



House of Commons  
Defence Committee

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# Afghanistan

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## Fifteenth Report of Session 2013–14

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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## The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

### Current membership

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Rt Hon Jeffrey M. Donaldson MP (*Democratic Unionist, Lagan Valley*)  
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Derek Twigg MP (*Labour, Halton*)  
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The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry:

Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP (*Conservative, North East Hampshire*)  
Thomas Docherty MP (*Labour, Dunfermline and West Fife*)  
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Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/parliament.uk/defcom](http://www.parliament.uk/parliament.uk/defcom) and by The Stationery Office by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/parliament.uk/defcom](http://www.parliament.uk/parliament.uk/defcom).

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are James Rhys (Clerk), Karen Jackson (Audit Adviser), Ian Thomson (Committee Specialist), Eleanor Scarnell (Committee Specialist), Christine Randall (Senior Committee Assistant), Rowena Macdonald and Carolyn Bowes (Committee Assistants).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5857; the Committee's email address is [defcom@parliament.uk](mailto:defcom@parliament.uk). Media inquiries should be addressed to Alex Paterson on 020 7219 1589.

# Contents

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<b>Report</b>	<i>Page</i>
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
Our inquiry	7
Previous inquiries	7
<b>2 Security situation</b>	<b>8</b>
State of the insurgency	8
Afghan National Security Forces	10
ANSF attrition	10
Civilian casualties	12
Women's rights and protections	13
Narcotics	15
<b>3 Political transition</b>	<b>19</b>
Signing of Bilateral Security Agreement and Status of Forces Agreement	20
<b>4 Prospects of a peace settlement</b>	<b>22</b>
Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme	22
The role of Pakistan	22
<b>5 Withdrawal of UK Forces</b>	<b>25</b>
Scale of the challenge	25
Progress	25
Force Protection	26
Medical services	26
Future role	27
Afghan National Army Officer Academy	27
<b>6 Lessons from Afghanistan</b>	<b>29</b>
National Lessons Study	29
Official History	30
<b>7 Conclusion</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Formal Minutes</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Witnesses</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Published written evidence</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>List of Reports from the Committee in Session 2013–2014</b>	<b>35</b>

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### State of the insurgency

1. The insurgency remains a strong and persistent threat to the future security and stability of Afghanistan. Despite the numerical advantage and increasing capability of the ANSF, insurgent attacks have continued to target high profile targets with some success. We note the confidence of the Secretary of State for Defence that Afghanistan will not descend into civil war following the withdrawal of the majority of international forces from the country and can only hope that he is correct. (Paragraph 11)

### ANSF attrition

2. The potential for post election conflict in Afghanistan will be heavily influenced by the extent to which the unsuccessful candidates accept the results and the extent to which those who are successful are able to develop consent for Afghan security forces to secure the country to allow it to develop. (Paragraph 12)
3. We are concerned that the rate of ANSF attrition has remained stubbornly high and significantly in excess of targets. This will hamper efforts to professionalise these forces and enhance their capability in the longer term. (Paragraph 18)
4. We remain concerned that in the face of a determined insurgency the planned reduction in ANSF strength by a third by 2017 could undermine efforts to maintain security in Afghanistan. We (Paragraph 19)

### Civilian casualties

5. We note the significant increase in civilian casualties recorded by the United Nations in Afghanistan in 2013. The vast majority were the result of attacks by insurgents, with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) representing the main factor driving the escalation. We recommend that the Government maintain its counter-IED support for Afghan forces during the drawdown and consider longer term support as part of a future package of assistance. (Paragraph 24)

### Women's rights and protections

6. We consider that the advancement of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan in the period since the fall of the Taliban government has been significant, although we remain concerned that progress remains fragile. We understand that future financial support and development aid for Afghanistan will be dependent upon the Government of Afghanistan meeting specific commitments under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. We call upon the UK Government to confirm the commitments to women and girls which the Government of Afghanistan must meet in order to continue to receive development aid from the UK and the wider international community. (Paragraph 33)

### Narcotics

7. The counter-narcotics strategy of the UK Government in Afghanistan has failed. As we withdraw from Helmand Province, poppy cultivation is soaring to record levels

and there is no sign that the Government of Afghanistan has the will or the means to tackle the problem. We are concerned that this will continue to fund organised crime, and undermine the development of democratic government and governance. We recommend that future UK Government aid to Afghanistan should be, at least in part, conditional on clear progress in developing viable alternatives to poppy farming. (Paragraph 39)

### Political transition

8. The first round of the Presidential election passed off relatively peacefully compared to expectations. We pay tribute to the dedication and courage of the Afghan and ISAF security force personnel who ensured that the elections could take place. We also pay tribute to the dedication of those who administered the elections in such difficult circumstances and the courage of ordinary Afghans who turned out to vote in such numbers in defiance of Taliban threats. (Paragraph 43)
9. It is to be hoped that the second round will allow for the first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected President to another in the history of the country and that the newly elected President will be able to develop a constructive working relationship with the Afghan Parliament and find a way of accommodating all elements of Afghan society into the democratic political processes of the country. It is also to be hoped that the new President will be able to develop a settled relationship with the international community and consolidate and develop a constructive and enduring working relationship with the UK. (Paragraph 44)

### Signing of Bilateral Security Agreement and Status of Forces Agreement

10. We hope that the new President of Afghanistan will move swiftly to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement and Status of Forces Agreement in order to confirm the legal basis on which international forces will operate in Afghanistan post-2014. (Paragraph 50)
11. If a new ISAF Status of Forces Agreement is signed, in addition to the UK military training mission, other UK Government Departments will be conducting activities in Afghanistan, in particular the Department for International Development will be engaged in the delivery of aid programmes. Other UK Government Departments will also be engaged in supporting a range of projects including state institution building, developing capacity in policing and justice, and facilitating commercial development. The ability of these agencies to operate will be determined by what is likely to be an uneven security situation. We therefore believe that a Comprehensive Approach to the work of all UK Government Departments and agencies in Afghanistan will still be required. We ask the Government to provide us with further details of the planning that is being carried out across Government for that transition. (Paragraph 51)

### The role of Pakistan

12. The conflict in Afghanistan must be resolved by the people of Afghanistan themselves, but the UK and wider international community must be ready to assist if called upon. Because Pakistan has strong economic and cultural links with its neighbour and suffers similar problems with combatting an armed insurgency, we believe that it is in the interests of both countries to co-operate closely in the years ahead in order to tackle common problems more effectively. We support a continuation of the trilateral process with Afghanistan, Pakistan and the UK which the Government has facilitated

and encourage all efforts towards conflict resolution and reconciliation which hold out the prospect of lasting peace. (Paragraph 60)

13. The broad reconciliation and reintegration of Afghan Taliban affiliates into the political processes of Afghanistan will be important to an enduring peace settlement in Afghanistan in the same way that Pakistan Taliban affiliates need to reconcile with the Pakistan Government to provide stability there. Such developments would help secure the integrity of each country and allow for improved co-operation between these sovereign states enabling them to become more settled and diminishing pressures for regional instability. (Paragraph 61)

### Progress

14. We welcome the significant progress towards withdrawal which has been made by UK forces to date. We call upon the MoD to include detailed information about progress on redeployment in its monthly progress reports to Parliament and to provide a detailed breakdown of the costs of redeployment at the conclusion of the operation. (Paragraph 66)

### Afghan National Army Officer Academy

15. We support the continuing UK Government commitment to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy at Qargha. The Academy will provide the Afghan National Army with the capacity to train and develop its next generation of Army officers who will lead the fight against the insurgency and help to maintain security for the Afghan people. However, without the signing of a Status of Forces Agreement between the Afghan Government and NATO we acknowledge that it will be impossible for the UK and other international partners to maintain a mentoring role at the Academy. (Paragraph 75)

### National Lessons Study

16. We consider that it would be appropriate for an independent national lessons study into Afghanistan to be commissioned by the Government. It should receive input from all departments of state concerned, and take evidence from all those engaged and affected by the campaign. (Paragraph 77)
17. We recommend that the study should include a balanced review of the successes and setbacks of the campaign, identifying lessons from the tactical to the strategic, clearly distinguishing the pre-2006 section of the campaign from activities in Helmand from 2006 onward. It should describe the translation of national policy, within an international context, into military operations and development activities and consider whether all instruments of national power were harnessed and orchestrated to best effect in order to meet the objectives of the UK Government and the international community. It should also explore the collective experience of operating within the extended ISAF international coalition. (Paragraph 78)
18. More specifically, the study should set out what the political ends were, how they changed during the course of the campaign, and judge whether the ways and means, diplomatic, economic and military, were sufficient during the course of the campaign. The study should review whether the national decision-making, military command and governance arrangements for the campaign were appropriate, and whether they could be improved for the future. (Paragraph 79)

19. Furthermore the study should analyse how public perceptions were captured, understood and considered by policy makers and what measures were taken to shape public understanding as the conflict moved through its various phases over a decade or more. The study should examine how public perceptions and understanding became largely shaped by a range of factors outside the Government's control, including developing social media. The study should also examine how plans to gain public understanding and support in the UK, in Afghanistan and amongst ISAF and other partner nations were determined and deployed. (Paragraph 80)

### Official History

20. We remain firmly of the view that the Ministry of Defence should commission work to write the narrative of operations in Afghanistan as an essential precursor to an official history that should follow in future years. While the official history can wait, as typically these are written 10-20 years after the campaign concerned, the narratives should not. (Paragraph 83)
21. The Ministry of Defence, alongside other departments of state, needs to invest in its history and lessons functions if our successors are to make better informed policies and strategic plans. A relatively small investment could have a significantly beneficial impact on future planning. (Paragraph 84)
22. As the Afghan Presidential election process will not be concluded as this report is published, the Status of Forces Agreements remain unsigned and the withdrawal of UK combat forces incomplete, we will continue to monitor the situation in Afghanistan and may well report further before the end of this Parliament. (Paragraph 85)

### Conclusion

23. The conflict in Afghanistan has been a long and arduous one. UK Armed Forces have fought with great courage and made extraordinary sacrifices in order to create and sustain a safer and more stable Afghanistan. We record here our gratitude to the many men and women who have served in Afghanistan since 2001 and the families who have given them such resolute support. We pay tribute in particular to all those who have lost their lives, and the many more who have sustained life-changing injuries. (Paragraph 86)
24. The future of Afghanistan is uncertain. In the face of a determined insurgency, when international forces leave at the end of 2014 the Government of Afghanistan will find it challenging to continue to maintain security and exercise executive control across the country. However, with the continued support of the international community, we believe that these challenges can be met and overcome. (Paragraph 87)
25. We believe that a lasting peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved through a process of reconciliation with the Taliban. We encourage the new Government of Afghanistan to begin a process of engagement as a matter of priority. (Paragraph 88)
26. It is imperative that the UK learns lessons from our intervention in Afghanistan. The public will quite rightly expect a thorough analysis to be conducted to ensure that the Government and our Armed Forces have identified and assessed lessons for the future. We recommend that the Government conduct a lessons learned review, encompassing

not just the military operation, but the wider intervention by the UK as part of the ISAF and United Nations missions in Afghanistan looking at the two stages of our involvement separately, the pre-2006 intervention and the deployment to Helmand post 2006. In the longer term, we consider that it is vital that a proper historical account be produced of the campaign. (Paragraph 89)

# 1 Introduction

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## Our inquiry

1. We announced an inquiry in September 2013 into the security situation in Afghanistan, the progress of withdrawal of UK forces and equipment, expected assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces after 2014, the impact on Afghanistan of the new Government in Pakistan, and UK relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan after 2014.

2. During the inquiry, in October 2013, we visited Afghanistan, including visiting Kabul and Camp Bastion, and Pakistan. Our meetings in Afghanistan included some with members of the Afghan Government including President Karzai and Deputy Defence Minister Nazari. We also received extensive briefings from Sir Richard Stagg, HM Ambassador to Afghanistan, Lieutenant General John Lorimer, Deputy Commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and Mr Lee Litzenberger, NATO deputy senior civilian representative in Afghanistan. At Camp Bastion we were briefed on the current UK mission priorities by Commander Joint Force Support (Afghanistan), Air Commodore John Bessell, and met with Brigadier General Mohammad Nasim, the new Commander of 3/215 Brigade, Afghan National Army, at Camp Shorabak. In Pakistan, those we met included the Interior Minister, Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, Defence Secretary, Lieutenant General (Retd) Asif Yaseen Malik, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Hon. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, and Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, President of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam. We wish to thank all those who took time to meet us and those who facilitated these useful meetings. We are also grateful to our specialist advisers<sup>1</sup> and our staff.

## Previous inquiries

3. We last reported on *Securing the Future of Afghanistan* in April 2013.<sup>2</sup> In that report we focused on:

- The transfer of responsibility for security in Afghanistan to Afghan Forces;
- Political and economic prospects for the country; and
- The withdrawal of ISAF combat troops.

4. Our report on *Operations in Afghanistan*<sup>3</sup>, published in July 2011, focused on military operations since 2009, training of the Afghan National Security Forces, and the impact on the civilian population. Many of the issues raised in these Reports remain relevant today.

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee's specialist advisers during this inquiry were: Mr Paul Beaver, Professor Mike Clarke, Chris Donnelly, Air Marshal (retired) Paul Colley, Dr John Louth, Major General (retired) Mungo Melvin, Rear Admiral (retired) Chris Snow, Air Marshal (retired) Philip Sturley. Their declarations of interests can be found in the Committee's Formal Minutes available on the Committee's website.

<sup>2</sup> Defence Committee, [Securing the Future of Afghanistan](#), Tenth Report of Session 2012-13, HC 413

## 2 Security situation

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5. ISAF is in the process of handing over responsibility for security in Afghanistan to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The final phase of this transition process began in June 2013. Since then, the ANSF has led the security response to the insurgency threat, with ISAF primarily operating in a supporting role and focusing on training, assisting and advising the Afghan security forces. The transfer of full responsibility for security across Afghanistan is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2014 in accordance with the agreement reached at the NATO Summit in November 2010.

### State of the insurgency

6. The MoD told us that, in early May 2013, the Taliban announced the start of Operation *Khalid bin Walid* with five goals:

- to increase violence;
- to degrade ANSF capability;
- to exercise Freedom of Movement;
- to defend support zones; and
- to influence the Afghan population.

The MoD added, however, that the insurgency had been largely unable to achieve these goals and the ANSF had demonstrated “persistent tactical advantage”.<sup>4</sup>

7. In a report to the US Congress in November 2013, the US Department of Defense concurred with this assessment:

The insurgency failed to achieve its stated campaign objectives during the reporting period and its ability to strike at major population centres is under pressure. The enemy is now less popular than in 2012. [...] The insurgency can mount attacks but generally cannot capture or destroy well-defended targets, and are unable to hold significant territory in the face of numerically superior ANSF. While tactically ineffective, these insurgent efforts potentially allow them to reap significant publicity gains. Insurgents continue to seek to conduct high profile attacks [...] against people in population centers as well as against remote outposts to garner media attention, to project an

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<sup>3</sup> Defence Committee, [Operations in Afghanistan](#), Fourth Report of Session 2010-12, HC 554

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 006](#)) paragraph 2.1

exaggerated image of their capabilities, and to expand perceptions of insecurity.<sup>5</sup>

8. However, in December 2013, the United Nations reported that the number of attacks against humanitarian personnel, facilities and assets in 2013 had reached 237, resulting in 36 deaths, 24 detentions, 46 injuries and the abduction of 72 people. As a consequence, Afghanistan was ranked as the most dangerous country in the World for aid workers.<sup>6</sup>

9. Ahead of the Presidential elections on 5 April 2014 attacks by insurgents increased in an effort to disrupt the polls. One particularly noteworthy attack took place on 20 March when nine people were killed by four gunmen in the Serena Hotel in Kabul.<sup>7</sup> The ICRC, while noting that the security situation in Afghanistan remained “precarious” noted that the elections had passed off more peacefully than many had expected.<sup>8</sup>

10. In oral evidence the Secretary of State for Defence expressed confidence that, following the withdrawal, Afghanistan would not descend into civil war:

There is already a robust insurgency; I don't see anything that would indicate that the insurgency would be able to move that up to civil war. They will have lost the recruiting sergeant of infidel troops, which has been an important one for them. We already believe they are throwing everything they have got at this in repeated attempts at surges. They have no reserves, as far as we can see, and their message becomes more difficult to deliver when they are inviting insurgency against Afghan forces under the control of a democratically elected Afghan Government.<sup>9</sup>

**11. The insurgency remains a strong and persistent threat to the future security and stability of Afghanistan. Despite the numerical advantage and increasing capability of the ANSF, insurgent attacks have continued to target high profile targets with some success. We note the confidence of the Secretary of State for Defence that Afghanistan will not descend into civil war following the withdrawal of the majority of international forces from the country and can only hope that he is correct.**

**12. The potential for post election conflict in Afghanistan will be heavily influenced by the extent to which the unsuccessful candidates accept the results and the extent to which those who are successful are able to develop consent for Afghan security forces to secure the country to allow it to develop.**

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<sup>5</sup> US Department of Defense, [Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan](#), November 2013

<sup>6</sup> UN press release '[After recent attacks on Afghan aid workers, UN official urges respect for humanitarian staff](#)', 2 December 2013

<sup>7</sup> BBC News "[Nine killed in Kabul hotel gun attack](#)" 21 March 2014

<sup>8</sup> ICRC, [Afghanistan: Protecting civilians remains paramount as election takes centre stage](#), 25 April 2014.

<sup>9</sup> [Q169](#)

## Afghan National Security Forces

13. In September 2013, the ANSF, comprising army, police and air force personnel, reached its surge strength target of 352,000. The enduring size of the ANSF is envisaged to be 228,500.<sup>10</sup> A breakdown of the ANSF by service in August 2013 is provided in the table below:

### *Breakdown of ANSF force levels by service type: August 2013*

	<b>Strength</b>	<b>Target</b>
Afghan National Army (ANA)	185,300	187,000
Afghan Air Force (AAF)	6,900	6,900
ANP (Afghan National Police)	152,700	157,000

Source: Ministry of Defence

Given the continuing high casualty rates, these numbers represent a considerable achievement. Nevertheless we have reservations set out below.

14. In our 2013 Report, *Securing the Future of Afghanistan*, we expressed concern that the planned reduction in ANSF strength by over a third was based on the expectation that the insurgency would have diminished. We called on the Government to urge the international community to develop a contingency plan in case that did not occur.<sup>11</sup> In its response, the Government said that the pace and size of a gradual, managed force reduction to sustainable levels would be “conditions-based and decided by the Afghan government in consultation with the international community”. We were told that this drawdown would occur around 2017.<sup>12</sup>

### **ANSF attrition**

15. A US Department of Defense report, published in November 2013, stated that in the preceding twelve months, the total attrition rate<sup>13</sup> for the Afghan National Army was 34.4 per cent:

Reasons for this high rate of attrition include poor leadership; inadequate living and working conditions; absence of planned leave and an operational cycle; the effect of seasonal attrition (harvesting, planting); lack of martyr care; and levels of pay and remuneration. Although the ANSF’s attrition rates are high by the standards of ISAF nations, the pillars of the ANSF are

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG01](#)) paragraph 4.1

<sup>11</sup> Defence Committee, [Securing the Future of Afghanistan](#), Tenth Report of Session 2012-13, HC 413, paragraph 50

<sup>12</sup> Defence Committee, Third Special Report of Session 2013-14. [Securing the Future of Afghanistan: Government Response to the Committee’s Tenth Report of Session 2012-13](#), HC 461.

<sup>13</sup> The attrition rate is a factor, normally expressed as a percentage, reflecting the degree of losses of personnel or materiel due to various causes within a specified period of time. Losses include those to death and injury, resignation, desertion and other causes.

currently able to maintain or increase force levels based on recruiting and retention rates.<sup>14</sup>

### *Breakdown of ANSF attrition rates by service type: August 2012–August 2013*

	<b>Annual Attrition Average</b>	<b>Annual Target</b>
ANA	34.40%	16.8%
AAF	12.80%	16.8%
ANP	19.20%	16.8%
Afghan Uniform Police (AUP)	15.24%	16.8%
Afghan Border Police (ABP)	26.04%	16.8%
Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP)	18.60%	16.8%

Source: Ministry of Defence.

	<b>12 Month Attrition Average</b>	<b>Monthly Target</b>
ANA	2.86%	1.4%
AAF	1.06%	1.4%
ANP	1.60%	1.4%
AUP	1.27%	1.4%
ABP	2.17%	1.4%
ANCOP	1.55%	1.4%

Source: Ministry of Defence

16. During our visit to Afghanistan we were told that although ANA casualties were very high this was only one element of the overall attrition rate. The main reasons for attrition were attributable to conditions of service, including levels of pay and the high operational tempo without a proper cycle of leave.

17. Lieutenant General James Everard, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Military Strategy and Operations), noted the challenge represented by the high attrition rate attributing the cause primarily to the lack of a proper cycle incorporating recuperation and training for the ANA:

You have a force that is losing 32% of its strength every year. That is not good news, and we need to work very hard on that. You are seeing far too many people do what is called “drop from role”, going AWOL and staying away from their place of duty for more than 21 days than we would like. In all those cases we understand the nature of the problem. Any army wants a cycle of rest, training, operations. For a large part, the Afghans are just doing operations.<sup>15</sup>

**18. We are concerned that the rate of ANSF attrition has remained stubbornly high and significantly in excess of targets. This will hamper efforts to professionalise these forces and enhance their capability in the longer term.**

<sup>14</sup> US Department of Defense, [Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan](#), November 2013

<sup>15</sup> [Q43](#)

19. **We remain concerned that in the face of a determined insurgency the planned reduction in ANSF strength by a third by 2017 could undermine efforts to maintain security in Afghanistan. We call upon the Government to discuss with international partners a contingency plan to support the ANSF at a higher strength should the level of the insurgency not diminish.**

### Civilian casualties

20. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) *Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* recorded that civilian casualties in Afghanistan rose by 14 per cent in 2013. The report recorded a total of 8,615 civilian casualties with 2,959 civilian deaths and 5,656 injured. This reversed a decline recorded in 2012 and was consistent with record high numbers of civilian casualties documented in 2011. It also found that it was the worst year since 2009 in terms of the number of women and children killed or injured as a result of conflict-related violence.<sup>16</sup>

21. According to UNAMA, the figures represented a 7 per cent increase in deaths and a 17 per cent increase in injuries compared to 2012. Since 2009, the armed conflict had claimed the lives of 14,064 Afghan civilians and injured thousands more.<sup>17</sup> UNAMA attributed 74 per cent of civilian deaths and injuries to Anti-Government Elements<sup>18</sup>, 11 per cent to Pro-Government Forces (eight per cent to ANSF and three per cent to ISAF) and ten per cent to ground engagements between Anti-Government Elements and Pro-Government Forces. The remaining five per cent of civilian casualties were unattributed, resulting mainly from explosive remnants of war.<sup>19</sup>

22. The MoD told us:

The protection of the Afghan civilian population remains at the core of ISAF's strategy and ISAF and UK forces have strict operating procedures to minimise the risk of civilian casualties occurring, and to investigate any incidents that do happen. UK targeting policy includes robust criteria to ensure that it fully meets the requirements of international humanitarian law with regards to the protection of civilians. It is reviewed in light of changing circumstances and advances in technology.<sup>20</sup>

23. Lieutenant-General Everard told us that UK support for Afghan forces in countering the threat from improvised explosive devices (IEDs), including training, had been successful. The UK had loaned equipment for detection of IEDs to Afghanistan but

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations [2013 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#)

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "[Civilian Casualties In Afghan Conflict Rise by 14 per cent In 2013](#)"

<sup>18</sup> UNAMA defines Anti-Government Elements as all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations [2013 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#)

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 006](#)) Annex B

decisions on the gifting of equipment would be dependent on the ability of the ANSF to maintain that equipment in the long term.<sup>21</sup>

**24. We note the significant increase in civilian casualties recorded by the United Nations in Afghanistan in 2013. The vast majority were the result of attacks by insurgents, with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) representing the main factor driving the escalation. We recommend that the Government maintain its counter-IED support for Afghan forces during the drawdown and consider longer term support as part of a future package of assistance.**

## Women's rights and protections

25. The MoD told us that the UK had agreed a new programme in Afghanistan to strengthen Afghan women's political participation, as candidates and as voters, in the upcoming elections. It explained that DFID had committed £4.5 million for the programme from June 2013 to December 2015.<sup>22</sup>

26. In 2012, the International Development Committee noted that Afghan women continued to suffer intense discrimination and abuse. Its report concluded:

While the UK Government says it is committed to protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan there is little practical evidence of this in either programming or funding. We recommend that DFID seeks to combat violence against women through support for women's shelters and legal services. DFID should also continue to ensure women and girls are a major focus for its education and wealth creation programmes.<sup>23</sup>

27. In its response, the Government stated that the Afghan Government's commitments to women and girls were already laid out in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF), the set of commitments made by the Afghan Government and the international community in July 2012 aimed at helping Afghanistan achieve its development and governance goals. The Government considered that the international community, including the UK, should focus efforts on ensuring these commitments were implemented. As co-chairs of the first Ministerial Review of the TMAF in 2014, the UK would play an active role in this process.<sup>24</sup>

28. In respect of women's rights and representation, the MoD told us that although political and social representation of women had grown, their political role and involvement in economic activity remained limited. They added that, in addition,

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<sup>21</sup> [Q58](#)

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 006](#)) paragraph 10.2

<sup>23</sup> International Development Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2012-13, [Afghanistan: Development progress and prospects after 2014](#) (HC 403).

<sup>24</sup> International Development Committee, Eighth Special Report of Session 2012-13, [Afghanistan: Development Progress and Prospects after 2014: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2012-13](#) (HC 862).

Women's rights violations remain prevalent despite existing legislation, while female access to education and health services remain relatively low.<sup>25</sup>

29. Oxfam called on the UK to work with its international partners and the Afghan government to support change within the Afghan National Police:

In a country where domestic violence, forced marriage, sexual assault, and so-called honour killings are shockingly common, the responsiveness of the ANP to the female half of the population is a particular concern. Afghan women generally face social and cultural barriers in reporting crimes and threats against them, especially when having to deal with male police officers. The lack of adequately trained policewomen—barely one per cent of the ANP—adds to these challenges. Making matters worse, policemen themselves committed nearly 15 per cent of the honour killings and sexual assaults recorded between 2011 and 2013, according to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.<sup>26</sup>

30. Neil Crompton, Director for Afghanistan and South Asia, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, told us that the Afghan Taliban had shown signs of adopting a more progressive position on women's rights:

The formal Taliban position now is that girls have a right to education. The formal Taliban position now is that women have a right to work. Neither of those were formal Taliban positions two years ago, so attitudes are evolving.<sup>27</sup> [...] So many women and young girls have been educated since the international community became involved, and I hope that that will allow for enduring progress. One of the things that international donors have made clear to any Afghan Government is that the extent of international support will depend upon continued commitments in these areas.<sup>28</sup>

31. The Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention, which submitted written evidence on behalf of Afghan and Pakistani women MPs, expressed the view that “compromise on women's rights in any negotiations with the Taliban in Afghanistan is unacceptable”.<sup>29</sup> Vincent Devine, Director Operational Policy, Ministry of Defence, told us that, post-2014, the international community would continue to fund much of the Afghan Government's activity and that that funding would remain conditional on performance in respect of issues such as women's rights.<sup>30</sup>

32. On 17 March 2014, HM Ambassador to the United Nations, Sir Mark Lyall Grant, spoke at the UN Security Council Quarterly Debate on Afghanistan:

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<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Defence (AFG 006) paragraph 10.3.

<sup>26</sup> Oxfam (AFG 005) paragraph 20.

<sup>27</sup> Q30

<sup>28</sup> Q42

<sup>29</sup> Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention (AFG 002) paragraph 15.

<sup>30</sup> Q65

One of the main challenges for Afghanistan and indeed the work of the UN are human rights, specifically the rights of women and girls. Women and girls in Afghanistan continue to face huge challenges and the gains made are fragile. We encourage the UN, to continue working closely with the Government of Afghanistan, international partners and civil society to improve the status of women and girls.<sup>31</sup>

**33. We consider that the advancement of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan in the period since the fall of the Taliban government has been significant, although we remain concerned that progress remains fragile. We understand that future financial support and development aid for Afghanistan will be dependent upon the Government of Afghanistan meeting specific commitments under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. We call upon the UK Government to confirm the commitments to women and girls which the Government of Afghanistan must meet in order to continue to receive development aid from the UK and the wider international community.**

## Narcotics

34. In its 2013 Afghanistan Opium Survey, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan had reached a record high in 2013. According to the Survey, cultivation amounted to some 209,000 hectares, outstripping the earlier record in 2007 of 193,000 hectares, and representing a 36 per cent increase over 2012. Two provinces that had previously been declared poppy-free, Faryab and Balkh in northern Afghanistan, lost this status. All in all, opium production in 2013 went up to some 5,500 tonnes, a 49 per cent increase over 2012.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Statement by HM Ambassador Lyall Grant at the Security Council Quarterly Debate on Afghanistan, [2014 is a year full of opportunity for Afghanistan](#) 17 March 2014

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, [Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013 Summary findings](#), November 2013



Reconstruction, warned that the expanding cultivation of opium poppies in Afghanistan threatened to destroy all of the progress made in rebuilding the country during the past 12 years and instead turn it into a “narco-criminal state”. He said:

In sum, the expanding cultivation and trafficking of drugs is one of the most significant factors putting the entire US and international donor investment in the reconstruction of Afghanistan at risk. All of the fragile gains we have made over the last twelve years on women’s issues, health, education, rule of law, and governance are now, more than ever, in jeopardy of being wiped out by the narcotics trade which not only supports the insurgency, but also feeds organised crime and corruption.<sup>33</sup>

36. We asked whether the UK had accomplished its task in relation to narcotics. Neil Crompton from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office told us:

The recent UN figures which show that opium production is rising in Afghanistan have been very disappointing. What our Ministers, led by the Home Office, are collectively looking at at the moment is how we can continue to contribute to Afghan efforts to deal with the counter-narcotics problem when we draw down next year. I think for the Home Secretary this is a priority, but clearly we will not have as many forces or capabilities in country.

37. The Secretary of State for Defence accepted that based upon recent crop figures, “the poppy trade is alive and well in Afghanistan”.<sup>34</sup> He offered an explanation for this:

Progress has been made, but in the last year there was slippage in the erosion of the crop. Clearly there have been different demands for the focus of resources. If there is a resolution to the insurgency and some kind of reconciliation in Afghanistan, it will then, I think, be easier to tackle the poppy problem.<sup>35</sup>

He added that, if the international community was going to continue to support the Afghan Government financially, it would expect that Government to pursue a robust counter-narcotics strategy.<sup>36</sup>

38. The MoD acknowledged the evidence from UNODC that opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan had reached record levels, but expressed the view that counter narcotics activity had made notable progress:

While the UK Government and military do not have a remit to conduct eradication, UK Embassy staff and contractors have given the Afghan Government advice, funding and equipment to support eradication in

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<sup>33</sup> John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, [Testimony Before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control](#), January 15, 2014

<sup>34</sup> [Q148](#)

<sup>35</sup> [Q149](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Q156](#)

Afghanistan. In 2012, 3,637 hectares were eradicated in Helmand and 9,672 hectares eradicated countrywide. In 2013, 2,112 hectares were eradicated in Helmand and 4,867 hectares were eradicated countrywide.<sup>37</sup>

However, the Government also acknowledged that the scale of the Afghan drugs trade is very large compared to the forces ranged against it:

For example, in 2010 Afghan forces, mentored by the UK military, seized almost seven metric tonnes of heroin, yet in that year heroin production was almost six hundred metric tonnes.<sup>38</sup>

We note that there has been little progress in offering farmers, especially those operating on the poorest fringes, viable alternatives to poppy farming.

**39. The counter-narcotics strategy of the UK Government in Afghanistan has failed. As we withdraw from Helmand Province, poppy cultivation is soaring to record levels and there is no sign that the Government of Afghanistan has the will or the means to tackle the problem. We are concerned that this will continue to fund organised crime, and undermine the development of democratic government and governance. We recommend that future UK Government aid to Afghanistan should be, at least in part, conditional on clear progress in developing viable alternatives to poppy farming.**

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<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 007](#)) section (1)

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 007](#)) section (1).

### 3 Political transition

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40. Presidential and provincial council elections took place on 5 April 2014. The Afghan security forces were primarily responsible for ensuring they were held in a secure environment with ISAF forces playing only a backup role. Overall, election day passed without any major attacks although some violence was reported. According to the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, of 6423 Polling Centres across the country, only 205 were not open due to security concerns.<sup>39</sup> Some media reports suggested that more than 10 per cent of polling centres remained closed.<sup>40</sup> However, the BBC reported that turnout was double that of the presidential elections in 2009.<sup>41</sup>

41. The nomination window for candidates in the elections closed on 6 October 2013. A number of key figures from across the Afghan Government and wider authorities resigned their positions in order to run in the elections. These included: the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Zalmay Rassoul; the Minister for Mines, Wahidullah Shahrani; the Minister for Commerce, Anwaral-Haq Ahadi; the Minister for Energy and Water, Ismail Khan; the Senior Minister, Hedayat Amin Arsala; the President's Advisor on Defence, Abdul Rahim Wardak; Head of the High Office of Oversight, Azizullah Ludin; the Governor of Bamiyan Province, Habiba Sorabi; and the Governor of Nangarhar, Gul Agha Sherzai.<sup>42</sup>

42. The BBC reported on 26 April that the presidential election will go to a second round as no candidate won more than 50% of the vote; the run-off will be between former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah who gained 44.9% of votes in the first round and former Finance Minister and World Bank economist Ashraf Ghani who gained 31.5%.<sup>43</sup>

**43. The first round of the Presidential election passed off relatively peacefully compared to expectations. We pay tribute to the dedication and courage of the Afghan and ISAF security force personnel who ensured that the elections could take place. We also pay tribute to the dedication of those who administered the elections in such difficult circumstances and the courage of ordinary Afghans who turned out to vote in such numbers in defiance of Taliban threats.**

**44. It is to be hoped that the second round will allow for the first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected President to another in the history of the country and that the newly elected President will be able to develop a constructive working relationship with the Afghan Parliament and find a way of accommodating all elements of Afghan society into the democratic political processes of the country. It is also to be hoped that the new President will be able to develop a settled relationship**

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<sup>39</sup> Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, [Polling and vote counting process of 2014 Presidential and Provincial Councils' elections](#), 5 April 2014

<sup>40</sup> BBC News, [Afghan notebook: Spotting fraud](#), 9 April 2014

<sup>41</sup> BBC News, [Afghan election set for Abdullah-Ghani run-off](#), 26 April 2014

<sup>42</sup> DfID, FCO and MoD, [Afghanistan: Monthly Progress Report – October 2013](#)

<sup>43</sup> BBC News, [Afghan election set for Abdullah-Ghani run-off](#), 26 April 2014.

with the international community and consolidate and develop a constructive and enduring working relationship with the UK.

## Signing of Bilateral Security Agreement and Status of Forces Agreement

45. On 1 May 2012, President Obama and President Karzai signed the *Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America*.<sup>44</sup> The Agreement provided for the possibility of US forces in Afghanistan after 2014, “for the purposes of training Afghan Forces and targeting the remnants of al-Qaeda”, and committed the United States and Afghanistan to initiate negotiations on a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) to supersede the existing Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).<sup>45</sup> A consultative Loya Jirga held in November 2013 urged President Karzai to sign the BSA before the end of 2013. However, the President told delegates he would only sign it once the US had brought peace to his country.<sup>46</sup>

46. On 4 December 2013, NATO Foreign Ministers and their counterparts from ISAF partner nations met at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. They reiterated their commitment to continue to support Afghan security forces after 2014, but called for a timely signature of the BSA, which would pave the way for NATO to establish its own legal framework for its new mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces after 2014. The NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said: “We have made it clear to the visiting Afghan ministers that we need that legal clarity before we can move ahead with planning our deployment”.<sup>47</sup>

47. In oral evidence, Secretary of State for Defence, Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, was clear that any continued UK presence in Afghanistan was contingent on the BSA being agreed with the United States:

There will be no British forces on the ground in Afghanistan if there is no bilateral security agreement.<sup>48</sup>

However, he expressed confidence that the BSA would eventually be signed:

It has been endorsed by a Loya Jirga, which was called last October/November, and all the leading presidential candidates have indicated that they think it is in Afghanistan’s interests to sign it.<sup>49</sup>

48. The Secretary of State for Defence, told us that the new Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) would be signed almost immediately following the BSA.<sup>50</sup> He stated that the delay

<sup>44</sup> [Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America](#)

<sup>45</sup> White House Fact Sheet, [The U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement](#), 1 May 2013

<sup>46</sup> Reuters, [Afghanistan’s Karzai rejects elders’ advice to back US deal quickly](#), 24 November 2013.

<sup>47</sup> NATO, [ISAF Ministers encouraged by preparations for 2014 Afghan elections](#), 4 December 2013

<sup>48</sup> [Q130](#)

<sup>49</sup> [Q122](#)

in confirmation caused uncertainty, but the direct impact on planning was limited as the expected UK presence post-2014 was based primarily at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy at Qargha, outside Kabul. However, he continued:

Where the impact is more significant is on those nations that are proposing to provide troops for the so-called hub and four-spoke model of Operation Resolute Support—the mission, post 2014 [...] If a BSA were not signed, they would then have a very short period of time to get what would still be quite significant numbers of troops out of the country before 31 December.<sup>51</sup>

49. The longer the signing of the BSA was delayed, the Secretary of State said, the smaller the number of US troops available was likely to be, which would have wider implications:

There is a possible outcome, which is not the zero option with no SOFA and no BSA, but a BSA and a SOFA concluded so late that the number of troops committed by the United States effectively dictates an alternative posture to the hub and four spokes. That would raise some questions for some of the intending troop-contributing countries, who are very focused on providing one of the spokes—Germany and Italy in particular.<sup>52</sup>

**50. We hope that the new President of Afghanistan will move swiftly to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement and Status of Forces Agreement in order to confirm the legal basis on which international forces will operate in Afghanistan post-2014.**

**51. If a new ISAF Status of Forces Agreement is signed, in addition to the UK military training mission, other UK Government Departments will be conducting activities in Afghanistan, in particular the Department for International Development will be engaged in the delivery of aid programmes. Other UK Government Departments will also be engaged in supporting a range of projects including state institution building, developing capacity in policing and justice, and facilitating commercial development. The ability of these agencies to operate will be determined by what is likely to be an uneven security situation. We therefore believe that a Comprehensive Approach to the work of all UK Government Departments and agencies in Afghanistan will still be required. We ask the Government to provide us with further details of the planning that is being carried out across Government for that transition.**

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<sup>50</sup> [Q135](#)

<sup>51</sup> [Q121](#)

<sup>52</sup> [Q144](#)

## 4 Prospects of a peace settlement

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### Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme

52. The Secretary of State for Defence told us that he did not believe that there was any long term sustainable future for Afghanistan that did not involve “some form of compromise between the Taliban and the rest of Afghan society”.<sup>53</sup>

53. The Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) was established by the Afghan Government, supported by the UNDP, to strengthen the capacity of national and sub-national institutions to support the peace process. Former insurgency soldiers and commanders are encouraged to reintegrate into their communities, give up their weapons and live their lives under the laws of Afghanistan.

54. Financed by international donors, the APRP claims the following outcomes:

- 7375 former combatants have renounced violence, including local commanders and leaders
- 7094 former combatants have received livelihood support through transitional financial assistance
- 33 Provincial Peace Committees engage in local outreach and negotiations, supported by 33 Provincial Joint Secretariat Teams
- 164 Small Grants Projects implemented and 82 projects completed. The projects are designed to provide livelihood assistance to former combatants and to reach out to more than 170,000 beneficiaries in communities around the country.<sup>54</sup>

### The role of Pakistan

55. As a neighbour of Afghanistan, Pakistan has an important role to play in promoting peace and stability in the country. The long, mountainous border region between the two has provided a base for militant groups which threaten the people and Governments of both countries. It is in the interests of Pakistan to ensure a stable and lasting peace for Afghanistan.

56. Pakistan is engaged in its own battle against a violent insurgency in the form of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), based mainly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the north west of the country. When we visited Pakistan in October 2013, we were told in meetings with representatives of the Government and military about the commitment which Pakistan has made to tackle terrorism in the FATA. Almost 150,000 troops had been committed to the FATA, an 85 per cent increase since 2007. The Pakistan military expect the Afghanistan/Pakistan border to remain volatile post-2014 with the

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<sup>53</sup> [Q81](#)

<sup>54</sup> UNDP, [Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme \(APRP\)](#)

possible resurgence of the Taliban, an increase in drug production and smuggling, and the potential for a fresh wave of Afghan refugees, adding to the 2.5 million already hosted by Pakistan. The view of the Pakistan Government was that the international community needed to adjust its objectives to create a “good enough” rather than a “perfect” Afghanistan. However, in March 2014, the TTP announced a month-long ceasefire aimed at reviving stalled peace talks with the Pakistan Government.<sup>55</sup>

57. In March 2014, it was reported that at the conclusion of operations in Afghanistan, the US military was considering gifting \$7 billion worth of armoured vehicles and other equipment to Pakistan, including up to 1,600 of the US Army’s mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles.<sup>56</sup>

58. In relation to Pakistan’s contribution to the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan the MoD told us:

The success of a negotiated peace in Afghanistan depends heavily on the participation of Afghanistan’s neighbours, especially Pakistan. The Pakistanis are receptive to creative solutions on the peace process and recognise the value of a stable Afghan government in which the Taliban are included. In consultation with Afghanistan, and with the support of the international community, Pakistan is engaging constructively in the Afghan peace and reconciliation process and working to persuade the Afghan Taliban to enter into good faith negotiations with the High Peace Council of Afghanistan as part of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process.<sup>57</sup>

59. In oral evidence, the Secretary of State for Defence said that the UK was in a “unique position” in its relationships with both countries and that the Prime Minister was committed to continue with the trilateral process of discussions between the countries.<sup>58</sup>

**60. The conflict in Afghanistan must be resolved by the people of Afghanistan themselves, but the UK and wider international community must be ready to assist if called upon. Because Pakistan has strong economic and cultural links with its neighbour and suffers similar problems with combatting an armed insurgency, we believe that it is in the interests of both countries to co-operate closely in the years ahead in order to tackle common problems more effectively. We support a continuation of the trilateral process with Afghanistan, Pakistan and the UK which the Government has facilitated and encourage all efforts towards conflict resolution and reconciliation which hold out the prospect of lasting peace.**

**61. The broad reconciliation and reintegration of Afghan Taliban affiliates into the political processes of Afghanistan will be important to an enduring peace settlement in Afghanistan in the same way that Pakistan Taliban affiliates need to reconcile with the**

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<sup>55</sup> BBC News [Pakistan Taliban announce month truce](#) 1 March 2014

<sup>56</sup> Washington Post [Pakistan eyes U.S. military equipment in Afghanistan](#) 16 March 2014

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 006](#)) paragraph 12.1

<sup>58</sup> [Q86](#)

**Pakistan Government to provide stability there. Such developments would help secure the integrity of each country and allow for improved co-operation between these sovereign states enabling them to become more settled and diminishing pressures for regional instability.**

## 5 Withdrawal of UK Forces

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### Scale of the challenge

62. The MoD told us that the successful transition of security responsibility to the ANSF had allowed the UK to progress with its redeployment plans. Its memorandum explained that based on current plans, a total of around 3,345 vehicles and major equipments (VAME) (including approximately 50 fixed wing aircraft and helicopters) and around 5,500 twenty foot equivalent units (TEUs) worth of materiel would be brought back to the UK between 1 October 2012 and the end of the operation.<sup>59</sup>

63. When we visited Camp Bastion in October 2013, we were briefed by Commander Joint Force Support (Afghanistan), Air Commodore John Bessell, about the challenges of managing simultaneously the base closure and transfer programme, redeployment of materiel from theatre, and support for the security transition to the ANSF, whilst maintaining support to UK forces and coalition partners. We were immensely impressed by the efforts of all involved in the planning and delivery of this complex operation.

### Progress

64. As of 30 September 2013, more than a third of all VAME and TEUs of materiel had been redeployed from Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup> In March 2014, the Secretary of State told us that to date, just over 50 per cent of total UK equipment, including vehicles and major equipments and containers of other materials had been repatriated or withdrawn from theatre. We noted that about two thirds of that total had been transported by air with about a quarter withdrawn by the “multimodal route”, which involved being flown to the Gulf and then brought back to the UK by sea.<sup>61</sup>

65. We asked the MoD for details of its repatriation plans and the cost implications of relying significantly on air transport. The MoD told us that it had always planned for equipment “attractive to criminal or terrorist organisations, and sensitive equipment with special carriage regulations attached to it” to transit directly by air or on the multimodal route to the UK as security could not be guaranteed on the surface lines of communication out of Afghanistan. The MoD explained that the remainder of equipment that is classified, sensitive and of value would be moved via the multi-modal route, or flown directly to the UK on either military air transport or civilian charter aircraft. In terms of costs, the MoD told us that the net additional costs for redeploying assets by air was estimated to be just under £100 million. This would be funded by the Treasury Special Reserve.<sup>62</sup>

**66. We welcome the significant progress towards withdrawal which has been made by UK forces to date. We call upon the MoD to include detailed information about**

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<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 006](#)) paragraph 8.1

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 006](#)) paragraph 8.1

<sup>61</sup> [Q180](#)

<sup>62</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 007](#)) section (4)

**progress on redeployment in its monthly progress reports to Parliament and to provide a detailed breakdown of the costs of redeployment at the conclusion of the operation.**

## Force Protection

67. The MoD told us that during the drawdown the safety and wellbeing of UK Armed Forces would remain a priority:

We will not allow our forces to become overstretched and we will ensure a proper balance is achieved between the military resources we have deployed and the tasks we are committed to undertaking. An ISTAR capability will remain available to UK forces until the end of 2014. Close Air Support, Medevac and Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems will provide effective support to UK and Afghan forces when required.

We will retain an in-extremis reserve that will be able to respond to events should the need arise and we also hold a theatre reserve battalion in Cyprus that will be ready to deploy if short-notice reinforcement is required at any point.<sup>63</sup>

68. The Secretary of State told us that the Taliban was focused on disrupting the election process, but once the elections were out of the way, he expected that their full force would be directed back at ISAF forces.<sup>64</sup> He explained how the UK would seek to counter this threat:

We will maintain in-theatre the forces that are required in order to provide appropriate protection to the very end of the withdrawal process, but clearly I do not want to go into the detail of how we will do that. A great deal of thought has gone into how to protect the rump, if you like, of the force as it draws down.<sup>65</sup>

## Medical services

69. During our visit to Camp Bastion in October 2013 we met personnel from 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital, who were on operational tour at the Role 3 Hospital. In our report *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 1: Military Casualties*, published in December 2011, we noted that the relationship between the health services and the MoD was symbiotic as personnel shared experience in treating traumatic injuries.<sup>66</sup> We were extremely impressed with the Role 3 Hospital facilities and very pleased to hear from personnel in this reserve unit that the transfer of knowledge between the MoD and NHS has continued, to the benefit of the Armed Forces and NHS patients alike.

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<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Defence ([AFG 006](#)) paragraph 7.2

<sup>64</sup> [Q105](#)

<sup>65</sup> [Q184](#)

<sup>66</sup> Defence Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2010–12, [The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 1: Military Casualties](#), HC 762, paragraphs 30–32

## Future role

70. Lieutenant-General Everard, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Military Strategy and Operations) told us that the UK would not have any military presence in the south of Afghanistan after the end of 2014. Beyond the commitment to the Afghan National Army Officers' Academy, everything else was, as yet, undecided pending ministerial decision which was dependent on "the freedoms and constraints that flow from the BSA and the SOFA".<sup>67</sup>

71. On 27 February 2014, NATO Defence Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to support continued planning for a post-2014 training mission in Afghanistan, but asked also for contingency planning, including a "zero option", in light of the continuing uncertainty around securing the necessary legal permissions for the mission.<sup>68</sup>

### *Afghan National Army Officer Academy*

72. The Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA) at Qargha, west of Kabul, welcomed its first intake of cadets in October 2013. The Committee last visited the facility during the construction phase in November 2012. The ANAOA is funded by the UK and based on key elements of the British Army officer training programme. Officer cadets are trained by Afghan military instructors, all of whom have been taught by British, Australian, New Zealand, Norwegian, and Danish mentors.<sup>69</sup>

73. The MoD told us that the Academy will build up to full operating capacity in summer 2014, when three separate training courses will run concurrently. Afghan instructors and academy staff will be mentored by UK and coalition personnel as they run the one year course designed to teach ANA officers leadership and tactical skills. The UK will provide approximately 90 mentoring staff with around 30 others provided by coalition partners. Eight female only positions, filled by UK personnel, will be dedicated to the support of female cadet training. The coalition mentoring commitment will reduce over time as the Afghans grow more familiar and confident with running the Academy.<sup>70</sup>

74. The MoD also explained that force protection measures were in place for all international troops at the ANAOA:

There is a robust support unit based at Qargha responsible for providing Base Security, Quick Reaction Forces, protected mobility for our personnel and force protection for our mentors. We will retain sufficient force numbers to ensure that we can properly protect our advisor footprint after 2014. The exact capabilities we will have post-2014 will be decided once our footprint is confirmed, and we have made an assessment of the threat post-2014.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Q63

<sup>68</sup> FCO, [Afghanistan Monthly Progress Report for February 2014](#), 27 March 2014

<sup>69</sup> British Army [Afghan academy welcomes first officer cadets](#), 24 October 2013

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Defence [\(AFG 006\)](#) paragraph 9.1

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Defence [\(AFG 006\)](#) paragraph 9.1

**75. We support the continuing UK Government commitment to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy at Qargha. The Academy will provide the Afghan National Army with the capacity to train and develop its next generation of Army officers who will lead the fight against the insurgency and help to maintain security for the Afghan people. However, without the signing of a Status of Forces Agreement between the Afghan Government and NATO we acknowledge that it will be impossible for the UK and other international partners to maintain a mentoring role at the Academy.**

## 6 Lessons from Afghanistan

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### National Lessons Study

76. Following a campaign that was so protracted and costly in both casualties and expenditure of resources, it is important for the public to understand what has been achieved in our engagement in Afghanistan. We asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the MoD had for a comprehensive review of our involvement in Afghanistan. He replied:

Once the campaign is over, it will clearly be appropriate to look at a strategic level across the campaign as a whole to see what lessons need to be learned in addition to those thrown up by the short-term and medium-term processes. I would expect that we would do that, but the time to do it will be when the campaign is completed.<sup>72</sup>

He explained that the terms of reference for a future review of the campaign had not yet been scoped and he invited us to make recommendations about what a post-campaign review should cover.<sup>73</sup>

**77. We consider that it would be appropriate for an independent national lessons study into Afghanistan to be commissioned by the Government. It should receive input from all departments of state concerned, and take evidence from all those engaged and affected by the campaign.**

**78. We recommend that the study should include a balanced review of the successes and setbacks of the campaign, identifying lessons from the tactical to the strategic, clearly distinguishing the pre-2006 section of the campaign from activities in Helmand from 2006 onward. It should describe the translation of national policy, within an international context, into military operations and development activities and consider whether all instruments of national power were harnessed and orchestrated to best effect in order to meet the objectives of the UK Government and the international community. It should also explore the collective experience of operating within the extended ISAF international coalition.**

**79. More specifically, the study should set out what the political ends were, how they changed during the course of the campaign, and judge whether the ways and means, diplomatic, economic and military, were sufficient during the course of the campaign. The study should review whether the national decision-making, military command and governance arrangements for the campaign were appropriate, and whether they could be improved for the future.**

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<sup>72</sup> [Q187](#)

<sup>73</sup> [Qq188-189](#)

80. Furthermore the study should analyse how public perceptions were captured, understood and considered by policy makers and what measures were taken to shape public understanding as the conflict moved through its various phases over a decade or more. The study should examine how public perceptions and understanding became largely shaped by a range of factors outside the Government's control, including developing social media. The study should also examine how plans to gain public understanding and support in the UK, in Afghanistan and amongst ISAF and other partner nations were determined and deployed.

## Official History

81. In our report *Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part One*, we recommended that the Ministry of Defence, in close conjunction with the Cabinet Office and National Security Secretariat, should initiate the writing of official histories of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns and of other conflicts since the end of the Cold War; review how the history function is being undertaken by all three Services and by the Ministry of Defence as a whole.<sup>74</sup>

82. In its response, the Government agreed that there was value in cross-Government learning of lessons from history and cross-Government input into Official Histories, but gave no specific commitments to address our recommendations.

83. **We remain firmly of the view that the Ministry of Defence should commission work to write the narrative of operations in Afghanistan as an essential precursor to an official history that should follow in future years. While the official history can wait, as typically these are written 10–20 years after the campaign concerned, the narratives should not.**

84. **The Ministry of Defence, alongside other departments of state, needs to invest in its history and lessons functions if our successors are to make better informed policies and strategic plans. A relatively small investment could have a significantly beneficial impact on future planning.**

85. **As the Afghan Presidential election process will not be concluded as this report is published, the Status of Forces Agreements remain unsigned and the withdrawal of UK combat forces incomplete, we will continue to monitor the situation in Afghanistan and may well report further before the end of this Parliament.**

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<sup>74</sup> Defence Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2013-14, [Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part One](#), HC 197, para 76

## 7 Conclusion

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86. The conflict in Afghanistan has been a long and arduous one. UK Armed Forces have fought with great courage and made extraordinary sacrifices in order to create and sustain a safer and more stable Afghanistan. We record here our gratitude to the many men and women who have served in Afghanistan since 2001 and the families who have given them such resolute support. We pay tribute in particular to all those who have lost their lives, and the many more who have sustained life-changing injuries.

87. The future of Afghanistan is uncertain. In the face of a determined insurgency, when international forces leave at the end of 2014 the Government of Afghanistan will find it challenging to continue to maintain security and exercise executive control across the country. However, with the continued support of the international community, we believe that these challenges can be met and overcome.

88. We believe that a lasting peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved through a process of reconciliation with the Taliban. We encourage the new Government of Afghanistan to begin a process of engagement as a matter of priority.

89. It is imperative that the UK learns lessons from our intervention in Afghanistan. The public will quite rightly expect a thorough analysis to be conducted to ensure that the Government and our Armed Forces have identified and assessed lessons for the future. We recommend that the Government conduct a lessons learned review, encompassing not just the military operation, but the wider intervention by the UK as part of the ISAF and United Nations missions in Afghanistan looking at the two stages of our involvement separately, the pre-2006 intervention and the deployment to Helmand post 2006. In the longer term, we consider that it is vital that a proper historical account be produced of the campaign.

# Formal Minutes

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**Wednesday 7 May 2014**

Members present:

Mr Dai Havard, in the Chair

Mr Julian Brazier

Mr James Gray

Sir Bob Russell

Bob Stewart

Gisela Stuart

Derek Twigg

John Woodcock

Draft Report (*Afghanistan*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 89 read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Fifteenth Report of the Committee to the House.

*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.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 13 May 2014 at 2.00 pm

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/defence-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/afghanistan/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/defence-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/afghanistan/)

### Tuesday 28 January 2014

*Question number*

**Lieutenant-General James Everard** and **Vincent Devine**, Ministry of Defence, and **Neil Crompton**, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Q1-69

### Wednesday 12 March 2014

**Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP** and **Lieutenant-General James Everard CBE**, Ministry of Defence

Q70-203

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/defence-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/afghanistan/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/defence-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/afghanistan/)

AFG numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Parliamentarians Network For Conflict Prevention (AFG 002)
- 2 Amnesty International (AFG 004)
- 3 Oxfam (AFG 005)
- 4 Ministry of Defence (AFG 006)
- 5 Ministry of Defence (AFG 007)
- 6 Ministry of Defence (AFG 008)
- 7 Ministry of Defence (AFG 009)

# List of Reports from the Committee in Session 2013–2014

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All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/defcom](http://www.parliament.uk/defcom).

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

## Session 2013–14

First Report	MoD Supplementary Estimate 2012–13	HC 291 (HC 644)
Second Report	Ministry of Defence Main Estimates 2013–14	HC 517 (HC 670)
Third Report and First Joint Report	Scrutiny of Arms Exports and Arms Control (2013): Scrutiny of the Government's UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2011 published in July 2012, the Government's Quarterly Reports from October 2011 to September 2012, and the Government's policies on arms exports and international arms control issues	HC 205 (Cm 8707)
Fourth Report	The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the Children of Service Personnel	HC 586 (HC 771)
Fifth Report	The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel	HC 185 (HC 759)
Sixth Report	The Defence Implications of Possible Scottish Independence	HC 198 (HC 839)
Seventh Report	Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part One	HC 197 (HC 1175)
Eighth Report	Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2012–13	HC 653 (HC 1198)
Ninth Report	Future Army 2020	HC 576
Tenth Report	Remote Control: Remotely Piloted Air Systems—current and future UK use	HC 772
Eleventh Report	Deterrence in the twenty-first century	HC 1066
Twelfth Report	UK Armed Forces Personnel and the Legal Framework for Future Operations	HC 931
Thirteenth Report	Afghanistan—Camp Bastion Attack	HC 830
Fourteenth Report	Intervention: Why, When and How?	HC 952