

AFGHANISTAN
MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT
February 2012

The UK is engaged in Afghanistan as part of a 50-nation coalition to prevent international terrorists, including Al Qaeda, from again using Afghanistan as a base from which to operate, threatening our security and that of the region.

The Government has committed itself to keeping Parliament informed about developments in Afghanistan on a monthly basis. This fifteenth report covers progress in February 2012. It reflects the combined assessment of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development.

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

Overview

NATO Defence Ministers met in Brussels on 2-3 February. NATO members restated their commitment to Afghanistan. The Secretary General reaffirmed that the decisions made at the Lisbon Summit will remain the bedrock of the ISAF strategy. Importantly this strategy will see ISAF forces remain in Afghanistan, in a combat role, until the transition process completes at the end of 2014.

On 21 February, religious materials, including copies of the Qur'an, were mistakenly disposed of by US service personnel by burning at Bagram Airfield. This sparked a mass demonstration at the facility. In the following days protests spread to over 40 locations across Afghanistan. It remains unclear whether the incident will have any lasting repercussions. In the short term at least it has damaged Afghans' perception of ISAF forces.

Despite these events, the UK continues to work with the Afghan Government and its people to ensure that local communities benefit from better public services, including justice, healthcare, education and roads.

We welcome the recent steps taken by the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan to enhance their relationship. Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar visited Kabul on 1 February. Prime Minister Gilani published a statement on 24 February which supported an inclusive Afghan led peace process. It called on the Taliban leadership and other insurgency groups to participate in a national reconciliation process. Hina Rabbani Khar visited London on 21 February. The Foreign Secretary had a productive and substantive discussion with her

on the Enhanced Strategic Dialogue. These discussions included UK-Pakistan relations, Afghanistan and the importance of regional stability. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan recognise that their long-term prosperity and security depend on maintaining strong and positive relations with each other.

Political

Reconciliation

On 21 February, President Karzai released a statement on the peace process in Afghanistan. The statement emphasised the Government of Afghanistan's commitment to pursue efforts on peace and reconciliation. It also invited the Taliban to engage in direct talks with the Government of Afghanistan and expressed its agreement to the idea of establishing a Taliban office in Qatar.

Reintegration

On 12-13 February 24 former fighters in Helmand enrolled in the formal Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme, thus bringing the total number of reintegrees in Helmand to 43. The Helmand Provincial Peace Council travelled to Washir for the first of a series of outreach visits supported by the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). Progress on reintegration faltered with the targeted assassination of a reintegration official in Gereshk on 13 February.

Strengthening the Afghan State

Rule of Law

National

Following the shooting of two US officers in the Ministry of Interior on 25 February, the UK police contingent was withdrawn from the Ministry of the Interior. This caused some disruption but their work soon returned to normal. The overall size of the Afghan National Police (ANP) force continues to grow at a sufficient rate to meet the 157,000 target by October 2012. However there remains considerable progress to be made in terms of raising the quality of the ANP to the required standard. The UK police contingent continues to provide support to ANP development across a breadth of areas, notably EUPOL's Police Staff College which has now provided training to over 2,000 officers.

The Rule of Law team worked with NATO colleagues during February to hand over a highly successful UK justice training package. By transferring the training to NATO, many more justice sector professionals will be able to benefit from it than the UK could reach. There was progress on the Justice National Priority Programme, with a seminar convened with donors to discuss some of the more complex areas such as alternatives to incarceration and legal aid.

Helmand

February was a productive month despite disruption due to the security threat following the Qur'an burning. The PRT facilitated a 10-day Land Law Training programme for Helmand Justice professionals, which was Afghan-organised and taught in Dari by an Afghan

judge/professor. There is progress on increasing the number of female police officers and the roles they fulfil. Two Female Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP (F)) have been asked to attend a Driver Training course in Police Headquarters (previously considered unachievable due to cultural issues). There are now 20 AUP (F) in Lashkar Gah.

The PRT-mentored Afghan Counter Narcotics Police (CNPA) arrested a high value target who was a powerful landowner in Helmand. The prisoner is now awaiting trial in Kabul. His arrest was a good example of National and Provincial CNPA working together, with only logistical support from ISAF.

Governance

A UK-supported Afghan anti-corruption programme continued to help ordinary citizens to monitor infrastructure projects to check that they deliver what was promised to communities. The programme enables communities to raise concerns where construction materials have been found to be of poor quality or the projects do not meet specifications. During the past three months community based monitoring has expanded from 184 to 239 projects nationwide, helping to ensure that development assistance is used efficiently and for its intended purpose.

On 2 February contracts for 40 development projects were signed in Helmand Province. These are to be implemented through the UK-funded District Delivery Programme (DDP). Twelve projects are for rural and rehabilitation affairs, eleven for health, nine for education, three for agriculture, three for irrigation and one for justice affairs. DFID recently completed the first Annual Review of the DDP, which confirmed the programme is performing well. This good performance has enabled its expansion to another five provinces in Afghanistan over the next financial year.

Provincial Governor Mangal opened a women's meeting in Lashkar Gah on 6 February. This was attended by 150 Helmandi women. The key themes were women's and children's rights, education, skills development, income generating projects for women and insecurity in districts.

Economic and Social Development

Thirteen Afghan businesses have been shortlisted from over 350 initial applications to receive grants of between US\$ 100,000 to US\$ 1,000,000 from the UK-funded Afghanistan Business Innovation Fund. These funds will be awarded once satisfactory full grant applications have been received. They will support investment in innovative products or services that improve the lives and incomes of the poor, such as harvesting, collection and processing of cashmere and cold storage for fresh fruits.

UK efforts to improve infrastructure across Helmand Province continued to progress well. The tender process for the extension of the strategically important Route 611 road in Helmand Province opened on 12 February. The road will provide vital safer access to the Kajaki dam and hydropower station in the north of the province. Work taking place on the reconstruction of Helmand's canal irrigation system during the 2012 irrigation shutdown is now complete, helping to improve agricultural productivity. Two more roads were completed and handed over to the Government of Afghanistan, helping to improve freedom of

movement as well as access to markets and basic services across the province. Emergency repairs to three other highways were underway.

The Provincial Governor of Helmand and the Director of the Department for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livelihoods attended a workshop with local nomadic farmers. These farmers provide 70-80 per cent of the livestock used for red meat production across Afghanistan. The workshop looked at practical ways in which the Government and donors can help add value to the production and sale of red meat, helping to increase farmers' income.

The UK completed refurbishment of the Sayedabad High School in Nad-e-Ali, in Helmand Province. The school re-opened its doors at the beginning of February.

Counter Narcotics

On 16 February, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime convened the Third Ministerial Paris Pact Conference in Vienna to discuss increased cooperation against the flow of opium and heroin from Afghanistan. Representatives from over 50 countries and associated international organisations reiterated their common and shared responsibility towards tackling the illicit trade in Afghan opiates. This built on the commitments made at the Ministerial conferences on Afghanistan in Istanbul and Bonn last year.

Security

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) Growth and Capability

Improving logistics capabilities remains a key development area for the ANSF. In acknowledgement, the "NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan" has highlighted logistics as a development priority for 2012. We have made some advances in this area, but as this was from a low base and we will continue to monitor progress.

Afghan National Army (ANA) Attrition Rates

Too many people are leaving the ANA and their attrition rate remains consistently above target. Although the recent trend is downward, reducing attrition levels remains a key challenge in ensuring successful security transition. At the national level, and in an effort to mitigate the problem, a Joint Attrition Working Group now meets weekly to monitor attrition rates. Afghan led, but supported by ISAF, this has identified six contributing factors that hinder retention within the force and has made a series of recommendations to tackle them. In addition, and acknowledging the link between good leadership and lower attrition levels, the ANA is adopting an "Army Values Framework". This is a joint ISAF/ANA effort and ties together many longstanding Afghan and Islamic values to service in the ANA. This will focus on leadership at the unit level and build on a range of work intended to promote further professionalisation of the force.

In Regional Command (South West), the UK's Area of Operations, we have been working to lower levels of attrition in Helmand. By implementing the NATO Special Afghan Leave Transport Program, we have helped the ANSF develop capabilities to fly troops from and to their Regional Command for leave cycles. This has increased morale and reduced the number of people leaving the ANA in RC (SW).

Table One: ANSF Growth to 29 February 2012

| | Objective (30 November 2012) | Target Strength (29 February 2012) | Actual Strength (29 February 2012) | February Target Met |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ANA: | 195,000 | 175,000 | 184,487 | Yes |
| ANP: | 157,000 | 146,649 | 148,932 | Yes |
| ANA Officers: | 29,644 | | | |
| ANA NCOs: | 72,123 | 60,000 | 52,000 | No |

Table Two: ANSF Attrition Rates

| | Target Monthly Attrition | Actual Monthly Attrition | February Target Met |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ANA: | 1.4% | 1.9% | No |
| ANP: | 1.4% | 1.14% | Yes |
| Uniformed Police | 1.4% | 1.11% | Yes |
| Border Police | 1.4% | 1.40% | Yes |
| National Civil Order Police | 1.4% | 1.14% | Yes |

Violence Levels

Month on month violence levels across Afghanistan against ISAF have not increased. This is in line with seasonal norms. In the east, which has experienced a particularly harsh winter, insurgent activity has reduced significantly over recent months. While the weather has had a predictable impact in reducing the number of security incidents, it is worth noting that overall violence levels are significantly and consistently lower than at this time last year. Complex attacks, those which use at least two distinct types of weapon, have however, increased this month. Though we should not ignore the fact similarly we should not exaggerate its significance. Despite the increase these remain at relatively low levels, only accounting for approximately 5% of all security incidents. In Kabul there have been no high profile insurgent attacks for nearly 12 weeks - the longest period since 2009.¹

Nationally, ISAF has continued to maintain a high operational tempo further degrading the insurgency. However we must expect activity across the country to increase when warmer weather returns.

The latter part of the month was overshadowed by the series of demonstrations that occurred in response to the mishandling of religious material at Bagram Airfield. General Allen, Commander ISAF, apologised to President Karzai, the Afghan Government and the Afghan people immediately after being made aware of the events at Bagram. President Obama also apologised to the Afghans and wrote to President Karzai expressing his “deep regret” at the incident. General Allen subsequently ordered a joint ISAF/Afghan Government investigation

¹ Information correct as of 29/2/2012

into the burning and the Qur'an burning incident that led to it. He also confirmed that all ISAF troops would receive training in the handling of Islamic religious texts by 3 March. Two additional investigations are being undertaken by the National Council of Ulema (religious scholars) and by the United States.

The civil unrest sparked by the incident was initially centred on Bagram, Jalalabad and Kabul, but subsequently spread across the country. Protests were reported in most provinces and left at least thirty dead. Two US soldiers were killed by a man wearing an ANA uniform during a protest in the eastern province of Nangahar on 23 February. This was followed three days later when a man, understood to have been an Afghan Police Intelligence Officer, killed two US soldiers inside the Interior Ministry in Kabul. President Karzai offered his condolences for the deaths. However, the incident prompted General Allen temporarily to withdraw all ISAF staff from Afghan Ministries; the British Embassy followed suit. An investigation into the deaths is underway.

In Helmand, reaction to the incident was relatively restrained. This was due to effective measures taken by Provincial Governor Mangal and other Afghan officials. They allowed a demonstration to take place in central Lashkar Gah, but contained it by encouraging the protesters to conduct their protest in a sports stadium, which was opened specifically for the purpose. They played a key role in maintaining calm across the UK's Area of Operations. Significantly, this was achieved without ISAF assistance.

Across Afghanistan, the Force Protection posture has been reviewed and adjusted to reflect the situation on the ground. NATO training of the Afghan Security Forces has continued, but with enhanced security. In Kabul movement restrictions were only temporarily put in place.

The ANSF responded effectively and professionally to the protests. Their performance in managing the demonstrations, in some cases, placing themselves between the protesters and international forces, has been assessed as extremely good. They showed courage, resolve, and maintained their professionalism despite sustaining casualties and agitation from the insurgency for them to join in.

On 29 February a PRT convoy was caught in a suicide vehicle-borne IED incident whilst travelling from Lashkar Gah Main Operating Base to the National Directorate for Security compound. None of the drivers or passengers was hurt, but six local nationals and one member of the ANSF received injuries. PRT road moves in Lashkar Gah were temporarily suspended following the attack.

| Type of incident | Definition | Change from January 2012 | Comparison with February 2011 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Security incidents | Enemy action and explosive hazards, both executed attacks and 'potential' attacks (e.g. an IED found and cleared) | ↔ No significant change | ↓ Fall in incidents |
| Enemy initiated attacks | Attacks executed by insurgents (This does not include 'potential' attacks) | ↓ Fall in attacks | ↓ Fall in attacks |
| Complex attacks | Attacks conducted by multiple hostile elements employing at least two distinct classes of weapon | ↑ Rise in attacks | ↑ Rise in attacks |

Civilian Casualties

On 4 February the UN Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) published its annual report on civilian casualties. UNAMA reported that civilian casualties in 2011 increased by 8% over 2010. They reported that civilian deaths caused by ISAF and Afghan Forces fell from 18% to 14%, while deaths caused by the insurgency rose by 14% to 77%. UNAMA were unable to attribute 9% of civilian deaths to either group. The overall increase in civilian deaths was attributed to an increase in IEDs, which were the single largest killer of Afghan civilians in 2011. The insurgents' use of victim-activated pressure plate IEDs does not discriminate between military or civilian targets. The protection of the Afghan civilian population remains at the core of our military strategy in Afghanistan. We will continue to take considerable steps to prevent civilian casualties.

Table Three: International Contributions to ISAF

| Country | Contribution | % of Total |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| US | 90,000 | 69% |
| UK | 9,500 | 7.3% |
| Germany | 4,818 | 3.7% |
| Italy | 3,952 | 3.0% |
| France | 3,916 | 3.0% |
| Poland | 2,475 | 1.9% |
| Romania | 1,876 | 1.4% |
| Turkey | 1,845 | 1.4% |
| Australia | 1,550 | 1.2% |
| Spain | 1,488 | 1.2% |
| Others (38 nations) | 8,966 | 6.9% |
| Current Total | 130,386 | 100.00% |
| <i>Above numbers are indicative of troop contributions as at 6 January 2012, actual numbers fluctuate daily. Source: ISAF</i> | | |

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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