, and install new leadership. They have not therefore been able to deliver development goals just through building an effective partnership with Iraqi or Afghan actors, but have had to perform themselves the role that a national Government would usually undertake—understanding the people’s political aspirations, communicating with them directly, and so forth. This makes Dari and Pashto language skills, and the ability to move around the country, particularly important.

20. Furthermore, because consistent strategy and building relationships of trust is so important, personnel should be encouraged to stay involved with Afghanistan for as long as possible. Commanders of British forces in Helmand province have rotated every six months, and civilian staff at the PRT likewise can move on after six months; staff at the Embassy in Kabul stay between one and two years. A recent report on staffing at the United States Embassy in Kabul remarked, “The one-year assignment scenario limits the development of expertise, contributes to a lack of continuity, requires a higher number of officers to achieve the administration’s strategic goals, and results in what one former ambassador calls ‘an institutional lobotomy’.”

21. My colleagues in Afghanistan—in both the British Embassy and the United Nations—include some of the most talented people I have ever worked with. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues to excel, among its equivalents internationally, in the quality and range of language training that it offers. For a mission in Afghanistan, however, and similar missions where a granular knowledge of public opinion and the daily life of ordinary people is necessary, the FCO and other departments will need to have access to new reserves of expertise at short notice. It might be sensible for the FCO (for example) to expand its recruitment of temporary contracted staff. This would enable it to employ people who have already spent time in Afghanistan as consultants, journalists, aid workers and so forth, and who in some cases have already learned Dari or Pashto. It might also want to encourage secondments to outside organisations working in Afghanistan, such as the United Nations.

22. The FCO should certainly aim to have an incentive structure which encourages and rewards staff to maximise their contact with Afghans, rather than dedicating their time (for example) to preparing reports that are to be sent back to capitals. Among the Embassy’s objectives, for instance, there should be a target for the number and range of Afghans whose opinions the Embassy will hear. Its own communications effort should be aimed at an Afghan audience.

23. As a broader lesson from the Afghanistan case, I believe that the UK Government should maintain, in partnership with other Governments, a database of expertise, along the lines of the database of civilian experts already maintained by the UK’s Stabilisation Unit (SU). That SU database divides people by specialism, according to whether they have experience in demobilisation, community engagement, and so forth. There should be a similar database divided by expertise, so that HMG and other Governments can be sure that in the event of a crisis happening anywhere in the world, they have access to at least some people who have long-standing experience of the particular place where that crisis is happening.

24. Even when such a system is in place, the international community should be modest about its ability to build governance structures (as opposed to assisting ones that already exist). Its relative success in the former Yugoslavia is beginning to look like an exception when set beside the criticism of its efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan and even East Timor. We can compare with these cases, other countries where the UK and its allies have encouraged slow and gradual reform. Such an approach is much better suited to our post-imperial capacities and inclinations. It also avoids the ironic dilemma we face in Afghanistan—where the scale of our political investment has made the Afghan Government feel that its international allies need it more than it needs them.

1 October 2010

**Written evidence from Dr Sajjan M. Gohel, Asia-Pacific Foundation**

**AFGHANISTAN—PAKISTAN (AfPak): BRITAIN’S CHALLENGES, DILEMMA AND STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES**

Dr Sajjan Gohel is currently, International Security Director for the Asia-Pacific Foundation (APF) which is an independent security and intelligence think-tank based in London. The APF provides analysis on a variety of security and terrorist related issues and is regularly consulted by various government and military departments and media organisations both domestic and foreign.

Sajjan is head of the APF Analysis team that produces reports on terrorist and security related issues throughout the world. In addition, he has written Op-Ed pieces for the national print media as well as serving

Sajjan is a guest commentator for television news networks including BBC, ITN, Sky News, CNN, ABC, NBC, MSNBC, CTV and CBC. Sajjan is also a regular speaker at international conferences on terrorism and security issues.

Sajjan is one of the leading authorities in investigating the ideologies, world-views, agendas, and strategies of trans-national terrorist and insurgent groups throughout the world. His primary focus is on the regional and wider situations in South-East Asia, South Asia and Central Asia, the Middle East, Horn of Africa, North Africa and Western Europe.

Sajjan has been part of the APF team that contributed written testimony and oral evidence for the United Kingdom Foreign Affairs Committee in the House of Commons on topics including “Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism”, “Terrorism in South Asia” and “Global Security: Afghanistan”.

In March 2005, Sajjan was asked by the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR) to produce an assessment on Lebanon and the security concerns after the killing of prominent Lebanese politician Rafik Hariri.

In 2005, Sajjan formed part of a European Union high-level working group to discuss the terror threat in the region and to produce a working paper for then European Union counter-terrorism chief, Gijs De Vries.

Sajjan serves as a visiting lecturer to the NATO School in Oberammergau, and the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. He is also part of the “Partnership for Peace Consortium: Combating Terrorism Working Group” organised by the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO.

Sajjan, received his BA (Hons) in Politics from Queen Mary, University of London. Sajjan has also obtained a Master’s (MSc) in Comparative Politics from the London School of Economics (LSE) and a PhD at the LSE entitled, “The Evolution of Egyptian Radical Ideological Thought from Hasan al-Banna to Ayman al-Zawahiri”.

**SUMMARY**

— A premature withdrawal from Afghanistan will enable the Taliban to reassert its authority throughout the country whilst instigating, fear, repression and discrimination, Afghanistan will again revert to becoming a cesspool for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda.

— The onslaught of Talibanisation in Pakistan has spread from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa to the urban heartland of Pakistan Punjab thus creating serious security concerns.

— British foreign policy will not be able to absorb the consequences of the growth and expansion of Taliban activity throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan as it will have a direct bearing on Britain’s security.

— If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al-Qaeda and its affiliates would be able to plot major trans-national terrorist attacks.

— The poppy trade has played a critical destabilising role in corrupting elements within the Afghan police, provincial governments and bankrolling the resurgence of the Taliban. There is a direct connection to the manufacture and processing of opium that helps to fund and fuel the Taliban insurgency.

— There is a need to look at the opium trade beyond just a law enforcement issue by considering its broader implications for trade, security, and development. A main contributor to the volatile narcotics-insurgency cycle continued to be the scarcity of economic opportunities despite significant foreign aid.

— A majority of the aid money sent from Britain to Afghanistan was channelled through international agencies and organisations, not the Government, resulting in a large portion of the aid being spent on administrative costs such as consultant fees. Britain is the second largest aid donor yet most Afghans are not aware of this, which undermines efforts to win hearts and minds.

— Security Sector Reform is identified as the cornerstone upon which the success of the entire state-building process depends. However, transformation rather than reform is the more appropriate way to describe the process in Afghanistan.

— Land grabbing and water disputes have been a major source of contention among tribes and individuals within Helmand, often leading to disputes and subsequent violence within and across communities. There is an urgent need to address the causes for which the majority of Pashtuns are disgruntled and disillusioned.

— There is no effective counter-narrative to dispel the myths and half-truths aimed at undermining the British presence. If there is no policy for a strategic communication approach then Afghans will only be hearing one perspective and that is from the Taliban.

— British film makers have been at the forefront in illustrating social issues that suggest that there have been some real success stories in Afghanistan’s transition from Taliban rule. In particular there have been grass-roots movements involving sports and entertainment which have broad mass-appeal and can also serve as a way of uniting the country.
— The UK needs to continue to robustly support the rights of women in Afghanistan. The Afghan Government’s attempts to seek reconciliation with the Taliban will harm women’s rights. Women living in areas where the Taliban have regained strength have suffered intimidation, violence and even death.

— The stabilisation of Afghanistan, to a very large extent, depends on the nature of that country’s relations with Pakistan. There is an urgent need to resolve the longstanding border dispute of the Durand Line and the Pashtunistan issue in order to improve the prospects of counter-terrorism co-operation between the two countries.

— The Taliban is not a homogenous group. It has many factions and is a mixture of characters including ideological, warlords, land owners, criminals, drug dealers and people out of work.

— The most significant Taliban faction is Mullah Omar’s Quetta Shura based in or near the city of Quetta in north-western Pakistan. The network of warlord Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin lead a deadly parallel faction to the Quetta Shura. The Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, although independent of the Taliban, is also another group that poses significant threats.

— Deep-rooted ties exist between Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line, blurring the distinction between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban factions especially with the Mehsud clan which continues to carry out attacks throughout Pakistan. Equally they have launched a strategy to recruit Pashtuns based in the West for carrying out future attacks in North America and Europe.

— Pakistan had gambled for strategic depth in Afghanistan, but has instead conceded reverse strategic depth to the Taliban in Pakistan. The insurgency is particularly dangerous because it has sparked an identity crisis throughout the Pashtun belt in Pakistan.

— No politician in Islamabad appears to be ready to take upon himself the task of fighting the militants within Pakistan on behalf of the international community. The Pakistani state has to stop approaching the issue of tribal insurgency through the narrow prism of assuming that maintaining law and order.

— Pakistan’s fragile democracy has been severely damaged by the Government’s poor response to the worst floods in the country’s modern history. Extremist groups have filled the void and have been far more successful in distributing aid than any governmental body or aid agency. The unfolding political story of Pakistan including its role in battling terrorism and the unfolding humanitarian disaster are inextricably linked.

— Directly because of dissatisfaction with Pakistan’s efforts in the tribal areas of Pakistan, the US began carrying out drone strikes to eliminate members of al-Qaeda as part of an evolving strategy to implement pre-emptive strikes to deter or dismantle any potential terrorist plots that al-Qaeda and its affiliates are planning.

— If continued drone strikes in Pakistan aimed at terrorists could inadvertently kill members of the armed forces. This could trigger the Pakistani military to close the Khyber Pass for NATO convoys in the future which in turn could put Washington in direct confrontation with Islamabad.

— The Pakistan-Afghanistan border region constitutes a significant threat to western national security interests. Terrorist related events in the UK have seen increasing connections between radicals in Britain and their counterparts in the Pakistani tribal areas that border Afghanistan.

— Intelligence co-operation between the UK and Pakistan is essential. However, that “co-operation” has at times been extremely problematic. It needs to be more transparent and effective.

— British foreign policy needs to factor in various potential scenarios related to Pakistan. How will the UK react and respond if another terrorist attack on British soil is traced back to Pakistan; what will Britain’s position be should and when the security situation in Pakistan deteriorates to an alarming level; what can Britain do to help bolster civilian rule in Pakistan and blunt any interference by the military?

— Many British servicemen have died in Afghanistan since operations began in October 2001. Many more have suffered terrible life-changing injuries. The majority of deaths have been from the Taliban that launch their attacks whilst crossing over from safe-havens in Pakistan and then slip back in afterwards.

— The fear that the situation in Afghanistan is unwinnable or that the Afghan Taliban is invincible are myths but myths that are often repeated which are damaging for public perceptions and morale. The irony behind the view that “Afghanistan is the graveyard of Empires”, is that for most of its history Afghanistan has actually been the cradle of empires.

— The rising tide of violence and daily misery has made the Taliban deeply unpopular in the south and south-west, and nationwide polls indicate that they and other extremist groups have little support.

— It is impossible and a fallacy to have a genuine dialogue with the Taliban on issues that involve the respect of the rights of women, and ethnic and religious minorities, to halt and dismantle the infrastructure that enables opium poppy cultivation and prevent al-Qaeda and affiliates from re-establishing their safe havens inside Afghanistan.
INTRODUCTION

1. The year 2010 saw a continued rise in violent incidents in Afghanistan, including in areas around the capital city of Kabul, which had previously been considered to be relatively safe. Deteriorating security conditions made it likely that the attempt to build a lasting and viable democratic state in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly precarious. Afghans appeared stuck in a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle in which attaining security was increasingly viewed as being a precondition to democratic state building, while the lack of investment in institution building contributed to a deterioration of the security environment. Lack of security was indeed an overriding concern for both Afghans and the international community.

2. As of 11 October 2010, the number of British fatalities in Afghanistan stands at 340. That is more than the combined total of fatalities of all European nations that have troops in Afghanistan. Helmand province, which is where British troops have been most active, has the highest fatality rate of all the Afghan provinces which is currently at 602. With the mounting casualties for NATO forces in Afghanistan, large scale Taliban attacks throughout the country, accusations of endemic corruption throughout the Afghan Government, police and armed forces, there is increasing concern and mounting pressure that the West needs to either reduce its commitments in Afghanistan or more dramatically withdraw entirely.

3. Despite the problems that exist and under very challenging circumstances, abandoning Afghanistan will create consequences that are unimaginable. Not only will the Taliban reassert its authority throughout the country through fear, repression and discrimination, Afghanistan will again revert to becoming a cesspool for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. In addition, through the cultivation of poppies for the mass-production of opium, Afghanistan will become a narco-state fully controlled and sanctioned by the Taliban which will provide resources to a terrorist infrastructure to use in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan to plot and plan attacks across the globe. A narco-nation being a state sponsor of trans-national terrorism would make the situation far worse than it was before 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. In Pakistan, the permissive conditions enabling the Afghan Taliban continue unhindered. The rhetoric by the Pakistani military has not been translated into any substantive action with only half-hearted measures against the various Taliban factions headquartered in the country.

4. With the collapse of the few remaining institutional structures in Pakistan’s North and South Waziristan, the districts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa are rapidly succumbing to the ruthless onslaught of Talibanisation. This problem has now spread to the urban heartland of Pakistan Punjab where it is now firmly entrenched. Afghanistan’s future is intrinsically tied to Pakistan’s stability. If these centrifugal forces continue to proliferate then both countries will continue to suffer from an insurgency that is robust, lethal, and resilient. Unless the networks and infrastructure that allow the Taliban to replan its ranks are dismantled, a new generation of leaders will emerge continuing to threaten the security of Afghanistan, Pakistan and potentially creating global repercussions.

5. Hope for a positive future in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not lost. That said, any progress made since the ousting of the Taliban militia from Afghanistan nine years ago is under serious threat. When examining the current crisis in both countries, observers must understand that the situation is tremendously complex; an all-encompassing solution will not easily be found. Some international policy makers continue to make the same mistake of approaching conflicts in a conventional, narrow-minded and incoherent manner. They carry with them a number of attitudes, perceptions and expectations that don’t reflect ground realities.

6. The fundamental question is can British foreign policy successfully absorb the consequences of the growth and expansion of Taliban activity throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan? In addition this is not some far off problem that will only affect other countries. In fact, it will have a direct bearing on Britain’s security. If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al-Qaeda and its affiliates would plot to kill and maim more Britons. So this is not only a conflict of enormous strategic importance but it is also pivotal to the defence of British political, economic and social dynamics. If the Taliban is ignored or assumed to be manageable, can we therefore afford to assume that this threat will not regularly arrive on our doorstep? These are the questions on which the stability of AfPak, and perhaps the strategic future of the United Kingdom will hinge.

---

7. Since the 2001 US-led liberation of Afghanistan, the poppy trade has played a critical destabilising role in corrupting elements within the Afghan police, provincial governments and bankrolling the resurgence of the Taliban. Afghanistan produces 90% of the world’s opium, the raw ingredient used to make heroin. It is no coincidence that the provinces in Afghanistan that have the highest opium poppy cultivation also happen to be the provinces where the Taliban is virulently active. There is a direct connection to the manufacture and processing of opium that helps to fund and fuel the Taliban insurgency. Narco-Taliban is one of the biggest long-term challenges to Afghanistan’s security and stability.

8. Taliban commanders at the village level have expanded their activities related to drugs from collecting extortion and charging protection fees to running heroin refineries and engaging in kidnapping and other smuggling schemes. Drug profits flow up the chain of command within the Taliban and other insurgent and extremist organisations operating along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. These funds appear to play a key role in funding the operational costs of the Taliban.

9. The high rate of return on investment from opium poppy cultivation has driven an agricultural shift in Afghanistan from growing traditional crops to growing opium poppy. Despite the fact that only 12% of its land is arable, agriculture is a way of life for 70% of Afghans and is the country’s primary source of income. During good years, Afghanistan produced enough food to feed its people as well as supply a surplus for export. Its traditional agricultural products include wheat, corn, barley, rice, cotton, fruit, nuts, and grapes. However, its agricultural economy has suffered considerably from years of violent conflict, drought, and deteriorating infrastructure. In recent years, many poor farmers have turned to opium poppy cultivation to make a living because of the relatively high rate of return on investment compared to traditional crops. Consequently, Afghanistan’s largest and fastest cash crop is opium.

10. Western commanders and donor nations have tended to view Afghanistan’s opium trade as a law enforcement issue, often not considering its broader implications for trade, security, and development. The insurgency, meanwhile, is treated as a military matter. Equally, drug enforcement agencies and intelligence agencies have different priorities when it comes to Afghanistan despite the fact that narcotics trafficking and terrorist funding and attacks are all inter-connected. These divisions have stymied efforts to build a comprehensive strategy toward southern Afghanistan.

11. Taliban commanders tax farmers in pre-designated “territories”. They collect a 10% ushr or tax in some districts, while in others, local mullahs share the take. The Taliban have even distributed leaflets ordering them against NATO troops. This is substantially more than the average Afghan police officer is paid by the farmers to grow poppy. In addition, they are paying Afghan men up to US$200 a month to fight alongside the lower entry level. In one of the most high-profile incidents on 4 November 2009, five British soldiers were shot dead in Helmand by an Afghan policeman.

12. To make matters worse, the problems plaguing Afghanistan have spilled over its borders. Drug trafficking and corruption also fuels growing instability in Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia. If left unchecked, there is the ever-present risk that terrorists with global ambitions could tap into this source to launch attacks outside the region. Through this entire smuggling network which connects Pakistan and Afghanistan through narcotics and the Taliban, there is the prevailing nexus with trans-national terrorism. In December 2008, Khan Mohammed, a member of the Afghan Taliban, was sentenced to two life terms in prison in the United States for drug trafficking and engaging in narco-terrorism. He was planning to conduct a rocket attack on the Jalalabad Airfield, an Afghan facility used jointly by US and NATO forces in Nangarhar Province.

13. Helmand Province, which is the source of 53% of all opium poppies in Afghanistan is considered to have the most acute security problems where the insurgent Taliban effectively controlled large parts of this province. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released their 2010 Afghan survey in September which revealed that opium cultivation in Helmand province had declined slightly from 69,833 hectares to 65,045 hectares.

14. However, any decrease in Helmand was offset by a jump in cultivation in neighbouring Kandahar province, where the provincial government has not pushed anti-opium efforts. Kandahar, the focus of a current...
surge in US troops to rout Taliban insurgents from their southern stronghold has also become increasingly volatile over the past year. Cultivation in Kandahar jumped 30%.

15. The total opium poppy cultivation estimated for Afghanistan in 2010 did not change from 2009 and remained at 123,000 hectares while rising prices suggested it may cause a spike in the illicit crop in 2011. 98% of the total cultivation took place in nine provinces in the southern and western regions, including the most insecure provinces in the country. This further underlines the link between lawlessness, the Taliban, and opium cultivation observed since 2007.

16. Total opium production in 2010 was estimated at 3,600 metric tons (mt), which is a 48% decrease from 2009. The sharp decline was due to the spread of a disease, the causes of which are unknown, that affected opium fields in the major growing provinces, particularly Helmand and Kandahar. The disease started to appear in the fields after flowering in spring. This was too late to plant another crop. The total estimated farm-gate income of opium growing farmers amounted to US$604 million in 2010. This is a significant increase from 2009, when farm-gate income for opium was estimated at US$438 million. This year's stable crop comes despite years of programmes aimed at reducing the poppy crop, including subsidised seeds for other crops, vouchers for farmers, alternative job programmes and incentives for provinces to become "poppy-free":

17. The governor of Helmand, Gulab Mangal, had instituted a counter-narcotics plan, known as Food Zone Programme which was funded by Britain and the US. It involved a mix of sticks and carrots which entailed a more aggressive counter-narcotics offensive, incentives to grow more legal crops, and the introduction of food zones to promote legal farming. The process required time to implement. The first phase of the Food Zone Programme supplied farmers with fertilizers and wheat seeds. Subsequently, opium cultivation in the food zone decreased by 37% and was mainly replaced by cereal crops. Outside the food zone, however, poppy production increased by 8%.

18. The current distribution phase of the programme is aimed at farmers living in areas affected directly by February 2010’s Operation Moshtarak in Marjah, enabling the Afghan Government to deliver tangible governance and benefits to those affected. Operation Moshtarak is designed to clear central Helmand of the Taliban and set the conditions for the Afghan Government to introduce increased security, stability, development and freedom of movement in the area. The second phase includes a public awareness campaign highlighting the dangers of opium, while the third phase involves law enforcement activities, including eradication and bringing prosecutions against those who persist in growing poppy. The Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is also supporting and mentoring the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan to assist them with the interception of those involved in the narcotics trade. The programme covers six districts, Lashkar Gah, Nad-e-Ali, Nahr-e-Siraj, Garmser, Sangin, and Musa Qala. Conclusive results on the Food Zone Programme are yet to be established and may take several years before the true impact is known.

19. Both Helmand and Kandahar have always had a strong Taliban presence, serving as hubs for the northern Helmand narcotics network, the production of IEDs, and weapons storage caches. Sangin and Kajaki initially became centres of concentration for the Taliban after they were dislodged from Musa Qala in December 2007. When US forces retook Musa Qala they found 11 tons of opium stored in warehouses there. Since then, the Taliban have expanded their presence and organised mobile courts and effective shadow governance structures in the districts, dispensing speedy and effective edicts to the population.

20. The Taliban’s presence in north-eastern Helmand has increased significantly following February’s Operation Moshtarak in Marjah, an area that had served as the main safe haven for them in Helmand. Now that US and Afghan forces are operating in large numbers in southern and central Helmand, many Taliban fighters have relocated to the north to avoid coming under heavy fire.

21. Another main contributor to the volatile narcotics-insurgency cycle continued to be the scarcity of economic opportunities available to most Afghans. Economic growth was quite high at around 8%. However, this growth is usually and largely fuelled by foreign aid, which accounts for more than 90% of public expenditures, and the illegal narco-economy that, by conservative estimates, accounted for one-third of Afghanistan’s gross domestic product.

---

42 Gretchen Peters, op. cit.
43 Ibid.
44 Kathy Gannon, “Taliban lose control of Marjah but remain strong”, Associated Press, 19 March 2010
45 “Afghanistan Economic Update 2010”, World Bank
22. Therefore, a large portion of the economic growth was not driven by normal indigenous economic activity. Moreover, the foreign aid that trickles into Afghanistan symbolises only a fraction of the amount pledged at international donor conferences. A majority of the aid money that did reach Afghanistan was channeled through international agencies and organisations, not the Government, resulting in a large portion of the aid being spent on administrative costs such as consultant fees. It could be interpreted as a miscalculation for the Department for International Development (DFID) to not invest all its development money into Helmand to support the British campaign. Perhaps understandably DFID believed its goal is to promote the development of Afghanistan and not support the British military in their operations. This is why DFID channels 80% of its funding to Afghanistan through the Afghan Government. However, although the British are the second largest aid donors in the country, most Afghans are not aware of this, which undermines British efforts to win hearts and minds. When asked, Afghans referred to the French, German, and American efforts and seemed unaware of what the British were doing.47 In the view of DFID, channelling assistance in this way was believed to increase the capacity and legitimacy of the Afghan Government. Unfortunately corruption, inefficiency and incompetence within the Afghan Government mean that money is actually being lost in the pipeline before it reaches those who need it.

23. The Helmandi economy functions significantly around criminality, corruption, and networks of narcotics traffickers. The dearth of schools, lack of human resources, and the blatant shortfall of governance, justice, and economic opportunities provide opportunities for exploitation by criminals, narcotics dealers, and the Taliban. It is therefore problematic to draw clear-cut distinctions between legal and criminal structures. This is a challenge in terms of a counter-insurgency and reconstruction strategy especially where perceptions of the state’s legitimacy amongst the populous are essential to the successful implementation of its moral and political authority.

24. Security Sector Reform (SSR) is identified as the cornerstone upon which the success of the entire state-building process depends. However, transformation rather than reform is the more appropriate way to describe the process in Afghanistan. The process faces a paradox that will be difficult to overcome. The SSR model requires a minimum level of security to function, a base line currently absent in Afghanistan. Relying on SSR to restore security and stability in the short-term has precipitated a premature acceleration of the process. The Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) are nowhere near the level or capacity to assume counter-insurgency operations on their own whilst at the same time providing effective security to the Afghan people.

**LAND AND WATER**

25. One of the flaws of the counter-insurgency doctrine has been a failure to identify or address the causes for which the majority of Pashtuns, not directed by the Taliban, are disgruntled and disillusioned. This especially includes land and water disputes.

26. Land grabbing and water disputes have been a major source of contention among tribes and individuals within Helmand, often leading to disputes and subsequent violence within and across communities. The critical problem of land theft is a vital issue almost entirely ignored by both the Government and the West.48 In fact, the overwhelming majority of international funds concerning rule of law is spent on criminal justice issues, with very little spent on civil disputes that often can spiral out of control and lead to violence and other crimes. Considering the extent of such disputes, ignoring land and water disputes could destabilise many areas within Helmand. On a national level, the Asia Foundation’s 2009 Survey identified disputes over land and property as accounting for 63% of all civil and criminal disputes, while crimes constituted 19% of disputes.49

27. Warlords are frequently involved in such disputes, which is complicated by the unusual extension of immunity in 2004 to actions alleged to have been committed before parliamentarians took office that in turn has led to a culture of impunity. The same warlords who gained immunity by taking public office as parliamentarians have been engaged in grabbing land that often belongs to people who had left during the last 30 years of conflict.50 In Muktar, an area of Lashkar Gah, refugees returned from Pakistan to find that President Karzai’s assurance that land would be restored did not occur. Instead cronies of former notorious Helmand Governor Sher Mohammed Akhonzada had occupied and taken the land in their absence, leading to unrest and Muktar becoming one of the more pro-Taliban areas of the city. In some cases, the ANP has been involved in not resolving but perpetuating disputes.51 Such land grabbing and corruption by warlords and ANP risks the stability of many Helmandi districts.

28. Presently, little information exists as to who Helmandis turn to for resolution of land disputes and whether a land commission comprised of tribal elders and community leaders could be formed in various districts to hear and resolve such issues. Partnering with local Afghan non-government organisations that

---

48 Frank Ledwidge, “Justice in Helmand: The Challenge of Law Reform in a Society at War”, 40:1 Asia Affairs, 77, 86 (March 2009)
50 Frank Ledwidge, *op. cit.*
already have personnel on the ground in Helmand could help bridge these information gaps, identify leaders and potential commission members and initiate engagement with these individuals.

29. While a Land Commission has been set up in Lashkar Gah with the help of the Helmand PRT and overseen by Governor Gulab Mangal’s office, it has very little reach outside of the city itself especially as it is undermanned and under-resourced. When the counter-insurgency military operations within Helmand are deemed to be complete, a plethora of land disputes and a vacuum of leadership could destabilise the area, risking the NATO and Afghan military’s ability to effectively hold onto the area. Thus, working with tribal elders and potentially expanding the reach of land commissions to hear such disputes is an important step forward.

30. Many disputes in Helmand also concern use of irrigation canals, leading to contention among tribes and individuals within Helmand and often escalating to violence within and across communities. The best way ahead may be to informally form shuras that bring together different tribal elders to meet face-to-face to discuss and resolve disputes. District government officials employing irrigation and agricultural specialists could play a big role in informally resolving disputes regarding water and land, thereby reducing potential violence and instilling trust and confidence in district government. Addressing land and water disputes is crucial in winning hearts and minds and garnering local support for the Government.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

31. British troops have sacrificed their lives and futures in order to help rebuild Afghanistan and it is a concern that the Taliban have implemented and developed a well-rehearsed narrative on the notion that the British army is in Afghanistan to seek revenge for 19th century defeats. As the former Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan Abdul Salam Zaeef, stated:

Another strategic mistake [by the US] was to allow the British to return to the south, or Afghanistan in general. The British Empire had fought three wars with Afghanistan, and their main battles were with the Pashtun tribes in southern Afghanistan. They were responsible for the split of the tribal lands, establishing the Durand Line. Whatever the reality might be, British troops in southern Afghanistan, in particular in Helmand, will be measured not only on their current actions but by the history they have, the battles that were fought in the past. The local population has not forgotten, and many believe, neither have the British. Many villages that see heavy fighting and casualties today are the same that did so some ninety years ago…The biggest mistake of American policy makers so far might be their profound lack of understanding of their enemy.

32. If grotesque distortions like this are left unchallenged then unfortunately some Afghans may end up believing the lies and distortions. Yet there is no effective counter-narrative to dispel the myths and half-truths aimed at undermining the British presence. If there is no policy for a strategic communication approach then Afghans will only be hearing one perspective and that is from the Taliban.

33. Afghanistan lacks communications infrastructure that would enable ordinary Afghans to have access to technology in order to obtain and receive accurate information. This situation benefits the Taliban to disseminate uncontested versions of their message and propaganda.

34. One of the most effective ways the Taliban are able to disseminate their doctrine is through the use of what are called “night letters”. Night letters are leaflets or letters attached to doors or walls to inform or threaten. They are an effective means of communication in areas where access to other media is limited such as Helmand province. The contents of the night letters are usually warnings or instructions to the local population to refrain from engagement with foreign forces and the Afghan Government or taking part in elections.

35. The use of night letters is particularly effective because the Taliban can move in and out of villages and towns unnoticed compared to how British forces move in and out of towns. Whereas the British forces want to be seen and openly convey information, the Taliban may not want to be seen in order to propagate fear into the local population by demonstrating through night letters they can be around anytime. There are instances where the night letters effectiveness is apparent, as a Time Magazine article by Ayn Baker would indicate:

36. Such is the impact of night letters, in some southern provinces that they have slowed government services and brought reconstruction projects to a halt because people are too scared and intimidated. In Kandahar province, many police officers have quit, medical clinics have been shut down. Even schools that have been burnt down were notified in advance by night letters warning parents to keep their children home. Instances like this demonstrate the ability of the Taliban to spread fear. Coalition and Afghan forces cannot be everywhere at once. Since British and Afghan forces wear uniforms and are visible, it is easy to tell when they are present. Their presence reassures the populace of their safety. The Taliban however, can move wherever and whenever there are no government forces present and spread their fear.

37. The Taliban effectively communicate to the people that they will be the ones who will remain when the western forces withdraw. This is a difficult strategy to counter. The Taliban will be able to continue its use of night letters in its information strategy so long as they are free to move and operate where there are no

---

52 Abdul Salam Zaeef, My Life with the Taliban, (Hurst: London, 2010)
international or Afghan forces present. While efforts should continue to directly confront Taliban fighters, it must not be looked upon as the way to undermine the Taliban’s ability to influence and intimidate the population. Night letters do far more to sow fear among the Afghans than airstrikes do to make them feel secure.

38. The Taliban have also begun developing other methods to reach their audience such as the distribution of DVDs, mobile phone messaging, radio messages and websites.

39. The use of DVDs to spread propaganda by the Taliban is a tool they most likely learned by observing al-Qaeda. The Taliban distribute DVDs containing video footage of attacks against coalition troops and Afghan forces. The distribution of DVDs enables the Taliban to visually refute claims made against them by the Afghan Government.

40. Other methods that the Taliban have employed in their efforts to spread their agenda have been radio broadcasts and mobile phone text messaging. The Taliban have had little success with radio broadcasting due to their lack of being able to maintain a fixed broadcasting station inside Afghanistan coupled with the ability of coalition forces to jam the frequencies that they would transmit. Mobile phone messages are becoming more ubiquitous as cell phone ownership is reported to be at 52% of the total Afghan population. This method seems to be the 21st century equivalent of a night letter for the Taliban.

41. The acceptance of new technologies may have more to do with sustaining internal morale and increasing recruitment rather than a change in religious philosophy. The Taliban are willing to change their acceptance of new ideas if they appear to assist the Taliban in achieving their aims. Beside the need to sustain morale, the Taliban most likely realised they need to adapt their use of information tools to compete against the Afghan Government and British forces. When the Taliban rose to power, Afghanistan was devastated by the war against the Soviet Union. The current technologies did not exist at the time and as such the Taliban saw no need to embrace them in order to exert influence and fear. Since the Taliban’s overthrow, Afghanistan has seen an influx of new technologies as a result of reconstruction efforts which have now ironically been embraced by the Taliban who will use modern technology to instigate medieval brutality.

42. The methods by which the Taliban disseminate their messages have evolved not only from the first time they took control but also over the past nine years of war. They continue to have a firm control in disseminating night letters and the lack of physical British or Afghan Government security forces in all areas allows the Taliban to move freely, and appear to be in all places at once. New tools to disseminate messages allow the Taliban to effectively plant terror in the minds of audiences and also give the impression that they are omnipresent.

ENHANCING NATIONAL UNITY THROUGH SOCIAL COHESION

43. British film makers have been at the forefront in illustrating social issues that suggest that there have been some real success stories in Afghanistan’s transition from Taliban rule. In particular there have been grass-roots movements involving sports and entertainment which have broad mass-appeal and can also serve as a way of uniting the country.

44. Rohullah Nikpai, an ethnic Hazara, won Afghanistan’s first Olympic medal in taekwondo at the Beijing Games in 2008. It should have been an occasion for national unity. Yet few people apart from the Hazaras were happy about his success. Many Afghans expect sport teams and all other aspects of society to function like a coalition government, ensuring tribal, racial and regional balance. This expectation started with Karzai's Administration, the foundations of which were based on such principles. This is largely due to the legacy of the Taliban years. Back in May 2001, a Pakistani youth football team was arrested and had their heads forcibly shaved last year when they made the elementary mistake of wearing shorts on a tour to Kandahar. Kabul's football stadium was regularly used by the Taliban for public amputations for convicted thieves and executions for murderers as well as for anyone that violated their dogmatic doctrine which included women who were either flogged, shot or stoned to death.

45. Yet sometimes sport provides a story which not only justifies its existence, but confirms its vast significance. The Afghanistan cricket team is such a story. They were only formed in the aftermath of the Operation Enduring Freedom towards the end of 2001. Only when thousands of Afghans sought refuge in Pakistan did they properly learn to study and appreciate the game. Upon their return, they continued to play and, as these things do, it filtered down to new players who were similarly entranced. The country, did not become an affiliate member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) until 2001 and didn’t have a single proper pitch until 2008. Nevertheless the national side has gone from being a non-entity to gaining successive promotions from Division Five of the ICC League to getting agonisingly close to qualifying for the 2011 World Cup. The saga is so implausible, that it reads like a film script.

46. The Oscar-winning British film director and avid cricket fan Sam Mendes has helped to produce a documentary, Out of the Ashes, that records the Afghanistan cricket team’s rise. His involvement began after

55 Derek I. Schmeck, “Taliban Information Strategy: How are the Taliban directing their information strategy towards the population of Afghanistan?”, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, December 2009. p 25
he was sent a first version by the director, Timothy Albone, that charted the team’s early, and improbable, success. Out of the Ashes premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival on 17 June 2010 and screened as part of BBC4’s Storyville.57

47. The film follows the team’s coach, Taj Malik, as he prepares his charges for one of the first rounds of the World Cup qualifiers, division five of the World Cricket League, in Jersey in 2008, against such cricketing minnows as Japan and Nepal. Successfully progressing on to winning divisional tournaments in Tanzania, Buenos Aires and South Africa, it all comes down to one match against Canada in the West Indies for a place in the 2011 World Cup. Unfortunately they are beaten, missing out on a dream that began years ago in the chaotic aftermath of post-Taliban Afghanistan.

48. They do get however to qualify for the 2010 Twenty20 World Cup, the shorter and faster format of the game in the West Indies. Although they fail to make much impact, losing nobly against India and South Africa in a tournament that England ultimately won, simply to appear on the world stage after having barely any history of the game a decade ago is extraordinary.

49. The sport is growing apace at home despite the obvious drawbacks of the security threat from the Taliban. For the time being they will simply have to become accustomed, like Pakistan, to playing their home matches away. There is an essential need for developing the grass-roots of the sport in Afghanistan itself. This is what retired Afghan cricketer Ahmadzai Raees will be doing, running cricket camps in partnership with Dr Sarah Fane of the charity Afghan Connection, which works to build new schools, with concrete pitches, across the country. The Afghan cricket story is the one story that gives everyone hope. In 2009, Fane, Raees and the Afghan team held a cricket camp for 50 children. 12,000 boys and girls turned up. It is the responsibility of cricket’s broader community to help develop the game at a lower level. It costs $3,000 (£1,995) to lay a concrete pitch at one of Afghan Connection’s new schools.58

50. Cricket is not without history in Afghanistan. British troops brought cricket to Kabul in 1839 and Britain can play a key role helping to nurture and develop the game of cricket in Afghanistan. If successfully cultivated, cricket can serve as a powerful unifying factor in the country. Security sector reform within Afghanistan’s police and military continues apace and trains Afghans to a sufficient level to be operationally effective but what it does not do is teach Afghans solidarity, nation building and a sense of what it means to be Afghan first rather than affiliating with their ethnic cleavage. Yet sport, and in the case of Afghanistan can provide a feeling of camaraderie that is significantly lacking in the country’s political and military establishments. Although the majority of players in the national team are Pashtuns with a few Uzbeks this is a work in progress. Britain could therefore gift a precious legacy by providing funding for the game for making more pitches, providing equipment, arranging tours and awarding scholarships. Importantly it is essential to let the Afghans own the game of cricket in their country. Britain needs to create the infrastructure but let the Afghans continue to develop it on their own so they can win the trust of the Afghan people.

51. Under the Taliban, music and other forms of entertainment were banned. Their feudal doctrine took Afghanistan back to the Middle Ages. Today pop culture is slowly returning to the country through the producers and performers of Afghan Star, the country’s version of The X Factor, which airs on Tolo TV. If western leaders are looking for a way to persuade the people within their countries that we should have long-term commitment to Afghanistan, they couldn’t find a better weapon than the film Afghan Star. The show has been hugely successful just as similar versions of the singing competition that air all over the globe. Perhaps more meaningfully, the volume of mobile text votes cast by viewers in favour of their preferred performer reflects a form of democracy through a culture that has sorely lacked it. Eleven million Afghans, one third of the country, watch Afghan Star. The show is chronicled in British director Havana Marking’s documentary film of the same name which won high praise at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival.59 It was the UK’s entry for the 2010 Oscar category for best foreign-language film, Afghan Star follows an entire season of Afghanistan’s version of “American Idol”.

52. Despite this not everyone is happy with Afghan Star. Afghanistan’s guardians of Islamic values, the Ulema Council, protested that Afghan Star was not part of Afghan culture. In 2009, a female finalist on the show received death threats and was forced into hiding after her head scarf fell to her shoulders during a performance.60 Women having equal rights with men in Afghanistan has nothing to do with cultural sensitivities despite the dogma of some.

53. It is more than just another documentary. It offers a fascinating glimpse of Afghanistan with a special focus on how the aspirations of its young people where 60% of the Afghan population is under 21 and this may end up having a far bigger impact on its future than its current political and military struggles. The show serves as a platform for the young people of the country to embrace pop music as a symbol of modernisation and hope for the future. More than 2,000 people audition for a chance to compete and although that figure is nowhere near the size of those that enter the X Factor, it is still a large number where televisions are not found in every house and conservative traits still permeate Afghan society and culture.61 The simple act of seeing
music on TV, for a country still emerging from a painful era where music was viewed as sacrilegious, cannot be understated.

54. In 2001, after the Taliban were ousted, the first thing people did was bring out their radios and phonographs and start playing music. Music became the sound of liberation and its why young people have so eagerly embraced the show. It gave them something they could be proud of, Afghans singing Afghan music for Afghans. It provided the youth with a lifeline for safe entertainment in the country. The show also makes a huge statement for Afghans by bringing together contestants of different tribal ethnicities as well as allowing the participation of several female contestants, a huge leap in a country that has essentially been run by a male-dominated tribal elder system.

### PRESERVING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

55. Under the Taliban, girls were not allowed to go to school and fewer than 900,000 boys were enrolled. In the same period, university enrolment was only 7,881. In 2010, nearly seven million students are now enrolled in primary and secondary schools, 37% are female, and university enrolment has grown to 62,000.62

56. Once the Taliban seized Kabul in September 1996, their war on women’s rights began with a vengeance. Girls over the age of eight were forbidden to attend school and working women were forced to remain in the home.63 One can imagine the drastic loss of capacity suffered by both the education and health systems in Afghanistan, where women more traditionally held professional positions. The compulsory wearing of the burqa in public spaces was not only a physical and psychological burden but an economic one, as many Afghan women could not afford the cost of the garment and had no choice but to share with their neighbours, thus being confined within the home for days.64

57. Women’s participation in the Afghan economy was virtually eliminated, as they were prohibited from showing their hands during monetary exchange. Women were prohibited from leaving the home without the accompaniment of a male relative. In hospitals, women could only be medically examined when fully clothed, making an accurate diagnosis and treatment plan impossible.65 The Taliban perpetrated acts of rape, abduction and forced marriage all in the disingenuous name of ensuring that Afghan women lived in security, dignity and honour.66 Since the defeat of the Taliban, some progress has been made in improving the lives of women. However, the current Taliban resurgence presents a serious threat to the safety, security and rights of the women and girls of Afghanistan.

58. The Afghan Government's attempts to seek reconciliation with the Taliban will harm women’s rights, the US-based campaign group Human Rights Watch says. Women living in areas where the Taliban have regained strength have suffered intimidation, violence and even death threats. The comments of Sabrina Saqib, Afghanistan's youngest parliamentarian, are most pertinent. She said “Women came back to life after the Taliban, but the Taliban did not come to power, women did,” and “Intimidation of women has increased as the Taliban have regained strength in those areas. A report by Human Rights Watch entitled The Ten-Dollar Talib and Women’s Rights, warns that,

59. After the Taliban were driven from power in 2001, women in Afghanistan, even in conservative areas in the south, returned to jobs as teachers, civil servants and health workers. But the intimidation of women has increased as the Taliban have regained strength in those areas. A report by Human Rights Watch entitled The Ten-Dollar Talib and Women’s Rights, warns that,

60. The Taliban has been sending threatening letters, the infamous “night letters”, to women to warn them to give up work. In one case, a female aid worker, who had been receiving threats from someone claiming to be a member of the Taliban, was shot as she left her office in Kandahar. She later died.69

61. The Mirwais Meena girls’ school in Kandahar had a student body of over 1,300 students. On 12 November 2008, several girls were disfigured and two blinded after an attack from the Taliban. The attack came as the girls and their teachers were leaving the school. Men on motorbikes, wielding what appeared to be water pistols, squirted acid on several groups of girls and their teachers. Many were wearing burqas, but they were targeted just the same. The attacks shocked the country, and the world. Footage of the injured girls was shown on CNN, the BBC and other international media. Yet despite the Government's well-publicised

---

65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
arrest of ten men who have been accused of involvement in the incident, the student body had been severely traumatised by the attack.\textsuperscript{70}

62. Mohammad Daoud Daoud, the Deputy Interior Minister for Counter-Narcotics, stated that the men had been paid the equivalent of US$2,000 for each girl they attacked. Education and security officials need to take robust measures to protect the students. The authorities should provide buses to take them to the school, to avoid the dangers of the road.\textsuperscript{71} Schools are routinely torched and teachers murdered in areas where the Taliban hold sway.

63. In May 2009, pupils were lining up outside their classrooms for morning assembly at their school in Mahmud Raqi village, Kapisa Province, when one girl collapsed unconscious. Suddenly more girls started to collapse because of a gas poisoning attack by the Taliban. In total there were 90 Afghan school girls rushed to hospital, several slipped into comas. Six teachers were also admitted. It was the third such attack against a girls’ school in Afghanistan in the same month, raising fears that the Taliban are resorting to increasingly vicious methods to terrorise young women out of education. Large parts of Kapisa are now under the control of men loyal to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a warlord with Taliban links.\textsuperscript{72}

64. Bibi Aisha, a young Afghan woman made headlines when she appeared on a cover of Time Magazine with the caption “What Happens If We Leave Afghanistan”. At 16, Aisha was handed over to her husband's father and 10 brothers, who she claims were all members of the Taliban in Oruzgan. She eventually ran away but was caught by police in Kandahar. And although running away is not a crime, in places throughout Afghanistan, it is treated as one if you are a woman. Eventually her father-in-law found her and took her back to her abusive home. She was taken to the Taliban for “dishonouring” her husband's family. The court ruled that her nose and ears must be cut off, an act carried out by her husband in the mountains of Oruzgan, where they left her to die.\textsuperscript{73} Tragically, Aisha is only one example of thousands of girls and women in Afghanistan who are treated this way. Aisha’s situation would be institutionalised. The UK needs to continue to robustly support the rights of women in Afghanistan.

65. The threat is not only to Afghan women. Britons that have travelled to Afghanistan for the purpose of working as teachers, doctors and to help distribute aid have come under attack. One of the most disturbing cases involved Karen Wo, a surgeon from London, who was with a group of foreign nationals working with the charity International Assistance Mission (IAM) when they were ambushed by men carrying assault rifles in a forested area of Badakhshan province. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the murders.\textsuperscript{74} The attack, the largest massacre in years of aid workers in Afghanistan, offered chilling evidence of the increasing insecurity in the northern part of the country and added to fears that the Taliban insurgency has turned even more vicious.

\textbf{The Afghan and Pakistan Taliban}

66. The stabilisation of Afghanistan, to a very large extent, depends on the nature of that country’s relations with Pakistan. Much of the history that has shaped the two countries’ border area can be traced to colonial fears of the British in India and of Russian encroachment throughout Central Asia, coined as the “Great Game” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The legacy of this era can be seen in the two countries’ border demarcation. The 1879 Treaty of Gandamak, signed in the midst of the Second British-Afghan War, led to the establishment in 1893 of the Durand Line as an arbitrary boundary between Afghanistan and colonial British India. The Durand Line, was drawn by a team of British surveyors, led by Sir Mortimer Durand. This border, which remains in place today, split both Pashtunistan and Baluchistan, traditionally occupied by the Pashtun and Baluch peoples, between Afghan rule and British colonial rule.\textsuperscript{75}

67. To a great extent, the line followed the contours of convenient geographical features, as well as the existing limits of British authority, rather than tribal borders. It divided the homelands of the Pashtun tribes nearly equally between Afghanistan and Pakistan, effectively cutting the Pashtun nation in half. This largely imaginary boundary has been viewed since its inception with contempt and resentment by Pashtuns on both sides of the line. As a practical matter the border is unenforceable. In some places the position of the line is disputed; in others it is inaccessible to all but trained mountain climbers. The majority of the Pashtun tribes and clans that control the frontier zones of eastern and southern Afghanistan along the Durand line have never accepted the legitimacy of what they believe to be an arbitrary and capricious boundary. Afghanistan’s promotion of Pashtunistan, although a moderate form of nationalism and the very antithesis to the Taliban doctrine, has brought retaliation from Pakistan since 1947.

68. There is an urgent need to resolve the longstanding border dispute and the Pashtunistan issue in order to improve the prospects of counter-terrorism co-operation between the two countries. An amicable resolution of the Durand Line dispute and the Pashtunistan issue will go a long way to help the campaign against terrorism...
in as much as it would allay Pakistani fears that a strong Afghanistan would revitalise past claims on the Pashtun regions of Pakistan.

69. The Taliban primarily comprises of Pashtuns from the Ghilzai group with some support from the Kakar tribe of the Ghurghusht group. Taliban spiritual leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, and most of the surviving senior leadership of the Taliban are from the Hotaki tribe of the Ghilzai. The Taliban represents an ultraconservative Islamic front with an ideology derived from the Deobandi School. The movement, however, took Deobandism to extremes the school’s founders would not have recognised.

70. The Taliban is not a homogenous group. It has many factions and is a mixture of characters including ideological, warlords, land owners, criminals, drug dealers and people out of work. The displaced and disillusioned Taliban youth of today were moulded by their country’s history of violence and found solace and purpose in an extremely radical interpretation of Islam. Distorted versions of Sunni Deobandism and Pashtunwali, the tribal social code of the Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan, became the basis of the Taliban ideology.76

71. Perhaps the most significant Taliban faction is Mullah Omar’s Quetta Shura based in or near the city of Quetta in north-western Pakistan, a short distance from the border with the Kandahar province of Afghanistan. Ever since the Quetta Shura started re-organising in 2002 the leadership has been dominated by former members of the Taliban Government. In October 2006, Mullah Omar appointed a new leadership council with 12 members and three advisors. On it were some new names such as Sheikh Abd al-’Ali, now acting as the chief legal advisor to the Quetta Shura, and Maulavi Abd al-Kabir, currently head of political relations.77

72. In May 2008, a Quetta Shura publication contained an article describing its organisational structure. According to this article, the Quetta Shura’s organisation consists of the leader Mullah Omar, the deputy Mullah Baradar, a 19-member military shura and a 15-member legislative shura led by a Sheikh Maulavi Abd al-’Ali, which is primarily concerned with appointing judges and setting up sharia courts in areas under the Quetta Shura’s control.78

73. The network of warlord Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin lead a deadly parallel faction to the Quetta Shura. Haqqani was part of the mujaheddin resistance in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, and both were allied with the Taliban Government during the Taliban regime. Jalaluddin Haqqani served as Taliban’s minister for tribal affairs. Today, his activities are largely carried out by Sirajuddin.

74. The Haqqanis have retained their separate identity from the Quetta Shura. They issue statements and videos through their own media outlets, as well as through postings on internet forums.79 Yet in an interview with Sirajuddin conducted by a Pakistani journalist, he stated “we are fighting under the leadership of Amir al-Mu’minin [Mullah Omar]”.80

75. The Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, in contrast, turned down an offer to ally himself with the Taliban in 1996, and fled the country instead. He did not return until 2002, after the Taliban had been ousted from power. Hekmatyar has not sworn allegiance personally to Mullah Omar, and his party pursues an independent political strategy in Afghanistan, although it occasionally converges with that of the Quetta Shura.81

76. It is well known that after the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, many senior members left the organisation. Former Taliban officials have also actively joined political life in Afghanistan. In the Parliamentary elections in 2005 six former Taliban officials ran as candidates, and two managed to win seats in the Parliament.82 This indicates a possible weakness of the Taliban’s coherence, but on the other hand, the Taliban Government was more diverse and included potential “moderates”.

77. Deep-rooted ties exist between Pashtun militants on both sides of the Durand Line, blurring the distinction between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban.83 The term ‘Pakistani Taliban’ usually refers to a loose coalition of militant groups based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Since December 2007, they have been known under the name Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TeTP),

---

78. “The Organizational structure of the Taliban Islamic movement”, al-Sumud, no.21 (March 2008), pp 14–17
81. “Interview with Taliban commander Sirajuddin Haqqani”, op. cit.
82. Anne Stenersen, “The Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan—organization, leadership and worldview”, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 5 February 2010, p 64
an umbrella organisation of perhaps as many as 40 groups led by the Waziristan-based militant Baitullah Mehsud.\(^\text{84}\)

78. Baitullah Mehsud also established his own parallel government and he set up his own judicial system wherein Pashtuns, approached him for justice rather than resorting to judicial courts set up by the Government. The TeTP also divided their respective areas of South and North Waziristan into administrative zones and appointed military commanders over each region. These military commanders are answerable to the supreme commander of the local Taliban and the Taliban Shura of their respective tribe.

79. General Pervez Musharraf’s decision to send a brigade of Pakistani troops into the Shawal valley of North Waziristan in September 2001 marked a dramatic change in Pakistani policy in the FATA. Although the local population initially welcomed Musharraf’s troops in their mission to protect them against a perceived threat from the Afghan Northern Alliance, their goodwill did not last. Two years later, under immense US pressure, 70,000 Pakistani troops reluctantly fought tribal militants and a core-cadre of foreign fighters that fled Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime. However, rather than eliminate the foreign militants and restore control, the Pakistan military negotiated a highly flawed cease-fire and withdrawal on 7 February 2005.

80. As a part of the peace agreement, Baitullah Mehsud “pledged” that he and his associates would not provide assistance to al-Qaeda and other terrorists, and would not launch operations against government forces. Baitullah Mehsud, at that time, explained that the peace agreement was in the interests of the tribal regions as well as in the interest of the Government of Pakistan. This has been more or less a consistent theme in his communications.

81. Fighting resumed however in July 2005, after Baitullah Mehsud accused the Government of breaking the terms of the truce. In September 2006, the Pakistani military negotiated yet another controversial truce with the militants, facilitated by tribal elders. At the time Musharraf was in the United States and hailed it as a “landmark agreement” that world serve as a role model for future agreements. Yet, within a month the militants reneged on the deal and violence along the AIPak border area increased substantially.

82. If nothing else, the “peace deals” tremendously raised Mehsud’s stature amongst his own men, and established him as a negotiating entity on a par with the Government, also allowing a respite to widen and further strengthen his support base. Mehsud further consolidated his hold, and established his Taliban credentials, when the Government conceded to his demand to free militant prisoners in return for releasing more than 240 Pakistani security personnel, seized by his fighters, and held hostage for two and half months.

83. The death of Baitullah Mehsud who was successfully targeted by a US drone strike in August 2009 failed to undermine the group’s operational capability. Baitullah’s successor Hakimullah Mehsud, in collaboration with the Haqqani Network, pulled off one of the most deadly and well-calculated terrorist attacks on 30 December 2009, when he sent a Jordanian, Humam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi, as a suicide bomber to wipe out an entire CIA unit at Forward Base Chapman in Khost who were active in gathering intelligence for the drone campaign in Pakistan.

84. The other significant aspect of this plot was that al-Qaeda only played a peripheral role. The attack was a joint operation by the Haqqani Network and the Mehsud clan. The Haqqani’s ensured that al-Balawi was able to move successfully from Khost into Pakistan where he was given operational instructions by Hakimullah Mehsud and even appeared in a video with him. The Mehsud’s then ensured that al-Balawi was able to move into Afghanistan to carry out the attack.

85. The Khost attack was a clear sign of the TeTP’s growing ambitions and intentions. They obviously want to target the US but previously lacked the logistical ability to plan something large beyond the scope of AIPak. However, that gap in ability was somewhat resolved when US resident, Faizal Shehzad, a Pakistani Pashtun, attempted to carry out a car bomb attack in New York’s Times Square on 1 May 2010. The vehicle failed to successfully detonate and the plot failed but it highlighted concerns that the TeTP had launched a strategy to recruit Pashtuns based in the West for carrying out future attacks in North America and Europe.

86. To this day, the Mehsud clan continues to inflict damage on the Pakistani military and police throughout the country. Baitullah Mehsud created an infrastructure and network that remains intact. Following his death, the Pakistani military failed to implement an effective strategy to systematically dismantle that infrastructure. As a result the TeTP used the time to reassemble and plot and plan new attacks not just against the Government, police and military but also to assist the Afghan Taliban in its assault on US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan.

87. The insurgency is particularly dangerous because it has sparked an identity crisis throughout the Pashtun belt in Pakistan. The local population, although at varying levels of development ranging from the contemporary to the conservative, maintains a common heritage in Pashtunwali or the Pathan way of life.

88. Pakistan had gambled for strategic depth in Afghanistan, but has instead conceded reverse strategic depth to the Taliban in Pakistan. Even then, as long as such elements looked away from Pakistan and engaged themselves in Afghanistan, the authorities thought they were safe in Pakistan.

\(^{84}\) Qandeel Siddique, “The Red Mosque operation and its impact on the growth of the Pakistani Taliban”, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 8 October 2008
Pakistan at that time Zia ul-Haq gave the ulema a more powerful position in the Pakistani state. 86 The old power vacuum in the area. As a part of the support for the mujaheddin in the 1980s, the military ruler in an inflexible, fearless, and defiant group of militants who are winning the battles against the state and filling the maliks (leader of a village or tribe) patronised by the state is falling apart. The state is now up against a rigid, the problem. It has to be acknowledged that the old system of controlling the area through obliging tribal insurgency through the narrow prism of assuming that maintaining law and order will alone resolve the issue within Pakistan on behalf of the international community. The Pakistani state has to stop approaching the issue of tribal unrest and the weakening of the institutional capacity of the state to govern effectively. All three factors are present in its western border areas with Afghanistan and can be traced in large part to its Afghan policies. By encouraging and supporting extremists, like the Taliban, as a tool to retain and hold influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan introduced changes that undermined its own ability to maintain its writ within its own borders. Policies on Afghanistan that altered traditional power structures in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have resulted in wider domestic instability. Not inconsequentially, the reputation of Pakistan's military has suffered.

The Pakistan state has seen a growing diverse array of threats in recent years to its legitimacy and authority. These challenges have included a substantial surge in religious militancy, mounting provincial and tribal unrest and the weakening of the institutional capacity of the state to govern effectively. All three factors are present in its western border areas with Afghanistan and can be traced in large part to its Afghan policies. By encouraging and supporting extremists, like the Taliban, as a tool to retain and hold influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan introduced changes that undermined its own ability to maintain its writ within its own borders. Policies on Afghanistan that altered traditional power structures in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have resulted in wider domestic instability. Not inconsequentially, the reputation of Pakistan's military has suffered.

90. The Pakistan state has seen a growing diverse array of threats in recent years to its legitimacy and authority. These challenges have included a substantial surge in religious militancy, mounting provincial and tribal unrest and the weakening of the institutional capacity of the state to govern effectively. All three factors are present in its western border areas with Afghanistan and can be traced in large part to its Afghan policies. By encouraging and supporting extremists, like the Taliban, as a tool to retain and hold influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan introduced changes that undermined its own ability to maintain its writ within its own borders. Policies on Afghanistan that altered traditional power structures in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have resulted in wider domestic instability. Not inconsequentially, the reputation of Pakistan's military has suffered.

91. No politician in Islamabad appears to be ready to take upon himself the task of fighting the militants within Pakistan on behalf of the international community. The Pakistani state has to stop approaching the issue of tribal insurgency through the narrow prism of assuming that maintaining law and order will alone resolve the problem. It has to be acknowledged that the old system of controlling the area through obliging tribal maliks (leader of a village or tribe) patronised by the state is falling apart. The state is now up against a rigid, inflexible, fearless, and defiant group of militants who are winning the battles against the state and filling the power vacuum in the area. As a part of the support for the mujaheddin in the 1980s, the military ruler in Pakistan at that time Zia ul-Haq gave the ulema a more powerful position in the Pakistani state. 86 The old and largely non-religious system of governance, which was in place in the FATA, was “Islamized”. Previously, the malik was the local political authority. He was elected by a jirga (tribal assembly of elders) in the village, and through an Islamabad-appointed political agent received government funds and handled relations with the state. The local mullah (Muslim religious cleric) was clearly subordinate, and in most cases completely apolitical.

92. From Zia’s rule onward, the state began to fund the mullahs directly, giving them financial control and independence. Over the years the mullahs took on an enhanced political role in the community and gradually became more powerful and influential than the malik. With new resources and status, the local religious figures were able to emerge as key political brokers and, very often, promoters of religious militancy. 87

The Pakistani Military and the Drone Strikes

93. In terms of Afghanistan, the questions that need to be asked are that does the Pakistani military envisage the same future for Afghanistan as the West does? And does the Pakistani military view the Afghan Taliban as a threat to regional stability as the West does?

94. On 22 July 2010 Pakistan’s army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani, emerged as a greatly strengthened figure after the fragile civilian government bowed to pressure to extend his tenure as Chief of Army Staff (COAS) by an unprecedented three years. Kayani, now has the remit to launch Pakistan’s foreign policy at a crucial moment in Afghanistan, where the army is manoeuvring to forge a political settlement that includes elements of the Taliban insurgency. The sudden move underscores the army’s strength over the democratically elected government of President Asif Ali Zardari, which has been racked by political turmoil. Kayani will now outlast the Prime Minister and the President and is likely to oversee the next general election. The army chief also commands more than 600,000 men, the sixth largest army in the world, and an officer corps that controls sizeable business and property interests. 88

95. Kayani has resisted all attempts by civilians to exercise control over it. Surprisingly the general is well-regarded in some quarters in the West despite the fact that he led the intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISD) from 2004 to 2007, exactly the period when the Taliban staged their comeback in Afghanistan. In Bob Woodward’s Obama’s Wars, the author depicts Kayani as unreliable and capable of telling only half the story. 89 Following Kayani’s extension as COAS, he is now leading the Pakistan military’s

88 Saeed Shah, “Pakistan increases power of army strongman General Ashfaq Kayani”, The Guardian, 23 July 2010
efforts to influence a new reconciliation policy in Kabul that will factor in Taliban elements of the Afghan Taliban that retain close ties with the military.

96. In late January 2010, there was dramatic news that Mullah Baradar Akhund, the Quetta Shura Taliban’s second-in-command and the head of its military committee, was apprehended during a raid on a madrassa near Karachi in an operation by Pakistani authorities. Initial reports about the arrest were confusing, but the news was certainly welcome. The arrest was the first detention of a rahbari shura or leadership council member since the capture of Mullah Obaidullah Akhund in 2007, and this operation was apparently led by the ISI.90 The ISI traditionally played a key role in protecting the fugitive Quetta Shura Taliban leadership in Pakistan. Baradar’s surprise arrest was quickly followed by a wave of other detentions: Maulavi Abdul Kabir, the former Taliban Governor of Nangarhar and the eastern provinces and also a member of the rahbari shura, was picked up a few weeks later.91

97. Pakistan’s sudden co-operation in targeting the Quetta Shura’s core leadership after almost a decade of feigning ignorance about its presence within the country surprised many and raised expectations in the West that Islamabad’s decision signalled a quiet but decisive shift in Pakistan’s geostrategic policy. Unfortunately, the realities are less encouraging. It then transpired that the arrested Taliban were in secret negotiations with President Karzai to bring an end to the conflict and isolate Mullah Omar within the Quetta Shura. It’s not clear who created the path for these negotiations but nevertheless the prospect of significantly undermining the Taliban and their operational capability had become a realistic possibility. However, the fly in the ointment was the fact that Baradar, who had first-hand knowledge of the nature and the extent of the Taliban network in Afghanistan and Pakistan, also knew details of their linkages with the ISI. Baradar’s negotiating with Karzai had not been sanctioned by the ISI and this angered them considerably, therefore, Baradar was no longer worth protecting.92

98. The arrests of some senior errant members of the Quetta Shura in Pakistan are, firstly, an attempt by Pakistan to seize control over any process of negotiations and reconciliation that its military leaders believe is both imminent and inevitable. Secondly, seizing some Taliban officials who do not serve Pakistan’s current purposes is a signal to the Afghan Taliban that all discussions about reconciliation with Kabul must occur solely through Pakistani interlocutors and in a manner that is mindful of Pakistani interests. Such a reminder, even to the Quetta Shura, is a clear warning of who is in charge.

99. Directly because of dissatisfaction with Pakistan’s efforts in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the US began using drones carrying Hellfire missiles to eliminate members of al-Qaeda. Over time, the gap widened between the US demand for Pakistan to do more and Islamabad’s ability to deal with militancy in FATA. The use of drones escalated significantly in 2008 and continued to increase throughout 2010.

100. Drone strikes have been successful in eliminating senior members of al-Qaeda such as Abu Hamza al-Rabia, Abu Laith al-Libi, Midhat Mursi al-Sayyid Umar, Mustafa Abu al-Yazeed, Fateh al-Masri, Fahd Mohammad Ahmed al-Quso and British citizens Rashif Rauf and Abdul Jabber.

101. The use of drones are part of an evolving US strategy to implement pre-emptive strikes to deter or dismantle any potential terrorist plots that al-Qaeda and its affiliates are planning. Electronic chatter combined with better information from sources in the AfPak border area and better surveillance technology have made this possible.

102. It was in 2008 that the US substantially stepped up the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over north-west Pakistan. Since then, the Hellfire missiles and drones that launch them have become a common theme in counter-terrorist operations in the border region of Afghanistan-Pakistan. The importance of the drone strikes is reflected in the fact that the Obama Administration, which has moved away from the Bush presidency on issues like Iraq and Guantánamo Bay, has sought to intensify the use of pilotless aircrafts to target al-Qaeda and Taliban safe havens in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

103. Pakistan’s official response to the drone strikes is ambiguous about its consent for the drone attacks. The response of the old Pervez Musharraf regime was generally muted, probably due to increasing domestic political pressure. The current Zardari Government in Islamabad is more vocal in opposing the drone attacks, and frequently protesting the civilian casualties. The issue, however, continues to be confusing for public perceptions. No drone strike can take place without the consent of Islamabad. It would harm the Zardari Government if they publicly supported the air strikes but it serves them better to privately condone them whilst publicly condemning them.

104. Despite the success in eliminating senior members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban the drone strikes have proved to be controversial as they also result in civilian casualties. As a result the drone attacks cause significant anti-American sentiment in Pakistan. The question is what is collaterally acceptable and what is the balance between eliminating high profile targets whilst trying to reduce civilian fatalities? It is worth recalling that the Obama Administration has made it clear that they will do things differently to the Bush Administration, whether

it is on Guantánamo Bay or Iraq. The one thing that has remained consistent is the drone strikes. The problem is that the US has lost faith and trust with the ISI in rounding up these people on the ground. It felt that there was a leakage of information. Actionable intelligence was sometimes being passed to the terrorists. The solution that the Bush Administration came up with was drone strikes, which are quick and decisive. The fact that the Obama Administration is continuing with that, shows that it is having tangible results. In the absence of ground troops being deployed we will continue to see drone strikes take place.

105. To supply over 100,000 troops in Afghanistan, NATO relies on road convoys with dozens of trucks to carry through supplies. It is a key lifeline for supplies going into Afghanistan. Up to 80% of NATO's non-lethal supplies into Afghanistan are through mountain passes along the Pakistan border, through the fabled Khyber Pass, near Peshawar, and Spin Boldak in the south. The Khyber Pass was closed down by the Taliban seven times in 2010, and convoys were unable to get through. Supplies have also been brought into northern Afghanistan via Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.93

106. However, increasingly these convoys are coming under savage attack by the Taliban. And these ambushes will get worse, which could impair NATO's efforts to keep a supply lifeline running to its troops in forts and camps scattered across the mountainous country. The main Kabul-Kandahar highway was once a showpiece for how western aid would modernise Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. Repaved in 2003, the 300-mile highway is now pockmarked with craters from roadside bombs. Travellers face three or four Taliban checkpoints along the way. Trucking firms have paid local Taliban commanders from $5,000 to $6,000 for the safe passage of each fuel tanker along the highway.94

107. Pakistan had stopped NATO convoys crossing the Khyber Pass in response to a NATO air strike on 30 September 2010 in which three Pakistani soldiers were killed when NATO helicopters strayed into Pakistani territory while chasing Taliban militants from Afghanistan. Unfortunately there is a perception that keeping the NATO supply line vulnerable suits the Pakistani military's strategy of creating favourable conditions for its proxy groups in Afghanistan. What remains a worrying potential is if the continued drone strikes in Pakistan aimed at terrorists inadvertently kill members of the armed forces. This could trigger the Pakistani military to close the Khyber Pass for NATO convoys in the future which in turn could put Washington in direct confrontation with Islamabad.

THE BRITISH DIMENSION

108. British foreign policy needs to factor in four future potential scenarios related to Pakistan. Firstly, how will the UK react and respond if another terrorist attack on British soil, like 7/7, is traced back to Pakistan? Secondly, what will Britain's position be should and when the security situation in Pakistan deteriorates to an alarming level especially in the urban heartland in and around Islamabad? Thirdly, what can Britain do to ensure that civilian rule in Pakistan remains intact and blunt any attempt by the military to launch a coup? Fourthly, if another attack takes place in India, like the one in 2008 in Mumbai, and the launch pad is from Pakistan, what will the Government be able to do to prevent a military escalation between India and Pakistan?

109. On 6 August 2010, British Prime Minister David Cameron met with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. Their meeting attracted extra significance following Cameron's candid remarks in Bangalore, India, in the preceding week, where he stated “We want to see a strong and a stable and a democratic Pakistan…But we cannot tolerate in any sense the idea that this country is allowed to look both ways and is able in any way to promote the export of terror, whether to India or whether to Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the world.”95

110. With these remarks, Cameron became the first western leader to formally identify the “elephant in the room” which is that elements in Pakistan have, since the September 11 attacks, adopted a strategic policy of covertly supporting terrorist groups like the Taliban factions of the Quetta Shura and Haqqani Network that have launched deadly attacks against Afghan, ISAF and US troops in Afghanistan.96 Another unresolved blot on Pakistan's record is the pervasive presence of the home-grown terrorist group, the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), that carried out the 2008 Mumbai Siege Attacks in which 170 people were killed including six Americans.97 Jean-Louis Bruguier, the former investigating magistrate from France stated that the "Lashkar-e-Tayyaba is no longer a Pakistani movement with only a Kashmir political or military agenda. Lashkar-e-Tayyaba is a member of al-Qaeda. Lashkar-e-Tayyaba has decided to expand violence worldwide".98

111. What is most relevant about the Mumbai plot is that this was terrorism by remote control. The gunmen were just pawns being guided by their handlers in Pakistan who gave instructions to them through using satellite phones. The handlers were watching the siege unfolding on television and giving the gunmen regular real time updates as to what the Indian security agencies were planning, and how the world was viewing what was transpiring. Many have said that the Mumbai siege attacks have set a dangerous precedent in the type of

93 Tim McGirk, “Taliban Stepping Up Attacks on NATO Supply Convoys”, Time Magazine, 7 October 2010
94 Ibid.
95 “Cameron: We won't tolerate 'export of terror' by Pakistan”, CNN, 28 July 2010
98 “Pakistan and Afghanistan: the bad guys don’t stay in their lanes”, Reuters, 14 November 2009
attack that can take place in hotels and the concern of it being replicated in New York, London, Paris, Berlin or elsewhere. Hotel security will always be an issue of concern and determined terrorists will always find a way. What is equally relevant is how the use of media and especially television news was used to guide the gunmen and enabled them to move with stealth combing their way through ten locations creating devastation along the way.

112. The person who did the reconnaissance and scouting for targets in Mumbai was an American-Pakistani national, David Headley. Headley fits into the type of person that terrorist groups are looking to recruit. A western-educated individual with a US or European Union passport for ease of travel and with western social skills. These attributes enabled Headley to travel easily to India and Denmark. The potential of Britons being recruited by the LeT to fill a similar task is a disturbing possibility. On 17 March 2006, Mohammed Ajmal Khan, was jailed for nine years after admitting directing a terrorist organisation, including providing weapons and funds to the LeT. Khan, from Coventry, UK, received an eight-year term for his involvement with the group and was sentenced to a further year for contempt of court.

113. The Pakistan-Afghanistan border region constitutes a significant threat to western national security interests. Indeed, terrorist related events over the last few years in the UK have seen increasing international interest in the connections between radicals in the UK and their counterparts in the Pakistani tribal areas that border Afghanistan. Attention has focused on how such groups and individuals could link up and co-operate to carry out attacks in the UK.

114. Cameron’s comments do not form an original starting point but, in fact, are part of a gradual evolution of thought in the West that the problems in Afghanistan, India, as well as the potential global impact, are intrinsically tied to the security challenges in Pakistan. Cameron’s predecessor, Labour Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, had stated in 2009 that Pakistan has become not just a “breeding ground for terrorism” but the “crucible of terrorism”. Prior to that, in 2008, whilst in Pakistan, Brown revealed that “Three quarters of the most serious plots investigated by the British authorities have links to al-Qaeda in Pakistan”. He added that “The time has come for action, not words”.100

115. Senior figures from the Obama Administration have also commented on this issue. Speaking to local journalists in Lahore in 2009, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton chided Pakistani officials for failing to pursue al-Qaeda leaders inside their borders, “Al-Qaeda has had safe haven in Pakistan since 2002…I find it hard to believe that nobody in your government knows where they are and couldn't get them if they really wanted to”. Therefore, in this light, the context of Cameron’s comments have followed an inevitable trajectory.

116. Despite repeated statements by some officials in the Obama Administration in Washington that Pakistan is working hard to crack down on militants, a private White House review uses unusually tough language to suggest the Pakistani military is not doing nearly enough to confront the Taliban and al-Qaeda, according to a leaked report to Congress. The report notes that from March to June 2010, the Pakistani military “continued to avoid military engagements that would put it in direct conflict with Afghan Taliban or [al-Qaeda] forces in North Waziristan. This is as much a political choice as it is a reflection of an under-resourced military prioritizing its targets”.102

117. The new tough line from the White House in the report to Congress comes as Obama faces increasing pressure from fellow Democrats to get tough with Pakistan. Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, suggested that the Pakistani Government is selective in its crackdowns. He said, “They have gone after some terrorist targets inside Pakistan but the ones they go after are the ones that threaten the Pakistan Government”.103

118. The institution where most of the criticism has centred regarding Pakistan’s mixed record on counter-terrorism, is the powerful military intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate ( ISI). Since 9/11, the West has become increasingly dependent on the ISI and the Pakistani military in terms of intelligence co-operation as regards terrorist groups like al-Qaeda as well as launching effective operations to take apart the terrorist infrastructure and militant strongholds throughout the country. Paradoxically, the Pakistani military stands accused of actually supporting and assisting these very same extremist centrifugal forces. This was highlighted by the publication in June 2010, of a report by the London School of Economics ( LSE) which was authored by Matt Waldman. The LSE report claimed that “Pakistan appears to be playing a double game of intelligence illustrated a continued relationship between the ISI and the Taliban”. This is not surprising.
119. The common thread between the LSE report and the WikiLeaks documents is the fact that Taliban factions, such as the Quetta Shura led by Mullah Omar, and the Haqqani Network which is controlled by Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin Haqqani, continue to operate unhindered from safe havens within Pakistani territory and use these sanctuaries as a launch pad for deadly cross-border attacks on US, British, Afghan and ISAF troops in Afghanistan.

120. Cameron’s comments can therefore be taken into context with the fact that, as of 11 October 2010, 340 British servicemen have died in Afghanistan since operations began in October 2001 which is a higher death toll than what the UK endured during the Falklands War in 1982. Many more have suffered terrible life-changing injuries. The majority of deaths have been from the Taliban that launch their attacks whilst crossing over from safe havens in Pakistan and then slip back in afterwards.

121. Western Governments have known for some time that the Pakistani military did not break its ties with all the different Taliban factions as General Pervez Musharraf, who ruled Pakistan from 1999 to 2008, had promised to do. Musharraf, the country’s military dictator, not only did nothing to sever those deep links with certain favoured Taliban or other extremist groups but on the contrary, he proceeded to weaken the judiciary, suspend the constitution, arrest elected politicians, muzzle the independent media, and misuse the billions of dollars of aid the West provided. Although, under western pressure, Pakistan returned to being a democracy in 2008, the shadow of the military continues to linger and has an overbearing and suffocating influence on Pakistan’s defence and foreign policy agendas. In virtually all parts of the world, nations have a military, but in the case of Pakistan, the military has a nation. Therein lies the problem.

122. As Pakistani officials are keen to point out, since 2001 more than 2,700 members of the armed forces have been killed and many more severely wounded in fighting the Pakistani Taliban. These figures exceed the total casualties suffered by ISAF troops in Afghanistan over the same period. Yet, the key part of the story that is missing is that although the Pakistani military has been battling the Pakistani Taliban, which is an indigenous movement, it has not attempted to dismantle the Afghan Taliban factions which are carrying out attacks in Afghanistan. According to Lt Gen Talat Masood, a retired Pakistan army officer and now influential policy analyst, “There’s a difference of policy, not a double game”. However, this “difference of policy” is completely at odds with British, European and American interests.

123. However, Chris Alexander, the former Canadian Ambassador to Afghanistan states that the chief of Pakistan’s army staff, General Ashfaq Kayani, “once again successfully deflected U.S. pressure to launch military operations in Baluchistan and North Waziristan, where the Islamic Emirate [Afghan Taliban] is based”. Worriedly, at odds with the West, Kayani remains rooted to the old military policy of utilising Afghanistan for the purposes of “strategic depth”. The Pakistani military has never accepted the Afghan Taliban as a liability but instead views them as a potential asset.

124. In addition to the challenge of the Talibans, the problem of al-Qaeda Central and its affiliates like the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba inside Pakistan remains a sore point between London and Islamabad. Between 2004 to 2006, al-Qaeda had planned a series of co-ordinated mass casualty attacks on British soil. These included the Ammonium Nitrate Plot and the Airline Liquid Bomb Plot both of which were disrupted by British intelligence and law enforcement agencies. However, the 7 July 2005 Transit System suicide bombings in London were successfully executed which resulted in the death of 52 people and over 700 injured. In all these plots, British citizens most of whom were of Pakistani origin had been recruited by al-Qaeda. Some were made to travel to Pakistan for operational training and ideological guidance. It is becoming increasingly complex for British authorities to observe people travelling between Britain and Pakistan and it is a significant challenge with nearly 400,000 yearly visits by British citizens of Pakistani origin with an average length of 41 days. In addition, it has become more difficult to determine which, if any, of those travellers are potential radicals following the dangerous route for indoctrination and training and the majority who are going there to legitimately visit family. What remains clear is that Pakistan serves as a gateway and finishing school for many British terrorists.

125. Therefore, intelligence co-operation between the UK and Pakistan is essential. However, that “co-operation” has at times been extremely problematic. In the case of the Ammonium Nitrate Plot, which involved individuals planning to use half a ton of the substance for bomb attacks on a wide array of targets in southern England, the ringleader Omar Khayam provided a detailed timeline of how he had initially been recruited by the ISI to fight in the insurgency in Indian Administered Kashmir. He would later be co-opted by al-Qaeda. When the trial resumed the following week Khayam refused to provide any more testimony claiming that the ISI had threatened his family in Pakistan because of all his revelations. This became a worrying case involving the intimidation of individuals by a foreign intelligence agency in a terrorism trial in the UK and set a dangerous precedent.

108 <i>Casualties, &lt;http://icasualties.org/oef/&gt;</i> accessed 11 October 2010
110 Dean Nelson, “Pakistan’s burning sense of injustice”, The Daily Telegraph, 3 August 2010
111 Chris Alexander, “The huge scale of Pakistan’s complicity”, Globe & Mail, 30 July 2010
126. Pakistan’s fragile democracy has been severely damaged by the Government’s poor response to the worst floods in the country’s modern history. The flood waters hit Sindh province particularly hard having travelled around 600 miles south and east along the course of the River Indus. In a slow-motion disaster, the floodwaters had robbed ordinary Pakistanis of everything they owned. From the storm-lashed remote northern valleys of Swat to the overflowing Indus River in the south, as well as in-between.

127. President Asif Zardari’s trip to France and Britain as the floods raged created an image of an indifferent, arrogant leadership. The image of President Zardari visiting his chateau in France, while there was devastating flooding in Pakistan will have long-term effects. However, it is the prime minister, not the president, who is responsible for running the Government, including its response to natural disasters. General Ashfaq Kayani, by contrast, strategically visited victims days before the Prime Minister, Yousaf Raza Gilani, who was campaigning for by-elections instead. Kayani repeatedly visited the affected areas thus bolstering his image with the people.

128. The World Bank estimates that crops worth $1 billion (£640 million) have been ruined by the flood waters. The Government may have to spend $1.7 billion on reconstruction, and has said it will have to divert expenditure from badly needed development programmes. Farming constitutes one fifth of Pakistan’s economic output, and 120 million people rely on agriculture both for food and jobs.

129. The 2004 Boxing Day tsunami and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake were massive disasters but the peak of the damage was established after a couple of days and therefore were finite and contained. The paradoxical problem with the 2010 flood waters in Pakistan is that they lingered for several weeks and moved so slowly that it caught everyone so off-guard. The media undoubtedly plays a role. Television in particular is crucial when it comes to capturing the public imagination. While in Britain the floods have got a fair amount of attention, in the US there has been little coverage, either in print or on TV. And low-key coverage results in a low-key response simply because people don’t know what’s going on.

130. The agricultural heartland has been wiped out, which will cause spiralling food prices and shortages. Many roads and irrigation canals have been destroyed, along with electricity supply infrastructure. With the Government overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster, Islamic groups, including extremist organisations such as Jamaat-ud-Dawa, the “charitable” front for the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), have stepped into the gap. Locals complain that government help is almost entirely absent. On 10 December 2008, the United Nations Security Council declared that Jamaat-ud-Dawa was a terrorist organisation directly tied to the LeT. Additionally four individuals were designated as terrorists. They included its spiritual leader Hafiz Sayeed.

131. At a makeshift relief centre organised by the Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the northwestern province, volunteers piled donations of food, cooking oil and clothing near a tent they had erected on a street in central Peshawar. The tent, draped with large banners on which the name of Jamaat-ud-Dawa featured prominently. There was also a donation box. Jamaat-ud-Dawa’s weekly newspaper Jarrar or Courageous was being distributed. Its front page carried reports and photographs of the flooding alongside provocative headlines including one which declared that the conflict in Kashmir would only be solved ‘with the gun’. Although the Jamaat-ud-Dawa is filling the vacuum of the inability of governmental and western aid agencies to get to the areas most affected, the concern is that their ideology and influence will also take hold.

132. Another Islamist group the Falah-e-Insaniat which translates into “Humanitarian Welfare”, also a group affiliated to the LeT, was active in setting up feeding centres for the homeless, as well as running medical posts and whose staff were busily handing out cash to flood victims, Rs 3,000–5,000 (£22–£36) per family. This far outstrips anything the Government of Pakistan has so far done. Western aid is often channelled through Islamabad and the process is often mired in a maze of bureaucracy and corruption.

133. The floods, triggered by torrential monsoon downpours, engulfed Pakistan’s Indus river basin. Villages have been wiped away but the impact of the disaster is being felt throughout Pakistan’s population of 170 million. Fears that Zardari could be overthrown, possibly through an intervention by the army, when it comes to capturing the public imagination. While in Britain the floods have got a fair amount of attention, in the US there has been little coverage, either in print or on TV. And low-key coverage results in a low-key response simply because people don’t know what’s going on. The media undoubtedly plays a role. Television in particular is crucial when it comes to capturing the public imagination. While in Britain the floods have got a fair amount of attention, in the US there has been little coverage, either in print or on TV. And low-key coverage results in a low-key response simply because people don’t know what's going on.


117 Mary Fitzgerald, “Concerns grow of aid wrapped in ideology for flood victims”, The Irish Times, 16 August 2010

118 “Concerns grow of aid wrapped in ideology for flood victims”, The Irish Times, 16 August 2010
good governance.” For the time being, however, there does not appear to be any effort by the military to use the humanitarian crisis as an excuse to seize power. For the time being.

134. The unfolding political story of Pakistan including its role in battling terrorism and the unfolding humanitarian disaster are inextricably linked. Western generosity at this time of crisis could still help prevent these Islamist groups from gaining any more foothold under the cover of aid to the victims. The more the West gives directly to the areas affected the most and not through local proxies, the less likely it is that flood victims will be driven by sheer desperation into the arms of extremists and radicals. The scale of this catastrophe is unprecedented. But this is not just about humanitarian aid. Looking after the people of Pakistan now is in everyone's strategic interest especially the UK. It is also of vital importance for Britain to support and enhance Pakistan’s democratic Government which remains under siege from the military.

135. What is also creating nightmarish scenarios is the concern over the safety and security of Pakistan’s nuclear and military installations. In the post 2008 Mumbai siege attacks atmosphere, there is a small but real possibility that the next India-Pakistan crisis could escalate to nuclear levels. The other aspect is that Pakistan may decide, as a matter of state policy, to extend its nuclear umbrella or once again engage in nuclear proliferation with one or more Middle East states, especially if Iran acquires a nuclear device. In addition, should Pakistan’s security and stability continue to unravel, its nuclear assets could be seized by remnant elements of the army or by extremist elements.

TALKING TO THE TALIBAN: MYTHS AND DILEMMAS

136. As mentioned earlier, the stabilisation of Afghanistan is reliant on the nature of its relations with Pakistan. In turn, the aspect leads directly to the issue of the Taliban and what their future role in the region will be. The key questions are whether, or to what extent, the Taliban are interested in negotiating with Kabul and the West? To what extent are Kabul and the West in a position to lay down terms and conditions for negotiations? If the Taliban are a decentralised entity, then which Taliban faction or affiliate should Kabul be talking to? On what terms and conditions would the Taliban be willing to share power with the Karzai Government? What would be its impact on the country’s constitution, state structures, and foreign policy? Is Kabul willing to integrate Taliban guerrillas into the armed forces? How would it impact on the position of minority ethnic groups? These are some of the issues of far-reaching consequence which are not being thought of, especially as Kabul, in the given circumstances, cannot speak from a position of strength. As Edmund Burke said “The superior power may offer peace with honour and with safety. Such an offer from such a power will be attributed to magnanimity. But the concessions of the weak are the concessions of fear”—Conciliation. (II. '75).

137. Afghanistan is one of those places in which people who wish to spell doom and gloom are likely to know the least of its history despite their confidence in making definitive statements. Examples include that the Afghans had risen up against all previous invaders and so any army would find itself immediately bogged down in guerrilla warfare, the people have such a hatred for foreigners that they would never co-operate with the occupying forces and Afghan Government, it’s an artificial country riven by ethnic conflict and doomed fragment like Yugoslavia. All of these maledictions are well off the mark. The fear that the situation in Afghanistan is unwinnable or that the Afghan Taliban is invincible are myths but myths that are often repeated which are damaging for public perceptions and morale.

138. “Afghanistan is the graveyard of Empires”. The irony behind that statement is that for most of its history Afghanistan has actually been the cradle of empires, not their grave. One of those repeated myths is that Afghanistan is inherently unconquerable thanks to the fierceness of its inhabitants and the formidable nature of its terrain. But this isn't at all borne out by the history. Until 1840 Afghanistan was better known as a “highway of conquest” rather than the “graveyard of empires”. For 2,500 years it was always part of somebody's empire, beginning with the Persian Empire in the fifth century B.C.

139. After the Persians it was Alexander the Great's turn. Some contend that Alexander met his match there, since it was an Afghan archer who wounded him in the heel, ushering a series of misfortunes that would end with the great conqueror's death. Yet coins traced to his reign keep being discovered in Afghan soil today. In fact, Alexander's successors managed to keep the region under their control for another 200 years.

140. Genghis Khan also had no trouble at all conquering the place, and the descendants of his army, the Hazaras, would build wide-ranging kingdoms using Afghanistan as a base. Tamerlane ultimately shifted the capital of his empire from provincial Samarkand to cosmopolitan Herat. Babur, who is buried in Kabul, used Afghanistan to launch his conquest of a sizable chunk of India and establish centuries of Muslim rule. Afghans were content with this. In 1504, Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire in India, easily took the throne in Kabul. In 1842, the British lost a bloody war that ended when fierce tribesmen notoriously destroyed an army of thousands retreating from Kabul.

141. Subsequently the British instigated a punitive invasion and ultimately won the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878–80). Although they didn't prevent Tzarist Russia from encroaching on Central Asia, they succeeded

139 David Batty and Saeed Shah, “Impact of Pakistan floods as bad as 1947 partition, says prime minister”, The Guardian, 14 August 2010
in occupying much of the country and forcing its rulers to accept a treaty giving the British a veto over future Afghan foreign policy. London, it should be noted, never intended to make Afghanistan part of its empire.

142. Around 1984, the Soviets were finally getting the better of the mujaheddin with the aid of helicopter gun-ships. It was the West’s considerable financial assistance as well as military hardware and in particular the US decision to send anti-aircraft Stinger missiles, which ended the Soviets’ total air superiority that allowed the mujaheddin to stage a comeback. The West defeated the Soviet Union not the Afghan-Arab Mujaheddin. In addition, many Soviet soldiers became opium addicts as well as suffering from dysentery.

143. The war against the Soviets was sharply different from previous rebellions in Afghanistan’s history as a state, which were relatively fleeting and almost always local affairs, usually revolving around dynastic power struggles. From 1929 to 1978 the country was completely at peace. Unfortunately, popular views of the place today are shaped by perception and hearsay rather than substantive knowledge of the country’s history. In any case, today’s American-led intervention in Afghanistan can hardly be compared to the Soviet occupation. The Soviet Army employed a scorched-earth policy, killing more than a million Afghans, forcing some five million more to flee the country, and sowing land mines everywhere. Even the most generous estimates of today’s Taliban insurgency suggest it is no more than 20,000 men. About 10 times as many Afghans fought against the Soviet occupation.120

144. The way in which the current Taliban insurgency is becoming criminalised also presents opportunities. The rising tide of violence and daily misery has made the Taliban deeply unpopular in the south and southwest, and nationwide polls indicate that they and other extremist groups have little support. Additionally, there are indications that anti-state actors at all levels of the insurgency compete for drug spoils. Military intelligence units within NATO should try to capitalise on these inner rivalries to weaken the insurgency, yet remain aware of the risk that fighting between rival commanders could cause collateral damage in the local community. In a 2010 new poll conducted by ABC, ARD and the BBC, it revealed that 69% of Afghans named the Taliban as the greatest threat to their nation. Only 4% said it was the United States.121

145. It is impossible and a fallacy to have a genuine and meaningful dialogue with the Taliban in the hope that they will somehow be willing to enter into a power-sharing arrangement, respect the rights of women, and ethnic and religious minorities, to halt and dismantle the infrastructure that enables opium poppy cultivation and prevent al-Qaeda and affiliates from re-establishing their safe havens inside Afghanistan. For the Taliban themselves these are issues that they will not compromise on whatsoever. Even if they agree to any of these terms in principle, they have an established track record of reneging and violating any agreement.

146. It is important to point out that the international community had been talking to the Taliban even before September 11, to try and prevent them from blowing up the Bamyan Buddhist statues. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the Taliban were asked to hand over Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri in order to avoid an invasion of Afghanistan. In both instances, the Taliban exhibited their rigidity and obstinacy and nothing was achieved.

147. The Taliban cannot be compared with the IRA, ETA or even the Tamil Tigers. All these terrorist groups have had or continue to have a political wing which would take part in the democratic process by standing in elections. They also were willing to compromise at some level for greater political representation and power-sharing. In addition, all these groups had women in their organisation which played an important role within their infrastructure. The Taliban is opposed to power-sharing, elections, compromise, and any substantive role for women.

148. The Taliban do not, in general, approve of jirgas as a means to settle disputes. The Taliban regard the tribal elder shura system as un-Islamic as strict Quranic haddud punishments are hardly ever applied. Indeed some say that the customary jirga system acted as a restraint on the wilder excesses of fundamentalist Islamic law.122 In Taliban-controlled areas, the Taliban either co-opt and work with the tribal elder shuras or constantly threaten and intimidate them, reiterating that a weak district government provides a vacuum in rule of law that the Taliban is filling.

149. For some time now, Karzai has been persuaded to talk to the Taliban with a view to ensure a negotiated settlement which can allow western forces to leave in good order and bring peace to the region. If that is the case, then Karzai has to be allowed to choose which factions of the Taliban he wishes to negotiate with. There cannot be any interference or pressure from the West, Pakistan or any other country on which Taliban elements can be brought into a reconciliation process. The Afghans are the only ones that know which Taliban groups can be reconciled and those that carry ulterior motives and agendas.

150. The divide inside the country has widened among the Pashtuns and also between the non-Pashtun north and the Pashtun south. The minority Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras are vehemently against any deal with the

121 The survey was conducted for ABC News, the BBC and ARD by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) based in Kabul, a D3 Systems Inc. subsidiary. Interviews were conducted in person, in Dari or Pashto, among a random national sample of 1,534 Afghan adults from 11–23 December 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/sbsp/hi/pdfs/11_01_10_afghanpoll.pdf> accessed 5 September 2010
122 Frank Ledwidge, “Justice in Helmand: The Challenge of Law Reform in a Society at War”, 40:1 Asia Affairs, 77, 86 (March 2009)
151. The Pakistan army wants to see a settlement that brings the Taliban back to Kabul in a power-sharing deal. In other words take Afghanistan back to the pre 9/11 position. Karzai has carried out secret negotiations with the army’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which first wants him to reconcile with the neo-Taliban groups led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani—the very groups the US wants kept out. Karzai even sacked his own intelligence chief, Amrullah Saleh, who was opposed to concessions to the ISI. Yet ironically Karzai has got nothing in return. He is deeply frustrated with the ISI's refusal to extradite to Kabul senior Taliban leaders it is holding.

152. Despite claims by some, there is no such thing as “moderate Taliban” or ‘extremist Taliban’. Moderate Taliban is somebody who will kill you with a knife or a pistol and not with an RPG or by blowing himself up. What we have is the ideological Taliban and those who join the Taliban for strategic or monetary purposes. It may be possible to clinically extract some of the financially motivated members of the Taliban by offering them employment, training and economic opportunities. It is not possible to talk to the ideological Taliban who pose the greatest danger. Their view and their mediaeval agenda are totally different to what the overwhelming majority of Afghans want for their country. The Taliban doctrine also goes against everything the West has been trying to achieve in Afghanistan. It is impossible to discuss anything positively with the ideological Taliban, other than to hand them back Afghanistan and admit that the Afghanistan project has failed.

153. It is inevitable that there will be some form of a political solution but it must be accompanied with the policy of tough military pressure to convince insurgents that they cannot win, coupled with offering the foot soldiers an economic way out. In spite of whatever incentives may be offered, the Afghan Government and ISAF cannot assume that all Taliban members will want to participate in reconciliation programmes. For example, the prison in Lashkar Gah has established a reconciliation programme. In many cases arrested Taliban members in Helmand who joined the Taliban to be a part of their campaign against the international forces and the Afghan Government, affirmed that they would remain part of the Taliban until told otherwise. These individuals have no desire to reconcile!124 No matter what efforts are extended by the Afghan Government or ISAF, a significant amount of Taliban members will never disavow the cause, and reaching out to and reintegrating leaders will be an important step in reconciling all those who follow such leaders.

154. In addition, the Taliban believe that they are in the ascendancy. They feel they have the strategic advantage, durability and resources to outlast the West in Afghanistan. Therefore it is too simplistic and naïve to somehow assume that they would have any meaningful desire to compromise with Karzai. An artificial deadline for troop withdrawal, which is not conditioned based, dramatically undercuts the US and UK by signalling uncertainty to its partners and enemies alike. Zabiullah Mujahed, a Taliban spokesman told the BBC:

We do not want to talk to anyone—not to [Afghanistan President Hamid] Karzai, nor to any foreigners—till the foreign forces withdraw from Afghanistan...We are certain that we are winning. Why should we talk if we have the upper hand, and the foreign troops are considering withdrawal, and there are differences in the ranks of our enemies?125

155. To increase community awareness and acceptance of reconciliation, Afghan officials could embark upon a public information campaign using themes specific to Helmand and from Islam and Pashtunwali. For example, terms like integration are not used by Afghans; rather, Afghans speak about being allowed to participate in Government. Additionally, messages that touch upon Pashtunwali concepts, such as nanawati or forgiveness, as well as peace and justice themes prevalent in Islam could help promote reintegration and reconciliation in Helmand. Appealing to a sense among many Pashtuns that their participation is necessary to rebuild their country would provide a positive way to re-engage disaffected portions who feel marginalised by the Government.

156. British foreign policy will need to assess what are the chances of being able to divide and fracture the various Taliban factions. Can there be a settlement with the movement as a whole, involving the exclusion of al-Qaeda and its affiliates? Failing that, when the West withdraws its troops, will the Afghan National Army be able to beat them back from the main towns, or will the Taliban sweep to power in the Pashtun areas, or even the whole country?

157. The most likely scenario may well resemble the past Soviet withdrawal. The West will build up the Afghan army to the point where it thinks it has a reasonable chance of surviving on its own, albeit with continued US support, including both air power and money to buy off local Taliban commanders. The army will then either hold the Pashtun cities against the Taliban in a series of bloody sieges or lose to them and retreat to Kabul and the non-Pashtun areas. Whatever is going on behind closed doors, the bloody preliminaries of an Afghan peace settlement are being played out at gunpoint along Afghanistan's lawless border with

124 Interview with a member of Afghanistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Garmisch, Germany, 22 January 2010
Pakistan. A manufactured exit strategy, capitulation through negotiation, will simply leave the problem for future generations to grapple with.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

158. The security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated in the last five years, and it will take time to reverse the Taliban gains. The first step is to weaken the perception that Taliban victory is inevitable. One of the biggest impediments to weakening that perception is the July 2011 date to commence withdrawal. This premature date has provided a psychological boost to the Taliban by signalling a lack of long-term western commitment to the mission. Furthermore, the West requires sincere co-operation from Pakistan in closing down the Taliban’s sanctuary on its territory. Unless Pakistan has confidence in NATO’s commitment to winning in Afghanistan, it will continue to hedge on its support for the Afghan Taliban and tolerate terrorist groups linked to al-Qaeda.

159. There is still a chance for the international community to bring durable, lasting peace to Afghanistan but it is guaranteed to take a long time. It is critical that all actors agree to reassess their individual and collective roles and strategies. The Taliban are running a highly competitive propaganda campaign and it is in the interest of all international donors to develop ways of communicating their goals and plans to the local Afghan population. If “Enduring Freedom” is to be achieved, we must abandon our conventional approaches to conflict resolution, think more dynamically and consider the real objective: bringing real and lasting peace to the Afghan people.

160. Afghanistan’s woes began with outside interference and though the Taliban was dislodged from power in 2001, they were never defeated or dismantled. They simply moved their headquarters across the border into Pakistan and have in fact proliferated, and this is being fuelled by those who wish to see pro-Taliban and al-Qaeda elements re-asserting themselves. The key point to understand is that the Taliban is not a political movement or even a militia. They are a terrorist group adopting the tactics and strategies of the insurgency in Iraq, killing with stealth and unflinching in their agenda, whilst using the trafficking of narcotics to partly fund their activities.

161. Afghanistan’s vast opium/heroin industry finances the Taliban and feeds rampant government corruption. British authorities should make public the names of the top Afghan drug lords, including government officials, so that they can no longer act with impunity. And because Afghanistan’s court system is still incapable of handling major drug cases, Kabul should sign a treaty with Washington that would allow key heroin traffickers to be tried in the United States.

162. Short-term measures regarding counter-terrorism and military co-operation should not get in the way of long-term imperatives to stabilise Pakistan. There is an essential need to devote much attention to shoring up Pakistan’s damaged democratic institutions and helping Pakistanis resolve their permanent domestic political crisis. Only this can ensure that the Pakistani military cannot interfere with the political system.

163. Britain needs to make its support for Pakistan more effective. In the past, there has been a failure of connecting aid, loans, and grants to specific policy goals. Linking economic and military aid to performance on those areas we judge to be most important. In addition, the aid process must be far more transparent.

164. Despite extreme poverty, a landmine-littered landscape, endemic corruption, a weak central government, a virulent insurgency, a damaged economy, booming opium production, and a host of other daunting concerns, Afghanistan nevertheless remains geo-strategically vital. The West cannot repeat its post-Soviet abandonment of the country, or naively assume that some stillborn peace deal can be achieved with the Taliban, because the results of that will continue to have negative consequences for the region. By abandoning Afghanistan once, the West allowed the country to become a refuge for terrorist groups to recruit, train, and wage war globally. The effect on Afghanistan, the region, and the rest of the world was dramatic and terrifying. This time, if the West leaves, or loses, the results will be even worse.

165. The Taliban are showing no signs of weakness but on the contrary are increasing their resources and infrastructure, expanding their reach into Afghanistan and successfully implementing the fear factor into Afghanistan with deadly effect. Success in defeating them militarily anytime soon appears remote, and the strategy will always remain hampered and flawed as long as the porous and badly manned border, the Durand Line, into Pakistan remains open.

166. Pakistan has fallen victim not to terrorism directed against it by external forces, but rather to the corrosive effects of extremist groups, many with a trans-national ideological orientation, that have flourished within its own borders, and often with the tacit support of military intelligence elements. Therefore, the remedy for the security dilemma must and can only lie primarily within Pakistan itself. It is therefore imperative for the UK to support and help to enhance the democratic and civil society institutions in Pakistan that the military has spent in weakening.

167. Throughout Pakistan's history, a weak and polarised political system has enabled the military to seize and maintain power. Therefore, a robust democratic culture will require the two main political parties, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), to renounce the vendettas that characterised their rivalry during the flawed democratic transition of the 1990s. Strong internal and external
political pressures will be necessary to redress the democratic deficit because the army will not voluntarily empower civilian institutions.

168. Whilst the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan remains in place, it will continue to act as a recruiting ground for young British and other European citizens that are being drawn and attracted by the ideology and doctrines that al-Qaeda and its affiliate preach. Pakistan needs to recognise the terror groups for what they are. Dangerous institutions which they have become, whose resources and reach have continued to grow over the years and which now are threatening to destabilise and bleed not just Pakistan but the entire region and beyond.

169. The symptoms are evident in Afghanistan but the disease is located in Pakistan. Indeed, the root lies in the inability of the Pakistani state to decipher the problem correctly. The situation can no longer be easily reversed and the Pakistani state has to move beyond the colonial policy of segregating the tribal areas and leaving the people to the mercy of the redundant tribal maliks, Islamists or the warlords. Islamabad tends to fight the symptom while the disease is left undiagnosed and untreated. Pakistan has to now ready itself for a long-term effort to integrate these areas and mainstream its population through political consensus. Parts of Pakistan too are in the process of Talibanisation which is gathering momentum and the influence of radicals is fast spreading beyond the tribal areas, where groups calling themselves Pakistani Taliban are operating.

170. In formulating its Afghan policies, Pakistan's leaders seem often to ignore the long-term and wider implications of their decisions both at home and abroad. Preoccupied with tactical policy goals such as achieving foreign military aid and gaining strategic depth, Islamabad has nevertheless turned a blind eye to domestic radicalisation and the impact this is having on its ability to govern within its own borders. It has acted too often out of convenience rather than conviction in choosing its allies, with the Government's credibility among its own people a frequent casualty. In Pakistan, the permissive conditions enabling the Taliban must be confronted, not with rhetoric and empty promises, but with action and not vacillating, half-hearted measures, but strong and consistent Pakistani military action wherever required.

13 October 2010

Written evidence on Pakistan from Professor Shaun Gregory, Pakistan Security Research Unit, University of Bradford

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is perhaps the most dangerous place on earth, where key security issues of concern to the UK and its western allies—regional and global terrorism, proliferation of nuclear weapons, and state instability—arguably intersect more consequentially than anywhere else. Getting Pakistan right is critical to our security going forward.

THREE WARS

Somewhat simplified, the UK and its NATO allies are fighting three wars in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region: the war against al-Qaeda, the war against Pakistan Taliban, and the war against the Afghan Taliban. With the first two of these our interests and those of Pakistan intersect [though are not the same] and we have been able to co-operate to some degree; with respect to the Afghan Taliban our interests and our objectives in Afghanistan are at odds with Pakistan’s and co-operation has been meagre. At best Pakistan has not significantly retarded the Afghan Taliban’s return to dominance in the Afghan Pashtun belt from safe havens in Pakistan; at worst—and more plausibly in my view—it has aided that process.

AQ AND REFOCUSING THE WAR

It has been clear for some years, particularly since the Reidel review, that the centre of gravity of the US/western struggle with al-Qaeda has shifted to Pakistan and the drawdown in Afghanistan is being accompanied by a scaling up of US/western counter-terror and counter-insurgency capacity in Pakistan. The escalation of drone strikes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has succeeded in killing significant numbers of AQ figures operating from Pakistan, but this has come at a significant price in civilian casualties, and in terms of possible pathways of radicalisation in Pakistan [the evidence is not entirely consistent]. Drone strikes are likely to continue to escalate in number as US intel reach on the ground in Pakistan continues to improve. The US would like to expand its drone operations into northern Balochistan—and perhaps elsewhere in Pakistan—but this is likely to be resisted by the Pakistan Army/Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Government.

Pakistan Taliban

Drone strikes have also been successful in killing important leaders of the Pakistan Taliban—such as Baitullah Mehsud—and these have helped the Pakistan Army/ISI to turn the tide (at least temporarily) against the groups—Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM)—which most directly threatened the Pakistan state and which caused havoc in many of Pakistan’s cities in 2007 and 2008 before major Pakistani military operations in the North-West Frontier Province (NWPP) [as was] and the eastern part of South Waziristan in April/May and October 2009.
AFGHAN TALIBAN

By contrast there has been almost no attrition of Afghan Taliban leaderships or foot-soldiers on the Pakistan side of the border. Indeed there is much evidence that Pakistan has supported the return of the Afghan Taliban from Pakistan in order to have a strong hand in Afghanistan post-NATO, to seek to avoid the kind of chaos into which Afghanistan was plunged when the Soviets withdrew in 1989 and the US abandoned the region [which had appalling consequences for Pakistan], and to keep Indian influence in Afghanistan to a minimum and away from the Af-Pak border.

PAKISTAN LEVERAGE OVER US/NATO/UK

Over the past nine years—despite billions of dollars of military and civilian aid and much diplomatic attention—the US/UK and NATO have been unable to pressure Pakistan into serious downward pressure on the Afghan Taliban, something General Petraeus has said would be critical to NATO success in Afghanistan. Aside from Pakistani stubbornness to resist diplomatic pressure [witness the Pressler sanctions] and the pernicious way in which Pakistan has resisted sanctions [witness the use of Islamic militancy 1989–2001], the main reason we cannot force Pakistan to act in our interests is because of the counter-leverage they hold over us. These are four-fold:

— Up to 80% of NATO’s main logistics lines [materiel and fuel] flow through Pakistan and we are dependent on these routes. Their disruption or interdiction poses a strategic threat to NATO objectives in Pakistan. The recent 10-day closure of Torkham and the express linkage of that closure to the NATO cross-border incursions into Pakistan illustrate the point.
— We rely on Pakistan for base infrastructure and over-flights to prosecute the war in Afghanistan.
— We rely on Pakistan for intelligence in Pakistan particularly on al-Qaeda. Without this our counter-terrorism efforts would be seriously degraded.
— Finally we rely on Pakistan’s Army and ISI to keep Pakistan’s estimated 60–100 nuclear weapons out of terrorist hands. This is arguably the ultimate threat the Pakistan Army/ISI can make.

In other words we are too dependent on Pakistan in too many grave security areas to seriously question their Army/ISI. We know Pakistan are—from our point of view—duplicitous with respect to the Afghan Taliban, but there is little or nothing we can do about that and we should not expect Pakistan to work against what it perceives to be its own interests. Moreover Pakistan has coercive options which are truly frightening.

TRANSITION AND PAKISTAN

The first tragedy of our failure to find alternative ways to engage with Pakistan over the past nine years is that the Afghan Taliban are back in force and the main groups—Omar (Quetta Shura); Zakir (Gergi Jangal Shura); Mansoor (Peshawar Shura), and Haqqani (Miran Shah Shura)—together with Hekmatyar’s HI, are to varying degrees being lined up by Pakistan to assert Pakistani interests in a transition Afghanistan. My view is that Pakistan will not be restrained in asserting its dominant hand in the country and that this is already beginning to lay the foundations for a renewed civil war in Afghanistan. The window for building a plural, stable, regionally inclusive dispensation in Afghanistan during transition is closing. [Prime Minister Cameron’s recent remarks in India about Pakistan’s Janus-faced attitude to terrorism was an important marker for Pakistan not to overplay its hand in Afghanistan.]

RISKS OF FURTHER INSTABILITY IN PAKISTAN

The second tragedy is that the Afghan War 2001–201X and the escalating war against AQ in Pakistan have fuelled the very dynamics of regional instability, radicalisation, and terrorism we have sought to address. Terrorism has risen sharply in Pakistan over the past decade; terrorist groups appear to be linking up, regional terrorist groups with some Pakistan state-backing (such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT)) appear to be developing global Jihad horizons, there are some significant trends in political Islamism as a number of Pakistan terrorist groups like the LeT and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) evolve into wider social/political actors (much as Hamas has), and—even without the floods—the situation of tens of millions of Pakistanis remains dire. Even the Pakistan Army/ISI has shown itself vulnerable to terrorist attacks and to forms of terrorist/insurgent penetration which could threaten the security of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons.

POLITICAL REALITIES

Before we can even think about reframing debates in ways which might help us find alternative policy approaches to Pakistan—which keep the best of what we have and change the worst—we have to keep in mind some important political realities:

— The US is in the driving seat with respect to Pakistan, its civilian and military aid dwarfs ours, its security objectives override ours, and we matter only marginally to Pakistan;
— The UK policy-making process (as well as our “establishment”) with respect to Pakistan is strongly influenced by a skilful and far-reaching Pakistani lobby;
The UK is home to more than 900,000 UK citizens of Pakistani origin many of whom are wealthy and some of whom constitute an important—perhaps even decisive—political constituency in some marginals;

The UK Foreign Office has operated a reasonably consistent Pakistan policy for decades and, like all bureaucracies, prefers minor and reversible adjustments of policy to more substantive, risky, and perhaps irrevocable changes.

**Future Options**

The idea that a few lines in a brief of this kind can offer some serious policy suggestions is unrealistic. To the extent that the UK matters and has been influential in terms of what happens in Pakistan successive UK Governments need to accept their portion of the responsibility for the present state in which Pakistan finds itself. Pakistan has spent billions to become a nuclear weapons state, it has proliferated nuclear weapons technology to the most unsavoury regimes on earth; it has created, sustained, and empowered some of the worst terrorist and insurgent organisations in the world, and it has stumbled from crisis to coup d’état to corrupt kleptocracy and back again for much of its 60-year history. The price for all this has been paid by ordinary Pakistanis who return some of the worst statistics for security, wealth, health and social well-being in the world.

If there is a single thread to our role in this history it is the UK’s consistent preference for Pakistan’s ruling kleptocratic politico-military elite and our secondary concern for ordinary Pakistanis. What more disabling political signal could there be than the “crowning” of Bilawal Bhutto here in the UK? Every person struggling at the grassroots for meaningful political evolution in Pakistan cannot but read in that event the UK’s commitment to another fifty years of engagement in Pakistan through the ruling neo-feudal elite. We might say the same of hosting (at the tax-payers expense) the former Pakistani dictator General Musharraf who launched his political “comeback” in London a few weeks ago, or the sheltering of Altaf Hussein, the Pakistani Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) leader, since 1992.

In the wake of the floods Pakistanis, despite some honourable exceptions, have seen their incompetent and indifferent civilian government and their self-serving and equally indifferent military. That the floods have not uncorked revolutionary change in Pakistan is down largely to the heterogeneity of the populous, the absence of a unifying idea or ideology, and the absence of a political actor or group which could harness the immense anger of ordinary Pakistanis. The most likely candidate for that role is political Islamism.

In looking for ways forward these have to be searched for in the needs and aspirations of ordinary Pakistanis, in the empowerment of ordinary Pakistanis and the expansion of a meritocratic middle-class (not least through English, the language through which the ruling elite monopolise power), in more just political dispensations [including federal], in connecting publics to political leaderships through the building of political legitimacy and through forms of neo-Westphalian state-making, and in regional processes which recognise the importance of Pakistan’s neighbours. Our means to be effective in these areas, alone or with others, is limited.

18 October 2010

---

**Letter to the Chair of the Committee from Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service**

Thank you for your letter of 8 December.

The National Security Council, which of course includes the Foreign Secretary, keeps our force levels in Afghanistan under regular review. It is absolutely right that we do so, to ensure we have the right numbers deployed—no more and no less. No decisions on whether or not force levels will be reduced in 2011 have yet been taken—as I said in Afghanistan and in the House on 8 December, it is possible some reductions could be made next year, but that would depend on developments on the ground.

Since no decisions on changes next year to our force lay down in Afghanistan have yet been taken, it would be unwise of me to speculate further on what the nature of any changes might be.

The Lisbon Summit reached important conclusions about the timetable for transition which will begin in early 2011 and will meet President Karzai’s objective for the Afghan National Security Forces to lead and conduct security operations in all provinces by the end of 2014. We therefore anticipate that as the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces increases, and the process of security transition is taken forward, the role of the international troops in Afghanistan will over time focus less on combat and more on training and mentoring the Afghan National Army and Police.

As William said in the House, this is something I also spoke about in Washington back in July.... I hope this helps.

18 December 2010
Letter to the Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service from the Chair of the Committee

Further to your response to my question today during Prime Minister’s Questions, and in light of comments you made during your recent visit to Afghanistan, the Committee seeks clarification on the Government’s position in a number of respects, as detailed below:

1. When was the decision taken to consider the drawdown of British troops in 2011, by whom and for what reasons? What was the FCO’s role in the process?
2. What will the military drawdown involve? Specifically, how many troops could be involved and in what capacities? Into which activities might British troops be “re-invested”?
3. Who will replace the British troops that are withdrawn? Will it be Afghan or US forces?

It would be helpful if I could have a response to these questions by Tuesday 14 December, before the Committee’s next meeting on 15 December.

In the light of the response to these questions, the Committee will consider whether it wishes to request further oral evidence from Ministers as part of its ongoing inquiry into Afghanistan.

8 December 2010

Supplementary written evidence from Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles KCMG LVO

One of the problems which the war in Afghanistan has thrown up is that of the management of military machines in democracies where few if any politicians or civilian officials have much or any military experience.

Almost by definition, good soldiers are irrepressibly enthusiastic, unquenchably optimistic, fiercely loyal to their service and to their own units within that service, and not especially imaginative. Nor, until relatively recently, did many senior officers have intellectual pretensions.

The war in Afghanistan has given the British Army a raison d’être it has lacked for many years, and new resources on an unprecedented scale. In the eyes of the Army, Afghanistan has also given our forces the chance to redeem themselves, in the eyes of the Americans, in the wake of negative perceptions, whether or not they were justified, of the British Army’s performance in Basra. Not surprisingly, in a profession paid to fight, most have been enjoying the campaign.

Against that background, the then Chief of the General Staff, Sir Richard Dannatt, told me in the summer of 2007 that, if he didn’t use in Afghanistan the battle groups then starting to come free from Iraq, he would lose them in a future defence review. “It’s use them, or lose them”, he said. In my view, the Army’s “strategy” in Helmand was driven at least as much by the level of resources available to the British Army as by an objective assessment of the needs of a proper counter-insurgency campaign in the province. Time and again, Ministers were pressed to send more troops to Helmand, as they became available from Iraq.

This “supply-side strategy” was also reflected in the Army’s policy of rotating entire brigades through Helmand every six months. This policy was based on the spurious argument that the brigades were fighting as brigades, and that the Army generated its forces through brigades, even though several of the brigades were specially formed for the Afghan campaign, and then disbanded on return to the United Kingdom. Similar arguments were used at the start of the Northern Ireland campaign. But by the end we would never have dreamt of rotating the General Officer Commanding (GOC) or the Brigade commanders and their key staff in Ulster every six months.

The result of this policy in Helmand was to have brigades re-inventing the wheel every six months. Brigade after brigade would spend months or years training up for its deployment, involving lectures from Afghan “experts” such as the Hon Member for Penrith and the Border and brigade study days of various kinds. Each brigadier would say that he understood the “comprehensive approach”, and planned to work with DFID and the FCO, as well as with the Afghan authorities. But each brigadier would launch one kinetic operation, before returning with his brigade to Britain after the best six months of his professional life. And then the whole cycle would start again.

Personally, I would rotate the troops fighting in the front line more often than every six months, perhaps doing away with the very expensive and inefficient mid-tour R&R break. But I would keep the senior staff, and key intelligence officers and others, in Helmand for longer, while putting them on new terms which would enable them regularly to see their families, perhaps in Oman or back in the UK. Interestingly, both the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Chief of Joint Operations advocated such an approach, but it was blocked by the Army, and never put to Ministers, either formally or informally.

In my experience, Ministers were reluctant to question the military advice put to them, for fear of leaks to the press suggesting that they weren’t supportive enough of the troops. Thus, I remember the Royal Air Force producing a paper arguing for Tornado bombers to be sent to Afghanistan, even when NATO’s Joint Statement of Operational Requirements made clear that the one category of weapons system ISAF did not need more of was ground attack jets. The original draft paper for Ministers argued that the RAF aircraft were necessary for the morale of British forces on the ground—not an argument that carried much weight with anyone familiar
with the average British squaddie’s view of the Royal Air Force, and one which was dropped from later versions of the paper. When I suggested to a Cabinet Minister that he might like gently to probe whether it made sense to spend £70 million just on extra taxies at Kandahar for the deployment, he remarked that he couldn’t possibly ask the Chief of the Defence Staff about this, as he didn’t know the difference between a Tornado and a torpedo. The same Minister asked me, after three years of seeing papers on the deployment of troops to Afghanistan, to remind him of the difference between a brigade and a platoon.

I am not blaming the military for being optimistic, or for constantly lobbying for more resources for Helmand. But I do think some of the advice they put to Ministers was misleadingly optimistic, and that Ministers’ professional advisers, both military and civilian, sometimes did not spell out for Ministers the costs and risks of engagement in Helmand. I well remember a brave young officer in a Footguards regiment asking for a private word with me on a visit to Helmand. He confided in me that he was very doubtful about the “strategy” of training up the Afghan police to secure Helmand after Western forces withdrew. He claimed to have warned his superiors of the dangers and difficulties in such an approach. But he said that his advice had been repeatedly rejected on the grounds that it was too defeatist, and it had therefore been re-written to put a more positive spin on what was happening.

I also thought that the military blamed Ministers unfairly for the shortages of equipment in Helmand, when those Ministers could not possibly have been reasonably expected to have known the details of logistics needs associated with a particular deployment. As Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, was particularly unwise to have allowed the military and the Opposition to criticise him over helicopter availability—a very technical subject which requires years of planning. I cannot help remembering an RAF movements officer in Helmand showing me a pie chart of British helicopter movements in southern Afghanistan in my first year there: 27% of the helicopter movements were for moving VIPs around theatre. And most of those VIPs were senior military tourists from London!

23 December 2010

Supplementary written evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

1. What level of finance has the UK provided to Pakistan for counter-terrorism support in the current, and preceding, two financial years?

Counter-terrorism support for Pakistan is funded as part of the FCO’s global Counter Terrorism and Radicalisation Programme Fund, which is £38 million in financial year 2010–11.

2. The Committee has received evidence that “the FCO and others are increasingly prioritising funding for short-term security activities, using Conflict Pool funds in Helmand at the expense of longer-term conflict prevention projects which the funds are intended for.” (Oxfam GB). What is the Government’s response to this?

We do not know what Oxfam are referring to.

The FCO, through its contribution to the Conflict Pool uses funds to help counter the insurgency and reduce and ultimately prevent conflict in Helmand. Providing the people of Helmand Province with security from intimidation and violence is an absolutely critical element of counter-insurgency and long-term conflict prevention.

The Conflict Pool fund has increased funding for long-term security in Helmand from approximately £6 million spend in 2008–09 to approximately £12 million scheduled spend in the current financial year. Over the same period expenditure on short-term security activities in Helmand has decreased steadily, from approximately £2 million in 2008–09 to approximately £600,000 committed spend this financial year.

Long-term security projects funded by the Conflict Pool in Helmand include training the Afghan police in detective and community policing techniques, upgrading police checkpoints, building prison accommodation in Lashkar Gah that meets international standards, and the Helmand Police Training Centre.

3. The FCO’s written evidence states that, “since Transition is conditions based, timelines cannot be made and it is important that transition planning does not interfere with the primary task of providing security to the Afghan people” (para 44). How can this quote be squared with the Foreign Secretary’s statement when giving evidence to the Committee that the 2015 deadline was fixed and not based on conditions?

In 2009 President Karzai set an objective that transition of the security lead across the country should be completed by the end of 2014. The NATO/ISAF Lisbon Summit in November 2010 endorsed this objective. The Lisbon Declaration said “The process of transition to full Afghan security responsibility and leadership in some provinces and districts is on track to begin in early 2011, following a joint Afghan and NATO/ISAF assessment and decision. Transition will be conditions-based, not calendar-driven, and will not equate to withdrawal of ISAF-troops. Looking to the end of 2014, Afghan forces will be assuming full responsibility for security across the whole of Afghanistan…” This means that identifying individual priorities and districts for transition to ANSF lead will be conditions-based and ISAF and the Afghan authorities have established
mechanisms for this process. The process is intended to be completed by 2014. The Government has made clear UK forces will be out of combat by 2015. The latest ISAF assessments are that the 2014 objective is achievable.

4. The FCO's written evidence states that it is not foreseen that the UK will provide any combat forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014 (para 19). Does this mean that all British combat troops will be withdrawn by the end of 2014? How can this be squared with other government statements which say the date for withdrawing combat troops will take place on an as yet undetermined date in 2015?

The FCO memorandum should have read 2015, quoting the Prime Minister’s statement on 7 July 2010.126 We apologise for this inadvertent error. The Lisbon Summit declaration looks forward to Transition being completed by 2014; the Government, in setting its timetable, has allowed a further period. The Prime Minister has made clear we will not be in Afghanistan in a combat role beyond 2015. It is too early to say what exactly the drawdown pattern will be up to this period.

5. How many Kabul / Lashkar Gah-based FCO diplomats have had local language training and to what level? How many speak Pashto or Dari fluently?

Currently there are two Dari speaker slots filled in Kabul. There is another officer based in Southern Afghanistan who speaks both Dari and Pashto. Six members of FCO staff have completed language training in the last five years, of which three completed language 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 4 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.

As the Foreign Secretary made clear during the recent evidence session, improving language skills is a high priority for the FCO. The Afghan languages are among the key languages that we will be investing in further over the forthcoming CSR period to increase our capacity from the current base.

31 January 2011

126 HC Deb, 7 July 2010, col 367
Oral evidence

Taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee
on Wednesday 13 October 2010

Members present:

Richard Ottaway (Chair)
Mr John Baron
Sir Menzies Campbell
Ann Clwyd
Mike Gapes
Andrew Rosindell

Mr Frank Roy
Sir John Stanley
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts

Examination of Witness

Witness: Michael Semple, Fellow, Harvard University, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: I welcome members of the public to this sitting of the Foreign Affairs Committee, which is on our report on Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mr Semple, can you hear us okay?

Michael Semple: Yes, I can hear you fine.

Q2 Chair: Mr Semple, you are our first witness in this inquiry. Members of the public may be unaware that Mr Semple is sitting in Islamabad. We are down for 45 minutes, Michael. Over here in the UK it is 14.50 and we will be running this to 15.35. What time is it over there?

Michael Semple: We've got a four-hour difference at the moment.

Q3 Chair: Okay. Thank you very much for agreeing to this. I shall kick off the questions. I was having a look this morning at the article you wrote in February in which you were quite critical about efforts to focus reintegration on low-level fighters. What is your prognosis for the current attempts to reintegrate low-level fighters into the mainstream?

Michael Semple: I believe that the reintegration efforts are necessary but inadequate. The inherent limitation of the reintegration efforts is that as long as the leadership is standing well back from them they will work hard to replace anybody who accepts the reintegration deal. We've barely got to that stage yet because although reintegration has been avowedly at the top of policy since the start of this year, very little has happened. It has not been as joined up or as well funded an effort as some people thought it might be at the start of the year.

Q4 Chair: Do you think UK taxpayers are throwing money into a reintegration black hole here?

Michael Semple: That was always a risk. I've been critical of the predecessor programme as I believed that many of the supposed fighters signing up to it were not bona fide insurgents. We have not hit that problem this year. Basically, not much has happened so UK taxpayers' money has been parked somewhere and, as far as I can see, has not been spent.

Q5 Chair: Am I correct in saying that you believe that the efforts should be higher up to the top leadership or do you think the emphasis should be more on reconciliation than reintegration?

Michael Semple: I think that both tracks should run. I think that it is sensible to continue efforts at reintegration, but to do that well. However, I also think that it is important to launch a much more politically oriented reconciliation track which would be at a higher level.

Chair: I will hand over to Mike Gapes now, who will continue the questioning.

Q6 Mike Gapes: Do you think that we–the UK, the US, ISAF–have any real idea or any coherent view of what we mean by reconciliation?

Michael Semple: Obviously a lot of people have worked on it. There is a lot of comment out there. It is a good question because some big decisions have not yet been taken so I am sure that there are quite a few conflicting ideas out there. In one sense, since the end of last year when the distinction had started to be made between reintegration and reconciliation, people have become a little bit clearer that reconciliation means some kind of political accommodation with the leadership of the insurgency, allowing them to join the political system in Afghanistan. That has been my understanding of the range of the debate over the past year.

Q7 Mike Gapes: But isn’t there a danger that if you have reconciliation from a position of weakness, you end up with a position that is very dangerous for the long-term? We had a report last year, in the previous Foreign Affairs Committee, in which we said that there could be no serious prospects for meaningful discussions until the Afghan National Security Forces were able to gain and hold ground and then negotiate from a position of strength. Do you agree with that approach, or do you think that we just need to negotiate regardless of the circumstances?

Michael Semple: There are a couple of aspects to this. First of all, I think that the single most important factor that could help the leadership in the insurgency to make their mind up, get on with it and enter into some kind of negotiations in good faith, would be if
they realised that they had no realistic military prospects of toppling the Government in Kabul and taking over the country. That is a slightly different phrasing of what you are saying, but clearly the way they read the military situation affects the way forward to reconciliation. But what I really don’t buy is this notion that that means that those on the international side and the Government of Afghanistan have to sit back and wait for a transformation of the military situation. We do not believe that there is any formula which allows you to send out invitations for negotiation, for those to be delivered and for negotiations to be able to start one week or two weeks later. It is an incredible amount of mistrust with the lack of confidence on both sides, something which perhaps we could get with a low profile before any meaningful negotiation process starts. There are a lot of useful things that could be done even before this fundamental change makes the situation happen.

**Chair:** Mr Semple, I am terribly sorry. I don’t know if you can hear at your end, but we have a Division bell ringing yet again. You have picked one of the worst afternoons that we could be having for this type of thing. I am terribly sorry, but I have got to adjourn the meeting for a further 10 minutes.

**Michael Semple:** I can feed back from some discussions I have had, behind the scenes, with various figures in the Taliban whom it is possible to get access to, at which I have asked exactly the same thing: what is likely to be their attitude to women moving into some kind of roles—whether it be in negotiations, or into future relationships or roles in the political system? The sensible ones say quite clearly that they realise that there are bottom lines. They also generally make a point of saying that they have moved on, and that they have recognised some of their failures during their period in Government.

It would be the wrong way to think of it that somehow the western powers go in muscling their way in negotiations, and that they will somehow be sole guarantors of the rights of Afghan women. The way I understand it is that the pragmatists in the Taliban would see benefits of being part of the political system and benefits of being accepted by the international community. Then you realise that they have to move on this themselves. They would probably prefer to be seen, in a sense, to be making that move themselves, rather than having their arms twisted the whole way. I think that there is a prospect for a positive outcome, but going about it the wrong way could undermine it.

**Chair:** A quick one on reconciliation—John.

**Q7 Mr Baron:** The chances of reconciliation and a successful negotiated settlement generally will obviously be improved if we can carry, to a certain extent at least, the hearts and minds of the local population. I would suggest that with the Government’s political credibility very low and with high civilian casualty rates, it is much easier for the Taliban to depict Kabul as a sort of puppet Government, and the West as an occupying force. What chance do you think there is of winning the hearts and minds of at least a reasonable segment of the population so that reconciliation can become a more likely prospect?

**Michael Semple:** That is a difficult one. Before we come on to what the general population, those who are not in the insurgency, think, we should look at what the Taliban think. You are absolutely right to say that one of the main recruiting tools that the Taliban have is their ability to point to the ongoing military operation, to claim that they have this enmity with the West and to mobilise young Afghans in the latest operation, to claim that they have this enmity with foreign occupation. In a sense, for the Taliban to depict Kabul as a sort of puppet Government, and the West as an occupying force, it would be the wrong way to think of it that somehow they realise that there are bottom lines. They also generally make a point of saying that they have moved on, and that they have recognised some of their failures during their period in Government.

It would be the wrong way to think of it that somehow the western powers go in muscling their way in negotiations, and that they will somehow be sole guarantors of the rights of Afghan women. The way I understand it is that the pragmatists in the Taliban would see benefits of being part of the political system and benefits of being accepted by the international community. Then you realise that they have to move on this themselves. They would probably prefer to be seen, in a sense, to be making that move themselves, rather than having their arms twisted the whole way. I think that there is a prospect for a positive outcome, but going about it the wrong way could undermine it.

**Chair:** A quick one on reconciliation—John.

**Q8 Mike Gapes:** Mr Semple, I’m not sure, because of the bell, whether all of what you said was picked up, so perhaps you could summarise what you said in your last answer and then I’ll come in with another question.

**Michael Semple:** There were two basic points. The first point is that I believe that one of the main factors affecting the decision of the Taliban vis-à-vis negotiation possibilities and entering a settlement is how they view the future. If they believe that they don’t stand a chance in the foreseeable future of managing to grab Kabul, they’re more inclined to enter into negotiations in good faith. If they see Kabul crumbling, their war party is more inclined to try and just grab it. However, even while you wait for something to be done to shore up the military situation, there is an awful lot that can be done in terms of reconciliation. You can summarise it simply by calling it confidence-building. The parties are so far apart at the moment that there is a lot of confidence-building that can be done to lay the groundwork for successful future negotiations.

**Q9 Mike Gapes:** To what extent, separately, are the Kabul authorities, the Afghan Government, our own allies and ISAF in a position to set the terms and conditions for any negotiations?

**Michael Semple:** If setting terms means being able to dictate all those terms, not expecting anybody else to have a say, at the moment I don’t think that the military and political situation really renders that possible. That’s why, when I talk about reconciliation, I certainly think it’ll take some form of accommodation. There is going to be some kind of give and take.

**Q10 Mike Gapes:** Can I give you a specific example with regard to the position of women in Afghanistan? Would we be able to lay down some kind of bottom line, which has to be accommodated?

**Michael Semple:** I can feed back from some discussions I have had, behind the scenes, with various figures in the Taliban whom it is possible to get access to, at which I have asked exactly the same thing: what is likely to be their attitude to women moving into some kind of roles—whether it be in negotiations, or into future relationships or roles in the political system? The sensible ones say quite clearly that they realise that there are bottom lines. They also generally make a point of saying that they have moved on, and that they have recognised some of their failures during their period in Government.

It would be the wrong way to think of it that somehow the western powers go in muscling their way in negotiations, and that they will somehow be sole guarantors of the rights of Afghan women. The way I understand it is that the pragmatists in the Taliban would see benefits of being part of the political system and benefits of being accepted by the international community. Then you realise that they have to move on this themselves. They would probably prefer to be seen, in a sense, to be making that move themselves, rather than having their arms twisted the whole way. I think that there is a prospect for a positive outcome, but going about it the wrong way could undermine it.

**Chair:** A quick one on reconciliation—John.

**Q11 Mr Baron:** The chances of reconciliation and a successful negotiated settlement generally will obviously be improved if we can carry, to a certain extent at least, the hearts and minds of the local population. I would suggest that with the Government’s political credibility very low and with high civilian casualty rates, it is much easier for the Taliban to depict Kabul as a sort of puppet Government, and the West as an occupying force. What chance do you think there is of winning the hearts and minds of at least a reasonable segment of the population so that reconciliation can become a more likely prospect?

**Michael Semple:** That is a difficult one. Before we come on to what the general population, those who are not in the insurgency, think, we should look at what the Taliban think. You are absolutely right to say that one of the main recruiting tools that the Taliban have is their ability to point to the ongoing military operation, to claim that they have this enmity with the West and to mobilise young Afghans in the latest operation, to claim that they have this enmity with foreign occupation.
occupying Afghanistan, and that the idea is going to help stabilise and wind down the military presence as soon as possible. So the Taliban have their own problem in winning hearts and minds to persuade people to fight.

On the other side, reconciliation, which I think makes sense, is about ensuring that there is something in the political order based around Kabul that is worth joining. Of course, the Kabul Government have to be at least performing up to a certain minimum standard, and western troops should not be providing too many propaganda opportunities with the civilian casualties. Somewhere along the way, there is going to have to be a better understanding of the long-term intentions to help Afghanistan.

Q12 Mr Frank Roy: The United States has been put forward as a country that drags its feet in relation to reconciliation. Where do you think we are in relation to reconciliation and the United States? How difficult will it be to bring about that reconciliation when they have said that they are very reluctant to negotiate with parties that are irreconcilable?

Michael Semple: I think it is true that previously it was very difficult for the US to contemplate something as radical as entering into a political accommodation with the Taliban. It is very difficult—it goes against many of the received narratives. That is why, as things have moved on over the past two or three years, publicly the US has moved the position of being supportive of reintegration but hasn’t been taking public stances in support of reconciliation with the Taliban leadership. I believe that there is an inherent logic in reconciliation that ultimately is bound to appeal to the US, and I would expect a significant change from the US to be supportive of reconciliation on the right terms. You can argue about history, and maybe there has been US foot-dragging, but I think there is a pretty serious prospect that the US, as part of its commitment to try to wind down the military entanglement in a sensible way that will lead to a stable Afghanistan, will come out more clearly in favour of reconciliation.

Ann Clwyd: Mr Semple, those eats in front of you look very nice, although I don’t know what they are.

Michael Semple: I wish I could offer them to you.

Q13 Ann Clwyd: I wonder if you could identify which elements within the Afghan insurgency are actually interested in negotiating with either Kabul or the rest, or both.

Michael Semple: Good question. In my experience of people from the original Taliban leadership from the Kandaharis—those who tried to get Mullah Omar back in 1994 and stuck with the movement throughout their period of Government—there is a significant level of interest there. That is not to say it is all easy and that it is going to happen tomorrow, but those are the people with whom we assume it is possible to sit down and have a very sensible discussion. They understand a lot more about the world than they are often given credit for, and they have a vision of a political settlement. So the first answer to that is a significant part of the original Kandahari leadership.

Looking at other parts of the movement and at the talk of the Haqqani Network and the people operating out of Waziristan, it is generally assumed that it would be impossible for them to go along with a negotiated settlement. On the other hand, I have heard a few signals saying that that’s not actually the case. I take a lot of this with a pinch of salt at the moment. Certainly the conversations that I have had have been much more meaningful with the original Kandahari leadership than with the people operating out of Waziristan.

Throughout the insurgency, any who think politically understand that, whether it is after 10 years or after one year, there will have to be a political process. There is not a monopoly in Kandahar; I started off by saying Kandahar because they are so important to the overall insurgency and in a sense they borrowed the brand name of the Taliban. The make-or-break role in any reconciliation process will rest with the Khost Talibs and the Kandahari Talibs.

Q14 Ann Clwyd: Apart from Mullah Omar, are there any other key individuals who are willing to talk to the Afghans?

Michael Semple: There are. This is probably not the best forum to go through that, but I can just explain that the people who formed this process are forever trying to work out who the pragmatists are, what scope they have and what weight they have. There are significant numbers of pragmatists in the original movement, and it probably all comes down to the circumstance in which the process starts, rather than just which individual. A lot of people will show their true colours when the time is right.

Q15 Ann Clwyd: Do you think that those who are interested in talking have sufficient clout within their own groups to bring those groups along with them?

Michael Semple: I will give you an example. The person that Mullah Omar appointed as his deputy essentially to run the insurgency is Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, who was the Civil Aviation Minister during the Taliban period of Government. My reading of him from his history, the way he behaved in the past, and so on, is that in the right circumstances he would come down as a pragmatist, yet he does nothing. He understands the world and he has a vision of an end beyond the conflict, and Mansour would be on board in the right circumstances. Currently, Mansour is assigned to run the insurgency, so he can’t just put his hand up and say, “Okay, we want the negotiations now”. Links can be created, and it is possible to deal with people even right at the top of the Taliban movement.

Q16 Rory Stewart: Hello, Michael. What is Pakistan’s role in all of this, and how should the international community respond? What should we do in relation to Pakistan and what should we do in relation to Pakistan?

Michael Semple: Thanks for the most difficult one, Rory. Obviously, all of the sensitive issues really revolve around the role of Pakistan. However you explain it and whoever you blame, the fact is that every commander network that is operating in the
insurgency—I vaguely understand that the insurgency is just a conglomeration of multiple commander networks—has a base in Pakistan. They all drove on what is being called as a form of safe haven, although if you are talking about Waziristan it is not quite as safe these days. Seriously, Pakistan is a host for part of the insurgency.

If you are talking about the potential for Pakistan’s role, I would say that the best potential for that role is essentially to turn what we have seen as a sort of military liability into a political asset and to make it possible for whoever is in charge of pushing for the deal to convince the Taliban that there is a life beyond our struggle, and that there is the possibility of an accommodation in which they will no longer be obliged to go out and risk getting themselves killed every day. The best hope for Pakistan is to put that faith at the disposal of those who pursue reconciliation, which is very different from asking for it to be used for strikes or an arrest or something. Speaking for Pakistan, the best thing to do would be to create an informal safe haven for peace rather than a safe haven for insurgents.

In terms of what Pakistan is currently doing, let me first of all refer to what a lot of the Taliban say, with the note of caution that most Afghan stories have to be taken with a certain pinch of salt and evaluated. Frequently, when I talk to the Taliban, they say that some elements in the Pakistan security establishment actively discipline the insurgency, apply all sorts of leverage to ensure that they keep up with the fight and maintain an eagle eye to ensure that nobody waivers. That is not to say that there should never be any possibility of some kind of negotiation, but it should only be on authorised terms and through authorised channels. Multiple Taliban have told me that story and given that version of events, and of course you have followed all the discussions around the arrest of Mullah Baradar and of various other arrests that went around, and everybody was trying to interpret those. Many Taliban choose to say that “that was a means of disciplining us”. To the extent that that is real, wherever it is coming from and however that rests against other aspects of Pakistan’s policy, we should never forget that Pakistan is the second largest beneficiary from successful reconciliation, peace in Afghanistan and a movement towards getting back on track—second only to the Afghan people themselves. However you understand this role of disciplining people and twisting their arms to keep up the fight, it is important to deal with Pakistan in such a way that they actually take a positive stance towards accommodation in which they will no longer be.

**Q17 Chair:** What role can President Karzai play in reconciliation? Will the Taliban talk to him? Do they trust him? Can he play a part in all this?

**Michael Semple:** First of all, President Karzai is the President of Afghanistan; he has a key role in everything that happens in Afghanistan and woe betide anyone who forgets it. I can feedback the kind of things that the Taliban say when I get a chance to talk to them. They do not particularly trust President Karzai. They are strangely unconvincing that President Karzai or the Kabul Administration exercise real authority. They are not greatly convinced that the Kabul Administration have staying power. They vary in their degree of allergy to Kabul. They certainly do not expect that a process where exclusively the Taliban talk to Karzai, who talks to the Kabul Government, would be terribly fruitful. In my contact with the Taliban they have been pretty consistent in saying that they expect an international role. They do not expect that a deal cut with only Kabul would be robust.

**Q18 Chair:** If not Karzai, then who?

**Michael Semple:** Well, they do not have terribly good answers on that, and I think that they will probably end up eventually talking to Kabul, and talking to President Karzai. In terms of the mechanics of getting things going and particularly the early stages of building up confidence and creating a space in which people can envisage what the deal and accommodation would look like, I think that a trusted international intermediary really could help unlock things. That is something that has sort of forced itself on to the agenda of late.

**Q19 Mr Baron:** Can I return to the issue of the hearts and minds of the local population, because that is going to be a key issue? Various reports, and I know there cannot be too much accuracy in these, suggest that civilian casualty rates have gone up relatively recently. I just wanted to know your analysis of that and the effect that it may be having on local populations and so forth, because the recent report by the US Department of Defence to Congress said that the most lethal weapon the Taliban had was their propaganda and that they can get into these situations very quickly and exploit bad news for their own benefit. If you look at the history of those countries or regimes that have taken on the West militarily, communism has survived the longest for example in North Korea, Cuba, China and Vietnam. I just worry that the civilian casualty rates are having a real negative approach to everything and make our chances of succeeding here—whatever you deem that success to be—very remote indeed.

**Michael Semple:** I think that it is absolutely right that the civilian casualty rate, apart from being bad in itself, makes things all the more difficult in the political process and certainly the Taliban capitalise on it. It also reduces the moral authority of both ISAF and the Kabul Government. I guess that alongside the civilian casualty rate there has been some increase in the Taliban casualty rate, which is just pushing us in a slightly different direction. Overall, the reporting of
civilian casualties has a tendency to make people think “a plague on all their houses”.

Q20 Mr Baron: Can I follow that up a little bit? Some sort of negotiation, I would suggest, is obviously going to have to involve the Taliban in their various guises, and the regional warlords. It is the old saying that you make peace with your enemies, not with your friends. You have commented about perhaps a suspicion with regard to President Karzai. We know of the US hostility or public hostility to any form of negotiation. At the end of the day, there has to be some sort of negotiated settlement, reflecting the reality on the ground, which is the regional power base of the warlords and the various components of the Taliban, but how is that going to be instigated? Is this going to be very low-level and under the radar screen, or is it about time for a public acceptance that there has to be some form of negotiation?

Michael Semple: Let me quickly make one more point on the previous question, then come on to the issue of the warlords. On the issue of civilian casualties, I have heard quite a few of the Taliban talk about the impact of military escalation on their own calculations, which is a slightly different point from the way people normally look at civilian casualties. Particularly with the start of the surge and in the case of the military operations, the Taliban basically say to me, “Oh, it seems that your people have obviously decided to fight this one through rather than settle it. Okay, we fight. We realise that all this talk about reconciliation was not serious”. Basically, what they are saying is, “As you escalate and generate both civilian and military casualties, you undermine your claim to be interested ultimately in a settlement”. Moving on to the issue of involvement of the regional warlords, the problem is that I did not get all of the question. If the point is about those who are the power behind the throne in Kabul—the strong men of the political order in Kabul—I think it is very sensible to think that they should be on board. It is a point that I have always discussed with the Taliban as well. The last thing you need on the Afghan counterpart side is a neutral figure. You need to be talking to old enemies if you are going to settle something. However the process is structured, an opportunity will have to be created for other political stakeholders on the Kabul side to sign off on any deal. The idea that a small number of people sitting in the palace should be signing off on it would be mistaken.

It is also worth pointing out that President Karzai is making this kind of calculation as well. If you look at the composition of his High Council for Peace, a lot of the people he has deliberately brought in have got lots of experience of waging war rather than promoting peace. I think what he is trying to do is demonstrate that some of the Taliban’s old enemies are sitting on the other side. The question I partly heard was whether it is time to be coming out in public with this. I believe that a public commitment to pursue reconciliation and seek a political accommodation would have a positive effect. It is something that one shouldn’t be frightened of. Doing it transparently would be far better than all these smoke-and-mirror stories that go around about supposed talks and so on happening. We have a fundamental problem in the narrative of what all these countries are doing in Afghanistan. I had naively thought early on that we were supposed to be about promoting peace in Afghanistan after an excessively long war. Even after listening to all the attempts to sum up national security interest in terms of the hunt for al-Qaeda, I think that the pursuit of peace in Afghanistan best sums up the common interest between countries such as the UK, the US, Afghanistan and even Pakistan. The issues of taking care of the terrorist threat can be nicely parked inside the overall agenda of peace. When you say that your primary business is promoting peace—with a robust element to it as well—you do not have to be frightened of showing weakness by being prepared to come to accommodation, because accommodation is fundamental to the pursuit of peace.

Q21 Sir Menzies Campbell: Could we give the word “regional” a wider application? How far do you think that any deal, if you will forgive the colloquialism, would depend upon regional acquiescence and/or support? In particular, as Pakistan and India are often at loggerheads for a variety of reasons, some historical, some contemporary, what role, positive or negative, do you think India might play?

Michael Semple: On the one hand, to make progress on reconciliation one would want to keep it as simple as possible. On the other hand, if you don’t address the regional dimension it will not work. Of all the regional powers, Pakistan is probably the one with most invested in this and the potential to help most in reconciliation and also to spoil it if it were to so choose. The first point is that in any move towards reconciliation it is important to have Pakistan on board. Ideas have been put forward that Pakistan could help by putting its proxies at the disposal of the reconciliation process. Mark Turton in his book about al-Qaeda mentions the whole of that region as a major area to be as he termed “proxy wars”. It is not that Pakistan somehow chooses the proxies in the insurgency and pushes them towards the negotiating table, it is more that Pakistan, in dealing with the US, Kabul and the other people involved, gets a chance to say, “Look, we’re concerned about A, B and C and who can help us.” You are well aware that we have been told in many forums that the first concern for Pakistan is that there should be viable stability inside Afghanistan so that Afghan problems don’t keep coming back to Pakistan. The second concern is that there should not be adverse Indian influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan should not have to worry about the Afghan frontier becoming a hostile frontier as it sometimes treats the Indian frontier in its security analyses.

It is not that Pakistan somehow chooses the proxies in the insurgency and pushes them towards the negotiating table, it is more that Pakistan, in dealing with the US, Kabul and the other people involved, gets a chance to say, “Look, we’re concerned about A, B and C and who can help us.” You are well aware that we have been told in many forums that the first concern for Pakistan is that there should be viable stability inside Afghanistan so that Afghan problems don’t keep coming back to Pakistan. The second concern is that there should not be adverse Indian influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan should not have to worry about the Afghan frontier becoming a hostile frontier as it sometimes treats the Indian frontier in its security analyses. Basically, there has to be regional diplomacy which ensures that Pakistan is reasonably certain that beyond the peace deal and into the future, there will be no adverse Indian influence. I have heard reasonable and unreasonable formulations of this. It would be absolutely inappropriate to think of India being talked out of Afghanistan. India is a major regional power
and it has to be doing things in Afghanistan, but there have to be some guidelines about what crosses the red line in terms of constituting a threat to Pakistan. A range of other regional powers have some kind of stake in Afghanistan, but none of them quite as much as Pakistan or India. The practical way probably to deal with this would be somebody taking forward a reconciliation track, particularly something like an international mediator, who would probably need a regional support group to work with them and to provide mutual reassurances. You will recall that Saudi Arabia has frequently been mentioned as a country with a lot to offer and also something to gain from the al-Qaeda issue being dealt with. That is an example of the kind of country that would play a very important role inside a regional support group for any reconciliation process.

Q22 Chair: Thank you, Mr Semple, time has expired. May I close with a final question? What are the essential steps for a successful reconciliation? Can you conclude with an overview of how it could be achieved?

Michael Semple: First, the key players decide to do it, moving beyond the kind of confusion and ambiguities that we have had. The next step is clearly assigning responsibility. Somebody has to run with this. There are various options, but it’s going to be quite a painful process, and it’s not going to happen by default. Somebody’s going to have to run with it. When that person runs with it, there’s going to be a process of building up confidence among all parties that there can actually be a settlement which will be useful for them. There’s going to be intense diplomatic work on both sides of the Durand line and in several regional capitals. Then there’s going to be aligning the overall political and military engagement in Afghanistan with any emerging settlement. At some stage along the way, there probably will be a round of negotiations. Then there’s resourcing it.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. That was really helpful, gives us a good insight and sets us off on our inquiry. It’s very much appreciated that you’ve taken the time to do this. On behalf of the Committee, I convey our thanks.

Michael Semple: Thank you very much. I’m delighted by the opportunity, and I’m really glad that you’re asking all these questions about reconciliation and reintegration. The sooner we get back to pursuing a peace process in Afghanistan, the better.


Q23 Chair: Reconciliation and reintegration are the theme of this session. Thank you very much. We now move to phase 2. Thank you for your patience and for waiting. Are you happy to stay until 5 o’clock? I intend to extend the session by half an hour. Hopefully there will be no votes and we can have an uninterrupted session.

I welcome Mr Leslie who is an independent Afghan analyst; Mr Waldman, who is also an independent Afghan analyst; and Mr Fergusson, who is an author and journalist. All of them are experts in their field, particularly in the area of reconciliation. We will be putting questions to you. You have probably seen the format. Don’t feel that every one of you has to answer every question; just come in on what you think is critical, and let’s try to keep the session moving.

Can you tell me what you think is the mindset of the average Afghan on reconciliation? Is there a consensus on what sort of outcome they want to have? Mr Fergusson, would you like to start?

James Fergusson: Gosh, is there such a thing as an average Afghan? I think there is a consensus about fed-upness with the war. We’re in year 9 of the intervention, and the numbers of foreigners keep on going up. It doesn’t seem to most Afghans, I think it would be safe to say, that there is a concomitance of improvement in the way that things are going there. In fact, you could argue pretty strongly that they’re getting worse in terms of increased civilian casualties and so on.

I think it’s important to remember how hard-wired the antipathy to foreigners really is among the Afghans—not just the Pashtuns; all sorts—and here we go again. From the things that the Afghans say to me, they don’t understand what we’re doing back there again and again. It’s been so many times. The one thing that unifies the Afghans is a distrust of foreigners. They want to be left alone. Would you agree with that?

Matt Waldman: I would agree with much of that. I have spent some time talking to Afghans about this issue, including in the centre of the country and the north, where one might expect a degree of scepticism about reconciliation and negotiations. But what was extraordinary was the degree of support. I think there’s a number of reasons for that. Perhaps it is to some extent a traditional mechanism inside Afghanistan for resolving disputes. I think they also are, as James says, suffering from the war. Even the people in the north are now increasingly affected by the conflict, but I feel that another factor coming into play, which affects their attitude, is that a majority of Afghans do not now believe that we seek to defeat the insurgency. Of course, that is acutely problematic from a counter-insurgency point of view. It also means that there is the belief that the only way out of this situation is through a negotiated settlement.

Q24 Chair: Is President Karzai the man to lead the charge on reconciliation?

Matt Waldman: That is a very big question. Certainly, talking to officials about that there is a diversity of views. There are those who are not convinced that he genuinely wants to see a negotiated outcome because, of course, he stands to lose power. Also, one might consider that his pronouncements are popular. Given the fact that a clear majority of Afghans support the idea, it is popular to say that that’s the way he wants to go. When you consider the preconditions that he and the international community have laid down, it is hard to believe that he is sincere when those
conditions—giving up violence, accepting the constitution, the acceptance of the Administration and renouncing ties to al-Qaeda—amount to surrender in their eyes, and I think most Afghans are aware of that. If you consider those pre-conditions, one has to ask questions about the sincerity of the Administration and the international community in taking this forward.

Jolyon Leslie: I concur with what James and Matt have said. I think it varies between a level of grudging support and, certainly in the world I inhabit, of resignation that something needs to end. The ambivalence that I pick up—apart from the anger at the incompetence of the regime, the Administration and the corruption—is that to some extent the Government are a very weak partner right now. They are on the back foot. Is the Peace Council, or elements within the Peace Council, actually able to run with the Administration?

I think there is a lot more leeway than we sometimes interpret it is what we consider to be a repressive approach to the rights, freedoms and opportunities of women and girls. I am not going to disguise the fact that that is going to be a very difficult issue. We have to take into account the fact that, in southern and south-eastern Afghanistan and in other parts and communities elsewhere in Afghanistan, there is support for practices that we would not consider liberal or fair with respect to women. In some cases, the Taliban’s views are not wholly disassociated from those of the population, but I believe that the only way through this is for women ultimately to have a real role in the process. That may not happen immediately, but I think that it has to happen.

Q27 Ann Clwyd: I would like to follow on from that. One of the reasons for my support for the war is the empowerment of women in Afghanistan. Twice a year, I meet Afghan delegations—Members of Parliament—who nominally always include a woman. But last time we met them in Geneva, there was one woman who didn’t say one word. I asked her why she didn’t speak during the delegation and she said, “I’ve been told not to, because the leader of our delegation is a warlord. He told me that I could not speak”. She spoke a lot to us separately, because we got her on her own. That was my recent experience meeting an Afghan delegation just two weeks ago, too. So although we have empowered women, we have not ensured at the same time that they have equal rights of speech and so on. I just don’t know how we get around that.

Jolyon Leslie: One day at a time. It is going to take a lot longer. Having negotiated on these very issues—education and employment—for the UN with the Taliban in the ’90s when they were actually in power, I think there is a lot more leeway than we sometimes explain. The reality is ordinary social life in Afghanistan—that is the main obstacle, particularly the realities of rural life and the kind of atmosphere and structure that you mentioned where women don’t feel they can speak out. It is not one particular group that is promoting that; it is members of the Peace Council. We can see all the names there. On some levels, they are very anti-women as well. We need to confront it, but give people time. Certainly, the more remarkable Afghan women in the body politic in Kabul are really pushing it, and I think they need more support. They feel very isolated. I had a meeting a couple of weeks ago with the deputy head of the Civil Service Commission and she said that she’s never felt more isolated than she does now. Diplomats are isolating her, and she doesn’t feel that she gets that political support in Kabul and she doesn’t have a lot of Afghans to support her.
Q28 Ann Clwyd: Would you agree that Karzai himself doesn’t give the right signals to the situation of women in the country either? He sacked one woman who was a Women’s Minister some years ago when I was there, because she was in Washington and her headscarf slipped off. She gave a press conference and she was sacked when she got back. That is hardly the right signal from the Head of State.

James Fergusson: It may be because he is speaking to his own Pashtun constituency. That is the thing. I think it is very important that we remember—I am paraphrasing General Petraeus—why we are there. Women’s rights are not directly relevant to this question of western security. Petraeus urged us to remember why we are there; we are there to make sure that al-Qaeda cannot come back and establish a base. However much we would like to change Afghan society and see a better deal for Afghan women, and of course we would, that is not why we are there militarily. It is not even part of the mission statement, and it has never been. It does not directly impinge on western security issues. You can go on engaging with them in a civilian way, but that is something quite separate and of a second order, I would suggest, however tough that sounds, to the military work.

Q29 Rory Stewart: Thank you very much, Jolyon, you have worked in Afghanistan since the Soviet period. Is there something that you would say to us and to western policy makers about what we misunderstand about Afghanistan, such as common mistakes that we make; ways in which Afghans perceive us; or ways in which our policies go wrong?

Jolyon Leslie: My goodness, one has written about it. As things stand at the moment, the key thing is that we need to back off and give Afghans some space to work things out themselves. Whether the High Peace Council is part of that or whether it will be micro-managed by the military powers that have an interest in the country, and that have a lot of troops there, remains to be seen. The hope is with the kind of Afghans that I have worked with for years and years, not necessarily with combatants. At the moment, they are feeling very confined by the international military who tell them what to do day and night, and who intrude on their space. I do not think that we should underestimate that, as Michael was saying, in terms of losing hearts and minds. An incompetent regime that we have put in place proved its incompetence in some ways—dear friends to a man and woman but not terribly effective. We need somehow to let them have the voice to try and work that out, which needs space and time.

With the whole conference cycle, these compacts and these benchmarks that we are chucking at this country, people sometimes feel that they are being frogmarched into a process that will unravel inevitably if it is not on their terms. I am heartened by the kind of questions that are being asked in this session but I wish that they had been asked way back in 2001–02, with this level of self-criticism.

At the receiving end of visits to Kabul, one sometimes hears opinions being promoted by the country that are very ill-informed, so goodness knows what some of the Afghans hear. We need to put them more centre stage, as Ann was alluding to, either in set-piece events like that or by getting out more, because one of the worries in the country is that we are cloistering ourselves away. We are not sure who to be afraid of—whether it is the Afghan National Army, or the insurgency, or factional forces that are re-emerging—so we are isolating ourselves more and more, and I think Afghans feel that at the moment.

To some extent, I am contradicting myself because I have said that Afghans need space and they do not necessarily need foreigners asking what they are doing, but we just need to slow down a little bit and literally pull back. I believe that we should also pull back militarily, and face the consequences. I think that Afghans will work it out, much more than we would wish to acknowledge after our investments.

Q30 Rory Stewart: Can you give us concrete examples of the sorts of things that British or American policy makers would generally say or do that strike you as wrong-headed or somehow misunderstanding our relationship to the Afghan people?

Jolyon Leslie: Perhaps the whole Helmand issue is a case in point, in the sense that we have presented a very difficult campaign in rather triumphalist terms, consistently for months if not for years. When the going gets tough, we are not honest enough about whom to blame it on, and maybe James would like to comment on that as well, given what he has written about. I often feel very disappointed that we are still peddling this mythology to some extent about the fact that we can go in and hold, clear and build an area. It is so patently clear at the village level—my life is in Afghan villages, not particularly in Kabul—that outsiders cannot do that. Even if you can clear, you are unlikely to hold, and you certainly cannot build.

To come to my profession, which is development work, I think we need to be more honest about what we can’t do in that country in terms of development. With all respect to DFID—I know that this meeting is not about international development, but we need to be honest that we cannot do development in full-body armour. There is a problem there somewhere. The Afghans are beginning to move on from being sceptical to actually being angry about some of these issues, because they are having to swallow some of these resentments. It’s making them very cynical about everything that we do as a result. That is a sadness, because the will is there and the intention is good, but we need to be more brutally honest about what we cannot do.

Q31 Rory Stewart: Finally, just to bring in Matt and James, you spend a lot of your time talking to policy makers, briefing them, and trying to explain some ideas. What, in blunt terms, do you think policy makers don’t get about Afghanistan? What are you struggling to communicate?

Matt Waldman: Personally, I find that it is the fact that we are not winning, and that events are not going in our favour. I’ve been going to ISAF for four years, and every year I have heard the same refrain, which is that we are degrading the enemy, they are really feeling the heat, and we are turning the corner.
However, if you look at the facts on the ground, and if you talk to ordinary Afghans, you get a very different picture. It is clear that the insurgency has moved from the south and the south-east, up into the centre, and to parts of the north and parts of the west. They are launching more attacks than ever before and are killing a record number of foreign soldiers, Afghan soldiers and police. They have this systematic campaign of intimidation against the population. From the perspective of the Afghans, no matter how many insurgents we may be killing or capturing, this is not going our way. The Taliban are moving from strength to strength.

One of the problems is that we have made the mistake of seeing a number of small tactical successes as a strategic success. We continue to do that; we observe the small elements where progress is being made—and in some areas, I believe progress is being made, even in Helmand—but we should not mistake that for strategic success. That, for me, is the biggest frustration. If you accept that, it leads you to the conclusion that the current strategy will not succeed and that we need a new approach. My conclusion is that, within that new approach, there has to be a willingness to explore the potential of negotiations. As difficult as it may be, we have to accept that.

James Fergusson: I agree with all of that. In general, we are extremely bad at seeing Afghanistan, its problems, and the Taliban in particular through Afghan eyes. We persist in looking at the Taliban through western eyes. The question of women’s rights is a classic example. To the ordinary Afghan, the way that the Taliban treat women is not so surprising or strange. It is difficult for us to comprehend that and we need to.

There was that awful incident the other day, of the young lady with her nose sliced off by a Taliban member. There was a poll after that, asking what people thought of it, and 100 Afghan men were interviewed. They said, “Well, if that had been me, I would have killed her”. There is a completely different way of looking at these things, and over and over again, we cannot quite comprehend the people that we are dealing with.

We certainly don’t understand the Taliban. It seems that we persist in seeing the Taliban as an armed militia, when actually they are not just that. They are also a frame of mind, if I can put it like that. For example, earlier this year, when President Karzai got cross with America once again and flew off the handle, saying, “If you carry on like that, I think I might just join the Taliban myself”, everyone said, “President Karzai has gone off the handle again”. I don’t think he had. I think he was absolutely spot on.

What is the US response? That is a different point. The Brits were the last people to go to the Maiwand area. It could also work in our favour. We do have a role to play, perhaps as a mediator in reconciliation when it comes.

The picture you paint is fairly pessimistic. It seems to indicate that the two sides—the Afghan Government and the alliance—are seeking to find a solution through reconciliation that is unacceptable to the Taliban, and vice versa. You seem to be suggesting what the alliance and the Government could do to move towards some form of reconciliation. Where’s the movement from the Taliban? The point has been raised as to how far the Taliban will move on some of these issues. We have rejected the idea that women’s rights should be part of that. Is there anything that they would accept that is one of the conditions being laid down for reconciliation?

James Fergusson: I don’t know, is the short answer. A lot of the time, these things depend on personal relationships. I hope that our Prime Minister is getting on well with President Obama, which I think is critical to it all. What I think it is safe to say is that no ally of America is better placed than we are to influence American policy because we are the biggest troop contributor in Afghanistan, because of the special relationship we enjoy with the US, but also the special relationship—oddly enough—that we enjoy with Afghans. That is a function of colonial history and the fact that this is the fourth Afghan war for the Brits. So a lot of Afghans, including the Taliban, have said to me, “You Brits are different from the Americans. We feel we know you”. That, of course, cuts both ways. It could be a bad thing as well as a good thing.

Q33 Mr Watts: The picture you paint is fairly pessimistic. It seems to indicate that the two sides—the Afghan Government and the alliance—are seeking to find a solution through reconciliation that is unacceptable to the Taliban, and vice versa. You seem to be suggesting what the alliance and the Government could do to move towards some form of reconciliation. Where’s the movement from the Taliban? The point has been raised as to how far the Taliban will move on some of these issues. We have rejected the idea that women’s rights should be part of that. Is there anything that they would accept that is one of the conditions being laid down for reconciliation?

Matt Waldman: Reflecting on the conversations I’ve had with commanders, I don’t think they are going to take it seriously until they think we do. That is a legitimate position to hold from their perspective. They do not believe that the United States has its heart in reconciliation and they are probably right about that, although there are some indications that there may be shifts within the Administration on that issue.

However, if you look at the facts on the ground, and if you talk to ordinary Afghans, you get a very different picture. It is clear that the insurgency has moved from the south and the south-east, up into the centre, and to parts of the north and parts of the west. They are launching more attacks than ever before and are killing a record number of foreign soldiers, Afghan soldiers and police. They have this systematic campaign of intimidation against the population. From the perspective of the Afghans, no matter how many insurgents we may be killing or capturing, this is not going our way. The Taliban are moving from strength to strength.

One of the problems is that we have made the mistake of seeing a number of small tactical successes as a strategic success. We continue to do that; we observe the small elements where progress is being made—and in some areas, I believe progress is being made, even in Helmand—but we should not mistake that for strategic success. That, for me, is the biggest frustration. If you accept that, it leads you to the conclusion that the current strategy will not succeed and that we need a new approach. My conclusion is that, within that new approach, there has to be a willingness to explore the potential of negotiations. As difficult as it may be, we have to accept that.

James Fergusson: I agree with all of that. In general, we are extremely bad at seeing Afghanistan, its problems, and the Taliban in particular through Afghan eyes. We persist in looking at the Taliban through western eyes. The question of women’s rights is a classic example. To the ordinary Afghan, the way that the Taliban treat women is not so surprising or strange. It is difficult for us to comprehend that and we need to.

There was that awful incident the other day, of the young lady with her nose sliced off by a Taliban member. There was a poll after that, asking what people thought of it, and 100 Afghan men were interviewed. They said, “Well, if that had been me, I would have killed her”. There is a completely different way of looking at these things, and over and over again, we cannot quite comprehend the people that we are dealing with.

We certainly don’t understand the Taliban. It seems that we persist in seeing the Taliban as an armed militia, when actually they are not just that. They are also a frame of mind, if I can put it like that. For example, earlier this year, when President Karzai got cross with America once again and flew off the handle, saying, “If you carry on like that, I think I might just join the Taliban myself”, everyone said, “President Karzai has gone off the handle again”. I don’t think he had. I think he was absolutely spot on.

What is the US response? That is a different point. The Brits were the last people to go to the Maiwand area. It could also work in our favour. We do have a role to play, perhaps as a mediator in reconciliation when it comes.

The picture you paint is fairly pessimistic. It seems to indicate that the two sides—the Afghan Government and the alliance—are seeking to find a solution through reconciliation that is unacceptable to the Taliban, and vice versa. You seem to be suggesting what the alliance and the Government could do to move towards some form of reconciliation. Where’s the movement from the Taliban? The point has been raised as to how far the Taliban will move on some of these issues. We have rejected the idea that women’s rights should be part of that. Is there anything that they would accept that is one of the conditions being laid down for reconciliation?

James Fergusson: I don’t know, is the short answer. A lot of the time, these things depend on personal relationships. I hope that our Prime Minister is getting on well with President Obama, which I think is critical to it all. What I think it is safe to say is that no ally of America is better placed than we are to influence American policy because we are the biggest troop contributor in Afghanistan, because of the special relationship we enjoy with the US, but also the special relationship—oddly enough—that we enjoy with Afghans. That is a function of colonial history and the fact that this is the fourth Afghan war for the Brits. So a lot of Afghans, including the Taliban, have said to me, “You Brits are different from the Americans. We feel we know you”. That, of course, cuts both ways. It could be a bad thing as well as a good thing.

When you go back to Maiwand in Helmand, they say, “What are you doing here? We’ll finish you off this time”. That is a different point. The Brits were the last people to go to the Maiwand area. It could also work in our favour. We do have a role to play, perhaps as a mediator in reconciliation when it comes.

They call us little Satan. That is a role we could play to our advantage. To be literally the great Satan’s outrider—if I could use that terminology—and be the mediator and go-between to perhaps the moderate Taliban is what I would like to see. I think it could happen, I think it is a possibility. It is certainly worth exploring and we haven’t explored that yet.

Q33 Mr Watts: The picture you paint is fairly pessimistic. It seems to indicate that the two sides—the Afghan Government and the alliance—are seeking to find a solution through reconciliation that is unacceptable to the Taliban, and vice versa. You seem to be suggesting what the alliance and the Government could do to move towards some form of reconciliation. Where’s the movement from the Taliban? The point has been raised as to how far the Taliban will move on some of these issues. We have rejected the idea that women’s rights should be part of that. Is there anything that they would accept that is one of the conditions being laid down for reconciliation?

Matt Waldman: Reflecting on the conversations I’ve had with commanders, I don’t think they are going to take it seriously until they think we do. That is a legitimate position to hold from their perspective. They do not believe that the United States has its heart in reconciliation and they are probably right about that, although there are some indications that there may be shifts within the Administration on that issue. At the moment, from their perspective they are doing well. They know that as a movement they are suffering, that many commanders are being killed and that they are under pressure, but they are extending their reach. As I said earlier, they are killing more foreign soldiers. They know there is fracturing within the international coalition. They also know that the Government are widely loathed and not trusted by the Afghan people. They have sanctuaries inside Pakistan.
and a lot of support provided to them. They also have what appears to be an infinite supply of recruits. In those circumstances, the real question is, “If we are not going to take it seriously, why should they?” First, we need a degree of international coherence about reconciliation. It does need to be supported by Britain and the United States. Then we need a period of confidence-building, as Michael suggested.

Q34 Mr Watts: Matt, can I push you on this? The one thing the Afghan Government and the alliance have done is set out their aims for reconciliation. What are the aims for the Taliban? Where are they prepared to meet? What are the lines we won’t move on? What are the lines we are prepared to negotiate on?

Matt Waldman: It is not clear. I think you would find a diversity of opinion throughout the movement of their attitude towards negotiations. If you look at Mullah Omar’s Eid statement of last year, he says they will consider any means of bringing the conflict to a conclusion, so long as they are rid of the infidel invaders and have a regime that respects sharia. I think that is a clear indication that they have not ruled out this possibility, as Michael said in his discussions. I think they haven’t. As to learning their exact positions, I don’t think that is going to happen until we step forward to send a signal that we are actually serious about this. They see the military surge; they see us making more efforts to attack them, to dominate territory and so on. The international forces are killing more commanders than previously. So, in those circumstances they do not feel that inclination. We are not giving the process a chance.

James Fergusson: There will be good things. It won’t be the same as last time. That is the thing that we all have in our minds: the Taliban was a disaster 1996–2001. I would dispute the description “disaster”. They made some terrible mistakes and they know it. The Taliban are a very broad church, but there is a diversity of opinion throughout the movement of their attitude towards negotiations. If you look at Mullah Omar’s Eid statement of last year, he says they will consider any means of bringing the conflict to a conclusion, so long as they are rid of the infidel invaders and have a regime that respects sharia. I think that is a clear indication that they have not ruled out this possibility, as Michael said in his discussions. I think they haven’t. As to learning their exact positions, I don’t think that is going to happen until we step forward to send a signal that we are actually serious about this. They see the military surge; they see us making more efforts to attack them, to dominate territory and so on. The international forces are killing more commanders than previously. So, in those circumstances they do not feel that inclination. We are not giving the process a chance.

Q35 Andrew Rosindell: The sole justification in the eyes of the British people for British troops being in Afghanistan is our own security. We went there after 11 September with the Americans and others. That is why the British people have in the past supported us being there. Can we honestly say to them today that if we withdrew, the threat of al-Qaeda coming back and using Afghanistan as a base would occur?

James Fergusson: No. There is absolutely no evidence that al-Qaeda even want to come back or that the Taliban would have them back if they did. I’ve had this conversation so many times in Afghanistan and I have not come across one Afghan who gets this justification for our presence there at all. They do not believe it. To them it is an irrelevance. They say, “What’s al-Qaeda?” They point to all the things that we know: the crew of 9/11 were all Saudis; they were all trained elsewhere. Afghanistan had nothing to do with it in their eyes. They hosted al-Qaeda, but that is a different matter.

Q36 Andrew Rosindell: Do you all agree with that?

Matt Waldman: Certainly there are elements of the insurgency that are closely connected to al-Qaeda. I have no doubt that some parts of the Haqqani Network work with individuals who either belong to al-Qaeda or are associated with it. But if you look at American intelligence estimates of the presence of al-Qaeda inside Afghanistan, rarely do they say that they think there are more than 150 operatives. If you talk to the Taliban there is no love lost between them and al-Qaeda. They know that ultimately al-Qaeda was responsible for their downfall. Indeed, Mullah Omar in his last public statement about a month or so ago said, “We want to conduct our foreign policy on the basis that we will not harm foreign countries if they do not harm us”. There is not a strong alliance between the Talibs and al-Qaeda. Could you get solid guarantees that they would not work together in the future? Probably not, but this time they will know what the consequences would be were they to support and to harbour extremists of that kind.

Q37 Andrew Rosindell: So, al-Qaeda are operating from where—North Pakistan entirely at the moment?

James Fergusson: Not entirely, no. Horn of Africa? This is an international movement.

Q38 Andrew Rosindell: In that region, I am talking about.

James Fergusson: Well, if I knew that, I would be a very successful journalist.

Matt Waldman: And a very rich one.

Sir Menzies Campbell: And the head of the security services, too.

James Fergusson: The working assumption is that it is Waziristan, it is the border areas on the other side of the border, which even Pakistan doesn’t deny quite as much as it used to. They are not in Afghanistan, that is for sure.
\textbf{Matt Waldman:} Just to go back to the question about what would happen if there was a withdrawal of foreign forces, I think that over time that could help lead to stability if it was in conjunction with a process that was part of a reconciliation move forward. If it was not part of that, if it was a rapid withdrawal, I think there is a strong potential that there would be a civil war. That, of course, then moves us into a different territory where, I think, potentially, legitimate humanitarian considerations would apply. I think that we have some obligation, having intervened in 2001, to ensure that we do not leave a situation that is worse than the one that we found initially. Potentially, there could be security threats to the United Kingdom from a civil war that could spill over into neighbouring countries, including Pakistan.

\textbf{Jolyon Leslie:} I would be as worried about the resurgence of factional interests into that vacuum, which would be inevitable if there was a fast withdrawal, as I would be about al-Qaeda 1 or 2 or 10 or 50 or whatever. I think we should also bear in mind that there is a real ambivalence among Afghans about Arabs in their midst, because of the mujaheddin history. Most ordinary Afghans, who are not even necessarily educated, don’t want them there any more than we do.

There is an element of scaremongering in the thought that if we take our finger out of the dyke, it’s all going to come down and get us. That is unhelpful, because that is not what many Afghans are thinking. After all it is their country, and it is their security that we should be worried about as much as it is the streets of London or wherever.

\textbf{Q39 Sir Menzies Campbell:} But we are taking our fingers out of the dyke, aren’t we? In recent weeks, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have reaffirmed the commitment to withdraw combat troops by 2015. President Obama will almost certainly have to acknowledge his pledge to start withdrawing American forces by the middle of next year; otherwise his prospects of re-election in the United States will be very severely damaged. I just wonder how much of what you have said to us so far you have placed against the timelines that are being imposed upon Britain’s, and indeed NATO’s, presence in Afghanistan.

\textbf{Matt Waldman:} In a conflict such as we see in Afghanistan at the moment, timelines are surely arbitrary. I think it is very unwise to condition actions on the part of the international community against a future that is unknown and unpredictable. In fact, looking at the Government’s submission to you, they say in paragraph 44 that “transition is conditions based, timelines cannot be made”, and then in paragraph 19 earlier on they say that the UK cannot provide combat forces beyond 2014; transition will allow this to happen. There is an obvious contradiction there. It is very unwise to seek to make plans about future conditions that we simply cannot predict.

\textbf{Q40 Sir Menzies Campbell:} It reflects the debate in the United States, doesn’t it? It reflects the contents of the recently published Woodward book and the extraordinary debate that took place before President Obama produced a reinvigorated—if that is the right word—strategy.

\textbf{Matt Waldman:} Yes, and I think that the recent disclosures of Mr Woodward’s book seem to indicate that Obama’s decision was made not on the basis of military advice or advice from experts on the region or the conflict, but on the basis of political domestic considerations. I think that that is misjudged, and it looks as if we have gone down a similar route. I think that it is unwise to constrain ourselves, and I believe that it will need a long-term robust military presence. As to the date that that ends, and as to the way in which that presence changes over time, I think that it is unwise to make commitments so far in advance.

\textbf{Q41 Mike Gapes:} I want to take you back, Mr Waldman, in light of what you have just said. In an earlier answer you said that we need to send a signal that we are serious. What signal does it send to the Taliban, or even to people who are not Taliban, but are uncertain about their future, if we set an artificial deadline, to which you have referred, of 2015 for British combat forces no longer to be in Afghanistan, or if President Obama says, “We are going to run down from 2011”, which, as you have said, is politically driven?

\textbf{Matt Waldman:} Absolutely. When I said that we need to send a signal that we are serious, I meant serious about reconciliation, but I take your point about seriousness with regard to the military effort. There are arguments on both sides, because we have to accept that international forces inside Afghanistan are part of the problem. There is no doubt that their presence is energising the insurgency for various reasons, particularly the civilian casualties, the abuse of raids and the perception that we are aggressive invading forces, which is going to be difficult to change at this stage in the conflict. On the one hand, there is that set of arguments, but on the other, as I mentioned earlier, there is a real risk of internece, intensive civil conflict if that withdrawal were to take place too soon.

\textbf{Q42 Mike Gapes:} You and Mr Leslie have both referred to the dangers of leaving too soon and too rapidly, but isn’t a complete British withdrawal of military combat forces within four or five years a rapid process, given the logistics and the preparations that have to be made to get people out of the situation? Isn’t it a rapid process that President Obama describes when he says that from 2011 there will be a significant run-down, which gives the impression that, in fact, the Americans will very soon be starting a complete withdrawal, although Petraeus says something else?

\textbf{Matt Waldman:} Just briefly, before the others answer, I would say that in a sense Britain is one actor, and we know that the United States will not make such a commitment. They will be there, I think, for longer than that period.

\textbf{Q43 Mike Gapes:} Beyond the next presidential election?

\textbf{Matt Waldman:} I would imagine so, but maybe not in the same numbers. In a sense, what Britain does
Q44 Mike Gapes: What about your colleagues? What do they think?

Jolyon Leslie: I would worry that the presence of troops is a metric for success. That is terrifying, because it is now 2010. I don’t think that it should be rapid, but we should withdraw. We should pull back and, as I have said, we should give space, but that depends on what else is going on in the room, outside the room, down the road, in the village, or wherever. We also really need to push the political track, rather than just twiddling our thumbs while President Karzai, bless him, appoints the High Peace Council. There has to be, of course, an element of sovereignty in all this, and I wouldn’t want to propose cutting deals more than they are being cut, but there are other tracks to follow. We shouldn’t forget that the 2014–15 date was immensely relieving to the Afghan people. It didn’t come across to the people with whom I live and work as a harbinger of, “Oh my God, they are cutting and running”. It came across as, “Thank goodness, we can get beyond this and we can work things out for ourselves”. We need to remember that. Obviously, the domestic constituency here is important, but that was a confidence-building measure and probably quite a sensible one. I am not saying that it was done for those reasons; perhaps it was an unintended consequence.

James Fergusson: I don’t think that anyone is suggesting that we should completely pull out and abandon Afghanistan to its fate. If the military were to go, it wouldn’t mean that the development and civilian agencies have to go, too. I think that such agencies should stay, and it is absolutely essential that they do stay. Furthermore, just think of all that money that is being spent on the military, which could be effectively shifted out and, for heaven’s sake, given to DFID, USAID, or whoever.

Q45 Mike Gapes: Frankly, doesn’t DFID and don’t development agencies require a level of security support and a peaceful environment? If we are going into what Mr Waldman described as a civil war, you might have development in some areas of Afghanistan, but there will be other areas where you couldn’t possibly do it. We had this problem in Iraq at certain times. The development people couldn’t go into certain areas, so the work couldn’t be done. Don’t we require a conditions-based solution here?

Mr Waldman, you said that the counter-insurgency was not succeeding. If the counter-insurgency is not succeeding, and on the other hand a precipitate or quick withdrawal would also lead to a disaster, we are between a rock and a hard place aren’t we? We are in an impossible position.

Jolyon Leslie: Yes. I don’t believe that foreign military can protect development processes. That is a complete delusion. It makes us feel good. It’s good for the MOD. It’s good for—well, it might not be very good for DFID. It is hugely costly. It won’t happen. The Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police or other security sub-forces, whatever they are going to be—hopefully not militias—have to step up to that. From that point of view, yes, it has to be conditions-based. So we have got to make sure that there is a degree of stability for development to move forward. But I would not link military presence with development rolling out, to use an unfortunate term, which is the way it has been portrayed, as if we are there to protect the aid workers. We are not and never have been.

James Fergusson: That’s absolutely right. It’s an anecdote, but in 2007 I was in conversation with some Taliban. They said, “Why are you here again?” I said that we are here to help you develop your country, and the rest of it. They said, “In that case, why do you send soldiers?” I said that the soldiers were here to protect the people who are going to do the development. They looked at each other and said, “But if that is the case, if you just came to us and explained that you wanted to build a road we would have protected you. We would have given you your security ourselves”. They were completely sincere. It is not an absurd thought because before 2001 the Taliban and the NGO world worked quite happily in Afghanistan. Many NGOs, believe it or not, worked fine with the Taliban and were allowed to do so very well, so there is some precedent for a relationship between development and the Taliban.

Matt Waldman: On your point on the counter-insurgency, I think that you are right—we are in an extremely difficult position. Transition is fraught with challenges and obstacles and it will take a lot longer than anticipated. Counter-insurgency faces enormous challenges too, for all the reasons that we have mentioned today. That is why I believe that it is right to move forward seriously with reconciliation, to explore the possibilities for it. It is unlikely to succeed. It is a long shot. There is no question about that, because there is so much mistrust. There are so many spoilers on all sides, whether it is the insurgents side, the Government side, political factions inside Afghanistan and the neighbours. It would be extremely difficult even to get an agreement at the end of the day, but we have to pursue that option because there are so few other options and because it is supported by the Afghan people.

Q46 Mr Watts: Can I take you back to the 2015 deadline? It seems to me that you believe that the deadline is arbitrary and has not been helpful. You said that it is not helpful to have British or allied troops on the ground in Afghanistan longer than they need to be there. I understand the point you are making. Is it realistic to believe that in 2015, if we withdraw troops, both the Afghan army and the Afghan police will be capable of policing Afghanistan and looking after security in the country? Won’t we face civil war as a consequence of the vacuum we create when we take the troops out and the Afghan army and police are not able to cope? Is 2015 realistic for both the troops and the police to be able to cope with the situation they are going to find themselves in?

Matt Waldman: That’s a very good question. I don’t know the answer to it, but I do know that expectations about the capability of the Afghan National Security
Forces are unrealistic. Ahmed Rashid wrote only recently that in his view there is not a single Afghan unit that is able to operate independently. That is despite the efforts to build those forces. Of course, they started too late. They commenced only in 2007 in any seriousness. I think it is widely agreed that the Afghan army has leadership problems, logistical problems and operational problems. It lacks, of course, a major element of Pashtuns in both foot soldiers and officers. So there are huge problems there, and also huge problems in the police, which are widely regarded as corrupt, ineffective or abusive.

To some extent, our withdrawal is predicated on the assumption that we’re going to have forces that are capable of protecting Afghans when we leave, and I just think that that is an unwise assumption to make. My own feeling is, as I said earlier, that given the constraints that we face in terms of transition, it is right to move forward with reconciliation.

Q47 Mr Baron: As a politician, it helps if you are an optimist, but I think a number of us felt from the very start of this enterprise that in getting involved we were ignoring the lessons of history. I would suggest to you that some of your analysis, in my view, is perhaps even too optimistic still. If you look, for example, at the successful counter-insurgency operations—take Malaya, for instance—the four preconditions are control of the borders, credible Government, good troop density levels and the support of the population. I don’t think one of those exists in Afghanistan. Convince me otherwise, please, because I do not believe that we can win this conflict from a military point of view. That has knock-on effects when it comes to reconciliation, because it’s obviously better to negotiate and try to reconcile from a position of strength. Am I being overly bearish about this? Please convince me otherwise if I am.

James Fergusson: I find it very difficult to be optimistic. I’m feeling Cassandra-like about the matter myself. The lessons of history are very important. Just carrying on from the ANP and the ANA, which we’re training up as our exit strategy—well, the Russians did that. They did exactly the same thing. They lasted, I think, about two years before the whole Afghan national army that the Russians had trained up imploded. The moment the funding ran out and the foreigners’ support ran out, it sort of just disintegrated, and people went back to their communities. It’s an artificial construct. We’ve made the same mistake, and I think it’s a tragedy.

The Americans, incidentally—we’ve increasingly referred to it—are pursuing an alternative way of policing the place, which is this question of militias: local militias, from the bottom up, empowering local people to police their own communities. That, of course, is fine if it works and they are kept under control, trained and the rest of it—it could be a good way of policing the place—but that, of course, is where the Taliban came in in 1994. Those private, small, ethnic, tribal militias got out of control and became a law unto themselves. That’s when the Taliban arrived in 1994.

So the stakes are quite high, and it’s not looking too good, I have to say. Around Kandahar province, there are already militias which are acting almost autonomously. In name, they’re answerable to US forces, but they’re not, really. It’s a very dangerous and depressing place to be. I’m afraid I can’t give you much optimistic ammunition.

Matt Waldman: Just to respond to the points on counter-insurgency and achieving a position of strength, I agree with you. I do not believe counter-insurgency in Afghanistan can succeed, and I also believe that that is not accepted by military officials. I think that because, first, we do not have a legitimate, effective host Government. If you go out of the urban areas of Afghanistan, you find that the Government is widely reviled. That is the first problem.

Secondly, I do not believe it’s possible to succeed when insurgents have sanctuary outside of the country and huge support, which is partly provided by elements of the military and the intelligence service of Pakistan. The third major reason is that, as I said earlier, Afghans no longer believe that we are there to defeat the insurgency. If a majority of Afghans actually don’t think we’re there to do that, how can you get them to join your side? It’s not a risk that they’re going to take, especially when they see the insurgency doing so well. We have to accept that some elements of counter-insurgency may be necessary from the point of view of stability, because if you just stopped all COIN operations, that could have adverse consequences. But in terms of whether we need to negotiate from a position of strength, the assumption is that we have to, which is one of the reasons that there is the military surge. I am not sure that I agree with that for a number of reasons. One reason is that the biggest problem that we face in terms of reconciliation is mistrust and enmity between both sides. It is from the Taliban side—especially the leadership and the commanders—and the Government and the warlords who are allied to the Government. A surge is compounding that mistrust, it is creating greater levels of enmity and it is making the chances of negotiations even less likely.

You might look at negotiations theories, the most notable of which is by William Zartman on mutually hurting stalemate. He argues that negotiations are more likely when you have a stalemate where neither side believes that it can escalate to a position of greater strength or victory. I think that, arguably, at the moment both sides believe that they can reach a position of greater strength or victory and we should accept the constraints of the conditions that we face and take that first step towards negotiations. That means trying to build trust between the parties and it means that talks must take place, but at the moment nothing formal, nothing structured, nothing substantive is taking place on that score.

Q48 Sir John Stanley: Between you, you have made a number of references to the Taliban and the insurgents strengthening their position in the past two or three years. To what do you attribute that?

James Fergusson: Partly to our presence.

Q49 Sir John Stanley: Do you think it is directly due to our presence?
James Fergusson: Yes. I agree with Matt, who said that the military presence is energising the insurgency. I refer to what I said earlier about this hard-wired nature, this distrust of foreigners that all Afghans have—not just the Taliban. They are beginning to coalesce around this idea of getting rid of us—they want us out. A large proportion—a majority of Afghans—would like us gone after nine years of meddling in their country. That is the way that it is seen. That is probably the single biggest reason for the insurgency strengthening; if there were no foreigners to fight there would be no fighting.

Jolyon Leslie: A close second would be disaffection with the Government. There is a real lack of patience, and they have no one else to turn to, particularly in areas that are, arguably, the swing areas, which have crossed over relatively recently—in Kunduz, Badghis, Ghor, and other areas. There is no other power structure to turn to and, tactically, whether it is the Taliban, local forces, or other insurgent forces, they have played that brilliantly, because they have stepped into the breach. What we have done is vilify that and said, “No, that isn’t real government. What we can do is bring you real government”. That does not cut any ice with Afghans at all, because we have not shown them real government, or we have not delivered it when we promised it, as they see it. Even where there is not head-on kinetic conflict between foreign forces and Afghan opposition, that is often what might swing it.

James Fergusson: Also the bad Government is seen as the foreigners’ fault, so it comes back to reason one.

Matt Waldman: I agree with both those points. On the one hand, the operations that go wrong and harm civilians have generated enormous resentment. Not only does that support the Taliban as a movement but they can get support from Afghans who react against those kinds of operations. Then of course there is this wider perception—something slightly different—that we are in some way seeking to invade or occupy for our own purposes. All Afghans have different ideas about why we might be doing that—perhaps it is to do with Iran or the minerals or resources—but that perception of an invasion that threatens Afghan values and Islamic values is important. As Jolyon said, the abuses that we have seen by the Government and the exclusion from various groups, whether at a national or local level, in terms of political power and resources, has created a great deal of alienation and grievances among those groups that are excluded, who then ally with and support the Taliban.

Finally, we have to take into account Pakistan. There is no question that there has been sustained and substantial support for the movement from Pakistan. That is obviously one of the reasons why they are having the success that they are. Their ability to draw on new recruits is phenomenal. If you consider that recent figures suggest that ISAF is either capturing or killing up to 10,000 insurgents a year, and yet they also estimate that the insurgency is around 35,000 strong, that is a phenomenal ability to regenerate. Then if you consider that they are launching on average this year some 580 attacks a month, it is phenomenal firepower. If you combine those factors that we have talked about, then we are talking about a very formidable enemy.

Q50 Sir John Stanley: Iran? What about technical support from Iran? Do you rate that or do you think it is insignificant?

Chair: May I interrupt? We have just 15 minutes left and I would be grateful if you could keep your answers tight.

James Fergusson: Iran is a whole other issue. It is meddling dangerously in the centre of the country in Hazarajat, with the Shi’ite Hazara minority. When I was there last there was significant concern among the Pashtuns and indeed among some of the Taliban that I was speaking to, that the Iranians were covertly arming the Shia Hazara, who are traditionally always at the bottom of society. Suddenly they have all this money. The funding is coming in and they are buying nice houses, land and the rest of it, and upsetting the social order. It is a warning. It shows you the fragility of Afghan society. It is a very complex, structured thing which is being messed around with by the regional neighbours. Iran is certainly a part of all of that and it has been arming the Taliban, or certain factions with it, for four or five years with anti-aircraft missiles and so on. There is plenty of evidence of that. They are a very big danger.

Matt Waldman: Just to add to that. I spoke with a Taliban commander who had been to Iran and had been trained in a small camp that was not too far from the border with Afghanistan. In fact they did not think very highly of the training. They were not sure. They could not say one way or another whether they believed that the Government were involved, but there was an assumption that the Government or elements of the military had allowed it to happen. There is also evidence that Iran is providing certain military hardware one way or another. The commander mentioned that normally in his district, every year, 80 to 100 people would go to Pakistan for training. He said that this year, 20 or so had gone to Iran and that that was new. So my judgment is that it still remains. It is not a very significant element of the support to the insurgency, but it is increasing and it certainly needs to be monitored.

Q51 Chair: May I take you back to Pakistan? Mr Waldman touched on it just a second a go. What role can Pakistan play in negotiations here?

James Fergusson: Whatever it is, they have to be present. The other problem with the Bonn process in 2002 was that Pakistan’s interests were not represented and since the Taliban—the enemy—was, I think we all agree, a client and a proxy of the ISI, they were never likely to take the setting up of a Government that did not include the Taliban lying down. So the next time round they have to be involved in some way—I don’t know exactly how. There needs to be a regional talking shop of some kind. We have talked about this already, but Pakistan is critical, as is India, as is Iran, as is China and as are the ex-Soviet republics. All the neighbours need to be involved. They all have a stake in this, but Pakistan is the most important.
Q52 Chair: Do you think they can do something?

James Ferguson: Practical? I think they want to be in a position where nothing can happen without their say so. Mr Semple mentioned Mullah Baradar and the Baradar issue earlier on this year. He was a senior Taliban mullah who was picked up and arrested by the ISI. This was the ISI punishing the Taliban and Mullah Baradar operating without their permission. He had been talking to Kabul without the ISI’s knowledge. What happened was he got arrested immediately. So yes, Pakistan, through the ISI, controls what the Taliban do. It is the puppet master in many ways.

Jolyon Leslie: It is not a matter of, “Can they do anything?”; but “Will they?” I agree with James that they certainly need to be there. But we also need to bear in mind that a lot of the destruction in Afghanistan in mujahedin times was done with active Pakistani connivance and support coming through Pakistan—largely from the United States—of course, and people don’t forget that. I think the folk who I work with are deeply ambivalent about what kind of place Pakistan has around the table.

Matt Waldman: I would agree with what has been said. I think that Pakistan needs to have a role in negotiations. I think negotiations are very unlikely to succeed unless Pakistan supports the process. The real question is what can be done to facilitate that.

My view is that although there is an argument that we use US incentives and disincentives better inside Pakistan, the prospects for that are relatively limited. What I think needs to happen is that efforts have to be made to improve the relationship between Pakistan and India. I am not expecting a breakthrough any time soon, and no serious analyst would, but it is worth the effort to try to get that relationship going in the right direction, because so long as Pakistan perceives a threat from India inside Afghanistan, it would be very difficult to get their full co-operation on negotiations. I think it is possible. I hear from sources inside Pakistan that there is now a growing view among the elite that a broad-based solution inside Afghanistan is the right way to go. I think there is an opportunity, but we have to consider the perceived threat from India, which of course means considering India’s presence inside Afghanistan, where it is investing over $1 billion. We need to consider that. I know that India is an ally, and we don’t like to upset the Indians, but we have to consider what implications there are to the mode, format and frame of Indian presence in Afghanistan.

Q53 Ann Clwyd: Following on from that, as you know, there are a large number of Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, right along the border. One of the things that really annoys the Pakistanis is the fact that the international community does not acknowledge the burden that Afghan refugees have been on Pakistan. I don’t see anybody trying to move to resolve that. That’s the first point. Secondly, what kind of threat comes from the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan? Are there insurgents within them, as there have been in many other conflicts in the world, where people are over the border, and are also a source of continuing insurgency?

James Ferguson: The Taliban came out of the refugee camps—they created the entire problem. The Taliban were, in some senses, the creation of the war against the Russians. The core Taliban were all orphans who were brought up in madrassahs, quite often within the refugee camps. Of course it is critical. We need to pay more attention to that. If that’s your question, I think we should do so. It is a desperate situation. There is Pakistani prickliness about aid, foreign help and the rest of it, which is part of the Pakistani psyche, and which makes helping very difficult. I don’t have a particular answer on how to deal with it.

Jolyon Leslie: The international community has acknowledged the contribution that Pakistan and Iran have made—Iran accepted millions of Afghan refugees at the time as well. I don’t know what the particular rancour is now, I also sense an element of finger-pointing. A lot of Afghans will blame the Pakistanis for all their evils now, because of the insurgency, the radicalisation of the youth and all the rest of it. At some point we have to draw a line under that and say, “No. Take responsibility for your own destiny”. Likewise, the Pakistanis can’t blame a huge amount on the legacy of a relatively small refugee community, which is pretty much integrated, despite the floods and all the rest of it. They are there to stay, in all likelihood.

Matt Waldman: The only comment I would make is that although there is certainly a humanitarian consideration there, from a security perspective, while I am convinced that the insurgency recruits from refugee camps inside Pakistan, I think that perhaps a more serious issue is the madrassahs, which you find throughout Pakistan. The clear majority of the commanders I have spoken to have been educated and trained inside such madrassahs, where they are exorted daily to fight international forces inside Afghanistan. Many of the madrassahs provide not merely a religious education, although that is a component, but also a military component—the individuals will go to a camp to be trained. People who are at those madrassahs for some years are exorted every day to fight, and it is considered a religious duty to do so. That I think is one of the reasons why there are so many people going to fight the jihad inside Afghanistan, and doing so at very considerable personal risk.

Q54 Ann Clwyd: Can I talk to you about the goals that the British Government have set themselves? Are any of them achievable? Are the British public being sold a pup by successive Governments? Are there any pluses to what we have already achieved in Afghanistan? You say that women’s rights are not part of the mission, but good governance, human rights and the rule of law should also include women’s rights—perhaps there are different mission statements from the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Do you think there is any conflict there? I would like your reaction.

Jolyon Leslie: As an aid worker, I think that the British Government speak in many tongues. It is very confusing—to my colleagues on the ground, whose
country it happens to be, and to me as an outsider. It isn’t all bad and we shouldn’t be too morose about it, but let’s cut to the chase and be honest about what we have achieved, even if it is very partial. To some extent, we should fall on our collective mandates, pens or whatever and be honest that progress is very limited, and have a no-nonsense approach as to how to get out of it.

I absolutely agree with Matt—when reading through the paper distributed to us, I was dismayed at its mixture of triumphalism and delusion; again, I use the word “triumph”. It is not actually about that. Get out, listen to people. The real issues are in the subtext—not in that report, but in the subtext on the ground. My worry is that we are beginning to believe our own assumptions. It is going round and round and becoming a self-fulfilling delusion. I don’t mean this in a particularly negative sense, but someone needs to have the courage of their convictions and say, “Stop, let’s put a spotlight on some of these goals, on the benchmarks that we have set in the London conference and on the other milestones”, and ask whether we are doing well enough. We need to have a radical re-look at how to get out of it. Because it’s becoming a hole—it is very difficult to back out of.

James Fergusson: In the end, all that matters actually is America in this—it is not us. We are, I’m afraid, pipsqueaks on the back of a much bigger machine. It is what America decides to do that matters. We are, I believe, in a position to try and influence America and American thinking, which is what we ought to be doing. That is our most useful role, to steer America towards and maybe help them with this reconciliation idea. At the moment, the Americans haven’t made their mind up—that is the problem. They cannot make their minds up about the Taliban. Robert Gates, the Defence Secretary, said in Islamabad in March, on consecutive days, in public, that the Taliban are a “scourge” and a “cancer”, and that they are clearly part of society these days. Well, it can’t be both. They must make their minds up, otherwise there will never be coherence in the policy.

Matt Waldman: I agree with both James and Jolyon. I think that one of our principal priorities now is to try to move events forward towards a peaceful resolution of this conflict. Actually, there are those analysts in Kabul whom I know and respect who believe that the principal objective of the international community should be to seek to avert a civil war. I do not believe that escalating military operations will facilitate that. That is more likely to compound the enmities, intensify the conflict and take us in that direction. I think that we need to consider those risks, not to think about victory but about how we might achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and to move in that direction.

Q55 Chair: I have three colleagues who still want to ask questions. Are you happy to stay for another 10 minutes?

All Witnesses: Yes.

Q56 Mr Frank Roy: Mr Leslie, I would like to take you back to earlier when you were talking about the need to win hearts and minds in the villages, which, at the end of the day, is where it will really matter. I noticed, Mr Waldman, that you said, “There has been a colossal failure by the international coalition to empathise with ordinary Afghans and act accordingly”. Bearing that, and what has been said, in mind, what therefore can the United Kingdom specifically do to win those hearts and minds, and what is it not doing that, for example, the Taliban are doing?

Jolyon Leslie: My worry is that it seems that one of the central planks of winning hearts and minds is delivering aid. That is the way it is presented, and it is not entirely but largely restricted to the area that was in our patch, which was Helmand. We have obviously failed at that, because we have not won hearts and minds through culverts, irrigation channels, shuras, training programmes or whatever the hell it is. It is not an absolute statement, and I am sure that there have been successes and some brave men and women who have tried to pursue that. Afghans will not be bought with aid projects; it has got too serious. They might have been bought with aid projects—perhaps not bought, but they might have been persuaded with aid projects, as they were in the mujaheddin times when I was working with the UN, when we could bring some degree of stability by bringing some assistance into the equation—but it has gone too far for that, at any rate in the areas where I have worked and that I know anything about. We are a little bit stuck, and all that vocabulary is rather 2004. It is just not going to work like that. In the middle of Marjah, where most of the population has been forced out, areas have been laid waste, vineyards have been laid waste and houses have been blown up, how can we dare to talk about development? It is a scorched earth policy, a lot of it.

There is a time and a place, and I am not saying that it is always impossible. Maybe around the outskirts of Kandahar, as part of this new kind of on-off strategy, there is a way to bring development in there to build some confidence, but it is not going to make people cross the lines, or build any great confidence. Also, that is often being done through national programmes, which are pumped as a success of the regime that people are very ambivalent about. Even if it brings a physical benefit to a woman or a man in downtown Kandahar, they might feel very ambivalent about it because of the way it is delivered and the way it is presented. That is one of the reasons why aid has become such a target, unfortunately—tragically. Even in the mujaheddin times, when it was highly politicised, aid was not to that extent such a target. It is now—build a school; we’ll burn it, and so on.

James Fergusson: It is entirely our fault. General Petraeus has said that our most important ammunition in this war is money. He has simply linked aid—a neutral thing with which we are supposed to be winning hearts and minds—

Q57 Mr Roy: How do we change the narrative?

James Fergusson: Delink the military and the civilian, but it is so late. The story is nearly told—I am afraid it is finished. We know when it is going to end, which is 2015 in military terms. The only positive thing we can take out of this is that the next
I am guessing the relationship between the civilians and the military is going to be absolutely central to that, and I think we got that wrong in Afghanistan.

**Matt Waldman:** I would say that we should not be seeking to win Afghan hearts and minds. I do not believe it is possible in current circumstances to win the hearts and minds of a majority of the population. If you consider the natural inclinations of ordinary Afghans, the suspicion of foreigners, the military activities that have harmed so many Afghans, the way in which we are supporting a degenerate regime that is utterly corrupt and ineffective and the pressure from the Taliban and the successes that they are having, I do not believe it is realistic to expect British forces to win hearts and minds. I think we need to reframe our objectives, minimising the harm that we cause. It would be a legitimate objective, while at the same time making greater efforts to listen to Afghans, to appreciate their interests and their aspirations for the future, and to try to adapt our policy and international policy accordingly. As far as I see it, most Afghans not only want better services and so on, they want law and order and peace. The conclusion one has to reach is that we need to take steps to achieve that. Of course, part of that has to be trying to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

**Q58 Rory Stewart:** In summary, you all seem to agree that we are not going to win a counter-insurgency strategy. You all have some interesting ideas about how we can decrease the likelihood of a civil war, with suggestions about what can be done, from Pakistan to police and army training to development. At the same time, there is something I am a bit confused about, which is the debate about timelines. If it’s true that we can’t win a counter-insurgency strategy, if it’s true that all we’re trying to do now is slightly decrease the likelihood of a civil war, from our point of view as British politicians, how long are we supposed to be putting hundreds of our troops, billions of pounds into this conflict? If that is all it’s about, does it make sense for you to say, “We’ve got to stick around; we shouldn’t have a deadline of 2015”? Or should in fact we be honest with the American and British public by saying that if it is that kind of humanitarian engagement—if it’s all about civil war—then $100 billion a year of US expenditure, thousands of coalition lives is not the game we should be playing?

**James Fergusson:** Listen to you. Here we are in year nine of our engagement in Afghanistan and you are still talking about why we are there. It is amazing, isn’t it? Here we all are. We don’t know. My advice would be to go back to what Petraeus has said. He attempted to define it by saying we are there to make sure that Afghanistan cannot be used as a base for an attack by al-Qaeda again. End of story. It is not about humanitarian minds. As a British politician, you surely have to explain that to your constituents—that that is what we are there for. British troops are not dying for women’s rights in Afghanistan, not to make their lives better, not to bring democracy. All of those things were freight brought on board after we turned up there in the first place and have nothing to do directly with the threat from al-Qaeda. We need to be speaking to the Taliban to see what guarantees we can get out of Mullah Omar that he won’t let al-Qaeda back into the country to use it as a base. We need to back up those talks with drones and our own special forces and the rest of it, but we don’t need to be there militarily any longer.

**Matt Waldman:** To answer your point about the timelines. I simply do not believe that it is sensible from a strategic point of view to lay out your plans for the future before the enemy. There are very few circumstances in which that would be sensible in conflict situations. There are two further reasons why it is not sensible. One is that if it is believed by the enemy, it may incentivise those who believe that they can outlast the internationals because the internationals are going to withdraw. Maybe they will envisage a scenario such as seen after the 1980s when the regime was unable to last for too long. It may incentivise and give succour to those individuals in the insurgency who think that time is on their side. The other thing is a question of leverage. We have very few cards left when it comes to negotiations. One of them is the phased withdrawal of international forces. It strikes me that is something that we should use in the course of negotiations, rather than stipulating in advance.

**Q59 Rory Stewart:** What costs are you prepared to take? The longer we delay, the more lives we lose, the more money we spend. How many lives, how much money are you prepared to spend on this idea of leverage?

**Matt Waldman:** Foreign troops are there and we know they are not going to withdraw immediately. There will inevitably be some sort of phased withdrawal. What I think is wrong is to set that out, to indicate what that will be in advance. One needs to consider the conditions and wait until there are negotiations under way, which I hope will happen. Then there is a possibility that that phased withdrawal will form part of that process, rather than being conducted unilaterally and in advance.

**Jolyon Leslie:** I have to say not a day too soon. I don’t think that we should be discussing whether, we should we be discussing where and how we are pulling back in the next month and the next six months. It needs to become a reality; it should not be a principal option up our sleeve. I think that is the only way that people will find the space to get on with their lives and perhaps even reach peace themselves.

**James Fergusson:** I agree.

**Q60 Mr Baron:** May I focus on the end game itself? Even the most sceptical of us do not believe that there should be a rapid withdrawal; that would leave a vacuum and it would cause more problems. I think that there is a moral obligation, which was brought out by Matt or someone else, that we try to leave a semblance of order and tidy up the mess that we have created by going in there in the first place. You are suggesting that there is no real chance of success in negotiation, but if we accept that the counter-insurgency operation is not going to work and that the longer we are there, the worse it is going to get from
our point of view—because we are seen as an occupying force and the high civilian casualty rates are going to exponentially increase the hostility towards us—why are we delaying withdrawing and why are we delaying negotiating? Why do we not come out and openly negotiate with the Taliban in their various guises and press the military and the national Governments to do that?

**Matt Waldman:** I couldn’t agree more. I think that that needs to happen now. We need to make it clear that we are willing to engage with representatives of the Quetta Shura right now, and that there may be legitimate grievances on the other side. If the grievances are legitimate, then let’s hear them, and let’s consider whether their demands are so unreasonable. Maybe they are inconsistent with what Afghans and the international forces want, but we do not know that, because we have not sat down and listened and argued about the future of Afghanistan. That needs to happen.

Just to clarify one point, I am not talking about the withdrawal itself—that needs to happen and it is inevitable. What I am disputing is the wisdom of pre-announcing it; I do not think that it benefits us. It may even benefit the enemy as perceived by international forces, so that is the only point of dispute. I agree that the withdrawal needs to take place. It may be difficult to negotiate if we are in the course of a withdrawal, which is one of the reasons why I think that talks at least should begin now.

**Q61 Mr Baron:** Finally, on the issue of negotiation, given the scepticism and lack of credibility as regards President Karzai’s Government and the US stance, what can we do to encourage that negotiation and encourage that reconciliation? We know about the difficulty on the ground, with the regional power plays and so forth, but you have the US not willing to—publically at least—countenance negotiations, Karzai is not trusted and so on. We are painting quite a bleak picture here. Meanwhile, troops are dying.

**James Fergusson:** Which is why it’s urgent.

**Matt Waldman:** I would say at least two things, one of which is to recognise that our obsession with killing insurgents does not help. It does not take us closer to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In fact, it seems that many, many commanders are being killed and those who are replacing them are more hard-line. They tend to be younger. The average age of insurgents is about 24 or 25. They are probably less inclined to support negotiations. In fact, the one area where successes are claimed may be undermining the prospects for a negotiated peace. Recognising that highly aggressive, kinetic operations against insurgency may not lead us in the right direction, a robust military presence in certain areas of the country is perhaps appropriate, but I think that we have to consider that element.

The other side is something that Michael has mentioned, which is an independent mediator—one who is trusted by the various sides to the conflict. It astonishes me that this has not happened yet. There needs to be a mediator—probably several mediators—who are facilitating structured talks: not merely contacts, as has happened for several years now, but structured talks about how the conflict might be resolved.

**Q62 Mr Baron:** We haven’t talked about the economy as it is. We know that international aid features very highly and so forth, but we have—correct me if I’m wrong—something like 9 million people unemployed in Afghanistan. Some would say that you can earn more working for two months with the Taliban than the average national salary. That many, many commanders are being killed and occupying force and the high civilian casualty rates as our money, whether through the militia, the security companies or other means. But it is a worry.

We present the narcotics economy as being, as it were, our point of view—because we are seen as an occupying force and the high civilian casualty rates are going to exponentially increase the hostility towards us—why are we delaying withdrawing and why are we delaying negotiating? Why do we not come out and openly negotiate with the Taliban in their various guises and press the military and the national Governments to do that?

**James Fergusson:** Which is why it’s urgent.

**Matt Waldman:** I would say at least two things, one of which is to recognise that our obsession with killing insurgents does not help. It does not take us closer to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In fact, it seems that many, many commanders are being killed and those who are replacing them are more hard-line. They tend to be younger. The average age of insurgents is about 24 or 25. They are probably less inclined to support negotiations. In fact, the one area where successes are claimed may be undermining the prospects for a negotiated peace. Recognising that highly aggressive, kinetic operations against insurgency may not lead us in the right direction, a robust military presence in certain areas of the country is perhaps appropriate, but I think that we have to consider that element.

The other side is something that Michael has mentioned, which is an independent mediator—one who is trusted by the various sides to the conflict. It astonishes me that this has not happened yet. There needs to be a mediator—probably several mediators—who are facilitating structured talks: not merely contacts, as has happened for several years now, but structured talks about how the conflict might be resolved.
Wednesday 20 October 2010

Members present:

Richard Ottaway (Chair)
Mr John Baron
Sir Menzies Campbell
Mike Gapes
Andrew Rosindell
Mr Frank Roy
Sir John Stanley
Rory Stewart
Mr Dave Watts

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Sajjan Gohel, International Security Director, Asia-Pacific Foundation, Dr Farzana Shaikh, Associate Fellow, Asia Programme, Chatham House, and Sir Hilary Synnott KCMG, Consulting Senior Fellow for South Asia and the Gulf, International Institute of Strategic Studies, gave evidence.

Q63 Chair: I welcome our three witnesses today. Thank you for your flexibility. We were going to have four witnesses—two for an hour and two for the second hour. Sadly, Professor Shaun Gregory has a family illness and is unable to make it. We decided we would put the three of you together. Even though we will take the whole thing as one package, don’t feel that you have to answer every question, because some questions will be targeted more at your area of expertise and some more at other witnesses’ area of expertise. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome you and welcome the members of the public who have come in. This is the second oral evidence session in our inquiry on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Let me open the batting. Talking about the interaction in Pakistan between the military, the civilian community, the Government and the intelligence services, where do you think the balance actually lies? Where is the centre of gravity of this and who is calling the shots? What impact will this have on the UK and how can the UK respond to where the centre of gravity is? Discuss. Who would like to begin?

Sir Hilary Synnott: The most effective institution in Pakistan, and in a sense the oldest political party, is the army, which dominates strategy policy and foreign policy. It got its fingers badly burned when it entered politics, for the fourth time really, under Musharraf, when it was sullied by the cut and thrust of domestic politics, for the fourth time really, under Musharraf, when it was sullied by the cut and thrust of domestic politics. But its real significance is in strategy, particularly in relations with India. That is the most important institution.

The Supreme Court is now getting a bit of weight, particularly because of its potential role in dealing with the problem of President Zardari. Of the other institutions, the two main political parties—the PPP and the PML—are important, but central Government is a long way behind the army in importance. Provincial government, district government and civil society are increasingly important because of the new open media channels. Religious parties are important, but electorally they are of limited importance. They only get a maximum of 11% or 12% of the vote, but they have quite a lot of street power. More recently, since about 2005, insurgent groups have a lot of significance, for better or for worse.

You asked about impact on the UK. Before 9/11—and I was there—the British relationship with the ISI intelligence agency, which is part of the army, was very poor because we believed, correctly, that they were running terrorist groups. After 9/11, the balance of British interests changed, and a particularly important British interest came about in relation to possible linkages between terrorism and the British Pakistan community. There developed a co-operative relationship with the ISI. I am not in Government now and I can’t speak authoritatively about it, but I believe that that co-operative relationship is pretty well developed. That doesn’t mean to say—I can’t speak for the British Government—that the British Government approve of everything the ISI does.

Dr Shaikh: I would broadly agree. I think it’s not a secret that power in Pakistan lies squarely in Rawalpindi and not in Islamabad. By that, I mean that it lies with the army at General Headquarters in Rawalpindi and not with the civilian Government based in Islamabad. Having said that, like Hilary I would go on to argue that we also have multiple centres of power in Pakistan. There was once talk of a troika involving the President, the Prime Minister and the army chief—not necessarily in that order. In fact, the reverse order. More recently we have heard talk of a quartet involving the President, the Prime Minister, the army chief and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who, as you have just heard from Hilary, is now being widely seen as exercising judicial muscle, taking on the Government. To that, one needs to factor in the dominant role of the Punjab in Pakistan. The province is the main recruiting ground for the army. It is also the richest, largest and most populated province in Pakistan. It is the base of arguably the most popular political party—the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), which is led by the former Prime Minister, Mr Nawaz Sharif. It is said that power resides as much in Rawalpindi and Islamabad as it does in Raiwind, which is near Lahore, the provincial capital of the Punjab.

As I read through the line of inquiry, the question was raised as to whose benefit this power was being exercised. My answer to that would be simply that power in Pakistan has been exercised for the benefit of the army and its clients within sections of Pakistan’s political classes, who stand to benefit from an alliance with the army. Together, what that has done is to reinforce authoritarian rule in Pakistan and it has certainly contributed significantly to the shrinkage of what one might call a constituency for democracy.

Dr Gohel: I will just add to those comments that the situation in Pakistan today is very much down to
legacy of the previous military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf. He suspended the constitution twice, sacked Supreme Court judges twice, muzzled the media twice and arrested politicians twice. The only thing that he did not do is dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, which he had been asked to do, especially after September 11.

The civilian Government are the way they are today because of the meddling of the military. They have been fractured and weakened. Ultimately, the West, the UK and other countries have to empower the civilian Government to be able to make decisive decisions that their word is the law, that they are the key principal decision maker, whether in terms of domestic or foreign policy. We obviously cannot intervene directly—that cannot be done in any country—but it is important that the civilian Government are given the tools and the function to be able to speak their mind without fear of the military intervening. Traditionally, the military were always involved in foreign policy issues, especially to do with Afghanistan and India. Increasingly, under General Kayani there is now a domestic component as well.

The military are playing a behind-the-scenes role to do with the legal issues, such as corruption cases against politicians and the judiciary. By and large, General Kayani is a smart individual. He has given the impression that he is not interested in politics, but he plays an important role from the shadows, and that does not have a positive impact on Pakistan’s fragile civilian Government. There is concern as to what will happen in the next few years. In an unprecedented move, the civilian Government gave him a three-year extension to his term. Normally, only a dictator gets a huge extension, but this was done under a civilian Government. Ultimately, it is designed to fit into the timeline of the withdrawal of western forces from Afghanistan. Kayani wants to be at the centre of that situation, while at the same time ensuring that the military’s influence in Pakistan remains prevalent. I fear that that will be to the detriment of Pakistan’s democratic infrastructure.

Q64 Mike Gapes: May I ask you about the appalling impact of the floods in the past three months? They were on such a massive scale: they were far worse than the tsunami, the Kashmir earthquake or the Haiti disaster, in terms of their impact. What is the political impact? Dr Gohel, you said that the fragile democracy has been severely damaged by the poor Government response. Does that raise questions about whether the civilian Government can survive the consequences of this flood?

Dr Gohel: The problem with the floodwaters was that they lingered—the flood continued. It was not like an earthquake, which would peak within a day and then we would see the full effects of the consequences. The flooding continued its process, it spread throughout the country and the civilian Government were not able to deal with it effectively. There was controversy about the fact that President Zardari was travelling to Europe at the beginning of the disaster. Certainly, in terms of public relations and the media perspective, that did not help.

On the other hand, the military were on the scene. They had the public relations advantage, because cameras were filming them assisting people. The concern is that it has damaged the civilian Government even more than before.

The problem is also that extremists and radicals took advantage of the situation. There were groups such as the Jamaat-ud-Dawa and the Falah-e-Insaniat, which are alleged charitable wings of the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, the terrorist group behind the Mumbai siege attacks. These groups are openly distributing aid, food, clothing and even money to people—they are trying to win hearts and minds. That is extremely negative, because individuals are going to be appreciative of what these groups are doing. Potentially, those are new breeding grounds for extremism and recruitment.

Q65 Mike Gapes: Sir Hilary, you have commented in written evidence about the impact that this could have on militant groups and the radicalisation of people in camps. Do you share that view?

Sir Hilary Synnott: Yes, I do. We are talking about 20 million people who have been directly affected very badly, so there is a massive humanitarian problem, coupled with the institutional vacuum on the part of the central Government. They clearly failed not only to respond, but, politically, they did not appear to be concerned. As well as that, there were well-substantiated reports that feudal landowners were moving the bund system of blocking water to divert water from their fields on to the fields of very poor people. Imagine the political and humanitarian impact of that.

The militant groups, as was the case with the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, have moved in to fill that vacuum. They are actually rather good at administering humanitarian aid, because they have direct links with the people. But of course, politically, that means that they are strengthening and there will be more sympathy for them. As a former practitioner, I desperately try and look on the upside, if there is one—and maybe there could be.

One upside is that the Americans, as you know, have pledged very large sums, very belatedly, for civilian assistance, which they have had a lot of difficulty in spending, because of the low absorptive capacity of Pakistan. So they are transferring a lot of the money they have pledged into humanitarian relief, which is visible, using helicopters. There may be an inflated sense among some American commentators that this will transform Pakistani opinion towards the United States; it won’t, but it may help a bit. That is one, limited, upside.

The other potential upside—and I am clutching at straws—is that out of all this, it may be that some non-governmental organisations’ aid administrators become visible and their effectiveness contrasts with that of the Government and of the army, whose effect has been better than the civilian Government’s, but...
still limited. You develop a sort of new political class, emerging to compete with the grand old parties, which are so terribly flawed. Sajjan’s point that empowering the civilian Government is what we need to do is absolutely right. The great problem with that is that successive civilian Governments have showed themselves to be deeply flawed. What is it that you are empowering? You actually need to empower the emergence of a new sort of non-military political class.

Q66 Mike Gapes: Dr Shaikh, do you want to add anything?

Dr Shaikh: Yes, I would like to add something, and perhaps nuance the position. The first thing I’d like to say is that I broadly agree with both points of view—Sajjan’s as well as Hilary’s—in that the current civilian Government has been hopelessly abject in their handling of the humanitarian crisis arising from the floods. They have shown themselves to be quite incapable of meeting the challenges posed by the floods. Three months after the floods, the Government has still to come up with any kind of comprehensive plan for reconstruction, something that the international community has called on Pakistan to come up with urgently if it is to take advantage of the immense international goodwill shown towards the flood victims.

Having said that, I just want to look at the issue of the role of militant groups. It is interesting that recent studies that have come out in the US in the last couple of months—one of which was by Tahir Andrabi, who has done a lot of work for the World Bank on madrassahs—show that in fact, during the devastating earthquake in 2005 in northern Pakistan, when militant groups were said to have been on the rampage in the area and were poised, in some sense, to accentuate and hasten the process of radicalisation in Pakistan, reports were, in fact, vastly exaggerated. The work that has been done since shows that the greatest amount of relief provided at the time did not come from militant groups, but from private and international NGOs. The proportion of aid coming in from groups such as Jamaat-ud-Dawa and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba didn’t really amount to more than 1%, or 2% maximum.

I think we need to be wary of how we go about assessing the role of militant groups in the wake of humanitarian crises of this sort. As I said, surveys have shown that many families questioned said that they did not, in fact, receive aid from these militant groups, and that much of the aid came from elsewhere. But that was 2005, and I think it is still too early to tell exactly how militant groups have behaved in the latest floods, and for us to make any kind of informed judgment about what we do about this. That is one issue.

The other important point to bear in mind is that the act of charity is a key part of being a Muslim. Very often, when you read reports of what precisely is going on in some of these earthquake or flood-affected areas, the charity of ordinary Muslim groups is confused with the actions of those who might have some ulterior motives. It is important to maintain some sort of balance in that regard, rather than simply rushing to conclude that we are set to see some kind of great radicalisation in the affected areas.

The last point that I would like to make is that it is true that anti-Americanism is widespread across Pakistan. Indeed, it is no longer the preserve of the religious parties; anti-Americanism is widespread within many of the mainstream parties. We can talk about that later. It is also quite deeply entrenched in some sections of the military. But anti-Americanism does not necessarily or automatically translate into support for militant groups and Taliban factions. Again, we need to hold back a bit. A little distance wouldn’t do any of us any harm. It is a very difficult situation in Pakistan.

Q67 Mike Gapes: Can I ask you about the army?

Dr Shaikh: Is that a question to me?

Mike Gapes: All of you.

Sir Hilary Synnott: I’ll have a go. In terms of the perception of the army, the first conclusion is that the army is better at doing these things than the civilian Government. If we want to empower the civilian Government, that’s a pity. Armies often are better at those things, actually. We have employed the army in national crises here, but under the direction of the civilians. What is happening here is that the army is filling a vacuum and is not getting strategic direction from a civilian Government. That is having the effect of strengthening it.

As regards prioritisation between this and dealing with insurgent groups, all I can really do now is speculate. The corps commanders are not going to tell us what they think about this, and they are the people who matter. My speculation is that it is actually rather convenient. The Pakistan army’s strategic priorities are not the same as our own and those of the Americans. It makes a very clear distinction between dealing with the neo-Taliban—new Pakistan insurgents who threaten the state of Pakistan—and, say, the Afghan Taliban, whom it does not want to alienate.

Of course, the pressure from the United States and others is to now go into North Waziristan, which is the focus of all these nasty groups. I speculate that it is quite convenient for the army to be able to say, “We’re really very busy dealing with the humanitarian crisis”. Its public line for some time—even before the floods—has been not “We are not going to do what you say,” but “It is a question of prioritisation. We can’t deal with everything at once and, for us, the biggest priority is those groups in Pakistan who threaten the state”. In a sense, that line can be reinforced by the implications of the floods.

Dr Shaikh: The army has probably been the greatest beneficiary, in some senses, of the floods and their aftermath. I am on record as saying that they have
significantly boosted the image of the army and the army chief, General Kayani. He has played a very careful and clever game, after being forced to nurse the tarnished image left to him by the army’s former chief, General Musharraf. General Kayani has worked skillfully, carefully and deliberately to ensure that the standing of the army is restored to its pre-Musharraf days, as it were. In this, he has very largely succeeded, owing no doubt to the dismal failings of the civilian Government. Ultimately, however, what needs to be said is that there are doubts about whether the army in Pakistan can really emerge as a force of stability. I share these doubts.

The only way in which the army in Pakistan can emerge as a force of stability is if it works with an elected civilian Government. It is far from clear that the army is doing that; we have all the evidence to suggest that there are quite serious sources of friction between the military and the political leadership. We saw it dramatically in 2008 following the attacks in Mumbai, when the civilian Government—particularly President Zardari—offered to India that Pakistan would send the chief of the ISI to launch a joint investigation into the attacks, an offer that was stamped on by General Kayani.

We saw it again in an unprecedented move last year, again orchestrated by Kayani, when the corps commanders emerged from a meeting to announce that they took very grave exception to some clauses of the Kerry-Lugar Bill, which was going through the US Congress at that time. The Kerry-Lugar Bill provides $7.5 billion in civilian assistance to Pakistan over five years on condition, in a manner of speaking, that the civilian Government rein in the military and bring the military’s accounts under their remit. Our military and General Kayani took a very dim view of this and, as I have said, rose following the meeting to announce that those conditions constituted nothing less than an infringement of Pakistan’s sovereignty. That went down extremely well across Pakistan, and it illustrates that this is a problem that is beginning in other parts of the country. It happened in Southern Punjab but we ignored it, and there were consequences. If we ignore it again, there will be further consequences.

Chair: Can the witnesses help the Committee, please? We want to ask you a lot of questions, but we have used up 25% of our time so far and have asked only 10% of the questions. I don’t by any means want to curtail your responses, but could you just bear that in mind and try to keep your answers concise?

Q69 Andrew Rosindell: During the Prime Minister’s visit to Pakistan in August, he made remarks that caused some controversy relating to how, he felt, Pakistan was looking both ways in terms of dealing with terrorism. How do you think his remarks have affected British relations with Pakistan? Should we accept the Pakistani response, or did the Prime Minister have a valid point?

Sir Hilary Synnott: I have written about this quite vigorously. There are two points. First, he actually made those remarks during his visit to India, not Pakistan. Of course, any remarks by any senior visitor to India about Pakistan never go down well. In some respects, it was the location in which the remarks were made that caused the greatest difficulty.

As regards what he said, I am absolutely convinced that he is right. He alleged that Pakistan looks both ways, which is another way of saying that there is a tension between what it says to us and what it actually does. It is a clearly documented tension. As I have mentioned before, it is willing to kill insurgents who threaten the state, but not those with whom it wishes to retain a political relationship. There are some reasonable reasons for that; I mean, Pakistan has a legitimate interest in Afghanistan. I think that most analysts would agree—I stand to be corrected by the two analysts sitting beside me—that the substance of what he said was correct.

As for how that has affected relations, I am not sure; I haven’t been there for a while. My own view is that it is good that it has come out and that there is a...
proper debate on whether what the Prime Minister said was correct or not, because this is about the truth, and the truth needs to be exposed. I am inclined to think it would blow over in Pakistan, but, as I said, I haven’t been able to test that myself on the ground. Dr Shaikh: Again, I am on record as having written and spoken about this matter at some length. Obviously, stage matters, and it wasn’t what was said, but where it was said that ultimately caused all the difficulty in relations between Britain and Pakistan. However, I need to add something. The statement might look today like it was something that needed to be said. We are, after all, talking about Pakistan and its duplicitous policies, and I have no problem with accepting that Pakistan’s role in the so-called war on terror has very often been less than constructive. However, there is more to the story: during many years, particularly the Bush years, Britain, like the United States, simply chose to turn a blind eye to the ISI and its activities in Afghanistan, because the ISI had been subcontracted to do the dirty work for the United States and the United Kingdom by going after the Taliban. During all that time, there wasn’t a squeak about Pakistan’s duplicity, because at the time it was seen that that was to the best advantage of both the United States and the United Kingdom, which were more interested in pursuing al-Qaeda. Looking at the situation from inside Pakistan, many people, including myself, felt that there was an element of disingenuousness, and that it was not entirely fair. That rankled. Having said that, Britain’s latest attempts to mend those fences—and particularly its role in the recent set of EU meetings, where it is fighting hard for Pakistan to have certain tariffs lifted on textile-related products in Pakistan—are going down well in Pakistan. So, like Hilary, I don’t believe that the damage was fundamental, but in the scheme of things, one can hardly deny that it was unwelcome.

Dr Gohel: The policy in the past has been public support, private pressure, but that did not amount to anything of substance. It didn’t stop the military supporting elements within the Afghan Taliban who were going across the border from Pakistan into Afghanistan and carrying out attacks against British troops, resulting in British fatalities. It also didn’t stop the military allowing Britons to train with terrorist groups inside Pakistan as part of transnational plots, such as the ammonium nitrate plot in 2004, in which a number of Britons were training in a place in Malakand in Pakistan right near an army camp, or the 7/7 bombers. It is not a criticism of the civilian Government; it is a criticism of the military; it simply hasn’t done enough to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. If British lives are at stake, it is of paramount importance to identify it. I would say that it is a continuation of what Gordon Brown mentioned when he talked about Pakistan being the crucible of terrorism, and 75% of plots in the UK being linked to Pakistan.

In any case, whatever British politicians have said does not compare to what the Obama Administration is saying now, whether through leaks or interviews. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been openly critical of the Pakistanis in Pakistan for not doing enough. I would say that that criticism should be more aimed towards the military that is there. We cannot ignore the fact that British troops are dying in Afghanistan because the Pakistani military are not doing enough to rein in the Afghan Taliban—and, by the way, many in the military still deny that the Afghan Taliban even exist in Pakistan. So, yes, it is the issue of context—it was said in India. I think that if David Cameron had made that comment elsewhere, it would not have been an issue.

Q70 Andrew Rosindell: Dr Shaikh, earlier you mentioned anti-Americanism in Pakistan. Do you feel that there is also anti-British feeling? How do ordinary people in Pakistan view the UK?

Dr Shaikh: The UK is seen very much as really having no independent policy of its own. It does what it is told to do by the United States. That, to put it very bluntly, is the view from Pakistan, so feelings of animosity and hatred, even, are really directed towards the United States. However, of course we are also very mindful that it is the US hand that feeds us. As for really understanding what was going on with the reaction against Prime Minister Cameron’s statement, again I am on record as saying that the real target of Pakistani anger about that was the United States, but as we cannot speak out against the United States, the next best thing is to lash out at Britain. There is no doubt that the real villain, in the eyes of many Pakistanis, is the United States. To the extent that the United Kingdom is seen to be acting, more often than not, at the behest of the United States, it comes in for a bit of flak as well, yes.

Q71 Andrew Rosindell: Do you think that the assistance the UK has given to Pakistan, particularly with regard to the floods, and the aid that we are sending is improving the image of Britain? Is it going to the right places, or is it simply bolstering the military?

Dr Shaikh: Well, you know, it is a drop in the ocean compared to what the United States has pledged to Pakistan in the form of the Kerry-Lugar Bill and in terms of relief assistance in the aftermath of the floods. I do not think it is really comparable. As for whether it is going to the right people, that is a moot point. There are genuine questions of transparency and corruption, which Britain—like the United States and its allies—is concerned about. Unfortunately, the Government in Pakistan has been unable to come out with any kind of persuasive position that can convince Britain, or any other members of the international community, that such issues as transparency and corruption have been squarely addressed. That is why, of course, a lot of the money that has been pledged is still stuck in the pipeline and is not making it to where it is intended to go.

Sir Hilary Synnott: Can I come in here, partly because I used to help administer the British aid programme? The big difference between the British aid programme and the American aid programme is that basically there hasn’t been an American civilian aid programme at all. Most of the time it didn’t exist, until the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Bill, which came into force this financial year, 2010.
Q72 Rory Stewart: Moving on to India, you have not perfectly formed, but a darned sight better than those things are important. It is small, indeed, and Government, is job opportunities for its young people.

Britain’s had a long tradition of administering aid, for better or for worse—a continuous tradition since 1947. It has built up a great deal of experience, for better or for worse. That experience is very relevant when you’re looking at administering any aid programme, including the American one, because it comes down to what parts of the administration work, which of the provinces are likely to be the most effective, what are the traps, transparency and so on, all of which are very relevant to anybody who wants to help Pakistan help itself.

Despite the doubling of British aid recently, it is still a very small amount compared to what is needed and to what the Americans have to offer, which is still small compared to what’s needed. One might be able to look at it as a pilot project, which might assist the Americans in administering their aid. We know there are problems with some provinces, where the administration is corrupt or ineffective. We know there are difficulties with using aid as quick-fix budget support, where you simply prop up the budget. There are real problems over transparency.

What has been happening up until now with regard to the Americans is that between 9/11 and now they have given in excess of $12 billion of overt military-related aid. They have opened their arms market to Pakistan, which has allowed Pakistan to use its own domestic money to buy big-ticket military items that have no relevance to the war on terror or Afghanistan, but are relevant only in relation to India, using very scarce domestic resources. Britain has not fallen into that trap.

The EU performance has been appalling, quite frankly. The British role, which is also development-related, in getting the EU to look at the question of opening markets to textiles has been very important. Dr Shaikh said that that has been appreciated, in terms of job creation. The textile sector is the second biggest source of industrial employment in Pakistan, and what Pakistan needs, apart from a decent civilian Government, is job opportunities for its young people. Those things are important. It is small, indeed, and not perfectly formed, but a darned sight better than anything else there is.

Q73 Rory Stewart: Thank you.

Dr Shaikh, one of the big arguments in the United States and Britain is about whether the security of Pakistan depends on what happens in Afghanistan. There has been huge emphasis on what happens in Afghanistan to the exclusion of other factors. People are not particularly talking about internal factors in the Punjab or about the Pakistan military so much. The whole debate has flipped around. Ten years ago, Pakistan would have thought it could handle what happened in Afghanistan and that whatever destabilised Pakistan was likely to be internal, or on the eastern border. Do you think we have the emphasis right? Does the security of Pakistan depend on what happens in Afghanistan?

Dr Shaikh: The short answer is yes. The more convoluted answer is that, actually, the eastern and western borders are inextricably linked, because the fact remains that Pakistan’s Afghan policy is shaped, informed and largely influenced by its relations with India and the dispute over Kashmir. There is no getting away from it. The international community—the United States and Britain—is going to have to grasp this nettle. While the points that Sajjan makes are broadly true—there is a very strong local dimension to the problems that we are currently witnessing in Kashmir—there is no question that the broader implications of this dispute are really quite significant. This is a conflict that the army in Pakistan has fed off for more than 60 years of the country’s independence. This conflict has ensured the political fortunes of the army in Pakistan. I believe that as long
as we do not grasp this nettle, democracy—which is what, after all, the international community is forever saying it wants in Pakistan—will elude Pakistan. As long as India does not appreciate and accept that, as local as it may be, Kashmir is a regional problem that will have to be addressed, India’s chances of graduating to become a player on the global scene will, I believe, forever be thwarted, because it will be yoked as it is now by the problem over Kashmir.

Q74 Rory Stewart: I just want to reinforce this, and this is the question I asked Sajjan. Were the international community to put as much effort into trying to resolve the issue in Kashmir as it has put into trying to resolve the issue in Afghanistan over the past eight years, do you think that that would have a more important and significant benefit for South Asian security over the next 20 years?

Dr Shaikh: Yes—that is the short answer. The international community must give as much importance to that, because the fact is that there are two wars going on. There is the public war, which we all know and speak of, in Afghanistan, and then there is the other war that is taking place in Pakistan. That war is inside Pakistan, but also between Pakistan and India. Those conflicts are interlinked.

Dr Gohel: If you get involved in the way that that can happen at times, my concern is that it will only ruffle feathers in New Delhi. Some individuals there, and it is a very large lobby, have a hysteria about British colonial rule, British imperialism and Britain’s interfering. The “K” word substantially aggravates individuals in India. You also have to think about that at an economic level. The French and the Germans are increasingly trying to woo the Indians. They are trying to make huge business deals with India. They do not mention Kashmir, which pleases the Indians substantially. I am not saying that the business dynamic has to be the only consideration, but we could lose out if we mention Kashmir just for the sake of cosmetic reasons. The Kashmir issue will be between the Indians and the Pakistanis, so let the civilian Governments deal with it and let the military be muzzled in its interference. If we start heightening it to a political level, it will have only a negative impact, especially for this country, where our economic and strategic influence will wane.

Q75 Rory Stewart: Just to focus initially on that first question. A lot of the arguments about Afghanistan are actually about Pakistan. In Washington, people increasingly say that the reason why we need to keep an open-ended commitment in Afghanistan is because the security of Pakistan depends on Afghanistan. Do you think that that argument is correct, overstated or understated? To what extent does the future of Pakistan depend on exactly what happens in Afghanistan? Can the situation be contained and Pakistan depend on exactly what happens in Afghanistan? Can the situation be contained and Pakistan—why should India make massive concessions to a country that, as far as it is concerned, has been conducting militant terrorism against it with the excuse of Kashmir? If you were to concentrate on Kashmir, that would be a recipe for stalemate. You actually need to make progress on all these other things as well. Similarly—you didn’t ask about this—there is a line of thought that you need to concentrate
Q76 Rory Stewart: May I just reiterate my question? To what extent do you think that the security of Pakistan depends exclusively on what happens in Afghanistan, or can the situation in Afghanistan be contained and managed? How much does Pakistan need to be afraid of what is happening in Afghanistan?

Sir Hilary Synnott: Well, I thought that I had answered that with the spectre of ungoverned space. If we, if you like, fail in Afghanistan, you are left with ungoverned space where there will be a free-for-all involving not only insurgent groups, but all of Afghanistan’s neighbours. Of course, Pakistan would see many of Afghanistan’s neighbours as its enemies, especially India, which is a proximate neighbour. I could elaborate further, but I think, in a sense, I felt that I had addressed that.

Dr Gohel: The key to your question, Mr Stewart, is “Pashtunistan”. That is what concerns the Pakistanis. The Durand Line separated the Pashtun heartland, and there is an issue of whether it will ever be reunited. Afghans, mainly Pashtuns, have always had an aspirational issue to reunite it. Pakistan, of course, would be worried, because that takes away huge swathes of its land. That is the concern that the Pakistanis have, and that is something that needs to be addressed in the sense that the issue of “Pashtunistan” cannot be dealt with without meaning boundary changes, and without it affecting the territorial integrity of both countries. That is the concern that impacts on Pakistan, and that is predominantly why the Taliban have been used as a tool, because it negates the whole “Pashtunistan” issue.

Mike Gapes: Quickly, on the relations between India and Pakistan, earlier this week there was a report, which seems to have emanated from intelligence sources in India, of transcripts and documentation relating to the Mumbai terrorist attacks that put the blame firmly on elements within the Pakistani state—within the Pakistani intelligence and military. I would be interested in your reaction to that report. Do you think that it is accurate? If so, what are the implications for any prospect of improved relations between India and Pakistan? You have already referred to this question of what Zardari promised and then what General Kayani detailed, in terms of ISI cooperation. Where are we on that now?

Sir Hilary Synnott: The reports emanate from the evidence given by David Headley, who is of Pakistani origin despite the rather Anglo-Saxon name. He is making these allegations, which the Government of India are disseminating. There is certainly a Government of India position, denied by Pakistan, that implicates the ISI. There is quite a lot of circumstantial evidence suggesting some of the connections that the Mumbai terrorist group had, and to suggest that some of its facilities and actions could only have been achieved with very sophisticated assistance. So there is a circumstantial connection. The truth of the matter—I am not competent at all here, despite my previous connections with the Government—would be found in the depths of the most secret intelligence. I am quite certain that the Mumbai group emanated from Pakistan. What is far less certain is the extent to which there has been any officially sanctioned assistance. If there were to have been, that is of supreme importance. I think David Headley’s evidence has to be seen as the evidence of David Headley.

Dr Shaikh: These confessions are clearly symptomatic of the lack of civilian control over Pakistan’s military and intelligence agencies. I have already referred to the fact that attempts to bring both the army and its intelligence services under the control of the civilian Government have so far been unsuccessful. The current head of the ISI, General Shuja Pasha, is under increasing pressure to account for his organisation’s links with groups like Lashkar-e-Taïyiba, which have been implicated in the Bombay attacks.

There are two interesting points about these confessions, looking at what we have seen in the public domain. First, we are not really sure at what level precisely there was complicity. That there was complicity is now pretty much well established and well acknowledged, but one does not know at what level precisely there was complicity. Was it, in fact, at the very highest echelons of the ISI? Were there serving military officers within the ISI who were somehow involved? Were retired military officers of the ISI involved, or were there rogue elements of the ISI working beyond the remit of the organisation altogether? That remains a key issue.

But what is just as important is what is going on within the murky world of militancy in Pakistan, because one of the things that emerges very clearly from these confessions is that Lashkar-e-Taïyiba, which is implicated in these attacks, was encouraged to stage these attacks in an attempt to shore up its own credibility as one of the most powerful militant groups in Pakistan. That credibility had apparently come under challenge from other militant groups in Pakistan, who accused Lashkar-e-Taïyiba of not being up to the job—in other words, of not taking on the Pakistani state and not taking on the enemies of Pakistan. These confessions show precisely not only the lack of control by the civilian Government in Pakistan but also a very fast-changing and, I would say, fragmenting militant spectrum in Pakistan.

Dr Gohel: There are a few dynamics, and I will be brief as I know that time is limited. David Headley was introduced to Ilyas Kashmiri—a well-known terrorist connected to al-Qaeda—by a member of the Pakistani military. That is an official fact that has come out from US investigations. A couple of weeks ago Interpol issued arrest warrants for two current serving members of the ISI in connection with the Mumbai attacks. A very strange footnote on page 46 of Bob Woodward’s “Obama’s Wars” mentions the fact that the American investigation came to the conclusion that elements of the ISI were involved in the Mumbai attacks. Most relevant to all this are the audio messages of the Mumbai gunmen talking to their handlers. Some of their handlers were experienced in military techniques, in surveillance, in using weapons and in observation. This is not something that an average terrorist with the Lashkar-e-Taïyiba would necessarily know. That is the issue,
and the concern is: how much of a role did the ISI play?

As Dr Shaikh mentioned, in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, President Zardari offered to send the head of the ISI, General Pasha, to India to help, and the chief of army staff, General Kayani, said no. There was a potential concern that if a further investigation was conducted, it could implicate individuals within the ISI, and that is a problem. Look at the plot in the UK—the ammonium nitrate plot in 2004. Omar Khyam, the ringleader of the cell, gave testimony in court about how he had been recruited by the ISI to fight in the insurgency in Kashmir. The proceedings ended on the Friday, and when they subsequently resumed on the Monday, Omar Khyam revealed in court that he was no longer prepared to testify, because the ISI had visited his family over the weekend in Pakistan.

**Chair:** We have this in your written evidence. **Dr Gohel:** This is just to remind you.

Q77 **Sir Menzies Campbell:** Forgive me for not being present when all three of you began your evidence. Dr Shaikh, I was taken by your use of the metaphor of the nettle, and your saying that this was something that ought to be grasped. My recollection is that the late Robin Cook, both as shadow Foreign Secretary and indeed as Foreign Secretary, found it a rather painful process when he even got close to the nettle. That rather conditions British attitudes, not least because of the fact that many Members of Parliament have got constituencies in which there are sympathies in both directions, or in either direction. Indeed, some constituencies have got groups of people who are from both, as it were, traditions. Who would grasp this nettle, and what could Britain bring to the issue other than its colonial past?

**Dr Shaikh:** I used the word “nettle” advisedly, only to suggest just what a thorny problem this is. Really, the stakes are much too high now to continue to turn a blind eye, to use Prime Minister Cameron’s phrase, and look the other way. There is no doubt that the issue of Kashmir is important, and if the United States, the Quartet and the EU can deal with the equally thorny question of the Israeli-Palestinian problem, there is no reason why one shouldn’t even make some sort of move in the direction of mediation. This is a conflict; it has to be recognised as such. While I would agree with Sir Hilary that there are no easy solutions, that doesn’t mean that we don’t start talking about it. There is simply no point in denying that this is a conflict, and it is going to have to be talked, or to get them to resume their comprehensive dialogue in such a way that we don’t get the sort of incidents, or near-war, that we had in 1999—

**Q79 Sir Menzies Campbell:** Sir Hilary, could you give us a sentence or two? **Sir Hilary Synnott:** There are two aspects: one is practical and one is strategic. The practical one you have alluded to. The late Robin Cook got into deep trouble; Mr Miliband got into deep trouble in India; and Duncan Sydons got into trouble some decades before that. So there has been a succession of trouble for the British former colonial power. The other practical point is that if it is not us, who are supremely ill-placed to do it precisely because of our colonial history, then you have to look to the United States. The United States is developing a strategic relationship with India, and it has no interest in upsetting India on this. The strategic aspect has been mentioned, and the nub of the issue is sovereignty. In the Foreign Office, I spent five years of my life dealing with the Gibraltar issue. You can come up with devices on the backs of envelopes, but the bottom line is sovereignty—the sovereignty of the valley. With Jammu and Ladakh, there is no problem, but the valley is crucial. It is very difficult to see, given the polarisation of views at the moment, how that could be resolved. It could be managed, and I do think that vigorous efforts should continue to be made to try and keep the two sides talking, or to get them to resume their comprehensive dialogue in such a way that we don’t get the sort of incidents, or near-war, that we had in 1999—

**Q80 Sir Menzies Campbell:** A million men facing each other across the line of control. **Sir Hilary Synnott**—and in 2001, when both armies were mobilised. The risks of conflict are enormous, and we have not touched on nuclear issues. **Sir Menzies Campbell:** Thank you very much. We will see what we make of your competing views.

Q81 **Sir John Stanley:** As the Chairman said, Professor Gregory cannot be here today. In the very interesting paper that he has left for members of the Committee, he makes the point that in Afghanistan and Pakistan we are actually involved in three conflicts, in which there are very different degrees of co-operation by the Pakistan authorities with ISAF:
Afghanistan Taliban, in which we get a reasonable degree of co-operation; the war against the Afghanistan Taliban, in which we get de minimis co-operation, and the war against al-Qaeda, in which we get a reasonable degree of co-operation; the war against al-Qaeda, in which we get any improvement in Pakistani authorities co-operating with us in dealing with the Afghanistan Taliban. That is because to a very considerable degree we are over a barrel, as far as Pakistan is concerned, in terms of our military and intelligence requirements. We are over a barrel because about 80% of our supplies have to come up through Pakistan; because we are dependent on the Pakistanis for infrastructure base rights and overflight rights; because we are very dependent on some elements of the ISI for intelligence on al-Qaeda; and, last but not by no means least, because we are crucially reliant on the Pakistani military authorities and the ISI to ensure that Pakistan’s nuclear weapons stay out of terrorist hands.

I would be grateful to know whether you agree with that analysis. If that analysis is correct, it calls into question the whole basis of whether we are going to achieve any degree of success in Afghanistan. If we cannot get vastly improved co-operation by the Pakistani authorities against the Afghanistan Taliban, it looks as if we face years of stalemate and loss of life and will not achieve success in the end.

**Dr Shaikh:** I’ll kick off. To me, the big elephant in the room is the question: why doesn’t Pakistan co-operate in Afghanistan? The discussion we have just had should point us in that direction. In other words, I am trying to say that Pakistan believes it has—

[Interruption.]

**Chair:** Sorry to interrupt you. This is a democracy here, and that bell means there is a vote, so we are going to adjourn. I do apologise.

**Dr Shaikh:** Not at all.

*Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.*

*On resuming—*

**Chair:** We are now back in session, and on the record.

**Q82 Sir John Stanley:** To provide continuity, my key question to you is whether you agree with Professor Gregory’s view that in the critical area of securing Pakistan co-operation with ISAF in dealing with the Afghanistan Taliban, we are over a barrel—that was the phrase I used—in terms of our dependence on them for critical military resources, security of their nuclear weapons, intelligence on al-Qaeda and so on. Perhaps you could respond to that.

**Dr Shaikh:** I was beginning to say that the big question is: why hasn’t the international community been able to secure Pakistan’s co-operation more effectively in Afghanistan? My answer to that is quite simply that Pakistan—particularly its military and intelligence agencies, who have always jealously guarded their control over Pakistan’s policy towards Afghanistan—believes that it has legitimate and vital security interests in Afghanistan. Those security interests are overwhelmingly, as I suggested earlier, seen through the prism of Pakistan’s relations with India.

To my mind, Pakistan might yet be prepared to cooperate in Afghanistan, but for a price that the international community, particularly the United States, is likely to consider altogether too high. At the moment we have a strategic dialogue going on in Washington between the US and Pakistan; it is understood that Pakistan now will be holding out, not just for millions of extra dollars in US economic and particularly military assistance—they are talking about a new military security pact between the US and Pakistan over five years, worth some $2 billion—but for a civilian nuclear deal, as well. Pakistan is also holding out for the United States to mediate on the issue of Kashmir; and, of course, Pakistan also wants better access to US markets. All of this is a tall order, and many in Pakistan understand this.

The question is whether there is some sort of common minimum that Pakistan might be prepared to settle for to ensure its co-operation in Afghanistan. I believe that there is, and that there might be grounds for beginning some sort of a dialogue on an issue that has long troubled Pakistan, which, of course, isn’t India’s presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan has raised repeated concerns over Indian consulates, particularly in Jalalabad and Kandahar, which Pakistan’s military is convinced are used as listening posts and centres for India’s intelligence agencies to spy on Pakistan. Of course, Pakistan wants the international community to set certain limits on India’s involvement in Afghan reconstruction. There are some minimum grounds on which one can begin to address, perhaps not wholly, some of Pakistan’s security interests—vis-a-vis India, which could advance the programme towards some kind of settlement in Afghanistan.

**Sir Hilary Synnott:** Your question was about whether we agree with Shaun Gregory’s strategic analysis. Yes, I totally agree with the analysis about the distinction between al-Qaeda, the Pakistan Taliban and the Afghan Taliban; I think it is spot on.

On whether therefore the Pakistanis have us over a barrel, my answer is largely yes. The only way in which they might not have is if their strategic interests could be brought closer to ours. At the moment, they are convinced that we are about to leave because of what President Obama said last December about the start of the withdrawal. As long as they have that conviction, they have got us over a barrel. You would then go on to draw some other conclusions, and that basically rests on the question of what we are going to do in mid-2011. Are we going to cut and run? What will be the nature of our relationship? As I say, they believe that we are going to, therefore they won’t change their strategy in relation to the Afghan Taliban.

**Dr Gohel:** To add one component to Professor Gregory’s analysis, which I agree with, you also have to factor in the Punjabi Taliban, which has emerged in the last year, based in southern Punjab, operating throughout the Punjab territory and carrying out attacks also in northern Sindh. The relevance is that they have been attacking the convoys that are travelling to Afghanistan. These convoys are not being attacked on the border region; they are being attacked in the heartlands, in Rawalpindi and in
Sheikhupura. That goes back to the underlying problem that the Pakistani military will not dismantle the infrastructure of the Afghan Taliban because they still view them as potentially an asset to regain a foothold in Afghanistan. The paradox is that the Afghan Taliban co-operate with the Pakistan Taliban who, in turn, carry out attacks against the military. The problem is not going to go away. The military spent an enormous amount of time and effort in the '90s to support and assist the Afghan Taliban, giving them strategic depth in Afghanistan which they'd never had before and, for once and for all in their minds, it put an end to the whole “Pashtunistan” issue, which subsequently, since 9/11, has re-emerged. They are not going to give up something that they invested so much time in just because the West is getting angry. As Sir Hilary mentioned, they are fully aware of the deadlines that western countries are imposing. They are going to work towards that for their own strategic benefit and, unfortunately, I don’t see how the situation against the Afghan Taliban is going to change in any way. It’s going to create problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the Punjab Taliban will create problems in Pakistan. The whole security situation will remain problematic.

Q83 Sir John Stanley: As you know, the role of this Committee is, above all, to scrutinise the foreign policy of the British Government and my second remaining question relates directly to that responsibility. It is commonplace to say that the perception in the villages, in the fields and in the streets of Afghanistan is the question of what the people of Afghanistan believe is going to be the outcome, and who is going to come out on top. That is absolutely critical to the stance that the people of Afghanistan take towards ISAF. It is also said that, if those contributing military forces state dates by which they are going to come out or to end combat operations, that directly undermines a perception that ISAF is going to achieve success in Afghanistan. Do you think it was wise or not so wise of the present British Government to state that, by 2015, they are going to cease involvement in combat operations in Afghanistan?

Dr Gohel: We should feel very proud of what our armed services have done in Afghanistan. When it came to dealing with the Taliban in the south, the UK put itself forward in 2006. In the aftermath of 9/11, all the European countries that are part of NATO agreed that Afghanistan was of critical importance, and the European allies in NATO. I think that the deadline is based on the fact that the Canadians, who have also fought in the south, and the Dutch, too, have put a timetable into place. I think it would be a mistake to have a premature timetable—one that feeds into the mindset that we are going to leave and that the Taliban can simply just wait and take their opportunities when they come. However, one assumes that the Government's deadline can be flexible if it needs to be, and that it is not etched in stone. We need to make that clear, so that the Taliban are aware that the timetable can be flexible. Going on about the timetable and articulating the position that we will stick to it will only feed into those who want to create chaos in Afghanistan.

Sir Hilary Synnott: My view is that, if you look at it solely from the perspective of operations in Afghanistan or Pakistan, it would have been better if a timetable had not been specified, but of course the decision must take in other factors that you are better informed about than I am—domestic, political and financial factors. Looked at purely through the prism of the area, however, it would have been better not to have done it.

Dr Sheikh: This is the conundrum, and I don't think that anyone has yet found a way of squaring the circle. Obviously, political exigencies dictate that the political leadership here in Britain and elsewhere heed their constituencies at home, and there is no doubt that those constituencies want the boys back home as quickly as possible; whereas military strategy, of course, demands keeping military timetables and plans for withdrawal as flexible as possible. Trying to bridge the gap between the two has proved to be extremely difficult. I don’t think there has yet been a satisfactory way of doing this. What I do believe is that we can be far from sure today that, even if troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan tomorrow and more or less successful talks took place in Afghanistan, the war in Pakistan would come to an end. I do not believe that. There is a war going on in Pakistan which is very likely to persist long after withdrawal of foreign troops, if that is on the agenda, and even if talks were successful in Afghanistan. That is a possibility that we must face squarely at this point.

Q84 Mr Baron: History suggests—one thinks of Malaya—that one of the preconditions for a successful counter-insurgency campaign is control of the borders. That is obviously not what is happening between Pakistan and Afghanistan at the moment, and one sympathises to a certain extent because the border has always been porous, and probably will be for all the reasons we know. Can you elaborate a little more on whether you believe, and how helpful it could be if, at least, progress could be made on the issues surrounding the Durand Line, not only to the extent or the influence it would have on improving control of the border—although one accepts that it has always been porous—but in improving the wider picture of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the hope that Pakistan could play a more constructive role in progress generally?

Dr Gohel: The Durand Line is key—it is the key issue that has created problems between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Our British colonial legacy created that problem in the first place. It is a sticking point to the Pashtuns in Afghanistan, it is a concern for the military in Pakistan, and if it can be resolved—if there can be an agreement, or if there can be a working establishment to try to see what the end goal can be, while protecting the territorial integration of both
countries—that would go a long way to dealing with the situation. But it keeps going back to the whole issue that the Pakistani military is worried that the “Pashtunistan” issue will be addressed, that the Durand Line is the thorn, so they will continue to support the Taliban. It is a vicious cycle. The Durand Line is the key platform that has resulted in the fact that the Pakistani military will continue to support the Afghan Taliban, and it will be the issue that must be addressed, otherwise, I can’t see the situation altering in any way.

It is very porous. In many ways, the Durand Line was created not out of respect for the ethnic and tribal cleavages, but more because of geographical factors. That has to be addressed, because that was always the sticking point when it was originally envisaged.

Dr Shaikh: My own view is that, while officially Pakistan’s stance right from the outset has been to press for the formal recognition of the Durand Line, Pakistan’s military has in practice been rather more ambivalent about this border. I am among those such as Ahmed Rashid who have argued that Pakistan’s military would choose to keep this border porous, because it allows the military and Pakistan’s military establishment to gain access to Central Asia—Pakistan has developed interests in Central Asia—and in order for those interests to expand, Pakistan needs a porous border.

More importantly, Pakistan needs this sort of porous border—so says its military—in order to give substance to the military’s policy of strategic depth. We all thought that the military had abandoned that notion in this age of modern warfare, but General Kayani is on record as having said that he subscribes to the idea of strategic depth, which he describes as being synonymous with a friendly Afghanistan. As I said, to my mind there is rather more ambivalence on the part of Pakistan’s military towards the Durand Line than is generally acknowledged or recognised.

Sir Hilary Synnott: I think a focus of attention on the Durand Line would not help for two reasons. The sanctification of the Durand Line as an international border would not help control of borders—your Malaya parallel—because of the terrain and because the Durand Line splits villages and tribes. The social aspects can’t be changed by an international border.

Politically, I don’t see it as feasible for the reasons described. I would think that there would be a solidification of Afghan nationalism if you were to focus on it as a dealmaker, which would prevent this from happening. As a pragmatist, I would take the view that this is a problem best dealt with by management rather than by solution, and that you focus on other issues.

Q85 Mr Baron: Can I move on and look at what seems to many to be Pakistan positioning itself with regard to peace talks going forward? We haven’t really touched on the arrest of Mullah Baradar. In the past, the ISI has provided sanctuary to one or two Taliban leaders, yet here we have them arresting a key—what key—military commander. It does suggest, and many people believe, that this is a way of the ISI and the Pakistan military demanding a position at the table when it comes to peace talks on one form or another. I would suggest, being devil’s advocate, that it highlights a bigger problem—one that brings us back to the very first question in many respects. Who is in charge in Pakistan? That makes the whole issue very difficult. The ISI is arresting people and President Karzai is falling out with the Pakistani Government because they are not extraditing key figures back to Afghanistan. That highlights a potential problem going forward. Who do we trust or to whom can we turn within Pakistan when it comes to this important issue of peace talks around the table?

Sir Hilary Synnott: Perhaps I can kick off. The circumstances of that arrest are swathed in murkiness: was it a chance arrest, or was it fixed; what was the CIA doing and so on? You ask for a judgment and mine is that this has developed into a very clear Pakistani signal that any back channel talks with so-called moderate Taliban must include Pakistan, and they will make sure of that. It is a major national Pakistani interest to ensure that any talks include them, so special channels to Karzai won’t be feasible without Pakistani involvement.

Who do we trust in Pakistan? I hesitate to answer that question in a public forum. I would only say, let us make sure we look at these issues through their perspective, not ours, and realise that their interests are not the same as ours. If you look at it very coldly in that way, that gives you lots of indications and limits your expectations about the art of the possible.

Dr Shaikh: I would certainly go along with that. We all know, or think we know, the circumstances of Mullah Baradar’s arrest. Of course, the reports are that he has been released since and that now he is sitting in Afghanistan, but I think what Sir Hilary makes very clear is that it sent out a signal from Pakistan’s military and its intelligence agencies that there can be no peace in Afghanistan unless Pakistan wants it—“We expect to be given a top table and to be in a position to influence, if not dictate, the direction of these talks and, of course, the identities of the key players”. I think that’s one point.

On the question of who one trusts and where power resides, again this is a conundrum. The international community has no alternative but to trust and work with the military, because it’s the military that are doing the fighting for the international community. That’s the bottom line in Pakistan. However much the international community wants to support a civilian, democratically-elected dispensation, ultimately the international community is constrained by its dependence on Pakistan’s military. The international community knows that this is a military that will ultimately work for its own interests and that, more often than not, these interests are at cross-purposes with the interests of the international community as a whole, but the international community has no choice—no choice as long as it depends on Pakistan to do much of the fighting on the other side of the Durand Line.
always denied that there was any Taliban presence in some of the major cities, yet suddenly Mullah Baradar is produced. Obviously, he decided to act independently to negotiate with Karzai, but Mullah Baradar can’t be seen as a moderate Taliban. He was a hardcore extremist, part of the whole repressive policy that the Taliban implemented in Afghanistan, but he was an opportunist who saw that perhaps the only way to gain a foothold in Afghanistan was to talk to Karzai. However, he’s no longer relevant, after having been arrested. He’s a bit player at best. The thing is that the Pakistanis very clearly want to influence who is going to play the negotiating role in Afghanistan. They have a valid interest of course, being a neighbour, but what worries me is that the type of individuals they want to promote are the type of people who will send Afghanistan back to the stone age. These are the types of Taliban faction that are opposed to the rights of women and opposed to the ethnic minorities getting any political power. They will also allow greater cultivation of the poppies and, most importantly, they have no problem in rehousing al-Qaeda and affiliates. This assumption that if the Taliban somehow come back into Afghanistan, that doesn’t mean that al-Qaeda and the affiliates will come in, is ludicrous. They are co-operating right now on terrorist plots—the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistan Taliban, al-Qaeda. They will do it again, and if these types of elements are brought into the negotiating process and gain power, we are heading into very dark times in Afghanistan.

Q86 Mr Baron: A final question in this group, if I may. We have been questioning you for the best part of two hours and we have discussed the various problems about Kashmir, the Durand Line and the differences within Pakistan. I am perhaps being devil’s advocate here, but forgive me, I have not heard many positive messages back about the role that Pakistan can play in helping us to achieve a successful outcome in Afghanistan. Our remit here is to scrutinise the British Government in trying to determine whether our policy is right in Afghanistan. I have not had many positive messages back. If I pinned down each of you and asked what do we have to do to succeed in Afghanistan, from this perspective of Pakistan, what would your answers be and what do you think our chances of success are? At the moment British troops are dying. We seem to have a conflict of purpose not only with the international community, but, I would say, with the vast majority of the people in Pakistan.

Q87 Mr Roy: Can I take you to the area that relates to the Obama Administration’s “AfPak” strategy? There are three points that I would like to address. How does the US reassure Pakistan that it has its best interests at heart? What leverage does it have over Pakistan? And—yes or no—does it mean that the US can ultimately rely, and know that it can rely, on Pakistan as a partner, bearing in mind this strategy? Has it made a difference?

Sir Hilary Synnott: Of course, the United States do not have Pakistan’s best interest at heart; they have their own interests at heart. At the risk of sounding flippant, the US could do a lot to reassure Pakistan by making fewer mistakes—and they have made some serious mistakes. To give a brief example, in September 2008, ground forces landed on Pakistan territory in hot pursuit. That was a tactical choice and a major strategic mistake, which mobilised Pakistani opinion against them. So it will be very difficult for the United States to persuade Pakistan that they are acting in Pakistan’s interests.

I think the civil aid package will do a lot to help, because at the moment the people of Pakistan think that the United States are just pursuing US war aims. There have been no benefits to the ordinary people of Pakistan. If the United States can mobilise their aid programme so that it has an effect on the ground, that will help, and they are making efforts to do that, led by Mr Holbrooke. There is very little leverage in the form of coercion. In the form of persuasion and having their legitimate concerns met, the United States could do more. They could ensure that there is a greater transparency about
the use of American money, about which, notoriously, there has been very little accountability. That could be improved. It won’t do away with corruption, but it could be better. So they need to make more effort on that, which they are doing, but it is difficult.

I think that the earlier discussion has suggested that there are limitations on Pakistan as a partner; Pakistan will never share all US interests. President Obama has made it clear that he sees the Afghan Taliban as pretty much as bad as al-Qaeda. That’s not how Pakistan sees it. As much as anything, I think, it’s about a realisation that there are divergent interests and trying to manage those divergences.

**Q88 Mr Roy:** In relation to the Obama change in the “AfPak” strategy, how did that go down in Pakistan? **Sir Hilary Synnott:** Well, bits of it should have gone down well. The aid package should have gone down well, but as has been mentioned earlier, the conditionality of it backfired and was seen as a sort of American neo-imperialism. What went down really badly and the biggest single problem was the date—that the American combat forces would start to withdraw in mid-2011. That was seen in Pakistan as absolute confirmation that the United States would be turning its back on the problem, as they did in 1989.

There is a narrative in Pakistan: they are waiting for the fourth American betrayal, the first two being two wars against India, the third in 1989, and this one they see as a fourth betrayal. **Dr Shaikh:** Taking instructions, I will be very brief. Let me just say that the attempts to transform or recast US-Pakistan relations from a business transaction to a partnership between allies has been less than successful. That is the first point. There have been several reasons why the relationship has run into difficulty, but really at the top of the list I would place the extremely damaging consequences of drone strikes in Pakistan. As long as these drone strikes continue, it is going to be extremely difficult for the United States to impress upon Pakistan and its people—[Interruption.]

**Chair:** I am told there are now endless votes coming, so I am going to adjourn the session. On behalf of Parliament, I apologise. This is a fairly unprecedented afternoon. I understand agreements on voting have been broken and there is chaos going on in the Chamber. There are a number of questions outstanding. We will write to you with those questions, and I hope that you will be able to answer them. On behalf of everybody here, thank you very much.
Tuesday 9 November 2010

Members present:

Richard Ottaway (Chair)
Mr Bob Ainsworth
Mr John Baron
Sir Menzies Campbell
Mike Gapes
Andrew Rosindell
Mr Frank Roy
Sir John Stanley
Rory Stewart
Dave Watts

Examination of Witness

Witness: Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, KCMG LVO, former HM Ambassador to Kabul, and former Special Representative of the Foreign Secretary for Afghanistan and Pakistan, gave evidence.

Q99 Chair: I welcome members of the public to this sitting of the Foreign Affairs Committee. It is an evidence-taking session in our process of producing a report on policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Our main witness for the first part of today's sitting is Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, who retired from the Foreign Office at the end of October. He was our Ambassador in Kabul from May 2007 to February 2009, and the Foreign Secretary's Special Representative from February 2009 to September 2010.

Sir Sherard, thank you very much for coming along. You are very welcome. Is there anything you would like to say at the start, or shall we go straight into questions?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Perhaps I could make a couple of comments. First, thank you for inviting me; as a former official, I am very flattered to be asked. I know and have met many of the members of the Committee in my professional career as a diplomat. That includes the former Secretary of State for Defence, Bob Ainsworth, who is with us today, and the hon. Member for Penrith and the Border, Rory Stewart—we worked together in Kabul on a number of projects, and we were there as recently as March.

I particularly welcome your inquiry because, with the mid-term elections in the United States behind us, we have a major American review of policy coming up next month. If I may say so, I think that the Committee’s inquiry is very timely, because the central lesson that I took away from my three and a half years working in and on Afghanistan is that it is a political problem that needs political treatment and a political process. It is a political and a regional problem, and it is time for the politicians to take charge of the project, as I believe the new coalition Government is doing. That is another reason why the interest of this Committee is so important and so timely.

Q99 Chair: Thank you. That was a very helpful kick-off. Following on from that, do you think that the present Government have the right strategy in their approach to Afghanistan?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Yes, I do. I was lucky enough to be present at a seminar at Chequers that the Prime Minister convened on 1 June. It was very much in the style of the seminars that Mrs Thatcher used to convene at crucial points in policy making. Outsiders, including Rory Stewart, were at an opening session; and then officials and Ministers were together, drawing conclusions for policy.

I do not think that I am breaking any secrets if I say that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, the Foreign and Defence Secretaries and other Ministers present, drew what I believe is the right conclusion—that this needs a political approach. But at the same time, we need to show unstinting support for our military effort, and it is particularly timely two days before 11 November that we pay tribute to what our troops are doing. However, military effort by itself is not enough. It is not grand strategy. As General David Richards would be the first to acknowledge—and, indeed, General Petraeus—the military campaign is about suppressing locally and temporarily the symptoms of a very serious disease, which is affecting the whole of the Afghan polity, not just the Pashtun areas in the south and east, or the Pashtun pockets in the north.

Afghanistan needs a new political and regional settlement, which cannot be delivered by military force. Military force can contribute—there is no military solution but, equally, there is no non-military solution. Military force plays a part but, in my view and my experience, it should and must be a subsidiary part. That is why politicians like you—like this Committee—need to develop and encourage the vision of a political approach to solving the underlying tensions that are giving rise to the violence.

Q99 Chair: When you say that it is time for the politicians to take charge, there is a slight inference that they are not currently in charge. Could you elaborate on that point?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: If I may be pedantic, it is your inference, Mr Chairman, not my implication. My message really is that we have got, on both sides of the Atlantic, extremely capable and enthusiastic, unquenchably optimistic and fiercely loyal—to their institutions and countries—military machines, which have naturally adopted a can-do attitude and driven forward. This has distorted the understanding of the problem, because the real problem is much deeper. It is a problem to do with the fact that the peace that was negotiated at Petersberg outside Bonn in December 2001 was a victors' peace—the vanquished were not present. The constitution, which we are
Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: It has got to be top down and bottom up—easy to say, difficult to do, but no other solution will work. We need to remember that the Afghan army, which is only 3% southern Pashtun, is almost as alien to the farmers of the Helmand valley as the 3rd Battalion The Rifles or the 82nd Airborne Division of the United States army.

Chair: I think some of my colleagues will come back to you later on that.

Q92 Mr Roy: Sir Sherard, may I take you to our relations with the United States and our influence, whatever that might be? You insist that Britain should support the United States and are quoted as saying, “We should tell them that we want to be part of a winning strategy, not a losing one”. What is the reality in relation to the influence that we can bring to bear on United States thinking on both Afghanistan and Pakistan?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Well, that quotation you attribute to me I think comes from a French diplomatic cable which was the result of a lunch with my deputy in Kabul, but the author bigged it up in order to impress people in Paris. It is not something that I ever recall saying.

The central point, if I may say so, is more important than anything else. Only the United States can succeed in this venture. America is necessary, but not enough for a solution. One of our chief roles, and one of the chief benefits of our massive contribution, is the influence that it gives us with the American military and in Washington. I would like to go into that more during the private session. David Miliband and I worked extremely hard over 15 months to proselytise for a political solution and process, with some success. My friend, colleague and sometimes sparring partner, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, gets Afghanistan in the way that few other American policy makers do. He is a highly intelligent man, who understands from his days as a foreign service officer in south Vietnam about the nature of insurgency and the need for a political solution to the problems. However, the problem often lies elsewhere in Washington. Sometimes, if the only or main tool in the toolbox is a hammer, every problem can look like a nail. I know that the Prime Minister understands that. We need to give an American Administration the courage and the cover to start on a political process.

In February 1963, after the United States army and marine corps had won a great victory over the Viet Cong and the north Vietnamese army, the dean of American broadcasters, the David Dimbleby of the time, spoke to the American people on CBS evening news on 23 February. He said, “The best we can hope for is a military stalemate. We need a negotiated solution; an honourable and political way out for an honourable people that have done their best”.

It is about encouraging all the good instincts of the Obama Administration, as set out in the Bob Woodward book. Britain is uniquely well placed to do that and Ambassador Holbrooke is one of those who really understands that. If I may say so, General McChrystal also understood it and General Petraeus understands it. Moving America in that direction, when many Americans think that the Taliban were somehow directly responsible for 9/11—they were indirectly, but they were not actually horrified immediately after the event at the way their hospitality had been abused—is difficult in American politics. Britain can help do that.

Q93 Mr Roy: Are we major or minor?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: We are major. We are very much premier league and everyone else is sort of champions league.

Q94 Mr Roy: Everyone else?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Yes, everyone else in terms of contribution, influence and access, intelligence, military and diplomatic matters. A member of my staff was in Holbrooke’s office and we had a member of Holbrooke’s team in my office in London. We are major league, but if you read the Woodward book, you see that most of it is inside baseball between the players in Washington and on the ground. Perhaps we could go into more of that in the private session.

Q95 Mr Baron: Sir Sherard, may I turn to your thoughts about the very public announcement that the Government plan to withdraw troops by 2015 as an outer deadline? For some, that presented a bit of a mixed message. One moment we are focusing on conditions—and achieving those conditions—for a full withdrawal, and the next we are setting a deadline. The two things do not sit easily next to each other. Critics would point to the fact that that could be exploited by the Taliban to convey the impression that they are on the road to victory so there is no need to negotiate. It may encourage the Afghan people to just
Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: I support the idea of deadlines. I didn’t initially when I first arrived there, but the Taliban can read the politics of the western troop-contributing democracies as well as anybody. They are perfectly aware that American troops are due to start leaving in July next year and that the next British general election, all being well, will be in May 2015. The Prime Minister has said that our troops will be out of combat, not out of Afghanistan. I have always thought that a long-term definition of success in Afghanistan will be, “Are troops out of combat?” We won’t be seeing Helmand and the tribal areas garrisoned by anyone very much—perhaps the towns and the roads—but we will have a long-term British military training mission in Afghanistan, and DFID needs to be in Afghanistan for 50 years. I think a deadline helps show the Taliban something that President Obama very wisely said in one of his early interviews. Contrary to what some of the neo-cons had said, President Obama told The New York Times, I believe, a month or so after he took office that America sought no long-term, permanent presence in Afghanistan.

Of course, most Afghans believe that we and America are there to seek some long-term military presence, some kind of neo-colonial, long-term hegemony over the area. They don’t believe that rationally—many people in Helmand believe that we are there to avenge the battle of Maiwand—but they do believe it, so announcing that we are going, that we are getting out of combat, is a good thing, in my view. It was a courageous thing for the Prime Minister to do, and the right thing.

Q96 Mr Baron: Do you not accept, though, that there is a danger in sending mixed messages? We seem to be saying that we will leave in 2015 whether we have achieved our objectives or not. That can be a dangerous message to send out.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: It is a risk, and it needs to be accompanied with a vigorous political process and strategy. As with strikes by our special forces, you need to strike with one hand and offer a political process with the other. In Northern Ireland, every armoured vehicle had on the side an 0800 number for people to use to signal that they were wanting to come over. In my view, the tragedy of NATO policy in Afghanistan is that we have had far too much of the right hand and not enough of the left hand. You need both: you need the political process to harvest politically the success that the military is delivering.

Q97 Mr Ainsworth: Sir Sherard, 2015 is not far away. You spoke about the lack of understanding in large parts of America about the limitations of the military alone to achieve anything in Afghanistan, but we have invested an awful lot of blood and treasure in Afghanistan, particularly since 2006. Looking forward, what do you think is likely to happen when we leave and the Afghan operation is over?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: If we were to leave precipitately, there would be chaos. There would be civil war and a battle across the south between the Taliban and the narco-mafia, broadly defined. We have not really succeeded in building a durable causeway of good governance between the narco-mafia on the one hand and the Taliban on the other. What many southern Afghans want to know is who will be in charge of their village or valley five months or five years from now, and they will back the winner. For many of them, the Taliban are harsher but fairer than a predatory narco-mafia/Afghan Government. I strongly oppose too precipitate a withdrawal of troops, which would do great dishonour to the sacrifice of our troops, and undo, or threaten, everything that has been achieved for the people of Afghanistan. I am glad to see that some of the members of the Troops Out Movement, with whom I have debated in the past, have adopted a more nuanced approach to this recently, and that is a very good thing.

The key question—this was Mr Baron’s question—is how you accompany a military draw-down with a serious political process. The analogy that I have used—I thought of it a few weeks ago—is of a double-decker bus. You need an American chassis, an American engine, an American driver and an American sat-nav system. The passengers on the lower deck of the bus will be the internal parties. This is about far more than just talking to the Taliban; the Tajiks are increasingly alienated. On the top deck of the bus, you have all the external parties. The largest passenger will be Pakistan, but India, China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the emirates and the lower tier of the -stans will all be there. The bus will be painted in Afghan colours and have a UN conductor on each floor and, with luck, a British back-seat driver.

The only question, I think, is not whether there’s a negotiated withdrawal; there will be a negotiated end to this conflict, as to all conflicts. The question is, do we get ahead of the tide of history? Do we have the confidence and courage to say, “Look, this needs a comprehensive negotiated solution, regionally and internally”, or do we say, “We don’t want to get involved. We’ll subcontract it to the Afghans and the Pakistanis”? In the end, we want what the Taliban want, which is the withdrawal of foreign forces. The conversation is about the conditions accompanying those foreign forces. If we want to protect what has been achieved, we will do it best, in my view—and, if I may say so, in the view of your former colleague, David Miliband, in his article as Foreign Secretary in The New York Review of Books, and, I believe, of the present Minister as well—by having the confidence to take the initiative ourselves rather than saying, “After you, Claude”, and letting it drift on.

Q98 Mr Ainsworth: Forgive me, but what is precipitate? You’ve just told John Baron that 2015 was a good idea, with no conditions base. That is about four years away now, yet you’re saying that precipitate withdrawal would be a disaster. What is precipitate?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Precipitate is starting to withdraw next month or next year. It is pulling back significant numbers of troops and just evacuating...
areas and letting chaos reign. Nothing that has been achieved will be preserved or sustained unless it’s accompanied by a political settlement. Even the Afghan army at its very best and the Afghan national security forces are not going to be able to hold these areas absent a political settlement.

Q99 Rory Stewart: Sherard, you said very clearly that you and the former Foreign Secretary were pushing very hard for a political solution. I think the sense, to follow on from the Chairman, is that you felt you didn’t make as much progress as you would have liked. You’ve been very diplomatic about the military and their position, but there’s certainly a sense that what the MOD was pursuing was slightly at odds with that political solution. As the Foreign Affairs Committee, we’re here to look at the relationship between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. Do you have some practical suggestions or between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Committee, we’re here to look at the relationship that political solution. As the Foreign Affairs Committee, we’re here to look at the relationship between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. Do you have some practical suggestions or thoughts—going forward, not backward—on how one could get the relationship a little bit better in terms of how soldiers relate to political priorities?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Well, that, my lord, is what is called a leading question. I do have a number of practical suggestions; perhaps we can go into more detail in the private session.

I think it is a question of politicians and civilian officials having the confidence to question some of the very optimistic military advice they get. I’m not in any way blaming the military—you couldn’t have a serious military unless they were incurably optimistic—but I saw in my three and a half years papers that went to Ministers that were misleadingly optimistic. Officials and Ministers who questioned them were accused of being defeatist or disloyal in some way.

One of the most moving experiences for me as Ambassador was in Helmand, when a young and very courageous officer in the Grenadier Guards came up to me and said he’d been at school with one of my sons. He said, “Can I have a private word with you, Sir? The strategy isn’t working, but whenever I try to report that up the line, my superiors say I’m being defeatist or disloyal in some way.

The truth is that in 2001, when our special forces and intelligence services helped the northern warlords to push the Taliban out of power, first in Kabul and then in Kandahar, the Taliban weren’t defeated. They were pushed south and east and down, but they were never defeated. They were pushed out of power, but they weren’t defeated and they were not part of the subsequent political settlement. They are violent; they are getting better, but it’s tactics without grand strategy and without a political approach. It is suppressing locally and temporarily the symptoms of the disease. It is not curing the disease.

Q100 Rory Stewart: Just following on from that, if we are to get ourselves, by 2015, to a situation in which we have ceased combat operations and are training and doing special forces, how are we, as the British Government, going to get the British Army in a position to be ready for 2015? Many senior generals are still saying, “It’s got to be conditions-based. This is a fungible deadline. We’ve got to stick with Petraeus all the way”. So what practically does one do to get us from where we are to where we want to be in 2015, in terms of the military?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: It’s not a question of Britain doing it alone. There’s a great conceit, really. I remember that when I first started as Ambassador there was a stack of papers headed “The United Kingdom strategy for Afghanistan” and “The United Kingdom strategy for Helmand”. The reality is that the United Kingdom cannot and should not have an independent strategy for Helmand or for Afghanistan. This is part of a collective effort.

We still deceive ourselves in thinking that we can somehow operate independently, but we can have a major influence on collective strategy, above all through our relationship with the United States. It is very much about the civilian side of the US Administration, the US Embassy, the State Department, the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency all making the kind of input that is necessary for an orchestrated de-escalation of military operations and a move towards the kind of new, negotiated, fair, political settlement that includes all parties to this multi-decade, multidimensional, multifaceted conflict. That is terribly easy to say in a Committee Room in the House of Commons, but difficult to deliver on the ground. But the truth is that the Afghans know how to do it. The system is called jirga—in Arabic it’s called shura. It is about sitting together and thrashing out your differences.

Q101 Sir John Stanley: Sir Sherard, you pronounce yourself satisfied with the British Government strategy towards Afghanistan, and I assume that you are satisfied therefore with the broad ISAF strategy. But do you think that we have a satisfactory strategy to deal with what appears to me to be the single most corrosive area of impact on the effectiveness of the Karzai Government: the exercise of power by the Karzai Government: the exercise of power by the Taliban through fear, intimidation, risk to family and cold-blooded murder? We see right now a systematic programme of assassination of government officials in Kandahar, as they try to see who exerts the real authority in that crucial city. Do we have a policy that can deal satisfactorily with the exercise of power through fear?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: No; clearly, Sir John, we don’t; but as in Northern Ireland, Malaya, Palestine, Vietnam and Algeria, the solution is not going to be to try to suppress it by force alone. You need to protect the population, but to make the young men who are mounting the violence feel that they have a political stake in modern Afghanistan. The truth is that in 2001, when our special forces and our intelligence services helped the northern warlords to push the Taliban out of power, first in Kabul and then in Kandahar, the Taliban weren’t defeated. They were pushed south and east and down, but they were never defeated. They were pushed out of power, but they weren’t defeated and they were not part of the subsequent political settlement. They are violent; they are unpleasant. But, in my view, for many southern Pashtuns they represent a less bad alternative—a fairer, more predictable alternative than a corrupt and predatory Government. That is why we need to use military force, but it must be accompanied by a political outreach and a sense that these people can be brought into a fair, political settlement.

Chair: Sir Sherard, that’s very helpful. Thank you. You have indicated that you would like to say some
Q102 Sir John Stanley: Could you tell us what in your judgment would be the minimum settlement that the Taliban would accept, taking in and getting support for that settlement from their top leadership in Pakistan?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Yes. Very, very good question—and very difficult. As you know, Sir John, from your experience as a Minister in Northern Ireland, one cannot know when one enters a negotiation how it will end up. People’s opening positions are not necessarily their concluding positions. All I can say is that from intelligence, from the websites and from my talks with people with access to the Taliban, it’s rather like the FLN in Algeria, the IRA or any resistance movement—for example, the Jewish resistance movement against our presence in Palestine. There is a moderate camp that is fed up with fighting and that wants a political deal, and there are hard-line rejectors.

The key to a successful negotiation is to engage those moderates, that being a relative term. There has been plenty of signalling that they realise they made very serious mistakes during their last time in power. It is rather like a political party here reinventing its policies in opposition. You have the new Taliban—I suggested once that their symbol should be a red rose, because they like roses—and many of their extreme policies have been abandoned. You’ll be able to watch television; they’ve said that they will allow girls to go to school; and they have said that beards will not be compulsory. They’ve realised that they made some horrific mistakes, but there’s an old guard sitting there in Quetta and in Karachi who need to be isolated. We need to drive a wedge. Pakistan and the Afghans need to work with us but, in the end, it needs America in there, because only America will be trusted as the authoritative interlocutor.

President Karzai is a much better man than he is made out to be. He’s gone from hero to zero, but the truth is somewhere in between. He’s a great king, but a poor chief executive. He’s never going to be seen as the credible interlocutor for the Taliban. You need a four-way conversation—America, Pakistan, the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan. The key link in that is a serious discussion between quiet and muscular American diplomacy and the Taliban we can find. The longer we leave it, the more uncertain it is that the Taliban will talk. They may not talk. They need pressure from behind—as the Government of the Irish Republic put pressure on the IRA—and enticement and pressure, including military pressure, from the front. You may not succeed, but it is the last best hope we have of an honourable way out and of protecting and preserving the sacrifice of our troops, and the billions of pounds and dollars that have been spent in and on Afghanistan.

Q103 Mike Gapes: Why should the hard-line Taliban in Quetta not sit out this timetable, knowing that American and British public opinion is reluctant at best, and that other NATO allies are wanting to jump out as quickly as possible? What possible incentive do they have to negotiate seriously?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Well, there’s a wonderful document that you should get your Clerks to find for you. It’s classified “secret NOFORN,” but it has appeared—or at least it has been summarised—in *The New York Times*. It is called “The state of the Taliban 2009” and it is based on hundreds of interviews of Taliban detainees by American special forces. It shows, perhaps surprisingly, that the Taliban are human beings. They think, as you suggest, Mr Gapes, that they are winning, but they are tired of fighting. They hate foreigners, and among foreigners they include not just Americans and Brits, but Arabs and Pakistanis. They are primitive, conservative, religious nationalists. They want what you and I want, which is a better education, a better future for their children and to get back to their farms. They want an honourable recognition that they weren’t defeated in 2001; they were pushed aside. They want to be dealt back into the political settlement.

But you’re quite right. Every day that goes by without us launching a serious negotiation, the more likely it is that they will say, “We’ll just sit this out and once the ‘Ifranji’—the foreigners—‘have gone, we’ll fight it out. We’ll probably take parts of the south, and other parts of the south will be in the hands of the narco-mafia.” The realists among them recognise that they’re never likely to rule the whole of Afghanistan again. That’s the aspiration in former article 1 of the Irish constitution, which says that the territory of the state is the whole island of Ireland. That’s no longer a serious aspiration for the Taliban.

Q104 Rory Stewart: We’re all praying that we can do this with the United States, but we might need to think about a plan B. It’s possible that we’ll get to 2014 and hawks in the Department of Defence and in the United States will still not be ready to negotiate, and will still want to push ahead with the counter-insurgency campaign, calling for more resources and more time, at a moment when Britain will say, “No more combat operations”. How do we prepare for that plan B? How do we make sure we don’t end up with a repeat of Basra, where, at the very last moment, we diverged from the United States? How do we use the next three years to make sure that we can get to that position in 2014?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: I devoutly hope that we will not get to the position you describe, because it would have a major impact on the transatlantic relationship. There is a risk, with the Republicans in the ascendant in the House, that there will be pressure on President Obama, against his better judgment, to ramp up the military campaign yet further. You’re quite right to point to that, Rory. The only way is gradually to move the British Army and British forces—one must never forget the Royal Marines, the
Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force, but above all the Marines and the Army—from a ground-holding territorial operation to a functional operation, to switch them out of holding territory into a training role, which could be in the south as well as in the north, and to do that by evolution, rather than by revolution, always taking the Americans with us, but being very firm with them about what we want and what we don’t want. There have been cases, I’m sorry to say, of different branches of the British armed forces telling the Americans different things without ministerial authority, because they wanted different things for their own agenda. This needs clear ministerial direction and a clarification of what Ministers want. Some of these mil-mil conversations end up with things being pre-cooked between the US and the UK militaries before they are subject to political approval back in London, and/or you get different parts of the military lobbying for their own hobby-horses without clear political approval.

Q105 Rory Stewart: So the answer, finally, would be that we need to make sure that British generals ultimately get it very clear in their heads that the 2015 deadline is serious, and that they can’t fantasise about it being fungible or about the idea that if Petraeus can somehow pull off an extension, they, too, can pull off an extension.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Well, I wouldn’t put it, personally, quite as harshly as that. I don’t think we will end up there. I think it will be a much more nuanced draw-down. I think there will be a negotiated end. Four years is a very long time in Afghan politics.

Q106 Sir Menzies Campbell: I was very interested in what you said about Karzai. Eighteen months ago, at the Wehrkunde in Munich, Holbrooke treated him with public disdain. It is no secret that the relationship between the two of them has been pretty poor. Just how much could Karzai contribute to a settlement of the kind you have described? What would he bring with him that he alone could provide?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: What he brings, Sir Menzies—I am very fond of President Karzai. I know him extremely well. I used to see him once a week as Ambassador. The hon. Member for Penrith and The Border and I have been walking with him in Scotland with the Prince of Wales. He is a great king, but a poor chief executive. ***

What he can bring to a settlement is that sort of quasi-monarchical leadership. He is a man who symbolises his country’s rebirth. He is fluent in Pashto, in Dari and English. Many of his instincts about civilian casualties and private security contractors are right. He is a true politician, a true retail politician, who feels what his people feel. He is just an absolutely hopeless administrator, and he doesn’t realise that governing means choosing. He thinks that governing means avoiding a choice.

Q107 Sir Menzies Campbell: So who is going to fulfil the chief executive role, if not him?

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: No. This is very sensitive territory, but many of us dealing with this problem have suggested President Karzai shouldn’t be removed. He can’t be removed.

Q108 Sir Menzies Campbell: I don’t believe he can.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: He should be encouraged to take his place in history, in a gradual way, presiding over a peace process. A new constitutional settlement might well involve the creation of a Prime Minister-like post in Kabul, that could be held by a Tajik, with a redistribution of power between the Executive and Parliament within the Executive—and above all between Kabul and the provinces and districts.***

Q109 Sir Menzies Campbell: That project for 2007 was made more difficult by the results last week. In one of the euphoric post-election speeches by the Republicans elected, I heard the person say, “We’re going to get a victory in Afghanistan”. If that sort of attitude pervades the House of Representatives, then it’s going to make it very, very difficult for Obama to move in the direction you suggest.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: I agree, Sir Menzies. General Petraeus himself said that this isn’t about victory; it’s about a long-term military struggle. But I don’t think it need be about a long-term military struggle if a political approach is adopted. We mustn’t forget that according to the strategy that we have signed up to, we are supposed to have stabilised 40 districts in southern and eastern Afghanistan by the end of next month. We are nowhere near achieving that—that performance measure has been forgotten. Forty districts next year and 40 the year after is an almost impossible target, and it certainly won’t be done by garrisoning these areas and putting men in forts. For the Pashtuns, seeing a man in a fort is a provocation not a pacification.
is inside baseball; we are the major outside player, but we are still a minor player. It needs a lead from the top. It needs the Prime Minister of the day to speak very robustly to the President. But all down the line, it needs us to be much more conditional in saying that we are prepared to go along with something that is a result of often sins of omission as much as commission by the American Administration. Again, that is easy for me to say, but difficult to do.

The truth is that, at root, the American Republic is not really equipped, constitutionally or in any other way, for that kind of quasi-imperial expeditionary adventure. Americans are too nice. They are not interested and not very good at ruling other people, which is essentially what this is about—ruling them in a benign sense, temporarily, in order to prepare Afghanistan for independence, as it were. America is not equipped to do that. It has huge resources and a very confident military, but very weak other parts of the machine. But I would not want that attributed to me.

Q113 Chair: Do you feel that you have covered all your bases now? Have you got across all the points?
Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: Yes. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses


Q115 Chair: May I welcome the public back to this session of the Foreign Affairs Committee and our inquiry into Afghanistan? You might well have been entitled to expect a video-link to Washington at present, but technical gremlins have intervened and we only have an audio-link. So I will be grateful if people try to avoid rustling papers and things like that, while we do our best to deal with the audio-link here. We have two witnesses in Washington at the moment, Gilles Dorronsoro, who is a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment Foundation as an expert in Afghanistan and South Asia, and Gerard Russell, who is a fellow at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy in Harvard University. May I give a warm welcome to both of you?
Gerard Russell: Thank you.
Gilles Dorronsoro: Thank you.

Q116 Chair: Do you have an opening statement or anything similar that you would like to make? Or shall we go straight into questions?
Gilles Dorronsoro: I would say that altogether the surge has had two different effects. The first effect is in the south, in Helmand and Kandahar, where most of the troops have been directed. The further short-term effect has been more violence, with a lot of casualties on both sides. The Taliban has taken a more careful approach in some places, but they are not done; they are still there.

In the other part of the country, what is clear is that the Taliban have the momentum—especially in the east and north. In the last year, the last six months, they have made a lot of progress. So, altogether the surge is not working the way that it was meant to. There is no change in the overall balance of power and the Taliban are still making problems.

Chair: Thank you.
Gerard Russell: Let me just add to Gilles’s statement a couple of other thoughts. First, it is difficult to get a clear picture of the military situation. There are so many conflicting reports. However, it is easy to see, over the course of years, certain trends. What those trends highlight is that no matter what efforts are made on the military front, the political and law enforcement side of the equation is more important in terms of getting communities to side with the Government.

Earlier this morning, I was hearing from Michael Waltz, who was the UN’s commander in the field in Khost province. He was relaying the comments made to him by an elder in the Mangal tribe, down in that area, who said basically, “You can give us all the aid you want to build the schools, as many as you wish,
and we welcome that, but if somebody comes and puts a knife to my throat in the night, what am I supposed to do?” That isn’t actually something that a military operation can easily address. It is an issue of getting communities to stand together against the Taliban and the Haqqani network. In that particular respect, I’m afraid, I don’t yet see great progress being made.

My second point would be that as a shaping operation that can enable talks to happen, the surge could be extremely effective, provided that is the strategy that is followed.

Q118 Chair: Right. Well, we are informed that it is the strategy that’s being followed. The number of insurgents killed is often used as some sort of measure of success. Do you have any views on this? Is that a reasonable way to look at the situation?

Gilles Dorronsoro: I would say that that is not a reasonable way of looking at the situation. As far as we know—but I’m not even aware of very good information on that—thousands of Taliban have been killed since the beginning of the surge. The political impact is difficult to appreciate. Most probably, all the older generation of the Taliban have been killed, and you have now new militants who are more radical, probably, and less willing to negotiate with the coalition. I would say, no, it’s not a reasonable way of looking at the situation, because more violence—the body count—means that Afghan society will be more polarised. It’s going to be us against them. In this case, I don’t see how the foreign troops would get any kind of support from the Afghan population. That’s exactly what we are seeing now in Kandahar, where they are not able to find local notables, local tribal leaders, local people to work with.

Chair: Gilles, could we ask you in your answers to get a bit nearer the microphone? Gerard is coming over very clearly, but we suspect that you’re a bit further away from the microphone.

Q119 Mr Baron: Hello there. Thanks for joining us. Can I ask a question? Most people I ask this question seem to agree with the premise of it, but struggle with the answer. History suggests that for a successful counter-insurgency campaign, you need various preconditions such as control of the border, good troop density levels, credible Government and the support of a majority of the population. To many, not one of those conditions exists in Afghanistan. What makes you think—if you do think this—that we are going to have any measure of success in that country?

Gerard Russell: Well, I would ask Gilles to speak first, actually, because I think his view is very clear on this.

Gilles Dorronsoro: I think it’s a very good point. It’s a very good series of questions, actually. South of the border, the border is out of control. The Taliban have a clear amount of support inside the Pakistani Government, so Pakistan is a sanctuary. In Kandahar, the Taliban are fighting two hours by car from their sanctuary. So the border is out of control. The second point is the level of troops. There are comparatively a lot of foreign troops in two or three provinces and the south, possibly, but you have to see that, for example, for all the north you have little more than 10,000 troops, and it’s not exactly a secret that German troops are not very—basically, this country is open to the Taliban insurgency in the north, because there are not enough foreign troops and it’s not possible to send enough.

The third point is about the Government. We all know about Karzai’s Government. It’s going to be extremely difficult to drill an Afghan national army and, of course, an Afghan national police in the next three or four years. I do not trust the quantitative approach: “We have more policemen or soldiers, so it’s good”. What we have to look at is their level of training, their competence. Here we have a problem. I don’t think we’re going to have an Afghan national army able to stop the Taliban or contain the Taliban in two years. The last thing is the population’s support. The Taliban have a kind of support in a lot of places. The fact that the Afghan Government is now absent from lots of provinces, makes the Taliban more and more a kind of parallel Government, and because they are involved with some kind of order they have some kind of popular support. So, for all these reasons, I think that the situation—

Chair: Gerard.

Gerard Russell: Gilles makes a lot of very good points. It is difficult for me to comment on military strategy, but I know that there has been some concern that to have secured the borders would have been a more effective approach than to have got into the population centres. I am not a military expert and I wouldn’t pretend to be, but it is certainly true that that question is a very good one.

I would, in general, make a comment about the lists. Of course, there is an excellent list of points and of questions that should be asked about the counter-insurgency campaign. I suppose that the other question to ask is, “Can a foreign force ever really hope to be effective in countering an Afghan insurgency?” One of the things that concerns me, looking back on the campaign to date, is whether we were right to think that it was ever going to work to put foreign troops into Afghan population centres—towns and villages—and keep them secure. It often seems to have been the stimulus for confrontation rather than the resolution of it, and for me that points to a much greater potential that existed for foreign forces in Afghanistan to have been all along in a position where they acted as a weapon of last resort, rather than being the front line of engagement with the Taliban.

Q120 Mike Gapes: Can I ask you about the long-term commitment of the coalition to troops remaining in Afghanistan? A number of countries have already withdrawn or indicated that they intend to withdraw, and we know that President Obama made a political commitment to begin a reduction in US troops from July 2011. What’s the attitude of the US military to that commitment and, regarding the long term, what’s the attitude to whether there will be a deadline, like the British Prime Minister has signalled, of a complete end to a combat role by 2015? Is there an American view forming about something similar and, if so, what is it?
Gerard Russell: In the readings that I’ve made, there isn’t very much said directly by the military about the issue of the July 2011 date, but from those who have served in the military and are close to the American military, you see a great deal of criticism, and there is a feeling from some who have been in Afghanistan that it leads to an inevitable ebbing of American credibility in the country. The other side of the picture is, of course, that with such a large presence in the country, inevitably the political cost increases all the time, and arguably the levels of casualties and expense are simply unsustainable and therefore a reduction has to come at some point. But in answer to your direct question about the American military’s attitude, my guess is that they are unhappy, and I think that they would be similarly unhappy with any end stage that would be set, even if it were 2015. My instinct, to be honest, when reading Bob Woodward’s book, *Obama’s War*, was that, having received an increase in troops in Afghanistan, there would perhaps be a feeling in some parts of the military that it would be really very hard for the civilian Government now to reduce forces even in 2011, by any significant degree.

Gilles Dorronsoro: I think that you have two different dynamics. The first is that the Europeans must be out of Afghanistan by 2014. The second dynamic is that the US military is always asking for more resources. Since 2002, you have a surge every year in Afghanistan. Every year, you have more troops and more money, and the result is not that great. What you are trying to do in a way is trying to stop the unending increase in resources. I don’t think it’s going to work, because the deadline has been pushed back. For example, when I came to Washington two years ago, the deadline was 18 months. In 18 months, we needed to see something on the ground. If not, we would have to withdraw. Then the deadline was 2011. It’s no longer 2011, in fact; it’s going to be 2014. I think there is an increased dynamic inside the military. It’s never to say, “Okay, we have to negotiate”. It’s always to ask for more resources. Obama doesn’t seem to be able to stop these demands. I think with the result of the latest election in the House especially, it will be more and more difficult to stop any increase. What we could very well have next year is demands for more troops in Afghanistan to compensate for the withdrawal of the Europeans and, very likely, the degradation of the security in the north and east of Afghanistan.

Q121 Mr Baron: May I turn us briefly to the 2015 deadline? A recent US Government inspection found that something like a quarter of Afghan soldiers could not work unsupervised. Only about 3% come from the predominantly Pashtun south. Some would suggest the Afghan police are corrupt and ineffective, and we know the attrition rates are high. So say the sceptics. How optimistic are you that the 2015 deadline is realistic, and what level of security do you think the Afghan forces will be able to provide?

Gerard Russell: There is a 2015 deadline and there’s a 2014 deadline, which is even more ambitious and which is President Karzai’s. You have focused on one point that I think is of critical importance, which is the number of Pashtuns who are in the Afghan security forces. Although Pashtuns from the east and the north can to some extent fulfil a role, it’s very hard for those who don’t speak Pashto to do the job that particularly the police are meant to do, which is to integrate themselves with the community and establish co-operative mechanisms with the community. That I would highlight as a serious problem. I’m glad that the UK and the US have begun to address it by this issue of community security. Whatever issues it brings with it—it brings many risks and dangers—it’s the only way of getting Pashtuns to serve, given that the police are widely seen as a Tajik-dominated service.

You’re absolutely right to highlight the risks and threats. I will only say that on the optimistic side—it is important, given the amount of pessimism there is, to emphasise the optimistic side—when Najibullah was left on his own by the Soviet forces and they withdrew, giving him money and weapons but very little in the way of soldiers on the ground, many people predicted that he would fall within weeks or months, yet he survived for three years with not a terribly good security force, although perhaps it was a little better than it is now, and there was a lot of pessimism about his prospects. That helps to emphasise that this may not be an issue of military force as conventionally understood but of psychological or moral force. The question is really whether the Afghan Government can command the loyalty of their subjects, rather than necessarily a question of how good their soldiers are.

Gilles Dorronsoro: Yes, I totally agree with what Gerard said. If you think about the Afghan national army as a way to contain the Taliban, it’s not going to work—first, because the Taliban are already penetrating the Afghan national army and the Afghan national police. What we have seen in a district north of Ghazni recently—last week, I think—is that the whole district went to the Taliban, joined up to the Taliban. That kind of thing can happen again and again in the next two years. So the ANA and the Afghan police are not going to stop the Taliban. They could be part of a political process. They could be part of negotiations. They could stabilise the situation after the political lead, but right now, what we are seeing in Ghazni and what we saw in Laghman province last summer, for example, is that it is clear that the Afghan national army does not have the autonomy to operate alone. Secondly, the ethnic composition of the army is a real, serious problem. I don’t see how you can train officers in two or three years, considering that the overall state structure is truly disappearing in a lot of places in Afghanistan. That is the problem. How can you build an army without a state?

Q122 Rory Stewart: Gilles, following on from your conversation about the state, what is the state theory of the coalition? Is it trying to create a centralised state, a decentralised state? How does it think that Afghanistan runs? It keeps saying that we need governance, but what is this governance?

Gilles Dorronsoro: Actually, I don’t think there is a theory. I think that there are a lot of local initiatives. Altogether, that doesn’t make sense for me. You also...
suspect that for efficiency’s sake you have to deal locally, so you don’t deal with the governor if the governor is not good. You go through the provincial reconstruction team—the PRT. Most of the work of the coalition is done in parallel with the Afghan state. In a lot of cases, that is destroying the credibility of the Afghan state. That is the first dynamic. That is true also for the NGOs to a certain extent. The second dynamic is that we want to enforce regulation at the top. We want to fight corruption at the top. Of course, it is not working. Well, it is working in some specific cases, such as the Ministry of Mines, for example, where it seems that something is moving. But overall, it is not possible, because it is going straight to Karzai and to people who are extremely close to Karzai. Some of those are working for the CIA, which creates a problem every time we try to fight corruption. There is a temptation to deal locally with whoever is in control. There is the temptation to put pressure on Karzai at the top, but all that doesn’t make for an overall coherent policy.

Gerard Russell: Thank you for the question, Rory. I agree with Gilles about the way that things have worked in practice. If I may, I will give two slightly separate responses to your question. First, in respect of development and national strategy towards Afghanistan, you rightly identify that the emphasis has, in theory, been on a top-down model of governance. In particular, whenever it has been proposed, for example, to enlist Afghans in a local fighting force in a community initiative of any kind, there has always been the desire to link that into the Ministry of Interior, which to some extent defeats the purpose. One of the problems in the south and east of Afghanistan is that the Ministry of Interior has lacked credibility and been seen as a body that was ill disposed towards Pashtuns.

To some extent the top-down approach is the result of theory and empirical evidence, I suppose from the Balkans. To another extent, I’m afraid, it’s a failing of the international community that it tends to engage most easily with those who speak its language, particularly those who speak English, those who are educated, and those who live in the capitals. In the case of Afghanistan and Iraq, it is very often those who have come to the country from America, who are almost by definition ill-suited to lead a country in a state of conflict, because they lack credibility on the street, because they don’t speak the language of the ordinary person, and because they have been insulated from the sufferings of their country over the last 10 or 20 years. When I look sometimes at the structures in Kabul that are in charge of local government, I remember what Wilfred Thesiger said in the 1950s about those who were sent from Baghdad to govern Maysan—of course, a place that you know well, Rory. He said that such people never had a deep-seated investment in the places to which they were sent, and therefore never troubled to really understand local issues or to resolve things in a way that would deliver long-term stability. It would have been much better from the beginning if we had tried to find solutions at a local level. We have done so, as Gilles describes, in a somewhat haphazard way and without a proper strategy.

The second point that I wanted to make was allied to that. Besides the issue of the Kabul-down approach, there has also been the PRT-up approach. Somewhat disjointed, partly because each country, with its own province to look after, has adopted a different approach.

Q123 Mr Roy: Gentlemen, as the years go by, what level of support for reconciliation is there from the American people, the US Administration and the US military?

Gerard Russell: I’ll go first, and Gilles can come in just a second. I feel that there is some confusion over the word “reconciliation”, which is used in two different senses. One is to describe the possibility of proper negotiations with the Taliban. I shall give an example of this. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) successfully mediated with the Taliban to produce the piece of paper with Mullah Omar’s signature on it; that is used for giving polio vaccinations in places like Laghman, and has given to this day protection from the Taliban. That is one sense of reconciliation. It means something of that kind; a negotiation with Mullah Omar, with the Quetta Shura. In another sense, it is used to mean persuading Taliban to defect.

These two exercises are totally different in kind, even if they may have some things in common, just as persuading Soviets to defect in the old days of the Cold War was not the same as negotiating with the Soviet Government. I would wish to distinguish between the two, and I am afraid at this stage—well, there has been progress towards an understanding of the importance of both of those things, but the idea of persuading individuals to change sides is much more popular.

Gilles Dorronsoro: Well, I totally agree with what Gerard said. First, reconciliation in the sense that you are going to ask Taliban to defect to Karzai’s side is not working. Actually it is not working; it never worked. What you have is very small groups or some individuals joining the Government, but it has no strategic impact. The more you’re fighting, the more you’re killing people, the less you will see people defecting, because it is the mechanism of polarisation. It is absolutely classical in Afghan society, so this policy is going nowhere.

The second policy, which is political talk with the Taliban leadership, never even started. It is clear that it is not supported by the US military, and not even by the State Department, so it’s a dead end. So in the next few months, you are going to see probably some move towards tribal militias, but it’s not going to work. You’re going to have a small-scale defection here and there, and no political talks.

Q124 Mr Roy: Is there a difference in thinking on the willingness to accept reconciliation between the Administration and the US military?

Gerard Russell: In the sense of accepting the idea of negotiating?

Mr Roy: Yes.

Gerard Russell: It is quite hard to see the exact dividing line. I am not sure, but it’s a division between
9 November 2010 Gilles Dorronsoro and Gerard Russell MBE

Mr Ainsworth: You are pretty pessimistic about the ability to align maybe what has been UK policy for some time now—that is, that military effort has to be combined with a political solution and reconciliation. To what degree do you think that we are going to be able to exercise influence over the United States, or are you totally pessimistic about our ability to shift American policy in this regard?

Chair: We do. And we are getting the hang of the accents.

Gerard Russell: Excellent. I am glad to hear it.

I think there has been progress and some of that is due to Britain. You heard today from Sherard Cowper-Coles, who did a great deal to push this agenda forward with, I think, some success. It is a big leap for a Democrat President to make, and it carries a lot of risk. That is why I say that public opinion is very important. There are a lot of political bear traps in the reconciliation process and, particularly, in public declarations of a desire for negotiations. I don’t necessarily say that that has to happen. I wish there were more evidence of a low-level practical approach, such as that adopted in Northern Ireland, where there was at least a link between the British Government and the IRA for many years, even though it was kept secret. As to whether that would happen, I think it is possible, because I think there is more pragmatism in the Administration than necessarily comes through in public declarations, but very difficult. It requires continued argument from commentators and from those countries and Governments that see the need for it.

Gilles is right to point out the difficulties. Equally, of course, peace processes in the past, including in Northern Ireland, were regarded as being unlikely to succeed, and yet people tried them and, eventually, they got somewhere. I think that there are some grounds for optimism. In the regional picture, both China and Iran will have a strong interest in stability in Afghanistan. It might not look like stability of the kind that we originally imagined, but they do need to protect their investments, and they have opportunities in Afghanistan—particularly, of course, mineral deposits, but also as a transit route for supplies of various kinds, not just natural gas. For that reason, I am a little more optimistic than Gilles. Either through a formal process of talks with the Taliban or through a de facto armistice on the ground, perhaps, if we are clever enough, a form of peaceful co-existence can be engendered. I haven’t given up on that.

Gilles Dorronsoro: A way to answer the question is to notice that Afghanistan was totally out of the agenda at the last election, so Obama doesn’t feel a lot of pressure from the Democratic left to make a deal in Afghanistan. On the contrary, he doesn’t want to look weak on foreign policy—that’s the usual problem for Democratic Presidents—and the House, of course, is going to put on pressure for a more military approach to the Afghan conundrum. So Obama, I think, is not going to take risks on Afghanistan, because there is no pressure from public opinion to do something to get out of Afghanistan, really. My feeling—the presidential election is in 2012—is that Obama is not going to do anything very strong or dramatic until 2012. After that, we’ll see if Obama is re-elected or not, but for this mandate, I think it’s basically not very likely you will see something.

Mr Rosindell: Can I ask you to comment on how you see the role of Pakistan in all this, and how that impacts on the situation in Afghanistan, particularly with regard to US policy and their approach to Pakistan? Do you think Pakistan is a country we can rely on?

Gilles Dorronsoro: This is Gilles speaking, but I think you understand that. I don’t think there is a US policy towards Pakistan, or I don’t understand what it is. You have a clear US policy towards India. We have seen that in the last few days. Towards Pakistan, it’s a mix of different things that lack intellectual coherence, and that is producing very contrary results.

Concretely, when it was time to put hard pressure on Pakistan between 2001 and 2004–05, when the Taliban were still very weak, the White House did not put any kind of serious pressure on Pakistan. Now the situation is such that even if Islamabad and the military wanted to break the Taliban and secure the border, it would not be possible. It’s now that the White House is putting some kind of pressure on Pakistan. Even this pressure is half-hearted, so you have the worst results. First, the Pakistani establishment doesn’t trust Washington, because it is obvious that Washington’s long-term interests are towards India; Obama’s last trip to India is very clear about that. So there is no trust. Secondly, for example, the drone attacks on the border are resented by a large military and civilians. There are plenty of people, including former senior people in the US military, who see the importance ultimately of negotiations. I do not know whether Gilles and I agree about this. I don’t necessarily say that negotiations are a thing that will work today, but I wish that there was some evidence that genuine effort was going to go into creating an atmosphere that would permit talks to happen at some stage in the next year or two. So, I don’t say that America should declare immediately its intention of negotiating, given that the Taliban would not necessarily accept such an offer. I think that the resistance, fundamentally, is an issue of public opinion, and that is where it has to be addressed.

Gilles Dorronsoro: What I am seeing right now is that the strategy is, mostly, a military one. There is no real political side—no one is going to negotiate with the Taliban, let’s say until at least next year, the end of next year. Negotiation doesn’t make sense right now. What the US military and, probably, the US Administration want is to put military pressure on the Taliban. But what is probably going to happen is that next year the Taliban will be stronger than this year—everything points in that direction. So, it will be more difficult to negotiate next year than this year. That is why I am not terribly optimistic about negotiation, even in one or two years.
part of the population. It’s not going to work long-term to secure US interests. It’s a kind of mixed bag of things that could work but are done half-heartedly. The result of that is that the Pakistani military support the Taliban and will continue to support the Taliban to the end. Just from that, you’re sure that the Taliban will not lose the war in Afghanistan, because they have a sanctuary. Altogether, I think people in Washington should reconsider their whole strategy towards Pakistan. It doesn’t make sense the way it’s done right now.

*Gerard Russell:* I must give a very brief response to your interesting question, and then I fear I have to leave, but Gilles will be able to stay a little longer. The Pakistani position is conditioned by many factors, some of which are outside our control. The relationship with President Karzai among some in the Pakistani establishment remains difficult. I think ultimately, they just don’t believe that the current Government in Kabul is well disposed to Pakistan or will survive very long after a US draw-down. There’s no doubt that the news and the prospect of a US draw-down is going to influence their thinking.

However, I am more optimistic than Gilles on one point. I think he disagrees with me on this, but I don’t see that Pakistan will necessarily be interested in pushing for a Taliban victory that would include the fall of Kabul and the north. I think it improbable that they would push for that if they felt that it would ultimately destabilise their investments and China’s investments in southern Afghanistan. China has invested $4 billion in the Aynak copper mine, which is vitally important for China’s growth, and China is Pakistan’s most important partner. It is beyond the US, in terms of importance, simply because it is there on Pakistan’s borders and it is their most reliable ally. So, in that sense, I have some optimism that although bits of the Pakistani establishment certainly support the insurgency, none the less, the overall national interest will point to some kind of compromise in the end, and will not drive them to seek the fall of the entire country, as the Taliban did in the ’90s.

*Chair:* Gerard, we have just one more question left. It will only take a couple of minutes. Are you able to stay for another couple of minutes?

*Gerard Russell:* I can stay for just two more minutes.

**Q127 Sir John Stanley:** You said right at the beginning that the American military did not like deadlines being put up by which time they had to withdraw. I would suggest that the American military are perhaps even more concerned about not being left as the only fighting force in a particular location. If that is not a particular concern to the American military, I think that it is a deep concern to the American politicians. We see now that the Canadians, the Dutch, the Australians, the British—all those countries—have set dates for coming out of combat operations, or there is a serious debate as to how long they should stay in Afghanistan. Do you see the American civilian political leadership being prepared to stay on in Afghanistan beyond, say, 2015, or do you think that they will actually end up coming in line pretty well with the British Government’s policy of coming out of combat operations by 2015?

*Gerard Russell:* It is a very difficult question to judge. I think that either scenario is possible—[Interruption.]

*Chair:* Are you there? Okay. Thank you very much, colleagues. We meet again tomorrow at 2 o’clock. Meeting over.
Monday 15 November 2010

Members present:  
Richard Ottaway (Chair)  
Mr Bob Ainsworth  
Mr John Baron  
Ann Clwyd  
Mike Gapes  
Andrew Rosindell  
Mr Frank Roy  
Rory Stewart  
Mr Dave Watts  

Witnesses: Rt Hon William Hague MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State, and Karen Pierce CMG, Director South Asia and Afghanistan, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, gave evidence.

Q128 Chair: May I welcome members of the public to this fourth and final evidence session of the Foreign Affairs Committee’s inquiry into the UK’s foreign policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan? Our two witnesses today are the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, and Karen Pierce, who is the director of south Asia and Afghanistan. Foreign Secretary, is there anything you would like to start by saying?

Mr Hague: No. I know we may be pressed for time, so it may be helpful if we get on with your questions.

Q129 Chair: I start by thanking you and your officials for facilitating our visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was a very good visit. It was well received, and we sensed that people went the extra mile for us, which is much appreciated.

Foreign Secretary, it is often put to us that al-Qaeda and the Taliban are being grouped together, when they are very different beasts, as you well know. The Government justify their intervention in Afghanistan on the basis that, if they were not there, al-Qaeda would return to Afghanistan and could pose a threat to national security. A number of our witnesses have disagreed with this premise. What evidence do you have to suggest that al-Qaeda—not the Taliban, but al-Qaeda—would return to Afghanistan?

Mr Hague: It is impossible to have direct evidence of something that would happen in a hypothetical situation, but we have the experience of what happened before 2001. Much of Afghanistan was effectively either ungoverned space or Taliban-governed space, and in those circumstances al-Qaeda was able to set up its training camps and bases there. Based on that experience, there must be a reasonable suspicion that the same thing would happen again, particularly where al-Qaeda feels under pressure in other areas. It would be a rash observer who said that they knew this would not happen. It is fair for President Karzai to have included in the conditions that he has set out for political settlement in Afghanistan, that the Taliban and others associated with them should renounce al-Qaeda and renounce violence. That is the line of reasoning.

Q130 Chair: President Karzai actually says that he doesn’t think they will return.

Mr Hague: It is one of the conditions that he has set, and he has set that condition for a good reason.

Q131 Mr Baron: Could you answer the question about the military strategy and the security situation that I posed in PMQs on Wednesday last week? Successful counter-insurgency operations in the past, particularly in Malaya, suggest that not one of the preconditions for success—control of the borders, high troop density levels, a credible Government and support of the majority of the population—exists in Afghanistan. Why do you think that the military, in particular, are so optimistic that they can achieve a successful outcome there, and doesn’t this beg for a more realistic assessment?

Mr Hague: It certainly requires a realistic assessment, but in any realistic assessment the task in which we are engaged in Afghanistan remains phenomenally difficult. That is partly because of some of the factors that you quite rightly describe. Nevertheless, all those factors are being addressed one way or another. The build-up of the Afghan national security forces is very substantial. As you know, and as you saw on your visit to Afghanistan, the Afghan national army is now at 144,000, which is 10,000 ahead of where it was meant to be at this time. The Afghan national police is stronger now than was anticipated. The attrition rates in terms of people leaving those forces month-by-month are diminishing.

The legitimation and operation of government in a province such as Helmand seem more widely accepted than they were a year ago, or two years ago. So progress is being made in many of those parameters. Even co-operation with other countries—you know about the Afghanistan-Pakistan transit trade agreement—and working with regional neighbours is an area of greater strength for the Afghan Government than before. They all remain very difficult—every parameter remains very difficult—but I think that it’s fair to argue that, at a varying pace, progress is being made in all those ways. So success remains very difficult in Afghanistan, but it is by no means impossible.

Q132 Mr Baron: Do you accept that one of the things that has plagued our presence in Afghanistan is the continual reading out of over-optimistic assessments by Ministers? We are all pleased, obviously, that we now have a more realistic assessment of the current situation in Afghanistan, although some of us would suggest that it needs to be even more realistic than at present. Does that suggest that, in the past, the military were driving strategy, as opposed to the politicians?

Mr Hague: That question has several parts. I agree that over-optimistic assessments have sometimes been...
made, and the current Government are trying to avoid that. We are learning lessons from what has happened in the past. I gave the first of our quarterly reviews to Parliament in the week in which your Committee was visiting Afghanistan, and I apologise for that. The spending review was the previous week and my own visit to the Middle East was the following week, so it had to be in that week. I will try to catch you in the country at the time of the next quarterly review. I hope that it was regarded by the House—I think it was—as a frank assessment of where we are and did not overstate what has been achieved, but showed that progress was being made in several areas. Much more needed to be done, for instance, in the area of corruption and governance, and we will carry on in that vein with our assessments. We will not encourage false optimism, but we will not be blind to good news, either. There are often more successes to talk about than feature daily in our media. Being realistic in our assessments is important, and hopefully we are getting it right.

Were the military driving the strategy before? You may need to direct that to members of the previous Government—you have directed it to one official who served under the previous Government—rather than the current Government. It is very important on an issue such as this that military and political leaders work well together and that political decisions are well informed by military assessments, otherwise, of course, politicians may make rash decisions without sufficient military awareness. I certainly think that the way we now conduct our National Security Council briefings is important, and hopefully we are getting it right.

Q134 Mr Baron: Finally, Foreign Secretary, do you accept that, when a negotiated settlement—of whatever description—takes hold, it will obviously have to reflect the realities on the ground, such as negotiations with the Taliban and with regional warlords? Is it not possible to have a negotiated settlement and still retain the ability to take on al-Qaeda, perhaps using special forces, should it ever return? In putting a line between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, a negotiated settlement has to take place with the Taliban. That does not mean that we have to make peace with al-Qaeda. Is it not beyond the wit of man to engineer some sort of solution whereby at the end of the day we retain the military capacity to take on al-Qaeda, should it ever return, while progressing with a negotiated settlement with the Taliban in order to engineer a success out of our present circumstances?

Mr Hague: Yes, I hope that that is possible. It is highly unlikely that it would be possible in the foreseeable future to negotiate a peace with al-Qaeda. That would fundamentally be against the beliefs of al-Qaeda. It might be possible to do so with the Taliban or with parts of the Taliban. We don’t know whether that is possible, but it is certainly desirable under the right conditions.

One of the conditions—I referred to it earlier—that President Karzai has set alongside respecting a constitutional framework and renouncing violence is cutting ties with al-Qaeda, so, yes, such a settlement would require a distinction to be made between those who are reconciled and those who are committed to al-Qaeda.

Karen Pierce: Can I just add to that? One factor that we consider when looking at the prospects for negotiation is the level of popular support for the Taliban. It is around 10%, although it varies in different parts of the country. The other thing that we need to consider is that parts of the insurgency now have active links with al-Qaeda, not necessarily inside Afghanistan but certainly links emanating from Pakistan. If we look at President Karzai’s conditions for renouncing links with al-Qaeda, we would also look at the Security Council resolutions in advance of 9/11 that invited the Taliban to give up al-Qaeda—a step that the Taliban didn’t take. The real question for us is to what extent would a Taliban assurance relating to al-Qaeda be capable of being carried out?

Q135 Mike Gapes: Can I ask about the nature of the insurgency? From what we were told, we understand that there are three different insurgencies: the Haqqani network, the Hekmatyar, and the Taliban leader Mullah Omar’s Pakistan-based Quetta. Maybe there are more. Perhaps you can confirm that. Is it your strategy to get all three of those components into a political process, or are you trying to split them and get some of them in on the basis that that will at least reduce the fact of the conflict going on?
Mr Hague: We are trying to create the conditions for a political settlement. The military campaign is a very important part of that, for the reasons I referred to earlier. Who wants to enter into a settlement is not within our control, whether it is all those groups, further groups or any of those groups that wish to do so. It is up to them to decide whether they wish to be part of that settlement. We might wish for however many groups to be involved, but we will see how the circumstances develop.

Q136 Mike Gapes: Finally, in your earlier answer to Mr Baron, you referred to the growing training and support of the Afghan national security forces. Isn’t it the case that there are virtually no southern Pashtuns in those security forces, and that the only Pashtuns are from the east and north of the country?

Mr Hague: It remains the case that southern Pashtuns are under-represented in the national security forces—3% is a widely quoted figure, although more than 40% of the army would be Pashtuns of other origins. So when you say that the only other Pashtuns are from other areas, you’re talking about very large numbers of people. That remains a weakness. It is an important weakness to address over time, but it has to be seen against the context of the very rapid build-up of the Afghan national security forces and the huge improvement in the training of officers and non-commissioned officers that we have seen over the past year.

Q137 Rory Stewart: We are all obviously praying that the surge works, but do we have a contingency plan? If we get through to 2015, we move back to special forces and training operations. How are we going to contain and manage the situation in 2015, if the counter-insurgency strategy doesn’t work?

Mr Hague: We are working very hard to make sure that it does work. Remember that the forces that we are talking about are a key component of this. The Afghan national security forces will be over 300,000-strong by the end of next year, never mind by 2014. The training of non-commissioned officers of the Afghan national army is up by 712% over the last year. This is a very important consideration. This is becoming an army much larger than ours, without yet the skills, logistics, engineering, intelligence and so on that need to be part of a highly effective army. Whatever happens, that build-up is crucial to the future of Afghanistan, so that Afghans can lead and maintain their own security operations from 2014, in line with President Karzai’s objective, irrespective of arriving at a political settlement. You can think of that as the next line of defence after international forces.

Q138 Rory Stewart: So the next line of defence is that the Afghans continue to conduct their own form of counter-insurgency operation post-2015 with the training of the special forces support from the United Kingdom?

Mr Hague: We have made a very clear statement about not being involved in combat operations in 2015, although that does not preclude being there in a training role, for instance. But yes, I think the long-term outlook, if there were to be no political settlement, is that the Afghan national security forces become large enough to be able to hold their own in Afghanistan. That does not mean there would be a peaceful Afghanistan. It does mean there would be an Afghanistan where the writ of Government ran widely enough for that Government to be able to resist being overthrown by force.

Q139 Rory Stewart: Will we be asking the British military to present their troops numbers for 2013 or 2014, and how they will be deployed, at the National Security Council?

Mr Hague: We will look at all such things in the National Security Council which, of course, is now the forum in which such matters are decided. So yes, the Prime Minister will certainly expect the MOD to set forward the plans for the next few years. However, it is quite hard to foresee, at this point, the level of resources and the nature of the activities required in 2013 and 2014. Of course, it is clear that we should have an ever larger training role and, as you know, the Defence Secretary has announced the movement of more than 300 personnel into a training role just in the last few months. But yes, the National Security Council will examine the plans for our deployments over time.

Karen Pierce: That is on the agenda of the National Security Council over the next few months and troops will be linked to tasks, obviously, so we will start there.

Q140 Mr Ainsworth: Can we get some clarity on exactly what the deadline in 2015 is? What is it, when is it, and exactly what does it encompass?

Mr Hague: It is as the Prime Minister and I have stated it: by 2015, we will not be engaged in Afghanistan either in combat operations or in anything like the numbers that we have there today. That, as I was saying to Mr Stewart, does not mean that we will not be there in other roles—in training and so on. However, I don’t want anyone to underestimate the clarity of this, or to confuse the clarity. The Prime Minister has said that very clearly; he means it, and that is what we will stick to.

Q141 Mr Ainsworth: When? 2015 is 12 months long.

Mr Hague: It is 12 months long.

Q142 Mr Ainsworth: There is a general election in May 2015, or that’s what you’re planning, isn’t it? Will it be in January 2015?

Mr Hague: I do not think it is necessary, now that we have said 2015, to try and home in on the actual day in 2015, particularly since we are sitting here in November 2010. It is quite a long way away—in fact, it is further in the future, as you all well know, than our whole operations in Helmand are in the past. So, it is a long time into the future, but we don’t anticipate, in the near future, setting out a particular month or week.

Q143 Mr Ainsworth: Who took the decision?
Mr Hague: The decision was taken by Ministers in the National Security Council and the Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister.

Q144 Mr Ainsworth: Was it taken in the National Security Council?
Mr Hague: It was taken by the Prime Minister in consultation with other senior Ministers, including me.

Q145 Mr Ainsworth: Were you consulted?
Mr Hague: Yes.

Q146 Mr Ainsworth: When were you consulted?
Mr Hague: Before the Prime Minister made his announcement.

Q147 Mr Ainsworth: Was the Defence Secretary consulted?
Mr Hague: I am sure the Defence Secretary was consulted, but I cannot tell you when everybody was consulted. You would have to ask the Prime Minister.

Q148 Mr Ainsworth: We are there as part of a coalition force—we are a very significant part of a coalition force—and we have always tried to be good partners as a country in coalition activities and international affairs, have we not? Is there no conceivable possibility that that will be changed if, let’s say, a NATO discussion takes place about the need for change because the deadlines are not being met, or because of American requests, because we simply cannot get to a position where the Afghan national army or Afghan national security forces are capable of standing up on their own? Is there no conceivable way that that is going to be altered? It’s set. It’s finished. That’s it. It’s a deadline. It will not be changed in any circumstances.

Mr Hague: It won’t be changed. The Prime Minister is being very clear about that. It is a change of policy from this Government, and there have been several. We have doubled the operational allowance for the troops and we have redeployed away from certain areas of Helmand to concentrate on other areas. As you know, there have been several changes of policy on Afghanistan and yes, this is one of them. People can argue about the advantages and disadvantages of it, as Mr Baron has done on the Floor of the House, but we will make the most of the advantages of this policy. Our intentions are clear to all concerned, and what we are going to do by 2015—they are clear to our allies and to the Afghan Government. We don’t want anybody to be in any doubt about that. There are other allies in NATO who have also stated specific timings for the deployment of their forces. We will, by then, have been in Helmand for much longer—50% longer—than the entire Second World War, so we feel it right to say that, by then, we will not be involved in combat operations.

Q149 Mr Ainsworth: This is the change of policy, isn’t it? We’ve changed the area of operations, but that was happening in any case. We had got out of Musa Qala before the change of Government; we were halfway out of Sangin before the change of Government. This, however, is the change.
Mr Hague: It’s an important change and it is a change that we will stick to.

Q150 Mr Ainsworth: Why announce it in public? Why did we think that that would be helpful? It has been said that we did it to put pressure on the Karzai Government, but did it not take the pressure off the Taliban and off the insurgents?
Mr Hague: I think that insurgents will find that, in line with our earlier discussion, they are under intense pressure over the coming months. There is no relaxation in the British or coalition military effort. Since it is only recently, as you know, that all the forces that the commanders have wanted have been available in Afghanistan, that pressure will intensify over the coming months and even over the coming years, when that is added to the increasing role of the Afghan national security forces. It would be quite wrong to conclude that anybody on the other side can relax in any way because we have made an announcement on 2015. It means that there is absolute clarity for the Afghanistan Government and that they know that that is the length of our combat commitment. It means that our allies know that, too. There are advantages to that, as well as, of course, the arguments against it that others have put.

Karen Pierce: I was simply going to say that the NATO summit, which takes place later this week, will endorse the 2014 target date for transition. All NATO’s efforts will go into ensuring that that happens.

Q151 Mr Ainsworth: Sure, but that’s not new. That’s been known for some time. On other nations, we have already lost the Dutch and the Canadians are leaving. In response to Rory, there was some indication that there was going to have to be a plan between now and 2015. How are we going to be affected by the withdrawal of those other nations? It’s all right to say that new nations join, but they are relatively small contributors. The Dutch and the Canadians were very significant contributors, so that is surely going to give us problems.

Mr Hague: Yes. I certainly hope that some of the countries that are withdrawing will be able to stay in substantial training roles. We have, of course, been discussing that with them. It would be highly desirable, given the extent of Canada’s contribution over the past few years. If they are able to do that, I think that that would be very welcome. We have been discussing that with the Canadian Government. There are, as you say, a growing number of nations overall, although not all are making the military contribution that Canada and the Netherlands have made. There are, currently, 48 troop-contributing nations, which is more than there have ever been. That is a fact that can be easily overlooked. In the cases of Canada and the Netherlands, there has been a good deal of advance notice of their intentions. From an operational point of view, given the increased numbers of forces from the United States and from some other countries, the operational gaps will be filled. There is no doubt about that.
Q152 Mr Watts: Foreign Secretary, you have already touched on the fact that there is a lack of trainers in Afghanistan. When we were there, it was quite apparent that the quality of training in both the police and the Afghan army was very poor. Also, the amount of time when people were actually training was very short. First, can you explain why that is the case? Secondly, it would seem to us that there needs to be a real change between 2014 and 2015, not only in the numbers training, but in the quality of that training. When we spoke to the Pakistani generals, they said that although the numbers were quite impressive, what we were doing was creating cannon fodder, not troops, because of the small amount of time that had been given to the training of troops. We heard that many of the Afghan police who had been returned had no idea of the job that they were intended to do. Their pay at one stage was so poor that it was below the living wage, which encouraged theft and extortion. Can you explain the policy for that and why, despite the billions of pounds that we have spent, we have such a poor record in training?

Mr Hague: It remains a huge challenge and you are quite right to highlight it. I don’t want to say, in any way, that this is an easy process or that we’ve achieved all the objectives on training. There are certain improvements that have taken place in recent times. One of those is that the pay of the Afghan national police has been increased and improved, because you are quite right that one of the difficulties has been that it has been more attractive for people to do other things. Afghan national police salaries have been increased, and the training programmes have been improved. Recruitment since then has generally exceeded the targets. I mentioned briefly the attrition rates, and the average attrition rate has gone down to 1.4% per month in the case of the Afghan national police, which is a serious improvement on past years. There is also increased attention being given to the training of non-commissioned officers and officers, who are absolutely key to the quality and to the leadership that is necessary so that people are not, in the phrase that you were given, cannon fodder. I mentioned some of the figures earlier, but to give you a bit more: the increase in the training of NCOs in the Afghan national army is up 712% since November last year; and the training of officers is up 175%. That will lead, over time, to quality improvements.

The other very important thing that is happening is the partnering of Afghan national security forces with British troops. Most of the work of British troops going forward is in partnership with the Afghan national security forces. In my review statement to the House three weeks ago, I pointed out how some of the operations conducted recently have been led by the Afghan forces, for the first time, in a very significant way. Those are all signs of improvement. Is the level of training the same level that you would get in a European or American army? No, it isn’t, because the emphasis here is on driving up the strength as rapidly as possible, but you can see from the figures that I am giving that the quality of training, the quantity of training and the way in which the troops in the Afghan forces then gain experience alongside NATO troops are all gathering pace and improving.

Karen Pierce: If I may just add one thing to that, Afghan troops are taking the lead in Operation Hamkari, which is the operation around Kandahar. That is proving quite successful.

Mr Hague: Fifty-eight per cent of the operations, I think, on Hamkari have been led by the Afghan national security forces themselves.

Q153 Mr Watts: Just to make the point, Foreign Secretary, it is only a couple of weeks since we’ve been there that the people responsible for the training of troops in Afghanistan were complaining bitterly about the lack of resources—even now as we speak. We’ve talked about the Afghan national police and the Afghan national security forces. Can I just move on to the Government themselves? One of the important things is that the Afghan people have faith in their own Government. We heard an awful lot about the corruption and the malpractices of the Afghan Government. What have we been doing and what can we do in the future that will build up the Afghan people’s faith in their own Government?

Mr Hague: This is one of the areas where much more progress needs to be made. By the way, I wasn’t arguing, in my earlier answer, that everything was fine and that the problem was solved. It remains a huge challenge. You are quite right to say that training requires increased international attention. On governance and on corruption, a greater effort needs to be made.

Some progress has been made. Some of the commitments entered into at the time of the Kabul conference in July are being met. We have seen, over the past few months, some of the Afghan Ministers declare their assets in public. We have seen a great improvement in transparency. For instance, in the Ministry of Mines, more than 100 new contracts were placed, openly, on the internet for people to examine. That is the kind of practice that may help to combat corruption in the future. Certainly, some progress is being made. Nevertheless, we have seen, in events surrounding the Kabul bank and other institutions, very depressing news. We do call on the Government of Afghanistan to make greater progress in this area, to continue to try to win the support of domestic and international opinion.

Q154 Ann Clwyd: I heard your statement in the House of Commons. It was very full and, I thought, very frank. You touched on good governance and you mentioned it again now. What precisely do you mean by good governance? How can it be seen; how do you feel you have succeeded in getting good governance? I imagine good governance would, for instance, include respect for human rights and women’s rights. I hope that might be a topic you would raise with Secretary of State Clinton, if you see her, because that is an issue she is very concerned about. What does good governance mean to you?

Mr Hague: That is quite a wide philosophical question. To begin with, in Afghanistan, it means certain basic things that we take for granted here such as government being present at all. I think we can see
some of the progress that has been made. There are 10 district governors installed in Helmand, for instance, compared with only five two years ago. That is 10 district governors who are able to operate. There are 26 Afghan line Ministries now represented in Lashkar Gah. Government is more present in certain very difficult areas of the country such as Helmand, than it was a year or two ago. That is the first requirement of governance: that it exists; that it is there at all.

A second requirement is in the area we have just been addressing, of people being able to have confidence that the Government are not corrupt, that they work in the interests of the people. There is much more to do there: Afghanistan remains near the bottom of the scale on international records for levels of corruption. It has improved a little bit. I think on the world index for ease of doing business, it has improved to 160th in the world, from 168th. It has moved in the right direction. It needs to start moving in the same way on corruption as well. So, we can see a little bit of progress there.

It also means those other things that you are talking about: respect for minorities, respect for human rights, including women’s rights. As you know, quite a lot has been done in that regard. The UK strongly encourages it and has funded projects that encourage the participation of women in Afghan society and politics. It may have been in answer to one of your questions a couple of weeks ago that I pointed out the improved participation of women, such as in the peace jirga in June. There has also been increased participation by women in the recent parliamentary elections. It is very important that we continue to encourage those things, so that they become part of the accepted fabric of Afghan society, before and during the time in which a political settlement is created.

Karen Pierce: The Committee might be aware of the Asia Foundation poll, which measures a number of things every year. One is the confidence of the Afghan people in their Government. That has gone up 4% over last year, admittedly to only 47%, but the trend is upwards.

Mr Hague: Probably more than many Governments in the world have.

Q155 Mr Ainsworth: Returning to the questions we are asking for clarification. Does the deadline of 2015 apply to special forces as well; to all combat troops?

Mr Hague: We do not ever comment, as the former Defence Secretary knows, on the tasks we give to our special forces.

Q156 Mr Ainsworth: So it is not clear whether it applies to special forces?

Mr Hague: I am not giving you a clear answer deliberately.

Chair: We are going into private session. Maybe it could be more appropriately dealt with there.

Q157 Mike Gapes: Clearly, the United States is the most important power in the coalition, but there are lots of reports about internal divisions within the US Administration. We have heard people saying that US Administra—whether it is us in private in many places, and we have also had it publicly on the record. Some of our witnesses referred to incoherent and contradictory positions in the US Administration. How committed is the US to reconciliation as a strategy?

Mr Hague: The United States is committed to reconciliation. It is also very much committed, as we are—as I have pointed out in answer to earlier questions—to intensifying the military pressure on the Taliban. Those things are not mutually opposed goals, for the reasons I have given. They go together; the chances of reconciliation are increased by an effective military campaign. Is there often a debate within the US Government about this or other foreign policy issues? Yes there is. The United States has the kind of society and governmental system in which any debate about foreign policy often surfaces in public. You would not expect decisions about a matter as important as this always to have unanimous agreement in advance of any discussion, but the United States is in favour of the process of reintegration and reconciliation.

Q158 Mike Gapes: But is the US in favour of the same approach as the British Government, which seems to be that we should be working on reconciliation now, as opposed to a view that seems to be quite strongly held by some in the US that you need to change the balance militarily before you go down that road?

Mr Hague: Sometimes this is an academic argument, because it is not possible to command the timing of a political settlement. It will be important for the military effort to continue and to intensify, I believe, to make that settlement possible. Nevertheless, I would say in answer to your question that there is no disagreement here between the leadership of the US and UK Governments. The Prime Minister and the President discuss such issues regularly, and they are in strong accord about it. We tend to discuss this privately rather than through giving speeches directed at each other, which I think is the right way for close allies to deal with it. We are not engaged in an argument about this at the moment.

Q159 Mike Gapes: Would you agree that the US needs to be directly involved in discussions with the Taliban in order to get a solution to this situation?

Mr Hague: This has got to be an Afghan-led process. There is no doubt about that. An Afghan-led process will bring reconciliation in Afghanistan. We facilitate that process if we think it is appropriate.

Q160 Mike Gapes: When you say “we”, do you mean the UK?

Mr Hague: I mean the UK, but the United States also agrees with that policy and is in the same position. It has to be an Afghan-led process, however.

Q161 Mike Gapes: Is the US facilitating as well, or just us?

Mr Hague: It agrees with our policy.

Mike Gapes: That was not my question.

Karen Pierce: NATO has said that it and ISAF facilitate President Karzai’s contacts and provide
practical assistance. That includes the US as well as other ISAF members.

Mike Gapes: I do not think I am going to get a better answer than that.

Mr Hague: That is the answer.

Mike Gapes: I am not entirely clear what that means.

Mr Hague: It means the answer to your question is yes. The United States has the same policy as we have.

Q162 Mike Gapes: They have the same policy, but in terms of contacts and what is being done to try and contact elements within the insurgency and within the Taliban, is the US actively engaged in that process at this time?

Mr Hague: I know we will have a private session later, and I don’t think it is right to go into any operational details of these matters in public.

We have had two sets of written evidence so far from experts. Matt Waldman has said, “There has been a colossal failure by the international coalition to empathise with ordinary Afghans and act accordingly”. The Henry Jackson Society has stated, “It is one of the most serious failures of Afghanistan that in many respects the United Kingdom and its allies are losing the war of information with the Taliban”. Is that true?

Mr Hague: I think we ought to be able to do better over the coming months and years in the strategic communication of what our objectives are, how we are achieving them and how the nations of ISAF—and indeed the Afghan Government—are working together. I think that this has been one of the weak areas in recent years, and it needs further attention. We are giving attention to that in the National Security Council, from the UK’s point of view. I recently raised it with the NATO Secretary-General as something that requires better international co-ordination as well; so, yes, it is a weak area, and communications is a vital consideration in conflict—communications with the population, both of our country and of the country where that conflict is taking place.

I think that there is room for improvement. That is not to say that quite a bit has not been achieved; as in so many of these fields, there remain enormous challenges, but some progress has been made, particularly on the creation of a more vibrant media in Afghanistan, on people’s access to news outlets and on the variety of information sources that they have at their disposal. All those things have improved, but, yes, more attention is needed in that area, so you are right to raise the question. I think I’ve neglected the first part of the question.

Q164 Mr Roy: Both of them are very similar. As we heard earlier, Karen, you said that support for the Taliban in Afghanistan was at 10%. I am interested to know whether you think that that is increasing, decreasing or a stable 10%.

Mr Hague: I don’t know whether we have any historic figures on that. Polling is not an exact science in Afghanistan, as it isn’t in most countries.

Karen Pierce: We don’t have a poll that shows us whether it has gone up or down in certain areas. In some areas, it’s higher than 10% already, and in some areas it’s lower.

Q165 Mr Roy: If you don’t have a poll and you state that it’s 10%, how can you state that it’s 10%? What I’m really interested to find out is, is it increasing? Are we losing the war for hearts and minds? For example, if the Afghans think that we are going to walk away in 2015, are they more liable to say, “Well, wait a minute, you guys are walking away, I’m going to look at the people who are left—the Taliban—and I’m going to start supporting the Taliban”?

Mr Hague: Karen was saying that there is not the historic data, not that there wasn’t a poll; there have been various surveys. Let’s think of other ways of looking at it. If you look at Helmand, the area with which we and British troops are primarily concerned, in Nad Ali, hundreds of people make their way to the district centre every day, up from a trickle a year previously. In Sangin, Governor Mangal recently held a shura for more than 800 local elders; he thinks that that would have been impossible a few months earlier. Those are not polls, but they are indications of how life on the ground can change in winning over people.

There is still an enormous challenge in Helmand, but considering that we have 135,000 children enrolled in schools across the province, which is a 250% increase on last year, there is some indication of how normal life has changed for the people on the ground. That may then give some indication of whether they have confidence in what is happening.

Q166 Mr Roy: Could I just take you further then? It seems to me that you’re saying that this is an area that needs international attention. Through diplomatic means, how can our diplomats in Afghanistan for small periods of short terms be expected to win the hearts and minds over a Taliban ensconced in local villages throughout the country? Those diplomats in Afghanistan are obviously very shielded from ordinary, everyday Afghan people.

Mr Hague: We work on that on several different levels. Our diplomats in Kabul are engaged in ensuring that the media throughout the country understand what we are doing. It would be wrong to say that diplomats and others are cut off from the people of Afghanistan. The people, for instance, who work in our Provincial Reconstruction Team based in Lashkar Gah are working daily on local and regional problems, and are very often dealing with local elders and others on every issue concerning local society and the services provided. That is a fundamental part of winning over those hearts and minds. Karen, do you want to add the details of that work?

Karen Pierce: Thank you, Foreign Secretary. Certainly, some of our diplomats and their colleagues in the stabilisation unit go out and facilitate local shuras, help to provide transport and help to get
people together. If asked, they help people to run a meeting. They are out there every day in places such as Lashkar Gah.

One of the areas in which we find that the local authority really has to compete with the Taliban is local justice. The Taliban have these motorcycle courts and they provide justice very quickly. A lot of our efforts, and those of other PRTs, go into helping the local community stand up what you might think of as traditional justice, so that people can get decisions quickly.

It is not so much a hearts and minds issue in that sense, but that people suffer from intimidation by the Taliban. When people are asked what their primary concern is, security comes out as the major one. A lot of what we are engaged in is trying to provide security for local areas, so that people can go about their normal business. For example, in Kandahar, Major-General Nick Carter’s team were involved in building houses and offices for the district governor, so that they could carry out their business protected from intimidation. As the Foreign Secretary was saying, we have seen an increase in the number of people who are coming to the district governor—the provincial governor—rather than to the local warlords for help.

Q167 Mr Roy: Talking to people, all I ever hear from diplomats is that because they were only there for a short period of time, they did not even know the language. Surely that is a barrier to winning the hearts and minds. Many of our diplomatic corps do not know the language when they are there, because they are not going to be there long enough.

Mr Hague: In an ideal world everybody would be able to speak the local language. That would have required being able to prepare hundreds of diplomats long in advance for this. Of course, these are difficult postings, where people usually serve for a year in Kabul with the option of another year, or six months, in Lashkar Gah, with the option of another six months. They are difficult, hardship postings, so it is necessary to turn over the personnel pretty regularly. Does that have the disadvantage that new people have to learn local culture and get to know the locals leaders well? It does, but I think that you can see that is the only practical way in which we can do this.

Karen Pierce: We do have a couple of speakers in each place—in Lashkar Gah and in Kabul—and we have some very good local staff who are bilingual.

Q168 Rory Stewart: General Caldwell, in his presentation as the three-star general who is commanding the training command, points out that he is already close to being 250 trainers short; he will soon be 500 short; and, within a year, he will be 900 short. The United States is screaming for more support in training. At the same time, the US marine corps is very comfortable in continuing with the two-star command, and would like to take over the PRT in Helmand. Could we not be looking at a political opportunity to shift more of our resources towards training?

Mr Hague: We have done so already. I have mentioned briefly that the Defence Secretary announced that over 320 more UK personnel would be devoted entirely to training. As I said in answer to the questions from Mr Watts, it remains a huge challenge and will require a lot more resources, despite the improvements that have been made over the past year.

It is an important topic for the NATO summit, which is coming up at the end of this week, and which the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and I will attend. Yes, it needs more attention. Does it mean that over time, more of the British forces may be engaged in training? There is a serious possibility of that, but we have to do that by working, and co-ordinating, with our allies. So all that we can answer for at the moment is that shift of 326.

Q169 Andrew Rosindell: Foreign Secretary, the public in this country think that we have taken on more than we can chew in Afghanistan. Do you think that we have been over-ambitious? Do you think that our ambitions should have been more modest?

Mr Hague: Our ambition is the right one, provided that we understand that our ambition is our own national security and that our objective is to achieve a situation in Afghanistan where Afghans can conduct their own affairs without presenting a danger to the rest of the world. That does not mean that we will necessarily arrive at a situation where every valley of Afghanistan is entirely peaceful, where there are no difficulties in its governance, or where it has reached a point where it is not 190th on the corruption league, but 10th or 20th. Those are very long-term objectives. So long as the objectives are realistic, it has been right to do what we’ve done since 2001. This was a response to the events of 9/11, when it began and, from 2006, an effort to stabilise the situation in other areas of the country. Provided that we are clear about our objective, it is not over-ambitious.

Q170 Andrew Rosindell: Do you think that there are lessons to be learned for future situations where conflicts need to be resolved and where Britain is engaged in a military sense?

Mr Hague: I am sure that there will be many lessons to be learned, and some of them will require the wisdom of being able to look back on all this in the future. To start with the lessons at the highest level, this country needs to put as many resources as possible into conflict prevention around the world, since we can see how expensive it is and how it costs us dear, in human life as well as in financial terms, to engage in long-term, substantial conflict. I am sure that you will have heard what the Prime Minister and the International Development Secretary have said about devoting more of the international development budget towards conflict prevention. We are working very hard at the moment in the Foreign Office on the situation in Yemen and Sudan. Tomorrow I will chair the UN Security Council on Sudan, where conflict prevention is what we are concentrating on. That must be one of the first lessons.

There will no doubt be other lessons about how a military intervention should be handled, if it has to take place. There will be lessons from Iraq, which the Chilcot Inquiry is looking into at the moment. I am sure there will be lessons about Helmand as well,
about the initial deployment and about many decisions taken since then. We have to concentrate in government on finding out ways of success in this situation, and that has to be our prime concern.

Karen Pierce: We have a unit in the Foreign Office that looks at conflict lessons learned, as the Foreign Secretary was saying. It will look at the results of the Iraq Inquiry.

Q171 Ann Clwyd: I want to get back to language skills—because that is one of the lessons that can be drawn from Iraq as well—and the necessity to have people who speak local languages. The last Foreign Affairs Committee report in 2009 says that “the ability to engage with Afghans in key local languages is crucial to the UK’s effort in Afghanistan and we are concerned that nearly eight years after intervening in Afghanistan, the FCO still has no Pashtu speakers”. What is the situation in 2010?

Mr Hague: This is of vital importance to the Foreign Office. It is a wider subject beyond the situation in Afghanistan. We are a country noted for the language skills among our diplomats compared with many other nations of the world. But I was very concerned, in opposition, by the closure of the Foreign Office language school. I have been looking in recent weeks at the language arrangements in the Foreign Office. It is quite hard to put a language school back together again, of course, and we have all the budgetary constraints on the Government that we have now. But I am casting a critical eye over the current arrangements to see how they can be improved.

Coming to the level of the specialisms in this area, you are quite right—the Committee has highlighted this before—about the small number of speakers of the relevant languages. Karen pointed out in an answer to an earlier question that we have some people who speak local languages, and of course we make a great use of interpreters. Karen will give you any more up-to-date figures than that. But I would point out that with the huge number of our diplomats who need to be deployed into a situation like this, and the inevitable human need to rotate them quite quickly, it is unlikely that we will arrive at a situation where a large proportion of those diplomats will become versant in the local languages of Afghanistan; I think that is unrealistic.

Q172 Ann Clwyd: There is just another quick point that I want to put to you, which has been made by several witnesses, on the importance of longer diplomatic postings. Many people working in Iraq, for example, were there for a short time. Expertise was lost when people returned to their base and did not come back. I certainly saw that as a great deficiency, and one that I think the Foreign Office ought to look at in some detail. Rest and recreation are essential, but when some of those key people are absent for long periods—sometimes because of illness—there is a void. That was very evident to me in my frequent visits to Iraq, and I imagine that the same would be true in Afghanistan.

Mr Hague: I take the point about that, although I stress that we have some incredibly hard working people in the Foreign Office and other government departments in Afghanistan. I am always enormously impressed, as I hope you were on your visit, by their utter dedication, often in very difficult circumstances. Certainly I think the Committee is right to raise the point about the length of deployment. This has often struck me in the past, looking at, for instance, the length of service of American military commanders in these situations, who can go on for a very long time, although with substantial breaks back home. They organise it in a different way. But I am not averse to looking at how we can improve this in the future.

Karen Pierce: If I may add to that, just on the language speakers. Because of the programme that the Foreign Secretary has mentioned and his fresh look at this, more people will be trained in Afghan languages over the coming years. But it is obviously not something that we can put right instantly. The proportion of speakers in the embassy—we would call it a hard language—is roughly equivalent to hard language speakers in our other postings. Admittedly Afghanistan is more important, but it is certainly not disadvantaged because it is a conflict zone.

Q173 Ann Clwyd: Could you give us a breakdown of the numbers?

Karen Pierce: I can certainly do that, but I’m afraid I don’t have it in my head. There is an additional advantage to using Afghan interpreters in that it tends to be reassuring to the local community, and the military have found that themselves. It tends to help build trust and confidence so we rely on our local staff quite considerably. On your point about not letting lessons be lost through continuity of postings, we are trying in my directorate to see if we can somehow link postings so that someone would do a rotation in Afghanistan, come back to London and work on the issue and conceivably even share a posting in Afghanistan. We are very keen to rely not just on young people who have no family attachments. We want to try to get more experienced diplomats there. More experienced diplomats tend to have families, so we need to try to get that balance right as well, but it is something that we look at.

Q174 Mr Watts: Foreign Secretary, can I take you back to the 2014–15 deadline by which time you say that, without question, we will withdraw combat troops? We went into Afghanistan because it was a failed state and we thought that the terror attacks would come to our own country if we did not take action. What will happen in a situation where that happens again? Do you or the coalition rule out putting troops on the ground if the situation becomes as bad as it was previously?

Mr Hague: We are clearly aiming here to create a completely different situation in Afghanistan from anything that prevailed in the recent past. I gave figures earlier for the anticipated strength of the Afghan national security forces just by 2011, let alone by 2014. I have indicated how they are already beginning to be able to conduct the majority of the operations, such as those that Karen was talking about earlier. So our objective—it is the internationally agreed objective—is to create by 2014 a situation where Afghan forces can lead and sustain their own
operations throughout Afghanistan. It is consistent with that, therefore, for us to say what we have said about 2015 and to believe that if we achieve those objectives with regard to the Afghan national security forces, we won’t be placed again in the situation of 9/11.

Q175 Mr Watts: But the 2014–15 deadline is set regardless of the situation that you find and whether or not the Afghan army and the police are ready and able to take over. So it is possible—I do not say that it is likely—that the situation will deteriorate. At that point, would you rule out coalition troops being used again?

Mr Hague: This is a clear deadline. No one should be in any doubt about this whatsoever. Let everyone’s minds concentrate on this—the Afghan Government, among our allies, as necessary. It is absolutely clear what we said about 2015. If the Prime Minister were here, he would put it in equally trenchant terms.

Q176 Mr Watts: But how would you stop terrorist attacks coming to the UK, if we had a failed state again?

Mr Hague: I can’t anticipate what the situation will be in 2025 or 2035. We are trying to create the conditions in which we don’t have a failed state, and in which a state with one of the largest armies in the world is able to conduct its own affairs at least to the extent of not being a danger to the rest of the world, in line with the realistic national security objective that I set out earlier. I think that is a realistic objective.

Q177 Mr Baron: May I return to the issue of hearts and minds and the situation with civilian casualties? The reports that we have as a Committee are that civilian casualties are going up. This in many ways makes it easy for the Taliban to depict us, ISAF, as the occupying force and Kabul as a puppet Government and so on. History would suggest that, in those countries and regimes that have militarily engaged with the West in the past, the old systems has survived. Communism has survived—one thinks of Cuba, North Vietnam, North Korea and perhaps even China. It fosters a feeling of mistrust, which plays into the Taliban’s hands. Is there anything we can do to break into this vicious circle?

Mr Hague: So much of what our military effort is directed at doing, working with the provincial reconstruction teams, is to break into this circle. As you know, the military strategy adopted at the highest level was redefined to be counter-insurgency involving the protection of the local population. ISAF forces go to great lengths to protect local populations, and they often take losses to do so. The majority of civilian casualties are caused by the other side, by the IEDs of the Taliban and others. I think it is very important to remember that. We are the forces safeguarding the civilian population, wherever possible. Karen may have the figures, but I think it is about 70% of civilian casualties that are caused by Taliban activity and IEDs.

Karen Pierce: That’s right—70% of casualties under UN figures are caused by the Taliban. The figure has gone up this year—largely due to an increase in Taliban attacks—and the ISAF and ANSF civilian casualty figures have been falling. I think it is helpful to point out that any casualty caused by ISAF or ANSF is accidental. It is regrettable and we have said so in the Security Council. As the Foreign Secretary said, we take all steps possible to minimise the risk that there will be accidental casualties. The Taliban, by contrast, actually go out and target civilians.

Chair: Foreign Secretary, we have spent the past 55 minutes looking at Afghanistan. For the last 10 minutes, before we go into private session, may we look at Pakistan?

Q178 Mike Gapes: We asked you in September about your reaction to the Prime Minister’s statement in India. He referred to Pakistan looking both ways and alleged that it was exporting terror to India, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world. It was certainly interpreted that way by the Pakistanis. Was he wise to make that remark in India?

Mr Hague: Yes. A good Foreign Secretary will affirm that a Prime Minister is always wise to make these remarks. I think they were widely supported and respected around the world. It was said at the time by some commentators that that had damaged relations with Pakistan, but I have to say that, in recent months, relations between the UK and Pakistan have been excellent, and the co-operation between our two Governments had been excellent. If there was disquiet in the Pakistani Government about that, it has been more than overcome by the work that we have been doing since then.

Q179 Mike Gapes: We have received evidence from a number of sources saying that Pakistan doesn’t fully co-operate with the UK on counter-terrorism issues. What’s your reaction to that?

Mr Hague: There is a huge amount of co-operation on counter-terrorism issues on a very regular, and very much on an operational, basis. I can’t go into the details of that in public, but I would certainly say that the co-operation on counter-terrorism with Pakistan has substantially improved in recent times.

Q180 Mike Gapes: Would you say, however, that it is not yet as unconditional and full as it might be?

Mr Hague: Those things can be quite difficult to assess. It is often hard to be sure whether a country is giving all the information and co-operation that it could give, but nevertheless I stress again that we have no current reason for complaint about that, and that co-operation has improved.

Q181 Mike Gapes: It was put to us in Pakistan that the Pakistanis would like some sophisticated equipment so that they would be able to do the job themselves much more effectively. Do we have concerns about giving certain equipment to Pakistan, because we are not quite sure where it might end up?

Chair: As it was said in public, President Zardari was saying that he would like to have access to the drone technology.

Mr Hague: The sale of technology from this country is very carefully controlled. We will look at all
requests from a friendly country, but I am sure you understand how carefully we control those things.

Q182 Chair: The point was made to us, “Look, you are asking us to do a job out here on the North West Frontier, but you are not giving us the technology we need”. Is there a case for doing more to help them on the military front?
Mr Hague: We will always be careful in selling advanced technology to many nations around the world and, of course, we will have to be careful in this case.
Karen Pierce: We are governed by the EU export regime and some of the other regimes, as the Foreign Secretary was saying. President Zardari has been very worried, for a while, about the degradation of equipment among the Pakistani armed forces. Some of that relates to very sophisticated technology; some of it is a bit more basic. The Ministry of Defence is undertaking a review on what help it can give to Pakistan across the board, covering a number of areas, not just provision of equipment.

Q183 Mike Gapes: The Pakistani state, or some of its agencies, were involved in setting up the Taliban that came to power in Afghanistan. They did so at that time with western support, because they were used against the Soviet Union. How confident are we now that elements within the Pakistani state, in particular the Inter-Services Intelligence, are willing and able to tackle those insurgents, given their close historical links with them?
Mr Hague: We have seen a sharply increased willingness in Pakistan to tackle insurgency in many different forms. You are familiar, of course, with many of the military campaigns that it has undertaken and, indeed, the huge losses the Pakistani military have sustained. It is always very important to recognise that. The Government of Pakistan, including its intelligence services, can now see very clearly, after some of the terrible terrorist incidents that they have themselves experienced, the importance of tackling insurgency and instability.

Q184 Mike Gapes: But that relates to their combat, and they have lost lots of people against the Pakistani Taliban. The question is, are they prepared to act against the Afghan Taliban, which might be a kind of proxy, or an organisation, over which they could still have some influence in the future?
Mr Hague: Again, I would say that the co-operation between our countries has improved in this area. But I stress that, in a political settlement in Afghanistan, which we discussed earlier, the active support of Pakistan for that, because of links that were established over a long time, will be very important.

Q185 Mr Ainsworth: Is it a case of willingness or capability to take on the Afghan Taliban? The Pakistani military have been pretty heavily involved in Swat valley. South Waziristan is still not terribly successful. North Waziristan is still a problem, and we have still got Baluchistan, which is the main base of the Afghan Taliban. Do you think there is a willingness and it is a lack of capacity, or do you think that it is a bit of both?
Mr Hague: The military capacity to deal decisively with every threat in that kind of terrain is, of course, quite difficult to come by. That always has to be understood. This is one of the most difficult areas in the world. As you know very well as a former Defence Secretary, Mr Ainsworth, this is one of the most difficult areas in the world to control by military means. Nevertheless, as I said to Mr Gapes, we have seen a greatly increased willingness on the part of Pakistan to confront insurgencies on its own territory and to take action against terrorist groups. I would like to emphasise that today, rather than be critical—we have seen very important steps forward in tackling terrorism by the Government of Pakistan, and of course we want those to continue.

Q186 Mr Watts: Foreign Secretary, we have heard from Pakistan that it has taken a lot of criticism about not taking on the Taliban, but it points to how many people it has lost in action that it has taken against the insurgency. It complains about the borders and the lack of border control. It highlights how many border control people it has on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and it highlights the difference between our forces and its own. Is there anything we can do to make the border more secure than it is now, by putting more emphasis on the need to keep a tighter boundary?
Mr Hague: There may be over time. There have been discussions about this between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which we very much encourage. Again, following up a point I made to Mr Ainsworth, this is one of the most difficult borders in the world to police. In some cases, there would no doubt be arguments about where exactly the border was. Certainly, there have been international initiatives to improve co-operation on the borders, and we encourage those. Karen, do you want to add to that?
Karen Pierce: Just to amplify that point, there is a G8 initiative, which was started by the Canadians, to improve co-operation on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan with international monitoring and help. We are hoping the French will continue that under their G8 presidency. There is also something called the Dubai process, which looks at the same issue on a slightly larger basis. We hope those things will continue.

Q187 Chair: While we were in Islamabad, the Pakistanis made it pretty clear that they wanted to be involved in any settlement. Do you think we can trust them to be an honest broker?
Mr Hague: I hope all nations in the region, including Pakistan, will be able to play a supportive role in a political settlement in Afghanistan, but we should be careful about defining who is a broker in bringing about such a settlement. This has to be an Afghan-led process of reconciliation.

Q188 Chair: Would you like to comment on US-Pakistan relations? They seem to be rather at loggerheads. While we were there, we picked up hostility to the United States, despite the fact that a
substantial amount of aid is given by the United States to Pakistan. I believe we have a role here. Do you agree that we could be encouraging Pakistan and the United States to communicate better with each other, so that they can work jointly towards a settlement? 

Mr Hague: Yes. I think that the Governments of Pakistan and the United States communicate effectively with each other. It is very important for the United States and the United Kingdom to explain to the people of Pakistan what we are doing. I strongly welcome the visits by fellow parliamentarians to Pakistan. As was set out in the memorandum sent to the Committee, we have had a large number of ministerial visits to Pakistan under the new Government. On many of those visits, we have gone out of our way to spend our time on the media in Pakistan. I did an exceptional number of interviews on my visit to explain to the people of Pakistan about the role of the UK and the extent of the assistance that we are giving with education. Since then, Britain has been one of the countries that have led the way in responding to the disastrous floods in Pakistan. The UK, the US and our allies have to continue to communicate that as effectively as possible and, alongside a close relationship with India, to build a long-term strategic partnership with Pakistan. Those things go indispensively together.

Chair: President Zardari has said that, when he is next in the UK, he wants to come to address this Committee, and we will be doing our best to facilitate that. Foreign Secretary, you have indicated that you are happy to sit in private. Could I ask the public if they will vacate the Gallery? Thank you very much.

Resolved, That the Committee should sit in private. The witnesses gave oral evidence. Asterisks denote that part of the oral evidence which has not been reported at the request of the witnesses and with the agreement of the Committee.

Q189 Chair: Foreign Secretary, although this is in private a record is still kept. We then enter into discussions as to what is public. You are entitled to ask for redactions and, I assure you that we will not be difficult over them.

Mr Hague: I can proceed on the basis that all of this is confidential.

Q190 Chair: All of this is in private, but a record is taken. Eventually a transcript will be published of that content of the session that you are happy to be made public. You are entitled to ask for redactions on anything that you said and, as I have said, we will not be difficult over those redactions.

Mr Hague: Okay. Well, on that basis I can’t be quite as forthcoming as I would be if it was complete confidentiality.

Q191 Chair: You can speak frankly, knowing that anything you do not want to go into the public domain will not go in the public domain.

Mr Hague: Okay. What would you like to cover?

Q192 Chair: We were on the runway in Kabul when we got a message from Karen Pierce that you would like a private session. You have indicated that you perhaps had further things you could say about reconciliation and possibly 2015.

Mr Hague: Yes.

Q193 Chair: We have no fixed questions, although I know that one or two colleagues have already told me about questions that they want to ask.

Mr Hague: ***

Karen Pierce: Thank you, Foreign Secretary. It was an offer, Mr Chairman, not an insistence. I hope it didn’t hold you up on the runway in Kabul.

Chair: Not at all. We were delighted to get the offer.

Karen Pierce: ***

Q194 Chair: Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles sat here a week ago saying that he thought that nothing would happen unless there was political reconciliation and that military strategy on its own could not succeed.

Mr Hague: I think that is right. Actually, I think that was the public perception of the outgoing Government and it is the public perception of this Government. None of us think that there is a purely military solution to this. However, you cannot bring about a political settlement by wishing it. You have to create the conditions for it, and that includes continuing to intensify the military campaign, but also being clear that we are open to a political settlement.

Q195 Mr Roy: ***

Karen Pierce: ***

Q196 Mr Roy: ***

Karen Pierce: ***

Mr Hague: ***

Q197 Chair: We got the impression from you earlier that the sheer existence of the military pressure would drive them to negotiate.

Mr Hague: That is my view. There is a legitimate alternative view, which I think is what John Baron was asking about earlier, that they will not negotiate if they are under such relentless attack. I tend to the view that it does require the continuing relentless attack to give them the incentive to come to the negotiating table.

Q198 Mr Baron: If I can be devil’s advocate, unless we really ramp up troop density levels, my instinct is we are not going to beat the Taliban militarily. But we can debate that. That is not important. Surely the key issue is that there is going to have to be a negotiated settlement. I think we can all buy that. The question is, how do we get there and who does it involve? At the end of the day, hasn’t it got to involve the Taliban as the main military force—our opposition military force—and the US, the major player in the area? What has hindered progress in the past is that the US, at least very publicly, has been reluctant to talk to the Taliban. We can have a debate about whether decapitation will work. My instinct is that I don’t think it is going to work. Somebody—or one of the military commanders on the ground—once said that if
we kill all the Gerry Adames on the ground, who have you got left to negotiate with? Putting that to one side, have we not got to persuade the US to open negotiations with the Taliban, and what conditions do you think the US would accept for those talks?

Mr Hague: ***

Q199 Mr Baron: Can I advocate, Foreign Secretary, that perhaps we need to be more forceful? When we were in Northern Ireland, we were negotiating with the provisionals when we were intensifying our military campaign against them. I was there, like a number of other colleagues were, and we knew that that was happening at the time. The Americans, perhaps, have a too simplistic view, that you can take the Taliban on militarily, but you cannot negotiate with them at the same time. At the end of the day, however, it is going to have to involve some sort of negotiated settlement. Should we be more forceful? May I make a plea for something else? I am going to disagree with a Committee member here. Sometimes, there is muddled thinking. We did not go into Afghanistan to sort out women’s rights. Our objective was very clear, and I sometimes worry that mission creep has also been another factor in the muddled thinking. To my knowledge, our mission was not to go in there and sort out women’s rights. I suggest that that illustrates a tendency to muddle our thinking as to why we are there. Whatever the answer to that question, we have got to, and the US has got to, accept that we have to negotiate with the Taliban. The sooner that we accept that, the closer that we can come to some sort of negotiated settlement. Do you agree with that?

Mr Hague: ***

Karen Pierce: ***

Q200 Rory Stewart: The place that the United States is in seems to make it at least possible that if it does not get where it wants by 2014, it will keep pushing ahead with combat operations. That is at least a strong possibility. At that point, we want to be out of the game—we want to be back in our bases, we want to be training and we want to be doing special forces operations. Our conversations with generals in Afghanistan, including British generals, imply that they are very uncomfortable with that. Some of them said privately that they were hoping that they can fudge it, that they would stick with the Americans and that it is all conditions based. We are with you—we are going to pin them down and we have to get out in 2015. How are we going to ensure that we really pin down the British military? How are we going to make sure that they are actually showing us what their deployment is going to be for 2013–14, so that we do not have a repeat of what we have seen for the last three to four years?

Mr Hague: We are the elected Government, and I think that the National Security Council works very well with the Government asserting their authority over such things. It is not for me to comment on what happened under any previous Government, because I am not privy to their internal workings, but there are members of the Committee who were. We are a sovereign nation, and the Prime Minister feels very strongly about what he has said on 2015, which I support. ***

Karen Pierce: I think that this is where transition comes in. The NATO plan, which will be endorsed at the summit later this week, is to hand over provinces to Afghan lead control and security, and have that done throughout Afghanistan by 2014. ***

Q201 Mr Ainsworth: Rory has hit on a big problem—ungoverned space. We have only just got to the situation where we have the number of troops available to us that we have now. We got there in the spring, in about April, which is when we became fully deployed with the additional Americans and the additional people that we deployed. We have other people pulling back, too. If you ask anyone in Afghanistan below a certain rank what the problem is on the military side, they will tell you that, with the current troop density, they simply cannot provide security to the people with the number of troops that they have got. Troop density, therefore, is a big problem. That set of undeniable facts comes from the people who are doing one of the hardest yards in one of the hardest operations that we’ve had in modern times. You have got to get from where you are now to where you need to be, and not fall off a cliff edge some time in 2015, but be on a glide path between now and then while other allies are reluctant to bring in additional troops and some of them are coming out. Indeed, the American Government may well start running down from next year. How are you going to manage that? That’s going to be enormously difficult to do.

Mr Hague: ***

Q202 Mr Ainsworth: You will leave it until 2013?

Mr Hague: That depends on what is happening. We will look next at how the forces should be deployed over 2011–12. Remember that the distance from now to the time by which we said we will cease combat operations is longer than the whole First World War, and nearly as long as the Second World War. It would have been quite hard in 1940 to say what you would be doing in 1944. Bear in mind that that is quite a long time.

Q203 Mr Ainsworth: I know what your public line is going to be, but the only backfill that you’ve got is the Afghan forces. The Committee has seen them, and I have seen them, over a protracted length of time. They are going to struggle, really struggle, particularly in the south. You cannot get them to deploy to the south. I have heard, and you will know this by now, that they hop off the bus when they realise where they are being sent.

Mr Hague: And yet you have to visualise what they could do four years from now, when they should have very different numbers, very different levels of experience, and, in many cases, much improved equipment. If we can’t get the Afghan forces into such a shape, when will we ever do so? We do feel it is right to set this deadline. There are downsides, some of which have been drawn out in this Committee, but there are upsides as well. If we are succeeding in all the ways that we have discussed today, it will be more
than appropriate to have ceased that combat role in 2015. If we are not succeeding in any of these ways, we will have been at this for nine years by 2015. We feel that either way, this is the right decision to take.

**Q204 Mr Watts:** We are possibly in a situation where, as we pull troops out from combat, the situation gets worse, not better. That is one scenario—it is not the one that you want to see, but it is possible. We can either continue to pull out, or we can maintain the levels, and then come 2014–15, we are faced with pulling out the bulk of the troops and leaving the situation worse. Let me give you a scenario: if that were to happen and the new Afghan Government took the decision that they couldn’t possibly police the whole of Afghanistan and that the deal with the Taliban was, “You can have this part of the south and we’ll stay where we are in the north,” and they carved up the territory in that way. That is another possible scenario. What would the British Government’s view be about that?

**Mr Hague:** I don’t think that would be a very desirable outcome, to have that situation, because it would be unlikely to be stable. It is not a country where you can say, “You just sit there; you stay there, and we’re going to be over here and we’re not going to hurt each other.” Past history suggests that dramatic things happen after that, and that you don’t get a permanently peaceful solution out of that. That is not what we’re looking for. We’re looking for a political settlement with a more constitutional basis than carving up the country with the Taliban.

**Q205 Mr Watts:** What would you do if that were the scenario?

**Mr Hague:**

**Q206 Mr Watts:** To pursue that, Foreign Secretary: the reason I asked that question the way I did is due to the lack of trained troops and police that we have in Afghanistan after nine years, because we hadn’t got the strategy right. We are determined, as far as I can tell, for the Afghan police and army to police the situation after we’ve pulled out of combat. Why are we not thinking about the likely scenarios, which include the one I have just set out, and have some clear idea of what we would do under those circumstances?

**Mr Hague:** We are aiming, with the huge build-up that we have described of the security forces, to have a political settlement. To anticipate all the scenarios we have described of the security forces, to have some ideas of what we would do under those circumstances?

**Q207 Ann Clwyd:** What will happen to the interpreters this time round? I wouldn’t like to see the situation repeated.

**Mr Hague:** You mean the situation that arose in Iraq. That depends on the political settlement, doesn’t it? If we have a country that has reasonable security, proper protection of people’s rights, and an atmosphere of co-operation and partnership with regional neighbours and with the western world, we won’t be leaving interpreters in the lurch.

**Q208 Mr Roy:** Some of us went to Herat on the western border with Iran, and there was obviously a big Iranian influence in the culture of that area. What is your thinking in relation to the relationship between Iran and Afghanistan, and what part does that play in the future of Afghanistan?

**Mr Hague:** It is a vast subject. It is important that the process of political settlement in Afghanistan is one that the whole region is comfortable with. That just demonstrates the complexity of this. Pakistan is a key player for the reasons that you all outlined earlier. Iran is a not-insignificant player. It is in its interest to have a more stable situation in Afghanistan in the long-term. One of the few things that I was able to discuss constructively with the Iranian Foreign Minister in New York a few weeks ago, given our strong disagreements on nuclear matters and human rights, was that the narcotics trade from Afghanistan has a very serious impact on Iran. There are reasons for Iran to want a stable Government in Afghanistan. I’m glad you went to Herat; I went there in July. Clearly there are parts of that province that would be at the early end of a transition in Afghanistan, because if you visited the factories, the airport or the university that I visited, you get a very different impression of Afghanistan from travelling around in Helmand, which is what we normally do through visiting our troops.

**Karen Pierce:**

**Mr Hague:** Yes.

**Chair:** Foreign Secretary, Karen Pierce, there aren’t many corners that we haven’t delved into during the last two hours. Thank you for your honest and frank answers.

**Mr Hague:** Thank you.

**Karen Pierce:** Thank you.