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Defence Committee

UK operations in Afghanistan

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written evidence*

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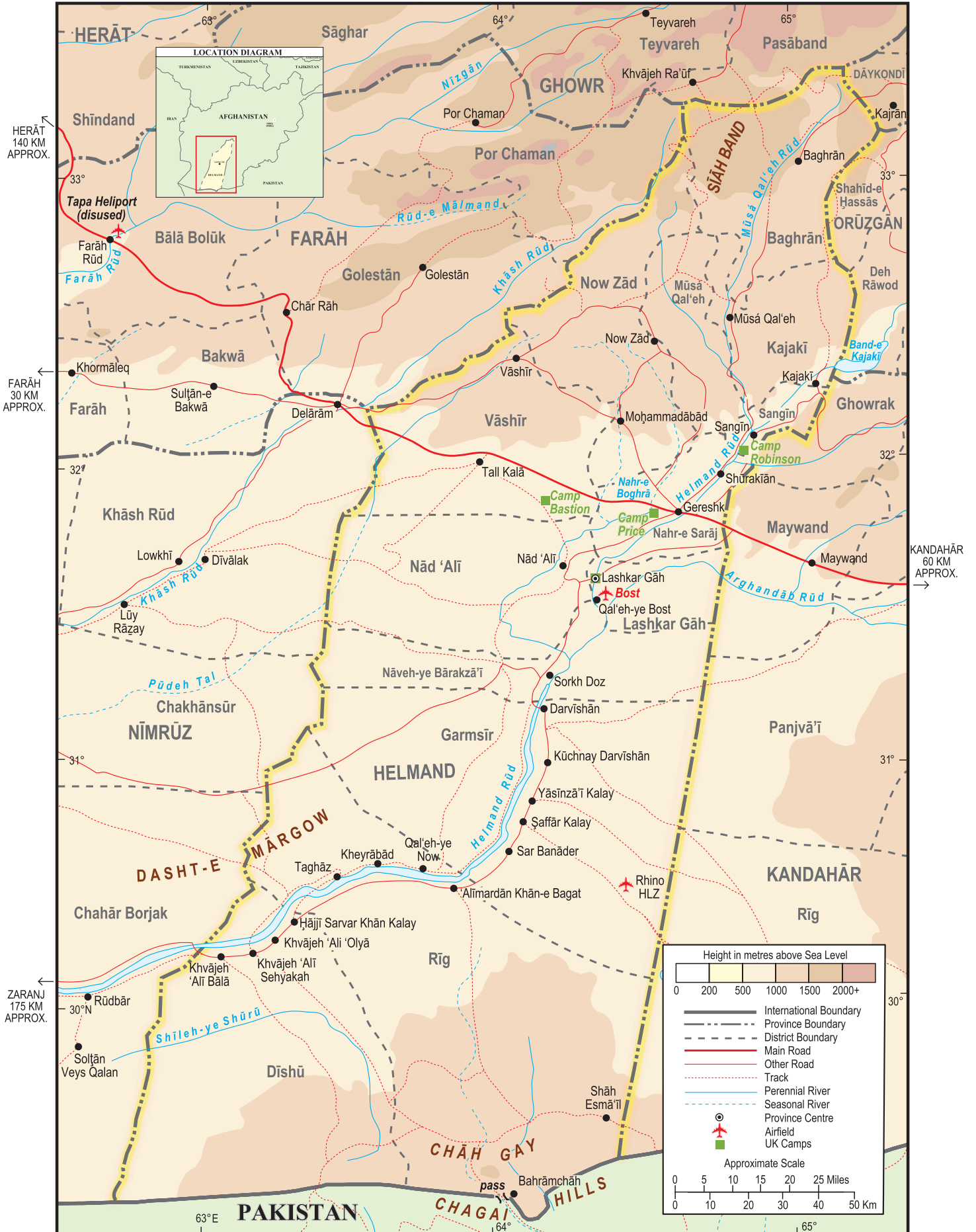
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Summary

In May 2006, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) deployed UK Forces to Helmand Province in Southern Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission. By the summer of 2007, the number of UK personnel deployed had risen from some 3,300 to approximately 7,700 troops. The vast majority are deployed in Helmand where security is fragile and UK Service personnel have suffered casualties when fighting insurgents. The commitment given by the UK Armed Forces has been outstanding.

Afghanistan has experienced thirty years of conflict. ISAF and the international community must focus on establishing security and denying the Taliban and Al Qaeda the environment in which to operate.

The ISAF mission was led between May 2006 and February 2007 by the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC). During the ARRC's leadership, ISAF expanded its area of operations first to the South and then to the East of Afghanistan. The challenge of leading a 37-nation coalition is considerable.

Ensuring a coordinated comprehensive approach to the reconstruction of Afghanistan requires energetic leadership. We call on the Government to press the UN to appoint a high-profile individual responsible for coordinating the international effort.

While the MoD asserts that the Taliban insurgency does not pose a strategic threat to Afghanistan, violence seems to be increasing and spreading to the previously more peaceful provinces in the North and West of Afghanistan and the capital, Kabul. ISAF should continue to minimise civilian casualties on operations and not measure success in terms of the number of insurgents killed.

NATO has not provided the required numbers of troops as stated in the Combined Joint Statement Of Requirement (CJSOR). We remain deeply concerned that the reluctance of some NATO members to provide troops for the ISAF mission is undermining NATO's credibility and ISAF operations.

Reforming the Afghan National Army (ANA) is progressing well although ANA units are not yet capable of operating independently of ISAF. Reform of the Afghan National Police (ANP) is not progressing as well as reform of the ANA. Although 62,000 out of a target of 82,000 Police have been trained to date, the standard of the training is reported to be less effective. The international effort should put more emphasis on this training and in addressing corruption in the judicial system.

Sufficient air-lift and air support is vital to the UK operation in the South. The MoD has provided additional helicopters since the initial deployment but must make even greater effort to increase the provision of helicopters and crew. UK helicopter operations in Afghanistan are not sustainable at the present intensity.

After a slow start, there are signs that the UK effort in delivering reconstruction and development in Helmand has become coordinated better. But there remains much to do.

The UK is Afghanistan's G8 partner nation for developing a counter-narcotics policy but this policy is not being communicated sufficiently clearly. We are concerned that uncertainty has arisen among Afghans about ISAF's role in poppy eradication and that UK Forces, under ISAF command, may consequently have been put at risk. Ending opium production in Helmand will require a long-term commitment by the international community to create a secure environment in which farmers can be encouraged to pursue alternative livelihoods.

The Government is not communicating key messages to the British or Afghan public about the purpose of its operations in Afghanistan effectively enough.

Afghanistan's relations with its immediate neighbours, Pakistan and Iran, are vital to its future. We call on the Government to encourage dialogue between Afghanistan and these two countries.

1 Introduction

Background

1. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, New York, on 11 September 2001, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was blamed by the United States (US) Administration (and the United Kingdom Government) for harbouring Al Qaeda terrorists, including its leader Osama Bin Laden, who had claimed responsibility for the attack. In October 2001, the US launched a military campaign—Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)—in conjunction with the Afghan Northern Alliance to remove the Taliban from power. The military campaign, for which the US provided air power and the Northern Alliance provided ground forces, ended with the fall of the Taliban in December 2001.

2. Following the end of the military campaign, prominent Afghans met in December 2001 in Bonn, Germany, under the auspices of the United Nations to determine the post-Taliban future for Afghanistan. The resulting Bonn Agreement set out a twin-track political and stabilisation process for Afghanistan. Nationwide presidential and parliamentary elections followed in 2004 and 2005; and a 5,000 strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was deployed under United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1386, to ensure stability in Kabul.¹ The US-led OEF counter-terrorism mission continued to operate separately from ISAF, primarily in the Eastern provinces of Afghanistan.

3. Since March 2002, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has coordinated the international political and diplomatic effort in Afghanistan. The UNAMA's stated mission in Afghanistan is to provide assistance to the Afghanistan Government in developing its institutions, protecting human rights and promoting development. The UNAMA is headed by Tom Koenigs, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan (SRSG), who has overall responsibility for all UN activities in the country.²

4. In addition to the UNAMA mission, many other international institutions have a presence in Afghanistan. In January 2006, 53 countries negotiated the Afghanistan Compact which committed the Afghanistan Government and the international community to achieving three overarching goals by 2011: security; governance; and economic development. The Afghanistan Compact was also signed by the Asian Development Bank, the G8, the European Union and the World Bank. Governments and institutions pledged \$10.5 billion to put the plan into effect.³

1 UN Resolutions can be viewed at <http://daccessdds.un.org>

2 www.unama-afg.org

3 "Building on Success: The Afghanistan Compact", 1 February 2006, www.fco.gov.uk

The security mission

5. On 11 August 2003 ISAF became a NATO-led operation and began to extend its area of operation over Afghanistan. In June 2004, ISAF extended into the Northern and Western Provinces, as authorised by UNSCR 1510. In July 2006, ISAF extended into Afghanistan's Southern provinces and 12,000 US troops, previously deployed as part of OEF, came under ISAF command.⁴ In October 2006, UNSCR 1707 extended ISAF's authority into Afghanistan's Eastern Provinces so that the whole country came under its authority.

6. Alongside the ISAF mission, the US-led OEF counter-terrorism mission continues to operate, albeit in reduced numbers, in Afghanistan's Eastern provinces. The ISAF stability mission (discussed further in Chapter 2) and the 4,000 strong OEF counter-terrorism mission remain separate in purpose, but during 2006 the missions became more closely coordinated. The respective command structures merged with the deputy Commander of ISAF, Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, continuing to lead the OEF mission. The air support for both missions was coordinated from the US Coalition Combined Air Operations Control Centre (CAOC) base at Al Udeid, in Qatar.⁵

The UK contribution to ISAF

7. Between 2002 and 2006 the UK contribution to ISAF comprised:

- A Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Maymaneh between 2002 and 1 September 2005 when responsibility was handed over to Norway;
- a PRT in the north of Afghanistan based at Mazar-e-Sharif, handed over to Sweden in March 2006;
- the Forward Support Base and Quick Reaction Force for Area North (troops which could be deployed speedily to deal with outbreaks of unrest);
- an infantry company that served as the Kabul Patrol Company (KPC) in Kabul, and staff officers in HQ ISAF;
- a training team for the Afghan National Army; and
- a detachment of six (subsequently increased to eight) Harrier GR7 / 9 aircraft, based at Kandahar, which provided both ISAF and OEF with air support and air reconnaissance.⁶

8. Since May 2006, the UK military presence in Afghanistan has comprised:

- the leadership, between May 2006 and February 2007, of the ISAF IX mission by the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) and its support Brigade, 1 Signal Brigade. In total, approximately 2,000 UK personnel were deployed in, or in support of, HQ ARRC;

4 www.cfc-a.centcom.mil/News

5 Defence Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2005–06, *The UK deployment to Afghanistan*, HC 558, para 14

6 HC (2005–06) 558, Ev 46, para 9

- since February 2007, 136 personnel deployed to the ISAF X Headquarters (including the ISAF Deputy Commander Stability);⁷
- since May 2006 the deployment of UK forces to Southern Afghanistan as part of the ISAF mission. The initial deployment comprised a 3,300 strong force whose main component was 16 Air Assault Brigade. Since April 2007, the Force has been spearheaded by the 5,800 strong 12 Mechanised Brigade and supported by the Joint Helicopter Force-Afghanistan comprising Apache, Chinook and Lynx helicopters; and
- Eight Harrier GR7 / 9 aircraft, based at Kandahar, which provide both ISAF and OEF with air support and air reconnaissance.

On 26 February 2007, the Secretary of State announced the deployment of an additional 1,400 Service personnel comprising a battlegroup to be deployed in the South, an additional four Harrier GR9s, four Sea King helicopters and an additional C-130 Hercules.⁸

Our inquiry

9. This is our second report into UK operations in Afghanistan. In our first report, *The UK deployment to Afghanistan*, published on 4 April 2006, we examined the challenges facing the ARRC ahead of its mission to lead ISAF in Afghanistan.⁹ We also examined the proposed deployment of 16 Air Assault Brigade to Helmand Province in Southern Afghanistan. In our first report we announced our intention to hold a further inquiry into Afghanistan to examine the lessons learned from those deployments. Since we published our first report, we have continued to monitor developments in Afghanistan. In July 2006, we visited Islamabad, Pakistan, and then Kabul, Helmand and Kandahar, Afghanistan, for meetings with officials, politicians and military personnel.

10. We announced our second inquiry on 31 January 2007.¹⁰ We have assessed the progress made in Afghanistan during the ARRC's leadership of ISAF. We have also examined the experiences of UK Forces in Southern Afghanistan since their initial deployment in May 2006. As part of our inquiry, on 16 April 2007, we travelled to New Delhi, India, and met with senior government and military representatives to discuss the issues facing Afghanistan and the wider region. On 18 April 2007, we travelled on to Afghanistan for a series of meetings in Kabul with UK officials and Afghan politicians and then to Kandahar and Lashkar Gah in Southern Afghanistan to meet UK military personnel, local politicians and local representatives of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) based in Helmand Province.

7 Ev 118

8 HC Deb, 26 February 2007, col 620

9 HC (2005–06) 558

10 www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/defence_committee/def070131_no_18.cfm

11. We took evidence on 20 March 2007 from Rt Hon Des Browne MP, Secretary of State for Defence; Mr Martin Howard CB, Director General Operations Policy at the MoD; Lieutenant General Nick Houghton CBE, Chief of Joint Operations (MoD); and Mr Peter Holland, Head of the Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit (ADIDU).

12. On 27 March 2007, we took oral evidence from a range of experts: Dr Shirin Akiner, Lecturer in Central Asian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS); Mr Robert Fox, journalist and historian; Dr Gilbert Greenall, Government Adviser on humanitarian issues; Ms Norine MacDonald QC, President of the Senlis Council; Mr Rory Stewart, Chief Executive of the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, Kabul, and Dr Michael Williams, Head of the Transatlantic Programme at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).

13. On 24 April 2007, we took oral evidence from General David Richards CBE, Commander of the ARRC and Commander of ISAF from May 2006 until February 2007.

14. In our concluding evidence session on 8 May 2007, we took further oral evidence from Rt Hon Des Browne MP; Lieutenant General Nick Houghton CBE and Mr Peter Holland. We also took evidence from Mr Desmond Bowen CMG, Policy Director at the MoD, and Lindy Cameron, Head of the Department for International Development (DfID) in Afghanistan.

15. We received written evidence from ADIDU; the British and Irish Afghanistan Agencies Group (BAAG), the MoD; the Senlis Council; Dr Shirin Akiner; Dr Gilbert Greenall; Olivia Holdsworth, an expert on the judicial system in Afghanistan and Philip Wilkinson. We are grateful to those who gave evidence to our inquiry and assisted with our visits. We are also grateful to our specialist advisers who assisted us in our inquiry.

Key developments since April 2006

16. Our first inquiry into operations in Afghanistan was concluded in April 2006 before both the full deployment of the ARRC to lead ISAF and the main deployment of 16 Air Assault Brigade to Helmand Province. Last year, public awareness of the aims and objectives of the UK deployment to Afghanistan—Operation Herrick—was low. A year on, operations in Afghanistan have become the subject of increased media and public focus in the light of UK Forces conducting sustained operations against tenacious insurgent fighters.

17. The scale of the threat is demonstrated by the fact that as of 1 July 2007, 40 of our Service personnel have been killed in, or as a result of, action in Afghanistan (63 have died in total in Afghanistan).¹¹ **We pay tribute to those Service people who have lost their lives or suffered injury and extend our deep sympathies to their families. The commitment given by our entire Armed Services has been shown to be outstanding.**

18. The table below identifies the recent key developments in Afghanistan.

Table 1: Key developments in Afghanistan since May 2006

Date	Commentary
May 2006	Deployment of the ARRC to lead ISAF for nine months. UK Forces , led by 16 Air Assault Brigade, deploy to Helmand province.
June 2006	UK are deployed to towns in Northern Helmand as part of a 'Platoon House' strategy.
10 July 2006	Secretary of State for Defence announces that, following fierce engagements with insurgents, UK will be increased during next roulement.
31 July 2006	ISAF authority extended to Afghanistan's Southern provinces.
2 September 2006	Nimrod MR2 reconnaissance aircraft crashes. 14 UK Service personnel are killed.
September 2006	Operation Medusa—a campaign against insurgents in Kandahar Province—begins. ISAF claims a significant victory.
3 October 2006	ISAF authority extended to cover the Eastern provinces of Afghanistan. 12,000 US troops come under ISAF command. 3 Commando Brigade replaces 16 Air Assault Brigade in Helmand province.
October 2006	Musa Qaleh agreement between Governor Daoud and tribal elders in which the Taliban were excluded from the town.
2 February 2006	Musa Qaleh agreement breaks down as Taliban retake control of the town.
3 February 2007	A NATO 'composite' headquarters replaces the ARRC as leader of ISAF (for a period of one year) US General Dan McNeill replaces the UK's General Richards as the new commander of ISAF.
April 2007	12 Mechanised Brigade replaces 3 Commando Brigade in Southern Helmand. Operation Achilles begins. The aim is to clear insurgents from Helmand's northern areas to enable development work.

2 The ISAF mission

The strategic context

19. ISAF and the international community are operating in an extremely challenging environment in Afghanistan. Dr Shirin Akiner described a country which had experienced thirty years of political turmoil and violence, had little infrastructure and had social indicators that were on a par with the West African state, Burkina Faso.¹² Ms Norine MacDonald and Mr Rory Stewart told us that Afghanistan was a deeply conservative Islamic society which exercised a strong social control on the role of women and had a suspicion of outsiders.¹³ Other witnesses told us about the low average life expectancy and high rates of illiteracy, particularly among Afghan women.

Table 2: Key social indicators

Afghanistan: Key social indicators
Average life expectancy is 44.5 years (UNDP, 2005)
1 in 6 babies dies during or shortly after birth (UNDP, 2005)
20% of children die before reaching the age of 5 (UNICEF, 2005)
17,000 women die each year from pregnancy-related causes (UNICEF, 2005)
12% of the population have adequate sanitation (World Bank, 2005)
13% of the population have clean drinking water (World Bank, 2005)

Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Purpose

20. ISAF describes its objective in Afghanistan as being,

to support the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) in providing and maintaining a secure environment in order to facilitate the re-building of Afghanistan.

ISAF is in Afghanistan to assist the Government of Afghanistan in ensuring a safe and secure environment that will be conducive to establishing democratic structures, to facilitate the reconstruction of the country and to assist in expanding the influence of the central government.¹⁴

21. The aim of ISAF is to deliver what Dr Michael Williams, Head of Transatlantic Relations, RUSI, described as the “comprehensive approach”. This involves the military creating the secure conditions in which reconstruction and development work can be delivered by government officials and NGOs. To coordinate the reconstruction effort, ISAF

¹² Q 110

¹³ Qq 160, 193

¹⁴ www.nato.int/ISAF/mission/mission_role.htm

has established 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) around the country and given individual nations lead responsibility for the activities within their PRTs. Dr Williams told us that each country approached its PRT very differently depending on the security conditions prevalent in their particular Province. PRTs in the less stable South required a greater military presence than those in the relatively more stable North.¹⁵

22. All of our witnesses agreed that it was in the interest of the international community to ensure that the Taliban did not return to power and that Al Qaeda was no longer able to operate in Afghanistan. However, Mr Robert Fox believed that there was some divergence of aims within the ISAF coalition about the purpose of the mission with most European nations seeing the mission as about providing development and the US seeing the mission as “part of the global war on terror and enduring freedom”.¹⁶

23. Mr Rory Stewart expressed doubt that ISAF’s aims were attainable as he considered them to be overly ambitious and lacking coherence.

We are now in a situation in which we are simultaneously trying to pursue quite different objectives that stretch from counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, state building, development, democratisation. Very few of these issues are logically connected and each one of them could be pursued on its own.¹⁷

24. Afghanistan has experienced 30 years of strife. In the short term, ISAF’s primary purpose is to secure stability and deny the Taliban and Al Qaeda the environment in which to operate. In the longer term, it will require a sustained military and financial commitment by the international community, working with the Government of Afghanistan, to create the environment in which enduring democratic institutions can be established. If that commitment is to succeed, its size and strength must be very great, and in our view considerably greater than the international community is at present willing to acknowledge, let alone to make.

ISAF numbers and structure

25. As of June 2007, there were some 36,750 troops drawn from 37 countries operating in Afghanistan under ISAF command.¹⁸ Within the current command (known as ISAF X) the US provides the largest number of troops (15,000) and the UK the second largest (7,700). The ISAF operation is commanded by US General Dan McNeill based in the Command Centre in Kabul. There are four regional commands covering provinces in the North, West, South, and East.

15 Q 180

16 Q 167

17 *Ibid.*

18 www.nato.int/isaf/

HQ ARRC leadership of ISAF May 2006–February 2007

26. From 2001 to 2005, ISAF was commanded by a succession of eight NATO countries on a six-monthly rotation.¹⁹ HQ ARRC, a NATO High Readiness Force Headquarters staffed predominantly by UK personnel, took over command from Italy for a period of nine months between May 2006 and February 2007. During this nine-month period, the ARRC oversaw the expansion of ISAF from its confines around Kabul and the Western provinces, to the less stable Southern and Eastern Provinces of Afghanistan (known as Stage 4). The task, which involved a significant extension of ISAF's territorial reach, coincided with an increase from around 10,000 to approximately 36,000 today.

27. On 24 April 2007, General David Richards, Commander of the ARRC, said the greatest success of the ARRC's operation "was to extend NATO command over the more difficult South and East".²⁰ He paid tribute to his colleagues, describing the ARRC as "a real prize that the UK possesses", and said that the ARRC had demonstrated that "NATO can do the most demanding of operations".²¹ General Richards told us that the ARRC's other achievements were bringing greater coherence to the international effort and achieving a psychological ascendancy, through military operations, over the Taliban.²² **We commend the achievement of HQ ARRC in overseeing the establishment of ISAF authority into the challenging provinces of South and East Afghanistan.**

Working in an international context

28. Many of the submissions to this inquiry pointed to the difficulty of coordinating the actions of the international community in Afghanistan.²³ The Secretary of State recognised the complexity of the multi-national mission in Afghanistan and told us that

the fundamental challenge lies in the ability to get at the proper strategic level, that is, at the national level in Afghanistan, a strategic overall campaign plan which is not an aggregate of every single country which has an interest in this, in other words bilateral interests. There is, of course, the United Nations Special Representative there and I look to that part of the infrastructure to provide the leadership for that campaign plan on the ground.²⁴

29. General Richards believed he had brought greater coherence to the international effort in Afghanistan but acknowledged that there was more to do.²⁵ A key development towards bringing greater coordination was the establishment under his leadership of the Policy Action Group (PAG). The PAG, chaired by President Karzai, was a forum in which the

19 HC (2005–06) 159

20 Q 204

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 Ev 87, 93, 107

24 Q 364

25 Q 204

UNSRSG, principal ambassadors, people like me, would debate the key issues and agree, with President Karzai chairing one in every three or four, the agreed strategy or way ahead on whatever particular issue, and we were responsible for ensuring it was all coherent.²⁶

We suggested to General Richards that the international mission might benefit from leadership provided by a high-profile individual. He told us that he had established the PAG to fill a “vacuum” and that

I do think that there is a strong case for a dominant international partner alongside President Karzai as his trusted adviser and friend to whom he can turn when necessary and with whom he has a very good relationship.²⁷

30. Coordinating the international effort in Afghanistan is a huge task. The Government should encourage the United Nations to work towards the appointment of a high-profile and authoritative individual with responsibility for coordinating the international effort in support of the Government of Afghanistan.

The general security situation

31. The MoD submission describes the security situation across Afghanistan as “broadly stable, if fragile in places”.²⁸ The Secretary of State told us that although the Taliban-led insurgency contained some “violent and dangerous people”, it did not constitute a “strategic threat” to Afghanistan.²⁹ The submission from the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) describes the general security situation as being worse in the South but states that “Increasing insecurity is now the greatest concern for ordinary Afghans in many parts of the country. Over the past six months, levels of violence have been at their highest since 2001”.³⁰

32. Some of the reported increase in insecurity has been attributed to the movement of ISAF Forces to areas where previously there had been no military presence. Others suggest it is a consequence of counter-terrorism operations conducted by OEF. However, some of the reported violence has occurred in the previously more peaceful Northern and Western provinces where ISAF Forces have been operating since 2002.³¹ On 12 June 2007, the International Commission of the Red Cross (ICRC), issued a statement on the security situation:

The conflict between Afghan and international and armed opposition groups in Afghanistan has significantly intensified and spread over the past 12 months, no longer confined to the South, but spreading to parts of the East, West and North.³²

26 Q 220

27 Q 218

28 Ev 84, para 3

29 Q 37

30 Ev 100, para 1

31 “Afghanistan conflict worsening”, *The Guardian*, 12 June 2007

32 www.icrc.org

33. When we asked General Richards whether ISAF was defeating the Taliban insurgency, he told us:

I believe we are still winning the war; if you like the campaign is going our way. That does not mean that in a particular area...things have not deteriorated in the sense that there is more activity, and that certainly is the case in Northern Helmand.³³

According to General Richards, a key battle against the Taliban-led insurgency was Operation Medusa fought in Kandahar Province in September 2006.

If Kandahar fell, and it was reasonably close run last year, it did not matter how well the Dutch did in Uruzgan or how well the British did in Helmand. Their two provinces would also, as night followed day, have failed because we would have lost the consent of the Pashtun people because of the totemic importance of Kandahar.³⁴

34. Since the defeat of the Taliban by ISAF Forces in Operation Medusa, concern has grown that the Taliban insurgents might adopt more 'asymmetric' tactics against ISAF including increasing their use of suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). According to Anthony Cordesman, Chairman of the US-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), there has been an increase in suicide attacks from 18 in 2005 to 116 in 2006 and an increase in attacks from IEDs from 530 to 1,297 in 2006.³⁵ The devastating impact of such attacks was demonstrated over the weekend of 16 / 17 June 2007, when a suicide bomber exploded a device in the North Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, and the following day, a similar exploding device killed 35 people in Kabul.³⁶

35. While we note the assertion made by the MoD that the Taliban does not present a "strategic threat" to security in Afghanistan, we are concerned at reports that violence is increasing and spreading to the relatively peaceful Kabul and the Northern Provinces. We are also concerned about the increased use of improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings in Afghanistan.

Civilian casualties

36. Assessing civilian casualties in Afghanistan is difficult. Human Rights Watch estimates that there were 1,000 civilian deaths in 2006. What is certain, is that civilian casualties are of increasing concern to Afghans. During our visit to Kabul we met representatives of the Afghan International Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), a body which reports to the Afghanistan National Assembly about human rights issues in Afghanistan.³⁷ The AIHRC told us that ISAF had pledged in December 2006 to take measures to limit civilian casualties but that since December 2006 civilian casualties had in fact increased and that, as a consequence, public support for ISAF had weakened.

33 Q 231

34 Q 224

35 "Winning in Afghanistan: The Challenges and Response", *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, February 15 2007

36 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6760791.stm

37 www.aihrc.org

37. In the spring of 2007 there were reports of significant civilian casualties following ISAF operations, particularly those that involved air strikes.³⁸ On 12 June 2007, the ICRC issued a press release describing the effect of operations by both ISAF and the Taliban on the civilian population, and stating that “owing to the number of roadside bombs and suicide attacks, and regular aerial bombing raids...it is incredibly difficult for ordinary Afghans to lead a normal life”.³⁹

38. We regret the number of civilians killed as a result of military activity in Afghanistan. Our Forces try their utmost to minimise civilian casualties on operations and it is to be hoped that the introduction of precision weapons such as the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System should help minimise civilian casualties further. Every life lost is a tragedy, causing misery to families and destruction to communities. Moreover, civilian casualties undermine support for ISAF and the Government of Afghanistan and fuel the insurgency, further endangering our troops and the objectives of their mission.

39. In March, we asked the Secretary of State whether media reports of large numbers of insurgent deaths could prove counter-productive to gaining the support of Afghans. He replied that detail relating to insurgent fatalities following operations had not been given by UK sources, but rather by NATO sources, and that “on occasion they were revised quite significantly”.⁴⁰ He also noted that:

you will not find any of those figures in terms of the number dead coming from us because we disavowed that approach to success and / or failure. It is not about body count.⁴¹

40. General Houghton told us that he recognised the potential that “kinetic” activity against the Taliban could have on alienating the population both “locally and internationally”.⁴² He also stated that the deployment of the GMLRS artillery would enable greater accuracy to operations,

we can then utilise equipment such as the GMLRS to bring effective and precise strike over significant distances, as I say areas up to 70 kilometres.⁴³

41. Operational success should not be measured in terms of the numbers of dead enemy combatants. Accurate and verifiable figures for the numbers of Taliban killed by ISAF are difficult to obtain, and many of those killed on the front-line may not be hard-core Taliban but rather farmers hired to fight. Exaggerated reports of insurgent casualties following ISAF operations can serve as useful propaganda for insurgents and undermine support for the ISAF mission.

38 “Civilian deaths prompt NATO rethink,” *The Independent*, 20 May 2007

39 www.icrc.org

40 Q 43

41 Q 42

42 Q 22

43 Q 25

NATO force generation

Caveats

42. In our first report into operations in Afghanistan, we highlighted the difficulties that NATO had experienced in gaining commitments of troops from ISAF members for the ISAF Stage 3 expansion to the less stable South.⁴⁴ In early 2006, before Stage 3 began, some countries were reported to have refused to commit additional Forces to the mission and others were reported to have insisted on exercising “national caveats” from NATO’s Rules of Engagement, effectively restricting their Forces from certain aspects of operations.⁴⁵ In the wake of Operation Medusa, in September 2006, there was some suggestion that some countries with Forces based in the Northern Provinces had not allowed their troops to be re-deployed to the South in support of ISAF troops engaged in war-fighting.

43. During our recent visits to NATO member capitals in Europe, as part of our Future of NATO inquiry, we were told about the constitutional reasons for some countries not participating in certain aspects of military operations. In Madrid, we were told by politicians and academics that while Spanish public opinion supported troops working on reconstruction projects in Afghanistan, it would not support a war-fighting role. In Berlin, we were told about the constitutional restrictions on Germany’s military operating abroad although it was noted that the German Government had, in January 2007, approved the use of Tornado aircraft for reconnaissance missions.

44. The Secretary of State told us that progress had been made at the NATO summit in Riga, Latvia, in November 2006 in reducing national caveats:

The Dutch, the Romanians, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia, Lithuania and lots of others effectively came out of that with no caveats at all. There is progress being made, therefore, and indeed France and Germany agreed, as I reported to Parliament, that in case of emergency their troops would be moved [from the North to the South] to help.⁴⁶

Despite the reduction in caveats agreed at Riga, the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) commented that the continued existence of caveats risks “impeding the ability of ISAF commanders to employ all their available resources”.⁴⁷

45. While we note the progress that has been made in reducing national caveats, we remain concerned that national caveats risk impairing the effectiveness of the ISAF mission. The Government should continue to press ISAF partners to reduce further the restrictions placed on the use of their Forces.

44 HC (2005–06) 558

45 “UK tries to form coalition to fight in Afghanistan”, *The Guardian*, 15 November 2005

46 Q 54

47 “Assessing ISAF: A Baseline Study of NATO’s Role in Afghanistan”, *British American Security Information Council*, 2 March 2007

Troop numbers

46. General Richards told us that, during his leadership of ISAF, the level of troop numbers rather than caveats was his major concern:

Simply being able to move their troops from the North to the South would not have been a solution to me at all because we have got just about the right number of troops in the North to contain the situation there, which is broadly stable... What I was really after was...an increase in the overall number of troops.⁴⁸

47. The force element deemed necessary by NATO's Deputy Supreme Commander in Europe (DSACEUR) to fulfil the operational plan in Afghanistan is known as the Combined Joint Statement Of Requirement (CJSOR). General Richards told us that progress had been made at the Riga summit in meeting the CJSOR for additional troop numbers to the South, but stated that more progress was required.⁴⁹ Despite the increased commitments made by the US and the UK, the Secretary of State confirmed that only five of the required seven battalions had been agreed to.⁵⁰

48. Dr Williams told us that ISAF needed more troop numbers on the ground if its deployment to the South was to be successful.⁵¹ We questioned the Secretary of State about the impact that NATO's failure to meet the CJSOR might have. He told us that NATO had never fulfilled a CJSOR for any operation but he expressed his confidence that the missing elements of the CJSOR would not impinge on ISAF's operational capability.⁵²

49. Despite the Secretary of State's assurances, we remain deeply concerned that the reluctance of some NATO members to provide troops for the ISAF mission is undermining NATO's credibility and also ISAF operations. In response to our report, the Government should explain its strategy for engaging other NATO Governments in addressing the deficit in the CJSOR.

Tour lengths

50. Both General Richards and the Secretary of State told us that there was a case for extending the tours of the more senior ISAF officers, as this would enable sufficient time for commanders to form relationships with local politicians and NGOs and gain operational knowledge.⁵³ However General Richards noted the effect on families that extended tours could have:

48 Q 270

49 Q 265

50 Q 335

51 Ev 94

52 Q 339

53 Q 323

I am all for it but you need to look at the conditions of service because everyone is working very hard and I think we must remember that it penalises our families. It is not fair on them if you do not give them a little bit of incentive, and there is balance to be struck, but in an absolute sense there is a definite case for longer tours.⁵⁴

51. The MoD, in consultation with NATO colleagues, should consider the feasibility of extending the operational tours of key personnel. This would allow sufficient time to build and maintain relationships with Afghans and other key figures in Afghanistan.

Afghan National Army

52. The 2001 Bonn Agreement committed the international community to the reform and development of the Afghan National Army (ANA). The US has taken the lead in training and equipping the ANA and has committed \$5.9 billion over the next 18 months to supporting the ANA, including providing weaponry and helicopters.⁵⁵ The UK's contribution has been focused on training the ANA through the establishment of an army training school in Kabul, which we visited in July 2006, and the provision of Operational Mentoring Liaison Teams (OMLTs), embedded in Afghan units.

53. In a generally positive assessment of the progress of the ANA, the Secretary of State told us in May that 35,000 troops (against an overall target of 70,000) had been trained so far. Four out of ten ANA Brigade Headquarters were judged as capable of planning, executing and sustaining counter-insurgency operations with coalition or ISAF support at company level.⁵⁶ General Houghton, while acknowledging the progress that had been made in training the ANA, told us that there were occasions when ANA units had been deployed on operations before they had been ready. He acknowledged that it would be "some time before the ANA is fully capable of conducting independent operations at the brigade level".⁵⁷

54. We note the MoD's assessment that some ANA units are now trained sufficiently to be deployed alongside ISAF troops on operations, but we also note that they are some way off operating independently.

55. General Abdul Rahim Wardak, Afghanistan's Defence Minister, told us in Kabul that he was grateful for the support that the US and UK had given the ANA and praised the contribution that UK OMLTs had made to the training of the ANA. When we put this to the Secretary of State, he acknowledged the contribution that OMLTs had made to training the ANA and told us it "represented a good return on investment".⁵⁸

56. General Wardak assured us that problems with the retention of Afghan troops, particularly during training, were being addressed through improved rates of pay. According to General Wardak, concerns that the ANA was insufficiently balanced in terms of ethnicity and regional representation were misplaced.

54 Q 215

55 Ev 85

56 Q 376

57 *Ibid.*

58 Q 377

57. We commend the role played by the UK in training the Afghan National Army. The UK's Operational Mentoring Liaison Teams (OMLTs) are highly valued by the Afghan National Army. The MoD should continue to provide the necessary resources for the OMLT programme.

Justice sector reform

58. Key to the future development of Afghanistan is its ability to apprehend, prosecute and detain alleged criminals, including those involved in the illicit drugs trade. This is dependent on the successful reform of its Police and Justice sector. The programme, under the leadership of Germany, has trained 62,000 Police out of a target of 82,000 but the MoD states that, in contrast to the progress made in respect to the ANA, the quality of Afghan National Police (ANP) training has not been as good as that for the ANA.⁵⁹

59. The submission from Olivia Holdsworth describes an inconsistent approach to Police reform in which Germany and the US have adopted very different approaches to the type of force that the ANP should be. According to Olivia Holdsworth, Germany favours a gendarmerie-style force and the US a more militaristic force, and this difference in approach had prevented “necessary leadership, coherence and strategic thought and assistance from the international community”.⁶⁰ In Afghanistan, we heard widespread criticisms of the pace and content of the German police reform programme. In October 2006, the EU established an ESDP Police mission to Afghanistan with the aim of establishing more effective coordination of Police reform,⁶¹ and General Richards told us that the US was providing a huge amount of money for the training of the ANP.⁶²

60. During our visit to Afghanistan in April 2007, we heard concerns about the newly-formed Auxiliary Police in Helmand. Some people told us that it acted more like a militia than a police force. General Richards told us that the Auxiliary Police in Helmand had been established because of “a shortage of troops and Police in Helmand”.⁶³ The Secretary of State told us that the Afghan Auxiliary Police was an attempt to bring local community policing to Helmand and that corruption would be avoided by the stipulation that its members had to apply to join the Police proper within one year.⁶⁴

61. We note the widespread concerns about the Afghan National Police reform programme. Police failure and corruption alienate support for the Government of Afghanistan and add to grievances which fuel the insurgency. The formation of a well-trained and disciplined ANP is vital to the long-term security of the country. The Government should work to create a greater coherence to the international effort to establish an effective ANP.

59 Ev 86, para 21

60 Ev 1113, para 46

61 Q 385

62 Q 271

63 Q 220

64 Q 384

62. The MoD should, in its response to this report, clarify the purpose of the Auxiliary Police in Southern Afghanistan and provide detail about how its members are recruited.

63. The submission from Olivia Holdsworth also expresses concern about the pace of reform to Afghanistan's judicial system. It alleges that the judicial reform programme, led by Italy, has suffered from a lack of coherence and been undermined by the existence of an alternative, non-state administered, legal system which is "exercised not through state institutions but remains in the hands of individual powerbrokers, tribal structures and warlords".⁶⁵

64. During our visit to Afghanistan we were frequently told that corrupt practices were common at all levels of Afghan society and that the failure to address corruption was undermining support for the Afghan Government. On 19 June 2007, the Attorney General, Abdul Jabbar Sabit, was reported to be requesting help from the international community to address corruption.⁶⁶

65. The Government should press the international community to give greater emphasis to the judicial reform programme. This should include measures to address alleged corruption in all areas of society.

The influence of neighbouring countries on Afghanistan

66. Throughout our inquiry we received much comment about the poor relations and mutual distrust that exist between the Governments and people of Pakistan and Afghanistan. A commonly-held perception amongst the people we met during our two visits to Afghanistan was that Pakistan, through its Inter Service Intelligence agency, had encouraged the training of Taliban fighters in madrasas (Islamic religious schools) and that Pakistan allowed them to cross freely over the border into Afghanistan to fight ISAF troops.

67. During our visit to Islamabad, Pakistan, in July 2006, senior politicians and senior military personnel denied any involvement in training Taliban insurgents. We were told that the Pakistan Army had deployed 80,000 troops in Waziristan to stop insurgents crossing the border and had suffered significant casualties as a consequence. It was also noted that Pakistan was currently home to up to 2.5 million refugees from Afghanistan who had fled there during the Taliban regime.

68. When we asked General Richards about the role of Pakistan, he told us that relations with Pakistan had been a central concern during his leadership of the ARRC and that his experience of dealing with the Pakistan Government and military had been positive. He told us that:

65 Ev 108, para 3

66 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia, 19 June 2007

Inside Pakistan, just like I am told inside Iran, there are people who are causing us trouble. That does not mean it is Pakistan government policy to cause trouble. Indeed, in my experience of some very good and detailed work with the Pakistan Army they are doing a tremendous amount and they are, in many respects, unsung heroes.⁶⁷

General Richards also noted that Pakistan had cooperated with ISAF on military operations during his command of the ARRC.⁶⁸

69. When we asked the Secretary of State about the border issue he noted the difficulties in securing any territorial border not least one that was 2,500 kilometres long and largely unrecognised by the tribal people who lived there.⁶⁹ He told us, that ultimately, there “needs to be a shared political solution to this which identifies the difficulties, and we encourage Pakistan and Afghanistan, despite their differences, to continually talk to each other”.⁷⁰ He was encouraged that recently Presidents Karzai and Musharraf had been speaking to each other more regularly.

70. Improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is of vital importance to both countries and the wider region. We note the recent move towards increased cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and call on the UK Government to continue to encourage dialogue between the two countries.

Iran

71. While it borders Pakistan to the South and East, Afghanistan shares a border with Iran in the West. Dr Akiner told us that:

For all the Central Asians, Iran is a historic centre, a cultural centre and at times has been the political centre...they still look to Iran as playing an important role in the development of the region. In Afghanistan, too, Iran has always played quite a significant role, culturally especially, and to some extent economically.⁷¹

72. During our visit to India and Afghanistan in April 2007, we were told that Iran led a number of development projects in Western Afghanistan. We were also told that the Iranian border was a favoured route for drug traders transporting narcotics out of Afghanistan, an issue which the Secretary of State told us “the Iranians themselves devote quite a substantial amount of resource to trying to deal with”.⁷²

73. During our visit to the region in April 2007, we gained the impression that Iran’s influence in Afghanistan was regarded as largely benign. On 13 June 2007, the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan agreed to cooperate more closely in stopping the smuggling of narcotics across their borders. The United Nations Office on

67 Q 281

68 *Ibid.*

69 Q 388

70 Q 78

71 Q 118

72 Q 82

Drugs Control (UNODC) Executive Director, Antonio Maria Costa, was reported as describing the agreement as “a turning point in the fight against Afghanistan’s drug problem”.⁷³

74. In June 2007 some press reports put the influence of Iran in Afghanistan in a rather less positive light.⁷⁴ On 11 June 2007, it was reported that Iranian-made shaped charges had been discovered in Kabul. On 15 June 2007, there were reports that Iran was forcibly deporting up to 2,000 Afghan refugees per day, many of whom had lived in Iran for many years.⁷⁵

75. We note the role Iran has taken in undertaking development work in Western Afghanistan and welcome Iran’s pledge to check the flow of narcotics across its border with Afghanistan. We also note with concern reports that explosives originating from Iran have been used by insurgents in Afghanistan. This underlines the urgent necessity for the West, particularly the US and UK, to foster constructive dialogue, and to build confidence in relationships, with as many parts of the Iranian Government and its offshoots as possible.

73 www.unama-afg.org

74 “Iran forcibly deports 1000,000 Afghans”, *The Guardian*, 15 June 2007

75 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia

3 UK operations in Southern Afghanistan

UK force package

76. The UK troops deployed to Southern Afghanistan have increased significantly since the initial deployment was announced on 26 January 2006 by the then Secretary of State, Rt Hon Dr John Reid MP.⁷⁶ At the head of the 3,300-strong UK force was 16 Air Assault Brigade of which 3rd Battalion the Parachute Regiment was a key component. The main force would be based at the newly-created Camp Bastion. The Headquarters of the PRT would be based at Lashkar Gah. A squadron of Harrier GR7 / GR9 aircraft was deployed to Kandahar airfield along with elements of the Joint Helicopter Force (Afghanistan) which had Chinook, Lynx and Apache helicopters at its disposal.

77. In July 2006, two months into the deployment, the newly-appointed Secretary of State, Rt Hon Des Browne MP, told the House that UK Forces would be enhanced following the roulement of 16 Air Assault Brigade, on completion of its six-month tour in October 2006.⁷⁷ The main component of UK Forces would then be 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Marines, again for a period of six months. Following requests from commanders in theatre, the force, commanded by Brigadier Jerry Thomas, would be bolstered by a further 870 personnel, additional support helicopters and one additional C130 Hercules aircraft.⁷⁸

78. On 1 February 2007, the Secretary of State announced that when 3 Commando, Royal Marines, completed their tour in April 2007, they would be replaced by 12 Mechanised Brigade.⁷⁹ 12 Mechanised Brigade would be a larger force than 3 Commando, comprising 6,300 Service personnel. He also confirmed the deployment, until June 2009, of the Harrier GR7 / GR9s, Apache helicopters, Viking all-terrain vehicles and Royal Engineers (to support reconstruction activities).

79. On 26 February 2007, the Secretary of State announced the deployment of a further 1,400 Service personnel to form a battlegroup reserve for Regional Command (South).⁸⁰ The battlegroup would meet the need for “robust, flexible, manoeuvrable combat” in the Southern provinces.⁸¹ The battlegroup would comprise elements of 1st Battalion, the Royal Welsh Regiment, Warrior infantry fighting vehicles and a troop of Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS).⁸²

80. This further deployment brings the total of UK Service personnel deployed to Afghanistan to 7,700, an increase from 3,300 troops since the initial deployment in the summer of 2006. The Secretary of State described the additional commitment as

76 HC Deb, 26 January 2006, col 1530

77 HC Deb, 10 July 2006, col 1132

78 *Ibid.*

79 HC Deb, 1 February 2007, col 20WS

80 HC Deb, 26 February 2007, col 620

81 *Ibid.*

82 *Ibid.*

“manageable”.⁸³ **We note that the number of UK Forces, and the firepower they have at their disposal, has increased significantly since the first deployment of UK Forces to Helmand in May 2006.**

Regional Command (South)

81. UK Forces in Southern Afghanistan are deployed under the overall command of the ISAF mission, currently commanded by US General Dan McNeill. The ISAF mission is in turn divided into regional commands of which the majority of UK troops are deployed as part of Regional Command (South) RC(S). RC(S) encompasses the neighbouring provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Nimruz, Uruzgan, and Zabul and comprises Forces from the UK, Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Jordan, the Netherlands and the US. This international force is commanded by a rotation of commanders so far drawn from Canada, the Netherlands and the UK. The UK’s Major General Jacko Page took command of RC(S) on 1 May 2007 from the Dutch Major General Tan Van Loon.⁸⁴

82. General Richards commented favourably on the performance of allies and told us that Dutch had performed particularly “brilliantly” in Uruzgan during his command of ISAF.⁸⁵ General Richards also praised the abilities of Canadian, Romanian and Portuguese Forces under his command.⁸⁶ This positive view of the performance of international Forces was confirmed to us during our visit to Helmand and Lashkar Gah.

83. During our visit in April 2007 to UK Forces in Southern Afghanistan, Service personnel emphasised the international nature of the mission in Southern Afghanistan and expressed satisfaction both with the command structure of Regional Command (South) and the professionalism of other national troops they fought alongside.

Purpose of the mission

84. UK Forces were deployed to Helmand Province until June 2009 as part of the wider ISAF Stage 3 expansion. The current Secretary of State described the UK’s objective in Afghanistan as being to

help the Afghan Government extend its reach in the South and East of Afghanistan...and, thereby, bring economic prosperity and opportunity to the people of Afghanistan.⁸⁷

It was intended that UK Forces would establish security in Southern Afghanistan and thereby create the conditions in which reconstruction and development work could be undertaken by government agencies, NGOs and Afghans themselves.⁸⁸

83 HC Deb, 26 February 2007, col 620

84 Previously RC(S) was commanded by the Canadian Lieutenant General David Fraser whom we met in Helmand in July 2006.

85 Q 267

86 *Ibid.*

87 Q 2

85. Alongside the security and reconstruction mission, the UK has a G8 ‘partner nation’ responsibility for assisting the Afghan Government’s country-wide counter-narcotics policy (the UK’s role in counter-narcotics policy is discussed in paragraphs 133-151).⁸⁹

86. In our first report, we expressed our support for the MoD’s security and stability mission in Southern Afghanistan but noted the considerable size of the challenge facing UK there.⁹⁰ During our recent visit to Kandahar and Helmand we saw some of the challenges facing UK Forces in its mission: the vast distances between towns, the lack of infrastructure and the unforgiving nature of much of the terrain. We were told that many Afghans had no experience of central government and were used to government by local elders at shuras, or meetings.

87. Some of our witnesses expressed concern that the UK’s objectives in Helmand might prove unattainable. On 27 March 2007, Dr Gilbert Greenall told us that he considered attempts to impose a strong central state in Afghanistan to be counter-productive to the interests of achieving security.⁹¹ Also on 27 March, Rory Stewart told us that:

I believe that the deployment to Helmand is a dangerous distraction from the core activities of the Afghan Government and that we are wasting resources and valuable policy time on a mission which I cannot see succeeding.⁹²

The Secretary of State acknowledged that UK Forces were operating in “a very difficult environment” which had little or no history of governance, but despite this he remained optimistic about the ultimate success of the mission.⁹³

88. When we asked the Secretary of State whether the size of the task facing UK Forces would need them to be deployed in Helmand beyond June 2009, he replied that “...I think it is too early to say at this stage exactly what the nature and shape of our commitment will be beyond 2009, but I agree that we will have to have a commitment”.⁹⁴ On 20 June 2007, the newly appointed British Ambassador to Afghanistan, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles was reported as stating that the mission in Afghanistan was a “marathon and not a sprint” and would last thirty years.⁹⁵

89. The UK’s mission to bring stability to Helmand will require a long-term military and humanitarian commitment if it is to be successful. We recommend that the Government clarify its planning assumptions for the UK deployment to Afghanistan and state the likely length of the deployment beyond the summer of 2009.

88 Q 2

89 “2007 World Drug Report”, *United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime*, 26 June 2007

90 HC (2005–06) 558

91 Q 111

92 Q 167

93 Qq 3, 4

94 Q 298

95 <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

The security threat in Helmand

90. The MoD describes the situation in Helmand as “challenging”.⁹⁶ The threat to UK Forces in Helmand comes from a Taliban-led insurgency intent on resisting ISAF’s mission. During our visit to Helmand we were told that ‘the Taliban’ was a loose term and that commanders preferred to subdivide Taliban into ‘tier one’ Taliban (irreconcilable fundamentalists who would never accept a compromise with the Government) and ‘tier two’ Taliban (whose allegiance was not based on ideology but who were in effect hired guns and more amenable to reconciliation).

91. The fragility of the security situation in Helmand was apparent from the beginning of the UK deployment. Media reports throughout much of the summer of 2006 carried accounts of intensive military engagements with insurgent Forces in the North Helmand districts of Sangin, Nowzad and Musa Qaleh.⁹⁷ According to the MoD, between June 2006 and 17 October 2006, there were 292 military contacts between UK and Taliban.⁹⁸

92. The MoD did not expect that Taliban insurgents would engage with UK Forces in the way they did. The Secretary of State told us that “the Taliban reacted to our presence in a way that had not been expected in terms of the violence and the nature of the way it deployed”.⁹⁹ Martin Howard told us “the tactics employed by the Taliban were unexpected in the sense that they used conventional tactics rather than asymmetric tactics”.¹⁰⁰ Despite the unexpected nature of Taliban tactics, the MoD states that the Taliban have been defeated every time they have engaged ISAF Forces.

93. We asked the Secretary of State whether this misreading of the insurgent threat in Helmand represented a failure of intelligence. He said that knowledge of the insurgency had been limited as ISAF had previously had only 100 US Service personnel in Helmand. He told us that:

Whatever people may now say retrospectively, the accepted wisdom was that we could expect a reaction from the Taliban and, indeed, possibly from others but that the nature of it would be what people refer to as asymmetric. We were being advised by all the experts that that would be the nature of the way in which they would deploy their violence. It turned out that they did not.¹⁰¹

94. After a relative lull in fighting during the winter months of 2006/07, indications are that fighting in Helmand has been at least as intensive in the spring of 2007 with reports stating that the “1st Battalion, Royal Anglian Regiment, battlegroup has fired almost 400,000 rounds of small arms ammunition”,¹⁰² a figure close to the total expended by 3 Para in the

96 Ev 84

97 www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east

98 HC Deb, 2 November 2006, 635WA

99 Q 6

100 Q 13

101 Q 12

102 “Afghanistan approaching ‘all-out war’”, *The Telegraph*, 5 June 2007

summer of 2006—a period of fighting described by General Richards as “probably as intense as anything the British Army has seen since Korea”.¹⁰³

95. Before the deployment to Southern Afghanistan, the MoD anticipated that the insurgents would adopt asymmetric tactics against the deployment. That assessment was inaccurate and the MoD concedes that the conventional warfare tactics used by insurgents was unexpected.

Support for the insurgency

96. During our inquiry we were keen to discover the effect that UK operations against insurgents had had on Afghan attitudes to UK Forces in the South. The support for the Taliban among the general population in Southern Afghanistan was a matter of disagreement between our witnesses. Ms Norine MacDonald told us that an opinion poll conducted by the Senlis Council in Helmand, Kandahar and Nangahar provinces found that 26% of men supported the Taliban and 50% thought that the Taliban would defeat ISAF.¹⁰⁴ According to Ms MacDonald, the latest surveys suggest that support for the Taliban has increased.¹⁰⁵

97. In contrast, the Secretary of State told us that, according to polling carried out on behalf of the MoD,

overwhelmingly the majority of the people of Southern Afghanistan welcome our presence... The polling suggests that they are still optimistic, that they support our presence, that they see improvements, but at the end of the day we will need to sustain this position for a period of time.¹⁰⁶

We asked the MoD to provide us with the polling data and we were subsequently provided with it on condition that we did not publish it, owing to the need to protect the anonymity of interviewers.

98. The polling conducted by the Senlis Council states that support for the insurgency is on the increase, but the MoD states that the “overwhelming majority” of Afghans continue to support UK troops.

Forward bases

99. The UK’s initial strategy in Helmand was to deploy a small force to government buildings in districts such as Musa Qaleh and Sangin with the aim of demonstrating the presence of UK Forces to the local population. This ‘Platoon House strategy’ led to some criticism in the press in the summer of 2006, following reports that soldiers from the Parachute Regiment had been pinned down by insurgent forces in Musa Qaleh for 52 days.¹⁰⁷ When we asked the Secretary of State whether the Platoon House strategy had been

103 “3 Commando: hunting the Taliban”, *BBC Panaroma*, 3 December 2006.

104 Q 107

105 *Ibid.*

106 Q 308

107 “Pathfinders on a four-day mission fight off eight-week Taleban siege”, *The Times*, 28 September 2006

a mistake he told us that the strategy had been conducted at the request of the Governor of Helmand, Engineer Daoud, and that he remained confident that “in the fullness of time they will turn out to be quite a significant contribution to the strategic success of our operation”.¹⁰⁸

100. General Richards who was ISAF commander at the time the strategy was adopted was less certain of the impact of platoon houses:

clearly the immediate vicinities of the Platoon Houses became areas where the average civilian with any sense left and his home was destroyed, etc, so I am sure that they probably in most cases did have a negative influence on opinion. Whether or not they achieved some sort of ascendancy over the Taliban in a military sense is something that one might debate, but in terms of hearts and minds they probably are not very helpful.¹⁰⁹

101. The Platoon Houses in Northern Helmand were established at the request of the then Governor of Helmand Province—in other words at the request of the civilian power. The long-term military consequence of this strategy is unclear.

The Musa Qaleh Agreement

102. In October 2006, Governor Daoud adopted an approach different from the Platoon House strategy to demonstrate the reach of his authority. The MoD submission states that the Musa Qaleh agreement between Governor Daoud and the tribal elders of Musa Qaleh established an exclusion zone around the town in which ISAF troops would not enter in return for the tribal elders denying Taliban Forces access.¹¹⁰ The agreement, which General Richards told us had not been supported fully by the US,¹¹¹ broke down on 2 February 2007, when the Taliban commander Mullah Ghafour and his forces entered the town.

103. During our visit to Afghanistan in April 2007, some of the Helmand MPs we met in Kabul expressed disquiet at the agreement and clearly believed that a deal had been struck between the UK and the Taliban. General Richards told us categorically that, “I did not do a deal with the Taliban; it was something that came out of Governor Daoud and was endorsed by President Karzai for a while”.¹¹² General Richards also said that the agreement, which had lasted for 143 days, had had unintended positive consequences:

108 Q 76

109 Q 249

110 Ev 84, para 6

111 Q 251

112 Q 250

Musa Qaleh in one sense was successful in that 5,000 odd people now bitterly dislike the Taliban because they have seen them in their true light, and do not forget in early February they rebelled against the Taliban in the area and fought against them and arrested Mullah Ghafour, who was then subsequently killed I think on the morning that I left.¹¹³

104. General Richards told us that similar agreements between the new Governor of Helmand, Asadullah Wafa, and tribal leaders had been negotiated in other parts of Helmand, and also by the US in the East of the country.¹¹⁴ Such agreements, he said,

allow the local population to take the war into their own hands, if you like, and to govern themselves. Some of them will be successful, others will not, but at some point we will hit on the right formula. If you do not try it, what is the alternative? You are constantly fighting the population, or there is a risk of you constantly fighting the population.¹¹⁵

105. The agreement brokered in October 2006 between the Governor of Helmand and tribal elders to exclude Taliban Forces from Musa Qaleh Province proved ultimately unsuccessful. However, the achievement of establishing peaceful conditions in the town for 143 days should not be underestimated. We were told that similar agreements are being negotiated in Helmand and elsewhere. While agreements of this kind carry risks, it is only through dialogue with local communities that a lasting peace will be achieved.

Current operations

106. During the winter of 2006/07 there was media speculation that insurgents would launch a spring offensive against ISAF in the South.¹¹⁶ During our visit to Kabul in April 2007, General Dan McNeill explained that ISAF had not waited for the Taliban to launch an offensive, but had instead taken the initiative against them. The Secretary of State told us that Operation Achilles in Helmand Province had been launched with two aims: first, to keep the Taliban on the back-foot and second, to create an environment in the upper part of Helmand in the area of Kajaki to allow development work on the Kajaki Dam.¹¹⁷ Within the overall operation, ISAF was conducting Operation Silver, the purpose of which was to “clear the Taliban from the upper Sangin Valley and...from the Southern part of Sangin down to Gereshk”.¹¹⁸

107. The anticipated insurgent Spring 2007 offensive in Helmand did not materialise, probably owing to the pre-emptive tactics of the ISAF mission.

108. Robert Fox told us that ISAF did not capitalise on the success of Operation Medusa in September 2006 because troops were not deployed in sufficient numbers immediately

113 Q 250

114 Q 251

115 *Ibid.*

116 <http://english.aljazeera.net>, “Taliban: spring offensive is coming” 21 February 2007

117 Q 302

118 *Ibid.*

following the clearance of insurgents.¹¹⁹ We asked the Secretary of State what plans were in place to ensure that areas remained clear of insurgents, once current operations were concluded. He told us that:

the intention, once an area has been secured is to have Afghan National Army deployed into government centres ...to consolidate the security.¹²⁰

On 31 May 2007, ISAF reported that operations in Sangin had achieved a number of successes including “a permanent Afghan National Army presence in the Sangin Valley and regular shuras, or tribal meetings, with local officials regarding reconstruction projects”.¹²¹

Equipment

109. In our previous report we called on the MoD to ensure that, in the light of the increased threat to the Army’s Snatch Land Rovers from IEDs and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), UK troops were given sufficient force protection when travelling in medium-weight armoured vehicles. In our recent Report, *The Army’s requirement for armoured vehicles: the FRES programme*,¹²² we examined the challenges of developing a long-term medium-weight vehicle. In the short-term the MoD has announced the following measures to provide enhanced protection for its Service personnel:

- the procurement of 162 Vector protected patrol vehicles (to replace Snatch Land Rovers) to be delivered to Afghanistan from February 2007;¹²³
- the procurement of 108 Mastiff “well-protected patrol vehicles” to be deployed from March 2007;¹²⁴ and
- upgraded protection to the FV430 Bulldog vehicles.¹²⁵

110. General Houghton told us that the deployment of both Mastiff and Vector was on schedule and would be complete by autumn 2007.¹²⁶ Once Vector had been deployed fully, the more vulnerable Snatch would be withdrawn from service in Afghanistan.¹²⁷ The Secretary of State told us that his aim was to ensure that UK Forces had a wide range of vehicles at their disposal in Afghanistan: from WMIK¹²⁸ Land Rover (and the new generation of E-WMIKs), Vector and Mastiff, Viking vehicles (used by the Marines)

119 Q 194

120 Q 303

121 www.nato.int

122 Defence Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2006–07, *The Army’s requirement for armoured vehicles: the FRES programme*, HC 159

123 Ev 85, para 10

124 *Ibid.*

125 HC (2006–07) 159

126 Q 84

127 *Ibid.*

128 Weapons Mounted Installation Kit

through to Warrior armoured fighting vehicles.¹²⁹ When we asked General Houghton whether there was any foundation to the BBC report of 2 April 2007 that the WMIK had experienced maintenance problems in Afghanistan and a lack of spare parts, he replied that the report was based on inaccurate maintenance figures and WMIK repairs were well within target.¹³⁰

111. We note that the MoD is in the process of providing the Army with a range of vehicles which provide Service personnel with greater protection. We welcome the MoD's assurance that Mastiff and Vector are being deployed to Afghanistan according to schedule. It is essential that UK Forces have the opportunity to train on appropriate vehicles prior to deployment.

Air-lift and close air support

112. Our visits to Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007 have brought home to us the huge distances over which troops, supplies and materiel need to be transported within Afghanistan. The current lack of passable roads means that sufficient tactical air-lift is vital to the success of the operation. The initial deployment of 16 Air Assault Brigade to Helmand was supported by four Lynx and six battlefield support Chinook helicopters, supplemented by 20 US helicopters and “some Dutch helicopters”.¹³¹ In our first report into operations in Afghanistan, we expressed concern that this air-lift package might prove insufficient.¹³²

113. When we put these concerns to the Secretary of State he told us that he recognised the need for more helicopters and that he had taken measures to provide additional helicopters and improve support arrangements so that the availability of helicopters was extended. He was satisfied that commanders had what they needed.¹³³

114. Following the evidence session, the Secretary of State announced on 30 March 2007 further additions to the UK's airlift fleet. In a package costing £230 million, the MoD had purchased six Merlin helicopters from the Danish Government (which would be deployable within one year) and would convert eight stored Chinook Mark 3 helicopters (which would be overhauled to Mark 2 standard and made deployable within two years).¹³⁴

115. During our visit to UK Forces in Helmand in 2007, we heard from Service personnel about the importance of air-lift to operations and some concern that there was insufficient air-lift available in theatre. In Kandahar we met UK helicopter crews who were clearly flying extremely long hours, often under enemy fire, in the most hazardous desert and night conditions.

129 Q 86

130 Q 318

131 HC Deb, 26 July 2006, col 1531

132 HC (2005–06) 558, para 59

133 Q 87

134 www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews

116. While we welcome the additional commitment of helicopters since the initial deployment in 2006, we recommend that the MoD make even greater efforts to increase the provision of appropriate helicopters to UK Forces and sufficient trained air and ground crew. UK helicopter operations in Afghanistan are not sustainable at the present intensity.

Airbridge

117. In Helmand and Kabul, we heard some complaints from Service personnel about the reliability of the airbridge which transported Service personnel between the UK and Afghanistan. When we put these concerns to General Houghton, he told us that 84% of outbound flights departed and 75% of return flights within a three-hour tolerance.¹³⁵ We examine in more detail the wider issues of Strategic air-lift in our report, *Strategic Lift*, which was published on July 2007.¹³⁶ **A reliable airbridge is key to the morale of Service personnel and ultimately operational effectiveness.**

Close air support

118. Close air support, provided by helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, is coordinated by the Coalition Combined Air Operations Control Centre (CAOC), Al Udeid, Qatar. Robert Fox, who had recently spent time with UK Forces in Helmand Province, stressed the importance of close air support to current operations in the Sangin and Kajaki dam districts of Helmand.¹³⁷ We were told when we visited Kandahar that when UK soldiers called in assistance, CAOC allocated appropriate aircraft and that they were as likely to be of US or Dutch origin as RAF or Royal Navy aircraft.

119. The UK's initial deployment of close air support to Southern Afghanistan comprised eight Apache helicopters and six Harrier GR7 / GR9 aircraft based at Kandahar air field. A further four Harrier GR7 / 9 aircraft were to be deployed in the summer of 2007. During our visit to Kandahar airfield in April 2007, we spoke with ground crew supporting the UK's Joint Helicopter Force (JHF) which comprised Chinook, Apache, and Lynx helicopters. The Secretary of State told us that he was aware of the importance of helicopters to operations in Afghanistan and had increased the air support package over the last year.¹³⁸

120. In our previous report, we recommended that the Harrier squadron should remain at Kandahar as long as necessary.¹³⁹ On 26 February 2007, the MoD announced that the deployment of Apache helicopters and a squadron of Harrier GR7 / GR 9 aircraft at Kandahar would be extended until June 2009.¹⁴⁰

135 Q 87

136 Defence Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2005–06, *Strategic Lift*, HC 462

137 Q 184

138 Q 87

139 HC (2005–06) 558, para 64

140 HC Deb, 26 February 2007, col 620

121. **The MoD should continue to press NATO allies to provide sufficient air support to operations in the South. In the meantime, we welcome the MoD's commitment to extend the deployment of Apache helicopters and the Harrier GR7 / GR 9 squadron until June 2009.**

Reconstruction and development in Helmand

122. The MoD divides its development activity into two categories: “local community based rapid effect programmes; and, longer term national development programmes”.¹⁴¹ Community-based programmes are carried out under the MoD's Quick Impact Project (QIPs) programme and to date the MoD states that “103 projects at a value of \$12.3 million have been authorised for development (19 security projects, 10 governance projects, 60 social and economic development projects and 14 for counter-narcotics)”.¹⁴²

123. For longer-term development, DfID has allocated around \$60 million over three years (2006/07–2008/09) for the Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Programme, and micro-finance funds for business start-ups. The Secretary of State told us that the UK effort had so far focused on short-term reconstruction:

we are increasingly providing in Lashkar Gah, in Gereshk, for example and in other areas in central Helmand province, reconstruction, which is having an effect on those communities.¹⁴³

124. Despite the assurances from the Secretary of State that progress was being made, during our visit to Helmand we heard the frustrations of local representatives of NGOs that reconstruction and development work in Helmand was not progressing quickly enough. We were told that the threat of violence had meant that civilian workers were reluctant to work outside secure areas. Indeed, during our visit to Lashkar Gah, the PRT was “locked-down” (not allowed to leave the military compound) because of the threat of attack. Although the NGO representatives appreciated that the military's first objective must be to establish security, we were given the impression that the patience of people living in Helmand was wearing thin and that progress had to be demonstrated soon, or else faith would be lost in the ISAF mission.

125. The submission from BAAG, which represents development organisations working in Afghanistan, highlights two main areas where it considers the UK development policy is lacking: insufficient engagement between military and civil organisations; and an over-emphasis on delivery through Afghan institutions which results in aid not being delivered to areas where central government's reach does not extend.¹⁴⁴

126. During our visit to the PRT at Lashkar Gah in April 2007, we met representatives of the Helmand Executive Group (HEG) which is made up of representatives of the MoD, FCO and DfID and tasked with coordinating the UK development programme in Helmand. They told us that, with the establishment of the HEG, coordination between the

141 Ev 118

142 *Ibid.*

143 Q 40

144 Ev 100

military and other government departments had improved significantly since our previous visit in July 2006. This view was reinforced by General Richards, who also told us that coordination between the military and DfID had improved during the time he commanded ISAF.¹⁴⁵

127. The MoD acknowledges that reconstruction and development, rather than military power alone, is the key to winning Afghan hearts and minds in Helmand. After a slow start, it seems that coordination between the military and government departments has improved and development work has begun. The people of Helmand will need to see tangible improvements soon or else ISAF and the UK will lose support for the mission.

128. Rory Stewart told us that it was important that the international community was associated with permanent development projects so that

in 50 years' time they could point to and say, "This is a gift from the international community to the Afghan nation". There are very few permanent symbols of our commitment. There is very little that Afghans can point to when they are asked what we have done for them.¹⁴⁶

During our April 2007 visit to Helmand, we discussed the need for enduring development projects with members of the Helmand Provincial Council. They told us that the Province desperately required investment in factories which would provide long-term employment opportunities.

129. General Houghton told us that one of the objectives of the ongoing Operation Achilles mission in Northern Helmand was to establish security near the Kajaki dam, a \$150 million USAID project designed to bring electricity to Helmand and Kandahar Provinces.

130. On the other hand, General Richards considered that commanders should be provided with increased funds to enable them to implement quick impact, short-term projects such as wells and road building. He saw such projects as vital, particularly when military engagements with insurgents had damaged buildings and infrastructure and pointed to the US military's Commanders' Emergency Relief Programme (CERPS) which he described as a "Commander's pot of gold".¹⁴⁷

131. When we asked Lindy Cameron whether commanders should be provided with more funds for quick impact projects, she agreed that this approach might prove productive as long as Afghans were involved in the delivery.¹⁴⁸ General Houghton, while noting that increased funds had been given to UK commanders, told us that the advantage of working through Afghan government institutions was that development projects gained greater legitimacy through a sense of ownership by Afghans.¹⁴⁹

145 Q 293

146 Q 202

147 Q 294

148 Q 365

149 Qq 367, 368

132. The consent of the people living in Helmand province will not be gained through the deployment of superior military force alone. Once security has been established, it is vital that development projects follow swiftly. The military has provided much-needed immediate reconstruction in Helmand. A balance has to be struck between quick impact reconstruction provided by the military and longer-term development best delivered by Government and NGOs in close cooperation with Afghans. Projects such as the ambitious Kajaki dam project will, in time, create jobs and demonstrate to Afghans the commitment of the international community; however, the Government should also ensure that smaller-scale projects are undertaken which involve Afghans closely in their design and construction.

The UK role in counter-narcotics

The scale of the problem

133. According to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) “2007 World Drug Report”, Afghanistan is responsible for the production of over 90% of the world’s supply of opium.¹⁵⁰ Indeed Afghanistan is a “narco-State”, an economy reliant on the production and trade of opium. Since 2006, the UK has had Partner Nation (previously G8 Lead Nation) responsibility for developing the counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan. The extent of the reliance of Afghanistan on narcotics was identified in the UNODC report of November 2006 which states that, “opium permeates much of the rural economy with critical links to employment generation, access to land and credit”.¹⁵¹ During our visit to Afghanistan in April 2007, we were told that involvement with the drugs trade permeates all sections of society including members of central and provincial government.

134. Helmand Province is the largest single opium-growing province in Afghanistan, accounting for 42% of Afghanistan’s total opium production and 30% of the world’s production.¹⁵² The UNODC describes the irrigated areas of Helmand as “almost ideal for high-yielding opium poppy cultivation”, and estimates that 70,000 hectares in the Province are being cultivated for poppy growing. The UNODC also estimates that the area contains between 1,000–1,500 small opium traders and between 300-500 larger traders.¹⁵³

150 “2007 World Drug Report”, UNODC, June 2007

151 “Afghanistan’s Drug industry”, UNODC, June 2006

152 “2007 World Drug Report”, UNODC, June 2007

153 “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007”, UNODC, 26 June 2007

Table 3: Opium facts

Opium facts and figures
Opium accounts for about 30% of Afghanistan's total economy
12.6% of the Afghan population is involved in the illicit drugs trade"
In 2006: total opium cultivation in Helmand was 165,000 hectares (104,000 in 2005)
Helmand Province accounted for 42% of Afghanistan's total opium poppy cultivation
Helmand Province accounted for 30% of the world's supply of opium

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2006*

The counter-narcotics policy

135. The UK's task, as G8 partner nation, is to assist the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics in developing its counter-narcotics policy. The submission from ADIDU states that this policy has four priorities:

- targeting the trafficker;
- strengthening and diversifying legal rural livelihoods;
- reducing demand, and
- developing state institutions.¹⁵⁴

136. The ADIDU submission states that by focusing on these priorities, the counter-narcotics strategy has decreased opium cultivation in "parts of the North and the centre of the country".¹⁵⁵ In contrast however, Peter Holland told us on 8 May 2007 that in the Southern Provinces, he expected poppy cultivation to increase during 2007.¹⁵⁶ When we questioned the Secretary of State whether the counter-narcotics policy was working, he told us that he did not measure the success of the counter-narcotics policy in terms of reduced production but in terms of whether there had been an increase in alternative livelihoods for farmers.¹⁵⁷

Targeting the trafficker

137. In our first report into UK operations in Afghanistan, we saw a "fundamental tension between the UK's twin mission in Helmand to establish security and check opium production" because of the involvement of large parts of Afghan society in all parts of the opium supply chain.¹⁵⁸ According to ADIDU, in the past year 3,000 drug traffickers have been apprehended in Afghanistan but no information is given about whether those

154 Ev 116

155 *Ibid.*

156 Q 354

157 Q 91

158 HC (2005–06) 558

arrested were significant players in the narcotics industry or whether they were small-scale dealers. During our visit to Afghanistan in April 2007, we were told that owing to the failings in the judicial system, many of these people were never charged and those that were, were rarely convicted.

138. During this inquiry the MoD told us that the Taliban insurgents were developing their links with opium farmers and the narcotics industry more generally:

....drug traffickers and the Taliban have a common interest in resisting the authority of ISAF.... There are indications of extensive financial and logistical links between Taliban and traffickers at all levels.¹⁵⁹

139. The Government should continue to support the Government of Afghanistan in its attempts to bring drug traffickers to justice. To have maximum impact, the particular focus should be on punishing those people involved in the funding and large-scale trafficking of narcotics.

140. We are very concerned at the indications of closer links between the Taliban and the narcotics trade.

Alternative livelihoods and eradication

141. The issue of eradication is the subject of much debate within Afghanistan. Eradication, where it takes place, is largely the responsibility of the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) which reports to the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and some eradication is undertaken by teams reporting to Provincial Governors. Only “manual eradication” of poppy crops is undertaken. This policy was reaffirmed by the Government of Afghanistan in January 2007 after the US Administration, frustrated at the slow progress in checking Afghanistan’s opium production, reportedly put pressure on the Government to consider aerial spraying of poppy crops with herbicides.¹⁶⁰

142. Peter Holland told us that ISAF did not advocate eradication of poppy crops where there was an absence of alternative livelihoods for farmers. Lindy Cameron told us that Helmand Province offered many opportunities for poppy farmers to grow alternative crops because

the Helmand river valley means that people can grow almost anything they want to there, so in Helmand in particular we are quite confident that extensive parts of the river valley are within what we think is an area where people have choices about what they can grow.¹⁶¹

143. Norine MacDonald told us that eradication of poppy fields had been undertaken in the Province by the AEF working with a US company, Dyncorp. Ms MacDonald told us that there had been instances of farmers attacking AEF and Dyncorp personnel in protest at what they considered to be an attack on their livelihood. She added that the farmers

159 Ev 116

160 Ev 86

161 Q 349

most affected by eradication policy were the poorer farmers because they were “unable to pay the bribes” to avoid eradication.¹⁶² According to Ms MacDonald most Afghan farmers did not distinguish between ISAF soldiers and Dyncorp and AEF personnel carrying out eradication. As a consequence, she suggested that even though ISAF troops did not take part in eradication, they had become a potential target for opium farmers concerned at losing their livelihoods.¹⁶³

144. During our visit to Helmand and Kabul in April 2007, we noted some uncertainty among Afghans about the counter-narcotics policy and whether the agencies involved in implementing the policy were sufficiently joined-up in approach. This uncertainty was reinforced when, soon after we returned from Helmand, there were media reports that ISAF had broadcast an advert on Helmand radio which implied that farmers were free to continue growing poppy without anybody trying to stop them.¹⁶⁴

145. We support ADIDU’s focus on working with the Government of Afghanistan to encourage opium farmers to pursue alternative livelihoods. We note that Helmand provides the potential for alternative livelihoods to be pursued.

146. The MoD’s position is that it will not take part in the eradication of poppy until alternative livelihood schemes are available. We call on the Government to ensure that this message is communicated clearly to farmers in Helmand. We are deeply concerned that uncertainty has arisen among Afghans about ISAF’s policy towards, and role in, poppy eradication and that UK Forces, under ISAF command, may consequently have been put at risk. This uncertainty undermines the effectiveness of the entire ISAF mission.

Arguments for licensed production of opium

147. The Senlis Council argues that until alternative livelihoods are made available for poppy farmers, the threat of eradication of their crop will result in them becoming increasingly involved with the Taliban. In places where alternatives to growing poppy do not exist, the Senlis Council advocates a pilot scheme in which farmers in designated areas are licensed to grow poppy in return for a guarantee that the State would buy their harvest.¹⁶⁵ The Senlis Council asserts that the legal production of opium in Afghanistan would help address a world-wide shortage of morphine and that similar trials had taken place successfully in India.

148. During our visit to Afghanistan we met with much scepticism about the Senlis Council proposals. We were told that Southern Afghanistan, where much of Afghanistan’s poppy crop grows, currently lacks the necessary security in which trial schemes could take place without being taken over by those involved in the illegal narcotics industry. When we asked the Secretary of State to comment on the Senlis Council’s proposals, he expressed

162 Q 155

163 Q 154

164 “NATO criticised for Afghan advert”, www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia, 24 April 2007

165 Ev 90

concern that the introduction of licensed opium trials would encourage farmers to start growing poppy crops and have the unintended consequence of increasing supply:

If I thought that buying the crop would solve the problem I would be first in the queue to persuade people to do that. My view is...that proposing to buy the crop currently would double the crop.¹⁶⁶

149. During our visit to Afghanistan in April 2007, we were told by officials involved in counter-narcotics policy that the world market price for illegally produced opium was up to three times that of legally produced opium. With that being the case, there would be little incentive for opium farmers to join any legal scheme.

150. Ending opium production in Helmand will require a long-term commitment by the international community to create a secure environment in which farmers can be encouraged to pursue alternative livelihoods. We recommend that the Government continue to pursue imaginative ways to policies to address narcotics production in Afghanistan but we are not persuaded that licensed production is a viable alternative strategy at this time.

151. Success in combating the narcotics trade will be crucial to the future stability of Afghanistan. We remain concerned that the coalition's counter-narcotics policy lacks clarity and coherence. We recommend that, in its response to this report, the Government set out in detail the international counter-narcotics strategy for Afghanistan, including its assessment of progress to date and targets for the years ahead.

The information campaign

152. Since the deployment of UK Forces to the less stable Helmand Province in the summer of 2006, media coverage of operations in Afghanistan has increased significantly. Despite this, there remains some uncertainty about whether the British people have been made sufficiently aware of either the purpose of the mission to Helmand Province or of the role of the UK military and DfID officials.

153. Dr Gilbert Greenall's submission describes a confusion among the British people about the purpose of the UK deployment, with many believing that it is concerned with enforcing a narcotics policy rather than aiding reconstruction.¹⁶⁷ His submission states. "The British public need to understand exactly why we are involved in Afghanistan if they are to be supportive and accept the considerable cost over the next few years".¹⁶⁸

154. We are concerned that the Government is not communicating key messages to the British public about the purpose of its operations in Afghanistan effectively enough.

155. Dr Greenall also had concerns about the effectiveness of the UK and ISAF information campaign within Helmand and Afghanistan. His submission states that:

166 Q 347

167 Ev 91

168 Ev 91, para 7

the information initiative is held by the Taliban who have had no difficulty in persuading Afghans to see British troops as the invader, the destroyers of their livelihoods and the enemies of their fellow Muslims in Iraq. The British military information campaign is now a key priority.¹⁶⁹

156. We were told, during our visit to Helmand in April 2007, about the importance of psychological operations in separating ‘tier 2 Taliban’ from supporting the irreconcilable insurgent extremists. Radio and leaflet drops were used to communicate key messages to Afghans, often living in remote places, and these methods were judged important in undermining the propaganda of the Taliban. General Richards told us that “an information operation has to be rooted in substance for it to work”.¹⁷⁰ He added that the most effective messages are those based on publicising tangible improvements that had been made, such as providing electricity or jobs to an area.

157. During our meetings with Afghan politicians in Kabul in April 2007, we became concerned that ISAF and the UK were failing to get key messages across to Helmand MPs and local people about the purpose of its mission. There was clearly much confusion about the terms of the agreement made in Musa Qalah (see paras 102–105) between the then Governor of Helmand and local tribal elders and the counter-narcotics strategy in Helmand Province. Some of the MPs we met were adamant that a “deal” had been done between the UK and the Taliban and that the UK had acted against the interests of the local people.

158. ISAF is bringing tangible improvements to the lives of Afghans, but there is evidence that news of such improvements is not being communicated effectively to Afghans. Indeed, there is a strong suggestion that the Taliban is ahead in the “information campaign”. We recommend that the Government work together with its allies to coordinate more effectively the presentation of ISAF’s objectives and the way in which developments in Afghanistan are reported.

169 Ev 91

170 Q 238

Conclusions and recommendations

1. We pay tribute to those Service people who have lost their lives or suffered injury and extend our deep sympathies to their families. The commitment given by our entire Armed Services has been shown to be outstanding. (Paragraph 17)
2. Afghanistan has experienced 30 years of strife. In the short term, ISAF's primary purpose is to secure stability and deny the Taliban and Al Qaeda the environment in which to operate. In the longer term, it will require a sustained military and financial commitment by the international community, working with the Government of Afghanistan, to create the environment in which enduring democratic institutions can be established. If that commitment is to succeed, its size and strength must be very great, and in our view considerably greater than the international community is at present willing to acknowledge, let alone to make. (Paragraph 24)
3. We commend the achievement of HQ ARRC in overseeing the establishment of ISAF authority into the challenging provinces of South and East Afghanistan. (Paragraph 27)
4. Coordinating the international effort in Afghanistan is a huge task. The Government should encourage the United Nations to work towards the appointment of a high-profile and authoritative individual with responsibility for coordinating the international effort in support of the Government of Afghanistan. (Paragraph 30)
5. While we note the assertion made by the MoD that the Taliban does not present a "strategic threat" to security in Afghanistan, we are concerned at reports that violence is increasing and spreading to the relatively peaceful Kabul and the Northern Provinces. We are also concerned about the increased use of improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 35)
6. We regret the number of civilians killed as a result of military activity in Afghanistan. Our Forces try their utmost to minimise civilian casualties on operations and it is to be hoped that the introduction of precision weapons such as the Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System should help minimise civilian casualties further. Every life lost is a tragedy, causing misery to families and destruction to communities. Moreover, civilian casualties undermine support for ISAF and the Government of Afghanistan and fuel the insurgency, further endangering our troops and the objectives of their mission. (Paragraph 38)
7. Operational success should not be measured in terms of the numbers of dead enemy combatants. Accurate and verifiable figures for the numbers of Taliban killed by ISAF are difficult to obtain, and many of those killed on the front-line may not be hard-core Taliban but rather farmers hired to fight. Exaggerated reports of insurgent casualties following ISAF operations can serve as useful propaganda for insurgents and undermine support for the ISAF mission. (Paragraph 41)
8. While we note the progress that has been made in reducing national caveats, we remain concerned that national caveats risk impairing the effectiveness of the ISAF

mission. The Government should continue to press ISAF partners to reduce further the restrictions placed on the use of their Forces. (Paragraph 45)

9. Despite the Secretary of State's assurances, we remain deeply concerned that the reluctance of some NATO members to provide troops for the ISAF mission is undermining NATO's credibility and also ISAF operations. In response to our report, the Government should explain its strategy for engaging other NATO Governments in addressing the deficit in the CJSOR. (Paragraph 49)
10. The MoD, in consultation with NATO colleagues, should consider the feasibility of extending the operational tours of key personnel. This would allow sufficient time to build and maintain relationships with Afghans and other key figures in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 51)
11. We note the MoD's assessment that some ANA units are now trained sufficiently to be deployed alongside ISAF troops on operations, but we also note that they are some way off operating independently. (Paragraph 54)
12. We commend the role played by the UK in training the Afghan National Army. The UK's Operational Mentoring Liaison Teams (OMLTs) are highly valued by the Afghan National Army. The MoD should continue to provide the necessary resources for the OMLT programme. (Paragraph 57)
13. We note the widespread concerns about the Afghan National Police reform programme. Police failure and corruption alienate support for the Government of Afghanistan and add to grievances which fuel the insurgency. The formation of a well-trained and disciplined ANP is vital to the long-term security of the country. The Government should work to create a greater coherence to the international effort to establish an effective ANP. (Paragraph 61)
14. The MoD should, in its response to this report, clarify the purpose of the Auxiliary Police in Southern Afghanistan and provide detail about how its members are recruited. (Paragraph 62)
15. The Government should press the international community to give greater emphasis to the judicial reform programme. This should include measures to address alleged corruption in all areas of society. (Paragraph 65)
16. Improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is of vital importance to both countries and the wider region. We note the recent move towards increased cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and call on the UK Government to continue to encourage dialogue between the two countries. (Paragraph 70)
17. We note the role Iran has taken in undertaking development work in Western Afghanistan and welcome Iran's pledge to check the flow of narcotics across its border with Afghanistan. We also note with concern reports that explosives originating from Iran have been used by insurgents in Afghanistan. This underlines the urgent necessity for the West, particularly the US and UK, to foster constructive dialogue, and to build confidence in relationships, with as many parts of the Iranian Government and its offshoots as possible. (Paragraph 75)

18. We note that the number of UK Forces, and the firepower they have at their disposal, has increased significantly since the first deployment of UK Forces to Helmand in May 2006. (Paragraph 80)
19. During our visit in April 2007 to UK Forces in Southern Afghanistan, Service personnel emphasised the international nature of the mission in Southern Afghanistan and expressed satisfaction both with the command structure of Regional Command (South) and the professionalism of other national troops they fought alongside. (Paragraph 83)
20. The UK's mission to bring stability to Helmand will require a long-term military and humanitarian commitment if it is to be successful. We recommend that the Government clarify its planning assumptions for the UK deployment to Afghanistan and state the likely length of the deployment beyond the summer of 2009. (Paragraph 89)
21. Before the deployment to Southern Afghanistan, the MoD anticipated that the insurgents would adopt asymmetric tactics against the deployment. That assessment was inaccurate and the MoD concedes that the conventional warfare tactics used by insurgents was unexpected. (Paragraph 95)
22. The polling conducted by the Senlis Council states that support for the insurgency is on the increase, but the MoD states that the "overwhelming majority" of Afghans continue to support UK troops. (Paragraph 98)
23. The Platoon Houses in Northern Helmand were established at the request of the then Governor of Helmand Province—in other words at the request of the civilian power. The long-term military consequence of this strategy is unclear. (Paragraph 101)
24. The agreement brokered in October 2006 between the Governor of Helmand and tribal elders to exclude Taliban Forces from Musa Qaleh Province proved ultimately unsuccessful. However, the achievement of establishing peaceful conditions in the town for 143 days should not be underestimated. We were told that similar agreements are being negotiated in Helmand and elsewhere. While agreements of this kind carry risks, it is only through dialogue with local communities that a lasting peace will be achieved. (Paragraph 105)
25. The anticipated insurgent Spring 2007 offensive in Helmand did not materialise, probably owing to the pre-emptive tactics of the ISAF mission. (Paragraph 107)
26. We note that the MoD is in the process of providing the Army with a range of vehicles which provide Service personnel with greater protection. We welcome the MoD's assurance that Mastiff and Vector are being deployed to Afghanistan according to schedule. It is essential that UK Forces have the opportunity to train on appropriate vehicles prior to deployment. (Paragraph 111)
27. While we welcome the additional commitment of helicopters since the initial deployment in 2006, we recommend that the MoD make even greater efforts to increase the provision of appropriate helicopters to UK Forces and sufficient trained

air and ground crew. UK helicopter operations in Afghanistan are not sustainable at the present intensity. (Paragraph 116)

28. A reliable airbridge is key to the morale of Service personnel and ultimately operational effectiveness. (Paragraph 117)
29. The MoD should continue to press NATO allies to provide sufficient air support to operations in the South. In the meantime, we welcome the MoD's commitment to extend the deployment of Apache helicopters and the Harrier GR7 / GR 9 squadron until June 2009. (Paragraph 121)
30. The MoD acknowledges that reconstruction and development, rather than military power alone, is the key to winning Afghan hearts and minds in Helmand. After a slow start, it seems that coordination between the military and government departments has improved and development work has begun. The people of Helmand will need to see tangible improvements soon or else ISAF and the UK will lose support for the mission. (Paragraph 127)
31. The consent of the people living in Helmand province will not be gained through the deployment of superior military force alone. Once security has been established, it is vital that development projects follow swiftly. The military has provided much-needed immediate reconstruction in Helmand. A balance has to be struck between quick impact reconstruction provided by the military and longer-term development best delivered by Government and NGOs in close cooperation with Afghans. Projects such as the ambitious Kajaki dam project will, in time, create jobs and demonstrate to Afghans the commitment of the international community; however, the Government should also ensure that smaller-scale projects are undertaken which involve Afghans closely in their design and construction. (Paragraph 132)
32. The Government should continue to support the Government of Afghanistan in its attempts to bring drug traffickers to justice. To have maximum impact, the particular focus should be on punishing those people involved in the funding and large-scale trafficking of narcotics. (Paragraph 139)
33. We are very concerned at the indications of closer links between the Taliban and the narcotics trade. (Paragraph 140)
34. We support ADIDU's focus on working with the Government of Afghanistan to encourage opium farmers to pursue alternative livelihoods. We note that Helmand provides the potential for alternative livelihoods to be pursued. (Paragraph 145)
35. The MoD's position is that it will not take part in the eradication of poppy until alternative livelihood schemes are available. We call on the Government to ensure that this message is communicated clearly to farmers in Helmand. We are deeply concerned that uncertainty has arisen among Afghans about ISAF's policy towards, and role in, poppy eradication and that UK Forces, under ISAF command, may consequently have been put at risk. This uncertainty undermines the effectiveness of the entire ISAF mission. (Paragraph 146)

36. Ending opium production in Helmand will require a long-term commitment by the international community to create a secure environment in which farmers can be encouraged to pursue alternative livelihoods. We recommend that the Government continue to pursue imaginative ways to policies to address narcotics production in Afghanistan but we are not persuaded that licensed production is a viable alternative strategy at this time. (Paragraph 150)
37. Success in combating the narcotics trade will be crucial to the future stability of Afghanistan. We remain concerned that the coalition's counter-narcotics policy lacks clarity and coherence. We recommend that, in its response to this report, the Government set out in detail the international counter-narcotics strategy for Afghanistan, including its assessment of progress to date and targets for the years ahead. (Paragraph 151)
38. We are concerned that the Government is not communicating key messages to the British public about the purpose of its operations in Afghanistan effectively enough. (Paragraph 154)
39. ISAF is bringing tangible improvements to the lives of Afghans, but there is evidence that news of such improvements is not being communicated effectively to Afghans. Indeed, there is a strong suggestion that the Taliban is ahead in the "information campaign". We recommend that the Government work together with its allies to coordinate more effectively the presentation of ISAF's objectives and the way in which developments in Afghanistan are reported. (Paragraph 158)

Annex: List of Abbreviations

ADIDU	Afghan Drugs Inter Departmental Unit
AIHRC	Afghan International Human Rights Commission
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Policy
ARRC	Allied Rapid Reaction Corps
BASIC	British American Security Information Council
CAOC	Combined Air Operations Control Centre
CERPS	Commanders' Emergency Relief Programme
CJSOR	Combined Joint Statement of Requirement
CSIS	Centre for Strategic and International Studies
DfID	Department for International Development
DSACEUR	Deputy Supreme Commander in Europe
GMLRS	Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System
HEG	Helmand Executive Group
ICRC	International Commission of the Red Cross
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JHF	Joint Helicopter Force
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OMLT	Operational Mentoring Liaison Team
PAG	Policy Action Group
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RAF	Royal Air Force
RC (S)	Regional Command (South)
SRSR	Special Representative of the Secretary-General

UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WMIK	Weapons Mounted Installation Kit

Formal minutes

Tuesday 3 July 2007

Members present:

Mr James Arbuthnot, in the Chair

Mr David Crausby

Linda Gilroy

Mr Mike Hancock

Mr Bernard Jenkin

Robert Key

Willie Rennie

John Smith

UK operations in Afghanistan

The Committee considered this matter.

Draft Report (UK operations in Afghanistan), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 158 read and agreed to.

Annexes (Summary and List of Abbreviations) agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Thirteenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman 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.

Ordered, That several Papers relating to UK operations in Afghanistan be reported to the House for printing with the Report [together with certain Memoranda reported and ordered to be published on 24 April and 22 May].

[Adjourned till Tuesday 17 July at 10.00 am

Witnesses

Tuesday 20 March 2007

Page

Rt Hon Des Browne MP, Secretary of State for Defence, **Mr Martin Howard**, Director General, Operational Policy, and **Lieutenant General Nick Houghton CBE**, Chief of Joint Operations, Ministry of Defence, and **Mr Peter Holland**, Head of Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit (ADIDU), Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Ev 1

Tuesday 27 March 2007

Dr Shirin Akiner, Lecturer in Central Asian Studies, School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), **Dr Gilbert Greenall**, and **Ms Norine MacDonald QC**, President, The Senlis Council

Ev 21

Mr Robert Fox, Freelance Journalist, **Mr Rory Stewart**, Author and Chief Executive of the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, Kabul, and **Dr Michael Williams**, Head, Transatlantic Programme, Royal United Services Institute

Ev 33

Tuesday 24 April 2007

General David Richards CBE DSO

Ev 45

Tuesday 8 May 2007

Rt Hon Des Browne MP, Secretary of State for Defence, **Lieutenant General Nick Houghton CBE**, Chief of Joint Operations, and **Mr Desmond Bowen CMG**, Policy Director, Ministry of Defence, and **Mr Peter Holland**, Head of Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit (ADIDU), Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and **Ms Lindy Cameron OBE**, Head of Department for International Development, Afghanistan

Ev 62

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2	Philip Wilkinson	Ev 87
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4	Dr Gilbert Greenall	Ev 90
5	Dr Michael Williams	Ev 93
6	Dr Shirin Akiner	Ev 96
7	Second memorandum from Dr Michael Williams	Ev 99
8	The British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group	Ev 100
9	Christian Aid	Ev 106
10	Olivia Holdsworth	Ev 107
11	Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit (ADIDU)	Ev 116
12	Supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence	Ev 117
13	Further supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence	Ev 125
14	Further supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence	Ev 125

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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

Session 2005–06

First Report	Armed Forces Bill	HC 747 (<i>HC 1021</i>)
Second Report	Future Carrier and Joint Combat Aircraft Programmes	HC 554 (<i>HC 926</i>)
Third Report	Delivering Front Line Capability to the RAF	HC 557 (<i>HC 1000</i>)
Fourth Report	Costs of peace-keeping in Iraq and Afghanistan: Spring Supplementary Estimate 2005–06	HC 980 (<i>HC 1136</i>)
Fifth Report	The UK deployment to Afghanistan	HC 558 (<i>HC 1211</i>)
Sixth Report	Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2004–05	HC 822 (<i>HC 1293</i>)
Seventh Report	The Defence Industrial Strategy	HC 824 (<i>HC 1488</i>)
Eighth Report	The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context	HC 986 (<i>HC 1558</i>)
Ninth Report	Ministry of Defence Main Estimates 2006–07	HC 1366 (<i>HC 1601</i>)
Tenth Report	The work of the Met Office	HC 823 (<i>HC 1602</i>)
Eleventh Report	Educating Service Children	HC 1054 (<i>HC 58</i>)
Twelfth Report	Strategic Export Controls: Annual Report for 2004, Quarterly Reports for 2005, Licensing Policy and Parliamentary Scrutiny	HC 873 (<i>Cm 6954</i>)
Thirteenth Report	UK Operations in Iraq	HC 1241 (<i>HC 1603</i>)
Fourteenth Report	Armed Forces Bill: proposal for a Service Complaints Commissioner	HC 1711 (<i>HC 180</i>)

Session 2006–07

First Report	Defence Procurement 2006	HC 56 (<i>HC 318</i>)
Second Report	Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2005–06	HC 57 (<i>HC 376</i>)
Third Report	Costs of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan: Winter Supplementary Estimate 2006–07	HC 129 (<i>HC 317</i>)
Fourth Report	The Future of the UK’s Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Manufacturing and Skills Base	HC 59 (<i>HC 304</i>)
Fifth Report	The work of the Committee in 2005 and 2006	HC 233 (<i>HC 344</i>)
Sixth Report	The Defence Industrial Strategy: update	HC 177 (<i>HC 481</i>)
Seventh Report	The Army’s requirement for armoured vehicles: the FRES programme	HC 159 (<i>HC 511</i>)
Eighth Report	The work of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and the funding of defence research	HC 84 (<i>HC 512</i>)
Ninth Report	The Future of the UK’s Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the White Paper	HC 225-I and –II (<i>HC 551</i>)
Tenth Report	Cost of military operations: Spring Supplementary Estimate 2006–07	HC 379 (<i>HC 558</i>)
Eleventh Report	Strategic Lift	HC 462
Twelfth Report	Ministry of Defence Main Estimates 2007–08	HC 835

Oral evidence

Taken before the Defence Committee

on Tuesday 20 March 2007

Members present:

Mr James Arbuthnot, in the Chair

Mr David Crausby
Linda Gilroy
Mr David Hamilton
Mr Mike Hancock
Mr Dai Havard

Mr Adam Holloway
Mr Bernard Jenkin
Mr Brian Jenkins
Robert Key
Willie Rennie

Witnesses: **Rt Hon Des Browne MP**, Secretary of State for Defence, **Mr Martin Howard**, Director General, Operational Policy, and **Lieutenant General Nick Houghton CBE**, Chief of Joint Operations, Ministry of Defence, and **Mr Peter Holland**, Head of Afghan Drugs Inter Departmental Unit (ADIDU), Foreign and Commonwealth Office, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: Good morning. This is the first of our evidence sessions in this, the second inquiry that the Committee has done into our operations in Afghanistan. We are lucky enough to be taking evidence from the Secretary of State this morning. The Secretary of State is coming again in May. In the last year we began an inquiry which looked at the aims and objectives of ISAF¹ in Afghanistan and the UK's deployment there. Now we are going to be looking at the developments over the last year and the extent to which UK forces and NATO are able to create the conditions for success and for progress in Afghanistan, and we have got a further session next week with outside commentators. I am sorry it is a bit cold in here, but we are trying to see whether that can be improved. Secretary of State, good morning. Would you care to introduce your team, please?

Des Browne: Yes, I will. On my right I have Martin Howard, who is the Director General of Operational Policy in the MoD, on my immediate left is Lieutenant General Nick Houghton, who is the Chief of Joint Operations, and on his left is Peter Holland, who is the Head of ADIDU, who obviously has responsibility for the Inter-Departmental Drugs Unit.

Q2 Chairman: Thank you. May I begin by asking you, Secretary of State, could you, please, be brief and concise in your answers and asking the Committee, could you, please, be brief and concise in your questions? I shall begin by asking you, Secretary of State, could you encapsulate, briefly, what our objectives are in Afghanistan?

Des Browne: Briefly, our objectives are to help the Afghan Government extend its reach in the south and in the east of Afghanistan in the way in which the Afghan Government has extended its reach in the north and the west and, thereby, to bring economic prosperity and opportunity to the people of Afghanistan. Principally we seek to do that in the

south by the creation of security from the MoD's perspective of working together with the Department for International Development, the Foreign Office and NGOs and complementing that by building the capacity of the Afghan Government, both centrally and locally, to deliver that more broadly stated objective.

Q3 Chairman: Would you say that UK forces were achieving their objectives?

Des Browne: Yes, I would say we have made progress and we are achieving our aims. I stress that we are there as a military force principally to enable others to achieve their objectives—that is the Afghan Government, the Foreign Office, the Department for International Development and NGOs and other international partners—and our progress needs to be seen in that context. We have helped the Afghan Government to extend its reach, but to improve both their capability and capacity to do that and the sustaining of that reach in some of the communities of Helmand province will take time. I think we have to realise that, particularly in parts of the south and in the east, there was literally very little, or no, governance in the past, substantially these were ungoverned spaces, and the nature and scale of that challenge I think could be overestimated. For decades there was little or no governance in these areas.

Q4 Chairman: Do you think we did underestimate the nature and the scale of that challenge?

Des Browne: No, I think we realised that we were facing a difficult challenge in the south and in the east and, as I have said before, I think it would odiously repetitious to repeat phrases such as descriptions of the nature of the force that we have deployed and its ability to be able to deliver force, and I do not think either you nor certainly I want to disappear down the cul-de-sac of the interpretation of one phrase of my predecessor. We realised that this was going to be a difficult environment and there were aspects of it that we

¹ International Security Assistance Force.

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learned as we deployed. We may come to discuss some of them in more detail, particularly the nature of the Taliban behaviour in the north of Helmand at the point of our deployment, which dominated a good part of last summer, but the supplementary answer to your earlier question is that the signs now are that the security that we are creating is allowing the sort of reconstruction that we had hoped to be able to engage in earlier in this process to start to take place. We are now at the stage where we are spending more on reconstruction and development projects than we are on security in the Helmand province.

Q5 Mr Jenkins: One of the things I was waiting for and I did not hear was a clear distinction about creating an environment to allow the aims and aspirations of the people of Afghanistan to be met. What we are not into is supporting a westernised public government in Kabul which tries to impose on the people of Afghanistan a westernised democracy and we are there providing the infrastructure to try and bring that about. Will you make it clear that that is not our intention, never has been our intention, but we are trying to support and trying to develop organisations in Afghanistan to allow these people to meet their aims and aspirations?

Des Browne: I think democracy comes in many guises across the world, and I do not think anybody who is involved in politics or understands that is in a position to say that there is one template. I am very strongly of the view that the governance that will survive and be sustainable in the long term in Afghanistan is governance that grows out of the people and is supported by the people, and we have very overtly supported that sort of development, for example, in the Musa Qaleh Agreement and the support of Governor Dauod and subsequently Governor Wafa and their relationships with their local communities. We are very much of the view that governance ought to reflect the culture and the aspirations of the local people; but that having been said, I do not want anybody to come away from this answer believing that I have accepted that President Karzai's Government could in any sense be described as a perfect government. This is a properly democratically elected government; it operates in a different way; the Executive has a different relationship with the Legislature than our Government does, but this is the Government that the people of Afghanistan themselves democratically asked for and it faces some serious and difficult challenges and relies substantially for help on the international community, but it is not just one or two countries, it is almost 40 countries in the world who are supporting them; so I do not think we should allow what the Government is doing or how it is being supported to be categorised in that way.

Q6 Chairman: Secretary of State, during the course of this morning we will be trying to get into the detail of some of the individual aspects of what you are

talking about now, for example, the nature of the Karzai Government and things like that. Could I ask you to try to summarise the main lessons that have been learnt over the last 12 months?

Des Browne: I think the obvious lesson that was learnt, and I have spoken about this before publicly, was that the Taliban reacted to our presence in a way that had not been expected in terms of the violence and the nature of the way it deployed the troops. I am no expert on that. I have the CJO to my left and, if you want to explore that in more detail, I would defer to his military expertise and analysis. We knew that both the Taliban and, for example, the drug barons were the people who had a lot to lose from improved security and were bound to oppose improved security, and, indeed, the Taliban overtly said that that is what they would do as we and others deployed entered the south of the country, but most experts did not anticipate full conventional attacks. So that was a learning experience for us, but we defeated them, and we believe that in the long run that will turn out to be very significant and will have quite a strategic effect on the Taliban. So that is the first lesson.

Q7 Chairman: That is not a lesson, so much as a surprise.

Des Browne: We learned the lesson of how to deal with that in that environment and we deployed our forces in a way that did that. We have also learnt the lesson that we needed to reinforce particular capabilities, and I have announced, and I will go through the detail if the Committee wants but I am sure you are very familiar with them, that we needed to reinforce certain capabilities—more helicopters, for example—in some cases new equipment, Predator UAVs—and we have deployed and are beginning to deploy different vehicles. In the last announcement I made I announced that we would be deploying a company of Warrior.

Q8 Chairman: We will come on to those as well. Would there have been a greater degree of success if a reserve had been deployed last year?

Des Browne: The overall force structure, of course, is a matter for NATO. I am not in a position, I do not think, retrospectively, to answer that question. What I do know is that as regards the degree of force that we faced, we overmatched everything we faced then, and I suspect, in fact, that we would have been in that situation, looking back from now, in any event. What we were not able to do, of course, was to do that and also do the reconstruction work that we had intended to do, particularly in Lashkar Gah, at the same time.

Q9 Chairman: That is a different question, I think, because the CJSOR, as the Chief of Defence Staff told us a couple of weeks ago, was not fulfilled. Would we have succeeded better if it had been?

Lieutenant General Houghton: Can I perhaps mention something from the perspective of the then COMISAF, General Richards, who I think is on public record as saying—there was a stage in respect

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of a major operation towards the end of last year, Operation Medusa, which took place in Kandahar province—that in his estimation a more decisive defeat at the tactical level might have been delivered to the Taliban had he been able to deploy a reserve in pursuit of the Taliban enemy that fled up the Panjwai Valley.

Q10 Chairman: Yes.

Lieutenant General Houghton: I think it is public record that he said that, but that was relative to the overall NATO operation after the specific operation was conducted in the Panjwai Valley close to Kandahar.

Q11 Chairman: So, in essence, the answer to the question is, “Yes”, there would have been more progress made if that reserve had been available?

Lieutenant General Houghton: There would have been, at the tactical level, a greater amount of progress made against the Taliban in that area at that time.

Chairman: Thank you.

Q12 Mr Hancock: Can I ask two questions arising out of what you have said. One is about the lessons, and you said you did not really foresee the reaction of the Taliban. Considering we have been in the country for over five years, surely our intelligence was such that we must have anticipated a bit better than we appear to have done the reaction of the Taliban. What was the reaction you expected from them: to run away?

Des Browne: That is not what we are saying. I think you have to be absolutely honest and realistic about what the force disposition in Afghanistan was prior to the decision to deploy forces into the south. There were, as I recollect it, about 100 American soldiers in Helmand province who were in a PRT, if my memory serves me correctly, in Lashkar Gah. That was the force disposition at the time and that was the basis on which any military information could have been collected, and since my understanding is that they seldom left the PRT, it was highly unlikely that they were going to be collecting information. Whatever people may now say retrospectively, the accepted wisdom was that we could expect a reaction from the Taliban and, indeed, possibly from others but that the nature of it would be what people refer to as asymmetric. We were being advised by all the experts that that would be the nature of the way in which they would deploy their violence. It turned out that they did not. It may well be (and, as I say, this is all qualified by the fact that I have no expertise to make these observations) that from their point of view, strategically, they made a great error and that they suffered a degree of casualty that they cannot sustain in the longer term, but time will tell. In fact, the way in which they deployed their forces, particularly in Northern Helmand, and we have already heard about the activity later in the year in Kandahar where they pinned down a significant number of their forces, caused us to have to concentrate in those areas, and the operational

commander made tactical decisions about the response to these environments which were exactly right, but they had an effect on the plans that we had otherwise.

Q13 Mr Hancock: But they were effectively running the province, were they not? The Taliban were back in control of the province, even if they had at any stage given up control of the province. I cannot believe that you did not have sufficient intelligence to tell us (1) the sort of numbers that the Taliban would have had at their disposal, (2) the reaction of the—. Mr Howard is shaking his head. Maybe you should answer the question then, Mr Howard.

Mr Howard: If I can add to what the Secretary of State has said, we anticipated a violent reaction from the Taliban and others. One of the problems you face, though, is that out of a strategic intelligence judgment it is impossible to get the granularity of tactical intelligence until you are there on the ground in strength; so that is what has managed to fill out our intelligence picture that we have had since then. As the Secretary of State said, the tactics used by the Taliban were unexpected, in the sense that they used conventional forces, conventional tactics rather than asymmetric tactics, but we never expected it to be that there would not be a problem, and in terms of numbers, I think it is always very tricky to talk about numbers of people like the Taliban, because you immediately run into the problem of definition. We in the MoD talk about tier one Taliban, tier two Taliban, and below those sorts of levels it gets very murky as to what counts as a Taliban. Is it someone who is organising these sorts of attacks or is it someone who is being paid by the local Taliban to join in? To come up with a number, I think, is always a tricky area, which is why, perhaps, I shook my head.

Q14 Chairman: General Houghton, in answer to my question about the reserve, you mentioned Operation Medusa. I am afraid I have left the impression somehow that Operation Medusa was something less than an outstanding success, but it was a dramatic success towards the end of last year. Would you agree?

Lieutenant General Houghton: Yes, in the estimation of the NATO commander, Operation Medusa was undoubtedly a success and dealt the Taliban a severe tactical blow. The point that I was making was that in his estimation, had he been able to, over and above that, deploy a reserve in pursuit, he may have been able to capitalise on that success to a greater extent.

Q15 Mr Hancock: Do you think we have fully explored why we left it so long to deal with areas in Afghanistan like Helmand province, bearing in mind the majority of the British people felt things had gone quiet in Afghanistan for a substantially long period of time? Do you think there has been a satisfactory explanation to the British people of why

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we left it nearly five years before we tackled that issue of what was going on in that province and in other parts of Afghanistan?

Des Browne: I am quite often asked to speak for lots of people, but I am not sure that I can speak for the British people necessarily as to whether they are dissatisfied with the explanation.

Q16 Mr Hancock: Do you think there has been any satisfactory explanation given as to why it has taken so long for us to tackle the issues like Helmand province?

Des Browne: I have certainly tried to give them the explanation that the plan was to concentrate on the north and the west and progressively move round, as it were, the faces of the clock in an anti-clockwise direction into the south and the east, but you have also got to bear in mind that there was, and still is, in part, another operation going on in Afghanistan known as Operation Enduring Freedom which we have been conducting substantially in the east and part of the south. A judgment has to be taken as to when it is appropriate to deploy forces in order to begin the process of reconstruction. I was not party to the timelines of this, but I can clearly understand that those who had responsibility for it felt that it was important to consolidate the north and the west and consolidate the governance there, and there were other challenges there, some of which, you will remember, people said would defeat the ability of the international community and the Afghan Government to be able to turn this country round; but the measures of success in the north and the west are quite significant now, so I think you either have the ability and the circumstances to be able to do it all at the one time or you do it progressively, and it was chosen to do it progressively. I was not party to that process, but I can understand why it was.

Q17 Mr Hancock: The original deployment was 3,300, we are now up to 7,700, according to the latest statement, and we have suggested that they would be in place until June 2009. Do you expect them to remain in numbers like that beyond that date?

Des Browne: I think we have got to get back into discussions about conditionality. Of course conditions change and the 2009 figure, the deployment out until 2009, was not ever at any time a prediction of any nature, it was a planning timetable, and it still remains a planning timetable. Our need to continue to provide force at that level will be a function of the rate at which the Afghan's own security forces can take over responsibility, because, after all, part of our ambition in building governance is to build the ability of the Afghans to be able to deliver their own security—that is the acid test—and it may start before April 2009 but it will happen at a different pace in different areas. I do not think it would be anything other than speculation at this stage to say exactly where we will be in April 2009, but we are beginning to make progress on all of those fronts.

Q18 Mr Hancock: What is the specific role of the battlegroup that is deployed to Kandahar?

Des Browne: The CJSOR had the requirement in it for a battlegroup to act as a reserve, as it were, in the south and in the east, and we undertook to provide that. It will provide the sort of reserve in that geographical part of Afghanistan that the Chairman was asking questions about earlier.

Q19 Mr Jenkin: Briefly on this point about original tasking, the Chief of the Defence Staff accepted that running the Armed Forces very hot, very tight and very stretched makes the danger of wishful thinking when tasking operations a reality. Is this not an example of where we hoped for the best rather than deploying what was really needed at the outset?

Des Browne: I read the evidence that the CDS gave. There were some pages of this. Wishful thinking was a summary that was put to him at one stage. I do not entirely recollect that he accepted all of it and did not qualify it, but that aside, I do not believe that what we did was wishful thinking. We had a very clear strategic plan, I think it was the right strategic plan, we deployed an appropriate force to be able to deliver that strategic plan and, at the point at which we deployed, the commander on the ground was called upon to make a tactical decision, which was entirely the correct thing to do because of the nature of the threat that was posed to the Afghan Government at the time, and by responding to that in the way in which he did, he, I think, used resources in a way that we had not planned that they would be used, but was entirely the right way, and I think may well have significantly improved the prospects of being able to succeed in this mission by overmatching the Taliban where they chose to attack the Government.

Q20 Mr Jenkin: I guess that is a, "No". General Houghton, could you describe, please, the aims of Operation Achilles?

Lieutenant General Houghton: Achilles is not what you would call a short-term decisive operation, it is very much what we would term a shaping operation. Its area of deployment is in the upper Sangin Valley, the area of Kajaki and its environment. People will be aware of a long-term US aid programme around the Kajaki Dam, a project that is intended to refurbish the hydro-electric power there and provide both water and power to Northern Helmand and into Kandahar, and this is a three-year project. Achilles is one of the early parts, as I say, a shaping operation, to generate the right level of localised security to allow that refurbishment programme at the Kajaki Dam to go ahead. In its nature it is one that tends, as it were, to isolate the amount of Taliban that are local to that area by interdicting potential lines of communication and supply routes into the upper Sangin Valley and, through enhanced intelligence gathering and targeting, attempt to target operations against key local Taliban leaders. In a broad sense, to summarise Achilles, it is a shaping operation, one of the very early phases in

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creating the localised circumstances which we hope will enable a successful refurbishment programme of the Kajaki Dam.

Q21 Mr Jenkin: We are inflicting quite large casualties. Is this conducive to winning hearts and minds overall as part of a counter-insurgency operation?

Lieutenant General Houghton: Are you saying localised casualties in respect of the Achilles operation?

Q22 Mr Jenkin: Generally?

Lieutenant General Houghton: Last year there were significant casualties inflicted on the Taliban because of the nature of the tactics that they employed, those of mass attack against some of our fixed points. Increasingly, this year, the switch has been towards the Taliban not using this tactic of mass attack but switching to a more asymmetric response—the utilisation of IEDs, suicide bombers and that sort of thing—and what we are attempting to do is use a far more intelligence-focused approach to the elimination of key Taliban leaders. In a way, therefore, we recognise that the kinetic eradication of the Taliban is not a sensible option and would act to alienate both the public locally and internationally. Therefore, to attempt to dislocate key Taliban leadership and attempt to drive a wedge between, as it were, the irreconcilable tier one Taliban leadership and the local potential Taliban fighters is the nature of the tactic we are following.

Q23 Mr Jenkin: That is a very helpful answer. Thank you very much indeed. Briefly, we are taking casualties ourselves. Do we have enough force protection?

Lieutenant General Houghton: Force protection is always an element of risk management, force protection will never guarantee the elimination of that risk, but taking in the aggregate of all our force protection measures, those that counter threats against our rotary and fixed-wing, those against our vehicles, those against our dismounted infantry, although we are in the process of making further improvements, particularly in the protective mobility area, in the round I am satisfied about our overall force protection posture.

Q24 Robert Key: Secretary of State, last month you announced that next month 3 Commando Brigade will be replaced by a force led by 12 Mechanised Brigade, which will include 39 Regiment Royal Artillery with their guided multiple launch rocket systems. Could you explain the reason for what appears to be quite a new approach?

Des Browne: Again, I may need to defer to the CJO on some of the more technical aspects of this. I look upon this as the reinforcement of an existing approach, at least that is how it has been explained to me, and I have accepted, as you point out in your description of the weapon, indeed, it is quite a precision weapon, and it enables our commanders to

strike the enemy where they want to and need to and continues the approach which has been developed under Brigadier Thomas over the winter, of us choosing the time and place where we strike the enemy, and the assessment of what capability we need in order to do that has included a recommendation that we deploy this precision weapon. So I see it as a reinforcement of our approach, not a change of approach, and I may have been guilty of this before the time I have spent in this job: people think of artillery not as a precision weapon but as some kind of delivery of bombs or things that explode over large areas. It does not necessarily need to be that, and this is a very precise weapon. I think part of the reason why we may have thought that is because it was misrepresented at one stage in some of the publicity about it as being deployed with different shells rather than the ones that we are deploying.

Q25 Robert Key: It does seem to be quite a new initiative, though, to be depending more on artillery than in the past. Could I have a military answer or a military view on that?

Des Browne: Let me say something before I hand over, if you would prefer a more detailed military view on this. Part of the reason why we are able to do this now is because the work that was done by the Apache helicopters and now by the Royal Marine Commandos allows us to plan to extend our reach and, as we need to extend our reach, we need to deploy the capabilities in order to be able to do that.

Lieutenant General Houghton: I am very much in support of what the Secretary of State said. A lot of people have a sort of an *idée fixe* that artillery is very much an area weapon where collateral damage is easily caused. The GMLRS is very much a precision weapon, able to deliver within meters of certainty, out to distances of 70 kms, precision warheads. Given those distances, you can imagine, within the overall ISAF concept of the Afghan development zones, the security is pushed out from these areas. We can then utilise equipment such as the GMLRS to bring effective and precise strike over significant distances, as I say areas up to 70 kms, using just this particular weapon.

Chairman: Moving on to the costs of this, Brian Jenkins.

Q26 Mr Jenkins: Secretary of State, we are talking about 2006. The cost for the three years was maybe about a billion pounds, but since then the actual forecast has gone from 2005–06 £199 million to a forecast in 2006–07 of £770 million. It looks like we are heading towards a billion pounds a year. Why exactly are these costs increasing at this rate? Was this not forecast?

Des Browne: The costs are a function of lots of things, some of which are indeterminate. For example, the amount of ammunition that we use generates the costs, and we obviously, over the time that you are talking about, used more ammunition than we had planned to because we were in circumstances that we had not anticipated and that

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is now well known and we have discussed this. So there are a number of aspects of the cost which you can estimate and plan for, but you can only really know it retrospectively, and that is why, if we estimate the process, the way in which we report to Parliament is so appropriate for this sort of deployment.

Q27 Mr Jenkins: You are not concerned about the fact that the costs are increasing at this rate then?

Des Browne: With respect, Mr Jenkins, I do not know what you mean by “concerned”. This is not, in my view, a discretionary operation as far the United Kingdom is concerned, this has very significant consequences for the security of this nation. I just think from my perspective (and I am supported in this by the rest of the Government and in particular by the Treasury), we need to do what we need to do and have commanders on the ground, and others, including CJO, to make recommendations to us that we need to respond to the environment that we see on the ground or that we need to make further investment in order to take advantage or to reinforce or to maintain the success, and we need to find the resources to do that.

Q28 Mr Jenkins: I have got no problem myself with the fact that, if we are putting a lot more money into developing the infrastructure and winning hearts and minds, the cost of consumption of things like the stock—I presume ammunition is part of the stock—nearly doubled in that period. The costs for this one go from 200 to 770. That is four times the increase. All I was indicating is that if we are going to come back to Parliament and vote on extra funds, at least we should know what we are voting for and whether we agree with it. Can you give a definition of where the costs are going?

Des Browne: Although I have not had a chance to read through all of the Committee’s report on the cost of military operations in the Spring Supplementary, which was recently published, as the Committee will be aware, we sought to be actively involved in that process, providing not only a memorandum but also a supplementary memorandum to the Committee in order to provide the information that we could to aid that process, I think this process works very well. I think it has a significant degree of transparency about it. I think people do know where the money is spent. I also make the point that creating security is an important part of the reconstruction of this country, it is fundamental, and, in fact, there are security-related costs which have quite significant leverage in terms of reconstruction and they are money well spent, and I consider all of the money that we are spending in Afghanistan to be to the objective of the reconstruction of this country and to the development of a secure and properly governed space.

Chairman: We will come on to that in a bit more detail later on.

Q29 Mr Jenkins: I know I am opening a can of worms, particularly with regard to NATO funding, where costs fall, but I think I should mention and recognise the tremendous cost the Americans have borne in this operation as opposed to our European allies. That is one of the things we always underrate. If this country is going to be reconstructed, it is going to be reconstructed with the dollar. We are playing a part in trying to bring that reconstruction around, and I do not want a debate about the concept, but we should recognise the fact that whenever you go anywhere it is the Americans that are paying a lot of the costs of this operation.

Des Browne: We do need, I think, to recognise the very substantial contribution that the Americans have made, not just in terms of a military contribution. We were talking, for example, about the Kajaki Dam earlier—that is a USAID project—which is a multi-million pound project that they have been committed to. Interestingly enough, if my history is correct, the state that the dam is presently in is as a consequence of American investment in the first place. The Americans have consistently over a long period of time made substantial contributions and plan, as I understand it, to make increased contributions and they have quite an important budget. The other side of the coin, of course, in the Afghan context, is that a number of countries (I cannot remember exactly the number—Mr Howard may remember) promised to make contributions to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and, as far as I can see, to a large degree most of them are living up to those promises, and we are ourselves.

Q30 Mr Holloway: Secretary of State, earlier you said that we are spending more on reconstruction and development than we are on security in Helmand. Can you clarify and expand what you meant?

Des Browne: This is not my area of responsibility, but I have a note here. It might be better to give this note to you in writing, but I will just run through it to give an example of what we have been able to do. So far from the 2006–07 £102 million Afghanistan budget DFID has allocated up to £20 million for Helmand, and we have spent £15 million, which is not bad in nine months, given that they only started spending in June. There is some unnecessary red tape in relation to the spending and we need to cut through that to achieve rapid results, but, moving on in shorter term Quick Impact Projects, of the £4 million committed so far (114 Quick Impact Projects) £2.7 million has actually been spent. It may not seem a vast amount, but with the kind of projects that we are conducting (Quick Impact Projects) a comparatively small amount goes a long way. The longer term projects, £10 million for the Government of Afghanistan, just focusing on the agricultural and rural development programme, 60 miles completed so far with pumps installed, giving villagers access to safe drinking water, four roads completed, 49 kms underway—it goes on. Our engineers themselves have released quite a lot of local capacity for people to carry out projects.

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Q31 Chairman: But compared, Secretary of State, with the billion pounds that is spent on security, that is peanuts.

Des Browne: I was comparing, and I may not have been clear, security projects to development projects as opposed to the money that we are spending on military.

Q32 Chairman: But those are tiny figures compared with the billion pounds that Brian Jenkins was talking about?

Des Browne: I understand that. That was not the point I was trying to make earlier. I may have misled the Committee. I am sorry.

Q33 Chairman: Yes, I did gain the impression that Adam Holloway was talking about.

Des Browne: I was making the distinction between projects that were designed to improve the security and projects that could be considered to be reconstruction projects. Of course, the money that we spend on military deployment—I need to look at the words that I actually used. If I gave the impression that we were spending more on development than we were on military deployment, then I did not intend to.

Chairman: I think you have corrected that. Thank you, Secretary of State. Dai Havard.

Q34 Mr Havard: Can I ask you about this business of the Taliban?

Des Browne: I am sorry, could I just say, of course there is £150 million going to be spent on the Kajaki Dam as well, which is quite a significant investment.

Q35 Chairman: It is.

Des Browne: I am sorry, Mr Havard.

Q36 Mr Havard: It is a straightforward question in a sense, I suppose, at the start. How would you assess the current threat posed by the Taliban/insurgency against UK forces?

Des Browne: They certainly do pose a threat to the governance of parts of Afghanistan directly, but they pose a threat to individual Afghans and to NATO forces mostly across the south and the east. They can deliver asymmetric attacks, as we have heard, suicide bombs, and provide explosive devices throughout the country, and in some areas they can, as we have seen, muster local concentrations of force for short periods of time, but mostly that has turned out to be at great risk to themselves, as was shown in Helmand and then Kandahar, particularly in the Panjwai Valley towards the end of the summer.

Q37 Mr Havard: So your assessment is what it was before, which is that they pose no strategic threat, but they obviously pose a tactical threat in particular places at particular times. Destabilisation, is it, as opposed to any strategic threat?

Des Browne: I have been criticised in the past for saying that they pose no strategic threat to the governance of Afghanistan, but I am still of that view, and the reason for that is that I do not think

that the people of Afghanistan show any sign of wanting to return to a Taliban Government, but that does not mean that these are not violent and dangerous people. I think they lack the capability for that sort of strategic change in Afghanistan, particularly against the will of their own people, despite the propaganda, I have to say, which suggests otherwise.

Q38 Mr Havard: I was going to ask you about numbers, but I will ask you in a different way. This business about knowing your enemy and knowing who the enemy is, as it were, this business about tier one and two Taliban that you were discussing earlier on is particularly important, is it not? As I understand it, the intelligence in Sangin was not very good because, effectively, we had not had people on the ground. You have got the manoeuvre outreach groups working. You say in your memo to us that the intelligence is now that the Taliban fighters, or the fighters who are badged up as Taliban anyway, are becoming tired and less supportive of their commanders, and you say that there is a sharp reduction in attacks against UK forces, yet what we see in terms of the figures from the CSIS and the US say direct fire attacks last year doubled, IED attacks doubled, suicide attacks essentially went up exponentially. The actual objective reality seems to be that there are more of these things—shaped charges, a more sophisticated response. You said they have moved back from old First World War trenches and mass attacks now to asymmetrical warfare. How does that match up with your intelligence assessment that it is going down and that they are tired and in some way or another there is a dislocation between the people who might support them and the Taliban?

Des Browne: I do not think those things are mutually inconsistent, and I think that because of the former it is likely that the hardcore of the Taliban are likely to concentrate on the latter in order to give an impression of activity because they cannot generate the sort of activity successfully that they chose to generate last year and, as I say, suffered quite severe casualties. We report to the Committee in the memorandum, what we understand from the ground, that there is a dislocation between those people whom they would expect to fight for them and their leadership, there is a tiredness among the people who perceive that they have borne the brunt of this fight for little or no success, and I think it is entirely consistent with that that the Taliban would seek to apply force to the community in these other, what would be described as more asymmetric, ways.²

Q39 Mr Havard: Am I right in saying then the force that has been projected so far in terms of this argument about if you are shooting people do you win their hearts and minds, at least what seems to be coming is the tier two Taliban, as it were, the hired help, as opposed to the hard core, are becoming

² See Ev 84

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disaffected with the process? Is that the intelligence or is that the tactical win, as it were, that has come out of it all?

Des Browne: Among a lot of other things that is what we are seeking to do, to separate the tier one leadership from the people whom they would look to for support, and I have to say I am not persuaded that they get that support always because people are sympathetic to them; they get it for a number of reasons, including a process of intimidation sometimes. We then (and there would be no need to repeat this because General Houghton has already described it) seek by intelligence to isolate not only those people from that support but then to target them very specifically and to send a very clear message to the people who do the fighting in the numbers that their leadership is not invulnerable and is capable of being taken out, arrested or killed by us.

Q40 Mr Holloway: Secretary of State, you say that we are trying to isolate the people from the Taliban. How are we doing that, given that we have got pitiful levels of reconstruction, we have got an utterly confused policy on what we do about drugs and, if I was a villager living in Northern Helmand province, I would probably think that the place was a lot less secure than before the British arrived? What things are we doing to isolate the people from the Taliban? Everything we are doing could actually be construed the other way or, rather, the things we are not doing.

Des Browne: We are increasingly providing in Lashkar Gah, in Gereshk, for example and in other areas in central Helmand province, reconstruction, which is having an effect on those communities. We test the views of the local people in a number of different ways, apart from the fact that we have people in among them who are reporting back to us what people are telling them, but we take their views in more obvious ways by asking people to go out and ask them what their view is, and overwhelmingly the people of Helmand province support our presence there. In areas to the north, for example, we have heard about Operation Achilles, which is designed to create, to shape, the environment there for a very obvious and large-scale reconstruction project—the Kajaki Dam—to take place. The people of the United Kingdom know a considerable amount now about the Kajaki Dam Project and what it can deliver to the people of Afghanistan. I do not believe that the people of Afghanistan do not know that, and not only our intelligence but our assessment of the views of the Afghan people is entirely different to the view that you put forward, and that is that they have the sense that security is improving and that that improvement is down not only to our involvement but also to the improvement of their own governance, and this is a long-term project—I understand that.

Q41 Mr Holloway: Do you ever feel that what you hear in your meetings and briefings with your officials is sometimes diametrically opposed to what you hear from elsewhere? I just think we need a bit

of a reality check on this. I do not see how it is getting better in terms of separating the ordinary Afghan villager from the Taliban.

Des Browne: In order to come to that conclusion, Mr Holloway, and no doubt you have a factual knowledge base to support this other than an assessment here of what is going on in Afghanistan, you have to discount what people are telling you through the intelligence in the country about what is happening. When we represent to the Committee that that is what the intelligence says, that is what the intelligence says. The intelligence says that in fact there is this separation taking place. If you have other information that suggests that the reality is something different, please tell me, please disabuse me of this false impression that I have. In addition to that, as you know, I try to spend as much time, and will continue to do so, in the operational theatres talking to the very people who know the truth. I have never and I do not think can ever be accused of painting a rosy picture of this particular operation. It is difficult, it is dangerous, it is dirty, but progress is being made. It is not as quick as we would all like it; it is slow. I do not discount all of the other issues that you raise, but we did not bring them to Afghanistan; they are the reason we are there. This is an economy which has been for years supported by narcotics and has been a training playground for terrorists and has had the Taliban running it. That is why we need to be there. That is not a reason for describing that we are a failure; that is the status quo for a lot of people in Afghanistan.

Chairman: Moving on to ISAF forces, please.

Q42 Mr Hancock: Could I touch on the question of the accuracy of your intelligence. My office did a headcount of what the press estimated the Taliban dead were over the last 18 months, and it runs into several thousand. Is your intelligence telling you that is “media spec” or is that what your intelligence tells you and, if it was as many as that claimed to have been killed in the press over that period of time, where was your intelligence telling you about the strength of the Taliban when you went there? We had this debate with you once before, Mr Howard, and you said, “Well, we cannot really say, the body counts do not really match up”, and all that business. We are now being told that the intelligence you are giving is very good to tell you that things are dramatically changing. That was the attack from the Secretary of State on what Adam Holloway just said. I would like some clarification about where you think we are with the numbers that have actually been killed against the size of the Taliban in Helmand. You cannot have it both ways, saying it is a very small force and claim you have killed several thousand of them because, based on your previous intelligence, that was the extent of the Taliban there.

Des Browne: Mr Howard can answer for himself, and I am sure from his body-language he is anxious to do so, Mr Hancock, and I will let him do that, but let me say two things to you. I am concerned that people believe what my answer was rather than your gloss it. I am not talking about dramatic differences,

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I am saying what the intelligence suggests, and I am wary enough of these sorts of events and what I say in public to constantly qualify what I say by saying it is a very difficult and changing environment, and I understand that, but that is the indication at the moment, what we are getting through our intelligence, of what is happening. The second point I would make to you, and I will be disappointed and surprised if this is not true, you will not find any of those figures in terms of the number dead coming from us because we disavowed that approach to success and/or failure. It is not about body count.

Q43 Mr Hancock: Where do they come from?

Des Browne: I understand what has been the dynamic of this. They have come from NATO, and on occasions those figures have had to be revised quite significantly after a comparatively short period of time. That is where they come from—they come from different parts of NATO—but we do not consider success or failure in relation to what we are doing by body count. As President Karzai points out to people who talk to him about this, a lot of these people are Afghans and I think it is very difficult, and actually quite unhelpful, although I understand why people search for accuracy all the time, to put figures on the numbers.

Mr Hancock: I am not searching for accuracy but some sort of reality in the situation.

Q44 Chairman: We are falling behind. We have to get on.

Des Browne: The reality is that in many of these communities there are large numbers of young people who are otherwise unemployed who are capable of fighting, and they are prepared to fight for the Taliban or whoever may pay them. Part of our objective is to give these people a future which does not involve that sort of short lifespan occupation. So, putting figures on it would not be helpful. We want to engage all of these people, whom we would call tier two Taliban, in productive occupations which are in the interests of the community.

Chairman: Secretary of State, you did say that Mr Howard could give an answer but he looks as though he is very satisfied with you, so moving on to ISAF forces.

Q45 Mr Hancock: Could I direct some questions to you, but I have to leave at ten to twelve to Chair in Westminster Hall, so I apologise to you and the guests with you. Are you satisfied with the increased force commitments recently announced by our NATO partners?

Des Browne: I think it is known that the CJSOR has not been filled, and, by definition, NATO will have provided enough forces, in other words they will have satisfied that (which is the word that you used, Mr Hancock) when there is a full complement of forces that the commanders have asked for, and we are not there.

Q46 Mr Hancock: Are you now satisfied that there is a sufficient theatre reserve force in place with ISAF now?

Des Browne: Specifically we have agreed to fill the request for the regional south theatre reserves, so it is not presently filled, but it will be when we deploy our forces. Although I made the announcement of this February, it will be later in the year before that is fulfilled and fully operational.

Q47 Mr Hancock: So you will be satisfied once we fulfil our commitment that the theatre reserve that will be available to ISAF is sufficient to cover the eventualities that you would see, General Houghton, as the chief of combined ops.

Lieutenant General Houghton: Perhaps I could clarify, there are two separate reserves here, there is a theatre level reserve which the Americans have resourced and there then is the regional reserve which is what the UK has resourced with the announcement of the latest complement.

Q48 Mr Hancock: The ISAF theatre reserve then is what we have delivered?

Des Browne: No, we have delivered the regional south reserve and the theatre-level reserve is going to be provided by the United States of America, so both of those parts of the CJSOR will be fulfilled.

Q49 Mr Hancock: Completely, to what was required. Why do you think it has taken so long for NATO to provide the troops that have been required? What is the mechanism that has slowed this process up from the initial request for troops to them actually being delivered on the ground? We have played our part, what has been the matter that has slowed up NATO's response?

Des Browne: With respect, Mr Hancock, I do not think the issue has been one of pace; the issue really is that the full complement of what the commanders have asked for has not been met. Actually when you look at this and the progression of ISAF into the South and the East, it has only happened over the last nine months and if it is the pace at which things happen that you are concentrating on, then there are lots of explanations for that. For example, if you are deploying large number of troops into a theatre you need to make sure there is infrastructure there for them to be accommodated and then to be supported, and all of these things take time. With respect, I do not think—please ask your own questions—it is the pace question that is the problem, it is the fact—

Q50 Chairman: Secretary of State, last month you said we were deploying one battlegroup and we had been asked for two. Has that second battlegroup yet been provided by anybody?

Des Browne: No.

Q51 Chairman: Do you think it is necessary to the success of the actions in Afghanistan that it should be?

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Des Browne: I am wary to accede to questions that describe in anticipation the things that will be necessary or unnecessary for success because I do not believe that that will be a function of just the complement of resource that goes, it will depend to some degree on circumstances; but in relation to the point and answering the question quite specifically, the other battlegroup was specifically asked for to operate at the border to provide as it were a screening of the border. The question is whether the absence of such a battlegroup will be decisive to the military operation, I do not believe it will be and it will at least be open to General McNeill to deploy forces to do that if, as the commander of ISAF, he believes that that is a priority. To the extent that that was part of the requirement by SACEUR for a full complement of forces for the South, it has not been filled.

Q52 Mr Hancock: How do you square then with what General Richards said in January that the success of ISAF IX “has been achieved with less troops than are really needed and I am concerned that NATO nations will assume the same level of risk in 2007 believing they can get away with it. They might, but it’s a dangerous assumption to believe the same ingredients will exist this year as they did last.” That is a very serious comment from somebody who was the commander there, making that statement, is it not?

Des Browne: Of course, and I do not play down that General Richards is a very distinguished commander and served with distinction in the role in Afghanistan, and his words obviously have to be taken very seriously, but he would be comforted by the fact that ISAF is not in the South having to face 2007 with the same resource as it faced 2006, in fact there is quite a substantial increase in resource. The CJSOR was reviewed and the reviewed requirement has not yet been fulfilled, but there is substantially greater resource available to General McNeill as the ISAF commander for the South than General Richards had, and I am sure he would have been very pleased to have had the resources that are going to be available in 2007.

Q53 Mr Crausby: Some questions on national caveats. Can you tell us, Secretary of State, what practical difficulties, if any, have national caveats caused to the ISAF mission?

Des Browne: I do not think I can specifically answer that question, although the General may be able to answer it, I am not sure whether he will be able to. I am not aware as I sit here of any specific difficulties that those caveats have generated, but it would be speculation; I am sorry, I cannot specifically answer that. I defer to the General if he is in a position to be able to answer more specifically.

Lieutenant General Houghton: By and large most of the troops in NATO are deployed without caveats but the practical reality is that nations will constrain the extent of their deployment if they think it is a detriment to the local protection or the local tactical success that they wish to enjoy when viewed from

their national perspective. There probably have been occasions from General Richards’ perspective when he would not have been able to generate the full level of force in a particular area that he would have wanted, but I do not think the instances of that were that frequent.

Q54 Mr Crausby: When the Chairman and I met the German Defence Committee they argued that there were no such things as national caveats, they just said that they were simply fulfilling the agreed mandate. Is that not just a way to get around the argument about national caveats and is it not the situation that we will not go unless we have an agreed mandate? What pressure is being put on our partner nations to provide a more flexible mandate?

Des Browne: We do at the ministerial level discuss this issue regularly and at bilaterals I discuss it with other defence ministers. There has been some progress. I clearly accept the reporting of the meeting in Germany that you and others had; I was not present and I do not know in what circumstances that came about, but I have from this list, for example, that at Riga the Dutch, the Romanians, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia, Lithuania and lots of others effectively came out of that with no caveats at all. There is progress being made, therefore, and indeed France and Germany agreed, as I reported to Parliament, that in case of emergency their troops would be moved to help. We continue to make the arguments and we continue to make progress, but at the end of the day caveats are a matter of political choice and I have to live, as I often explain, in the real world. The political circumstances of countries are different and an appreciation of those circumstances sometimes helps one to understand why there are some limits on what they agree to do in terms of the plan.

Q55 Mr Crausby: The situation is that we just have to live with it really and it seems to me that what is being said more and more is that as long as we know what those caveats are, then our operational commanders can get round that. It is just that I would make the point that we should keep pressure on those nations to argue that the mandate should be such that their forces are in no less harm’s way than our forces. I get the impression that that is not the case.

Des Browne: Mr Crausby, maybe I should have answered your question the other way round and said that this is the reality, but this is what we seek to do to operate within that reality at a political level. I do not want to give you or others the impression that we do not continue to discuss and argue and, as you would say, keep the pressure on in relation to this. The list of countries that I referred to earlier are an indication of the overt expression of political will by those countries that their troops will not operate with caveats. We do make progress, but from the point of view of the military commanders, the military commanders have to carry out the

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operations that they are required to do by NATO with the constraints that are there and they have to use their forces to the best advantage.

Q56 Mr Havard: I have a related question to that and I was interested to read David Richards' article in *The Guardian* where he talks about rules of engagement, because this has been an issue as well. What he says essentially is that the rules of engagement are fine and a non-issue, is what he talks about, and there is a whole paragraph about how he then worked with these other countries. Can I just be very clear though, there are NATO rules of engagement and then there are within that individual countries' rules of engagement as well, not always exactly the same as one another. Can we just be very clear that there is no problem in relation to what the forces can do as far as the commanders on the ground are concerned?

Des Browne: Mr Howard may be able to go into more of the detail of this, but there is an agreed NATO rules of engagement profile.

Q57 Mr Havard: It is interpretation of it.

Des Browne: It is obviously a multinational agreement and it comes about through an effort which is designed to reflect the fact that rules of engagement at a national level are a reflection of the laws of the individual nation and it is an attempt to seek to accommodate the laws of all of the nations and allies involved in a profile. I suppose I can say this as I am a lawyer rather than anybody else because the law is involved in this, and when it comes to actual interpretation I would not be surprised if there were arguments about what the proper interpretation of things are. I do not think General Richards found the rules of engagement issue to be a problem.

Q58 Mr Havard: It says not.

Des Browne: Yes; that indicates the success of that process.

Q59 Mr Jenkin: Can I ask about the effort to bring the civilian aid agencies into the picture? May I just read from General Richards' article in *The Guardian* where he said: "One has to work hard to create conditions that bring all the actors together in a synergistic manner. We can set the conditions but are often powerless to implement key parts of the overall plan. This is hugely frustrating; I believe personally more authority and money should be given to military commanders to orchestrate the overall campaign, certainly while serious fighting continues." While it is impossible to bring civilian aid agencies in to deliver efficiently, is that not what we should be doing?

Des Browne: We did not do precisely that, but you will recollect that we deployed military engineers in an announcement that I made in July of last year recognising—and this is one of the lessons learned of Afghanistan—that we will be able to create a certain level of security but that that may not be a level of security that allows, for example, NGOs or people

who do not have military experience or are not prepared to take the risk that the military are prepared to take to deploy into that environment to do reconstruction work. That is specifically why we deployed engineers and we discovered by the deployment of those engineers that there was a substantial untapped local resource of people capable of reconstruction work and they have been able to leverage that local capability, so we have been doing a form of exactly what General Richards identified. Can I also say that some aid agencies are working in the environment of Helmand, others are returning and, frankly, with respect to General Richards, whose views and advice I greatly do respect, he has to accept also that there are many aid agencies who do very good work even in very difficult environments and who are able to do that because they actually can distance themselves from the military and are not associated with the military and would not constitutionally want to be associated with the military, so it would not be the answer to all of these problems. I think that we do need to nuance a form of what General Richards identified, and that is indeed what we did do.

Q60 Mr Holloway: Secretary of State, I was in Lashkar Gah talking to Afghans the week before last for four days; who are the aid agencies working in Helmand now, who is planning to return and what are we doing to spend money further exploiting this local capability that we seem to have just identified?

Des Browne: Can I say, Mr Holloway, we have not just identified this local capability; I am sure that when you were there last week if you spoke to our engineers they would have been able to identify precisely to you who the construction companies were. We have, for example, in Gereshk made a significant difference to that town by the building of security checkpoints around about the town; I was not there and did not see it but what was reported to me was that this was carried out by local labour, and I am told by military engineers that there is a local engineering capability of some expertise in terms of design which they discovered. I am not able to give you the names of those particular companies, but I am sure we can provide that information in detail.

Q61 Mr Holloway: Secretary of State, you are talking about people helping us to build our bases or helping to build security checkpoints that, incidentally, are not often manned at night because the Afghan army is too afraid to be in them. I am asking about reconstruction, about the thing that is going to "unstick" the Afghan villager from the Taliban. What aid agencies are there doing it apart from the Italian hospital? Who is there? Who is coming back?

Mr Howard: The Secretary of State has read out a number of details earlier and it would be easiest if we give you a note of the things that we have done, but it includes things like well-digging, it includes refurbishment of schools and other civil projects in Lashkar Gah. The point that is important to note is

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that when the engineers were first deployed and went out and operated with the locals, it was actually the locals that asked for the checkpoints to be built.

Q62 Chairman: Mr Howard, in view of your offer to give us a note that would be extremely helpful. I wonder though if, instead of giving us examples, you could give us a complete list of what has been done please?³

Mr Howard: We might also offer, in response to a question you raised earlier, to give you a clear indication of what we know about what other nations have provided.

Q63 Chairman: That too would be extremely helpful.

Mr Howard: In terms of cash and development aid.

Des Browne: I apologise, Chairman, if I thought I was going to be asked for the detail of every project—such lists do exist and they can be provided.

Chairman: It would be helpful if we had them, but it is a fair question. Bernard Jenkin, carry on.

Q64 Mr Jenkin: Let us be absolutely frank about it, there is a structural problem, as you have identified, Secretary of State, between the military and many of the non-governmental agencies who would be very appropriate to help with reconstruction, and we have to respect their views and their sensibilities for that, but is this not really something very urgent to address because when I have been in Iraq and when I have been in Afghanistan before it has been a great source of frustration to the military. Do we not need more military-based capability to deliver civilian reconstruction rather than relying on non-governmental organisations that do not wish to work with the military?

Des Browne: Let me answer that directly. Right across the world, those who are involved in nation-building or conflict resolution have come to very similar views about the importance of reconstruction work, the importance of being able to follow up improvements in security by early reconstruction work and the risks that that generates for people who are sometimes not well-placed to take those risks. For example, the Committee will know that there is a debate going on in the United States of America, encouraged at the highest levels, as to whether or not there should be some force that is able to do that, that would be prepared to take those risks. Clearly we identified that problem in Afghanistan and we were very open about it within weeks of deploying, to such an extent that we deployed the engineers. I can only report to the Committee what is reported back to me through the military communications chains, and that is what they tell me these engineers have identified, and I have spoken directly to the engineers in Lashkar Gah. But they also say, you know, that the increased contribution that the FCO and DFID are making in terms of the PRT is creating a cross-government

capability in Lashkar Gah which is improving their ability to be able to deliver the aspects of construction and improvements in governance. I am not underplaying the difficulty of this, I recognise that there is a difficulty, but rather than concentrating on what the difficulties are and the failures—because there will be failures. Of course there will be with an army which is perhaps in some elements months old an ability to be able to carry out the same functions as the British Army would be able to, but it is mentoring them through these things that is important.

Q65 Mr Jenkin: The simple solution would be that some of the money that goes to DFID and therefore to these non-governmental organisations should actually come to the Ministry of Defence so it can deliver the effects that these non-governmental organisations cannot provide in that environment.

Des Browne: We have structures for directing finance to do just that, and that is indeed what we did do: we directed finance out of common pools of money and from DFID in order to facilitate the work that the engineers were setting out to do. That is what happened.

Q66 Mr Jenkin: Fine, I will move on, Secretary of State, thank you. It seems to be an objective of this mission to extend the authority of President Karzai's government across the whole of the country; has there ever been a government in Kabul that has had authority across the whole of the country—or at least not for a very long time. Is it really a realistic objective?

Des Browne: Probably the answer to that question is no, there has not been a government that has been able to exercise governance across the whole of Helmand Province, certainly not that I can recollect. I do not know how far back in history you would need to go before you could describe that there would have been one, but is it a realistic objective? Yes, it is. Will it take a long time to do? Yes, it will.

Q67 Mr Jenkin: General Richards—whom I must say we are disappointed we have not been able to cross-examine today, although you have given us some reasons and maybe we can have him later—is saying we are in danger of attempting to impose Western systems on an Islamic state; the fact is that we do not want the warlords to be warlords, but these are powerful people who generally wish to work with the grain of Afghan civil society and are not trying to impose a completely different idea of civil society on Afghanistan.

Des Browne: As you would expect, General Richards and I discussed these issues at length on many occasions; there is no difference between General Richards and me, or indeed between General Richards and the Government, about our approach to this. We are four-square of the view that if we are to have sustainable governments in Helmand Province and indeed across Afghanistan then it has to go with the grain of local culture. There is no question about that and I do not think General

³ See Ev 117

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Richards, if he were able to come here and give evidence, would indicate that there had been any contradiction between us in that; that is absolutely right, that is what we need to do. Building local government is about building local government, that is government for the local people that serves their aspirations. The other point I would make to you, and I say this often in public and in private, we have to work with who is there and our objective is to get people who are people of influence and people of power into government and to be operating within the framework of the law. That is exactly what our objective is to do because everybody who has ever tried to do this anywhere in the world realises that if you do not have an inclusive approach you just perpetuate the clubs.

Q68 Mr Jenkin: But also that the currency of Afghan politics is money, dollars. Basically, if we want the writ of the Kabul government to have any meaning beyond the boundaries of Kabul itself, it is about money, is it not?

Des Browne: This is distinct, Mr Jenkin, to which government?

Q69 Mr Jenkin: The Karzai government.

Des Browne: I seem to think we spend a lot of time over there talking about public spending too. Government is about directing resources, of course it is about directing resources and it is about directing resources in a way that reflects the success that governments can have in people's aspirations, and there is that, of course there is, about directing resources.

Q70 Willie Rennie: You are talking about local buy-in and the Musa Qaleh deal was an integral part of that local buy-in; what exactly is the position in Musa Qaleh now?

Des Browne: We need to first of all recognise what the Musa Qaleh agreement was, and it is relevant to the discussion I have just had with Mr Jenkin. It was an attempt to reflect the wishes of the local community and put responsibility into the hands of the local government of the village elders and the tribal leaders, and in the long run I am firmly of the view that it is this kind of approach which will sometimes fail and sometimes falter which will bring long-term security. I am very pleased that we were able to make that agreement and it was a sign of improvement that we were able to make that agreement. Candidly, the jury is still out on whether it has worked, there is no doubt that the Taliban in that community sought to break that agreement and they sought to break that agreement in a way in which they thought they could overwhelm the local community. There is no certainty of the evidence from that community at the moment, but I am far from the view that they have succeeded in doing that and, because of the way we responded to it in particular, because we managed by air strikes to kill two of the local Taliban commanders, we believe that we significantly undermined their ability to be able to do that, but it is in a state of uncertainty, that

is all I can say, it is not clear exactly what the situation is but it is not nearly as gloomy as people describe.

Q71 Willie Rennie: Are you looking at other places to institute similar agreements? We have talked previously about those kinds of measures we have introduced elsewhere.

Des Browne: Our ambition is for the governor, presently Governor Wafa, to be able to deliver governments to the local communities of his governature in the way in which he considers to be most appropriate, in consultation with local people. He has an approach to that which involves local agreements and since he is constitutionally the appropriate person to be doing that, we will support him in doing that across the communities of this province. That is a matter for him, rather than us looking to do it; we are looking to support but then he is in turn accountable to President Karzai and that engages the central government in his local decisions, which is exactly how the Musa Qaleh agreement came about in the first place.

Q72 Willie Rennie: Have they approached you about that kind of exact support for other areas?

Des Browne: We do that all the time. Part of Brigadier Thomas' responsibility is to facilitate and enable and support that sort of behaviour because we are trying to extend the role of the fact of governance from the governor across as much of Helmand Province as we can.

Q73 Willie Rennie: Do you think the use of overwhelming force is undermining our approaches on reconstruction and development?

Des Browne: I just think that there are some situations—the Panjwai Valley which we have spoken about and people know about the attacks in the district centres in the north of Helmand when we were occupying them—where we have to recognise that where the enemy can muster a level of force that generates violence that attacks and potentially undermines the governments or directly attacks our troops, then we must be free to use the force that we need to in order to overcome that violence which is being presented to us. We then need to recognise that that has to be done in a way that does not undermine our broad outlook on insurgency and reconstruction projects, and we seek to do that.

Q74 Willie Rennie: But do you think it does undermine it? Does it actually set back some quite good measures introduced with reconstruction; that you have actually had to act in that kind of way has set you back?

Des Browne: I am content that our commanders make their decisions on the ground operationally and tactically in a way that deploys force in the safest way possible and in the most effective way. Sometimes actually the use of targeted force in that way, whether it be overwhelming or not, is the most effective thing to do. There is another aspect of the

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culture of Afghanistan that I am constantly told about and that is that the people will follow those whom they think will prevail.

Q75 Willie Rennie: The “Platoon House” strategy from last year; do you think in retrospect it was a mistake?

Des Browne: No.

Q76 Willie Rennie: Why?

Des Browne: Because the commander on the ground was faced—as increasingly I am learning they are—with a tactical dilemma. There was a challenge made to the authority of the then governor, Governor Daud, in a number of areas of the north. He made an entirely appropriate decision to respond to that, to over-match that attack, and then to hold those district centres through the use of platoon houses to ensure the presence of the governor and of governors was kept in these communities, which is what the communities wanted. They were of course attacked and we had to deal with those attacks and we sustained a level of casualty which we had not expected that we would sustain and I accept that, but I do not think they could in any way be described as mistaken. In the fullness of time they will turn out to be quite a significant contribution to the strategic success of our operation.

Q77 Chairman: We do not hear the word “ink spots” nowadays; is there any reason for that?

Des Browne: I have no idea. I do not think I have used the word once, even in anticipation, but if you mean have we given up the plan to secure areas and to spread construction out from them, we have not and that is what we are seeking to do in Lashkar Gah. We will, if we seek to deliver progress to the largest number of people, be forced into that process in any event, call it what you like, ink spots or Afghan development zones or whatever; I think these terms are all interchangeable.

Q78 Willie Rennie: When Vice-President Cheney visited Pakistan and Afghanistan earlier on this year he seemed to pin the blame for the cross-border insecurity on Pakistan, and we keep getting intelligence from both sides saying that the other is to blame. Can you give any clarity as to exactly what the problem is and what partly the solution would be?

Des Browne: The problem is that there is movement across the border both ways, and there has been for some time. One of the things that I have learned over the last months is that in respect of lots of these borders around the world, the people who live at or near them do not recognise them apart from the fact that there are disputes and traditionally tribes move back and forward across these borders. We have probably discussed this about Maysan in Iraq, which is a very good example of where the local people have scant if any regard at all for the fact that there is a border between their country and another. The problem is that people move back and forward across the border, there are separate jurisdictions

either side of that and it is easy for one to blame the other for the failings on the border, but that seems to me to point to the solution, which is to get these two countries to work together. There are all sorts of projects predicted for this border including, I have heard, fencing it and mining it. I just remind people sometimes that we tried to police the border in Northern Ireland for 30 years and things still moved back and forward across it in a very much smaller area with quite a significant number of troops. I do not think that is a possibility, there needs to be a shared political solution to this which identifies the difficulties, and we encourage Pakistan and Afghanistan, despite their differences, to continually talk to each other. There are some developments, for example the Jirga Commission, which is designed to bring the peoples of the border area together to discuss their problems, which are promising, but it is difficult political work. Can I just make one other point, and that is that we should never underestimate the scale of the challenge that Pakistan faces on their side of the border nor should we play down the casualties that they themselves have suffered in that border area trying to control some of the violence and some of the bad people that move around there.

Q79 Willie Rennie: You have made some important points in that and that was something that President Musharraf was very keen to stress to us when we visited last year, about the losses that his troops have faced. You mentioned earlier on about the failure to deploy a battlegroup on the border; do you think that has had an effect on how you actually deal with security across the border, with the lack of that battlegroup?

Des Browne: The border extends beyond just Helmand Province, as people know. The tactical approach to that and the broader strategy is a matter of course for the NATO commander; we have not as an alliance filled that part of the CJSOR, but it is open to General McNeill and the other commanders to decide to deploy their resource in a way that addresses the issues that they wanted the battlegroup to address at the border if they choose to do that. We are under that command and it is not for me to decide how they should deploy those troops.

Q80 Willie Rennie: Do they have sufficient troops in order to do that?

Des Browne: At the end of the day the general and other commanders have to deal with what they have. We have already had a discussion about that and they have to prioritise and if what he planned that battlegroup would do is one of General McNeill’s priorities, then there are sufficient resources for him to be able to do that. That will mean that other things may not be able to be done, but they may not need to be done at that time, they might not be priorities.

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Q81 Willie Rennie: You talked earlier on about a Jirga Commission as a possibility. Is there sufficient dialogue between the two countries and what else do you think could be done to improve that dialogue if it is not sufficient?

Des Browne: I just think there needs to be greater collaboration between them. For example, they need to begin to identify their differences with a view to resolving them; they are very good at identifying their differences. If we could move them on to resolving them then we would make some progress, but we need to develop joint approaches because there are some big issues such as, for example, the refugee camps. There are plans to close the refugee camps and, in principle, I think that would be a good idea, providing it is done in a managed way and with the support of the international community so that we do not get a substantial refugee problem, which will almost certainly be delivered into Afghanistan. The whole issue of the Pushtun identity needs to be discussed between them and resolved to the degree that it can be, although these are big issues and I do not think they will be resolved. They may be managed or accommodations may be found, but then there are governments and developments in the tribal areas themselves which are part of the problem. There are a whole number of things that can be done and if the Commission does meet there will be no shortage of issues on the agenda for it to discuss.

Q82 Mr Havard: The question of the border tends to centre on the border with Pakistan, but of course Afghanistan is geographically significant because it has borders elsewhere. The last time I was in the far west of the country, there is the border with Iran and there is the problem of the leakage or export of drug-related things north as well, up towards the Stans and all the rest of it. What have you got to say about the relationships with the other border countries as well as the relationship with Pakistan?

Des Browne: I have to say that I do not consider myself to have great expertise in relation to those relationships, but to the extent that they do not come to me as part of the problem as it were, the relationships with other countries, I suspect that President Karzai has continuing relationships. There are clearly issues there and the drug trail across into Iran is a very serious issue which the Iranians themselves devote quite a substantial amount of resource to trying to deal with; indeed, at a humanitarian level, because of the way in which that delivers into their community support work in Afghanistan, it is designed to support alternative livelihoods and to move people off the drugs business. It is a very mixed environment, therefore, and sometimes things that happen are counterintuitive to our views of individual countries.

Mr Havard: Absolutely.

Q83 Mr Hamilton: Could I ask about armoured vehicles? I am still trying to work out your comment “they follow those who will prevail”—that comment is quite interesting and I think that applies to our

part at the present time, we follow those who prevail. It might be quite an interesting diversion to follow. My questions are quite straightforward: one is, how many Mastiff and Vector vehicles are now in theatre?

Des Browne: Can I just say to you, Mr Hamilton, the CJO will give you the detail to the extent that we are prepared to share that, but we tend not to give a blow by blow account of the deployment of individual vehicles, for the reason that that sort of information in the hands of the enemy can aid their defeating our security. If they know the extent to which we have something and can see it deployed to its fullest extent, then they can work things out from that. I am prepared to hand over to the CJO for him to give the detail to the extent to which it would be safe to do so in the public domain.

Q84 Chairman: That is fair enough. Do you want to answer?

Des Browne: Or do you want to write to the Committee? That may be best.

Lieutenant General Houghton: We could commit it to a note.⁴ It is very early on in the deployment of Mastiff and Vector, there are only a couple of the Mastiffs there at the moment, but the whole deployment is due to be finished by the end of the autumn, by which time then all of the Snatch vehicles will have been removed from theatre.

Q85 Mr Hamilton: You are quite happy with where it is at the present time.

Lieutenant General Houghton: I am, and industry and the procurement process could not have moved quicker in respect of these particular vehicles.

Q86 Mr Hamilton: Could I ask a more general question? When we were in Afghanistan last year service personnel told us about the vulnerability of the soft-skin Snatch Land Rovers. My question would then be, trying not to be too specific, are we intending to replace this type of vehicle, because you know the public concern has been in relation to this and what are we intending to replace them with?

Des Browne: I will come back to the CJO in a minute but this is my responsibility and I do not shift from it, so it is appropriate that I actually answer this question in general terms. I am very seized of this issue of protective vehicles and have been since I came into this job. What we need to do is to offer commanders a range of vehicles so that they are able to deploy the appropriate vehicle for the particular part of the operation. Our ambition, and we will achieve this ambition shortly, is to have a range of vehicles in Afghanistan that goes through from Land Rovers, Snatch and WMIK—which are entirely appropriate vehicles to be used in certain circumstances, but it is a matter for the operational commander to make the decision about whether they ought to be used. Part of that—and this is not a small part of counter-insurgency work—is to present a particular image to communities in certain

⁴ See Ev 117

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circumstances which is less threatening and engaging, but it is also about mobility and the weight of vehicles and the nature of the infrastructure. However, they ought to have the opportunity to use those vehicles and I know, having spoken to marine commandos who have used WMIK vehicles, that they like those vehicles and, indeed, never mind soft-skinned, they are entirely open when they drive them around in the desert and that is what they want because it gives them the degree of visibility that they can see people coming for literally miles in certain environments. From there through the Viking tracked vehicles, which were deployed with the marine commandos—they are very good vehicles that are very successful with the marines and are spoken of very highly by them—the Warrior tracked armoured vehicles which we will deploy as part of the announcement I made on 24 February in response to a request for a light armoured capability, the Mastiff vehicles which we are at the beginning of the deployment of, which are protected patrol vehicles with very good mine protection, and of course Vector vehicles which are the longer term plan to give us improved off-road and long-range patrol performance—that mix of vehicles will then be available to the operational commanders to choose the appropriate vehicle for the appropriate job. I do not know if the CJO wants to add to that.

Lieutenant General Houghton: Just on the specific question, the deployment of the Vector, virtually on a one for one basis, replaces the Snatch, so when they are fully deployed all the Snatch will then be removed from theatre.

Chairman: That is very helpful; thank you. Robert Key.

Q87 Robert Key: Secretary of State, in the last year or so what improvements have there been to strategic air transport to support our troops in theatre. Are you confident that we have now got that problem licked?

Des Browne: On the issue of air transport in the round can I defer to the CJO, but I do want to say something and I know this is not specifically a response to the question but these are strategically important and I want to cover helicopters in particular because the Committee has expressed some concerns. I will be candid, as I have tried to be on these and other issues in this job. I believe that we do need more helicopters in the Forces and I want the option to provide more to operations to increase the flexibility that the commanders have, because just as they need flexibility in ground vehicles, they need flexibility in the air as well. I have looked at ways of bringing this about since I arrived in the job last summer and we have deployed two more Chinooks and improved our support arrangements to make more flying hours available for both Chinooks and Apaches. We continue to explore what can be done to increase the resources available, but I am equally clear that now the commanders have what they need to do every job they need to do—that is not to say that if we could not give them more they could not do more, and commanders

would want me always to give that qualification because every time I ask them about this they make that qualification and I understand that. They have the Apache to support our forces when they are engaged on the ground, they have the helicopters that they need to pick up and carry our people, whether they be injured or not. I have no doubt that if I can get them more they will find good ways of using them; that is the position I actually want to be in and I will probably have more to say about this in the not too distant future. The CJO might talk more strategically about air assets, including the air bridge.

Lieutenant General Houghton: Moving to the air bridge and the strategic air transport fleet, I probably just need to contextualise it in as much as we would accept the fact that this is an aging fleet which needs quite a high degree of maintenance to keep it going. What I would also put into context is that the fleet is there to support what is a military operation, we are not trying to imitate a chartered air service. In statistical terms what the strategic air fleet has done in respect of both of the major brigade relief in places for both theatres and the R and R programme, in terms of outbound flights 84% have met their anticipated timing within a three-hour tolerance and 75% in the return leg. We only as it were get to hear the bad news of when that goes wrong and the times when it does not meet its scheduled timing. As I say, within what is a strategic air fleet which is aging and does have reliability problems, those are not bad statistics in the round, given what we are trying to provide. I would also say of course that it is a finite fleet; we have to use it because of the specific defensive aid suites that it has got and it is therefore also subject to dynamic re-tasking, so in the circumstance for example of a casualty evacuation situation that needs to be done, that has got to be at detriment to some of the programmed flying.

Chairman: General Houghton, because we are doing an individual inquiry into strategic lift, probably it would be best to go into this sort of issue in that inquiry rather than in relation specifically to Afghanistan. There is one other issue as well. We are just about, Secretary of State, to send you a letter about the operation of the coroner service to ask for a memorandum as to how that is changing and the changes that need to be made. In the context of that, Robert Key, is there any question you would like to ask?

Q88 Robert Key: The morale of British Forces and their families is very sensitive when it comes to the matter of the repatriation of bodies of those who have lost their lives, and an unintended consequence of the closure of Brize Norton for two years is that that changes the jurisdiction of Her Majesty's coroners, who have to undertake not only the actual court process but the support service for families who are receiving bodies at Brize and will now receive them at Lyneham in Wiltshire. There is what now appears to be a rather grubby little argument

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about additional resources for the coroner in Wiltshire to be able to support those families, and I wonder if you could just give me your assurance that the Ministry of Defence will do whatever they can to ensure that there is proper funding, either transferred from Oxfordshire to Wiltshire but in any event that there is proper funding to give appropriate support to the coroner service, not only to ensure speedy and careful court processes but also the proper care of the families of those receiving the bodies of their loved ones.

Des Browne: Can I just say, Mr Key, that I am sorry we do not have the time to go into this in some detail because there is more to this than the story that has been reported at the moment, and there is still water to pass under this particular bridge because it is not just as clear-cut as it would appear from the way in which it was reported. The submission in relation to this came onto my desk this morning; it is just unfortunate that sometimes things go onto the front page of newspapers before they come onto my desk, and it is all too common nowadays. This is a complicated organisation that I am in charge of, however, and some people think it is in the best interests of it to share information before decisions are necessarily made. Can I just say to you that I am very seized of this issue and I agree entirely with you that this ought to be a priority focus, and not just for the immediate families of the loved one who has given their life in operational theatres but the effect it has on the extended family of the Forces and I understand that. You will know that we diverted resource from the MoD to the DCA in order to increase the number of coroners who were available in Oxfordshire to be able to deal with the backlog that had built up. I am absolutely determined that that backlog will be reduced and eliminated and not replaced, but I do know from conversations that others have had with families that have been reported to me and that I have had with families, concentrating these inquests in one geographical area has not always been to the best advantage and that we have to maybe be a bit more flexible about that. Certainly what I will not want to do—and I will ensure that it does not happen—is repeat the problem that arose at Oxfordshire somewhere else in the event that there are bodies repatriated in a way that the jurisdiction of another coroner is brought into play.

Q89 Chairman: I know that the Minister of State is also pursuing this and has been doing so for some months.

Des Browne: Yes.

Q90 Chairman: We will send you a memorandum.

Des Browne: Just let me say, because the Minister of State when she speaks about this is always very careful to attribute the contribution that the MoD has made to this, that she has made a substantial and splendid contribution to this and, indeed, on a week by week basis ensures that there is a report in relation to all of the outstanding inquests across her

desk. She is personally supervising the process to try and deal with this issue and she deserves to have that recognised.

Chairman: Thank you. Moving on to counter-narcotics, Mr Holland, you have been waiting here for a long time and we are now onto you. Linda Gilroy.

Q91 Linda Gilroy: Can I welcome the serious response the Secretary of State has just given to that issue. As he will know, there are about 1,000 men and women in support roles out in Afghanistan from Devon and Cornwall over the past six months. Moving to the question of narcotics, there is great admiration for their role in tackling the Taliban and in reconstruction work; our newspaper has certainly covered the very good work they have been doing in that arena which we were discussing earlier. In relation to the anti-narcotics strategy, which is an Afghan policy set in 2003 and we are four years through that, General Richards in the article that has been much-quoted in this session said that the resources and the planning put into provision of alternative livelihoods or the economy really is still inadequate and must be refocused for the international community in 2007. Will we be seeing that focus or will we be finally admitting that the policy so far has been a failure?

Des Browne: My view is that it will take fundamental changes in the economic situation in Afghanistan to break the stranglehold of the narcotics industry. I do not get any sense from any members of this Committee—and I think at one stage or another I have discussed this either in the House or privately with almost all of them—that there is any difference between us as to whether this is a long-term job or whether there is a quick fix for it. Counter-narcotics is a long-term job and everywhere anybody has tried to deal with it they have discovered, even if they have gone in on the basis that they can eradicate it—using that verb advisedly—in one growing season, that they cannot. Perhaps what we have been seeking to do and what the Afghan Government is seeking to do has suffered from the constant focus on a number of metrics of success, none of which I consider to be the appropriate metric of success at all. The candid answer is that we need to build the infrastructure that deals with all of the aspects of a very complex strategy, and it is not by any stretch of the imagination a muddled strategy, it is a very clear strategy but it is very difficult to deliver it because it relies upon principally an Afghan component, it is for the Afghans themselves to do this. We should facilitate that, however, and we should help them to build the capacity to be able to do it, so they need to be able to build their police, they need to be able to build their special narcotics police, they need to be able to improve their ability to arrest those people who are the principal drivers of it, the middle-level drug dealers, and they also need to have a justice system that brings those people to book, puts them in prison and keeps them in prison and also takes from them the proceeds of that dealing that they do. We are making some progress in relation to all of

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those and it is not until we get those in place and, as you identify, alternative livelihoods or the opportunity for alternative livelihoods for people, that we will be able to see the progress that we want to see in this area. That all having been said, there are parts of Afghanistan now that are drug-free or virtually drug-free that were not five years ago. That is because we have been able to create that sort of environment and that sort of success in those communities. There is success in parts, there is apparent failure in others against metrics which I think are the wrong ones and there are still challenges, and in Helmand our ability to be able to develop economic alternatives for farmers is a key to this.

Q92 Linda Gilroy: Can you say a bit more about the respect in which you think the metrics are wrong? We will be taking evidence next week from academics about this and from the Senlis Council, so it would be useful to know whether you accept that there is something that needs to be changed.

Des Browne: I understand why people do this. Poppy cultivation figures and eradication figures are the two joint obsessions, it would appear, of people who are trying to measure success. I do not think either of them is the appropriate metric to decide whether or not the strategy is right; the strategy is much more long-term than one season's growing or one season's eradication, although we can report them and of course people do report them; I just think it focuses on entirely the wrong area. It is their ability to be able to do all of the other things that we have been discussing all morning that will create the environment that will help us undermine and drive out the narcotics economy and culture. Where it has been successful in Afghanistan or in Pakistan, for example, where a long-term approach to this was successful, it has been successful because people have been able to build up those other parts. They are much more long-term, they cannot just be produced out of a hat. People can go and eradicate a field here and there but that does not create a sustainable answer to this. It may be that Mr Holland wants to supplement this.

Q93 Linda Gilroy: Perhaps directed towards him, I understand that you need security, you need to involve the Afghans in that and we need to see the development of the legal economy in general, not just the alternative livelihoods. Can you tell us more about the way in which that is developing across Afghanistan; in particular are we seeing any development in that sphere in the South at all?

Mr Holland: Yes, those are absolutely the factors that we are talking about. Critically what you need to see is a diversification of the economy to offer farmers more opportunity to earn a livelihood, so that is about more choices of what they grow and a mixture of cash crops and subsistence crops. Critically it is going to be access to markets, so that means a market being there so you have roads and that you do have the rule of law and police forces to protect them. We have commissioned some research

year on year to look at what is happening on cultivation and we are just analysing the results this year, and actually there does seem to be some progress in Helmand, particularly around the town centres, around Lashkar Gah. We are seeing that farmers are actually choosing not to grow poppy this year, even though across Helmand as a whole there will still be a very high poppy cultivation, but actually in those areas where there is better security, there is a bit more rule of law and there are markets—actually even in Helmand you are seeing farmers move away.

Q94 Mr Holloway: Secretary of State, what you were saying entirely reflects what the marines are saying in Bastion and Lashkar Gah, but they are also saying that eradication is fuelling the insurgency. From their point of view it is extremely unhelpful, yet Britain remains very closely associated with this corrupt process. Why are we continuing to do that in the face of criticism from our own troops; secondly, is it because we are really trying to rein in the Americans who would go a lot further unless we involved ourselves in some way?

Des Browne: In relation to the last part of the question there are different views across the world as to the right approach to this; there are acres of newsprint written about this and anybody who has even looked at the tip of the iceberg can see that there are differing views. All of those views are probably represented in and around Afghanistan because all the countries that espouse different views are all there. The fact of the matter is, however, at the end of the day all of us concede that this is a matter for the Afghans themselves and President Karzai made the decision, in consultation with his allies but with his cabinet and his own ministers, as to how they would approach this year's poppy cultivation. He himself has said that there will be no aerial spraying and, indeed, although he contemplated the possibility of ground-based spraying at one stage, he came to the decision in consultation with us and others that he would not do that in Helmand Province this season, but decisions are only made year on year. At the end of the day there will be this process of discussion and debate about what is the best way to approach this, but we will all have to defer to the sovereign government of Afghanistan as to how to deal with this because we all say it is their issue. There has been some manual eradication and there have effectively been two forms of it in Helmand Province: there has been the Afghan eradication force deployed and that has been some government-based eradication. I do not have the advantage of recent discussions with marines on the ground that you have, Mr Holloway, but I hope to be able to correct that deficiency in the not too distant future and I will raise this issue with them. The reason that we are associated with that is because that activity is going on in Helmand Province where we have responsibility and we have given some logistic help to the Afghan eradication force to move tractors.

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Q95 Mr Holloway: Eighty of them, yes. Is this not deeply conflicting, Secretary of State? On the one hand our troops are telling us that this is fuelling the insurgency and to any observer with half a brain you would think that would be the case, but on the other hand we are still helping to facilitate this process, which is itself seen as completely corrupt by the Afghan villager. Is it not another thing which does not help us at all to unstick the villager from the Taliban?

Des Browne: I do not know that the equation is just that simple. Again, I am in the unfortunate position of having to defer to your conversations with people and I am not saying that you are not reporting that correctly.

Q96 Mr Holloway: Let us ask the General, does the General think it fuels the insurgency?

Lieutenant General Houghton: There is no doubt about it, you make an exact correlation that an ill-informed amount of eradication, when the other things, alternate livelihoods and such are not in place, does present an ideal opportunity for the Taliban to exploit and could alienate local people. That is why it is very important that we properly co-ordinate the eradication the that does go on it can be done locally without detriment to local consent. Equally, there has to be an element of eradication in support of the overall business of rule of law and upholding that, so although I do recognise that incoherently carried out eradication is bad for consent, I would not be an absolutist to say no eradication at all should ever be carried out because that encourages a lack of the imposition of the rule of law and that is not what over the long term we want to achieve.

Mr Jenkins: I can see the need for a symbolic act of taking out certain fields and when you say to the farmer “Which field do you want to take out?” “We will take that one out, it is not as good as this one” they take out the poorer field. It is not just the farmer, however, this is quite common sense. If you have a rural community, the people who work on the fields in the harvest season are part of the community so if the harvest is being taken away from you and you can see the opportunity to feed your family is being taken away from you, you would not be very pleased with the people who are taking it away, so the alternative must be in place and that is why I am very interested in the amount of money we are spending. If I spend \$20 a day—that is what they get, about \$20 to \$25 a day for harvesting the poppy—and if I pay them for 100 days, that is \$2,000 a year. Since we are paying £1 million or about \$2 billion, I can actually employ one million people for 100 days not to harvest the poppy or not to fight on behalf of the Taliban, but to build roads, dig ditches or maybe fight on our behalf. I know we cannot do that, that is too simplistic, but somewhere along that road we have to start taking some big strides to get people off this crop and to give them an alternative. I do not think it is just the poppies; to convert it into another crop there has to be an involvement in all the community.

Q97 Chairman: Mr Holland, are you going to comment on that or the Secretary of State?

Des Browne: To the extent that Mr Jenkins describes a response of the poor farmer to his or his family’s livelihood being taken away, that is likely to be correct and that is what Mr Holloway is describing as fuelling the insurgency. The fact of the matter is, however, that if you have a strategy—and I believe the strategy is right—when security reaches a certain level and when alternative livelihoods are available, there has to be a consequence for those who choose to continue to be greedy and not needy in that environment. That does mean risking the possibility that you will generate some reaction, but at some point the rule of law has to be enforced. There is evidence to suggest, as Mr Holland has said, that eradication has been successful in areas of Lashkar Gah where that environment exists but—and this is important as well—there is some evidence, and it is growing but from a small base, that farmers chose not to grow poppy this year in Helmand Province because of the threat of eradication. If we went through a growing season without some eradication to deliver that threat to reality, then next year these people who have already turned without the need for eradication will just go back. It is difficult, but evidence across Afghanistan suggests that you reach a tipping point with this and that you can move very quickly thereafter, and there are provinces in Afghanistan who have, even on the metric that I do not think is the best, moved to virtually poppy-free or poppy-free zones.

Q98 Mr Havard: This question of alternative livelihoods, can I just explore this a little more. I mean, what are these alternative livelihoods? You could say people can go and become policemen and judges and all the rest of it, but you have not got education. Is the alternative to pay them to do nothing, like we do British farmers as part of the EU, or is it something else? Is it to buy the crop of them, or what are these alternatives? Are they nuts and grapes, what are they?

Mr Holland: It is going to be a mixture of things. In many areas you are talking about changing the agricultural economy, and particularly in the North where you are seeing that happening, that is exactly what is happening, you are developing a cash economy. In some parts of the country that is not going to work, it is being grown because it is too poor and actually you are talking about ultimately creating employment opportunities for people to move away from the land, and that is going to take a lot longer. What you are not looking at at this stage is buying the crop. At the moment it is grown on less than 4% of agricultural land; if we go in and buy the crop all we are going to do is create another market and encourage more people to grow it. That is really not a solution, you are talking about a long-term development process.

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Q99 Linda Gilroy: Some commentators in the beginning suggested that the profits of the drugs trade might be recycled into the legal economy; is there any evidence of that happening at all?

Mr Holland: The IMF has done some work on this, and it does happen to a degree, certainly in terms of property and things like that. They estimate actually significantly less—the opium economy is worth about \$3 billion roughly, but much of that does not stay in Afghanistan, much of it leaves and does not get reinvested back, and the IMF's assessment is actually that the opium economy as a whole, because it creates illegality, actually is a real drag on the legitimate economy.

Des Browne: Chairman, on that subject may I suggest that the Committee, if it gets the opportunity, speaks to the Governor of Kandahar on that very subject. He is engaging in very interesting things on that subject.

Chairman: That is a helpful suggestion; we will do our best to do so.

Q100 Linda Gilroy: The Secretary of State mentioned that what you are trying to create is a tipping point where you get the local community behind the alternative livelihood, the drive towards legality, and there is a House of Commons research paper which quotes an *ABC News* survey of December 2005 that shows how exactly that could be achieved because the vast majority of people say if there are alternative livelihoods then they think that there should be no drugs crop, it is only one in twenty who would support it in that situation. Is there any more recent surveying of the population and their attitude towards this, and could it be made available to the Committee if so.

Mr Holland: There are some fairly regular surveys; the *BBC World Service* has done a survey relatively recently which shows similar sorts of patterns. It

varies across the country; it is more acceptable to grow poppy in the South than it is in other parts of the country but, yes, we can make that available.⁵

Chairman: The final question on narcotics, Adam Holloway.

Mr Holloway: I totally accept what the Secretary of State says about there needing to be the threat of eradication, but is not what we are doing by being involved in this process actually playing into the hands of Taliban information and operations. Secondly, how successful is this process?

Chairman: We have had the answer to the first question.

Q101 Mr Holloway: Eradication is now being done much, much closer to Lashkar Gah than last year, done much more widely; is that because of the deteriorating security situation?

Mr Holland: It is actually being done much better this year in the areas where livelihoods are assessed to exist. Last year it was actually done in areas where they did not exist, and that was a real problem because you were essentially eradicating very poor farmers. The areas that are being eradicated are those where alternatives are already assessed to exist.

Chairman: That is very helpful, thank you. Secretary of State, we will write to you—because I am afraid we have pretty much run out of time—about the ARRC and the ISAF headquarters, how it fulfilled its objectives and what role we have in ISAF X, but in the meantime may I say thank you very much indeed, not only for coming this morning and giving such helpful answers and for keeping them as brief as we permitted you to be, but also for committing yourself to come again in May which we will look forward to. Gentlemen, thank you all very much indeed.

⁵ Not printed

Tuesday 27 March 2007

Members present:

Mr James Arbuthnot, in the Chair

Mr David S Borrow
Mr David Crausby
Linda Gilroy
Mr Dai Havard

Mr Adam Holloway
Mr Bernard Jenkin
Mr Kevan Jones
Robert Key

Witnesses: **Dr Shirin Akiner**, Lecturer in Central Asian Studies, School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), **Dr Gilbert Greenall**, and **Ms Norine MacDonald QC**, President, The Senlis Council, gave evidence.

Q103 Chairman: Good morning to you all. This is the second evidence session of our second inquiry into Afghanistan and we are looking at the work of the United Kingdom in Afghanistan. Last week we had the Secretary of State and this week we have two groups of independent and extremely well-informed commentators. Good morning to all three of you as witnesses. I wonder if you would like to introduce yourselves, and if I may start with you, Shirin Akiner, I gather you have lost your voice, which is always a handicap when you are appearing in front of a select committee, but thank you very much for coming back to talk to us.

Dr Akiner: Thank you. My name is Shirin Akiner, I am from the School of Oriental & African Studies and I lecture on Central Asian affairs. I am also an associate fellow at Chatham House, and I have been working on the region for a very, very long time indeed and seen many ups and downs and changes.

Q104 Chairman: Thank you very much. Norine MacDonald, would you like to tell us about yourself and about your experience.

Ms MacDonald: My name is Norine MacDonald, I am the President and Lead Field Researcher for The Senlis Council and Senlis Afghanistan. The Senlis Council is a policy group looking at counter-narcotics, security and development. I am based between Kandahar and Lashkar Gah doing field research on the issues affecting the insurgency, including counter-narcotics.

Q105 Chairman: Thank you. Gilbert Greenall.

Dr Greenall: I have been involved in humanitarian emergencies since 1979; ex-military, I had a four years short service commission in the Household Cavalry, I am a medical doctor and since the first Gulf War I was deployed with 3 Commando Brigade in Northern Iraq and have worked on a number of military operations as an adviser to brigade and divisional commanders over the last 15 years.

Q106 Chairman: What is your experience of working within the Government of the United Kingdom?

Mr Greenall: I worked as consultant adviser to the Overseas Development Agency (ODA) and then since DFID was formed since 1997 I have worked as a consultant adviser to DFID and, more recently, at the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit.

Q107 Robert Key: Could I ask you each, in your view is the United Kingdom making a positive contribution to Afghanistan?

Ms MacDonald: The UK military is fighting in the most difficult circumstances with remarkable success. Our research has shown, however, that the development and aid efforts of the UK and the counter-narcotics policy supported by the UK are in fact not only failing but contributing to the rise in the Taliban insurgency in the South. We have just finished a survey of 17,000 Afghan men in Helmand, Kandahar and Nangarhar provinces and we have asked them whether they support the Taliban. In Helmand and Kandahar provinces 26% of the men were willing to openly state that they support the Taliban and when we asked them whether they believed that the Karzai Government and NATO will win the war or the Taliban will win the war, 50% of them stated that they believe the Taliban will now win the war. Our research results have shown that clearly we are in a crisis situation and emergency measures must be taken to ensure the success of the UK and NATO effort in Afghanistan.

Q108 Robert Key: What measures might those be?

Ms MacDonald: I have brought a list of them, if I am permitted to make a handout?

Q109 Chairman: Yes, that is helpful; by all means.

Ms MacDonald: I apologise but we are a research and policy group so we tend to do this type of thing. I will pass it around. What we are recommending is an emergency action plan that looks at five separate areas: the first is the area of research. I spend a great deal of time talking to villagers in Helmand province. There are people displaced by the fighting and poppy eradication that are literally starving. The men are willing to sit in the food-aid line-ups for hours at a time; thus becoming easy recruits for Taliban. Both from a humanitarian and a counter-insurgency point of view there must be immediate aid. There has been no food aid in Helmand Province since March 2006. On counter-narcotics policy we are recommending an immediate end to the eradication campaigns which turn the locals against us, fuel the insurgency and are ineffective, and the implementation of pilot projects for poppy for medicine, which I can speak about more if the Committee is interested. We are calling for Jirgas with the local population and a joint committee between Afghanistan and Pakistan chaired by

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General David Richards, address those urgent issues and the broader NATO commitments. The entire NATO structure and response in Afghanistan must be rebalanced. The UK is doing its part and the other countries are not. If I can have the Chairman's permission I would also like to hand out those survey results that I referred to, it is just a two-page document.

Chairman: That too would be very helpful; thank you.

Q110 Robert Key: Could I then ask you, Shirin, if you would give us your view about whether the United Kingdom is making a positive contribution?

Dr Akiner: The United Kingdom is treading water; they can cope just about with the security tasks they have been set, but if you are talking about any further vision as to how the country should be developed, that is entirely lacking. One of the major problems is that we have indulged in obfuscation. We have used a term "reconstruction": we are not talking about reconstruction. If you look at all the data on Afghanistan going back over the years, we are talking about construction from a very low base. Looking at the United Nations Human Development Index, Afghanistan is today, as it was 10 years, 20 years, 30 years ago, on a level with countries such as Burkina Faso, so when we talk about development if you want to raise the level of development in Afghanistan it has to be clearly understood that this is a vast undertaking. Think of a country like Burkina Faso; what level are you hoping to raise Afghanistan to? That is the first question. The second question, which I do not think has been taken into consideration enough, is how is Afghanistan ever to become self-sustaining? It has very few natural resources, the few minerals it has are difficult to exploit and transport costs of course are extremely high. Leaving aside the opium, it seems to me that Afghanistan has only one advantage, and that advantage is deliberately being ignored and, I would even say, undermined. The advantage is that it could be a transit country for the region, for roads, railways and pipelines, but because the Western-led coalition quite firmly and explicitly has stated it does not want the involvement of the neighbours, what we have in Afghanistan is in effect an enclave completely cut off from the neighbouring countries. The level of trade between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan is absolutely minute; between Afghanistan and the other neighbouring countries, likewise absolutely minute, so apart from Pakistan there is virtually no regional involvement. This may be sustainable in the short term if you are prepared to pour in aid to Afghanistan, but in the longer term, with the growth of China and China's relationship with the other major powers in the region, that is to say Russia, Iran and eventually India, either Afghanistan has to be keyed into the structural developments that are taking place or it is doomed to be excluded. What we see now, if we look at all the road and rail networks that are being planned for Afghanistan, they are not linked in to the other states. In the long term this policy of isolation is entirely unsustainable. In the short term

of course individual units, individual people from the UK are doing a great job, but this is not looking ahead to the future.

Q111 Robert Key: Thank you, Dr Akiner. Gilbert Greenall, is the UK making a positive contribution?

Dr Greenall: The original plan back in 2001 when the Taliban were harbouring al-Qaeda, it was a direct threat to the United Kingdom and it was completely correct to deal with that direct threat. Since that time there have been a number of secondary objectives and those secondary objectives now are undermining the operation in Helmand province. With counter-narcotics, for example, I cannot think of anything more designed to actually create conflict and get us embroiled in great complexities of central Asian politics than trying to deal with counter-narcotics. The nation building, pushing a stronger central government—initially the idea came across the Atlantic that failed states were a danger to a harbouring of international terrorists, therefore a strong central state was a barrier to them—I cannot think of anything in Afghanistan which is more likely, than a strong central state, to actually create conflict and not actually reduce it. The actual resourcing of this, if you look at the billion or so that the press report for the war, versus £180 million for the civil effort in Afghanistan, there is complete disparity of effort and also the effort now is being spread in so many different areas and not in just this one defeat of the Taliban.

Q112 Robert Key: Is this because of a lack of strategic focus or could you identify one or two serious obstacles that are preventing progress?

Dr Greenall: It is a loss of strategic focus.

Dr Akiner: I would agree entirely with that, but I think that comes from the refusal to face reality and to pretend that the task is something that it is not, that it is a short term task that can be accomplished and that therefore there will be an exit point in the foreseeable future. That is not the case and therefore there is a failure of analysis here.

Q113 Robert Key: Norine, do you have a view on that?

Ms MacDonald: Part of it actually is a lack of internal capacity. As I mentioned, the military is really doing their very best in difficult circumstances, but there is a failure on the aid and development side. The Department for International Development has turned out to be the Department for International Development except in war zones. This means it is failing the military and showing a lack of commitment to the military success there. There has been a lack of willingness to discuss that capacity issue: whether or not this Government wants DFID to be DFID only in places that are not war zones, or whether it wants it to be also present in war zones as part of a counter-insurgency effort. This is an internal strategic and capacity issue that has not been brought into the debate. I understand their response to why they are not present there, but it is not acceptable when you are asking your military to go in. That has to be clearly addressed

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and I would agree with the comments previously made about the counter-narcotic strategy, which is at cross purposes with the military aims.

Dr Greenall: This business of the funding too, there is a complete disparity between the enormous effort on the military side and part of the campaign plan being dependent upon DFID to deliver and that capacity not actually being there.

Chairman: We will come on to the relationship between the military and DFID in a few minutes time. Bernard Jenkin.

Q114 Mr Jenkin: Very briefly, Dr Greenall, you say in paragraph 2.3 of your paper “There was no post conflict recovery plan in December 2001.” That was not what we were told in Parliament.

Dr Greenall: I was in Kabul at that time and it was very difficult to implement any projects because they all had to be multilateral, and the problem was that the UN were only just bringing in a skeleton staff themselves—this was right at the end of the war—and they did not have the capacity to actually implement their own programmes, and with us trying to say can we create programmes which they are going to be involved in, there just was not the capacity at the time to do it. It was a very complicated process of trying to get projects up and running and there was definitely a pause of quite a few weeks before those actions started to happen.

Q115 Mr Crausby: Can I ask Dr Akiner about Afghanistan’s immediate neighbours because I know she has a view on that. Should Afghanistan’s immediate neighbours be more involved in shaping its future?

Dr Akiner: The immediate neighbours, immediately after Operation Enduring Freedom was launched and then even more so after NATO-ISAF began operations in Afghanistan, had tremendous optimism and they wanted to be engaged in all these developments, all the more so as many of them had actually worked on construction projects in Afghanistan during the 1980s. I remember one journalist, Anthony Lloyd, commenting on the Soviet presence in Afghanistan as being barbaric; absolutely not at all. The Central Asians were involved in very serious, major construction projects during this period, so they had assumed that when there was peace, when NATO and ISAF were established in Afghanistan, they would be able to contribute to the recovery of Afghanistan. Also, they believed that trade and cross-border links of all sorts would pick up. That is not happening; quite the contrary, they have been specifically excluded, and I have been present on many occasions when that point has been made. The result is that the benefits that Afghanistan could have had through integrating into the region it is not having, and the longer this situation continues, patterns are formed and the more difficult it is to change the situation. Metaphorically speaking, I talked about the policy dilemma in Afghanistan being to remain in the zoo or return to the natural habitat, because what we have in Afghanistan today is like a zoo where Afghanistan is entirely nurtured and protected by

outside forces. Eventually there must come a time when it is reintegrated and I see no move to even realising that that will have to happen or should happen if Afghanistan is going to have any kind of peaceful prospects for the future.

Q116 Mr Crausby: What about India and Pakistan and what is the relevance of the tension between India and Pakistan and the impact that that has on Afghanistan?

Dr Akiner: Pakistan of course is present and represents both a positive contribution and also a source of threat. India is striving now to make its presence felt in Afghanistan and it is also making its presence felt in the bordering Central Asian states—for example, it has just constructed an air base in Tajikistan; it is slightly uncertain what the status of that is but India is certainly becoming very active in the region, though it has to balance that with its very close relationship with China, its relationship with Russia and a relationship with Iran as well as, of course, remaining alert to considerations about Pakistan. India can do some things, therefore, but it is also constrained by its broader foreign policy. There is one other point I wanted to pick up on which follows on from something that you said. We have confused terms, and again it is a question of analysis. We talk about “nation building” when we do not mean nation building, we mean state building, creating institutions. It is important to make the distinction because nation building—as we have heard in discussions in Britain recently, involves an effort to create a sense of national identity, of Britishness. In Afghanistan, if there is no sense of Afghan nationhood, the country will not hold together, and that is what we have at present; the sense of being Afghans together is evaporating, which brings us back to Pakistan and the ever-present threat of Pashtunism. Because if the Pashtuns decide that actually it is in their best interests to create their own state without all the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, we will see the disintegration of Afghanistan. That is a very real possibility and one which Pakistan may in fact be encouraging.

Q117 Mr Crausby: India has refurbished an airbase in Tajikistan, can you tell us what is the relevance of that and what influence will that give India?

Dr Akiner: It gives them a presence very close to Afghanistan; it certainly makes Pakistan very nervous, but that base is actually shared with the Russians at present. The Chinese are also nervous as to what India is doing, so the balance between those states is extremely complicated and changing constantly. China is making major investments in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, throughout the region in a word; yet it is not making such investments in Afghanistan because while the Western-led alliance is there it regards it as a waste of money. The most important arterial link in the region is the Karakorum Highway, which links into the road system of Pakistan and goes down to Gwadar on the Indian ocean. Afghanistan is cut off from that, whereas the other states are all linking

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into it because that takes them right down to a warm water port, which is important. The same thing with pipelines, they are being constructed around, not through Afghanistan, so the longer Afghanistan is kept out of these developments, a lot of which are being, as I say, funded by China and driven by China, the more difficult it will be to actually have any place, it will be this forgotten island—somewhere in the middle—that everyone goes around.

Q118 Chairman: Should Iran have a role and, if so, what should it be?

Dr Akiner: I remember General David Richards saying a few weeks ago—and I do not know if it was on the record or off the record—that the influence of Iran had in fact been “benign”, but obviously the Americans are very concerned about Iranian influence. For all the Central Asians, Iran is a historic centre, a cultural centre and at times has been the political centre, so even if they do not like what is happening in Iran today—and they have different views on that—they still look to Iran as playing an important role in the development of the region. In Afghanistan, too, Iran has always played quite a significant role, culturally especially, and to some extent economically. Yet Iran is being largely kept out now—it is of course working extremely energetically on the drug eradication and has done a very constructive job there, but overall its engagement is very patchy. The Central Asians take note of that. If Iran were more involved, it would stimulate greater regional cooperation, but at present that is not happening.

Q119 Mr Havard: Dr Greenall says in his memo to us that, “There is a danger that international military operations in Afghanistan are already destabilising Pakistan. An unstable Pakistan is a much bigger threat than Afghanistan.”⁶ The Senlis Council says there should be a presidential committee of the presidents of the two countries, Pakistan and Afghanistan. What is all that telling us then, that we should just stop military operations in Afghanistan because it is dangerous?

Dr Greenall: It is my comment so I must answer it. One needs to be cautious about how one does one’s military operations so that one does not end up with a bigger problem than one has already got. That would be the extent of my comment on that and common sense would tell us that that must be a sensible thing to reflect on when we are engaged in Afghanistan.

Q120 Mr Havard: What does that mean in practice?

Dr Greenall: I have not been to Helmand and therefore I cannot answer the question.

Q121 Chairman: What about this presidential committee? You need to have the presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan on good relations with each other before they can form such a committee, do you not?

Ms MacDonald: One very valuable resource that we do have in a situation full of negatives is General Richards. I understand that because of the way the military structure works he is obliged to leave Afghanistan. He is very knowledgeable, he has very positive relationships with the two presidents and he is very committed to the success of the British military and NATO there. All of our information on the ground suggests that he would be able to make a positive contribution to the very serious situation inside Pakistan and the continuing deterioration of the relationship between those two governments. This is just part of the puzzle that has to have some immediate solutions. I believe that one thing that the UK could do is show leadership on this issue of Pakistan, because they do have that valuable resource. He is respected, not only inside military circles but in development and aid and political circles. He is respected all across Afghanistan and he made an enormous impact there in a very short period of time. The reason that we are being so vocal about recommending this is that time goes on and his ability to make that contribution is deteriorating week by week as the local dynamics change. It is very important that that urgently be pursued, that he be put back into that milieu and then we use that positive resource. There is no doubt whatsoever that a lot of the trouble in southern Afghanistan is being organised across the Pakistani border and there is no doubt that Musharraf is limited in his ability to deal with these issues and needs positive support from the international community to actually deal with it: not in the fall but this week. Not next week, not next month because the situation is literally deteriorating week by week. The situation inside Lashkar Gah is dramatically different this month than it was last month. Every Afghan who can leave has left, every Afghan who can send their family away has done so. They believe the other side of the river is controlled by the Taliban; there is fighting and bombing every day. There is not a realistic picture of the crisis in Helmand in the international discussion and it is the British military who are sitting out there, unsupported by the development and aid and the international community who are paying the first price here. We are calling for immediate action on numerous fronts because we are faced with a crisis. Another six months of this and there will be very few opportunities to resolve it.

Q122 Mr Jones: Are not a lot of your solutions—and I will come on to the poppy thing in a minute—rather naïve in the sense that in an ideal world, yes, you would be able to do what you are suggesting with an NGO and DFID and others, but unless you have actually got the security in place what you are suggesting will not happen?

Ms MacDonald: I have been there two years and I am going out every day into the villages and the camps, so I believe it is actually possible to go out and do that. Last summer when the starvation crisis got so extreme and we were in the camps and the villages doing our research they asked us for food, so we have been doing food-aid there regularly, we have been running clinics regularly. Inside Lashkar

⁶ See Ev 92

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Gah city, right beside the airport, there is a camp of over 1,000 families, people who have gone to Lashkar Gah because of the bombing in Sangin and the eradication. Inside the camp it would be very easy to recruit young men to fight for the Taliban. I understand perhaps only partially the political and financial effort it has taken to send another 1,000 British troops to Helmand; it would be so easy to recruit another 1,000 men to fight for the Taliban inside Lashkar Gah city. It is quite possible to go out and deliver food aid, I am doing it.

Q123 Mr Holloway: Dr Akiner referred to the lack of a sense of nation in Afghanistan. Do we infer from that that attempts to impose a central government in places like Helmand province is doomed to failure?

Dr Akiner: Yes, it is indeed. Just to pick up on what Norine was saying, in the Central Asian states there is already a firm perception that NATO has failed and therefore they are turning back very strongly now to Russia for defence because they have to take action, they have to defend themselves. If there is not going to be peace and stability in Afghanistan then they have to defend themselves and try to contain Afghanistan, so they have all turned back to Russia both multilaterally and through bilateral relations. The same thing is happening with China because they do not believe that the West can deliver—the West as represented by NATO. The second point is that views on President Karzai are of course very mixed but in the country he actually does not have as much respect as he has abroad; he is not seen as a strong leader, he is not seen as a leader who understands his people. Musharraf is seen as a leader who understands his people, for better or for worse; whether you like the way he governs or not he understands the dynamics in his own society and up to now has survived in extremely difficult circumstances and probably will survive for the future. Karzai does not inspire confidence amongst his own people. More and more I hear unfavourable comparisons being made between President Karzai and President Najibullah. The latter was someone who stayed to the end, who was loyal to his people again. People disagreed with him but they believed that he cared about them in a way that Karzai does not. The third point, we talk about the threat of the Taliban, but what I think we are forgetting is the small but very important middle class constituency; they have now been alienated but they were the very ones, in fact the only ones, who actually cared about state building, who cared about running the country or any of these development projects and who had, to some extent, the education and background to take part in all of this. They have been completely marginalised; if you look at the pay structures there is no place for them, so they have been pushed out by foreign advisers in their own country and therefore the situation is actually much graver than we imagine. When we talk about Afghans we tend to be thinking of the Taliban, the population for or against the Taliban, but we should be thinking of the people who provided the leaders for the

Mujahideen, all of whom were middle class, educated, engineers and doctors and so on. We have forgotten all about them.

Q124 Mr Holloway: Many of them are in London and the US.

Dr Akiner: There is that too.

Q125 Mr Holloway: Staying with this question of governance, Governor Waffa is reported to be very, very rarely in Lashkar Gah. How far do people think the writ of the Kabul government extends through Helmand province? Does it extend anywhere beyond Lashkar Gah during daylight?

Ms MacDonald: I will tell you what is my personal experience and what is reported to me by my Afghan staff, who are based in Lashkar Gah and travel through the provinces. The Taliban have absolute control, depending on the day, over three to six districts in Helmand Province. Here they control the roadblocks, where the military cannot go without being engaged. In Lashkar Gah city there are Taliban watchers on every street corner, on my street corner. Most locals completely stay away from the governor's compound because it is regarded as a target for attack. There are perhaps four compounds inside Lashkar Gah city that are clearly housing some international staff because of the immense protection.

Q126 Mr Holloway: Fortifications.

Ms MacDonald: You have seen it, around it. Two of them have suffered suicide attacks. Very few Afghans are willing to be seen openly with westerners. Lashkar Gah, for those of you who have not been there, is actually a town and not a city. You can drive across it in ten minutes and on the far side is the Helmand River and bridge; my staff reported to me that two days ago the bridge was considered not passable by the Afghan National Army. It is now an area where, if the Afghan National Army or the British military attempt to cross the bridge there would be a stand-off attack there. Psychologically insurgents gained control about four months ago. All of our staff who tended to be clean-shaven are starting now to grow their beards back, to make sure that none of their phones have any international phone numbers in them. These are all strong indicators of psychological control. As I said, many people who could leave have left. What we are seeing on the ground is not what is reflected here or in other capital cities. One of the reasons for that is because the staff of many Western governments who are present in Afghanistan feel a great deal of pressure to provide positive reports to their capitals; it is not just the UK, it happens in my country Canada as well. Because of that, the people who are making the strategic decisions in the capitals are making their decisions on incomplete or inaccurate information. This is not the fault of the staff, these are the people who are actually there trying to do the job and I have the greatest admiration for them because I understand the difficulties and the challenges of working in Afghanistan, but because of this political pressure to be showing that Afghanistan is the good

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war, the success story, in the current climate what you are not getting is complete reports of the amount of fighting and the difficulties that we are seeing, the political deterioration and problems with development aid and counter-narcotics policies, which makes you think that you can spend another few months reviewing it, discussing it and seeing what alternatives there are, waiting for development and aid to kick in. But we do not have another few months. One of the concerns that I have when I leave Lashkar Gah and go to one of the capitals is that it is like two different realities. I talk to the troops on the ground—when I am travelling about, if I see the British military, of course I stop and identify myself and state what our intentions are, when we are going into those camps. Those young men are exhausted, they are shattered, they are facing fighting every day and they really feel that they have been abandoned by the rest of the international community and that the development and aid and counter-narcotics policies are undermining them there. One of the reasons I really welcome the opportunity to be here today is to say, please consider the fact that the staff who are providing you with reports are feeling under constraints at some level to be providing you with, perhaps, a positive viewpoint that is not necessarily reflected in the reality that we see on the ground in places like Lashkar Gah city.

Dr Greenall: If I can again pick up on Mr Holloway's question about the centre and the periphery. I was up in Mazar-e Sharif and mentioned something I could discuss when I got back to Kabul and the reaction was very extreme, that provincial matters were dealt with absolutely at a provincial level and that was where the government lay. This idea of strengthening the centre against the peripheries is probably not a terribly wise direction.

Dr Akiner: Just on what Norine was saying about the young soldiers being exhausted, as a matter of fact I was giving a presentation to NATO members a few weeks ago and I found a real sense of frustration. What are they meant to be doing? Are they meant to be acting as a mini United Nations or what? Are they meant to be holding particular areas? Are they meant to be road building? Are they meant to be school building? Are they meant to be involved in drug eradication? They seem to have little clear sense of what they are meant to be achieving and at what point one will be able to say "that has been achieved"—that we will give them a pat on the back, and say "thank you, you have done it". It seems instead to be an absolutely open-ended mission. Again, coming back to the reality of the situation, I stress the need to look at demographic pressures. About half a million new citizens, new mouths, are added to the population every single year—and that is the ones who survive; the birth rate is high but the death rate, too, is high. Half a million are those who survive. So the situation is not static, these people are growing up, they need to be found work, they need to be educated and so on and so forth, and if that does not happen you have people waiting to join not just the Taliban, but other militant groups. From Central Asia I hear the Northern Alliance is now regrouping. It is militarily not strong yet but

politically—definitely. The neighbouring states—Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan—all of whom have ethnic diasporas across the border, they all report that the Northern Alliance is extremely unhappy about the current power balance and is regrouping and looking for arms. So far as one knows, at present they do not actually have an armed force, but it is only a matter of time before this changes. The situation therefore is actually deteriorating while we are hearing all these very upbeat reports about how things are going so well.

Dr Greenall: Can I reinforce this business about demographic changes in Afghanistan? The population has grown exponentially over the last 20 years. When I was dealing with the problem of food deficit back in 2001 it remained at 375,000 tonnes; it is almost certain to be much higher. When we come to counter-narcotics, if you look at the poppy it grows with unreliable rainfall in places where you could not grow cereals. There is a very big problem link between food deficit, livelihood and this population growth.

Mr Jones: All I would like to say is that is one opinion—and it is an opinion—because certainly the people I have spoken to on the ground when I have been there and people who have come back, the dedication of all personnel from the military has actually been very high and it is a bit insulting to actually give this picture that everything is terrible, the people are exhausted and there is no way forward. Having read your submissions I have to come back to the conclusion I always have about all think-tanks and that is that they live in a very perfect world and unfortunately what is happening in Afghanistan is not a perfect world. I would caution the fact that somehow it is all doom and gloom because I certainly do not think it is the twice I have been there speaking to people who are actually on the ground.

Q127 Chairman: Do you want to answer that?

Ms MacDonald: I have the greatest admiration as well for everyone who is there because I do understand what it takes to be there, especially the military. My concern is that all voices be heard, including that of the local Afghans. It is possible to say that given certain assignments that the international community has undertaken, absolutely some things are better, but nevertheless our grave concern is that we are on the brink of losing control in southern Afghanistan in a way that will lead to a regional deterioration. I would hope I would be wrong, we would hope to be wrong, but every sign from our research indicates otherwise. The last public poll we had—ABC said in 2006 support for the Taliban was 3%—if 26% state that they openly support the Taliban. I found that chilling when those results came in.

Mr Jones: In your documentation—I will come to your naïve policy on drugs in a minute—

Chairman: Steady on, try to make your questions courteous, please.

Q128 Mr Jones: I am sorry, but it is naïve. The point you make concerning the NGOs for example, I accept you need security in there to actually go in,

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but I have seen places in northern Afghanistan where NGOs will not work with the military full stop. In one case I saw a hospital where the local doctor of the PRT there, the military doctor and a nurse were wanting to go into the local hospital and help them and actually assist. That should be welcomed by the Afghan doctors but they were being told by the NGO that if they went in the NGOs would not co-operate with them. The NGOs cannot have it both ways, they cannot want security and also choose whether they actually want to do it. That to me was a stupid situation where a doctor and a nurse could actually have added value to that hospital but were being prevented because the NGOs wanted “to keep pure”.

Ms MacDonald: I can agree with you on that point. When the development and aid community first said that there is not sufficient security to go in there and therefore, for example, the military should not be involved in any type of aid or development, we disagree with that. If, as part of a counter-insurgency plan, the military is involved and seen to be involved in some sort of development and aid, that can only be a positive thing and if the development and aid community is refusing to go in they cannot criticise the military for doing that. I agree with you on that point.

Q129 Mr Holloway: For the benefit of Mr Jones, is not the point you are making that British troops are being let down by the lack of security, the reconstruction weakness and the narcotics policy. Secondly, perhaps you could explain for his benefit actually what you guys are doing in Helmand province. You are not exactly sitting around in a library; I think that credibility is quite important to establish.

Ms MacDonald: Perhaps that will explain our viewpoint, which I agree is just one viewpoint; I do not have a military viewpoint. I just observe the situation on the ground. Our organisation is primarily Afghan—there are about 80 staff and about three who are not Afghan. We are conducting interviews and research in the villages and the camps in Lashkar Gah and the surrounding region, so I am out with my staff talking to the locals. Our research does, I agree, only reflect the local opinion, what people are telling us, it does not reflect what the people inside the military are saying; I can just tell you I believe they are finding very difficult circumstances. When we are saying this is a result of our research, that is the local viewpoint on the ground which is not a viewpoint from a geopolitical point of view, it is part of the puzzle, part of the matrix.

Q130 Linda Gilroy: On your research, it is difficult enough to carry out opinion polling in this country and to have its quality respected. What sort of quality controls do you have on your research?

Ms MacDonald: The opinion poll, as I said, was 17,000 Afghan men—to be clear, it was just men—it was conducted by men and they did it in 25-person clusters, so they would go to different locations and

ask that set of questions, yes or no questions or no answer, to 25 men in one location and then they would move on to another location.

Q131 Linda Gilroy: Is there anything of the equivalence of peer review of the quality of that opinion polling?

Ms MacDonald: Statistically it is 99% accurate for that population. In fact, the last poll that was done was 4,000 people. The reason we did 17,000 was because I wanted to avoid any question about the accuracy.

Q132 Linda Gilroy: But quality is not just about numbers and ascertaining that you have got a relevant cohort of people to look at, it is also the quality of how the questions are asked. What quality control do you have on that?

Ms MacDonald: We were reviewing them every day. There cannot be any error because statistically we went past the necessary numbers, so you would have seen a fluctuation if one of our interviewers was offside. We took the same methodology that had been used in the previous polls, used that and as I said we ratcheted up the numbers so that we did not have to say there is a two or 3% error rate. We used more numbers than we had seen in the previous polls.

Q133 Mr Jenkin: On the question of the relationship between civil and military assistance, would you not agree that unless the NATO forces and counter insurgency forces deliver tangible benefits, i.e. aid and reconstruction, they are not going to have the support of the population? It is one of the first principles of counter insurgency warfare.

Dr Greenall: I would absolutely agree with that point. The normal period where you have a spike of euphoria with the civilian population is immediately post-conflict, and one of the big problems we have got is that we did not capitalise on those first three months back in 2001. That was the real moment to have done it. With the dam to the east of Kabul; four million people were dependent on that dam, which was in a parlous state and I remember that not being given the go-ahead as a major priority for the renovation at that time, but simple military assistance projects are absolutely part and parcel of counter insurgency warfare.

Q134 Mr Jenkin: What is your assessment of the civil-military projects being delivered in Helmand and generally in Afghanistan at the moment?

Dr Greenall: I will have to defer to my colleagues because one of the things I did advise was that I had not been down to Helmand.

Q135 Mr Jenkin: Okay, not Helmand, but you were elsewhere in Afghanistan.

Dr Greenall: I was elsewhere. They have been slow.

Q136 Mr Jenkin: What are they actually building apart from roadblocks?

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Dr Greenall: Roads and telecoms have been very successful, but talking to the government department, for example on roads, very great progress on roads and I would say it is an outstanding success but there is no budget—because they have been done on bilaterals there is no budget for repairs so they would despair, the people in the road department, saying our budget for repairs has increased by \$1 million a year and we do not have the money to do it, so the roads are coming apart as fast as we are building them.

Dr Akiner: This comes back to local knowledge. The weather conditions are terrible and therefore the roads, buildings of any sort, have to be repaired with major repairs every single year after the winter, so unless there is an on-going budget for maintenance, these things just fall apart. I have seen it throughout the region, not just in Afghanistan. The second problem is that a lot of these infrastructure projects are white elephants, they are not tied in to any overall scheme of development. They look good and you can say to yourself that is fantastic, we have built this road, but if there is no traffic on it, if there is no way of sustaining it from within the community, if it is only foreign vehicles and the military who go up and down it, that is not helping the Afghan economy. In fact, if you are talking about useful development, what you probably need in Afghanistan is actually very, very low key development catering to local needs because most of the people are still subsistence farmers, so you do not need these high tech developments which will not last for this very reason, that they need continual maintenance and care. If I could just turn back to the poppy eradication—

Q137 Mr Jenkin: I am going to come to that later if I may. Norine MacDonald, we read of schools and police stations being built and then occupied by the Taliban and then destroyed by the NATO forces; is that actually happening?

Ms MacDonald: Yes. For example, the road between Lashkar Gah and Kandahar, which was completed this last summer, on my last drive on there I counted ten police stations and I would be happy to provide the Committee with photos of each of those police stations which are now burned-out wrecks surrounded by sandbags, with two very frightened Afghan National Army members in them. It would be very easy for anybody to make a co-ordinated attempt on all ten of those police checkpoints between Lashkar Gah and Kandahar. Just last summer, during the bombing of Kandahar, when I was travelling back and forth, the road was not open and we had to travel through the desert. The situation is as you state: the actual positive impacts on the local population are really not visible. I have seen a large amount of money dedicated by the government to aid and development and, sadly, on the ground it is so minimal as to be non-existent, and the psychological impact on the local population is not only a non-positive it is starting to be quite negative.

Dr Akiner: That is true, it is detached.

Q138 Mr Jenkin: The problem appears to be that the efforts of DFID and other NGOs are completely disconnected from the military effort and so there is no co-ordination between the two. Is that a fair description?

Ms MacDonald: I would say their effort is non-existent on the ground; what efforts there are will not have an effect for three to five years and they are not only disconnected from the military, they are not supportive, which is even worse.

Q139 Mr Jenkin: That goes for DFID as well as for the NGOs.

Ms MacDonald: “As well as the NGOs”—there are in fact no NGOs present in Lashkar Gah.

Q140 Mr Jenkin: You are talking about DFID being completely unsupportive of the military.

Ms MacDonald: From the viewpoint of Lashkar Gah and Helmand province, yes.

Q141 Mr Jenkin: Should not the military actually be given the resources that are currently being given to DFID so that they can actually apply them? The Royal Engineers—the Secretary of State told us that the Royal Engineers are actually delivering aid projects but they are not being given the resources to do them.

Ms MacDonald: If no one else is going to do it they should be allowed to do it. It is not their job, it is not what they are trained for, but functionally if DFID refuses to do it you have to do it or else everything that we have committed to Afghanistan is going to go down the drain.

Q142 Mr Jenkin: Exactly.

Dr Greenall: The timeframe is a very important part of this. The realistic timeframe post- conflict, over the years experience would tell us ten years to settle down, another ten years for real economic life to return. That is the sort of timescale that we should be looking at, and the idea that in three or four years you can make huge improvements—you can make some very strategic improvements and do very important things that change the lives of a lot of people, but generally across these areas you need a generation to make a difference and our idea of time is completely out of kilter with reality.

Dr Akiner: There is an important point here. We are talking about these projects being connected or not connected to the military, but my point is that they are not connected to the population either, and that is perhaps much more serious because if the population do not see that these things are going to benefit them, then there is no positive effects, they are something that the foreigners do for themselves.

Mr Jenkin: I fully understand that point, but if the military are not able to deliver those benefits they are not going to get the support of the population and the Taliban are going to get the support instead because they at least want to maintain people’s livelihoods in maintaining the poppy production.

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Q143 Linda Gilroy: What budget do you operate on and what are you doing with it, and if you were put in charge of the redevelopment issues tomorrow in Helmand province what would you do with that much bigger budget that is different from what is not being done at the moment? Other than the poppy crops, I do not want to get on to that yet, we will be coming to them.

Ms MacDonald: In aid, for example, I do not have an exact figure but I am guessing we have probably spent a quarter million on food aid and clinics since last summer. I agree with the previous speakers that you have to have the medium-term and the long-term plan, but you need an immediate aid surge in there to deal with really critical food issues.

Q144 Linda Gilroy: How would you go about delivering that if you were advising the Government?

Ms MacDonald: I am sure people with PhDs in development would be horrified to hear it but we put food on a truck and went out there and line them up and handed it out, so it is not that difficult to do and, as I said, we are doing that on a regular basis. There are 6,500 families in Mokhtar Camp, there are 1,000 families in what we call the city-camp in Lashkar Gah, so in fact the actual expense is not the issue when you look at the amount of money that is being spent on the overall effort. If you took even 10% of what you are spending on the military effort and put that into direct aid, food aid, to actually deal with the problem that they have of feeding their families—over 80% of them when we ask them worry about feeding their families and we certainly see that every day. I cannot over-emphasise the psychological effect of that in that community, so that is a very simple quick fix solution.

Q145 Mr Jenkin: On that very point what you are saying is that the Armed Forces that are meant to be protecting the population are not in a position to think, and they are starving alongside our Armed Forces. Is that the case?

Ms MacDonald: They are starving; I have seen dozens of starving children on the malnutrition and baby ward in the Lashkar Gah Hospital and I have seen starving elderly people. They are starving.

Q146 Mr Jenkin: And NATO forces are not in a position to deliver anything to deal with that.

Ms MacDonald: No, they are not. In March 2006 all food aid was stopped into Lashkar Gah province. There actually is an established internal displaced persons camp less than half an hour from the PRT. Maybe one of the things that would be useful, if I could just formally offer this, is any of you who happen to be in Lashkar Gah city, if you would like to come out with us to the camps. Part of this conversation is based on what is the reality there, so I would just like to invite you to come out with us and see for yourselves what the situation is in the camps, speak yourself to the locals and form your own opinions about the situation, because part of the problem with the policy development and the policy debate is an argument on the facts. I am

presenting you with a set of facts based on my experience; you are getting other sets of facts so I would like to invite you all to come with me, go to the camps, speak to the people directly and form your own opinions.

Q147 Mr Havard: Let us just unpack this a bit because you are very, very critical in your memo about DFID in particular. You have said their “lack of effectiveness in delivering essential food aid [which is the point you have just been making] and effective development has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and fuelled disillusionment.”⁷ This is the point about British soldiers being let down that my colleague Adam Holloway was talking about, and in some sense there seems to be an almost deliberate set of actions here, deliberately going about and creating that sort of tone. I do not think that is quite what we are trying to say, but we need to be very clear that what we have been told by our military is that this disconnect between DFID and the military is partly because of the overall commitment they have got about drugs eradication, but they have involved the NGOs and they have involved DFID in the military planning and their activities as part of the ISAF operation, so there should be no surprises between the military and DFID about aims and objectives and what they are doing on the ground but, you are right, there does seem to be almost like an *X-file* here, there is some sort of conspiracy of silence about this humanitarian crisis and people starving in the streets of Lashkar Gah. I have not heard this before so I am not quite sure what I am being told now. On the one hand we have our development people embedded in with our military in terms of the planning and you are now telling me that not only are they failing but the circumstances on the ground are not as reported. That is what I have taken from what you have said and I have to square that with what I am being told by other people.

Ms MacDonald: The one comment I would have on that—that is an accurate conclusion—I do not think there is any lack of good intentions. I believe that within the current structure of DFID the staff and the governance of DFID are operating as best they can, and the people I meet—

Q148 Mr Havard: But there is a difference in policy. Maybe you are not trying to be emotive here and I accept that, that is fine, let us set that aside for a minute. What you are saying is their response should be direct humanitarian aid: trucks full of food, dropping it in the streets, feeding people.

Ms MacDonald: Yes.

Q149 Mr Havard: That is completely different to the strategy that has been adopted which would create a dependency problem that we have seen elsewhere, so you are asking the British military and DFID to change the political direction in terms of its strategy of helping the Afghan police.

⁷ See Ev 89

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Ms MacDonald: Yes, it is absolutely necessary and it has to be done immediately.

Q150 Chairman: Shirin Akiner, you look as though you want to say something else.

Dr Akiner: Actually on the drug eradication, but I think we are coming to that later.

Chairman: We will come to that later. Kevan Jones.

Q151 Mr Jones: Can I pick up on one point. It is important to recognise that we are talking about one part of Afghanistan here and I actually accept the issue about some of the large projects like the US highway to nowhere and things like that. I am sorry, I do not accept that there is a disconnect occasionally, although there might be in certain parts, but I have actually been to schools in Kabul where the public are buying into this, they are actually very grateful for these clinics and other things, but I have to say we have been delivering a lot of things by quick impact projects by the British military on the ground and I think there is an issue—I have said this certainly in Iraq as well—where there is a new doctrine that has to be put in place and it is actually about the military delivering a development project rather than actually waiting for, I have to say, many hopeless NGOs to come in afterwards. Would you agree with me that it is not all doom and gloom everywhere in Afghanistan because there are certain projects which certainly are welcomed by the local people and have been supported by local people?

Dr Akiner: There are some projects that are good and certainly there are several projects that are good in intention. The sustainability is the issue here and that is very much in doubt. Secondly, you have been to show places, you are not picking and choosing where you will go at random. Rather for you, by the very nature of your sorts of visits, you will be shown success stories. I hear from people on the ground that some of the schools they build are empty shells, nothing happens there. If you think of providing education in an environment such as that, it is not just building a school you have to make provisions for, but bussing the children in—very often they will come from quite far away—and that has to go on on a regular basis. There has to be provision of not just textbooks but also all the writing materials, paper and so on and so forth. There has to be teacher training, there has to be monitoring, there has to be a long term strategy there. None of that is happening.

Chairman: We have got to move on, I am afraid, because we are running considerably behind now.

Q152 Mr Jenkin: Very briefly, Dr Greenall, you have worked extensively at the interface between DFID and the Ministry of Defence and we are told that it is all joined-up government. Can you give us an honest assessment of what the conversation is between the MoD and DFID, both here at Westminster and also on the ground?

Dr Greenall: There are two points really and one is on quick impact projects. There used to be, going back prior to 1997, very user-friendly for the Ministry of Defence, one-page applications, they were £20,000, there were delegated powers to an adviser with the

military commander, but that has now all been honed down. There were 14 pages the last time I looked at one and the restriction was down to £5,000 so it is a much more complicated procedure. It used to go through military imprest accounts and was a very, very easy process. That is one point and the other is actually having people on the ground. Over the last few years there has been much more reluctance because of duties of care and that sort of thing to actually have civilians on the ground in conflict areas. We could take a view on that, but my own personal view is that to actually get this to work you need to have senior people on the ground, right up in Helmand province, and in volume.

Q153 Mr Jenkin: And if they are not NGOs they have to be soldiers.

Dr Greenall: If civilians are not allowed to go there for whatever reason on government business then it has to be done by soldiers.

Q154 Linda Gilroy: On the poppy crop, last week the Secretary of State told the Committee that the UK Government supported President Karzai's decision not to adopt ground-spraying tactics. Norine, in your evidence you say that there is a correlation between poppy eradication and the rise in insurgency and you also report that "optimising the authority of military forces to engage in forceful counter-narcotics activities [and you then quote the commander of NATO forces] to 'push it to the edge' jeopardises both the safety of the troops and the stabilisation mission." Where and when have poppy eradication schemes been targeted in Helmand province particularly?

Ms MacDonald: They started a month ago, they are underway as we speak and there is violence associated with almost every eradication attempt on a regular basis. They are led by an American private military company called Dynacorp with the Afghan National Army. I saw the eradication teams coming along the road; the first night they arrived in Lashkar Gah there was a stand-off attack on their compound. It is a regular occurrence. We are all committed to the end of heroin trafficking from Afghanistan; however, as was stated, there is no viable alternative livelihood and the UN policy states that there should be no forced poppy crop eradication unless there is an alternative livelihood. I have visited villages the day after there has been eradication and because they equate the Dynacorp men with the foreign military, when I say "Who was here?" they say "The foreigners were here." "Which foreigners?" They do not know the difference so, sadly, if the British military goes into a district after an eradication they are on the receiving end of the anger and the violence of the local community. So it is fundamentally impossible for counter-insurgency tactics to be undertaking eradication because of the response it engenders in the community while at the same time trying to win the hearts and minds campaign. That is an unfortunate reality.

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Q155 Linda Gilroy: Some commentators have said that those eradication incidents that you have described are actually the Taliban being clever about that. Do you have sufficient evidence to know whether that could be true or not?

Ms MacDonald: Yes, that has been reported and they are very clever in the hearts and minds strategies. Also, unfortunately, the poppy crop eradication is happening with the poorest farmers who are unable to pay the bribes, so that is another way for them to go in there and provide the support to show that they are the ones that are caring and concerned about the livelihoods of the locals. Their propaganda machine is very sophisticated, they are from there, they speak the language, they know how to build support there and it is something that we do not have the same background and instant history in, and that is why I believe that they are prevailing in the hearts and minds campaign.

Q156 Linda Gilroy: We take it from that you are not opposed to eradication of poppy if there could be an alternative livelihood programme.

Ms MacDonald: Absolutely.

Q157 Linda Gilroy: Have you seen in your time there any alternative livelihood programmes apart from the illicit poppy crop that you recommend? Have you seen any other successful alternative livelihood programmes at all?

Ms MacDonald: They are not successful yet and they cannot be because you need an irrigation system, and the beginnings of an irrigation programme has been funded by USAID, but that will take three to five years. That is a very good CADG that is running that—I have forgotten, the acronym . . .

Dr Greenall: Central Asia Development Group.

Ms MacDonald: That is a fantastic programme and it should be supported, it is absolutely necessary. When we talk about poppy licences for medicine we are not saying it should happen, we are saying it should be tested because there are a lot of outstanding questions, so I want to be very clear about that. It is successful in Turkey and in India, it should be looked at in Afghanistan because it will send a positive message, it will support the Karzai government and it should be tested. We are not taking the position that it should be implemented.

Linda Gilroy: You must understand the concerns that people have; this is such a fragile society with so little in the way of security that if you look at that proposal, warts and all and not just as the ideal, it could actually just feed into making Afghanistan a narco-economy and it would be very difficult without security—

Mr Jenkin: That is what it is.

Q158 Linda Gilroy: I said feed into making it a narco-economy, I accept that it already is there, but it would not solve the problem it would just continue the problem. What part of your proposal actually tackles that and gets it in the right direction of travel?

Ms MacDonald: These are legitimate concerns, which is why I said we are not taking the position that it should be implemented, we are saying it should be tested—and I have another handout. What we would like to try—and I want to be very specific—is we would like to run pilot projects in the next planting season these test projects in Helmand province. We are prepared to do that with a proper set of monitors etc. What we have found in a lot of the research we have done—and I believe a lot of you have already seen our feasibility study, and if you have not seen it we will happily give you copies of that—and the follow-up is there are two things that Afghanistan has: one is an opium crop and the second is very strong local control at the village level. When you go into the villages it is not chaos, it is a very controlled environment and what we would like to try and test is what we call a “village-based model” so that the licence would actually be given to the local community and if anybody breaches the licence it means that the local community loses their licence. It would be predicated on them delivering—you can figure out exactly how much they should deliver for each village and they have to deliver an accurate amount or they lose their licence. It would be used to produce codeine tablets so you are not transporting around the province the raw opium. There is a series of devices that we would like to test to see whether we can answer what we think are legitimate concerns. The thing about trying is that you would be sending a positive message to local people that we are with them trying to find solutions. Any village that gets a licence would also have to be committed to diversifying; we do not think there should be a mono crop. There is a series of conditions that you could put in place. All of this would actually give them one reason to support the Karzai government and we think it is very important to give them reasons at this moment to support the Karzai government and the presence of the international community but, as I said, we are not saying it should happen, we are saying it should be tested and see what the results are and whether those legitimate concerns that you have expressed can be dealt with in some innovative models.

Q159 Linda Gilroy: Has that in fact been attempted in any other part of Afghanistan, the use of the local Jirgas?

Ms MacDonald: No, it has not. We would start to do it in Helmand and in Kandahar and Nangarhar. As I said, we want to try and find the proper vehicle to do that that would give the proper political assurances and make sure that all the relevant agencies were involved in the process and monitoring.

Dr Akiner: Everyone speaks as though in Afghanistan there has always been illegal cultivation of the poppy crop; in fact, until the mid 1980s if we look to the Afghan experience they grew poppies for opium under strict UN control and the system worked, for the reasons that you have pointed out: that there was local control as well as central government control. The system

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broke down in the second half of the 1980s as the Mujahideen began to embark on an operation, arms for opium—rather similar and possibly with the same people involved as arms for drugs in Nicaragua. The genie is out of the bottle now and all the solutions that are being suggested are certainly worth testing, but if you are looking at the bigger picture what will happen for sure is that the poppy plantations in Afghanistan are eradicated they will simply move across the border to Tajikistan, to Pakistan, to Xinjiang so the problem as such will not go away. You might be able to solve it in Afghanistan using all sorts of levers and pressure points, but the problem is much bigger. What we are also seeing now throughout the region is the growth of local addiction and a rise in the popularity of synthetic drugs. This is where the surrounding states—Iran, Russia and China—are particularly concerned because it directly affects them. In any strategy for controlling and hopefully eradicating, as far as that is conceivable, illegal cultivation of poppies, they need to be involved because they are the ones who are also suffering directly. We often talk as though it is simply a problem for us, but it is not.

Q160 Mr Holloway: Norine referred to the Central Asia Development Group which has a huge agricultural development programme in Helmand with extraordinary local Afghan infrastructures. I do not know if you know, but that is no longer being funded so they are sitting around the compound doing nothing. Is there not a point that there is actually some Afghan infrastructure for development and there are actually structures in the villages and you do not actually need the Royal Engineers or the UN who may or may not come next year. Is that not something that we are missing out, that the Afghans do have some capacity themselves?

Ms MacDonald: We do not have what we would call a Western style rule of law, infrastructure and governance in there and we do not necessarily immediately see the governance that is there because we are not used to it. For example, the reason we only survey men is because the social controls and the social structure make it impossible for us to hire women and survey women; it is really strong and you cannot break through that and it governs their behaviour. There are some complicated relationships around sharing water and the use of community facilities, but it all does exist. As I said, the village is a highly controlled structure and we want to experiment and see whether it is possible to take that force and use that to support the Karzai government and address these issues. It is a combination of our approach, the international community's approach, and what already exists. We need to find some innovative synergies there and experiment with that.

Q161 Mr Havard: This business about eradicating poppy, we were told by our side of this, the British military, that we are not engaging in eradication policies and what you describe are American contractors, is that correct?

Ms MacDonald: That is correct, but I do believe your Government is financing them.

Q162 Mr Havard: We will ask about that separately, but let us just take this point. You say you want a special trade framework that is making the growing of these poppies and production facilities in the village to turn them into codeine and what have you, so you add the value up a point, which is what I understand is happening with the illicit drugs now. That is the major change between the last time I have been, that the production is actually happening in the village and they do not just export the raw product. They have twigged onto that, you want to do that but you talk about a special framework and you talk about it becoming a taxable activity, but it becomes part of the legal economy as opposed to the illegal economy. Of course, you also talk about using the “proven local control systems” and you talk about the “renowned tradition of strong local control systems and economic profits remaining in the villages.” I remember having a discussion with some of General Dostrum's boys about giving up their guns; there are certainly strong local control systems in various parts of Afghanistan but I am just wondering whether you are making the process of growing something that will leak out illegally more efficiently than it currently is because you do not have the criminal justice system and other parts of the mechanisms of the state in order to enforce and practically police what you describe as a jolly good idea.

Ms MacDonald: And I understand those concerns. For example, if all of us lived in a village together and we were all farmers we would know, because we have all been living there for generations, I would know exactly how many jiribs you had and how many jiribs he had and I would know exactly how many kilograms of opium he can produce and you can produce. Our village licence would calculate on the base of our jerbis the total amount that we would have to deliver. If he does not deliver you lose your licence; if you do not diversify, he loses his licence. We have to test that. As I said, we are not saying it should happen in Afghanistan, we are just saying we are spending millions of dollars on a counter-narcotics strategy that is counterproductive—cultivation was up 60% last year. The Americans did this successfully in Turkey and India and we should give it a try, so what we are asking for is to run pilot projects with a balanced, politically diverse group of observers and see what the answers are to these questions. I cannot give you any assurance on these points unless we have been allowed to test them.

Q163 Mr Havard: I know you cannot. I am well aware of that.

Dr Greenall: The wise course is to leave those counter-narcotics alone. Whatever you do you will end up with the law of unintended consequence; it is highly complicated and it involves the whole of Afghan society. It draws you into very complicated internal politics and even if you were successful it

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would only migrate across the Oxus. I am welcoming the option to try and do something legitimate because of the point I made about the rainfall and the unreliability of cereal crops in Afghanistan, but it must be incentive-driven. If it is incentive-driven and the market favours it, it will happen.

Chairman: Thank you very much indeed to all three of you. You have been extremely, if I may say so, courageous, not in going to Helmand but in coming

here. Thank you for your most valuable evidence and we will be able to think very long and hard about what you have told us. I will now declare a three-minute break before the next part of the session.

The Committee adjourned for a short time.

Witnesses: **Mr Robert Fox**, Freelance Journalist, **Mr Rory Stewart**, Author and Chief Executive of the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, Kabul and **Dr Michael Williams**, Head, Transatlantic Programme, RUSI, gave evidence.

Q164 Chairman: I should give you too a warm welcome to our evidence session. I wonder if you could possibly introduce yourselves and say what your experience is of Afghanistan and of what we are doing there. Can we start with you, Robert Fox?

Mr Fox: My name is Robert Fox; I have been a journalist for 40 years, I am also a part-time historian and I am now involved with ARAG at the Defence Academy where I have been involved with Afghanistan. I am not experienced as the gentleman on my left, but I first went there in 1989 to see the Russians withdraw and spent a lot of time there then, then I had quite a long break. I have been back four or five times since 2001 and I lately went on General Sir Michael Jackson's last visit as CGS in the summer and I spent a fortnight there at the end of January and beginning of February which was very instructive. I must add that do a lot of work with the British formations going out there, including divisional headquarters and, lately, the 12 Mechanised Brigade. It is on the media perception, just how journalists might or might not perceive the narrative that will unfold and that they will participate in.

Q165 Chairman: Were you there at the dam?

Mr Fox: I spent four days up on the Kajaki Dam and I would, if I am allowed later on, Chairman, like to talk about some specifics. I should explain to you that I have had an extended experience of being embedded with British forces, notably in the entire Falklands campaign and I have also travelled in Iraq. I have been in Iraq rather more frequently than I have been in Afghanistan and I have lately started taking up Afghanistan.

Mr Stewart: I was briefly in the Army and then I joined the Foreign Office. I served in Indonesia, then in Yugoslavia, then in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. I spent 21 months walking on foot from Turkey to Bangladesh, I wrote a book about Afghanistan and a book about Iraq. I now live in Kabul where I have lived for the last 18 months running something called the Turquoise Mountain Foundation. We are involved in restoring part of the historic commercial centre of Kabul and we train Afghan craftsmen and try to find markets for Afghan goods.

Dr Williams: My name is Michael Williams and I run the transatlantic security programme at the Royal United Services Institute. Since 2005 RUSI has been engaged in research and writing on operations on the cusp of warfare and post-conflict reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan. This year my research has focused on civil-military relations in Afghanistan supported by the government of Canada and NATO, essentially strategic concept modelling trying to pull apart what has happened so far and where the crisis is headed.

Q166 Chairman: Thank you very much. Can I start with the mission and can I ask you first, Dr Williams, are you clear on what the UK ISAF mission in Afghanistan is?

Dr Williams: Yes and no. The stated mission is to support the government in Kabul and extending governance throughout Afghanistan by maintaining security. NATO has adopted, and in turn the UK Government adopted, a very broad conception of security which means that it can do everything or nothing essentially. By assuming everything NATO has put itself into a corner I think in that instead of being one part of the solution, it is being seen by the public, by the Afghan Government and by the majority of people looking at the scenario as responsible for the entire situation whereas really it should be a component. UNAMA is not doing very much, the international community is not doing very much; we need much more co-ordination and cross-communication in terms of international approaches to Afghanistan. NATO should not be doing all the work by itself.

Q167 Chairman: Would you like to add anything to that, Rory Stewart?

Mr Stewart: We are in a very dangerous stage. The initial strategy of course in Afghanistan was for a light footprint in 2001, 2002 and 2003. That was a considered approach led by Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN special representative. He believed that deploying too many troops on the ground would both undermine the capacity of the Afghan government and spark an insurgency. Since then we have begun to increasingly expand our ambitions and the range of activities we are involved in, including of course the deployment of more troops and we are now in a situation in which we are

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simultaneously trying to pursue quite different objectives that stretch from counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, state building, development, democratisation. Very few of these issues are logically connected and each one of them could be pursued on its own. I believe that the deployment to Helmand is a dangerous distraction from the core activities of the Afghan Government and that we are wasting resources and valuable policy time on a mission which I cannot see succeeding.

Mr Fox: The expression was used in the earlier session about the mission losing focus, and in practical terms I think it has because, as my colleagues have described, there is a great divergence of view because it is undoubted that the main point of effort for the British is in Helmand province and it is counter-narcotics. I doubt if many of the other NATO allies would see it in those terms. The US still, from my encounters with US commanders and diplomats, see it as part of the global war on terror and enduring freedom. The question that has arisen in the minds of NATO allies is whether this is in fact strategic ground, whether it is a discretionary or vital operation. I work a great deal with the Italian press, I have just been to Germany, and they certainly do not see it as urgent as we do. It is becoming very atomised, the view of the mission. The NATO spokesman, I should add, Mark Laherty, about a year ago said that the main effort must be to sustain NATO, NATO's credibility is on the line. This does not play either with the majority of the allies or with the majority of the media, I must say, the way that the media message has gone through.

Q168 Chairman: Given what you understand of the mission, do you believe its objectives are achievable?

Mr Fox: Given the resources and the issues that run throughout both parts of this discussion of sustainability, I would have to be unequivocal and say no.

Q169 Chairman: Would you agree with that, Rory Stewart?

Mr Stewart: I would also say no and I would say it would be very dangerous to believe that simply bringing in more troops or more equipment was going to make any difference to that. We fundamentally neither have the understanding, the will, the resources nor the consent of the local population to try and pursue this kind of policy in Helmand. Simply bringing in more troops will make the situation worse.

Dr Williams: In Helmand I very much agree with my fellow presenters here. Kevan Jones made the point quite rightly that there are areas of success in certain parts of Afghanistan which should not be overlooked; however our current objectives and the resources put to those objectives, coupled with the lack of support within our own populations for the campaign, I find it very doubtful in some cases that it could be successful.

Q170 Mr Holloway: Mr Stewart, in the *New York Times* and elsewhere you say that you think this is deemed to failure whatever you do in a sense because this is a very traditional, Islamic and xenophobic society. Can you expand on that?

Mr Stewart: I do not believe the mission in Afghanistan as a whole is doomed to failure, I believe there is a lot of opportunity for us in Afghanistan but we are wasting our resources on Utopian ideas. We have set the bar much too high and I am very worried about what currently seems to be happening. People seem to be talking in a highly moralistic language and when I say "Can we defeat the Taliban?" politicians reply "We have to defeat the Taliban." When I raise the problems in southern Afghanistan people respond, "Surely you are not saying that we ought to sit back and do nothing". The answer is of course we can do a great deal. Primarily we can defend ourselves against the terrorist threat from Afghanistan, we can do considerably more projects which prevent the population from becoming disillusioned. I am not talking here really about traditional development projects, I am talking about heavy infrastructure projects, projects which deliver to Afghan demands which are essentially for jobs and infrastructure. Thirdly, we can do serious, sustained development projects of a traditional kind in the country, but acknowledging our limits is both an empowering thing—it is something that allows us to focus on what we can actually achieve—but it is also something that should make us cautious about trying to pursue a radical policy of, for example, elimination of narcotics, attempts to suddenly change gender relations, attempts to destabilise the political structures in southern Afghanistan when we have no credible alternative. As the members of the Committee are aware we have now been through three governors in a year in Helmand. This represents a real failure on the part of the international community—because it is largely the international community that is putting the pressure on Karzai—to understand what would be required from the governor of Helmand. We have gone from Sher Mohammed Akhunzada who was portrayed as a drug-dealing warlord to Engineer Daoud who was an English-speaking NGO friendly technocrat from Kabul and we are now back to an extremely eccentric and peculiar governor who appears to have the merits of neither of his predecessors. I believe, therefore, that we need to acknowledge that communities in Southern Afghanistan are considerably more conservative, anti-foreign, than we acknowledge, that there is genuine local support for the Taliban, that we have tended in talking about hearts and minds not really to focus on hearts and minds so much as on bellies, by which I mean we tend to think like Marxists and assume that people's primary motivations are economic. Of course, the military, of anybody, should understand that it is quite possible for money to have non-economic motivations and in the case of many communities in southern Afghanistan those are religious, ideological and it is quite easy in Quetta at the moment to recruit by

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saying “come and fight the English”. Therefore, I would say we perhaps need to acknowledge that Southern Afghanistan may remain for the foreseeable future fragile, traumatised and not fully under governmental control, that we need a much more decentralised governmental system, that Karzai’s approach to the southern areas perhaps needs to be closer to the approach that Pakistan takes to the federated tribal areas, which is to say he needs to rely more on local surers at a village level, not just at provincial level and on the use of political agents, and that we need to invest in areas where they are generally welcomed. It is a disgrace currently that in Kabul the garbage is seven feet deep in the city, 200 yards from the presidential palace. This is a massive national political symbol that we have the resources to improve, win consent and support from the Afghanistan people, instead of wasting our time trying to pursue development projects in areas where security does not allow us to do development and where the population often do not wish us to be present.

Q171 Mr Jenkin: Let us just be absolutely clear. There is a reason for us to have a footprint in Afghanistan. Do each of you regard that as essential for our national security in order that we prevent al-Qaeda coming back, or is this something we could walk away from and not worry about, apart from the humanitarian crisis? Strategically do we actually need to be there?

Dr Williams: I think it cannot be doubted to say that we must be in Afghanistan for national security reasons. Leaving Afghanistan and walking away we would have the same situation in Iraq which, unfortunately, is not of our own making, it cannot be done. I do not think that we should abandon Afghanistan. We made promises to Afghanistan going in there that we would deliver on certain things which we have not done and to walk away would be negligence. From an internal security perspective, the heroin problem that you have on the corner of the street in Brixton is intricately linked to the situation in Afghanistan as well, and I am not at all endorsing a complete counter-narcotics programme at the moment, I agree completely with what has been said by my fellow panellists here on that subject. But, to look at Afghanistan as something that NATO can walk away from and the UK can walk away from is to ignore lessons from history.

Q172 Chairman: Do you think we are having any sense of a positive impact, UK and ISAF forces, in Afghanistan in any direction?

Mr Fox: I would like to answer the previous question.

Q173 Chairman: By all means.

Mr Fox: I think it is very important because it is all very well for military experts and think-tanks, as we have heard, to say that it is absolutely vital, that we need to stay there for X and Y reasons, but I think this is where in the public domain, and I deal with the information pool that goes out there

and I know what my editor, publishers and readers are interested in, as we got in the BBC polls in Iraq we are getting a very similar thing from Afghanistan: were you to use some of these terms, is this strategic ground? It is an open question. It is very difficult to get it across now because actually not too many people talk about al-Qaeda being there and, good God, if things go really wrong if you are a farmer in Panshway then al-Qaeda will come back. The Panshway farmer is talking about the equivalence in his mind and in the mind of his family between the violence coming from the skies from NATO and the violence coming from the guns of the extortionists, the mafia entrepreneurs of Taliban. I think it is going to be very, very difficult as this goes on that we do not see terribly great success this will move from a very difficult situation in the public perception—this is the real danger—into the too difficult box made famous by Henry Kissinger when you have the in-tray, the out-tray and the too difficult tray and it could end there and it is not absolutely vital. I think that the drugs argument is not necessarily being won. Do you fight the battle of heroin or whatever on the streets of Marseilles, Milan, particularly London and Brixton, by tackling it upstream? It is a very, very open question. I think that this is going to be one of the big questions as to whether Afghanistan is strategic ground, particularly if you are talking, as American and British military commanders, about a commitment of 20 years. I think this is going to be very difficult. To follow your question, I do not think there is a quick victory in this one. General Richards has talked about Operation Medusa thwarting the attack on Kandahar last year in September as a tactical defeat for the Taliban. The Taliban, both socially and demographically, have infinite resources compared with the NATO presence and I think we are in a cycle now. I do not mean to nudge the agenda of the Committee but we really must say what the violence is about. What do we mean by the insurgency? What do we mean by the Taliban? I have read the transcript of General Houghton talking to you and I was rather concerned that he seemed to be implying that it is one unified enemy with several points of command; it just does not work like that, even in my limited experience and my experience of talking to Afghans in Helmand.

Mr Stewart: Just briefly on this, this definitely is not my area of expertise but it might be worth conceptually distinguishing more clearly between counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism. It is quite clear when you talk to General McNeill, the new US commander who has replaced General Richards, that he is thinking of counter-insurgency. He does not believe that his fight against the Taliban is part of the key fight against al-Qaeda or that US national interests are directly concerned with the counter-insurgency campaign. The counter-insurgency campaign is really about pursuing forces opposed to the Afghan Government. Very few of those people who we are killing have any intention of launching attacks against United States soil or UK soil. It is quite

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plausible that we could continue to pursue a good counter-terrorism strategy of the kind that we pursued in 2002–03 through intelligence operations and Special Forces operations, I do not think it requires trying to dominate every inch of ground with NATO troops and taking on these Taliban associated groups.

Q174 Chairman: Do you think the actions that we have been taking in Helmand have been a distraction?

Mr Stewart: Absolutely.

Q175 Chairman: Do you think it was a mistake to have the counter-clockwise move around Afghanistan?

Mr Stewart: I think it was an error to spread out too much. I think the 200 US troops sitting in a base in Lashkar Gah, who have been mocked a great deal, was probably a better approach than putting 5,500 British troops into the Province. The objectives that we set ourselves were clearly unachievable. A very disturbing aspect of this is that a year and a half ago, two years ago, when we were sitting around debating whether or not to deploy to Helmand it seemed to me that the majority of my colleagues in the Foreign Office and the military believed it was a bad idea but somehow this policy proceeded and a lot of the things that were predicted happened. The notions that were being sold that somehow within our deployment we would be able to allow NGOs to operate freely, get drugs under control, improve governance in the Province, none of these have been achieved. It seems to me that at the same time there are many areas of Afghanistan that are crying out for our assistance and genuinely would welcome us and invite us in. I cannot quite understand why we think this is a sensible policy.

Mr Fox: I do agree. It is 20/20 hindsight, I would agree with that. To make Helmand the centre of gravity of British operations in military terminology has been a mistake. I would like to just add to that. There was a great problem with the concept of operations. I recall very well the 3 Para Battle Group had been in for about six weeks when I visited with General Sir Mike Jackson and we were briefed by Colonel Stewart Tootal, the Battle Group Commander, and by Brigadier Ed Butler, the commander BRITFOR, and what it was predicated on was capacity building right across the piece of local Afghan forces. I think this is a fundamental weakness and it was one of the most worrying aspects that emerged during my most recent visit, and it is the fragility of Afghan forces. Let me put it like this: I did an interview with General Wardak, the Minister of War, who claimed that there is a usable force of 45,000 soldiers in the Afghan army. I hope it is not an indiscretion but I had a long conversation with somebody I know extremely well, Major General James Bucknall, the Chief of Staff of the ARRC and Chief of Staff, therefore, to General Richards' command. He said how fragile it was, that at best by the end of this year you are going to have 15,000

usable Afghan troops and only in particular regions. James Bucknall had experience of training the Iraqi army and I think that this is illustrative. The problem with training the Iraqi army at points was that you had broken it before you made it. We are in danger of doing the same in Afghanistan. This brings me back to the concept of operations in Helmand, particularly in the northern reaches of the Helmand river system, in Musa Qaleh, Sangin, now very well known in the headlines. That was predicated on the idea that you would build a platoon house, you would build out and you would get out within weeks or months and hand over to Afghan national forces. This is simply not obtainable. The word I heard right across the piece from multinational trainers of the Afghan army in the base outside Kabul, where they are doing terrific work, 18 hour days and you name it, they are really working on training at all levels, one senior British officer used the word again, this is very "fragile". We are on an edge and I think perhaps far too much is being expected of local Afghan forces. I was quite convinced that the local Afghan forces around the Kajaki dam, for instance, their loyalty was utterly tradable and they would go over within weeks if they were under severe pressure from the Taliban.

Dr Williams: Taking the larger strategic context of the situation, it is a decision now whether we leave the south to be an area where it is abandoned, no law and order essentially, no governance, leave it be and just work on the north. I have been to areas in the north of Afghanistan that have been quite successful, they have got schools being built and communities are part of the project, they are integrated. The Germans have done fabulous work in that area which follows on from the British approach in that area which was very, very good. However, the strategic question is do we leave an area of instability in the south unaddressed? I would pose that eventually at some point that would come to challenge progress in the north of the country. Whether you look at it in terms of the UN perspective or the US perspective initially of operations to go in a counter-clockwise motion, whether that was really smart, I am not sure. There is a 2005 RAND study by James Dobbins, who is probably one of the foremost experts on this subject, and I quote from that study. He says: "There appears to be an inverse correlation between the size of the stabilisation force and the level of risk. The higher the proportion of stabilising troops the lower the number of casualties suffered and inflicted, indeed most adequately manned post-conflict operations suffer no casualties whatsoever." It is interesting if you look at Kosovo, we had 50 times more troops per capita in Kosovo than they do in Afghanistan. I accept and we can talk about the very, very different strategic realities of both countries, but the difficulties we face in Southern Afghanistan are to a large extent a result of the fact that we are not properly prepared for those operations, they have not been properly manned or not executed. General Richards did a fabulous job, but he said that if the

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Taliban had not chosen to say, "We will defeat NATO here and now", he would have been out-manoeuvred, they could have gone round him in Kandahar and he could have done little about that. Again, that is from an interview with General Richards. I am just giving my analysis of the situation. You have to take that into the context of can you leave the south without having repercussions on the north and if the problems are there in the south is that because it is an intractable situation or is it one that we have not adequately addressed and then, of course, following the discussion from this morning, are you dealing with the external dimension, which is can you address it by military force. There is an external dimension that even military force in southern Afghanistan might not solve the problem.

Chairman: I think we ought to record that Rory Stewart was showing disagreement with what you were saying. I also think we ought to move on because we are running a bit behind now.

Q176 Mr Borrow: I just wanted to pick up on a point with Mr Stewart on the distinction between counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency and link it back to the reason we are in Afghanistan in the first place, which is counter-terrorism. If the Taliban had given up al-Qaeda we would not have gone in. The key thing strategically is to ensure that a government or administration of some sort does not come to power in Afghanistan which could provide a haven for terrorist bases.

Mr Stewart: Definitely.

Q177 Mr Borrow: At the moment it is counter-insurgency but that is to ensure there is a stable administration of some type.

Mr Stewart: I think we can certainly achieve your objective of ensuring that a government does not come to power that would provide safe haven for terrorist training camps. That does not require trying to put 20,000 troops on the ground to fight the Taliban in every village, and that is what we need to be clear on. The other thing is we need to get out of a world in which we are talking continually about what we ought to do rather than what we can do. The reality, of course, is yes there may well have been 50 times as many troops on the ground in Bosnia but that would mean 2.5 million troops on the ground in Afghanistan. It is simply inconceivable that we could have the number of troops required to pursue James Dobbins' notion of counter-insurgency. It is inconceivable that we could have the kind of relationship with Pakistan which would allow us to control the borders in the way that we would like. We need to accept these things as intractable realities and design a policy that addresses them rather than perpetually speculating that if only we had a little bit more of this, that or the other we would be okay.

Q178 Mr Borrow: If I could move on now to the questions I was supposed to ask. The first one is to Mr Stewart. In your opinion, how would you say

the UK presence is viewed by Afghanis and is there a difference between different ethnic groups within the country?

Mr Stewart: Yes, I think broadly speaking you could make that claim. Essentially the Uzbek, Huzara, Tajik, Turkmen populations in the centre and north of the country are quite well disposed not just towards British troops but towards a foreign presence in general. The Huzara, for example, three million people in the centre of the country, have been the great winners from this intervention. They were killed in large numbers by the Taliban and they now have considerably more freedom and autonomy but the Pushtun groups in the south have tended to feel angry and disenfranchised and in some cases, because through the early 1980s we encouraged this great myth of Jihad and resistance to foreign oppression, it is quite easy for people to draw on that to frame their opposition to Britain or the United States.

Dr Williams: I just wanted to support Rory in particular your first question on this idea of what are the objectives. The ultimate objective is to prevent a hostile government from controlling the whole of the country. It may very well be that the operations in Afghanistan in the south are unsustainable and I do not quote the RAND study to say that we need to have that number of troops, but perhaps this year we will not be able to do that essentially. To look at what we do in the rest of Afghanistan, being able to support the government and prevent the whole country from coming under Taliban control, it might be a better strategy and the operation in the south might ultimately undermine the larger strategic objective. I completely agree with that assessment.

Q179 Mr Borrow: In the previous block of questions Robert Fox talked about the fact that we are not talking simply about a battle with the Taliban as a single unified command structure. Do your colleagues want to elaborate on that?

Mr Stewart: It is a very difficult subject because, of course, it has now become quite fashionable for the military to say, "Well, who are the Taliban anyway?" whereas nine months ago essentially it appeared that we had quite a clear definition of the Taliban, the Taliban were the people who we killed but not the people we negotiated with. Now we are realising, of course, that you can cut them up any number of ways. You can distinguish between extremely aggressive extreme groups of leaders based in Quetta with whom no negotiation is possible, you might be able to identify a middle group of people who remain loyal to the notion of the Afghan nation but espouse a lot of the conservative religious ideology of the Taliban, and finally a third perhaps floating group of young men who are excited by the notion of resistance to foreign occupation but do not have a serious ideological commitment and might be won over. These kinds of things become most interesting, though not as a broad division into three, but when you get down to the village level and try to work out in this particularly community who is in charge,

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is it a tribal elder, is it a particular group of old men who may have no connection to the tribal structures and how do they relate to those groups, that is the kind of work that one would hope eventually the Afghan Government would get involved in. It is fundamentally not military but political work. It would involve some kinds of negotiations. The Dutch in Uruzgan I commend very much to the Committee as a very good model. They would say it is not a Dutch model but an Afghan model but in essence they are very much trying to work with communities that invite them in, they are relying on a governor who was himself the Taliban deputy minister and is quite a conservative mullah. They appear to be able to slowly reach out but it is not the kind of strategy which is being pursued by NATO so far and I am slightly concerned it may not be the strategy that General McNeill is about to pursue in the next six months.

Q180 Mr Borrow: Presumably the Dutch were doing it as part of the NATO force?

Mr Stewart: One of the problems with NATO is that every single one of these countries seems to have a completely different view about what they are doing. They have different rules of engagement, they do not like to listen to the headquarters, they listen to their politicians at home, and this was very clear in Iraq and it is very clear again in Afghanistan. It must be very frustrating that the United States has 90% of the troops, 90% of the money and wants to take 99% of the decisions.

Dr Williams: The NATO model is essentially faulty in that the PRTs are being asked to do too much across the entire country. There is no standardised model for a PRT which in some ways allows it flexibility to cater for local needs but at the same time the locals do not know what to expect so there is no standard output, no standard composition. The military side of the PRT reports through the ISAF chain to NATO, the civilian side of the PRT reports back to national governments in their home capitals. The funding comes from home capitals, which thus means that PRTs answer to politicians sitting in Berlin, London and Washington and not to the commander on the ground, not to the President of Afghanistan, not to the regional or local leaders. I think it is important to remember that all politics is inherently local. One of the things that has been more effective in Afghanistan have been devolved efforts where there is a heightened degree of autonomy with minimal reporting back to the overall commanders. We tend to try and put—this goes to the Taliban as well—things into Western models of conflict and Western paradigms and this is simply not the case in Afghanistan. If you talk about the Taliban or al-Qaeda as some enemy as you do the Soviet Union you entirely miss the point. I do not fault the military for doing this, it is a difficult situation to overcome, but it is one that we must work on. Again, the approach to reconstruction and conflict needs to adapt. We see a lack of accord between the PRT approach in one area and, for instance, the German role in the north

when compared to even the Italians in Herat to the west. That is something that needs to be addressed and also bringing other actors to do the job where possible. I would say that you do not need to have a severe military presence and a German PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif when that could be done by NGOs, very much so.

Mr Fox: I would like to add two footnotes to what I said. I am very worried about a one-size-fits-all approach to counter-insurgency. We love doctrine and now orthodox doctrine moves between British experiences in Malay and American experiences in Vietnam with sacred texts like McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty* and *Eating Soup with a Knife* by Nagl. These are almost looked on as holy texts. I agree with my colleagues, every situation that I have looked at, whether it is Kosovo and the mafia activities there behind the KLA and what I am looking at in Helmand, are absolutely *sui generis*. The second point that I would like to make about the insurgency is to add a very old expression into the debate but I know that the head of UNAMI uses it a hell of a lot. This is just what historians would call a pajakaran, a spontaneous explosion from below with very little political sense of direction or programme. The people are just really fed up, they are on their uppers, and if somebody says, "I have got the gun, fight", it is almost motiveless action at certain points. Certainly, for instance, the ground between the Kajaki dam and Musa Qaleh is full of people like that because, as one of the militia chiefs put it to me, "The only people with guns here, and they have the final argument, are the Taliban".

Q181 Mr Jenkin: I am very interested to know more about the Dutch model referred to by Rory Stewart. This is something without creating a one-size-fits-all approach that seems to be about delegated command and letting commanders on the ground use their discretion in view of the resources they have got available to produce best effects rather than following a more centrally directed agenda. Could you all comment on this, particularly if NATO cannot agree a single strategy for Musa Qaleha.

Mr Fox: Can I just say it is not exclusively Dutch. Having a Dutch wife and many colleagues and friends in the Dutch media, one must explain the extreme reluctance with which the Dutch went into Uruzgan and what they have done about it. They have thought asymmetrically about it. It is not exclusively Dutch because James Bucknall and General David Richards were much impressed by the individual initiative of a single Italian Alpini colonel who did much the same in a very difficult valley quite close into Kabul where he organised the surers, made the elders see that it was in their interests to have an Italian military presence to slowly put back the bad guys, where they had schools burnt down and so on. Yes, there is devolved command, there is mission command, and various groups are trying to deal with the facts as they see them on the ground. The Dutch exclusively concentrate on a very, very light military footprint.

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Mr Stewart: I agree that there are other people attempting similar things but the real secret of the Dutch, which is quite difficult to replicate, is that it is very reliant on very good political and tribal affairs officers, particularly a man called Matheus Toot who has been there for over a decade. The British are surprisingly poor at this. This is something we are supposed to be good at and really we are very, very bad at having anybody—I do not know where they would come from, whether they would come from DFID or the military or the Foreign Office—who is prepared to spend years sitting on the ground in Helmand mapping the political allegiances, mapping the tribal allegiances and really beginning to understand how power structures work at a local level. That then allows the Dutch to do a great deal through covert operations and a great deal through intelligence operations, intelligence agents, creating very sophisticated links with surers which actually helps them in their counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism because they can get these people to tell them where the bad guys are. They also require very flexible funding arrangements in order to pursue these kinds of relationships. I am honestly extremely disappointed, Britain ought to be good at doing this and I cannot quite understand why none of the institutions of government are really getting involved in it. The final footnote would be that the Dutch would ultimately say that this should not be a Dutch approach, their aim is to make this an Afghan approach and really what Matheus Toot is trying to do is to explore some of these connections, discuss with the Afghan Government new approaches, new constitutional approaches, and try to get Afghan political agents ultimately taking over the weight of these kinds of negotiations. We are never going to have the kind of knowledge, the kind of commitment to do it ourselves, all we can do is nudge things in this direction.

Dr Williams: I completely agree. The sad fact of the NATO deployments is that the rotations are too quick. We do not have a basis of knowledge that we can deploy now but, as it is, when someone gets on the ground, let us take General Richards, for example, being a very high profile one, he is there for a set number of months and then he leaves and all of that expertise goes with him, all of the knowledge and relationships he has built up. It is the same thing at the local level. You cannot establish relationships with Afghans when a principal fact of their culture is to have very strong, close personal relationships. The same thing with other agencies, you can ask about working relationships with DFID, the military, the FCO or NGOs when everyone is changing over and NGOs are sources that generally have a much deeper knowledge base in terms of knowing the country because their people will have generally been in the country for decades. It is something that we need to work on.

Q182 Robert Key: Could we look at operational matters now. Michael Williams, you have been very critical of the number of NATO forces in

Afghanistan. A number of people have commented that Operation Medusa last summer was a tipping point, that we only just managed to make it happen, that we could have gone the other way and lost out, that we lost a lot of ground anyway and subsequently. Was that because there was no Theatre Reserve?

Dr Williams: Certainly I think that Theatre Reserve would have made a large difference in General Richards' ability to combat the situation he found. Again, accepting all the criticism that perhaps what we are doing in Helmand is wrong, looking at this from the perspective of ongoing operations, if he had a Reserve he would have been able to perhaps render a much more decisive and tactical defeat of the Taliban. Talking about strategic defeat is unrealistic, you need to think in terms of accommodation at some point and ultimately this is something that will be resolved in discussion and negotiations. I refer to a situation such as Northern Ireland where you will resolve it not through weapons and arms but through on the ground talking. The fact of the matter is that if he had Reserve he would not have been pressed in the way he was last year.

Q183 Robert Key: Robert Fox, what additional military assets does ISAF need now?

Mr Fox: I would like to talk, if I could, from the British perspective. I think the lack of support helicopters is still alarming, particularly as in under one year we have gone up from one manoeuvre battle group to three manoeuvre battle groups. When you are trying to run that between seven and eight Chinook heavy transport helicopters it makes you extremely vulnerable. I know how difficult it is to train crews, to provide the equipment because it has to have the full defensive aid suite, but the lack of helicopter support is really risking a major tactical failure, particularly when commanders will say in confidence to journalists—whenever can you speak in confidence to a journalist—“I used to wake up and think this was the day that a Chinook would be shot down”. When the Nimrod crashed, and it crashed for mechanical failure, I know, 14 people went down. I am very worried about sustainability. I am very worried, which I look at through my defence academy lens, about the problem of mental and physical sustainability of the piece of software that we call the human flesh of our soldiers. David Richards has highlighted this to you. When you have young soldiers, fit, highly motivated from elite units, and they are all pretty good, 40 days under sustained fire, which is longer in the line than most infantry battalions had on the Western Front, you are asking for trouble. You are grinding them down. We are looking at tremendous physical and mental ageing of our soldier population. I am not saying we are facing disaster with this but if this goes on at this rate for another 18 months we will really have to have pause for thought. The US forces in Iraq are facing exactly the same thing, by the way.

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Q184 Robert Key: Mr Fox, this Committee has constantly been told by senior military commanders and ministers that we do not need any more helicopters in Afghanistan. You have seen the evidence we have been given, they say that the military commanders on the ground are being provided with all the helicopters they need. Who are we to believe?

Mr Fox: So have I been told that. On my visit with General Jackson I said, “Surely you need more support helicopters, you do not need such a heavy footprint as the Chinook”, which has been a problem on tactical occasions, “Oh, no, it is just a question of helicopter hours”. That is economy with the truth if ever there was one. Yes, you do need these helicopters. Why do I say it with such passion? It does lead me to reflect back on what happened 25 years ago. I fully recall telling H Jones on Sussex Mountain that the Atlantic Conveyor had been sunk and a hell of a lot of our helicopters, all but one of our heavy lift helicopters, went down and that delayed the approach to Port Stanley, which was obviously to be the culminating point, by 10 days to a fortnight. Expand that several times. I think that the garrisons that we have at Kajaki dam, for example, and in Sangin are utterly dependent on helicopter support, particularly on ageing helicopters as they are now, a hell of a lot of wear and tear, and they must be worrying. I am sorry to their Lordships who dictate our policy, civil but particularly military, I am afraid it has got to a point where I do not believe them.

Dr Williams: I have never met a military man who would deny having more access to equipment. Close air support was key last year in effecting a NATO defeat of the Taliban during Operation Medusa. Unless you have been to the country I do not think you understand how difficult it is to get from one area to another and these quick reaction forces that do not have the air support but are called to assist and by the time they get there the incident is long over and done with. The fact of the matter is what you put into the operation you will get in return and low levels of investment will equal a low output at the end.

Mr Stewart: I, of course, am very worried at the idea of investing more in this operation because I think that had we tried to go in heavy with more troops and more equipment at the beginning of 2002 we would have turned Afghanistan into Iraq and provoked an insurgency. We are on exactly the wrong path by continuing to ratchet up troop numbers and equipment. That said, I am fully in support of a notion that if soldiers are going to be on the ground and given a job they might as well have the correct equipment to pursue it. I would much rather we focused on what on earth we are trying to do and how credible it is that we are ever going to win a strategic victory rather than gradually inching up, as of course inevitably if General Richards is given a mission, he is not going to say, “This mission is impossible”, he is going to say, “Give me more troops, give me resources. Just another thousand, just another couple of thousand, we will get there”. I am very keen to try to sound a

note of caution to say it does not matter how many troops you have or how many helicopters you have if you have got no clear idea of what you are doing with them, and by bringing in more you are causing more problems because the fundamental issue on the ground is that many Afghans are beginning to perceive this as an occupation by foreign non-Muslim troops and this is causing anger and resentment in Afghanistan and throughout the Muslim world.

Q185 Mr Havard: Specifically on the helicopters, we have asked a lot of questions about this because there is concern about it. What we were told by David Richards was he did not need any more British helicopters, what there is within NATO is a commitment to provide helicopters by the other members of the NATO Coalition and they are not delivering the helicopters. Do the Brits always substitute for other people not complying with the things that they have agreed to? That is where you get to, is it not?

Mr Fox: I follow absolutely the direction of your question. I blush to say this to a three star/four star general but the boys on the ground really want Brit helicopters to turn up.

Q186 Mr Havard: They do.

Mr Fox: I am sorry. There are enough problems between the Army and the Air Force as to whether the Air Force will turn up on time; whether Italian Air Force—

Q187 Mr Havard: If you are speaking French it might be a problem!

Mr Fox: Seriously, if it is the Italian Air Force it really is a problem. For the “teeth” units—this is where I disagree with my colleague there—as much as we can we must mitigate the possibility of tactical reverse, of a very serious tactical reverse, of which there is the potential at Sangin and on the Kajaki dam in particular. It cannot just be done by gunship and ageing heavy lift helicopters. That is what has to be done. I do agree with Mr Stewart in that we have to review our concept of operations and understand in this complex insurgency, and it is an insurgency, protest or revolt, what exactly we want to do and what we think we can achieve.

Q188 Robert Key: How important to the future of NATO is the success of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan?

Dr Williams: I think if NATO fails in Afghanistan then you have to question how relevant the Alliance is to operations in future global security. If it fails it will become a forum for discussion, which may be suitable, but I think what the United States is looking for, and many allies, is a tool to manage international security further into Asia in the first half of the 21st century, so if we cannot provide a situation in Afghanistan, whether it is just a pull back to contain the north and support the government that way or whether it is a complete victory throughout the south, some degree of success must be evident in order for the

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Alliance to sustain itself otherwise you have allies in the West who then feel in the west of Europe and North America that the Alliance has failed in terms of their ability to muster force and you will have allies in the east of the organisation who then think the Alliance is not credible in deterring threats such as Russia, which is still of great concern to those countries.

Mr Fox: I agree, I think it is an open question and it is an exam question which they are failing at the moment, which comes back from NATO and other international gatherings that I have attended lately. I think it is the exam question that was set with the new strategic concept at the fiftieth anniversary summit in May 1999 in the middle of the Kosovo crisis: can NATO operate outside the North Atlantic Security Area? The answer is that if you take into consideration both at the operational level and the strategic level the folders and folders of caveats, and they are still there, that you get, the Germans say, “We are there for reconstruction, we are not there to fight the Taliban in the south”, and it is going to be very, very difficult. My sense is that it is floundering but it has not yet sunk because there is no alternative in dealing with EU officials, dealing with ESDP, and their view of security and the EU, although they have mounted some dozen missions now, will find it very, very difficult to step up to the plate in large and difficult operations involving conflict. I include even the European nations’ contribution to Lebanon, for example, in that.

Q189 Chairman: Rory Stewart, you were disagreeing?

Mr Stewart: I am by no means an expert on this but my instinct is that we are investing too much in these impossible objectives and saying the credibility of NATO or the credibility of the United States and Britain is all bound up in whether or not we are going to be able to achieve things that we obviously cannot achieve. If we can lower expectations, if we can set some realistic tasks, we should be able to get a situation in which NATO can emerge with some credit out of this and move on to do other things. So long as we continue trying to pitch for this impossible Utopian picture then I imagine that NATO will be damaged.

Q190 Robert Key: Do you between you have some sort of feeling about how the United States perceives the performance of ISAF?

Mr Fox: I think there is a problem here which was indicated by some of the commanders I have already mentioned, and I will not cite them because it would be invidious. They get the feeling in dealing with the new US command of ISAF in Kabul that the US sees itself as the US command and then NATO, as if the US is not part of NATO, and operationally this is a very, very big problem. You might have the European equivalent of a US Marine Corps Light, known as the UK Armed Forces, and it is coalitions of the willing. I do agree with you that from everything I hear, not hearsay but what people are saying to me, the Americans

have a much more isolationist view of NATO. As one of the speakers in the previous session said, it is almost as if they have written it off as a tool of real utility when force is involved. On your point about setting goals too high, I do agree. Great contrast has been made with all sorts of commanders in the way we have approached Afghanistan with the performance particularly of General Sir Rupert Smith when he was the UNPROFOR commander in very difficult circumstances. You may recall in Bosnia in 1995 somebody said—actually it was General James Bucknall, who was his MA in Northern Ireland—his great gift was to promise low and deliver high. The feeling is that a bit too much of the obverse has been happening over Afghanistan.

Q191 Chairman: Dr Williams, if you could be very brief.

Dr Williams: I just want to say that I think the Americans still see a utility to NATO. At the political level I have met with colleagues who are on the NSC who advocated against NATO’s involvement in Afghanistan and on a visit we did together were very impressed by what they saw in Afghanistan in the north. They were amazed also at the resilience of the troops, such as the Canadians, who had previously been mainly peacekeepers at fighting there. I do not think the US would back out at all. At the military level I think there is some reason for concern. The new commanders purportedly launched Operation Achilles without informing NATO Headquarters or any of the NATO ambassadors in Brussels. That is a concern and General McNeill does not speak very much of the comprehensive approach reportedly, so there could be a disjuncture between the military thinking and the political thinking, but at the political level I do believe that there is strong support for NATO’s presence there.

Chairman: I am glad I gave you the opportunity to put that in, it was very interesting.

Q192 Mr Borrow: Just touching on what would be perceived as failure, would I be right in assuming that were NATO to alter the strategic goals to take on board some of the issues that have been raised that would not necessarily be seen as failure, but what would be perceived as failure would be the failure of NATO members to deliver the troops and equipment in the way which had been agreed in line with the strategy of NATO? I am separating there is a perception now that if NATO allies do not come up with the troops, with the kit, for the existing mission that would be perceived as failure, but were the mission itself to change that would not be perceived as failure.

Dr Williams: On the first point in terms of coming up with kit, the mission is so ill-defined it allows a large degree of flexibility, so the Germans, for instance, say their troops have no caveats, they are providing the force needed to do the mission and they are doing that mission there, however we have other allies who say, “No, we need fighting forces in the south”, so there is a degree of separation here.

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However, it is very difficult to quantify whether that has an effect or not. NATO survived in Kosovo under similar circumstances. I think that if NATO could take Rory's advice on board, and I am commenting within the strategic objective now, and were to redefine its mission, perhaps saying they are going to leave southern Afghanistan in a certain manner and concentrate on other parts of the country, it would not necessarily be a failure. The ultimate failure would be if NATO left Afghanistan in a state worse off than it found it in 2001, which is certainly a possibility, that would be complete and utter abject failure.

Q193 Linda Gilroy: Rory, you were describing the advantage of lowering the expectation of the mission. Would you like to try and describe what a mission that had lower expectations would look like?

Mr Stewart: I really see this as a task for politicians, and it is a very exciting task because we are at a tipping point. We are at a moment where the rhetoric remains very high but, in fact, at the ground level the politicians are beginning to panic because the population is disenchanted and angry and I am very worried that we are about to flip suddenly from total engagement to isolation, from troop increases to withdrawal. We need to seize this point, freeze it and keep our involvement by redefining what we are trying to do there in terms that people can understand. The first key of those objectives should be counter-terrorism. We should absolutely ensure that our policies there are going to protect the interests of UK/US citizens on home soil. Secondly, I think we should be focusing on trying to deliver projects which Afghans demand. Thirdly, I believe we should be focusing on real sustainable development projects. Those are multiform, there are so many opportunities. For example, we need to look at Afghanistan much less as a nation state and much more as part of a broader region. We need to think about the potential for overland trade. It is now stuck between a number of very rapidly growing economies, some with very rich natural resources, and we need to invest in the road infrastructure. We need to concentrate on Afghan products for export. Afghans are unbelievably energetic and entrepreneurial; they have an extraordinary number of goods which they could sell internationally if we supported them in the correct way. All of this means drawing back from a statement that says, "We are going to turn Afghanistan overnight into a liberal democracy", it probably means accepting that we are not in the next three years going to eliminate illegal narcotics growth or radically change the way that Afghan men treat their women. These are worthy objectives but they are not objectives for three years, it requires patience, humility, perhaps accepting that we are never going to create a democratic state in southern Afghanistan. Nevertheless, there is an enormous amount to be done. Elizabeth Winter, who is in the room, who knows much more about Afghanistan than I do, can confirm that there is so

much opportunity and energy in Afghanistan if we got off our high horses, stopped talking about these extraordinary fantasies and actually worked at a grassroots level with Afghans. There is so much that could be done. There is so much more flexibility in Afghan society. We may not be as powerful as we pretend or as knowledgeable as we pretend but we are certainly more powerful and knowledgeable than we fear. There are many things that we can do.

Q194 Mr Crausby: Last week when the Secretary of State gave evidence to the Committee he was asked to give up an update on the situation in Musa Qaleh and he described the situation as unclear. How do you see the situation in Musa Qaleh?

Mr Fox: It is very difficult. When Musa Qaleh "fell" I was in Kandahar with two translators, one the AP correspondent who had stringers in Musa Qaleh, and the Marine Brigade Headquarters in the end were phoning us to find out what was going on. I would like to endorse Rory Stewart's point. We are frightened of going back to the era of Kipling and reinventing the role of the political officer, the figure who devotes his or her lifetime to the culture of this region, and we are sadly lacking in it. This is the answer to your point about Musa Qaleh, I do not think we really know, and this is the flaw in a lot of our military concepts. This is where network-centric cannot help you at all. It can see bits and pieces but it cannot see into the minds of the village elders of Musa Qaleh, and that is the problem. It goes backwards and forwards. Yes, you can knock off the heads of a few metaphorical tall poppies, as they did with the leadership, but talking to an Afghan militia commander protecting the dam who was from Musa Qaleh it seemed that the loyalties were utterly tradable there. Musa Qaleh is a focal point, it is an entrepôt for drugs, arms and also for local Afghan recruits, so it comes and goes. It will be disputed ground, I suspect, for much of the summer. Could I just answer Ms Gilroy's question. In terms of public perception here I do think that too much is being predicated on military failure and success. The world that we are really reaching for is there has got to be a hell of a lot of strategic patience because I would like to clarify to the Committee that I am not advocating cutting and running, far from it, but if the terms of reference can be shifted in public opinion that would be beneficial to all.

Chairman: We have still got a lot of ground to cover.

Q195 Linda Gilroy: I do not want to do my last question, I just want one short question to Robert on the point he raised which follows through from what Rory said. When we were in Denmark discussing the future of NATO last week, for the first time I came across the concept of managing security as something that might be appropriate for NATO. Would you think that was something which fits in with Rory Stewart's idea about lowering or perhaps making more real the expectations, that is more honest about what we are

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there to do and, rather than it being a war against terrorism, it would be much more explicable to people here as to why we are there as well as being more honest as to why we are there?

Mr Fox: It has got to fit the Afghan physical and human landscape because the battle of abstract plans really does not work there. It is how to manage or grow some sense of stability. It is a very long generational game and it is at that level that the commitment will be difficult. Looking for a kinetic solution, as David Petraeus has said very explicitly in the Baghdad context, cannot deliver the answer you want, and nor can it in Lashkar Gar or Sangin.

Q196 Mr Crausby: If I could take you back to Musa Qaleh. I do not know whether anybody else has any views on the situation there. There has been some disagreement about how the Americans felt about it. What do you feel was the American reaction to the Musa Qaleh agreement?

Mr Fox: I was around at the time when it appeared to be coming apart. They were overtly two British commanders very hostile but—I hope this is not an indiscretion—I was at a briefing by General Richards about ten days ago in which he made a very interesting point that the American command of General McNeill has not reneged on the Musa Qaleh agreement. I would like to refer to my conversation with General James Bucknall when he said, “We are going to have to engage. We are going to have to talk. We are going to have to put up with a certain amount of failure, but to say that we will not talk, we will not come to local arrangements, you cannot turn the Helmand river valley into half a dozen little Alamos”.

Q197 Mr Havard: I have got a couple of questions down here which are largely redundant in a sense because they were about whether or not if the Taliban forces had concentrated themselves they would have had more effect in terms of beating us and whether we could defend ourselves in those circumstances and questions about whether we can get any decisive military victories, as it were, in that area, dominate the ground that way, this summer. I do not know what the assessment is of what the summer militarily is going to bring because the tactics are changing around, specifically in this northern Helmand area. We are not going to walk away this summer.

Mr Fox: No.

Q198 Mr Havard: We are not going to change this policy next week.

Mr Fox: I think it is very worrying that we have concentrated areas of operation on several centres of gravity, indeed there is the Lashkar Gar lozenge where progress does seem to have been made with some reverse, as we have heard, but now the concentration on Highway 611 from Sangin, Sangin itself, which is the chokepoint, up to the dam, because the acid test of success is whether we can get the road open enough, so we are told, to get the new turbine and equipment up to the dam.

I think that invites the kind of operation and activity that we saw with Op Medusa last year. It has to be noted that Op Medusa was a check, a very bloody one, for the Taliban but it needed Operation Falcon Summit for them to go into the area and drive a certain amount of Taliban out for the civil population to even contemplate returning to the area. Tens of thousands fled the area, as you know, of the Panshway river system.

Q199 Mr Havard: Mr Stewart, you are shaking your head in relation to that. You would say change the direction totally, but one of the things we saw when we went there last time was your point about that whole area being less known to us than perhaps we would like when we send forces in and your point about 100 or so US forces have been in the area but what we did not have was intelligence from any of that. What we did not know was about the tribal warring forces in that anyway, the traditional fighting grounds and all the rest of it. Our intelligence is not there. I want to be clear. You seem to be suggesting, Mr Stewart, that militarily we ought to draw back the intensity of the materiel and the people there and set up something that perhaps, okay, may end up looking like Waziristan rather than anything else but at least you would have forces there which would then allow you to understand the people better and move forward in that way. That is the change in direction you would transform to, is it, so over time they would not pull back militarily?

Mr Stewart: If we look at this dam project, the Helmand Valley Authority in the 1960s and 1970s had an incredibly difficult time dealing with tribal elders and by the mid-1980s that dam was generating enough for a single light bulb and was surrounded by incredible warring mujaheddin groups and opium growers. There is a good report which came out in 2001 which analysed that experience in the 1960s and 1970s. The lesson from that would seem to be that if you want to go in there and put hundreds of millions of dollars in repairing that dam and bringing in US engineers you need to do it with a very subtle and careful negotiator with the different village communities all the way up the valley. That is not what we have done. What we have done is largely ignore them, go straight in and we are trying to bring in these civilian engineers, we put glass walls around them and we will clear a field of fire around the dam and just try to bomb anybody who opposes it. This is a very, very peculiar approach to doing development. I cannot see any future in it.

Q200 Mr Havard: But if we did it your way do you provide a platform for the Taliban who do not have any strategic capacity to gain strategic capacity and undo the good work that has been done elsewhere?

Mr Stewart: My guess is that the real resource here in terms of the sustainable campaign against the Taliban is the Afghan people themselves. There is no serious counter-insurgency campaign in this country without Afghans buying into it.

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Q201 Linda Gilroy: I think we covered earlier on the questions we were going to ask about Provincial Reconstruction Teams and particularly Mr Williams' views on those and also the role of the military in delivering development. Perhaps one last catch-all question: where would development funding and effort be best directed?

Dr Williams: One of the points I wanted to make about the rather critical PRTs is that they are useful in many regards and whether you maintain the current strategy or you change to Mr Stewart's strategy of the Waziristan approach of giving up in the south for the time being, I think we need to split security, reconstruction and development into three different spectrums. You should have a frontline where the military is working to provide security and doing very quick relief for aid projects, then you have PRTs which are concentrated in areas of conflict but where it is too dangerous for NGOs and you could start serious construction perhaps and development activities which would then be followed by a third band where NGOs are the principal actor. This frees up military resources to be used in areas where security is the paramount concern and allows you to access the experience of NGOs and development organisations in more peaceful areas where they can operate. It is a bit silly to have troops in an area where you do not need them aside from regular security patrols. That is something to take into account in terms of how funding is divided between military relief, as Mr Jenkin has pointed out, in long-term development aid and, of course, this all has to be wrapped in a framework from the beginning so that NGOs have input so that the military are not going to say, "What is your opinion" and then ignore NGO responses systematically, that advice is taken into account.

Q202 Linda Gilroy: So there is nothing wrong with having different types of PRT as long as they are focused in the right way to do the right job?

Dr Williams: I think that some standardisation would be good but, as Rory has pointed out, it depends on local circumstances. A more devolved authority tends to be the most successful. We do not want to have a difference between, let us say, the Germans and the Americans where one PRT is doing mainly shooting and killing and the other is

doing only reconstruction. That is why I am saying you put them into a certain band of conflict where the definition of the ratio of military actors to civilian actors is about the same but then what is the best approach for this area. That is what you need to address.

Q203 Linda Gilroy: Does anybody else want to comment on the best use of development funding or, indeed, PRTs?

Mr Stewart: I would say we want to distinguish very clearly between three quite different kinds of economic investment. There is the sort of money that you might want for military units, which is really money and projects used for counter-insurgency warfare. The second might be the kinds of projects which DFID would pursue and DFID, of course, is a very theological organisation, they are dedicated to an extremely sophisticated idea of sustainable development over the long-term. The third kind of projects, which we are not doing, are those which somebody like the Foreign Office should be controlling if DFID refuses to touch it, and those are symbolic political projects which have the name of the international community on them. I talked about garbage being seven feet deep in the centre of Kabul, we are currently trying to restore the historic commercial centre of the city and, done correctly, this could be a place that hundreds of thousands of Afghans would visit and in 50 years' time they could point to and say, "This is a gift from the international community to the Afghan nation". There are very few permanent symbols of our commitment. There is very little that Afghans can point to when they are asked what we have done for them. We do need to start directing money towards this third category. I am not saying give up on counter-insurgency, I am not saying give up on all the very worthy sustainable development projects which DFID is pursuing, but we must think more like politicians and less like bureaucrats if we are going to catch the imagination of the Afghan people.

Chairman: It being 12.59, I would like to say to you three and to all of our witnesses this morning that this morning's evidence from the point of view of the Committee has been a real privilege to take. Thank you very much indeed for your well-informed and very careful evidence.

Tuesday 24 April 2007

Members present:

Mr James Arbuthnot, Chairman

Mr David Crausby
Linda Gilroy
Mr David Hamilton
Mr Mike Hancock
Mr Dai Havard
Mr Adam Holloway

Mr Bernard Jenkin
Mr Brian Jenkins
Mr Kevan Jones
Robert Key
John Smith

Witness: General David Richards CBE DSO, gave evidence.

Q204 Chairman: General Richards, welcome to the Committee. As you know we are doing a second inquiry into Afghanistan. We were in Afghanistan last week, and we first met you to discuss this in Kabul last year, and we were very grateful for your help then. You have now returned to Germany, I think, as Commander of the ARRC. I wonder if you could begin by telling us about the ISAF IX and telling us whether you believe that it achieved its objectives?

General Richards: In all humility, Chairman, in one sense definitely, in that I had the military task—and I would like to pay tribute to a fantastic headquarters. It is a real prize that the UK possesses and needs looking after, because I have been told as an aside that there was no other headquarters available to NATO to do what I am about to tell you other than the ARRC, and the fact that ISAF X is now a composite headquarters as opposed to another of the HRF(L)s in the NATO armoury probably substantiates that fact. But in one sense definitely we achieved the aim which was to extend NATO command over the more difficult south and east regions. If you remember when I deployed I only had responsibility for the capital region, the north and the west, and quite clearly that was achieved. In a technical military sense, although we did it and there is not much song and dance about it, it was very demanding and my headquarters, if you like, as a result proved that NATO can do the most demanding of operations so I would just like to pay tribute to the people who worked with me. Did we achieve the other task? Well, in the military we talk about “implied” tasks and “specified” tasks. What were my other tasks that we might consider? I think it was bringing greater coherence to the overall international effort and in that respect—and remember I am talking as a NATO officer; although I am in front of you as a British officer it was in my guise as a NATO officer that I was doing this—it was through the creation of mechanisms like the Policy Action Group in Kabul and through the development of concepts like the Afghan Development Zone concept, which was how we tried to implement the PAGs plans in the provinces, that we achieved greater co-ordination because it was needed. I would say, and I was talking to SACEUR yesterday, that co-ordination of all the different actors and actions in Afghanistan remains a weakness in what we were all trying to achieve there.

But we did improve things—not yet proved to the point where it is working as smoothly as you or I would like, but then does any nation function as well as that? I do not know. But it certainly could be better. Did we establish what I call psychological ascendancy over the Taliban? Again, I think we can claim that happened. They set out to defeat us, and I know you probably will want to look at it during Medusa in the early autumn; they failed, and we won in a narrow tactical sense. Whether we were able to exploit that tactical success is something you probably want to talk about, but we nevertheless left that battle—which is what it was, an old-fashioned battle—the victors, and almost uniquely they said at the time that they had to conduct a tactical move out of the area. So I think we achieved that. Did we facilitate the degree of reconstruction, development and improvement in governance that we all know lies at the heart of this problem? No, there is a lot more to be done, but I would like to think things are better today and after our time there than they were when we arrived when, do not forget, there were two different military operations so inevitably you were competing for space and influence. I have given a long answer, Chairman, but I think we can look back on it and say that we achieved certainly the military aims of the mission and probably did a lot more, but it was setting the conditions for more work rather than solving all the problems.

Q205 Chairman: Did the aims and objectives change at all while you were there? Did you think: “This is not the right direction to be going in; we need to be moving in a different direction”?

General Richards: That is a good question. Any military operation evolves and certainly ours in Afghanistan did, not least obviously in the numbers of troops that were committed to it. Did our aims and objectives alter? The answer is no. I remember having been given my orders, if you like, before we did our final work-up exercise in Stavanger, Norway, in March, interpreting that and passing my interpretation back up the NATO chain of command, and it talked about extending and deepening the writ of the government of Afghanistan, creating the conditions in which reconstruction, development and governance can start to prosper—all of those. That remained extant throughout my time and it led to the creation of the Policy Action Group and the ADZ concept. Those

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two factors lay at the heart of everything we did and still remain, as far as I know because my successor inherited them from NATO, the bedrock, if you like, of what he is trying to do. How you do that might then get on to a different thing, but the aims and objectives remain pretty well constant.

Q206 Chairman: You say “as far as I know” because you have no current role in relation to Afghanistan?

General Richards: No. I left on 4 February. Obviously I have kept an interest in it and I have e-mail contact with people there, but I have no formal responsibility or role.

Q207 Chairman: What would you say were the three headline lessons you learnt, or, if you would like, four—

General Richards: Or twenty!

Q208 Chairman: —from ISAF IX?

General Richards: I suppose the most important one is that as a NATO commander, and I think I could say as a commander of any coalition operation, you have to learn how you can exert a decisive influence on the campaign when you do not actually have all the levers to pull. I was just one of many influences, yet I and my headquarters probably had the most critical role to play, and I did not pull the levers. There are 37 nations in ISAF, there are people outside ISAF like the Japanese who have an influence, there is the World Bank, and so it goes on. Even within the Alliance the USA understandably, and I think rightly, were the major influence, the only nation that had a national role because of the OEF operation but also because of the amount of money they are putting in across the whole country. So all these different influences must be brought to bear in a coherent way, we might say in the military into something that reflects unity of effort, unity of command, yet you cannot just order it. When asked to compare others in my position people often mention Templar in Malaya. Well, he was in charge of a single nation’s campaign there, and basically he ran it; he did not really have to go and ask anybody. I either had to ask or to co-ordinate and influence a whole host of actors. How does someone in my position achieve that is something I think we learnt on the hoof, and maybe there are some useful lessons to be learned. It led to the creation of the Policy Action Group and other mechanisms. Another question in the context of Afghanistan is what does “hearts and minds” actually mean? Afghanistan is a nation that has been in a state of conflict for 30 odd years, and I learnt there that you cannot get at the heart except through the mind, it is not something that is necessarily a concurrent activity, and the Afghans, until you can prove that you can militarily win, are not going to give you their hearts because they just cannot afford to take the wrong decision, back the wrong horse, if you like. Hence that led to the fight in Operation Medusa in September, when we had to fight a conventional battle—not a huge scale one but given the amount of ordinance that was dropped in that area and so on it was pretty big. So that was another lesson—do not just buy that

“hearts and minds” necessarily means soft action; it can mean hard action because people are not going to take a risk. The comprehensive approach I think goes back to my first point, really; it is no good. As wonderful as it is in a country like the UK which has the comprehensive approach here in Whitehall, when you are not running the operation or the campaign as a single nation in the theatre of operations, having a comprehensive approach can count for relatively little if you have relatively little influence in the country concerned, or if you do not integrate your thinking and your approach with all the other nations and all the other actors in, in this case, Afghanistan, and I think that is a lesson that we have all relearned probably. Those are three lessons; I am sure you can pick on many others, but I think trying to stay at a higher level those would be my major ones.

Q209 Chairman: In purely military terms, have you made any changes to the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps as a result of your experiences in Afghanistan?

General Richards: Not yet. We are as a result of our lessons learned process having a structural review of the ARRC. Broadly, because we had long enough to train, we were about right, but I think we need to look at air/land co-ordination and we are going to strengthen that part of it. On the question of intelligence, I do not know whether it will help but I think our current full Colonel intelligence boss will become a one-star, so it is those sorts of factors, which are not massive. The ARRC, because of Kosovo and because of Bosnia, broadly is comfortable with this but running a theatre of operations is something that you cannot just pick up and do at the drop of a hat. It is a whole area of skills and experience that a headquarters needs to work at almost on a daily basis, and that is what the ARRC was lucky enough to be able to do.

Q210 Chairman: Do you envisage that the ARRC could, in the medium or even short term, be returning to Afghanistan?

General Richards: I think that is probably quite likely. I do not think there are any plans for it at the moment but I know they are under discussion, because you have in the ARRC a headquarters whose *raison d’être* is doing this sort of thing. It seems a bit bizarre if you do not use it again when it is sitting ready to be used certainly by 2009. So I think that is being looked at but no decision has yet been taken, and it would certainly get my support.

Q211 Mr Crausby: So how well do you think that ISAF X will do, and do you expect that the approach to ISAF X will differ greatly from ISAF IX?

General Richards: ISAF X as a headquarters will take time to get into its stride because—and I know SACEUR is looking at this—they came together as a group of individuals without the benefit of coming from a well-found headquarters like the ARRC, where we live and breath and socialise as well as work together and train together, some of us for nearly a year. I know as I said that NATO is looking at how a composite headquarters, as it is called—

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and you visited it—can be as efficient and work as well as a team as the ARRC was able to do, and I see no reason over time, if they trickle-post people into the headquarters, as is the intention, why at some point they cannot reach the same standards as I like to think we are at, and in many degrees I suspect they already are at. They are having, if you like, to work up on the job. At some point they will be as good as we were. I am sure we would like to think we might be slightly better but that is just a bit of headquarters pride at stake, but I think they will be fine—and I have every reason to think, with the extra resources that General McNeill has got, he will be able to continue and build on the work we did.

Q212 Mr Crausby: So has continuity between ISAF IX and ISAF X been achieved?

General Richards: I think we can say it was. From an early stage we set ourselves the additional task of ensuring that ISAF X got a good run in. Most of the key staff, that is the colonels, brigadiers and a number of two-stars, actually served under me for between seven weeks and a minimum of two weeks, so with my own chief of staff and others remaining in theatre to sit alongside them—the Americans call it left seat/right seat driving—I think we were able to give them a pretty good run-in. General McNeill obviously has huge experience of Afghanistan and I am sure he took it on to new heights.

Q213 Mr Crausby: Finally, what is the command structure between Commander of ISAF through to the Commander of British Forces?

General Richards: The Commander of British Forces is in the ISAF command structure; he is double-hatted. I think it is now Brigadier Lorimer, who you visited—

Q214 Chairman: Yes.

General Richards: He is a NATO officer and the British National Contingent Commander, I think or COMBRITFOR, so he answers up two chains. I think it works.

Q215 Mr Jones: General, could I ask about your role in the relatively short period of time you were there? When we met President Karzai one of the issues he raised with us was, and he obviously had great respect for yourself and what you had done, that you were really there for a relatively short period of time and by the end of it you had got your feet well under the table, you understood the politics of the country, but you then moved on. Do you think there is a reasoning to have a commander out there for longer than the period of six months they are there at the moment?

General Richards: Well, I did nine months, which was an improvement from the six months that most ISAF commanders did; General McNeill will do a minimum of one year, so I think NATO is addressing this. I think there is a strong case for the top leaders, certainly the commander, for doing maybe as long as two years, but if you are going to do that, depending on how far down the chain you take it, you need to change the conditions of service,

certainly for British officers. The Americans do not pay any tax, so it is quite an incentive for Mrs McNeill to know that the mortgage will be paid off at the end of the two years, or whatever it might be. So I am all for it but you need to look at the conditions of service because everyone is working very hard and I think we must remember that it penalises our families. It is not fair on them if you do not give them a little bit of incentive and there is balance to be struck but in an absolute sense there is a definite case for longer tours, although I do not think you necessarily have to take it all the way down to Corporal Higgins in the mortar section, and that sort of thing.

Q216 Chairman: But presumably you have to take it some of the way down otherwise you would be separating the commanders from the troops that they have been commanding?

General Richards: That would be one of the issues you would have to resolve. If the CO of X Battalion in Helmand was to do a year then you could not do that without his whole battalion staying logically because he commands the battalion. There was talk of me staying on but the ARRC leaving. Well, I can absolutely assure you if I was at all successful it was because of HQ ARRC solidly behind me and I did not want to do that. We were a team or we were nothing, so you do need to go through all that. But at the top level, in the case of ISAF, having a composite headquarters does have the advantage of allowing extended tours because one person can do one year, another can do two, and they just trickle-post through the headquarters, but to get it down lower into, if you like, the fighting troops you have much more of a complex problem and it would have to be worked through, which is why I say you would have to look at conditions of service and a host of other things.

Q217 Mr Jones: I do not think it is necessarily down to the troops. I think on the three occasions I have been there with the politicians you meet there you can see it is a very complex society which is based on relationship-building, which you obviously did very well, and the new people who come in try to establish those relationships. What the President was saying is that keeping those relationships longer actually helps the process.

General Richards: You are absolutely right and I would agree, which is fine, but you have to somehow compensate the individual and his family for two years living in those conditions, and so on and so forth.

Q218 Mr Jenkin: General, very briefly, what about the idea of extending permanence further up? Again, it was in President Karzai's thoughts that there would somehow be some UN-mandated international co-ordinator precisely to achieve those comprehensive effects which you say are quite difficult for a purely military commander to achieve.

General Richards: Well, again, in theory the UN SRSO could fill that role, Tom Koenigs, and he is there on I think a two-year contract, so I think the

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mechanism is already in place in terms of extended tours for key civilians there. The ambassadors and so on tended to do more, and I know our next ambassador is due to do a two-year tour, for example, but for some reason that co-ordination and, if you like, that dominance of a single individual has not yet occurred, and it was to a degree because of that that I felt what was perceived to be a little bit of a vacuum and we created the Policy Action Group and so on. It could be a military man but I do think that there is a strong case for a dominant international partner alongside President Karzai as his trusted adviser and friend to whom he can turn when necessary and with whom he has a very good relationship.

Q219 Mr Jenkins: You are quite right to make a plea for extra bonuses and operational bonuses for staff who stop long. But please do not repeat your idea of not paying taxes. I like people paying taxes because it pays my wages, yours as well, and it might catch on which would be very detrimental to us!

General Richards: Yes. I do understand very well what you are saying!

Q220 Mr Jenkins: In this region what impact do you think ISAF can have in the long term, and what exactly is the campaign plan or strategy that you think we should adopt?

General Richards: If I may answer the second one first, NATO has what they call an “O” Plan, which I think you could, if you read it, say: “That sort of is a campaign plan”. I would argue that it is not entirely a campaign plan because it does not include things like counter narcotics which is a supporting task for NATO, but it gives us aims, it gives us objectives, it gives us parameters, and it does get into the strategic and political dimensions to a degree. What we need, though, and I am not alone in thinking this, is a proper campaign plan that brings together and integrates all the issues that have to be resolved, and tells us and people like me and others what our part is in the resolution of those problems so that it is coherent across the piece. That is what I have been taught is a campaign plan at Staff College, and so on and so forth. To get on to your first question, we tried if you like to substitute for the absence of that sort of coherent campaign plan with a common sense approach that led to the creation of this Policy Action Group, and the reason I am emphasising that a little bit is that it was in that body that we tried to find what you are getting at, I think, which is the comprehensive nature of the problem and of the solution. For Kabul, this is a task for the sovereign head of state; President Karzai should really own that campaign plan and it should not be something the British or the Americans give him. He could adopt it and sign it off, which is mechanical, but it has to be President Karzai’s campaign plan because it is his country we are going to assist. I am sure he would be very happy with it if you got it right but we, through the PAG, with all the ministers that, if you like, have some relevance—and you could say any and every minister does but these are more critical ones—in the conduct of the counter

insurgency, with all the key international actors from the UNSRSG, principal ambassadors, people like me, would debate the key issues and agree, with President Karzai chairing one in every three or four, the agreed strategy or way ahead on whatever particular issue, and we were responsible for ensuring it was all coherent. So that is as good as we got, but I do think it started to pay dividends. For example, there was a shortage of troops and police down in the south overall so we at the PAG devised the creation of the Afghan National Auxiliary Police. Now that is not going to be the answer to every maiden’s prayer but it is a good starting place, and it put more policemen on the beat, if you like, in some contentious places, allowing us not to risk this vacuum creation that often happened when you went into an area and then moved on and people filled the gap, the Taliban, so we wanted to fill it with police and that came straight out of the PAG. Getting finally to your first question, broadly we succeeded in bringing together the different actors, we have created the conditions for success, but we now have to make sure that the other actors, the non security actors, deliver on their part of the bargain. I used to talk about, and I am sorry to prolong this slightly, RDGP&S, and I do not know when you visited whether I had come up with this but it stands for Reconstruction, Development, Governance—(improvements in relations with) Pakistan, all within a cloak of expanding Security, RDGP&S, and that was the purpose of the PAG and is at the heart of a campaign plan. If you can meld all those five areas together efficiently and make sure all the various bits that are going on within each area are complementary, both within each area and between each area, then have you a coherent campaign plan.

Q221 Mr Jenkins: So what extra resources, pressure, or diplomacy are needed to make sure this campaign plan is produced?

General Richards: Well, I think someone has to take the initiative and offer to write it. NATO, when I was last involved, was looking at it; JFC Brunssum have started the process, and I am sure it will involve HQ ISAF and will involve SHAPE. We were asked as headquarters to play a role and it will then be up to General McNeill to ensure with the NATO senior civilian representative that the Afghan government are fully integrated in the process and I know the aim is that by the end of this year there will be an agreed campaign plan in the time I have just hinted at.

Q222 Mr Jenkins: So we are going to do some nation building then?

General Richards: That is the aim really!

Q223 Mr Havard: We want to ask you some questions about policing a little later on and also the broader effects in terms of the region as a whole in terms of the dual politics, as it were, but if I can just unpick a little of what you said about the plans at the moment though, on this recent visit this idea of regionalising seemed to be developing. When we

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visited you there was a very impressive Canadian chap running what was the south sector at the time—

General Richards: Brigadier General Fraser.

Q224 Mr Havard: Yes. What, however, you had then, and you have now to a certain extent, was the Brits in Helmandshire, you had the provinces, as opposed to looking at it on a regional basis, and it seemed as though that was a strategic view that was now coming and was a developing change, as it were, with more emphasis being put on each province individually being looked at more in terms of where it fitted with a more regionalised plan, and a flexibility of manoeuvre across a regional area as opposed to provincial areas.

General Richards: I am slightly surprised they have given you that impression because I talked about the risk of Balkanising the campaign, and I might have done when you came, because we saw this was a risk. Every nation that has adopted a province naturally enough wants it to succeed, Britain with Helmand, the Dutch with Oruzgan and so on. There is a risk that every nation becomes obsessed with its province and you Balkanise what must be seen as a theatre of operations. I have to say that as I left I thought there was less risk of that than I might have told you in the summer of last year, hence my slight surprise that you have come away with that impression, but it is a risk. What I have said to nations when I have gone to speak to them, because this is the most clear example of where you must not fall into the trap, is that if Kandahar fell, and it was reasonably close run last year, it did not matter how well the Dutch did in Oruzgan or how well the British did in Helmand, their two provinces would also, as night followed day, have failed because we would have lost the consent of the Pashtun people because of the totemic importance of Kandahar. Clearly the UK, for example, whom you could have accused, as some did last year, of being over-focused on Helmand, most definitely are not today. One reason no doubt is that we have a British major general about to take responsibility for the region, but they have also declared that they will provide, in line with the revised NATO CJSOR post Riga, a regional reserve to make sure it is available for use across the region. So I am not saying you did not but I am slightly surprised and a little disappointed that you were given that impression.

Q225 Mr Havard: Maybe I expressed it wrongly, that there was already what you have just described but I got the impression that was now being consolidated and developed, as it were, to improve it in the sense that, with the real changeover of all of the Operation Enduring Freedom, that part of it that is collapsing in, as it were, to the ISAF operation in proper terms was going to be melded into that process that you described to us in a more co-ordinated and coherent way in order to avoid some of the issues you had alluded to.

General Richards: Balkanisation?

Q226 Mr Havard: Yes.

General Richards: That is great. Certainly General McNeill was very alert to the risk and he did not want to go down into a provincial approach.

Q227 Mr Havard: Exactly.

General Richards: I am sorry, I was at cross purposes. I think that is an old problem but, when push comes to shove, every nation will still want to make sure its province works well and there is a certain amount of rivalry but I think they have all, if you like, matured so it is less of an issue than it was and I am glad to hear it confirmed.

Mr Holloway: Are the Pakistanis acting unhelpfully within Afghanistan's borders? If so, what are they doing, and does General Musharaf have any say over their activities?

Chairman: I think I would like to raise that later on in the session, if we may. Rob Key?

Q228 Robert Key: General, what account does the ISAF mission take of the difficulty of building a democratic system of government without the participation of the female half of the population?

General Richards: I cannot remember the statistics but a relatively large number—and I am getting into deep water here but I think more than in Westminster—of the MPs in the Afghan Parliament are female.

Q229 Chairman: It is 25%.

General Richards: They are not well represented in government but they are certainly well represented in the political process, and in Kabul I did not really sense that it was a big issue for the international community. The civil rights leader was a woman who I, amongst others, had a good relationship with so I do not think it had a big effect and all I would say is, and again this is getting into slightly more contentious area, that we should not hurry them too much in this area. We have really got to let the Afghans develop their understanding of this, and if you impose it on them too quickly it could just backfire. Certainly in the provinces it is a different issue. There is no doubt that we never would be introduced to a woman virtually, except in Kandahar where occasionally there were women involved, but then a very effective Kandahari MP was killed, sadly, murdered, by the Taliban for speaking out. So I am not trying to avoid the question but it just was not an issue for us, and I do not really remember people talking about it in Kabul.

Mr Jenkin: Just on that, we met two very able members of the Provincial Council in Lashkar-Gah who were women, who were very vocal and certainly were not short of opinions!

Mr Havard: 50% of the delegation, in fact!

Q230 Mr Jones: Can I turn to the threats in the south at the moment? We had a very strange organisation called the Senlis Council before us a few weeks ago and their assessment was that there had been a

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dramatic deterioration in the stability of southern Afghanistan. You in a recent interview in that great supporter of the Armed Forces the *Guardian* said that you were winning the war against Taliban. What is the threat to ISAF forces? Is it diminishing or is it, as the Senlis Council told us, increasing?

General Richards: I do not think either my statement or the Senlis Council's—but I will get on to the Senlis Council's view—are necessarily inimical—

Q231 Mr Jones: The *Guardian* has you in quotation: "we are winning the war against the Taliban".

General Richards: Yes, because I think we are. I do not see that the Taliban are, and when we talk about Pakistan's efforts in this regard we can look at that too, winning. You could say that that means that at best there is some sort of neutral stand-off, but I do not believe that. I believe we are still winning the war; if you like the campaign is going our way. That does not mean that in a particular area, and this is where Senlis might be coming from, things have not deteriorated in the sense that there is more activity, and that certainly is the case in Northern Helmand. The British contingent under, first of all, OEF and then under me went into an area of Helmand into which no one had been for years, for all I know, other than the drug lords, and that upset the equilibrium of those living there, and there has been a lot of activity which you know as well as I do. So if you look at it from that perspective Senlis is right. Before we went in there it was relatively calm but was it good? Were we right to do something about it? Arguably, undoubtedly, yes, and there are other areas where the Taliban writ broadly ran that we are taking off them so there is more instability during that process but, as I have said to other people before, you do not—certainly not I as a general nor you with your knowledge of defence—look at a campaign on any given day; you are planning like a chess player four or five moves ahead. That is why I am confident that if you look at where we are going, and I know we had a spring campaign plan to contain their spring offensive, and it is very important that we use those two terms because "offensive" is nothing but more blood and despair whereas a campaign properly run introduces reconstruction, development, improvements in governance and all those sorts of things, and we had that broadly ready for the spring, and so far, with a little bit of "touch wood", things do not seem to be going too badly for ISAF. So it is those sort of judgments that led us to deduce that with some way to go we were winning the war but there will be tactical setbacks and there will be places within the overall plan, both geographically and by time, where things are not so brilliant, but you know that around the corner we have a solution to it.

Q232 Mr Jones: It has been emphasised that the so-called well-publicised spring offensive has not actually occurred. What do you think the priorities now after the summer for ISAF are?

General Richards: General McNeill will be modifying the plan that we gave him and he, do not forget, has to obey his orders, and there is this

NATO "O" Plan which tells him he has to protect the Afghan Development Zones and create conditions for improvements in governance and so on and so forth, so there will be no fundamental change over what we were doing other than hopefully he will continue—and you remember I mentioned that our aim was to expand the writ of the government, in very crude terms—to expand that writ based around expanding Afghan Development Zones. You remember the Afghan Development Zone is an area within which reconstruction, development and improvements in governance hopefully can flourish, and the aim was to let the Afghan population, particularly in the south, see quite clearly improvements and then you can put a lie to the Taliban propaganda, at which they are very adroit, that was saying that the Government cannot govern and the international community is not delivering, and we can say: "Oh yes, it is, where you allow it to happen we are making really good progress", so that remains at the heart of General McNeill's plan for this summer.

Q233 Mr Jones: Certainly when I visited Lashkar-Gah this year you can see progress in terms of the redevelopment that is going on in Lashkar-Gah in terms of what is being done, and in terms of what we are told in terms of development in the Sangin Valley, which could not have been done last year. What was emphasised to us both by Provincial Council and also by the MPs for Helmand that we met was the importance of the Kajaki Dam project. Do you see that as a key turning point in terms of success and improving the writ of the government of Afghanistan?

General Richards: I was always very keen on the Kajaki Dam project. One has to be careful not to be driven by totemic things, one has to be hard-nosed about it, but if we are about anything we are about improving the lot of the average Afghan and it is through that over time that you can win what is often an information battle, a propaganda battle. If you are giving people lots of jobs in the Sangin Valley, or if you are leading to a supply of electricity which allows the generation of small-scale industry and jobs, because the bottom line for most of these people is jobs, as I know we discussed when you came over, then that must be good, but it has to be part of a wider something, which is in this case the expansion of the government's writ and, most importantly, the creation of an alternative economy which can draw some people increasingly away from the narco economy which currently runs Helmand.

Q234 Chairman: Going back to the issue of what is being done in Afghanistan in the spring and summer, I think you said earlier this year that there was a window of opportunity for us really to be successful in Afghanistan during the spring and summer. Am I paraphrasing you wrongly there?

General Richards: Not really. Sometimes people say I should not say it but I do think that in any society there is a point at which they will get a bit fed up with pledges that they think have been made that are not being met and that sort of thing. There has to be

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what I call an upward trajectory of progress to keep people with you, because by being there there is inevitably going to be fighting on occasions and they have to see that it is all worth it, and after 25 years of war there may be a point reached at which they say: "Actually you are not achieving what you said you would achieve". I do not think no progress is good enough, they have to see it is all worth it, hence the ADZ concept. We could not do it across every province but we had to be able to demonstrate that progress is possible and manifest. Why I have said words approximate to what you just said is that I felt that on occasion our trajectory of progress was not upward enough and that was not really buying people's enthusiasm support into the long term, so that is where that came from.

Q235 Mr Holloway: Somebody in the PRT in Lashkar-Gah said to us that Lashkar-Gah was secure so where was the development? How does that fit in with this line that we are always hearing that there cannot be development without security when, according to this guy, we are not providing any development even where there is security?

General Richards: He was not getting pedantic about the difference between reconstruction and development, was he?

Q236 Mr Holloway: I do not know, you would have to ask him, but it was just this thought that in this Afghan Development Zone, where there was theoretically a degree of security, nothing was happening for the ordinary Afghan who, as you say, is the key to all this.

General Richards: Well, I think the reason why he might have been speaking about development is that development tends to be longer term, whereas reconstruction should have started to take place, whether it is schools or roads.

Q237 Mr Holloway: What sort of things might we have seen in Lashkar-Gah in terms of reconstruction, then?

General Richards: I would have thought new schools, new roads, new mosques. The shorter term projects should be able to be implemented pretty quickly and I am surprised he was saying none of that was happening. The development might get into what I think is so important which is the growth of an alternative economy with all that goes with it, rather than the alternative livelihoods that you so often hear people talk about to replace the narco economy, because chucking a few seeds at a farmer is not going to persuade him not to grow poppy, for example. It is not only a matter of feeding their families: we are now talking about substitutes for income, and they do not necessarily want to go back to a peasant economy where they are just feeding themselves with a very limited market. So they are getting used to having a reasonable income from poppy and we need to develop an alternative economy, so that is where the development word would come in.

Q238 Mr Holloway: Sure, but do you think we are communicating by what we do sufficiently to the Afghans that we are there to help and not just bringing, as they might perceive it in Helmand, war?

General Richards: This is all about information operations, and an information operation has to be rooted in substance for it to work—

Q239 Mr Holloway: Absolutely.

General Richards: —which is what you are saying. Was he a member of the PRT?

Q240 Mr Holloway: No. Fortunately we heard from an Afghan.

General Richards: Good. Well, if an Afghan is saying that then I think we need to take notice of it. I used to go round on my visits—and I am talking about at the height of the problems last year largely—and they all wanted what you are talking about, jobs, and I do think that this gets to the point you were making about the pace of development. If you have an upward trajectory that is exciting people then they will stay with you. Clearly in that particular individual's case we were not exciting him.

Q241 Mr Holloway: But do you think we are doing enough on this in the south?

General Richards: No, I do not. I do not think any of us are doing enough.

Q242 Mr Holloway: Do you think the lack of it threatens the strategy?

General Richards: If I looked at it from across the country—

Q243 Mr Holloway: No, from the south.

General Richards: In the south? We have to play catch-up, hence this relationship with security. If Lashkar-Gah is broadly secure, which I think is the case because that was part of the Afghan Development Zone concept, if the development side, the reconstruction side and the improvements in governance are not yet there, then we need to catch up quick, I agree.

Q244 Chairman: One of the things that one of the two women we met from the Provincial Council was saying was needed was something like a carpet factory where they could employ women to do things that were not involved in the narcotics trade. Roughly how long would you expect that sort of reconstruction or development to take before local Afghans began to see it as something they could point to?

General Richards: Well, I think very quickly. This is exactly the sort of thing I was advocating. Where is the small business adviser in the provincial government that will say to somebody who is interested and prepared to take the risk: "This is what you need to do". There is a huge shortage of capacity of understanding. Where are the small start-up loans, the micro loans that have been so successful in Bangladesh? Could they be provided by the lead nation for each province? I do think it is reasonably easily done. We are tending to focus on

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the longer term development, the roads, the power, the Kajaki Dam type project, and not enough on what most affects the average Afghan, which is jobs, job opportunities and the creation of small businesses—which they are pretty good at. Pakistan is not far from there, there is a big market there, it is a country that wants to do more with Afghanistan, there is a huge potential there but are we providing the wherewithal to kick-start it? I did not see a lot of it, I have to say.

Q245 Chairman: Moving to Operation Medusa, you felt the lack of a strategic reserve. It was a serious and major victory that you had; however much you may play down your success it was a success. Do you think you could have done significantly better with a strategic reserve?

General Richards: Yes. Being slightly pedantic I call it a theatre reserve but it is the same thing; it is a reserve. I have no doubt that the extra three months it took to pacify that area probably could have been done in the space of a few weeks immediately after the main battle, because essentially we culminated; I could not do any more by the end of September. The troops were exhausted and the Taliban, although they fled, some south but mostly to the west, started to trickle back in and I had very little left to deal with it with, hence we came up with the Afghan National Auxiliary Police because I got so fed up with not having anything. President Karzai was keen to do it anyway so we accelerated the whole process. That is why I missed it on that occasion, and what I had to do is create ad hoc reserves at any given stage which meant robbing Peter to pay Paul, and the problem with that is you created vacuums into which the Taliban could flow if they recognised the vacuum, which inevitably they sometimes did. But I would like to say that to a degree my problems are General McNeill's benefits because nations and NATO, as a result of their understanding of how we were managing without a reserve—just—have given him a reserve. He has a theatre reserve; it has been very active in Helmand and in Kandahar provinces already; the UK is shortly going to deploy a regional reserve, so while I would say, wouldn't I, that no commander should have been sent into this theatre of operations—and I am on record as saying it at the time—without a reserve, the fact is nations have also now agreed and it looks to be a dead issue, which I think is great.

Q246 Chairman: But is there a sense that if NATO had provided you with the forces that were first requested it would have saved NATO a lot of trouble, a lot of money, and possibly a lot of lives, and we would be far further forward in Afghanistan now if NATO had done what you first asked?

General Richards: As a commander I clearly felt at the time that we were not being listened to and nations tried their best but were not able to give me one, so I suppose you could deduce from it the deduction you have. How much better who knows because, as it happens, we managed, but there was a period during Medusa when it was pretty close and I would wish never to repeat that.

Q247 Mr Jenkin: Coming now to the question of the broader counter insurgency campaign, the overwhelming anxiety that I am left with, however impressive the effort, is that there are two very fundamental gaps in the strategy, that we cannot deny the terrorists their home base and, because of the ineffectiveness of the ministries, and particularly the policing, the “G” part of your acronym, we cannot really address the legitimate grievances. How do you win a counter insurgency campaign if you cannot deny the home base of the terrorists and address the legitimate grievances?

General Richards: Well, you come up with a plan that would allow you to address them and then you implement the plan, hence my RDGP&S. President Karzai and I talked a lot about governance, the “G” bit of it, and it is obviously linked to security because of the police role within that, but all I can say is that he has the bit between his teeth on it but there is an Afghan way of solving these problems and he is going about it in that way. There is relatively little complaint over most of the country, but I know he feels that there are some provinces that still are weak in this respect. What I would like to say, if I may, is that it is not all to do with corruption. A lot of it is pure capacity and again I think we, the NATO nations, can do more to help here. The Education Minister, and you probably heard this on your last tour and if you did not I will tell you but please excuse me if you have, the Education Minister in Oruzgan province, I am told, is unable to read or write and he is the Education Minister, and there are certainly going to be others who cannot do these things which are pretty basic in running a province. Now, why are not we putting money into developing capacity rather than simply criticising them for corruption? A lot of it is because they know no better. Are we addressing that issue? For example, could every nation that has adopted a province find a little bit of money to train and develop capacity? It could be in-country or it could be back in Britain in the case of the UK for a year to train them up. We need to look at that as well as replacing man with man, because the replacement often may not be any more able in capacity terms to do the job than his predecessor.

Q248 Mr Jenkin: Nevertheless because of these grievances and the terrorist capacity you are forced to rely on perhaps using far more force than you wish to, and that itself is counter productive?

General Richards: Yes. This goes up to my upward trajectory of progress across the board, because there is a risk that you alienate the population by using force when an improvement in governance might solve the issue, and I was the first to see that relationship. Originally I was asked by people: “Why are you banging on about governance issues at the PAG” or whatever, and I said: “Because they are the Taliban's biggest recruiting sergeant and I have every right to tell you about it”, so I think everybody sees that it has to be a holistic approach to the problem of which that is a key part, but what I am saying is you cannot just get at the Afghans on

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it; they know they have an issue here and I think we can be more helpful than perhaps some nations are trying to be.

Q249 Mr Jenkin: And the Platoon House strategy? That was an imperative but, again, did that not produce a negative reaction amongst the population?

General Richards: Clearly the immediate vicinities of the Platoon Houses became areas where the average civilian with any sense left and his home was destroyed, etc, so I am sure that they probably in most cases did have a negative influence on opinion. Whether or not they achieved some sort of ascendancy over the Taliban in a military sense is something that one might debate, but in terms of hearts and minds they probably are not very helpful.

Q250 Mr Jenkin: And we picked up a very negative reaction about Musa Qaleh, particularly from Afghan MPs who very sincerely believed that you had done a deal with the Taliban, and the Chairman explained that that was not the case and it was a good opportunity for us to do so. You talked about the information campaign. Did you not lose the information campaign on Musa Qaleh?

General Richards: Almost certainly, but of course it depends who you talk to and I can almost now envisage the MPs that gave you that line. I could find another half a dozen that might have given you a different line because it depends on their tribal background, but I think the consensus amongst, if you like, the key southern MPs was what you have just relayed—and thank you, Mr Chairman, for putting them right! Musa Qaleh, and I think you know this, was not my initiative; I did not do a deal with the Taliban; it was something that came out of Governor Daud and was endorsed by President Karzai for a while. I viewed it as an opportunity to exploit to bring a bit of a breathing space to hard-pressed British troops and to allow some reconstruction development to take place in Musa Qaleh, which it did—not as much as I would have liked because it took time to get people in there to start doing it. Musa Qaleh in one sense was successful in that 5,000 odd people now bitterly dislike the Taliban because they have seen them in their true light, and do not forget in early February they rebelled against the Taliban in the area and fought against them and arrested Mullah Ghafour, who was then subsequently killed I think on the morning that I left, but that has rather been obscured by various factions because it was seen in very black and white terms as surrendering in some way to the Taliban. I chose to think that if it could drive a wedge between, if you like, reconcilable Taliban and irreconcilable, of whom there are sadly always going to be a number, then that was an experiment worth trying. Sadly, we did not bring the average Afghan member of Parliament along with us; for what reason I never really divined, I am afraid, but you are right to say that we did not win the information campaign in the macro sense and there is a lot of suspicion about it.

Q251 Mr Jenkin: Do you think such an arrangement might be repeated elsewhere?

General Richards: It is being repeated. The new Governor of Helmand, Waffa, tried something rather similar very early on with stricter codicils; in the East the Americans—who were not happy with the Musa Qaleh deal on the whole—have implemented a different version, but it is quite similar, which allows the local population to take the war into their own hands, if you like, and to govern themselves. Some of them will be successful, others will not, but at some point we will hit on the right formula. If you do not try it, what is the alternative? You are constantly fighting the population, or there is a risk of you constantly fighting the population. If you can give them what they want and fight alongside them, which is what President Karzai was seeking to do in these various arrangements, then you become a partner with them, and I think that is what we needed to do more of actually and there will be more of them.

Q252 Chairman: The Americans were opposed to the Musa Qaleh deal mostly because there were not those stricter codicils in place, is that right?

General Richards: I think so. They remained polite to me over it, but I had a number of conversations and it was clear they did not like it. They saw it as some form of surrendering to the Taliban, but that is not how we viewed it. I saw it pragmatically as a means of allowing hard-pressed troops to have a break and to redeploy them into a more mobile role to manoeuvre, because at that point, if you remember, most of the British troops were pinned down in Platoon Houses and it gave the initiative away to a greater degree than I was happy with to the Taliban—they could move around, we could not, we were pinned, either in the Platoon Houses or re-supplying the Platoon Houses, it took every British company in Helmand to do it. Finding some means of allowing manoeuvre which started to give us back, potentially, the military initiative was at the bottom of my thinking. It also was driven by this desire to try and drive a wedge between good and bad—for want of a better term—Taliban and to demonstrate to the people of Musa Qaleh that it would spread out. Do not forget Now Zad tried to do something very similar, the elders of Now Zad, the elders of Sangin, at the time they all wanted to do something like Musa Qaleh because they got fed up with the fighting. This gave us a potential route out of the problem, but the Americans saw it as surrendering the initiative which is, as I have just explained, something I failed to get across to them, but they are very clear, I had long debates with the US ambassador about it and, obviously, with General McNeill on arrival, and they absolutely understood the rationale; they did not always, in this case, agree with if you like the detailed implementation of it.

Q253 Mr Holloway: We are talking on an immense scale, but if you say, for argument's sake, that we have the consent of 70% of the people in Helmand and therefore do not, for argument's sake, have

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about 30%, these are traditional Muslim, highly xenophobic people: we may not like it, but that is the way they want to live their lives. When we talk about Taliban, therefore, we are to some extent just talking about a percentage of the population that are up there. Is there an argument that says that in recent months we have killed an awful lot of Taliban people who, in the future, we may actually have found quite helpful to buy off in order to provide stability and we may have now made ourselves much more open by not dealing with them initially in a non-kinetic way to asymmetrical warfare, increased numbers of foreign fighters and so on. Have we made, possibly, a mistake?

General Richards: It is, I suppose, wise after the event. There is a risk of that and that is the conundrum in any counter-insurgency, you have to preserve the consent of the people and what you are saying is that slowly you may be losing the consent because you have turned them against you.

Q254 Mr Holloway: I am saying we have killed key leaders who might have been quite helpful later on.

General Richards: There is something in what you are saying, but if you are being shot and being opposed physically by force you cannot really at the time say “Hang on, can we parley about this” other than through some arrangement like the Musa Qaleh deal.

Q255 Mr Holloway: But we have taken the war to the Taliban in recent months.

General Richards: We went into those areas, we did not fire a shot first ever.

Q256 Mr Holloway: No, but since then we have taken the war to the Taliban.

General Richards: We are trying to establish the military initiative within those areas, and if you know through your intelligence that X person is planning to kill your troops tomorrow, you are not going to hang around and let him have a go at you. There is something in what you say but it would be too neat to take it too far down the line you are going.

Q257 Mr Havard: The question that has been asked in the press and elsewhere is that during the last summer, in Helmand and Kandahar, the Taliban did not really concentrate their forces, they attacked in places simultaneously rather than concentrating all their effort in one place. Given you did not have the reserve and there is now going to be a reserve, if they change their tactics what is the situation there?

General Richards: They have lost the opportunity to concentrate force and fight ISAF conventionally, which I think is what you are saying. Actually, they did of course do it once and that was during the Medusa battle when they had over 1000, some estimates say 1,500 fighters, in a very small area geographically, because at that time they had persuaded themselves and the population down South that they could defeat soft old NATO—remember all the media speculation about whether NATO was up to it—and so in the back of my mind

there was another rationale for making sure that we did confront them if we had to, but they were defeated, as the Chairman has kindly reminded us, and I think that they will not risk doing that again. Actually, at the risk of giving them a bit of military advice, it would be the worst thing they could possibly do because we can concentrate not necessarily only the troops, but we can concentrate combat power against them in a way they could never manage, and the old formula for an army attacking a defensive location is three forces, three to one. We did not have anything like three to one in the battle of Medusa, it was nearer one to one; what we had was fire power and some very brave fighting from some wonderful Americans in particular, led by an outstanding Canadian general. I do not think they are going to do it again in a hurry.

Q258 Mr Havard: Brigadier Lorimer seemed to be suggesting that over the summer—given that the spring offensive has not come along and the Taliban day labour as it were is still in the fields taking the harvest and has not come along yet, the tier one, tier two Taliban situation—his objective is probably high intensity counter-insurgency activities. How would you see that as different to what went before last summer?

General Richards: It is a term I do not really recognise, but I can infer from what you are saying that you could say that was happening last year when there was some very intensive fighting was high intensity counter-insurgency. I would like to think that with luck—and we will see what happens at the end of the poppy harvest—Brigadier Lorimer will be able to concentrate his expanded force more on securing reconstruction and development progress and keeping the Taliban, whatever numbers they may be, at distance from the Afghan Development Zone which is at the heart of his little provincial campaign. Going back to what we discussed earlier, by the end of this year we must be able to demonstrate real progress in terms of reconstruction and development, both in the Helmand Afghan Development Zone and in the others; we have got to show that in 2007 we really started delivering not only the long term stuff like the Kajaki Dam but the jobs, the alternative economy, that we have been discussing this afternoon.

Q259 Mr Havard: One question I wanted to ask you was about the Afghan National Army and their role in this because one of the things that is different in a sense, to answer my own question, is that he has more capacity in terms of using Afghan forces in a way that perhaps you did not because they have developed more over the period of time. When we spoke to General McNeill he was looking forward to the armoured manoeuvre capability that would come later in the year as well, teeing himself up for the next calendar year as it were and putting more resources in, and using the Afghan Army more involved in doing these things. What is your assessment of the development that the Afghan National Army requires in order to consolidate and perhaps be used to consolidate more? It is this

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horrible phrase about an Afghan face, it is not an Afghan face, it is an Afghan plan, it is the Afghans actually consolidating the plan once you give them the advantage.

General Richards: Two things, if I may. Under the Afghan Development Zone concept—and I have never liked the term Afghan Development Zone—it is actually a very well co-ordinated plan of how to take forward the counter-insurgency at provincial and regional level, and in that it sees Afghan National Army and police doing the less demanding but very necessary tasks of securing the ADZs and some limited offensive action, while the more demanding work is, if you like, done by the better trained, better equipped ISAF forces. That is how I see and I think General McNeill sees the Afghan Army being used more and more. It reduces this risk of creating vacuums as you go out of an area and in come the Taliban; you have got to somehow preserve your progress and the ADZ concept needed that missing link: that is where the Afghan Army should be able to focus. The problem is that we must not ask too much of an army that is still being trained; in other words we are developing it at the same time as we are fighting it and there is no doubt that one of the reasons for the high absentee rate in the Afghan Army is we are just asking too much of them, so we have to watch that carefully to make sure that it does not get to the point where the Afghans in the Afghan Army say this is more than we signed up for, because they are a volunteer army who are not paid a huge amount and they are often operating a long way from their homes, it is difficult to get back and all those things. The other thing I would add that is pertinent to this answer is that the USA is pouring billions of dollars into the Afghan Army this year and next, and I have absolute confidence that we will see a step change in the capability of the Afghan Army. This is why 2007 is an important year because you will not really see that come through until the end of the year and, in the meanwhile, we have just got to get the balance of use versus training and development right.

Q260 Mr Havard: That is quite interesting really. I do not know General McNeill very well but I assume he is a poker player because he was very clear about possibly not only being happy with what the Brits were giving him, but maybe they could give him a bit more a bit later on because he wanted another battalion now he has got one. It was this question about capacity, about being able to dominate the ground, and he was talking very much about using the Afghan National Army in that sort of process.

General Richards: You can dominate what has been secured—in other words you go into a semi-defensive mode relatively easily. The difficult thing is gaining the ground in the first place and then, after you have gained it, you secure it, and that is where the Afghan Army and police can be used very successfully.

Q261 Mr Havard: More in consolidation and less in manoeuvre because they do not have the manoeuvre capability.

General Richards: Yes, they are not at that stage of training and nor do they have the equipment, so I saw a nice little synergy developing between the more capable ISAF troops that, if you like, go forward and expand the ADZ while the security of the expanded ADZ can be more and more given to the Afghans.

Q262 Mr Havard: One final quick question, General Wardak was asking for more British embedded trainers. What was your view of how successful or otherwise that process was and was it a big enough contribution from the British in terms of helping develop the Afghan National Army?

General Richards: The British are pretty squeaky clean in this respect—I speak as a NATO officer—in that we, the UK, provided all the OMLTs (or “awful omelettes” as they were called) that we were asked to provide. I know that that process is still ongoing. There is no doubt, speaking to SACEUR again yesterday, that NATO as a whole needs to provide more OMLTs. If the UK had the wherewithal to do more than that would be great, but I do not think that the UK should by any means be singled out for anything but praise on this one.

Q263 Mr Havard: It is an additional contribution that NATO needs to make.

General Richards: There is no doubt that we have not met the original number of OMLTs and, of course, as the Army expands this number of OMLTs is going to expand too. That is a dynamic process and the UK is well ahead of the game at the moment in that respect.

Q264 Mr Jones: General, can I ask about military assets available to ISAF. When you were in charge the headlines in newspapers here were about lack of helicopters. Firstly, what is your position on that now and, secondly, what additional assets does ISAF actually need?

General Richards: There is a CJSOR which has now been agreed. That was a pretty long drawn-out process last summer and I remember we talked about it on your visit.

Q265 Chairman: Just remind us.

General Richards: Combined joint statement of requirement. That is put together by D-SACEUR on behalf of SACEUR in shape. As I understand it, talking yesterday—to bring you entirely up to date—after Riga and in the process immediately after that within the CJSOR an additional eight battalions were agreed to. Five have now been met, that is three US, a British battalion and the Polish battalion. If we the UK can provide this regional reserve later in the year, which is the plan now, then six of the eight will have been provided to General McNeill. There is more progress that needs to be made on it, but if you compare it with the situation last year it is pretty good and SACEUR is cautiously optimistic about it all.

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Q266 Mr Jones: One thing that I certainly was impressed with was the contribution that some of the new NATO Allies are making, which does not get a great deal of press over here. When you were in charge though, were you happy with the support that you were getting from NATO?

General Richards: There is NATO and there are the nations of NATO, I always was careful to draw a distinction, because NATO is as good as its constituent nations allow it to be and my chain of command could not have been more supportive to me, so I have no problems with NATO but I also now know more about the politics of the 37 nations of ISAF and the 26 nations of NATO than I ever thought I would.

Q267 Mr Jones: Just on that point, one of the issues which clearly I do not quite think the British media have got round and I do not think certain elements of the Conservative Party have got their head round yet is the fact that this is a multinational operation. What more can be done to actually expose, for example, what is actually happening, certainly with the tremendous work and dangerous work that the Dutch, the Canadians and others are doing and also, like I say, some of the new aspirant nations. Is there a selling exercise that needs to be done here in terms of British public opinion and also broader European opinion on this?

General Richards: There is. The Dutch have been brilliant down in the south. Everyone was very wary of whether they would have the stomach and actually they are conducting a model operation in Oruzgan, the Dutch Major-General, General van Loon, in Kandahar showed that a Dutch general is every bit as good as any other general with some very innovative thinking. Obviously, the Canadian effort I cannot praise too much, it is just wonderful the sacrifices Canada has made. I would like to say—and I know everyone knows that they are heavily involved—we would be nowhere without the USA in every respect, both in the amount of money they are putting in, through the bravery of their troops and their preparedness to take risk and to fight when not every nation yet has that offensive spirit. The smaller nations like the Estonians, the Danes, are filling vital slots that, say, in the case of the UK we would have a problem filling because of other commitments, they are being picked up by these other nations. The other one if I may, whilst I am praising a few others, is the Romanians. They have been a model of how new NATO perhaps should function. They picked up the Zabol commitment and moved out of Kandahar at a time when actually, in many respects, they would like to have stayed there because it was a relatively easy task, but they took on, with American help, the much more demanding Zabul province. My biggest heroes outside are the Portuguese, funnily enough, because they were my one little reserve, I had one company of light troops from Portugal, Britain's oldest ally, who did a hell of a lot of things that made a lot of difference, particularly in Farah province in a very demanding side shoot or offshoot of what was happening in the South.

Q268 Mr Jones: You saw the arrival of the first troops of Jordan coming in and also nations like the United Arab Emirates and others contributed forces. How important do you think it is to actually try and get non-NATO forces into this coalition?

General Richards: Eleven nations in ISAF were not in NATO and the Australian commitment, in particular, is an interesting one because that is becoming more significant still. There was a recent announcement from Prime Minister Howard that they were going to increase their contribution to about 1,000, which is fantastic news for everybody because they are extremely capable troops. Your point about Jordan and other Muslim states contributing is very important and I know that the Secretary-General of NATO is working on encouraging other Muslim nations to contribute and NATO held a very successful symposium in the Middle East not long ago, looking at that amongst other things. It would put the lie to any suggestion that this is a sort of us versus them, which it quite clearly is not. The other area that we are not allowed to get onto yet is obviously Pakistan and how can we do more with them.

Chairman: We will, shortly. John Smith.

Q269 John Smith: This is a bit of an unfair question, Chairman, but if the General is in a position to answer it, he was the military commander in the field during the Riga Summit and I just wondered whether you were encouraged by that summit, did it mark a step change in your opinion as regards the long term commitment of NATO to Afghanistan, or was it the same old posturing?

General Richards: Initially I thought same old stuff here, but actually what flowed from it has been nothing but good. I remember the then SACEUR—it was General Jones, it was his swansong really—ringing me and he asked me to write something, which I did, which in the corridors behind the main meeting, amongst all the other work that was going on, clearly did have effect. If you look at post Riga—and this is a point the new SACEUR made to me yesterday on the phone—there are now five battalions more in Afghanistan than there were pre-Riga. Whether it was all Riga I do not know, but we have every reason to think that there is very solid support within NATO as an institution for what NATO is trying to do in Afghanistan and the proof of the pudding in terms of Riga is that we have had quite a big increase in troops.

Q270 Chairman: Is there anything that you want to say about caveats, or has it all been said?

General Richards: I am happy if you are that we have discussed it and it has all been said. ROE, for what it is worth, I never saw as a problem; we are fighting within the ROE today and so it has not been an issue for me. Caveats you are as well-versed in as I am; troop numbers were the real issue rather than caveats. If we just pursue it slightly, without wishing to sound like some sort of apologist for what, for example, the Germans or the Swedes or any nation you like were doing in the North, or the Italians in the West, simply being able to move their troops from the North to the

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South would not have been a solution to me at all because we have got just about the right number of troops in the North to contain the situation there, which is broadly stable. I had no incentive to move them out; what I was always after—going back to your question—which has now been fully accepted was an increase in the overall number of troops, it was not really caveats because within the area where we were doing the fighting we were able to fight.

Chairman: Thank you. We have three issues left to cover; you have to leave at five o'clock. I would like to cover civil/military assistance etc until twenty-five to five, international/regional context, including the issue of Pakistan, until about quarter to five, narcotics until about five to five and the final five minutes for contingencies. Civil/military assistance; Dai Havard.

Mr Havard: We saw a much more integrated organisational set of arrangements as far as development work in the PRT and so on than we had seen previously, and quite clearly a lot of work had been done on that. All of those people, including the Afghans involved in some of the NGOs, told us about the difficulty of actually carrying out their work on the ground—are we going to deal with policing under this, Chairman?

Chairman: You could concentrate on policing.

Q271 Mr Havard: One of the things that clearly comes screaming through is that that is the gap, the development has gone on in the Army, General Wardak said to us “I want embedded trainers for policing as well as for the Army, that has been a success there, I want it here”, but it is missing. One of the things that I was interested in discussing with the President was this business about auxiliary policing, and you have mentioned it two or three times. Can I just say that I am confused about it; I am confused about it because on the one hand people described it as a militia, right through to being the community bobby, but it is the tension between that and the Afghan National Police, so now we have a discussion about should it be the Afghan National Police or these auxiliary police. What would you say about what should be done in relation to trying to develop that policing activity that does not, if you like, become counter-productive in the sense that it causes one force to clash against another because it becomes a regional force rather than a national force?

General Richards: There is no doubt that the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Auxiliary Police is part of the Afghan National Police, so anyone who said they are militia is just being mischievous. There were some that saw it as a militia but the parameters within which it was drawn up very clearly put them under the Minister of the Interior and under the police, but there were certain nations that did not like them, but in fact the PAG signed up to it and while I understand—and I checked last week because I thought you might raise it—there are still birthing pangs, broadly the aim is being achieved which is that they are securing localities. In that respect the idea that they are a local bobby is right, but obviously there is a slight difference in that they have to be armed and they have to be prepared to

fight to secure their locality. The whole issue of the police is a good one for you to get your teeth into because, if you like, the Afghan National Army is doing pretty well. Yes, it has further to go but there is a huge amount of money from the USA, they had ETTs and NATO is now partnering them through the OMLT concept. The Afghan National Police is at least two or three years behind the Army; it will benefit from a huge input in resources from the US again into the police, this year and next, which is why I keep saying how much we all owe the USA in this respect because both in absolute and relative terms they are putting in much more money than any other nation and they are also through a contract putting in trainers. They are ex-policemen who are being paid to go down into the most difficult areas and mentor and train the Afghan police, including the Afghan National Auxiliary Police.

Q272 Mr Havard: Is there a problem that the British Army might substitute for something there and end up trying to do that training as well.

General Richards: It would not be the first time.

Q273 Mr Havard: Without resources.

General Richards: Not without resources directly, but it would not be the first time that the British Army and other armies have had to act at least as role models to the police. I used to encourage all the NATO forces, if they saw there was a problem, not to just leave it but to get involved, whether it was misbehaviour on a roadblock or just not understanding what was about. I do not think it should become our role primarily, but we should not let bad habits develop sort of thing.

Q274 Mr Holloway: Helmand is where the Arab world would identify the British particularly and where we would appear on Arab television channels, perhaps to our own cost. Have we got the right balance of spending between military effort and reconstruction in Helmand?

General Richards: Difficult. I know it is a very crude use of my right arm, but if we agree broadly and crudely that we have to have an upward trajectory in progress which is sufficient to enthuse people to keep them with us, then from what you told me it would seem that we have not yet got that balance right, but it has to be much more holistic than chucking money at it. You need to look at how you develop capacity because if, say, there are not enough Brits or international people who want to go to Helmand, if you want to focus on Helmand, then there are plenty of Afghans that will do it.

Q275 Mr Holloway: I was about to ask exactly this, do you not think we are a bit self-centred sometimes because we imagine that only DFID or UN agencies can do stuff, but despite the lack of civil society there are actually a lot of Afghans who could do stuff with relatively small amounts of money that you could then expand when you have confidence, so why are we doing it?

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General Richards: You need both, it is a balance. You will need DFID to provide the structure and the overview and all this sort of thing, but I do think you can give properly trained Afghans much more to do, but you have to train them and I do not, to be frank, always see that process going on. If there is quite a lot of criticism of corruption and poor capacity, where are the solutions to that in a properly worked out programme that over one or two years will start to solve it?

Q276 Mr Holloway: Finally, if we accept that at the tactical level we have defeated the Taliban—as part of that we have got air power and they have not—what happens to security and therefore development, or the other way round if you want to put it that way, when and if our enemy starts using increased numbers of foreigners and increasing levels of asymmetrical warfare? What does that actually do to your ordinary Afghan's attitude towards us in terms of providing security and providing development?

General Richards: That is why they are going down that route, because they see the import in what you are hinting at. The only way to win at counter-insurgency is to ensure that the people remain on your side, therefore they want to see you succeed and they will report that the foreigner has arrived in their midst.

Q277 Mr Holloway: Are we on target for that? Are we where you would want us to be in terms of hearts and minds right now?

General Richards: I think, going back to your point, that the balance between investment in reconstruction, development and improvements in governance needs to be looked at again to make sure that it matches the S bit in my RDGP and S, and I suspect that you are right, that with the honourable and notable exception of the USA—and we the UK are there or thereabouts—there is insufficient money and effort overall going into Afghanistan to be certain that we will continue to achieve that upward trajectory in the minds of people of sufficient progress to meet their expectations.

Q278 Mr Hamilton: General, all through the discussion you have used your right arm quite a substantial amount of times. I am a Member of Parliament, I represent Midlothian, and I have two major towns, Penicuik at one side of the county, Dalkeith at the other side; with all the 24-hour television, newspapers and infrastructure the people in Penicuik have not got a clue what is going on in Dalkeith, the people in Dalkeith do not have a clue what is going on in Penicuik most of the time. We are building new schools in Midlothian, we are doing a whole host of things, but information that we try to put out in a sophisticated way within the United Kingdom—sometimes the message does not get there. In how many areas within Helmand Province, Afghanistan, do you think that people know what is happening in one part of Afghanistan to the other part? When you try to get that information through to the people and tell them what was being done and how we can help them, is it not the case in one village

that we might not be able to do that with another village because there is no infrastructure between them, they do not have a clue what is going on? How do you overcome that when you are communicating with the population to let them know individually that you are actually able to help? We find it difficult here, but it must be 100 times more difficult in Afghanistan.

General Richards: It is, and I could bore you with the woeful stories about the ignorance on the part of a lot of us about how you did that. For example, my PSYOPS chief came in once—a very short story this, Chairman, to substantiate your view—to show me a film he had made about alternative livelihoods, and it was really a very, very clever film, good stuff, showed greenhouses being built and tomatoes or something—the whole thrust was instead of poppy. I said to him “When is this going out then?” and he said “It will go out on Afghan television on whatever” and I said “How many poppy farmers watch television then in this country?” You are absolutely right and there are two things I would say: an information operation has to be rooted in substance and then if there is real progress—I will not use my right arm again—then over time, rather like the jungle drums, it does get out. The tribes often spread over a number of villages and they do meet, there are processes whether it is the provincial assembly or a regional substitute which they are beginning to develop, and then there are the various mullahs who are very important, so as long as it is rooted in substance it will happen. It is when you only, if you like, talk it but do not walk it that you have the problem over time that I think we have all identified, are we keeping pace with these people's expectations.

Chairman: Moving on to what we have all been waiting for, Pakistan and other areas. Dai Havard.

Q279 Mr Havard: It is Brian and myself actually who will try and ask about this, but one of the things I was interested in was the Iranian development work that is going on in Afghanistan and we had an interesting discussion with General McNeill about their involvement in the country and his idea of possibly also putting forces over to the West in Herat in the future and any mixed messages there may be in relation to the politics of that sort of activity in the South. We are interested in the Indian Government development programme building a road which links the ring road into Iran for trade purposes and so on, so the question really is about what was your experience in relation to the politics of the relationships with the Iranians.

General Richards: I had little interaction with the Iranians but I did meet the ambassador of Iran about three times and obviously I was well-versed in the amount of money and effort that Iran was putting into the West of the country but also into the Hazara population in particular, and it was clearly doing a lot of good work for Afghanistan. General McNeill's concern is a new development that I am really not in a position to comment on, I am afraid.

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Q280 Mr Jenkins: That is the problem I have got in that we do need the regional conference, we do need the players involved to make commitments, and that is India, Pakistan and Iran, the whole area. How do the Americans who are the lead players and the ones pushing it sit down with Iranians? How do we get them to understand that Iran in this area has a positive role to play, it has a commitment to stop the drugs going across its border, but 60% of it still goes across the border, and we have got to sit down and discuss these strategies as far as this is the only way we are going to get a regional plan to bring Afghanistan back to the civilised world as such, so when do we get it, how do we get it?

General Richards: Your judgment on this is better than mine but I do think first of all in my discussions with US officers about it, they recognise this issue, that there is a regional solution. It does not necessarily have to be dependent on a US lead, the heads of the states in the region do and can come together more frequently and for what it is worth—I know this is certainly not my business—the US were very happy for that to happen, so we have got to encourage the heads of state in the region to do it and then take it from there.

Q281 Mr Jenkins: Can I ask you the other side of the question which is about Pakistan? We went to Pakistan and they said they are doing all they can to try and avoid people going over the border, we went to India and the Indian government said the Pakistanis could be doing more, and so on. What was your experience, because we have Operation Enduring Freedom going to continue in terms of, if you like, chasing al-Qaeda and terrorism, alongside the ISAF operation; what was your take on relations with Pakistan in particular and whether it really is the problem that everyone says and the engine from which a lot of insurgency comes?

General Richards: Firstly, OEF and ISAF operations cohabit the same space and it worked tremendously well actually. The chairman of the joint chiefs said it would and he would trust me as the ISAF commander and I have to say that that was great, I could not ask for more, so I do not think that is key to this issue although I quite see why you have raised it at the same time, it is manageable. The thing is that inside Pakistan, just like I am told inside Iran, there are people who are causing us trouble. That does not mean it is Pakistan Government policy to cause trouble. Indeed, in my experience of some very good and detailed work with the Pakistan Army they are doing a tremendous amount and they are, in many respects, unsung heroes. It is all too easy to blame someone else, is it not, for things that are going on, in this case inside Afghanistan, so there is a difference between what is happening and the amount you can deal with it—ie on the part of Pakistan—and the degree to which it might be engineered in some way by the Pakistan Government. I just do not buy that. Clearly in the past, they will be the first to tell you, there were elements that we know historically supported the Taliban, but that was a different era and I do not think one wants to confuse that period with today. We had very good relations with the

Pakistan military; I obviously had the privilege of talking to President Musharraf on at least three occasions and I had good and convivial relations with his military leaders. Inside Kabul—I do not know if they talked to you about it—there is now a joint intelligence and operations centre so you can have Afghan officers, Pakistan officers and ISAF officers sitting in the same building doing the planning in intelligence operations between the tri-partite commission meetings which are also another military success. The real issue now is that the military is doing everything it can, but going back to what has been the thrust of much of our discussion, it is much beyond just military endeavour and we now need to get into a more strategic approach that sees—this would be my own view—Pakistan, Afghanistan and other nations in the region coming together to solve it as a regional issue. There is no mechanism for doing that at the moment; there are bilateral arrangements and we now need to develop those one step further to create a regional structure or mechanism that allows these nations to actually discuss the issues. These are a joint problem, they have got joint solutions there, and I know from my bilateral discussions with both presidents that they are talking about many of the same things, but there is no mechanism for bringing them into harmony.

Q282 Chairman: But at all levels of Afghan society there is a deep conviction from what we saw that this is the fault of Pakistan not doing enough about Taliban people having a safe haven in the Pakistani border region. Do you think that that fear is justified and do you think there is something that needs to be done to put that right that we are not doing?

General Richards: It is rather like when I was asked last year do I have enough and I would say no, I never have enough, no general ever has enough and, as we discussed, it was a close-run thing on occasions. The same criticism can be levelled against Pakistan, you are doing a lot but please do more, and I am sure that they would be the first to say to me, yes, we do need to do more. In my last meeting with General Hyat—he is effectively the head of the Army—he described how they are now putting the Army into the border zone to try to do more, and since I left I have noticed that some other leaders have been either driven into Pakistan or been dealt with within Pakistan one way or another. What I would say though is that this is not just Pakistan's business. On our side of the border, the Afghan side of the border, we need to do much more too. NATO needs to put more effort into it and one of the missing elements of the CJSOR that we discussed earlier is a battalion that would enable the commander of RC South, shortly to be a British Major General Page, to look after our side of the border, because the Pakistanis would quite rightly say to me “We understand we have to do more, but what about you lot on your side of the border?” and they were absolutely right, we had virtually no one on the border and it is a very, very difficult border to police. In Ireland we would have to control an 80 mile border, they have a nearly 2,500 kilometre border in some of the most inhospitable country in the world and the tribes that live either side of it have forever

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time gone across it. This is a very, very difficult subject and, yes, they could also do more, we need to do more, but let us stop viewing it in that way and let us act together to solve the problem in the way that two of you have suggested.

Q283 Mr Holloway: Are ISI or other Pakistani civil servants behaving unhelpfully within southern Afghanistan? Secondly, if they are, does General Musharraf have any influence over their activities?

General Richards: Very certainly he does. The ISI is commanded by a serving lieutenant-general in the Army and he made it very clear to me that he does as he is told.

Q284 Mr Holloway: Are there Pakistani civil servants in Afghanistan doing unhelpful things?

General Richards: I do not know the answer for certain and therefore this is conjecture, but I suspect there are people—if any, but this is where the perception comes from—that either were in or are in and, but this is conjecture, who are having a problem after 20 years of helping the Taliban, which is what they did historically, for understandable reasons at the time. They are having a problem seeing that the head of state—I have used the analogy of a super tanker and I believe the Prime Minister said something similar recently about how the super tanker has been told by the captain on the bridge to change course in that direction, but a super tanker takes some time to turn into the new direction. There are some people in the engine room or somewhere, who have not quite got the message, and those are the people who I think on occasion surface and explain why ISI are still up to what they were doing before. I suspect that is the reason, but I am quite clear that it is no longer an act of government policy on the part of Pakistan to support the Taliban.

Q285 Mr Hancock: Can I ask you, General, if in your opinion there can ever be a policy which would be successful in eradicating the opium trade?

General Richards: I think there is, the issue is how long will it take. If I may say, although I am on record as saying you have to be cautious and it is all about timing, the principle that it has got to be dealt with in the context of the counter-insurgency I have always fully supported because the Taliban are drawing a lot of their money and influence through the opium trade, and in other words we have got to beat the Taliban in that sense, we have to start dealing with their source of funding or a very important source of funding. The issue is are we at the point where we can sensibly do certain things and I think it is the second and third order consequences of eradication and the other things that we are doing that need to be carefully thought-through—have we got the troop levels right, are the police ready and trained to take on whatever the narco-warriors chuck at them in their last throes, those sort of things. It goes back to the coherence of the campaign, have we got a campaign that is really coherent across the piece, in which case fine, but I think we are a little bit far from that yet.

Q286 Mr Hancock: Where does the policy of ISAF troops giving out leaflets saying “We’re not responsible for eradication of poppy fields come from?”

General Richards: I have to say you have caught me on that one because it did not happen in my time as far as I know but, strictly speaking, somebody has interpreted the O-plan correctly in that the counter-narcotics effort is not a specified task for NATO troops, it is a supporting task. It is not our task, for example, to eradicate poppy.

Q287 Mr Hancock: If we go back to what you said about the difficulty of communication and the sort of message that is sent out, does that not send out two different messages?

General Richards: On the part of the international community’s effort as a whole, yes, but on the part of ISAF—and I am not trying to defend it, incidentally, I did not know that that had happened and I would not have wished that to happen and it did not in my watch as far as I am aware, because of the muddle—in one sense, whoever decided to do that may have been playing for short term gain in that if his troops had been identified as eradicators you would have had even more people opposing him and therefore there was some rationale in it, but I would not endorse it for one minute for the point you are making.

Q288 Mr Jones: I have to say I am a bit confused in terms of what the policy was, as Mike is probing at, but how it was explained to us—and actually when we flew into Lashkar Gah the farm next door to the compound had a nice poppy crop growing—was that the poppy eradication for the large scale narco areas was still carrying on, but what they did not want to do was actually eradicate the small farmer who had, say, half an acre of poppy growing in the short term because of potential conflict. That is how it was explained.

General Richards: It might have been that that was the case. Particularly if it was within an ADZ it would be perverse if the only people who were eradicated were those within the ADZ; at the same time, in one year’s time, if the alternative economy that we have been discussing can be created, then you can eradicate because you have an alternative.

Q289 Mr Hancock: But it is confused, and one of the things that confused me was when we met in Lashkar Gah the American who was in charge of their programme for alternative lifestyles, and when Dai asked him what is the connection between your programme—which did give some good examples of how they were bringing in alternative lifestyles—and the eradication work, he said there is no connection between the two. It worries me a little bit—not the mixed messages so much because I do think that practically what is actually happening is right, but longer term it needs to be more joined-up between eradication and alternative lifestyles.

General Richards: I would take it one step further and that is that it should be integrated into this overall campaign plan, because it is all these different bits. I hope he would not mind but I said to SACEUR

24 April 2007 General David Richards CBE DSO

yesterday what is the enduring biggest problem, because I wanted to make sure that I was current, and he said it is co-ordination. It is co-ordination within a district, between a district and a province and between the province and Kabul, and of course it is the purpose of the Policy Action Group to get at some of that and then we try to recreate the efficiencies of the PAG at provincial level and then ultimately at district level. I am told we have some way to go.

Q290 Mr Havard: That is quite clear; the USA policy was not necessarily joined-up with what was seen on the ground. Quite clearly it is United States money going to the President for the eradication programme and Dynacorp the American corporation people hiring people to go and do eradication alongside ISAF troops who were giving out leaflets, and we saw the leaflets saying “We do not do eradication”, so to the ordinary Afghan it is how do you make all these subtle distinctions. One of the questions I asked, however, is when that eradication programme is conducted, wherever it is conducted, what is done about a criterion of decision-making to decide whether or not it is a good strategic or tactical manoeuvre in any particular given set of circumstances, and I was told there was an elegant process somewhere that no one could describe to me that allows that to happen.

General Richards: There was a process for the first time in my last couple of months; I had a one star Brigadier Nugee, a British officer, who sat through with those who were designing—and it was a British lead—the eradication programme, and they agreed with the Afghans and the minister for counter-narcotics which areas would be eradicated and which ones would not. The details probably I do not need to go into.

Q291 Mr Havard: It is very much dependent on the governors’ structure, is it not?

General Richards: The governors conducted their own eradication of course as well. There was the central eradication which was funded by the US, AEF—the Afghan Eradication Force—and then there was ad hoc eradication conducted with money that each governor was given to do it. Actually, more eradication is achieved through that than by the AEF.

Q292 Chairman: We will need to ask questions of the secretary of state on this, but I hope that those who are taking notes of this will note our confusion and concern.

General Richards: And mine.

Q293 Mr Hancock: Can I take you back, General, about the article you wrote that appeared in the *Guardian* and what you have slightly alluded to this afternoon which appears to be your frustration about the lack of co-ordination, that the money was being put there and yet not everyone was moving at the

same pace and so not everyone was actually up for the same game. Did that persist through the whole time you were there?

General Richards: It goes back to the issue of co-ordination being the Achilles heel of this thing, and of course historically if a single person runs the whole thing you do not have a problem with co-ordination. We are in the real world where 37 plus nations were involved plus the Afghans, so I do not think one can seek Nirvana here but there is a degree of co-ordination that has yet to be achieved.

Q294 Mr Hancock: You specifically mentioned the frustration you felt between the co-operation from the FCO and the lack of commitment or maybe the slowness of DFID to operate, which made co-ordination even more frustrating for the British general and two British departments here not working as one.

General Richards: Of course, I was there in a NATO capacity but that is neither here nor there really, but it did dilute my British role a little bit because I had a lot of other things to do. From what I recall—you may have it in front of you and I apologise if I am wrong—I did say that in the summer things were not too good on the development front, but in the eyes of DFID we were creating the environment in which they could safely conduct their activities. I know, as one of you mentioned earlier, that things have come on a long way, and that co-ordination is now much better. The real issue is not so much whether it is well co-ordinated, it is two-fold: one is should we do more to win the campaign and, secondly, is there some mechanism by which what the Americans call CERPS—Commanders Emergency Relief Programme—which is a pot of gold for the military commander to put in and implement shorter term things that the local people really want, wells, short stretches of road and those sorts of things which currently most NATO troops, other than the US Army, do not have. It is not DFID’s job really to do that, they are focusing—I think by statute—on development issues; they do take time and I understood that, but there is a little bit of an area between that and the immediate stuff that is being done by the Army, the fighting and the patting on the heads, that sort of thing, that we could do which the Americans do to great effect. I will give you an example: in one valley in the East after a push through the valley by American troops, within a couple of days they were rebuilding things, putting in a road, building a new mosque, putting in wells, those sorts of things that showed just how well this can be brought together. My feeling is—as I said in that article—that we need to give all NATO troops that sort of facility. It is rather like sending troops into action without a rifle; in modern combat, certainly in counter-insurgency, every commander needs a pot of gold, and I do not think we have yet got that and where we have got it, it is not really sufficient. That is the point I was getting at really.

Chairman: There are lots of questions we could continue to ask you but it is now five o’clock and we must say thank you very much indeed for coming to give us evidence.

Tuesday 8 May 2007

Members present:

Mr James Arbuthnot, in the Chair

Mr David S Borrow
Mr David Crausby
Linda Gilroy
Mr Mike Hancock
Mr Dai Havard
Mr Adam Holloway

Mr Bernard Jenkin
Mr Brian Jenkins
Mr Kevan Jones
Robert Key
Willie Rennie
John Smith

Witnesses: **Rt Hon Des Browne MP**, Secretary of State for Defence, **Lieutenant General Nick Houghton CBE**, Chief of Joint Operations, and **Mr Desmond Bowen CMG**, Policy Director, Ministry of Defence; **Mr Peter Holland**, Head of Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit (ADIDU), Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and **Ms Lindy Cameron OBE**, Head of Department for International Development, Afghanistan, gave evidence.

Q295 Chairman: Good afternoon, Secretary of State, and welcome. As you know, this is a part of our second inquiry into Afghanistan and we are taking evidence from you, Secretary of State, for the second time in this second inquiry, so you have been back and back, and we are most grateful to you for doing this. We went to Afghanistan two or three weeks ago and many of our questions will be informed by that visit, but I wonder if I could ask you to begin, Secretary of State, by introducing your team please.

Des Browne: Certainly, Chairman. I am not that long back from Afghanistan myself, so perhaps we can compare notes. On my far right is Desmond Bowen, who is the Policy Director from the Ministry. Immediately to my right is Lindy Cameron who is the Head of DFID Afghanistan and is part of the team at the special request of the Committee. On my immediate left is Lieutenant General Nick Houghton, who is here for the second time in this inquiry as the Chief of Joint Operations and for a second appearance also is Peter Holland, who is the—

Q296 Chairman: I think it is about his third or fourth time.

Des Browne: In this current investigation?

Q297 Chairman: Not in this current investigation, no.

Des Browne: Here in this current investigation for the second time, and Peter Holland is also here at the specific request of the Committee.

Q298 Chairman: We met Lindy Cameron in Kabul. This is a personal comment of mine. I went to Afghanistan this most recent time feeling really very pessimistic about it and came back feeling less pessimistic, but thinking that the work that is being done in Afghanistan is going to take a very long time indeed. When we were there, we heard about progress that had been made there and there was no doubt there was a lot still to be done, but, Secretary of State, I wonder if you agree that it should be suggested to the British people that this is going to

take a very long time indeed and certainly will take the deployment of equipment and people way beyond 2009?

Des Browne: Well, can I just say first of all, Chair, that I am pleased that your visit to Afghanistan dispelled at least some of the pessimism, if not all of it, and no doubt the rest of the questions that we face during this session will be an indication as to what extent that was in dispelling pessimism. It is of course a very significant challenge, what we and others have taken on in Afghanistan, and I have never made light of that at any time. Can I just say that I think people ought to be reminded, and maybe the public should be reminded, that in January of 2006, which would then be five years after we had embarked on this challenge, at the London Conference the international community in the Afghan Compact agreed with the Government of Afghanistan that they would commit to five years at that time, so that of itself takes the international community's commitment, expressed in the Compact, to 2011. We ourselves as a government made a bilateral commitment to Afghanistan for 10 years to support and be with them. I realise that that does not mean that at that stage either the international community or we ourselves committed to a military presence in Afghanistan for either of those two periods and I think it is more the military side of this that the Committee is interested in, although I believe that this country, having been 30 years in conflict or more, will take efforts to get to the stage where they will be able to stand on their own two feet, and I think that the international community will have to support them for a considerable period of time. Perhaps some of the confusion in relation to time arises from the fact that when we announced the deployment of troops into the southern part of Afghanistan, we announced at the same time that, for planning purposes, we would be planning to 2009, and that has been interpreted as a commitment to 2009 with nothing beyond. My own view is that, given the nature of the challenges there, particularly the security challenge, we will have to stay with the Afghans beyond 2009, but exactly how long and in what way I think it is too early to tell. We have only been about one year

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deployed, I think it is about a year almost exactly since we first deployed troops into Helmand Province and I think it is just too early to say at this stage exactly what the nature and shape of our commitment will be beyond 2009, but I agree that we will have to have a commitment. Exactly how many troops we will have to have there and what they will be doing will be more a function of our ability to be able to grow and develop the Afghan National Army and a police force to provide security there than anything else.

Q299 Chairman: But about one month ago you said that we were one of the few countries that could actually do this really difficult work, so a lot of the burden will fall to us in military terms. Do you think that, without an increase in funding and in manning in Afghanistan, we will be able to sustain the commitment that you are talking about now?

Des Browne: Well, I do not retract any of the words that I used before, but I would need to look at exactly the context of them to see what exactly I was talking about as far as difficult work is concerned.

Q300 Chairman: It was in the statement you made to the House of Commons when you were announcing the extra 1,400 or 1,600 troops.

Des Browne: The point I am making, Chair, is that we are in an evolving set of circumstances. As we will no doubt come to during the course of this session, we will be looking at what is going on in Afghanistan, particularly in the south and in the east of Afghanistan at the moment, compared to what was happening, for example, about a year ago when we deployed our troops there and we were engaged in some quite heavy war-fighting sustained in a very particular way. We will, in my view, over the course of the next year see a situation which will evolve further and our ability to be able to improve the security situation and also to improve the ability of the Afghan National Army and its own police force to be able to take over from us and to take the lead in security, I think, will be this principal determining factor as to what scale and nature of military commitment we will need to make.

Q301 Chairman: But do you accept that there needs to be a large-scale exercise to persuade the British public that we are going to be deploying resources there for a long time?

Des Browne: Well, I have never made any bones about the nature of the challenge that we face and the level of the commitment, but I have never been in a position to answer precisely the questions that people always want me to answer precisely. I can give prescriptive answers and say that this is a difficult and challenging environment, and I have been straightforward and honest about it, but we will need to see over the course of the next year to what extent the work that we have already done, which has shown some progress and progress is being made, the extent to which we can build upon that and how the other parts of what has become known as the "comprehensive approach" create a

secure environment, but also create capacity with the Afghans to be able to do what we are doing. From where I am at the moment, I am not able to put specific measures on that, but I do not avoid the question that this will be a long-term commitment. I think we will be involved, we the international community and the British in particular, and the Americans will be involved with the Government of Afghanistan, militarily we will be involved with them and financially in terms of financial support, so we will be involved with them in all the ways that we presently are for some period of time. The scale and nature of that will depend on the progress that we make. I am concerned, Chair, that if I say things very specifically, they will be misinterpreted. This is an evolving set of circumstances and, as I have been absolutely straightforward with the Committee on a number of occasions, we have learnt a lot from the last year, but things are different this year than they were last year.

Q302 Mr Jones: Secretary of State, can I talk about current operations. On April 20 the media reported that Operation Silicon was taking place in the Sangin Valley. Can you just give us an update on what is happening, what the aims were of that operation and whether they have been achieved?

Des Browne: I think, first of all, in order to understand Operation Silicon, you have to understand the kind of operational intent of the ISAF Commander for that part of Helmand. The overall operational objective comes under the title "Operation Achilles". The intention of the operational Commander, as I understand it and indeed it is, is to do two things in that area. One is to engage the Taliban in that area and specifically by engaging the Taliban and keeping them on the back foot, as we have been doing over all of the winter across southern and indeed eastern Afghanistan and in other parts of Afghanistan, to protect Kandahar in particular because Kandahar is an iconic place for the Taliban, as the Committee will know. Secondly, it is to create an environment in the upper part of Helmand that allows a very specific project to take place and that is the development of the Kajaki Dam which is very important to reconstruction and development in southern Afghanistan. At the tactical level, there have been two operations, one being Operation Silver which was designed to effectively clear the Taliban out of the village of Sangin in the northern part of the Sangin Valley and to establish or re-establish the writ of the Afghan Government. That has been done. The supplementary tactical operation goes under the name of "Operation Silicon" and it is designed to do two things, one of which is to do the same for the southern part of the Sangin Valley down to Gereshek and, by doing that, to spread the opportunity for reconstruction and development north of the Afghan Development Zone which presently ends at about Gereshek. What has happened since it started at about the end of April is that the battlefield-shaping exercises have been concluded successfully, what is known as the "kinetic" part of it has been

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successful and we are now into the consolidation part in anticipation of the construction and other work that needs to be done, so it is ongoing at the moment, but it has broadly been successful in its earliest phases.

Q303 Mr Jones: So it is a phased approach and, once we have secured an area, what is the process then in terms of ensuring that you keep that area clear of Taliban? How does it actually work? Are there specific timelines for those or is it just as and when?

Des Browne: Well, this operation does not only involve us, it involves other coalition forces specifically, including the Reserve which has been deployed into these operations, but it also includes Afghan National Army forces. The intention, once an area is secured, is to have Afghan National Army forces deployed into government centres or into the area to hone and consolidate the security and to support them by immediate QIPs projects which are designed at improving the security infrastructure, putting in vehicle checkpoints, improving the security of the police station, improving the security of the government centres, allowing the Afghan forces to operate in an infrastructure which they can protect and then to follow that up with a carefully planned and agreed reconstruction efforts which sometimes concentrate on improving schools, improving perhaps the mosque in the area which sends a very strong message to the people of that area in terms of information operations in relation to the propaganda that the Taliban use, and there are multifarious wells, clearing up of ditches, all sorts of small quick-impact projects that have an effect on the community, and then to allow an environment that NGOs and others can deploy into in order to do the longer-term development work.

Q304 Mr Jones: That is clearly a thought-out strategy, but when we met General McNeill in Kabul, he said that the coming priority over the next few months was to continue taking the fight to the Taliban, a pre-emptive attack, and keep at them. How does that fit in with this? Is that separate from this planned control of areas or how does it actually work? Are they running side by side?

Des Browne: I can see from the CJO's body language that he is anxious to answer this part of the question, so perhaps he could.

Lieutenant General Houghton: It is very hard to improve on what the Secretary of State has said for a start. He has got absolutely the right balance between what are tactical sets and operationally desired outcomes. As he said, just to refresh, in respect of the operationally desired outcomes of Achilles, that is taking the pressure off Kandahar and creating the circumstances under which security is right in the Sangin Valley to enable the Kajaki Dam project and that is the desired outcome of the tactical sets and Op Silver and Op Silicon. However, at the same time Commander ISAF has a series of desired operational outcomes throughout Afghanistan, many of them actually concentrating in RC South and RC East, some of them down in the

border areas, and again through Commander RC South, he lays down what his desired operational outcomes are and then the tactical sets match that, so this is happening as concurrent activity all the time. I think the Secretary of State mentioned that the Commander ISAF's tactical reserve has been put at the disposal of RC South and down into Helmand for the two tactical sets of Silver and Silicon and I think they are going to be with Commander RC South for a little while longer and then will be lifted to be put in support of one of the other tactical sets, but you will understand that, because these are operations into the future, I could not now specify where in time and place those tactical sets are or necessarily the operational outcome design.

Q305 Mr Hancock: Are you satisfied, Secretary of State, once an area has been relatively secured and it is then safe for others to come in behind you, that there are both the financial resources available and the manpower resources then to carry out the hearts and minds operation that needs to happen?

Des Browne: If you take, for example, the lower Sangin Valley or the Sangin Valley itself, the United States have committed \$3.7 million for follow-up projects, what we would call "QIPs" projects, in that area over and above the plans that we have for the Sangin Valley. I do not have the list in front of me, but I know that we can give the Committee a list of the projects, the QIPs projects which cover a wide range of different areas for the Sangin Valley, so I am satisfied that we are doing what it is necessary to do, but at the end of the day what will hold security in these areas is a combination of governance and local security. It is proper policing, a presence of the Afghan National Army and that the Governor's writ runs. Now, in preparation and anticipation of these tactical operations, a significant amount of work was done by the Governor and indeed, in the case of Operation Silver, the President himself came down into Helmand Province and had a shura with their tribal leaders to explain what this was about and to get the support of the tribal leaders for sustaining the situation. Also in anticipation of both of these operations, there has been a quite significant information operation to send a very strong message into these communities about what these operations were about. Now, on the measures of success that are applied by assessing the level of resistance which these operations have faced, those information operations were successful because they persuaded the local people not to fight with the troops as they were deployed into the area, but at the end of the day this is not an exact science. We have to understand the very low base from which we are starting and that is what instructs of course the Chairman's first questions to me. It is a very low base from which we are starting and of course we will have some success and there will be regression from that point of success, but it is inevitable that that will be the case and, until we test the ability of the Afghan forces to be able to hold in this environment the areas that we have cleared, we will not know whether they are able to do it. We have got to be very careful that we do

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not over-extend them, so it is not an exact answer, Mr Hancock, to your question, but this is not an exact science.

Q306 Mr Holloway: Mr Bowen, we have a great plan, there is no doubt about that, the comprehensive approach is marvellous, but do you think we are delivering it?

Mr Bowen: From the perspective of the ordinary Afghan, which we do not talk about very often, I think we are increasingly delivering it. The efforts of the military followed by the efforts of the International Development Department and the money of the International Development Department, some of which is spent by Royal Engineers deployed for that purpose, are, I think, delivering exactly the kind of comprehensive action that we seek. Has it been a slowish start? I would say yes, it probably has, but on the ground I think now we see the activity brought together of the military and civilian heads in Lashkar Gah as being something that is actively being pursued and actively being delivered.

Q307 Mr Holloway: So do you think your ordinary Afghan would think things were better this year than they were last?

Mr Bowen: I would say that there are some ordinary Afghans that would say that and there are an awful lot of ordinary Afghans in quite remote places that probably do not see that, and there will be some ordinary Afghans who see the rough end of some military activity, but the intention is there and indeed I think the message is beginning to get out, but maybe I should turn to my colleague, Lindy Cameron, who is actually delivering some of these projects.

Q308 Chairman: I am wondering whether we are getting slightly away from the subject and whether we will come back to this.

Des Browne: Might I just state one or two things. I do not have the qualification of being an ordinary Afghan, nor to my knowledge does Mr Bowen, but what we do is we measure, and consistently measure, the view of the people of Helmand Province through polling and that polling comes across my desk and overwhelmingly the majority of the people of southern Afghanistan welcome our presence and talk optimistically. You have to understand that these people have been through a number of changes in their lives; they have seen people come and go and they have lived in a number of brutal sets of circumstances. Until they see that we are there and can sustain the security, then they will not believe that they should be optimistic for themselves or for their children. I read, and I will not repeat it, General Richards' evidence to this Committee, but he went on, I thought, quite eloquently and at some length about how important it was for us to be able to show the people of southern Afghanistan that not only could we match the Taliban, but that we could sustain that position of security, and it does not take a genius to work out why that is the case because, if

we cannot sustain that position, then when the Taliban come back they will punish them for the fact that we were there for a period of time. We know that, so I think it is early days to be saying whether Afghan people have made the decision about this. The polling suggests that they are still optimistic, that they support our presence, that they see improvements, but at the end of the day we will need to sustain this position for a period of time before they will come to the state of mind that we want them to.

Q309 Chairman: Secretary of State, do you make that polling public?

Des Browne: We do not, no.

Q310 Chairman: Why not?

Des Browne: I do not know the answer to that, Chairman. I will need to enquire about it. There may well be reasons to do with the security of the people that we poll.

Q311 Chairman: The attitudes of Afghan people?

Des Browne: Well, I think the reason that we do not make it public is that we have concerns about the security of the people who engage with us and the people that we ask to carry out this work for us. I will look at it.

Q312 Chairman: Could you, please.

Des Browne: I will do.

Q313 Chairman: Could we have copies of the polling, if you could consider that as well, please.

Des Browne: I will of course.⁸

Q314 Robert Key: Chairman, I am very anxious that we should not be deluding ourselves on this question of polling because this Committee has been told in an earlier session that the polling that has been done is only amongst women and only in the safest and friendliest parts of the country. Therefore, I am pretty doubtful that we should take it too seriously. Can you comment on that? Am I right?

Des Browne: Certainly that is not right about the polling that I see. It could not possibly be in the safest parts of the country if it has been conducted in Helmand Province; that is axiomatic, it seems to me. I do not agree with that interpretation of the polling, but I do not hold the polling up as being the total answer. This is not an exact science and, as Mr Bowen has said and I agree with, of course there are violent acts taking place in some of these communities, but we should not kid ourselves that there were not violent acts taking place in some of these communities before we deployed into them. The Taliban's behaviour in some of these communities was absolutely brutal.

Q315 Mr Jenkins: Secretary of State, on 2 May the BBC reported maintenance problems with the Army's WMIK, the armoured Land Rover used in

⁸ Provided in confidence

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Afghanistan. They reported that, due to maintenance problems and a shortage of spares, nearly a quarter of the fleet was not in working order. How would you respond to press reports about the availability of this vehicle?

Des Browne: The WMIK Land Rover is a very important vehicle for us in Afghanistan and indeed those of you who have spoken to the people who use them will have been told that they value them very highly and that they think they are a very helpful piece of equipment. At any given time on operations, particularly operations in the sort of arduous environment that is southern Afghanistan, a proportion of our vehicles will be in need of maintenance, there is no question about that, and indeed that is why we deploy into theatre people to maintain vehicles because they need to be maintained and things break. It is not a failure of planning that things break, it is a function of operations and the very difficult environment if things break, so at any given time there will be a proportion of them that are in need of repair or are being repaired and in fact we deploy additional vehicles in order to mitigate that very set of circumstances. My understanding is that we expect for any given time about 20% of our vehicles to be under repair. Currently, the figure is significantly lower than that and I do not recognise any time when a quarter of our vehicles were in need of repair. It was reported that that was the case, but I do not recognise that as being an accurate figure, that there were a quarter, but it may well have been that at one particular point there were 25% not being serviced, and I cannot say, but I do not recognise that figure. Currently and throughout the time of deployment of these WMIK vehicles to Afghanistan, my understanding is that the figure has been less than the 20% that we plan for and repair at any time and I think it is a credit to our mechanics and the people that do the work there in very difficult circumstances who work very hard to keep these vehicles that they were able to achieve that.⁹ Can I also say that every other country that has equipment in this environment has the same problems. It is as if the fact that things break when you use them in very difficult terrain is a function of some decision of the MoD; it is not. It is a function of the fact that we are using the vehicles in very difficult terrain.

Q316 Mr Jenkins: I like your answer, Secretary of State, so far, but honestly when you have got vehicles operating in this type of environment, which is hot, dusty, awful, things break, things go wrong and what I want to know is whether our supply chain is adequate to make sure we have got the spares there to keep these things up and running so that it does not interfere with the operational capability of the force, and are you going to say, "Of course they are"?

Des Browne: If the information I have been given, and again the CJO looks at me as if he wants to supplement what I have to say and I am content that

he should do so, but, if the information I am given is that we expect about 20% of our vehicles to be under repair at any one time and that consistently the figure has been less than that, then that suggests that we are doing well in relation to getting the spares that are needed to repair them and the mechanics are doing an extraordinary job in very difficult circumstances to keep these vehicles going at a level that we had not planned we would be able to achieve.

Lieutenant General Houghton: That is just the point I was going to make. This particular BBC reporter, I have to say, caused the severe irritation of the Commander of the Task Force because he had not checked his facts, he had picked up some apocryphal stuff from some of the soldiers. The number of deployed WMIKs in theatre is 140 and we would go to the envelope of perhaps a 20% margin for first-line repair, but as of today 120 are available and that is 86% availability and we have been nowhere close to the 25% mark, again supporting the fact that there are sufficient both first-line vehicle mechanics and spares in the system to keep us well up to our desired operational availability level.

Q317 Mr Jenkin: There is no doubt that these vehicles are getting an absolute pasting in that environment and of course, as our military operations become more manoeuvrable in character, that mobility becomes more important and, therefore, they are getting even more of a pasting. While we were out there, the guys were certainly looking forward to having the next generation of vehicles. Can you confirm that that is actually going to happen and it is going to happen in good time and can you give us any other information about what we might be deploying in order to make sure that that mobility component is maintained?

Lieutenant General Houghton: I think currently the maintenance issue, as I say, is not a concern against availability of the in-theatre equipment. There is a plan to roll out, as it were, the next generation of WMIK and, without going into the detail, we have changed the roll-out profile, but actually the full roll-out of the additional vehicles, the changed profile, gets us to the fully deployed state quicker than we had previously thought. The enhancements in respect of the Warriors, they will be out in their anticipated time-line of September, the Mastiff that is there again in its anticipated roll-out, the figure there being 166 deployed, 132 available, again just within the tolerances. Therefore, there is nothing on the protected vehicle mobility side at the moment that gives us any cause for concern, but of course it is always a dynamic battle between technical developments on the enemy side and our own to make certain that we maintain the technological edge, which is why we have specific teams deployed that look at the specific capabilities requirements against the emerging threat because there might be a requirement through the UOR system to rush further elements of protected mobility into theatre.¹⁰

⁹ Note by witness: The target availability for WMIK is, in fact, 90%, not 80%.

¹⁰ Note by witness: These figures are for the whole patrol vehicle fleet.

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Q318 Mr Jenkin: I am thinking in particular about enhanced WMIK. It has a new name, I wrote it down and I cannot find it.

Lieutenant General Houghton: E-WMIK?

Q319 Mr Jenkin: Menacity?

Lieutenant General Houghton: Yes, there is a WMIK and an E-WMIK and the E-WMIK relates to the quality of armour on the floor and the radio fitting. Then Menacity, if you like, is a WMIK and, remember, "WMIK" is no more than an abbreviation for "Weapon Mounted Installation Kit", but mounted on a Pinzgauer rather than a Land Rover.¹¹ Indeed, it is the deployment of the Menacity rather than further enhanced WMIKs which alters the profile of the deployment, but gets the full requirement of vehicles there more quickly than was going to be the case with the enhanced WMIK.

Q320 Mr Jenkin: And that is happening?

Lieutenant General Houghton: That is happening.

Q321 Chairman: When will the Mastiff deployment be complete?

Lieutenant General Houghton: I have not got a firm date, but there has been no change. It is the late autumn, which is, I think, what I gave last time and, as far as we are aware, there is no change to that.

Q322 Chairman: So there has been no delay?

Lieutenant General Houghton: No delay that I am aware of.

Q323 Mr Borrow: There have been a number of suggestions made to the Committee, including by General Richards and President Karzai, that the effectiveness of military operations would be improved if the length of the tours were increased or at least as far as the senior officers were concerned, if they were there for a longer period of time. I wonder how you respond to the suggestion that senior officers should be there for periods in excess of six months?

Des Browne: Well, I agree with them, that there is advantage in relation to certain posts to have people there for longer than six months. Of course, again as General Richards told you, that has consequences for the families of those who may be asked to stay in post for longer. General Richards himself did nine months in post precisely for the reasons that he and President Karzai believe would come as a benefit to operations from extended periods like that about continuity, building relationships and all the things that are important for the people at that senior level. Major-General Page, who will take over as the Commander for Regional Command South, will serve nine months. Whether we take this further and apply it to other posts of course will depend on the job involved, but I have no objection in principle, but the only other point I make is of course that we are operating in a multi-national environment and

the length of tours of commanding officers, particularly where they are commanding troops from another country, is a matter for negotiation and discussion with our NATO partners and others who are deployed in the area, and we have to take into account the views of other countries as well as the views, with all due respect, of General Richards and President Karzai and the other people who get a vote in this particular discussion. I agree with them and I think there is something to be said for extending the tours of important people at a particular stage at this stage in the command.

Q324 Mr Borrow: Do you consider it was worth exploring the possibility of extending ISAF XI and XII to periods of in excess of one year?

Des Browne: I am not sure what would be gained by extending the periods of ISAF. There are ongoing discussions all the time about the terms of service of senior officers and, as I say, they are discussed at a fairly senior level between the Chiefs of the Defence Staff all the time. What has emerged from that which has affected our officers is that both General Richards and General Page will be extended to nine months, or they have been and will be extended to nine months.

Q325 Mr Hancock: In the summer of last year, ISAF's assessment of the Taliban's capability and tactics seems to have been somewhat unreliable and we were getting conflicting information about the reliability of our intelligence. How can we be sure that the current assessments we are getting are more accurate?

Des Browne: Intelligence is just what it says it is; it is information which is gathered. I think we are in danger of getting into the situation where we put more of a burden on the people who collect this information and on the information than they are entitled to bear. Intelligence can only guide us and we have to make our best assessment on the basis of the information that we glean from a number of sources. Why do we think we are better in a position to come to more accurate conclusions? Well, we have a year of experience in the environment, we have a year of experience of observing the enemy, of collecting information from engagement with them, observing their tactics, learning from logistic lines their lines of communication and also from building up the sorts of sources that we would normally use for intelligence purposes in that environment, so we are better placed from that year's experience to come to conclusions than we were when we had not been in that environment before and were relying solely on intelligence that had been gleaned from a comparatively small number of sources.

Q326 Mr Hancock: When the Committee were in Afghanistan, they heard conflicting interpretations of the purpose of the agreement in Musa Qalehh, and General Richards acknowledged that there were shortcomings in the way that the agreement was explained to the Afghans. What steps have been

¹¹ Note by witness: Menacity is based on a SUPACAT chassis.

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taken to improve the way ISAF gets its message and its role, its specific role, across to the Afghans at all levels?

Des Browne: As far as the Musa Qaleh agreement is concerned, it is not just the Afghan people who, in my view, misunderstand the Musa Qaleh agreement. I read over the weekend a very interesting report by Amnesty International on the violence of the Taliban and breaches of human rights by the Taliban, and no doubt members of the Committee have read that report. At the heart of that report there is an assertion that we, the UK Government or our Commanding Officer, negotiated the Musa Qaleh agreement with the tribal elders of Musa Qaleh. The fact of the matter is that that is not true. It was gleaned from media reports of that agreement back here in the United Kingdom where the footnotes indicate where that came from, as indeed almost every assertion that is made in the report has a footnote that depends on the media somewhere or another, but that is not the case. The fact of the matter is that the Musa Qaleh agreement was an Afghan agreement. It was an agreement by the Governor of Helmand with the tribal elders which was endorsed by the President himself and, in those circumstances, it was an Afghan agreement that we respected and which we thought had potential for a template for moving forward if the tribal elders were able to exclude the Taliban from their area and allow the Governor's writ to run in the area. We thought that was far better than having to fight in these communities and we were supportive of it, but it was an Afghan agreement.

Q327 Mr Hancock: But the President himself—

Des Browne: Let me just answer the second part of your question, Mr Hancock, which is that the only way in which we can ensure that the people of these communities know and understand what is going on is by encouraging and improving communication between their Government both at central and at provincial level and the people who represent them, the tribal elders, and, as I have already explained, we were very successful, it would appear, in doing that in relation to Op Silver and Op Silicon by using in one case the President and a shura and then the other the Governor himself sitting down with the tribal elders and explaining to them what is going on, and that is what we continually try to do. Over and above that, of course we have, as ISAF, the opportunity to put out messages on the radio or to put out messages through local media, and we do that, but the fundamental is if their own people who lead the communities know and understand what is going on and explain it to them, then that is the most successful. This is substantially an environment where word of mouth dominates this area.

Q328 Mr Hancock: But do you feel that there is a problem yourself and is the advice that you are giving that there is a failure to explain properly? The Committee were told by the President himself and indeed by General McNeill that they had real reservations about the way this agreement had been

put together. Now, it is an Afghan agreement, but the President raised with this Committee very strongly held reservations and said that he doubted whether he would sanction such an agreement again. Are you personally concerned on the advice you are getting that the real message of what we are actually doing there is not getting across at all levels? I do not want to talk about ordinary Afghans. If you have the situation where the President and the Afghan farmer have doubts about why we are there, then are we sure that we are actually telling people why we are there?

Des Browne: Well, just like in this community or this society, mostly when people are commenting on things that have happened, then they are not motiveless. Helmand Province is a very challenging environment, not just physically in terms of its terrain, its weather patterns and its poverty, but the Taliban operate in there and these people are capable of propaganda in a way that would be unthinkable to us. They can do things which we would never contemplate doing. First of all, they lie comprehensively, they lie with violence and they intimidate and they use night letters and other ways of getting their messages into the community, and it is very difficult for us with the constraints that we have and the way in which we can approach these issues, quite proper constraints, to be able to face that sort of intimidation and propaganda down. It is not surprising in these communities that people who are having a message delivered to them quite often with an overt or implied threat are more impressed by that message than they are by the carefully delivered message which is designed to try and encourage them to stand up against that. It is also not surprising to me that sometimes people are selective in their recollection of exactly how certain circumstances come about if they are not as successful as they think they may be. What I am satisfied of is that we are doing the very best in very difficult circumstances, but our whole objective is to build up the ability of the Afghan Government to be able to engage with its people and give them the reassurance that they need because that is what we are about because building governance is a key element of this and our ability to be able to do that depends on how good the messages are that we are given by the Afghan Government as well, but I am satisfied that we are doing as well as we can, but that does not mean that we will not improve in doing it. The longer we are in there, the better we will get at doing it.

Q329 Robert Key: Chairman, some people have suggested to us Secretary of State that there is a real need to improve the number and performance of political advisers to the military. How many political advisers are there in Helmand, should or could there be more and what is the role of the political adviser to the military?

Des Browne: I do not know the answer to the specific question about numbers, I am sorry, though maybe somebody at this table knows the specific answer, but we can get that for you. To be honest, Mr Key, in

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four visits this year to Afghanistan, nobody has ever raised this issue with me about the number of political advisers, so that is the reason why I have had no reason to ask anybody how many there actually are. I meet people who do that job and I know they are valued very highly by the people they work with. Their role is to do exactly, with respect, what it says on the tin and that is to advise the military about the political environment that they are operating in, to be au fait with it, its complications, and to make sure that they know and understand those complications, but, I have to say, my sense of the military officers that I have met at that level who have political advisers is that they are very alert and very aware of the political circumstances that they operate in in any event and that they tend to complement each other and advise each other, and I have seen a lot of relationships between political advisers and senior military officers which were very supportive of each other.

Q330 Robert Key: Which I think, Secretary of State, underlines my point that they are clearly very useful.
Des Browne: They are.

Q331 Robert Key: They clearly have great potential and what I am saying is that, if people are saying to people like me, “We need more of them”, perhaps that is something that might be considered to help the environment.

Des Browne: It is certainly something that we will now go and look at. I have to say, nobody has ever said to me that they need more advice at this level, but, if they do need more of them, there is no reason why we should not look to see if we cannot provide more of them to them to support them. There are over and above of course political advisers that are FCO civil servants in Helmand who also have the ability and capability to be able to analyse the politics and there are people who work for DFID as well who have these skills. I was not aware that there was a shortage of these skills, but I am certainly prepared to go and look at it.

Q332 Chairman: Secretary of State, may I move on to the fulfilling of ISAF’s requirements? We have heard about the CJSOR, the Combined Joint Statement of Requirements, and we have heard that last year it was not satisfied in that there was no strategic reserve and that the summit in Riga moved towards fulfilling some of it but still some of it remains unfulfilled. Are you disappointed by NATO’s apparent inability to meet the requirements of the CJSOR?

Des Browne: Can I just say, Chairman, that it would be better in my view if the requirements of the CJSOR had been met but, as you point out, this is fundamentally a question for NATO. Consistently we have, as the United Kingdom, put our money where our mouth is and we have supported this mission well, as have a number of other nations, and I continue to press others to identify and deploy resources that will move towards the fulfilment of the CJSOR. I learned today, and I did not know this

but I share this with the Committee, that nobody in our department has any knowledge of any NATO CJSOR for any operation ever being fully fulfilled. I am going to have it checked to make sure that it is exactly right, but I am told that it is quite common for NATO CJSORs not to be fully fulfilled.¹²

Q333 Chairman: What does that say about NATO?

Des Browne: The only thing I can say it says about NATO is that the NATO countries have never been able to fulfil the statement of requirements. I am not in a position to go into the motivation of the individual countries in relation to all of the operations but as far as this CJSOR is concerned this ISAF Commander has significantly more resource available to him than General Richards had, but essentially he asked for seven additional battle groups and—

Q334 Chairman: I thought it was eight.

Des Browne: I think it was seven.¹³

Q335 Chairman: And he has got six.

Des Browne: He has been given five.¹⁴ I think the two that are missing are the border one and the Nimruz battle group.

Q336 Chairman: But that is quite an important battalion, is it not, to go onto the border of Pakistan?

Des Browne: Well, yes, although we did discuss this the last time I gave evidence to this Committee and it does not necessarily mean that the Commander of ISAF will not be able to deploy resources into that area. If that is a priority for him then he could, of course, deploy resources into that area.

Q337 Chairman: At the expense of something else?

Des Browne: I make two points. One, the theatre reserve has been deployed as instructed to northern Helmand, as we have already discussed in this evidence session, and, secondly, the Afghan Special Narcotics Force, the ASNF, has been deployed into the border area and was there for a period up until about the end of March shortly before I went to Afghanistan myself, and was very effective in working in a manoeuvre fashion in that area and detecting the communication and supply chains of the Taliban, so it does not mean that the work is not getting done and I believe there are plans at some time in the future to deploy them there again in a tactical way. It just means that the Commander does not have a force that specifically fulfils that requirement of the CJSOR.

¹² NATO operation and mission CJSORS have never been entirely fulfilled, although the level of successful force generation varies between missions and within missions over time.

¹³ There are seven battle groups.

¹⁴ Five new battle groups were provided (3 US, 1 UK, 1 Polish) but only 3 of these were against CJSOR battle group requirements.

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Q338 Chairman: But in the end it costs NATO, does it not, not to fulfil the CJSOR because they are under-equipped and under-manned to do the job that NATO themselves have assessed needs to be done?

Des Browne: They certainly are the latter, under-manned against what NATO assessed needed to be done. The question as to whether or not there is a cost depends on what actually happens. That is the discussion we had the last time. I am not in a position to anticipate exactly what the challenges will be and what General McNeill will require. I know that retrospectively General Richards was able to go into some detail as to what he would have been able to do additionally had he had that reserve, how he would have been able to deploy that reserve in the aftermath of Medusa, for example, but I do not think I can anticipate what General McNeill may or may not do. I just make the point to the Committee, as I did before, that it does not mean there is no manoeuvre capability for that important area. If the General decides that needs to be done then it can be done, and indeed it has been done by the deployment of the Afghan Special Narcotics Force.

Q339 Willie Rennie: I am quite surprised at the relaxed approach that we seem to be taking to the constant under-manning or under-committing of the NATO countries. Is there a kind of overbidding by commanders in the knowledge that these requirements will never be met, so that at the end of the day they always get what they want? Is there a little game being played here?

Des Browne: No, it is not my sense of the way the process goes forward. The process is an iterative process and there are discussions that take place about it before the CJSOR is finally settled. I do not have any sense that there is overbidding. I just share that fact with the Committee today because in preparation for this meeting I was advised quite casually by somebody who had more extensive knowledge in terms of time in the department than I have. I am going to go back and check that it is accurate. I am not suggesting it is not true. The source that told me suggested it was true but I have not had a chance to verify it. I am not casual at all about this. I spend a lot of my time engaged with defence ministers from other governments encouraging them to provide additional resources to the collective NATO commitment, and indeed we ourselves have taken some steps to fulfil the demands of the CJSOR. We have also, recognising the challenge that lies there in the border area where we supported the deployment of the Special Narcotics Force into that area for that very purpose, taken some operational steps to tackle the problems posed by the border areas, such as the provision of additional ISTAR as part of our next roulement in order to get some visibility of what is going on in that area.

Q340 Mr Hancock: Are you surprised on this occasion that we have to pick up the slack which NATO countries who are not picking it up

committed to when they agreed to the way in which this deployment was going to operate? There has to be a time when the likes of the UK Government have to make this point, does there not?

Des Browne: I just say to Mr Hancock that surprise and disappointment would be luxuries in my job. I get on with the job.

Q341 Mr Hancock: Well, angry then.

Des Browne: Even anger. The fact of the matter is that we have made a commitment.

Q342 Mr Hancock: And we are keeping to it.

Des Browne: It is of the nature of our commitment and our expectation in that context that we will live up to that commitment. We do live up to that commitment and I spend, as I say, a lot of my time encouraging others to live up to the collective commitment.

Q343 Chairman: Secretary of State, would a bit of anger not be a good thing here? You implied a few moments ago that General Richards was looking back at things retrospectively, I think you said, as though he regretted in hindsight the absence of a strategic reserve, but it was not in hindsight. It was in foresight that the ISAF requirement included a strategic reserve and it was not fulfilled. Is it not time for you to begin to get extremely angry rather than for you to accept this as part of the things that go with the job?

Des Browne: Can I just say to you, Chairman, that first of all the example of General Richards' evidence and the retrospectivity of that was designed to support my explanation to you that I was not in a position to anticipate exactly what General McNeill would want to do that he could not do and I am not aware today of General McNeill wanting to do anything that he could not do. I point out quite specifically to the Committee that he has deployed the theatre reserve but to northern Helmand and not to the border area. I am not aware that General McNeill is unable to do anything that he would want to do tactically in relation to the delivery of the operational plan in the absence of the CJSOR having been fulfilled.

Q344 Chairman: I thought they were two entirely separate roles. There is the theatre reserve and there is the battalion to be deployed along the border.

Des Browne: Absolutely, but the point I was making and made before was that the fact that a battalion was to be deployed along the border as part of the CJSOR does not necessarily mean that once it is deployed that is what the General will do with it.

Chairman: I accept that.

Q345 Mr Hancock: Yes, but he wanted it there for counter-narcotics and to stop arms and infiltration coming across the border, so if they are not there nobody is stopping it.

Des Browne: I have given evidence to this effect, that we have been able to deploy forces to do that by use of the Afghan Special Narcotics Force and we will be

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able to do that again. I do make that point forcefully in NATO meetings and to our NATO colleagues. I do not want to get into a debate about anger, disappointment and whatever these mean to people.

Q346 Mr Jenkins: Secretary of State, you have my sympathy on this issue. The problem is, of course, that within NATO if you do not make a commitment no cost falls on your Treasury so you are in effect a freeloader on the organisation and we all know it is very difficult to change the rationale of freeloaders, but surely the time has come for us to say, "If you are not prepared to make a military commitment we are asking you to make a financial commitment so that some of the facilities we need can be put in place", like a good, reliable airbridge. That is what we need to do: put moral pressure on these countries, so that if they have not got the will to fight at least they can have the will to pay so that the facilities are there to enable other states to fight on behalf of NATO.

Des Browne: We certainly have been encouraging countries which might not be able to make the contribution that fulfils a part of the CJSOR to make other additional contributions to the effort. A number of countries are making substantial contributions to the effort across Afghanistan. We should not forget that there are contributions being made and it is as important to sustain the progress that has been made in the north and west of the country as it is to try and bring that progress to the south and the east, and I think we need to be careful sometimes not to devalue the efforts people make and that there are risks associated with the deployments to some of these other parts of Afghanistan as well.

Q347 Mr Havard: Moving on to counter-narcotics, we have had some figures given to us that in 2006 165,000 hectares were used for opium cultivation, that the resulting harvest of 6,100 tonnes represented 92% of the world supply and that only six of the provinces are opium-free and so on, so the numbers look extremely stark and very bad. We have also seen this report in *The Independent on Sunday* at the beginning of April about there therefore being some sort of revision of government policy in relation to this and that the Prime Minister might be minded to change his attitude towards the strategy and buy some of the crop or possibly legalise it and change the strategy. Could you make some comment about that?

Des Browne: I have talked about this and answered questions about it on a number of occasions, including, I think, in front of this Committee and in the House of Commons. If I thought that buying the crop would solve the problem I would be first in the queue to persuade people to do that. My view is, and I think this is a view shared by most people who know and understand the environment of Afghanistan, that proposing to buy the crop currently would double the crop. There is not the infrastructure in place to ensure that we would be buying anything other than what was grown to be

bought by the Government. I do not know exactly how much of the land that can grow poppy is used in Afghanistan but it is somewhat less than 10%. There are plenty of other places in Afghanistan where poppy can be grown and it grows very easily. Attractive as this idea is, and there are acres of print written about this and about how much of a challenge the chemical companies are facing in trying to get opium for medicinal purposes, I know and understand all of that but if we start doing this in my view in Afghanistan at the moment it will be grown for us but it will also be grown for opium to feed into the heroin market.

Q348 Mr Havard: When we were in Afghanistan the last time a few weeks ago there did seem to be some confusion, and I have to admit there was some confusion in my mind, about exactly what was happening in terms of eradication and how that was playing out on the ground. Subsequently we have had a memo from Mr Holland which is quite useful because one of the things he talks about is the criteria he has deployed before any attempt at eradication in given circumstances is conducted. I say this because, as you will know, when we met Brigadier Lorimer his troops were putting out leaflets saying, "Look: we do not do this. We do not do eradication". However, eradication was going on in the area and we were concerned about the confusion as to why it appears as though we do not do eradication but maybe elements of the Afghan army, with whom we are also associated, are involved in eradication activities. Can you possibly make some comment about exactly what the strategic view is of the eradication policy, particularly in relation to its relationship to British forces who are possibly in a situation where Afghans themselves might be confused as to exactly what their role might be?

Des Browne: You are looking at both me and Mr Holland.

Q349 Mr Havard: I think it crosses all elements.

Des Browne: Why do I not say something first and then I will hand over to Mr Holland? I do not believe there is any confusion over the policy but there is a debate about the difficulties of implementation in the difficult southern and eastern regions. I do not think that should come as any surprise because, as I repeatedly say, this is a very difficult environment. No aspect of our policy in relation to Helmand or the southern part of Afghanistan is straightforward when we try to apply it on the ground, whether it be reconstruction, counter-narcotics or even security. It is not straightforward and we have to take into account the local circumstances. Most of this debate about narcotics focuses on either counting hectares and production or counting hectares that have been eradicated. I have said before that I think that is an unhelpful concentration on a particular part of a very complex policy that involves trying to build up an environment in terms of a justice system, in terms of policing, in terms of reconstruction, development and alternative livelihoods that allows us then to move on, and it is a long term challenge, like most of

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the other challenges we face. Specifically on eradication, I have spoken at some length to the governors of southern provinces and they are absolutely persuaded that eradication has a place in this overall policy. The place they believe it has in the overall policy is that we should use the threat of it to prevent people from planting in the first place and in order to ensure that that threat is deemed to be real at the time of planting there has to be some eradication takes place. Doing that through the Afghans is difficult in this environment. There are effectively two methods of eradication. There is a national force known as the Afghan Eradication Force, which comes into a province and carries out eradication, and then there is governor-led eradication. The ability to do the latter is a function of the extent to which the writ of the governor runs in the areas where the poppy is being grown and that has proved to be a challenge in Helmand province. As far as ISAF is concerned our policy is clear. ISAF do not conduct eradication but that does not mean we do not make a contribution to the security environment in which eradication can take place. That is generally, as I understand it, the policy. The application of it, however, is challenging. It has proved to be challenging this year and no doubt at the end of the day when it comes to these simple counts people will come to conclusions but we have to look at the effect our policy has had across the whole of Afghanistan, and increasingly there are parts of Afghanistan where there is no poppy being grown at all. There are provinces that are poppy-free and that is because we have been able to generate the greater environment that allows that to take place.

Mr Holland: Eradication is, of course, only one element of the strategy as a whole and its is exactly as the Secretary of State has described. It is there to put risk in to farmers where they already have alternative choices and they have a diversified economy so they can grow something else. We do have some evidence that it is a pretty crucial factor in persuading farmers in that sort of circumstance to change and move away from growing opium poppy. That is very much the purpose of these criteria, particularly where we assist in terms of the eradication effort. We support the Afghan Government in terms of identifying those areas which are more likely to have choices in terms of livelihood. Specifically in Helmand we did some work with the Afghan Government in terms of identifying specifically which were going to be the wealthiest areas in the province. Lindy Cameron might be able to expand on that.

Ms Cameron: Helmand is one of the areas that we are least worried about having effective target areas where people do have alternative livelihoods because, as those of you who have been to Helmand will know, when you fly over Nadali, for example, which is the irrigated area to the north of Lashkar Gar, you will see that it is an incredibly fertile area. The Helmand river valley means that people can grow almost anything they want to there, so in Helmand in particular we are quite confident that extensive parts of the river valley are within what we

think is an area where people have choices about what they can grow. It is less the case in some of the more difficult rural areas in the north.

Q350 Mr Havard: But with regard to an eradication policy in that particular area there is obviously a tension between the governor-led policies and the ones that have come out from national governments and the co-ordination of all of these different things. As I understand it, the American firm Dyncorp are the people who are paid effectively by the national Afghan Government from the US subvention in order to employ people to carry out the activity; is that right? Do they do both the governor-led strategy as well as the national-led one?

Mr Holland: No. Dyncorp are the contractors who provide support to the Afghan Eradication Force, which is the central force, so they are doing the central force, not the governors.

Q351 Mr Havard: And they would be, if you like, given some sort of protection in an overall sense by the general security by ISAF forces and the national police and anyone else in the area?

Mr Holland: They firstly provide their own protection within the force. The Afghan Eradication Force is part of the Afghan National Police. It is one of the police forces, so it comes with its own protection but it will use local Afghan national police forces as well.

Q352 Mr Havard: So how does the governor-promoted strategy work that is different from that?

Mr Holland: In Helmand specifically the vast majority of eradication was central force eradication because that is where it was. In other provinces the governors will use their own police forces to do local eradication.

Q353 Mr Havard: Given that we are the G8 lead for the issue of narcotics and drugs, full stop, across the whole of the country, what are your projections for making progress given that Helmand ought to be somewhere where alternative livelihoods ought to be possible? What is the prognosis?

Mr Holland: This year overall you are unlikely to see much change in terms of overall cultivation across the country.

Q354 Mr Havard: It is a bumper crop because the weather helped.

Mr Holland: Yes, that is likely to be the case, absolutely. I think there are going to be differences though across the country. It does appear that essentially the trends from last year are continuing, that in the north and the central provinces you will see increasingly cultivation coming down, so there may be an increased number of poppy-free provinces in those areas. There was a reconnaissance, for example, yesterday up to Balkh, which was the sixth biggest cultivator last year, to assess what could be eradicated and they could find

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very little poppy at all up there, but in the south you are likely to see again pretty high levels of cultivation.

Q355 Robert Key: Why has there been so much disagreement between the United States and the United Kingdom on narcotics policy?

Mr Holland: I do not think there has been disagreement between the United States and the United Kingdom.

Q356 Robert Key: Oh, please, Chairman.

Mr Holland: We work very closely with the United States on counter-narcotics. I have been doing a series of presentations with my counterpart from the State Department to NATO recently on this. We are agreed absolutely on the need for a national drug control strategy, the need for the range of pillars that the drug control strategy has. It has to cut across all elements of that. We do work very closely together.

Q357 Robert Key: But there have been well reported occurrences of briefing against the United Kingdom by the United States in Afghanistan. You must have heard of that.

Des Browne: Can I just say, Mr Key, that I meet regularly with the Secretary for Defense, Mr Gates, and we discuss this, among other things, and we do not disagree with each other. The heart of this issue in relation to eradication is that we both recognise that this is an Afghan-led process and at the end of the day President Karzai takes responsibility for it. I cannot be responsible for what other people may brief or report as having been briefed. I can just tell you that at the highest level in terms of my discussions with the Secretary for Defense of the United States there is no difference between us in relation to the appropriate policy for narcotics.

Q358 Mr Holloway: General, some of your officers say that our policy on narcotics is conflicting. Some say it is insane because it fuels insurgency. We are currently the G8 lead on drugs. Would this great lead that we are giving be different if the Americans were not determined to see eradication, if we had a free rein?

Lieutenant General Houghton: I do not know about the business of a free rein but as for the business about certain British officers saying that the drug policy is insane, again, I think that probably relates to a tactical view on the degree to which in a localised sense poorly targeted eradication is anathema to consensus within the local population. From a localised tactical view that may very well be the case, but, as I argued last time I gave evidence, that is not to say that properly applied eradication, properly targeted does not need to be done; indeed is an essential part of an overall counter-narcotic strategy. What can appear like local lunacy from a tactical point of view in respect of local consent does not necessarily mean that it would be at odds if the targeting was correct. That is what I think Peter Holland said. It is the implementation of the policy which is difficult. One of the things that I think this

year went wrong with the eradication and the Afghan Eradication Force was that at the local level some of that targeting was subject to localised abuse and corruption which made it anathema to consent locally. There is this dichotomy. Eradication is absolutely properly a part of a properly worked out strategy but in the implementation of it within a society in which there is localised corruption, where the business of local land ownership is quite complex, there will be occasions at a tactical level where eradication is done against the wrong people with an unfortunate security result.

Q359 Linda Gilroy: The answer that you have just given may be part of the answer to my question, which is this. Am I right in thinking that in some of the provinces where there have been governor-led programmes it has been done in such a way as to target, say, 50% of the crop so that it introduces the element of risk that you talked about, it reduces the income that the farmer can get from it and therefore introduces the level at which they will make other choices about what other alternative livelihoods they will get? Is that true and is there any way in which that approach is capable of being introduced into Helmand at this stage, where you very selectively target a farm and part of a crop?

Mr Holland: The implementation of eradication varies across the country. In some provinces some governors have done it significantly better than others, and you are right, there are certainly lessons in terms of the ways that those governors have done that. This is absolutely a question that we are looking hard at. Is it possible to target very specific landowners, the biggest landowners, for example, who are exactly the people that you would want to target? It is difficult because the information that is available, the availability of land records, is again pretty patchy but that is exactly the kind of thing we are trying to look at, obviously not for this season but for next year.

Q360 Mr Havard: I just want to make the point that what you say in your memo is that there is no evidence to suggest that the resistance met by the centrally directed Afghan Eradication Force came as a result of them being mistaken for ISAF forces. This question about confusion between the eradicators and the ISAF forces which might have this tactical consequence locally in relation to consent you say is not present in Helmand.

Mr Holland: From the Eradication Force perspective the resistance that they came across was because they were coming to eradicate. There was not confusion that they were ISAF. It was that these were the eradication forces that had come out. The issue that is more difficult to know is how does that then affect the whole security environment, and obviously the question of consent, but they were not directly attacked because they were ISAF.

Q361 Robert Key: Secretary of State, we have been told that since the 2005 counter-narcotics law was introduced there has grown up a parallel judicial

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system in the country with parallel judges, prosecutors, defence lawyers, police, investigators, even prisons in this parallel judicial system which has led to it being extremely ineffective. It has even been suggested that a mark of bravado is that you have been for a fortnight in one of these special prisons and it marks you out as someone who has done something special. Would it not be better if we did not have a parallel judicial system dealing with narcotics but that it was all dealt with under a single system?

Des Browne: I do not think it is true that there is this parallel system, although I do observe that there are drugs courts in Glasgow. The point I make is that all over the world where there are specific challenges generated by organised crime or by specific problems such as drug abuse or use it is not uncommon for the judicial system to recognise that the particular specialities of these challenges require people to be put together into task forces or special courts to be identified for them. Indeed, we had for many years a special jurisdiction in Northern Ireland to accommodate a type of criminality there which generated in that community a degree of intimidation that meant that the normal processes of the law could not be applied. It is not uncommon for sophisticated and developed countries to recognise that the criminal justice system creates special circumstances for dealing with particular types of activity, particularly when it is organised and done by people who are particularly affected. I just make that point as an opening remark. There is a counter-narcotics tribunal which is the judicial element of the criminal justice task force which deals with counter-narcotics cases. It is particularly constituted as part of the Kabul court and it is part of the Afghan criminal justice system. I think this is nothing other than a recognition of the uniquely serious challenge that narcotics pose for society in Afghanistan, but more importantly for the ability of the system of justice to be able to deal with immensely wealthy and powerful people who, if we do not make special provision to develop the skills and secure the safety of the people who are involved in that, will use their wealth and their power in a fashion which will be designed to undermine the administration of justice. Why is that important? Because at the end of the day much more important than anything we do militarily, or indeed anything we do economically, is our ability to make the rule of law run in this country where for decades, because of the violence in it, people behaved with an impunity that allowed them to intimidate and murder at will the ordinary people of Afghanistan. It is important for us, through the Afghan Government, to be able to say that the rule of law runs and that even the most powerful people can be taken on. Have we been able to do that? They have been able to convict 350 drug dealers. Have they been the top people? Disproportionately not. They have taken a number of the top people but this is a balance and for the people in the ordinary communities it is much more important that the people who immediately prey on them are being convicted and going to jail than the people at the

very top. Getting the people at the very top is an objective but we need to be realistic about what we can achieve. Contrary to the gloss that people put on this and have done to date, I would say that this is a sign of progress. We have not got enough of the significant people but as we build the capability and the confidence of this system to take them on we will get more of them.

Q362 Mr Jenkin: Secretary of State, can I just tell you that we encountered, I would say, widespread despair about the Italian lead on justice reform. Do you have confidence in the progress of justice reform in Afghanistan?

Des Browne: I sometimes think people think this is because I am a lawyer but I think the most important thing that we can do in any environment like this where we are trying to build a nation or help people come out of conflict is to establish their justice system. I think it sets the framework for the police force. You can build an army because the army serves the state but if you want police officers to serve the community they need to do it within the structure of the rule of law. I think we have not done enough in terms of building that element of our reconstruction of the state and need to do more. I am hopeful that we will see progress coming over the summer and part of the engagement of the ESDP, of the EU, in this in my view generates a hope and a possibility that we will be able to build on that. This is a country which has had decades of people behaving with impunity and brutalising the people of the country. It is a very difficult challenge.

Q363 Chairman: More like millennia, I suspect.

Des Browne: It may well be. Making use of the challenge is very difficult. These people who are bad people in Afghanistan are used to exercising their power with a degree of violence that would make most people shudder.

Q364 Mr Jenkin: I would say that overall the Committee was impressed by the huge international effort across all lines of operation to try and bring the country round but there was a general concern that the different lines of operation were not sufficiently co-ordinated. We were very impressed with the PRT in the way that DFID, USAID, FCO and the military operations were being effectively co-ordinated on the ground, but I have to say it was more by the determination of those individuals than because of the strategic framework within which they are operating. I wonder if I could draw your attention, Secretary of State, to a chart which is about to be placed in front of you which was presented to me at a briefing in Shrivenham last month by a lecturer who had better remain nameless, which underlines the complexity of multinational, multi-agency, multi-departmental operations of this nature. I wonder what we are learning from this as we try and apply the comprehensive approach. Do you feel that DFID and the Ministry of Defence and the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit, incidentally a box that is not

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on this chart and perhaps should be, are having a strategic effect or are we simply dependent upon the brilliance of the people we met on the ground to make it work on the ground, because that is far too complicated, is it not?

Des Browne: Of course it is far too complicated. I have to be careful that I do not add to it because I do not think it is comprehensive. We have made lot of progress in the last year since we deployed into Afghanistan. We have learned a lot. I do not think it is accidental that when you visited you saw progress or were impressed by what people were doing. What these people are doing on the ground is a consequence of their own skills and abilities and I never underplay that, but also of strategic decisions that have been made, recognising some of the difficulties. Strategic decisions have been made back here in London but there is still a challenge. The fundamental challenge lies in the ability to get at the proper strategic level, that is, at the national level in Afghanistan, a strategic overall campaign plan which is not an aggregate of every single country which has an interest in this, in other words bilateral interests. There is, of course, the United Nations Special Representative there and I look to that part of the infrastructure to provide the leadership for that campaign plan on the ground. It is in the context of that campaign plan that we should be doing what we are doing in Helmand province. Our ability to reduce this spaghetti to something more manageable is a challenge for us in Whitehall and that is a challenge which I believe we are accepting and seeking to deal with and operating better at a strategic level, although not perfectly. Your own visit and my visit were followed by a visit to the theatre by the three Permanent Under-Secretaries of the three departments involved, the FCO, DFID and my own department, and seeing for themselves on the ground in the way in which it operates what needs to be done and have come back energised, I can tell you, to reduce some of this unnecessary complexity. There are challenges and I do not move away from them, but at the strategic level we are addressing them and addressing them successfully, which is now reflected in the improvement that there has been on the ground. At the end of the day, however, the real strategic challenge is to find a campaign plan and a leadership for that campaign plan in Afghanistan that works closely with the Afghan Government in an appropriate way to set the framework for what we are doing in Helmand province because quite a lot of our decisions, as this points out, are centralised and decisions are made in Kabul.

Q365 Mr Jenkin: Can I put this to Lindy Cameron as a follow-up? The reality on the ground is that the aid is following the military plan because that is the only way you can win a counter-insurgency war, if the success of security is rapidly followed by quick impact projects. We heard the American USAID chap announce that \$4 million had been added to the Make Work programmes in Lashkar Gar that day we were there, which is very important. Does DFID accept the principle of military leadership, of quick impact

projects and aid programmes at the cutting edge of a counter-insurgency campaign? Is that not an absolutely essential part of winning Afghanistan for the people of Afghanistan?

Ms Cameron: I think DFID completely accepts the comprehensive approach, which means that basically we are all in this together working at the same time in a co-ordinated fashion in Helmand and in Kabul. That is why we transferred £4 million of our funding last year to the GCPF (Global Conflict Prevention Fund) so that they could manage it as a single sort of funding, not as DFID money but as cross-government QIP funding managed by the HEG, the Helmand Executive Group, and the PRT, which has one of my representatives on it but also has a representative of the Foreign Office, of the PCRU, as well. We completely accept that there has to be a comprehensive approach. I should point out that in Kabul the comprehensive approach is probably at least as important with the other international agencies as it is within the UK because, obviously, we have to look at this as a whole Afghanistan operation with all of the key partners who provide the rest of the funding and support the Government of Afghanistan.

Q366 Mr Jenkin: I congratulate you for what is going on on the ground but can I ask General Houghton, looking at it from a PJHQ point of view and a Whitehall point of view, do you feel that comprehensive approach yet fully exists? Is it institutionally embedded or, as some have suggested, does there need to be a sort of elevation of PCRU or a Cabinet office minister at Cabinet level co-ordinating the various government departments across Whitehall?

Lieutenant General Houghton: I think the cross-Whitehall co-ordination mechanism works. This is not a cheap comment but it perhaps works more or less imperfectly over time. I think the business of the comprehensive approach across government is a little bit like the journey of Jointery that went on between the Services. It improves over time and with lessons learned from operations. I see the functioning of the comprehensive approach within Afghanistan from a UK perspective as being reasonably effective. The first question that you asked is should the application of DFID's money be put in the hands of the military to apply its projects locally. It might surprise you to know that I do not think that that alone is at all the answer. I think that an element of government money needs to be spent locally on consent winning projects in order to help create the security and the stability locally, but if that is the only routing of international money it will effectively result in an Afghanistan that lives off local handouts. You do need the majority of the programmes and the money to be spent down the channels of the emerging hierarchy of Afghan governance That at least gives you the prospect that at some time in the future, 10 years or whatever, the international community will be able to take a step back from Afghanistan in the knowledge that it is leaving behind a legacy of governance which is able to administer its own money in the interests of its own

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people. I do think it is a balance and that recognition of the requirement to be comprehensive is perhaps something that a predecessor of mine might not have said.

Q367 Chairman: General, you just left one or two things hanging there when you suggested that putting money into the hands of the military for quick impact projects alone was not the answer but it does suggest that you think there could be an increase in the money to be given to the military for running quick impact projects.

Lieutenant General Houghton: I think Afghanistan is a case in point where increased money has been given to the military to spend on quick impact projects with local consent.

Q368 Chairman: But do you think there is scope for more?

Lieutenant General Houghton: One has to get a balance between the amount of money and the amount of military capacity to disperse it, and at the moment I think they are in relative balance.

Q369 Mr Holloway: While there is no doubt about the commitment and ability of people in DFID, off the record again people I guess working at the tactical level are contemptuous of DFID's performance. Have there been problems and is DFID as it is currently structured the right organisation to be helping you to win a war?

Lieutenant General Houghton: Again, I do not know to whom you have spoken that suggests that people would be contemptuous of DFID's performance, so I do not think that is the standard, the emerging or the enlightened view. I think there probably is an understanding that the primary purposes for which DFID as a department spends its money relate to things, I understand, enacted in Parliament about millennium goals, the relief of poverty and all that, rather than spending huge amounts of the Government's money on consent-winning programmes at the tactical level in our campaigns. It is not for me to judge whether or not Government has got that balance right.

Q370 Mr Holloway: But it is if you are trying to win. You are trying to win so you can make a judgment about whether Government has got it right.

Lieutenant General Houghton: No. In terms of the relatively small number of billions that are at DFID's disposal, it is not my job to say that more of that should be given to the military for us to spend on consent winning activities but, as has happened, a small proportion to be redirected to local QIPs and Consent Winning, which has happened in the case of Afghanistan, I think is appropriate.

Q371 Mr Crausby: It is not so much the amount of money you spend, it is where you spend it really, is it not, and spend it on the right projects. That is the most important thing. Whilst it was difficult for us to get a real feel in Lashkar Gah because of the security situation, certainly the representatives of the NGOs

and those from the Helmand Provincial Council felt pretty strongly that they had not been involved enough, that they had not been a real part of the planning process sometimes. What efforts are you making to involve those? I sit in my constituency and listen to people who complain about what the council spend the money on and in some sense I thought it was almost a progressive thing to hear people complaining about where the money is being spent, it was almost a step up from absolute desperation to a point where you say, "You should not be building that road, you should be doing something else". Are we at the point where we make that proper step up and involve people to have a real say in the planning process in argument really against the military spending it? Should not the local people be making these decisions?

Des Browne: Ms Cameron can come in in a moment. There are one or two issues that these questions raise. There has to be an understanding of what we are doing and the environment in which we are doing it and the legal framework within which we are doing it. Parliament passed a law which constrains the way in which we can use and spend development money. Quite rightly it did that because of immediate past history in which there was serious criticism about the way in which development money was spent and the conditionality associated with it. It is Parliament's law, which was supported, I think, by all the parties in Parliament that determines what DFID can do with its money and what its objectives have to be. There may be a debate about the interpretation of these laws but at the heart of this debate is how much of our money should we spend on what you might call construction or reconstruction and how much money should we spend on development. There is always going to be a tension. What Mr Crausby identifies from speaking to people locally is playing out of that tension. In our view, as a Government, it is appropriate that we get that balance right because it is exactly empowering local people through their structures, through their provincial councils, to make the decisions about their own communities that we are about in the long-term. That is part of what the General describes as the legacy that we are seeking to deliver. It is about directing money through the channels of central Government so that those channels operate properly and accountability measures operate properly. That is part of our development. Unattributed comments about people's views at a tactical level of other people's contributions does not help us make these balances right. In my view it does not properly recognise the nature of the challenge that we face. We have provided to the Committee a list of Quick Impact Projects which in my view devotes a significant amount of money to following up immediately security operations in communities all across Helmand Province. It is not an insignificant amount of money, it is a fairly comprehensive list and covers a wide range of activity, all of which is a function of consultation with parts of the communities. This money is being spent and at the same time there is a significant additional amount of American money

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being spent in Helmand Province, indeed more in Helmand Province than there is in any other province of Afghanistan. It is not my sense when I am in Helmand Province talking to people that it is a shortage of money that is the problem, it is the ability to be able to encourage and deploy the local capacity to spend that money to the best advantage that is the challenge. The final point I make before I move on is it is universally recognised that the Department for International Development is a world class organisation. It is the envy of many other countries, in Afghanistan and across the world, for the way in which it applies its funding and engages in development projects. That is not to say that everything is perfect, it is not, but there is a recognition in the Department for International Development, indeed in the Government, that conflict is the most consistent cause of poverty across the world. I do not want anybody to be coming away from this with any suggestion that my Department or, indeed, the military share the view that the Department for International Development do not know where the priorities and challenges lie. This is a very difficult environment. Part of the restriction on the people that we deploy from other departments into this environment is that they are not the military and they cannot operate without engaging a level of risk, which is unacceptable to those who employ them, including me.

Q372 Mr Holloway: What is the point of having them there?

Des Browne: That is part of the problem on occasion but they are doing very good work. Unattributed criticisms, which may be designed for reasons other than adding to our ability to understand what is going on in Helmand, do not help. Who is saying these things? What knowledge base do they have in order to say these sorts of things? What do they know of what DFID is actually doing? What do they know of what other people are doing, NGOs and others, our own engineers? In order to measure the worth of these comments we need to know where they actually came from. It is disappointing that they are being deployed against people who are doing a very good job without them being attributed to where they came from.

Q373 Mr Holloway: I was only trying to be constructive.

Ms Cameron: I think it is worth explaining that DFID is putting £107 million into Afghanistan this year. That is our sixth biggest development programme worldwide. That level of resource is much higher than it would be on our normal aid allocation framework but because of the level of conflict in Afghanistan we are explicitly targeting resources now in a period when we know they can be absorbed effectively. Research shows that it is four to seven years after the conflict that aid is most effectively absorbed in a post-conflict state. I do not say that about the south but in a sense about the rest of Afghanistan where the absorption capacity is now very good. We have also said that we will put up to

£20 million of that in Helmand, and again that is a very significant part of that overall allocation. To go to Mr Crausby's specific question about the local council, you are right, it is a real sign of progress that the Provincial Development Committee now are beginning to engage with us on QIPs funding and saying, "Hang on a second, we want to determine where this money goes rather than letting you tell us what you think the right answer is". That is exactly the kind of development we want to see. What we do need to see more of, and that is part of what we are putting effort into in Kabul, is an improved linkage between the national and local government. National government has come a long way in Afghanistan in the last five years; local government is still extremely weak. Part of what we are doing at national level is trying to build the capacity of national government to reach out to local government and make sure, for example, that the Ministry of Rural Development at local level in Helmand can tell you exactly what funding is going into the Ministry in Kabul for Helmand. I think you are right, it is a real sign of progress.

Q374 Mr Crausby: I was quite encouraged particularly by the women from the Helmand Provincial Council who were talking about job opportunities.

Ms Cameron: Absolutely.

Q375 Mr Crausby: If they are talking about job opportunities then job opportunities are more important than Quick Impact Projects. I do not see any prospects for properly dealing with poppy cultivation without real alternatives. There needs to be a clear combination of a very firm hand on poppy cultivation at the same time that there are alternative opportunities to feed one's family. I do not see any future in anything other than allowing the Afghan people to regenerate their own economy. What opportunities are there to allow those local people to set up their own businesses? There was lots of talk about carpet factory-type stuff and employing local women that way, and that seems really progressive to me. If that is the sort of thing that they want to do then that is the thing that we should want to do.

Ms Cameron: That is absolutely right. One of the programmes that we are trying to bring down to Helmand at the moment is something called MISFA, the micro-credit scheme, to which DFID has given £15 million nationally and it is also part of the £30 million Helmand commitment. That is specifically designed to give people, particularly women, access to small loans so that they can set up small businesses. We have also funded a very innovative grant guarantee scheme through the World Bank which helps to guarantee a much higher level insurance for bigger businesses that want to set up in Afghanistan to make sure that investors are not put off. We have put a lot of effort into working with the Ministry of Commerce as well to try and reduce red tape so that the private sector is encouraged to flourish because that is exactly where the jobs will be created.

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Chairman: We still have to deal with the Afghan National Army, the police, corruption and Pakistan. Let us move on to the Afghan National Army.

Q376 Linda Gilroy: During the Committee's visit to Afghanistan, Members were told about the progress that had been made in developing the Army and General Wardak seemed to be keen on the Army taking on more responsibility. When do you anticipate that the Afghan Army will be capable of conducting serious operations?

Des Browne: We have trained 35,000 of the Afghan Ministry of Defence forces. That is based on a target of 70,000. Presently four of the 10 formed Afghan National Army brigade headquarters are judged as capable of planning, executing and sustaining counter-insurgency operations with coalition or ISAF support at company level. We have some way to go before they are capable of operating independently at brigade level. The challenge, of course, is to develop an Army that we can use to provide security, but to do that without that use damaging them because of their immaturity. This is a very young Army. It is a difficult balance. My view is that NATO has not always got that right and, in fact, we were deploying the Afghan National Army before they were ready to or leaving them in a situation of conflict for too long. Recently, having recognised that, particularly in Helmand, we have gone through a period of reconstitution to allow them to rest, train, take leave and be more effective for operations. I am not in a position at this stage to say when we will have developed an end product that will be able to take over from us in terms of security. My experience in watching the development, for example, of the Tenth Division of the Iraqi Army in MND South East is that you get to a point where that process accelerates very, very quickly. We now have an Army in Iraq which was capable of being deployed into the Baghdad security plan operations very successfully and acquitted itself very well and was admired by others, including other countries who had trained and deployed forces there. I am not in a position to answer, maybe the General has a better idea of when that is likely to happen.

Lieutenant General Houghton: I think it would be too adventurous to put a specific date on it. As the Secretary of State has said, in terms of the competence of the individual Kandak (the battalions), they are showing the raw material is very good. The Iraqi experience is bearing this out, that the more complex things are the higher level command and control, the planning for operations, combat service support that goes into the support of those operations, the administrative system that supports them. The integration of tactical effects, for example bringing the air dimension, those sorts of more complex operations, are things that will make it some time before the Afghan National Army is fully capable of independent operations at the brigade level, but that is not to say that they are not contributing an awful lot at the moment.

Q377 Linda Gilroy: What about embedded trainers? When General Richards gave us evidence he told us that the UK had provided its fair share and they obviously play an important role, but NATO as a whole needs to provide more. Are there discussions about that? Could, say, Spain or Germany provide more in the way of embedded trainers?

Des Browne: As part of CJSOR there are 83 OMLTs, as they are called, which are the embedded training teams. Perhaps I should not use "embedded training teams" because that is the phrase the Americans use. They have them in place in the absence of these mentoring units. There are 83 of them required to be filled and we continue to lobby other nations to provide them because our experience has suggested that they offer quite a significant return on the investment.

Q378 Linda Gilroy: What equipment has the UK given to the Afghan National Army and what plans are there to provide more?

Des Browne: I am unable to answer specifically the question as to what equipment the UK has given.

Lieutenant General Houghton: Off the top of my head I am not certain that we have gifted any. The idea is that this is a centrally done thing by the organisation that you have probably come across called CSTC-A run by General Durbin, which is responsible for the force generation and training of the Afghan National Army. They are a train and equip organisation primarily. All the equipment is being procured and distributed to a standardised set. That is not to say that on a bilateral basis, no doubt, the Afghan National Ministry of Defence would not look at gifting from other nations but what we would prefer to do by dint of policy, and certainly what the CSTC-A organisation wants, is to equip to standardised sets of equipment.

Q379 Linda Gilroy: It certainly seemed to be the view of General Wardak that NATO could provide the Army with more equipment. Sorry, have you discovered something?

Des Browne: No, no, I have not discovered it. I have brought with me a note which is headed up, "ANA equipment". As the Committee can see it would take a couple of minutes to read it and rather than read it into the evidence I can hand it over.

Q380 Linda Gilroy: Thank you.

Des Browne: It shows how they are equipped presently and what the plans are. With respect to General Wardak, and I understand why he does this, everybody he speaks to he asks for—

Q381 Chairman: He would like some tanks and we do not necessarily endorse that.

Des Browne: He was a tank commander himself at one stage, I think, which may explain. I can hand over this note which I have brought with me, there

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are a couple of copies of it, if Members want to pass it around and it will save a few minutes.

Chairman: Can we move on to the police.

Q382 Mr Havard: You are quite right, General Wardak did ask us for tanks again. However, one thing he did, which I thought was very significant, was that not only was there great merit in the embedded trainers for the Army, he was arguing that the same sort of process might help in relation to developing the Police Force. That sounds to me to be about right. I want to ask about the Police Force, however. There has not been, if you like, as much progress as we would like to see. I shared some of your thoughts earlier on about where a criminal justice system fits with policing because even if you interdict people and arrest them and cannot process them, it does not help cement, if you like, the relevance of a Police Force even if you have policemen on the corner. One of the things that we heard was as well as the development of the Afghan National Police itself at all levels, whether at local level or support for forensic activity, etc, there was the development now of the Afghan Auxiliary National Police Force. This raised some concern. The Human Rights Commission, for example, were fearful that this might simply become a way of supporting a militia-type structure. That ranged right across to others like the President himself who billed them to us as community support officers and community policemen. There is quite clearly a tension here as to whose control they are under and whether or not they just reinforce regional strongmen, warlords, whatever, or whether they are part of a national force. I wonder whether you could comment on the relationship between those two, the national police and the auxiliary police, and the question, which is raised all the time, about whether or not the Police Force in Afghanistan ought to look more like a gendarmerie than anything else.

Des Browne: Well, where to start? First of all, the development or the reform of a Police Force in a post-conflict situation is a very difficult thing to do. It is invariably more challenging than developing the Armed Forces. There are a number of reasons for that, not the least of them in Afghanistan—this is a distinction that I make—is that the Armed Forces serve the state and there is a structure for them, but for the police in any community to be successful and accepted by the community they must serve the law and the manifestation of the law must have a structure round about it and where that is missing it is very difficult to grow a Police Force in a community. The other point, of course, is, unlike the Army, the police operate in societies where there is endemic poverty, illiteracy, experience quite often of abuse by Police Forces at what I would call the point of corruption. They operate at the point of interface with the community where if they do not resist the temptation and it becomes endemic then it is really difficult to get out of any emerging structure. That is a challenge. It is a challenge that we faced in Iraq, in Sierra Leone and it is a challenge we now face in Afghanistan. The auxiliary police is an attempt to

rise to that challenge in the communities. One of the things that we should remind ourselves of is that almost all of us live in communities where the Police Force has a very strong identity with our local communities and may indeed have grown up out of our communities. We only need to remind ourselves of the way in which communities across England responded to the proposal that there should be an amalgamation of Police Forces to see how strongly our communities identify their local Police Forces with their communities. With respect, it does not seem to me that it is a criticism of the Police Force that it might identify strongly with the community. The Afghan Auxiliary Police Force was an attempt to try and generate Police Forces in communities which serve those communities out of those communities. Of course, implicit in your question, Mr Havard, is would they serve warlords in those communities or individuals rather than the rule of law. In order to try and prevent that from happening the PAG, which developed this concept, which the President sits on, and it is community policing in the sense the policing comes out of communities, made a number of rules about them and the application of these rules will ensure that they do not go down the path that people fear. One is that they are within the structure of the Police Service and they are accountable to the Ministry of Interior. Secondly, you can only serve as an auxiliary police officer for a year and then if you want to continue to be a police officer you have to move into the Police Force itself. Given that the challenge was in remote communities to find police officers quickly, people who could serve that function who the communities would have confidence in, who would not be seen to have come from the north of the country or another part of the country and behave or be expected to behave in the way in which police officers have previously in these communities, they were worth a go. I have seen them operate. For example, I have seen them operate in the Kajaki area where they provide a significant amount of security for our own forces very successfully as we are doing other work to secure the Kajaki Dam for reconstruction.

Q383 Chairman: Would there be something to be said for having a Police Training College in Helmand Province?

Des Browne: I think there would be something to be said for having Police Training Colleges where there were people who were prepared to volunteer to join the police. Indeed, my understanding is that at the surer that President Karzai attended, he said to the tribal leaders of the south, “If you want police officers or members of the Army who represent your community, send your sons to volunteer”. If they were prepared to volunteer then I am sure we could build the training facilities to be able to accommodate the volunteers.

Q384 Mr Jenkin: Again, can I tell you, Secretary of State, about what we actually heard on the ground

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which was that when the British Army went into Sangin with the Americans we had to arrest the police because they were looting, which rather reflected the lack of on the ground training of on the ground police, yet the Germans are spending large amounts of money on higher command and staff course training for senior police officers which is regarded as largely irrelevant to the ordinary platoon commander on the ground. Is there going to be a rebalancing of the police training effort towards what is actually needed now rather than, say, five years hence? I get the impression that the German effort is largely wasted at the present time.

Des Browne: There is a review taking place. The Americans are about to invest quite a significant amount, I think \$5.9 billion or thereabouts, in Army and police, so there is significant resource coming in. I was making the point about the auxiliary police earlier. There is a problem with the police. The police do behave corruptly in certain parts of Helmand, there is no question about that. As you point out, the first thing you need to do in some of these communities is deal with the police. We need a structure in place that makes sure that those police officers who are deployed into these communities are paid, and paid properly. That is part of the problem, that some of the central government and provincial government structures that were supposed to pay them was not working properly and they were not being paid. In those circumstances they will use at the point of corruption, as I describe it, their power to be able to get their wages out of local people.

Q385 Mr Crausby: My understanding is that as part of this extra money from the ESDP mission and so on, there is a plan to put embedded trainers in to try and develop the Police Service at various levels. My only concern is that there quite clearly is an enthusiasm amongst some of our people, and I mean the military, the British Army people on the ground, to try and assist with that and get good people where they can get them and work with them as best they can and do it. My only concern is that they may be trying to do things and substitute for others without the resources to do it. I have a little bit of a fear that the enthusiasm and goodwill of our people might be abused a bit by trying to do things that perhaps are not their full brief and they have not got the resources to do it with.

Des Browne: We have police trainers on the ground in Helmand Province and we make a contribution to that and look forward to the deployment of the ESDP initiative which ought to increase the number of police trainers across Afghanistan and our ability to do that. Most of the training will need to be done in local police stations by mentors and people with the skills once they are deployed and we will no doubt use our resources, such as military resources that we have in these communities, to be able to keep an eye on how police officers behave.

Q386 John Smith: I am not sure that we are going to have enough time to do this question justice at the end of this session, but in the answers that we have

received this afternoon quite clearly enormous emphasis is placed on the rule of law, the writ of the central government, presidential agreements, the role of presidential agreements, the question of the police, and up until now it has been implied that corruption does occur but it is varied and it is isolated. This Committee has received a very worrying submission from a former employee of the British Embassy in Kabul that corruption remains absolutely endemic at every level of decision-making, at every level within the legislature, public appointments, right throughout the Police Force, and consequently it is undermining the popularity and authority of the Karzai Government. Do you recognise that description, Secretary of State? Are we addressing that issue seriously and is there any more we can do?

Des Browne: Corruption is a significant issue, I do not doubt that. We have to be realistic. This is a largely subsistence economy and over the years corruption has become endemic, it has become almost cultural in certain parts, and in order to get things done people use the resource that they have. If you add to that the fact that it is largely a drugs economy and there are quite substantial amounts of money floating around in the hands of a very small number of people then it is not surprising that there was corruption. I think it will take time to develop the sort of values that we are all more familiar with and against which we judge whether or not progress is being made. Sometimes we set ourselves measures of success which are unrealistic given the nature of the challenge and then we are bound to fail against these measures that we set. Stability will ease this challenge for us. We will work towards the goal that we have set ourselves of eradicating corruption from this society, but I say again we must keep realistic expectations while we are going along. What can we expect of the Karzai Government at this stage to prevent people taking the opportunist corrupt path which will be there for them as money moves around? First of all, and I will come to Ms Cameron after, we have to ensure that the money we are investing through DFID is not being used for corrupt purposes. We have very strict rules in place and audit methods for ensuring that the money that we are investing in this country is being used for the purposes that we are investing it. I will let Ms Cameron deal with that. The second is that we can expect from the government the creation of structures that ensure that corruption is identified and eradicated. Those structures are emerging. The international community continues to keep a lot of pressure on the President and the government. For example, the President has established both an Anti-Corruption Committee and a Commission, as I understand it. The committee is chaired by the Chief of Justice, he has established an Appointments Advisory Panel to make sure that all senior appointments below ministers that are not within the mandate of the existing Civil Service Appointments Board are carried out properly so that people do not use patronage and corruption. The Afghan Prosecutor General, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Supreme Court have proven, in our assessment, that they are determined in their fight

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against corruption despite the enormity of the task. A number of government officials in Kabul have been suspended, various provinces and provincial governors are under investigation and there are a number of investigations under way. I do not think that these steps will bring an immediate end to corruption but they are visible signs of intent, and that is the crucial and important part given where we are starting from in this country that they are making progress in this regard, and they are. I suspect, frankly, and it does not surprise me, that anybody looking at that against what we would expect would say, "This place is corrupt. If you want to get things done then you grease people's palms". Whether or not that is a measure of success or strategic failure, in my view, is challengeable.

Chairman: Secretary of State, can we finally discuss the regional context in which Afghanistan plays out its part.

Q387 Willie Rennie: We have discussed this issue a number of times, both in the Chamber and in this Committee. President Musharraf has been given considerable credit for the efforts that he has made on the Afghanistan front, but it seems to be a widely held view in Afghanistan that elements of the Pakistan Army and Intelligence Service are funding and training insurgents. What is your view on that?

Des Browne: I have not got any evidence that the problem that emerges from Pakistan, and there is unquestionably support from the Taliban coming from Pakistan, is state sponsored. I do not have evidence that suggests that is the case. What I do know is the Pakistan Security Forces have sustained considerable losses, disproportionately greater losses than certainly we or others have, in trying to deal with the issues that lie on their side of the border. I believe that President Musharraf is committed to taking on this problem and in recent months they have stepped up their actions against the Taliban to a level that we have not previously seen. We ought to encourage them to continue to do that. There is no doubt that historically there were relations between elements of the Pakistan structure, government structure, and the Taliban and it is highly improbable that those have gone away, those are likely still to be the case. We need to recognise what Pakistan is seeking to do. At the end of the day it is relations between the Pakistan and Afghan Governments that will resolve these problems. There is no other resolution to them than that these two governments talk to each other. Certainly I am encouraged by the fact that both presidents have spoken to each other recently. On my most recent visit to Afghanistan, which was only weeks ago, I heard President Karzai speak much more warmly and positively about what Pakistan have been doing in this regard than I have ever heard him speak before. I am encouraged by that but it is an enormous challenge.

Q388 Willie Rennie: Do you think he is doing enough to try to root out these rogue elements within the Intelligence Service? What more support could be provided to him to help him do that?

Des Browne: Across the board a number of countries provide a significant amount of support and encouragement to him, but we all recognise that he has to balance our calls for action, which are repeated, against the risk that operations of a certain nature in these very troubled areas of his border communities will inflame tribal groups and drive them into further extremism. He has to make these judgments for himself. We can encourage him, and do encourage him, and there is significant emerging evidence that he is responding in a very positive way. Will these problems be resolved by military force? They will not be. They will be resolved across that disputed border by these two countries coming to an accommodation and an agreement about how they will deal with a common problem. I am much more interested in them talking to each other and developing a common solution to the problems than I am in encouraging people to deploy military force. I will be guided by others but I think there are approximately four million refugee Afghans living in refugee camps in the territories across the border in Pakistan. The scale of these problems is phenomenal. How much military force would you need to deploy? Some of these communities you could not deploy military force into at all without the danger of carnage.

Q389 Willie Rennie: It is the rogue elements within the Intelligence Service and the Army that I am focused on here. I accept what you say, but within the Intelligence Service and the Army do you think he is doing enough to try and root out those rogue elements?

Des Browne: I am just not in a position to measure that, I am afraid. I know the effect that is having but that is not the only activity that is going on at that border that is generating problems for us or generating Taliban fighters into southern Afghanistan.

Q390 Mr Jenkin: Secretary of State, there are estimated to be 3,000 madrasas in Pakistan funded by various Gulf States very liberally churning out degrees of religious extremism, some of whom finish up over here, some of whom finish up fighting our Armed Forces in Afghanistan.

Des Browne: Absolutely.

Q391 Mr Jenkin: Is Her Majesty's Government treating this problem, albeit in as positive a way with regard to President Musharraf, as a top level strategic problem? Are we determined that this should change and should we not encourage General Musharraf to back the Commission which he himself established to bring the tribal areas, particularly in Waziristan, under the constitution of Pakistan instead of this vestige of imperial government that still remains in that part of Pakistan which basically leaves the tribal elders to govern themselves? The tribal elders have given their view that they would like to be incorporated under the constitution of Pakistan as part of regular Pakistan, should we not be encouraging and aiding Pakistan to achieve this

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objective? What support are we giving President Musharraf, perhaps financial or in terms of reform support, in order to be able to do this?

Des Browne: Can I just say to you, Mr Jenkin, I am not in a position to give you chapter and verse on this, but my recollection of our recent engagement with the Pakistan Government is that we have been doing all of those things that you identify, including significant aid for education purposes. As you point out, we have a common interest with the Afghan Government and, indeed, the Pakistan Government in addressing the radicalisation that these madrassas are creating in that area. It is a strategic issue for us because it is a strategic issue in relation to the security of the streets of this city, never mind Afghanistan. We are investing there and encouraging President Musharraf, who indeed has taken action, as you will have seen from your visit, in these areas in relation to some of these madrassers. You will have seen the demonstrations that are taking place in the streets of his own capital city about his challenge to the way in which his own people are educated. We are working on the other side also, on the Afghan side, with the Education Minister in Afghanistan directing and encouraging investment to ensure that Afghans are not crossing the border into these madrassers to get their education but are able to be educated in Afghanistan in a broader way. All of these things we are seeking to address. If it is necessary and helpful I would ask colleagues from the Foreign Office and perhaps also DFID to give a note to the Committee in relation to this issue.¹⁵

Q392 Mr Jenkin: That would be very helpful.

Des Browne: I am not in a position to give the detail but I recognise steps being taken in all of the areas that you identify.

Q393 Mr Havard: Can I ask you about the other border on the west, which is the border with Iran. We visited India on our way to Afghanistan. Having visited Pakistan last time we thought we would get the other point of view. The Indian point of view is slightly different but interesting in terms of their own strategic development into the future. They have quite a significant aid programme, as do the Iranians in the west of Afghanistan, who have been there for some time. Therefore, military engagement on the border on the west in Herat with US forces, we discussed those issues about whether or not the confusion that could come in some minds, if you like, about the US involvement on a border with Iran might not be very helpful but, on the other hand, given that there is a positive engagement, and it seemed to be a positive engagement, by the Iranians in Afghanistan, by the US Commander, that was quite clear, that might be a very helpful thing in terms of developing a different regional relationship and the business about having a regional conference which might involve all of these different parties because

there are countries such as India and Iran playing a positive role within Afghanistan at the moment which is perhaps not fully understood.

Des Browne: I agree with you and the Committee, and I am sure you came to the conclusion that Iran, India and Pakistan all have strategic interests in a strong, stable Afghanistan. Regionally an Afghanistan which is not a failed state and has a reduced drugs economy, which I suppose is the best we will get, is in the strategic interests of all of those countries. They all in their own way make a contribution to achieving that but it is much more complex than just saying that because Pakistan, for example, is very wary of India's intentions and has been for some significant period of time and is suspicious of India's engagement with Afghanistan. Iran, on the other hand, do make a very positive contribution, particularly on the border in relation to drugs. They make significant investment inside Afghanistan as well and in keeping that border sealed against drug dealers have themselves lost a significant number of their own security forces in protecting that border. They are supportive of Afghanistan. On the other hand, comparatively openly, and certainly demonstrably, they have sought confrontation by proxy with us and the United States and other NATO members elsewhere in the region and there is some indication that they are doing the same in Afghanistan. This is a complex environment. Should these countries come together in some form of co-operative regional conference, yes, they should, and that is exactly what they do. There is an organisation called the Regional Economic Co-operation Conference which last met in India in November of last year, the year before in Kabul and next year proposes to meet in Pakistan. It is co-chaired by Afghanistan. They provide a real opportunity to move the economic and trade agenda forward, which is where the common interests lie. For example, I am told that India has pledged \$650 million to Afghanistan over five years and signed an MoU on rural development, but you know yourself that Iran has made investment and Pakistan has made significant investment as well as the contribution that we have already discussed at the border. These countries need to come together themselves.

Q394 Mr Crausby: Do you think that NATO involvement in Afghanistan, supported by others outside NATO, such as Canada and particularly Australia, and the view that these countries have towards the East as well as to the West, must be hugely beneficial in trying to move that political agenda on which would obviously help Afghanistan as well in terms of its structural development?

Des Browne: I do not think there is any doubt that the international community, particularly those who are involved in Afghanistan and those who have resources there, whether they be troops or other resources that they deploy, would encourage this sort of regional co-operation and, indeed, as far as I understand it, do everything to encourage this

¹⁵ See Ev

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regional co-operation. I am not aware of any of those countries involved, be they NATO or other countries, who are not encouraging this. Frankly, as far as I can see there is a well-worn path to President Musharraf's office by almost all of the countries who are involved in Afghanistan encouraging this sort of co-operation.

Chairman: Secretary of State, and to all of the witnesses, I would like to say thank you very much indeed for a very constructive and helpful evidence session. A long session but it is an extremely important subject and we are most grateful to you. Thank you.

Written evidence

Memorandum from the Ministry of Defence

UK DEPLOYMENT

1. The UK has recently handed over command of ISAF to a composite headquarters (drawn from different nations) under the command of US General Dan McNeil. The HQ of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (HQ ARRC), under the command of General David Richards, led ISAF for nine months from May of last year. Once the roulement of 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Marines, by 12 Mechanised Brigade is finished, and the Command Group of the ARRC has completed its withdrawal, the overall scale of the UK's commitment in Afghanistan will remain constant at around 6,300.

2. The withdrawal of the ARRC has allowed us to increase our troop concentration in other areas, most notably training of the Afghan National Army which is key to our exit strategy. There have also been increases in some command, specialist and support capabilities, such as strategic communications, logistics, and an enhanced UAV capability for use in the South.

SECURITY SITUATION

3. The security situation across Afghanistan is broadly stable, if fragile in places. Insurgent groups are able to launch small scale local attacks, particularly in the South and East, but at present they do not pose a strategic threat to the long term stability of Afghanistan. The Joint Intelligence Community regularly reviews the security situation across the country.

4. The security situation in the South remains fragile with the situation in Helmand proving challenging. However, recent months have seen a sharp reduction in the number of attacks against UK forces, which can be attributed to a combination of the harsh winter season, the slow but steady strengthening of local governance, the poppy planting season and most importantly, the proactive work of UK forces. Manoeuvre Outreach Groups (MOGs) have been deployed across the province, seeking out and engaging with Taliban forces. This has allowed us to inflict significant damage against the Taliban, with intelligence reports suggesting that their fighters are becoming tired and are becoming less supportive of their commanders. Nevertheless, our forces are prepared for an increase in insurgent activity.

FATALITIES

5. The death of Lance Corporal Ford on 15 January brings the total number of UK personnel killed in Afghanistan since 2001 when operations began to 46, of which 25 have been classed as killed in action. Since March 2006, when UK forces deployed to Helmand, there have been 41 casualties, 22 of whom were killed in action.

MUSA QALEH

6. The Musa Qaleh agreement was brokered by former Governor Daud and the tribal elders of Musa Qaleh in October 2006. There were no negotiations with the Taliban. In essence the agreement involved an exclusion zone of 5km around the Musa Qaleh District for ISAF forces in return for tribal elders denying Taliban presence in the town. This led to a 143 day period of peace in the town.

7. On 2 February 2006 a limited number of Taliban entered the district centre of Musa Qaleh disrupting the agreement. This was indicative of their dislike of the agreement and it contradicts claims that it had led to the "Talibanisation" of the district. Our assessment is that this action was against the wishes and interests of the local population. Taliban claims that ISAF breached the agreement are untrue, but, given recent events, the agreement is no longer considered by the Governor of Helmand to be extant.

8. This event should be kept in context. This was not a mass assault by the Taliban, nor are they in Musa Qaleh in great strength. They have previously occupied district centres for short periods for propaganda purposes; this is not a novel activity for them. With the support of the local population Governor Wafa of Helmand is trying to find a local solution that enhances the Afghan Government's grip over the area. He is in contact with the Tribal elders over implementation of a protocol which will see his authority, and that of the Government of Afghanistan, increased. He also believes that the Taliban have alienated themselves from the local population which was illustrated recently when Local Mullahs issued a *fatwa* in favour of the Afghan flag. Carefully targeted strike operations against Taliban leaders by UK and NATO forces have helped strengthen the hand of the tribal elders and the Governor. Karzai, Wafa and COMISAF all support an approach that works with the Musa Qaleh elders and ISAF forces stand ready to assist if requested.

EQUIPMENT

9. We are focused on ensuring that we have the right people and assets deployed in support of our operations. The equipment package for Afghanistan has been agreed by our Chiefs of Staff and we keep it under continual review. Since April 2006, over 150 Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs) have been approved for Afghanistan, of which 59 have already been delivered. In addition, we conduct substantial periodic Force Level Reviews (FLRs), which examine equipment and personnel levels.

ARMoured VEHICLES

10. Although it is impossible to protect our service personnel from every eventuality, we do everything possible to provide as much protection as we can. We have recently undertaken a major procurement of new protected vehicles for troops in Afghanistan and Iraq that will give commanders more options to deal with the developing threats. The first element of the new procurement package is to buy 100 VECTOR, our new Pinzgauer-based protected patrol vehicle, for Afghanistan, on top of the 62 already on contract. VECTOR provides good protection and increased mobility and capacity compared with the protected Land Rover known as SNATCH. This makes it very suitable for the rugged terrain and long patrol distances in Afghanistan. VECTOR will be delivered to theatre from late February of this year. The second element is to procure MASTIFF, which meets our requirement for a well-protected, wheeled patrol vehicle, with a less intimidating profile than our tracked vehicles. We are rapidly procuring 108 of these vehicles for use in both Iraq and Afghanistan. These will be delivered to Afghanistan from March.

HELICOPTERS

11. The Secretary of State announced the deployment of two additional Chinooks to Afghanistan and an increase in available helicopter hours on 24 July 2006. Additionally, it has recently been decided that Harriers and Apaches will be extended in Theatre until April 2009. The MoD continually reviews helicopter requirements to ensure that we have sufficient helicopter support to meet current and anticipated tasks, but the current Commander UK Task Force in Helmand, Brigadier Jerry Thomas, has made clear that there are sufficient helicopters available to support UK forces.

NATO

12. At the NATO summit in Riga NATO countries agreed that commanders on the ground must have access to the resources they need to carry out their mission. Thus some Member States lifted all their caveats (for example the Dutch and Romanians); and there was an agreement, including from countries like Germany and France, that in any situation where there is an emergency then troops can be deployed in order to help those that are in difficulty. As NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer concluded: "*About 26,000 of the total 32,000 NATO ISAF forces are now more useable than they were for combat and non-combat missions.*". In the run up to NATO Ministerial Meeting in Seville in early February the US pledged to double its manoeuvre forces in the South and East of Afghanistan in addition to an extra \$10.6 billion (£5.4 billion) to bolster its Afghan aid effort. \$5.9 billion of this will be used to train and equip Afghan Security Forces. The other significant announcements included the German decision to deploy six Tornados for reconnaissance purposes, a Lithuanian SF package for the South, and more border guards from Italy. Nevertheless significant requirements remain and the Government will continue to actively pursue further contributions from other nations.

RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D)

13. The UK military presence in Helmand Province is designed to set the security conditions for progress along various lines of operation, such as governance, counter-narcotics, and social/economic development. It also takes an active role in R&D projects relating to these lines of operation. The UK military contribution to the R&D effort is mainly implemented through 28 Engr Regt. R&D activity can be broken down into two categories: Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and Long Term Development (LTD).

14. QIPs are usually short-term, small-scale initiatives which tackle the concerns and priorities of the local community, and are designed to have an immediate and sustainable benefit, as well as contributing to post-conflict stabilisation and enabling a wider and longer-term development agenda. January 2007 saw the approval of the 100th QIP in Helmand since the programme began in April 2006. Of the £6.48 million allocated for QIPs this financial year, we have committed £5 million and spent more than £3.7 million. Spending on QIPs has increased significantly since the deployment of 28 Engr Regt to theatre and the formation of a Royal Engineer led R&D branch within the Task Force Headquarters. This gives the PRT significantly greater capacity for contract and project management across a wider portfolio of activities. The military may be involved in implementing QIPs across the four strands and are not simply confined to projects authorised against MoD funding.

15. As part of the QIPs effort, some Consent Winning Activity (CWA) is carried out. CWA addresses the community's immediate requirements, but does not generally mitigate their fundamental concerns. It aims to gain local good-will, in order to support Force Protection and to enable the engagement required to identify, plan and implement QIPs and LTD. Comd UKTF has authority for the release of up to £40K per month from the QIPs programme for CWA. An example of CWA is rubble clearance in Nowzad.

16. Successful QIPs projects so far include:

- Setting up vehicle check points.
- Providing kit and building facilities for ANSF.
- Building security infrastructure for Governor's compound, women's facility.
- Constructing school/library facilities.
- Constructing a midwifery hostel.
- Upgrading Lashkar Gah prison.
- Repairing bomb-damage at Directorate of Counter-Narcotics.

17. LTD is addressed at the provincial level through the development of a Provincial Development Plan by the Governor and Provincial Development Council under the guidance of the DfID Development Advisor. This will take place against the backdrop of National Priority Programmes funded centrally through Kabul, as well as bilateral DfID programmes in Helmand, towards which DfID will provide up to £20 million pa. These not only deliver benefit on the ground, but also serve the central purpose of building sustainable capacity through delivering via the GoA and local Afghan administration.

KAJAKI DAM

18. The Kajaki Dam Project is a hydro-electric project which will entail the refurbishment of the power generation turbines and infrastructure at the Kajaki Dam, as well as constructing the power cables to supply Southern Helmand and Kandahar provinces. It aims to provide a sustainable network of reliable and affordable electricity to 1.8 million people across the provinces. The power generated will also enable irrigation in the region to the south of Kajaki and triple the amount of arable land which should enable wider cultivation of legal crops, reducing farmers dependence on poppy cultivation. It is USAID's largest project in Afghanistan with a project cost of \$180 million and will take three to four years to complete.

19. UK Forces have been involved in the area around Kajaki in order to set the security situations necessary for the Dam project to proceed. Future operations will be conducted closely alongside ANSF forces and will continue to be focused on disrupting Taliban activity in the area.

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

20. There are some 32,000 trained Afghan National Army (ANA) across Afghanistan, comprised of nine Brigades. There are also another 4,000 in training. The planned completion date for ANA basic training is December 2007 based on a total of 50,000 troops. However, there are aspirations to increase this number to a total of 70,000 troops with a planned completion date of December 2008. The fielding plan for ANA troops sees them completing their basic training package before deploying to their provincial HQ, whereby they should then spend up to 12 months conducting collective training in order to conduct Brigade level operations. ANA troops have deployed successfully alongside UK forces in operations in the South with UK forces reporting that the ANA have performed admirably.

21. There are 62,000 Afghan National Police (ANP) trained to date with a target of 82,000 to be trained by December 2008. While ANP training is more advanced than ANA training in terms of numbers, the quality of that training has not been as high. This has been noted by ISAF contributing nations, many of whom have been pressing for some time for greater EU engagement in the rule of law sector, so as to co-ordinate the efforts of various EU Member States in Afghanistan, and ensure linkages with the work of the European Commission and key partners such as the US. An EU fact-finding mission visited Afghanistan in late 2006 and recommended the deployment of an ESDP mission focussing on policing, but with linkages to the wider rule of law sector. We support key elements of this concept, including that the mission should facilitate the mainstreaming of counter-narcotics, tackle Ministry of Interior reform, establish effective co-ordination with other international efforts and give adequate priority to Kabul with a possible expansion into the provinces. We are pressing for the mission to be deployed as early as possible, ideally in April/May, though the German Presidency believe that June would be a more realistic target. The UK is planning to provide roughly 10% of the police forces necessary for this mission.

COUNTER NARCOTICS

22. On 21 January the Afghan Government decided that it would not approve Ground Based Spraying pilots in selected Afghan provinces this year, a position that the UK will support. Manual/Mechanical eradication has begun in earnest in Afghanistan in 11 provinces including Helmand where the Afghan Eradication Force has begun eradication in the targeted Central districts. Total eradication so far is 2,206ha

(based on UNODC verified total at 11 February). Eradication is being conducted and managed in a much more orderly fashion than last year, and it has started earlier. There is also much greater Afghan ministerial dialogue than 2006.

23. Of course, eradication is only one part of a comprehensive strategy, targeted where there is access to legal rural livelihoods, as set out in the National Drug Control Strategy. We are working with the Afghan Government to ensure that counter narcotics efforts are also integrated across the Afghan rule of law sector. In the last year, we have seen the passage of vital CN legislation, conviction of around 300 traffickers, and an increase in drug related seizures. A high security prison wing is also now operational. Progress is being made but there is much left to do.

24. It is going to take a long time to uproot something so deeply entrenched in Afghanistan's culture and economy. And without a strong state, a fully functioning judiciary or a properly trained and manned police force, Afghan capability has been limited. At the opening of the London Conference, President Karzai said "In my view, and in the view of the United Nations that shares it with me, perhaps Afghanistan will need at least 10 years of a strong systematic consistent effort . . . in order for us to be free of poppies by that time. So I would give it a decade, at least." It is essential for the international community to increase resources in line with the scale of the problem if we are to tackle more difficult provinces effectively.

19 February 2007

Memorandum from Philip Wilkinson

1. The Defence Committee inquiry of 31 January 2007 into the UK's deployment into Afghanistan states:

The inquiry will examine progress made in assisting the Afghanistan Government's programme to bring stability, security and development to Afghanistan and whether NATO partners have provided sufficient resources, both personnel and equipment, to the mission.

2. From September 2004 until July 2006, I was the Director of the UK's support program to the Office of the National Security Council (ONSC). The ONSC office block is situated alongside the President's office block in the Arg Palace in Kabul. I was the only permanently based non-Afghan policy advisor in the Palace. My job, and that of my small team was in three parts; the provision of policy advice to the National Security Advisor, Dr Zalmai Rassoul, and institutional development and capacity building and training in the ONSC. Dr Rassoul is fourth in the national protocol list and, in Pashtunwali, style spent most of everyday with President Karzai, including dinner. My discussions with Dr Rassoul and everyday interactions with his directors in the ONSC gave me unprecedented access to palace opinions. While I kept many of these opinions in confidence, when I felt there was an issue that was or could have a direct impact on UK's best interests, I did pass those along to the Ambassador or relevant Embassy staff. It is not my intention to name individuals in this statement because I felt that many were under such pressure to deliver diktats from either the Reid group or No 10 that their ability to deliver ground reality, which was contrary to these diktats was a pointless exercise and therefore they did not push as hard as they might if there had been a more receptive recipient.

3. In early 2005, when NATO force levels for the Phase 3 roll-out plan into the South became known we (those in the ONSC) were incredulous. At that time we were in the process of reviving the National Threat Assessment (an annual document, first produced in 2004) and were well aware of the threat levels. Helmand province has a land area of 20,058 sq miles as compared to England's 50,698 sq miles. No central government in Kabul has ever exerted the rule of law into Helmand, the provincial political infrastructure, where it existed was corrupt, the province was rife with drug-lords and we knew the province was heavily infiltrated by the Taliban and AQ with a large re-supply and reinforcement capability across the border in Pakistan. Yet we were deploying a force that could deploy at best 500 soldiers on the ground at any one time to police an anarchic area a little less than half the size of England. The general consensus in the ONSC, concerning Dr Reid's statements that the mission was the delivery of humanitarian assistance and hopefully it would not be necessary to fire a single shot were considered extremely unrealistic. I certainly passed those views to the Embassy and British military in country at the time. Unfortunately when NATO forces and Lt Gen David Richards conducted their reconnaissance missions to Afghanistan, I never got to brief them even though David and I are friends of very long standing, and I made that known to the Embassy staff. I know Dr Rassoul had the same concerns but in his polite Afghan manner he would have expressed his concerns very diplomatically. I have no idea whether our concerns were passed back to London.

4. The consequence of the failure to deploy sufficient troops, in a balanced combat package was entirely predictable. The drug-lords, the Taliban and AQ were not deterred but encouraged to attack robustly; leaving those NATO forces no option but to take robust defensive measures. This was not the mission and killing Afghans runs counter to the long term goal of the mission and the creation of a secure environment in which reconstruction activities can deliver tangible benefits to the Afghan people and persuade them to support the central government.

5. Let me make some comments about NATO/ISAF forces generally. The Afghans call ISAF the International Shopping Assistance Force because the only time in Kabul they see NATO forces outside of their speeding vehicles, with the honourable exception of the Brits who conduct foot patrols, is when they

stop to do their tourist shopping before going home. I believe that the second largest amount of money spent (after support to the ANP) by the Germans in Afghanistan has been to build a “Fort Knox” type camp for themselves to EU standards. Unless things have changed since I left, German military patrols are not allowed out of their secure camp after dark, which tends to limit their patrol range. In 2005, as part of the burgeoning DIAG (disbandment of illegal armed groups) program, the GoA proposed conducting a simple pilot scheme; one small IAG in the south and one in the north. However, the German Ambassador objected as he claimed this disbandment had the potential to raise the threat level to German troops in their area. The use of national “red flags” is a major inhibitor of operations.

6. In 2005, the Reid Group deployed an RAF Group Captain to the Embassy in Kabul to try and stitch together the activities of DfID, the FCO and military into one coherent strategy. This was an admirable ambition which would indicate that up to that point coordination had been poor. A major concern then and now (I am still in regular contact with the ONSC staff) is the failure of the development community, including DfID to deliver tangible benefits to the ordinary people of Afghanistan. The oft repeated saying in the ONSC was, *at least the Soviets delivered some reconstruction*. If we fail in Helmand it will be more to do with the failure of the development community than the military. The argument that security and development are inextricably linked needs no rehearsal but works both ways.

7. Looking at DfID’s strategic plan for Afghanistan, their strategic objectives relate to the disbursement of money not the delivery of tangible benefits. Making the GoA responsible for the management of their own budget, including donor funds is fine up to a point in terms of capacity building. However, if there is no oversight and accountability in ministries that are not yet competent in themselves, not only tolerates inefficiency but also encourages corruption and impunity. And unfortunately they and the WB have often relied upon the wrong people to deliver. In 2005–06, there was a clique of smartly suited Afghans in government who were all able to chant the development mantra but who were actually corrupt and plotting against President Karzai. They were known in the Palace as “the tie wearing Taliban”. We had proof of their corruption and subversive activities however, because these individuals were being so strongly supported by DfID, the UKG and WB, President Karzai had difficulties getting rid of them. He did eventually but only against the wishes of their supporters. During this period when this support was causing the UK to lose influence in the Palace I produced the strongest of briefs to the Ambassador only to be dismissed as a trouble maker—I was told that it was considered that I had gone native.

8. While the military has been doing the best that it can with limited resources in Helmand Province, the abject failure of DfID to deliver tangible benefits to the ordinary Afghan people is a disgrace. DfID is culturally anti military and they would rather see no reconstruction than seriously fund the military to take on the role. Their argument that only civilians know how to do development owes more to their institutional bias than reality and runs counter to the achievement of mission success in Helmand and Afghanistan generally.

My background is military (32 years), I retired in 2000 and my last job as a colonel and my appointment was Assistant Director for PSO at the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre. I then moved into a DfID funded post in the Conflict Security and Development Group at Kings College. I am no longer at Kings but a research associate at Chatham House and a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences. In the last seven years, I have been employed as a strategic security policy (Security Sector Reform) advisor at the national level in Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan. I am currently working on a US DOD funded program looking at Phase 4 operations—nation building.

27 February 2007

Memorandum from the Senlis Council

INTRODUCTION

1. The Senlis Council is an international policy think tank established by The Network of European Foundations, with country offices in Kabul, London, Ottawa, Paris and Brussels. The Council’s work encompasses foreign policy, security, development and counter-narcotics policies, and aims to provide innovative analysis and proposals within these areas.

2. The Senlis Council’s extensive programme in Afghanistan focuses on global policy development. The Council is committed to conducting in-depth field research, investigating the relationships between counter-narcotics, military and development policies, and their consequences on reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Senlis Afghanistan has field offices in the cities of Lashkar Gah, Kandahar and Jalalabad.

UK MISSION IN SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN IS AT CROSSROADS: THE URGENT NEED TO SUPPORT THE COMMENDABLE JOB OF BRITISH MILITARY

3. The UK stabilisation mission in Afghanistan is at crossroads: should the UK insist on the same, unbalanced and ineffective policies, its mission is bound to fail. British forces in southern Afghanistan are doing a commendable job in an increasingly hostile environment. The deployment of extra British troops

represents is a necessary step for the British forces and the UK to make a positive impact in achieving stability, but the deployment will prove an irreparable failure if there is no fundamental change in the overall policy portfolio.

4. It is time for a reality check: the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) and British troops in southern Afghanistan are lacking sufficient support from other NATO countries, faced with extremely difficult circumstances. The MoD is bearing a great share of the military burden when compared to the negligible contribution of most NATO countries.

5. The MoD and British forces are also insufficiently supported at home by other Government Departments. An ineffective and expensive FCO-led counter-narcotics strategy that focuses primarily on poppy eradication, in conjunction with DFID's lack of effective development compromise military operations, forcing British troops to fight in an increasing hostile environment and putting their lives at risk. A coordinated plan to reconcile counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics and development strategies is imperative in order to support the efforts and operations of British troops in southern Afghanistan.

Recommendation

6. By seeking to defeat the Taliban militarily and at the same time destroying people's livelihoods through misguided policies, the stabilisation mission in southern Afghanistan is at great risk. The UK Government can address the problem of conflicting objectives and support the immense task British troops are facing by aiming to reconcile counter-insurgency, development and counter-narcotics efforts. An immediate response that focuses on the provision of effective development and aid and an effective counter-narcotics strategy is required.

DFID'S LACK OF EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD AID UNDERMINES THE MILITARY OPERATIONS OF BRITISH TROOPS IN SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN

7. The counter-insurgency efforts of the British forces in Afghanistan are directly affected by the lack of impact of the UK's broader development policies. Southern Afghanistan is ravaged by extreme poverty. The system of food aid is dysfunctional and inadequate; it does not even address the minimum needs of the thousands of victims of poppy eradication and bombing campaigns and drought. Moreover food distribution to the large camps of displaced persons was halted in March 2006. DFID's lack of effectiveness in delivering essential food aid and effective development has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and has fuelled public disillusionment against the British troops.

8. Crucially, the failure to address the population's basic needs has led to the rise of a growing *grassroots insurgency* and British forces are now faced with an increase in Taliban activity. Building on the local grievances, the Taliban have gained widespread local support, fuel. Impoverished rural communities and refugee camps across southern Afghanistan have now become the recruitment centres for the Taliban's Afghans living in refugee camps under appalling conditions are often the victims of poppy eradication and aerial bombing campaigns that have destroyed their villages

9. Grassroots insurgency is also reinforced by the perception that the Karzai government is controlled by foreign governments. It is essential that Afghans see that they control their future with the support of the international community to address the needs of its people. Understanding the insurgency realities in southern Afghanistan dictates the appropriate response. In order to gain local confidence and support for their counter-insurgency efforts, the British effort in Helmand needs to be closely associated closely associated with reconstruction efforts, enabling immediate aid to reach the population in need and actively supporting initiatives that help to bring economic development and stability in the short term.

Recommendation

10. Counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan must be a complete package of diverse development-based interventions along with a military response. The UK must ensure that its troops are being supported by appropriate aid and development strategies. A comprehensive development policy that tackles the real causes of the rise in grassroots insurgency and addresses the real needs of the Afghan people must be in place. This calls for an immediate widespread distribution of food aid until medium-term development can provide sustainable assistance.

ILL-FATED RESPONSES TO AFGHANISTAN'S OPIUM CRISIS IMPEDE THE STABILISATION MISSION OF BRITISH FORCES

11. Years of failed counter-narcotics policies have been at odds with counter-insurgency efforts. Although the UK Government has proclaimed the endorsement of poppy eradication only where there is good access to legal livelihoods, poppy eradication is widespread in southern Afghanistan where development aid is essentially non-existent. In particular, an extensive eradication campaign is currently underway in Helmand province. In fact, the FCO is now keen to test the efficiency of ground-based spraying over manual and mechanical eradication methods. In effect, such ill-advised, extremely costly campaigns

destroy the only source of sustainable livelihood, thus alienating rural communities. By opposing aggressive poppy eradication, the Taliban not only generates financial gains from the illegal drugs industry but it also draws important political gains and legitimacy amongst the population.

12. There is no rational justification and assessment of the poppy eradication policy, especially no frank evaluation of the negative impact on counter-insurgency and reconstruction efforts. There is ample evidence showing that there is no correlation between the levels of poppy eradication and opium cultivation. There is however a strong correlation between poppy eradication and the rise in insurgency. Optimising the authority of military forces to engage in forceful counter-narcotics activities and to “push it to the edge”, as called for by the Commander of NATO forces, jeopardises both the safety of the troops and the stabilisation mission.

13. An effective and positive counter-narcotics policy is a necessary and decisive factor in winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people and creating a conducive environment for British troop operations. The UK must immediately cease the eradication campaign and ensure that the counter-insurgency efforts of British troops are instead facilitated by a village-based Poppy for Medicine response to the drugs crisis. Poppy for Medicine is an immediately effective policy which recognises the opium poppy as a potential economic resource for Afghanistan and, thus, improves the livelihoods of Afghan rural communities. The key feature of the model is that village-cultivated poppy would be transformed into codeine and morphine tablets in the Afghan villages. By maximising Afghanistan’s renowned tradition of strong local control systems, the economic profits will remain in the village, providing the necessary leverage for the diversification of economic activities. In light of the increasing global shortage of poppy-based medicines including the growing shortage of diamorphine in the UK, Afghanistan is ideally positioned to address this substantial gap. This would put the local Afghan population in a commercial position to support the Karzai government. We are willing to undertake pilot projects in Helmand and Kandahar provinces in the next planting season, aimed at testing the controllability and economic effectiveness of this counter-narcotics initiative.

Recommendation

14. With forceful poppy eradication operations leading to a backlash and threatening to plunge southern Afghanistan into further chaos, the UK Government should support the implementation of Poppy for Medicine. This is an effective response to Afghanistan’s opium crisis, allowing for economic development and contributing to British forces’ stabilisation mission.

ADVANCING RELATIONS BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN WITH PAKISTAN

15. The relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are critical for the stability of both countries and in evolving regional dynamics. The porous border between the two countries is a major cause of instability. The border between Helmand province and Pakistan is of particular concern—by exploiting the ill-defined border, the Taliban is regrouping and gaining more power. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan will benefit from a close relationship aiming to address their shared problems and achieve stability.

16. The UK and the international community could assist both Pakistan and Afghanistan by proposing the establishment of a joint presidential committee, co-chaired by the Presidents of both countries, with the sole purpose of working together—constructively and persistently—on joint problem solving. Such a joint presidential committee could be facilitated by a neutral third party in the short term that has the trust of both presidents. For example, General David Richards, Former Commander of NATO-ISAF, is intimately familiar with the challenges facing both countries, particularly from a security point of view, and has the respect and trust of both Presidents.

Recommendation

17. As part of a cohesive strategy to address the crisis in Afghanistan and promote long-term stability, the UK should support Afghanistan and Pakistan to establish a joint presidential committee, in order to collectively address shared problems.

15 March 2007

Memorandum from Dr Gilbert Greenall

1. BRITISH INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

1.1 It will be difficult to be successful in Afghanistan without the support of the British public. They are at best sceptical and there is a deep historical unease about operations in Afghanistan. Without public support it will be very difficult for the Government to fund this operation properly. There has been little information about why we are there. It is now over six years since we invaded to remove the Taliban and

destroy the AQ training camps. After five years of relative peace why should there now be a war in Helmand Province? A commonly understood reason is the counter narcotics policy. This is generally ridiculed for the practical reason that it is very unlikely to be successful and is morally questionable.

1.2 In Afghanistan the information initiative is held by the Taliban who has had no difficulty in persuading Afghans to see British troops as the invader, the destroyers of their livelihoods and the enemies of their fellow Moslems in Iraq. The British military information campaign is now a key priority.

2. FAILURE TO CONSOLIDATE MILITARY VICTORY

2.1 The decision to invade Afghanistan and defeat the Taliban in 2002 was necessary and undoubtedly correct. The Taliban allowed the AQ training camps which were a direct threat to the United Kingdom.

2.2 Within hours of Kabul being taken the euphoria that greeted the Coalition was heartfelt and genuine. However, the failure to demonstrate the benefits of peace in the 100 days that followed and use this goodwill to consolidate the military success, left a vacuum which has been exploited by the Taliban.

2.3 There was no post conflict recovery plan in December 2001. Even then interest on Iraq was distracting attention from Afghanistan. The military defeat of the Taliban appeared so easy that new objectives of nation building and counter narcotics took centre stage. Rural Afghanistan was neglected and the Taliban were able to recover.

3. WHAT ARE THE UK'S OBJECTIVES?

3.1 It might be useful to examine exactly what the UK's objectives are in Afghanistan, whether we are approaching these problems in the right way and how British government policy is affecting Central Asia beyond the borders of Afghanistan?

3.2 The initial objective was to remove a direct threat to the United Kingdom (AQ training camps). The establishment of democracy, the strengthening of a centralised modern nation state as a barrier to international terrorism and an attempt to stem the supply of heroin from Afghanistan have been added since 2001.

3.3 Do these have a reasonable probability of success regardless of the outcome of the military campaign in Helmand?

3.4 *Defeat the Taliban and their Support to AQ*

3.4.1 Every report indicates that British Military operations have been successful and that the Taliban has been severely weakened. However, this is not a problem that has a simple military solution. The population of Helmand and Afghanistan have to see the benefits of international intervention. Unless this happens the Taliban will regain support.

3.4.2 The security situation has made it difficult for civil assistance projects to demonstrate the benefits of peace. The distraction caused by the Gulf War meant that the goodwill after the 2001 defeat was not sufficiently used to improve the welfare of the rural population. It is difficult to recover from this position now.

3.5 *Counter narcotics*

3.5.1 Afghanistan has had a rapid population growth over the last 20 years. The population is now over 26 million and there has been a food deficit of 350,000 metric tonnes for some years. Cereal crops are unreliable and cultivation of poppies is advantageous on the grounds that they will grow on poor soil and survive unreliable rainfall. For a large proportion of this rural population there is no immediate alternative.

3.5.2 The "narco" economy permeates every sinew of economic life in Afghanistan and foreign backed attempts to irradiate it are unlikely to succeed. Even if successful in Afghanistan the narcotic trade would migrate elsewhere in Central Asia. It is easy to see transference of allegiance from Taliban to "narco" warrior to freedom fighter, all united against the interfering foreigner. Our domestic drug problem requires a domestic solution.

3.5.3 A counter narcotics policy is not only unlikely to succeed but will undermine the central objective to defeat the Taliban. It will inevitably lead to the UK getting tangled in internal Afghan politics. There is no doubt that this will generate conflict.

3.6 *Strengthening Central Government*

3.6.1 It has been clear that failed states harbour international terrorists. Injudicious military interventions also create international terrorists. It has been argued that a solution to this problem is to create a strong centralised central state in Afghanistan.

3.6.2 The idea of Afghanistan as a nation state is a relatively modern and western idea. It has traditionally been a buffer zone between other countries and loyalties determined by tribal rather than national considerations. Because of tribal allegiances, a strong central government is unlikely to be popular anywhere outside Kabul. Neighbouring countries may be equally unenthusiastic. Afghanistan should have functioning government departments but insensitive attempts by foreigners to strengthen the central government against the provinces are likely to increase instability and violence.

3.6.3 Even if the United Kingdom thinks that strengthening the central government is important, the proportion of GDP devoted to it is unrealistic, it is probably no more than half that of other extremely poor countries. The problem is not only funding. Many government departments in Kabul do not have the capacity to improve central government services even if they wished to. Capacity building will take at least a generation not the four years originally envisaged.

3.7 *Establishing Democracy*

3.7.1 Clearly anecdotal evidence, but discussions with Afghans revealed a dislike for democracy imposed by foreigners and preference for traditional political arrangements. The Afghans are fiercely independent and there was a strong message here about foreigners meddling in their affairs

4. DESTABILISATION OF PAKISTAN

4.1 There is a danger that international military operations in Afghanistan are already destabilising Pakistan. An unstable Pakistan is a much bigger threat than Afghanistan.

5. UK FUNDING

5.1 The press reports £1billion being budgeted for the war but only £180 million for civil projects in Afghanistan. The exact figures and the period are not important but the disparity is.

6. THE WAY FORWARD

6.1 The military campaign has had nothing but praise. Lt General David Richards and Brigadier Ed Butler have taken the military initiative and severely weakened the Taliban. The campaign plan is dependent on the lives of Afghans improving, a task that is DFID's responsibility. What will now be important is to make sure that other UK objectives do not undermine the military success. A clear, simple objective (the defeat of the Taliban) geographical focus in Helmand Province, realistic funding and timeframe are required. It is not clear this is going to happen.

7. INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

7.1 The British public need to understand exactly why we are involved in Afghanistan if they are to be supportive and accept the considerable cost over the next few years.

7.2 The Afghans need to see British activities in their country as helpful and supportive. They should not find UK policy threatening or interfering.

8. OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION

8.1 To destroy the only source of income that people have can only generate conflict, especially when done by interfering foreigners. This policy needs to be abandoned by the UK, the Coalition and NATO partners. As security improves, irrigation systems are repaired and there is access to markets, other forms of livelihood can replace opium.

9. CIVIL MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

9.1 There has been too much concern about the deployment of civilians in conflict zones. If Britain is serious about expeditionary campaigns key civilians must be deployed if necessary. They have not deployed in sufficient numbers and this has delayed projects demonstrating the benefits of peace and improving the welfare of the civilian population.

9.2 The same amount of effort should be directed at improving the lives of the civilian population as in the war against the Taliban.

10. FUNDING

10.1 The UK funding so far for civil projects has been disproportionate to the cost of the military campaign both centrally in Kabul and provincially, yet the overall plan was to help the Afghans not wage war against them. Delay over spending the \$5 billion of international funding pledged will have serious consequences.

11. TIMESCALE

11.1 Afghanistan's troubles over the last 30 years will take a generation to cure. Four year plans at nation building are not helpful. If the UK is serious about Afghanistan we need to be realistic about the funding and length of commitment required.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 There has been a loss of strategic focus.

12.2 The needs in Afghanistan are beyond the scope of one nation yet Britain is taking a disproportionate share of the international effort. Currently Britain's contribution is split between multiple objectives some of which are working against the successful outcome of others.

12.3 It would be wiser to direct all the effort, both military and civil in Helmand Province, with one single objective, the defeat of the Taliban.

12.4 Britain's military effort must continue to be associated with improvements to the welfare of the civilian population otherwise it will be seen as an army of occupation.

12.5 This effort, both military and civil, requires adequate resources and a realistic timeframe.

12.6 Kabul is much less stable than it appears. The rapid economic growth in Kabul is no more than "narco" consumerism not real economic growth. The capacity of government departments remains poor. The Afghans are fiercely independent and resent foreign interference. Present UK policy remains high risk.

27 March 2007

Memorandum from Dr Michael Williams

Dr Michael Williams is a NATO expert, currently engaged in strategic concepts and planning evaluation examining civil-military relations in Afghanistan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. NATO has made a valuable contribution towards improving the stability, security and development of Afghanistan. Despite the progress made, however, the current situation is less than ideal. Primary areas where the Alliance has failed to deliver adequately included: (a) failure to agree on a standard mandate for NATO operations; (b) provision of adequate numbers of fighting forces and supporting equipment; and (d) a failure to effectively harness the "comprehensive approach". A lack of international funding for the mission and a reluctance/inability to address the external factors affecting the security situation in Afghanistan have also hampered the mission. These shortcomings are exacerbated by the fact that the international community is largely absent from Afghanistan. NATO has been handed the entire responsibility for a mission that it never accepted. NATO should be only key actor among many in Afghanistan, not the sole provider of security, reconstruction and development.

STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

2. The overriding issue with NATO's involvement in Afghanistan is that the nature of the mission has never been agreed upon by all the Allies. The International Security Assistance Force, operated by NATO, is charged with "assisting" the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) with the maintenance of security throughout the country.¹ This should consequently enable the GOA and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to operate across the country. NATO has defined security very broadly, and as such ISAF encompasses substantial reconstruction and development tasks, in addition to military campaigns. This has led the public to believe that NATO is responsible for rebuilding Afghanistan and it has meant that UNAMA has not played a major role in country. NATO allies are themselves quite divided over how maintaining security should be achieved. Certain members feel that the primary object is reconstruction and development and have sold the mission to their publics as a "peace-keeping and development" operation. Consequently, they do not want to engage in combat. Other members, while

¹ UN Security Council Resolutions 1386 (2001), 1510 (2003), and 1623 (2005).

believing that reconstruction and development are essential to long-term security and stability in Afghanistan, believe that kinetic operations, particularly in the south and east of Afghanistan, are essential to support development objectives. The lack of consensus on this point has meant that allies have been (a) reluctant to contribute fighting troops and equipment and (b) have failed to standardise a “NATO approach” to the country, instead utilising different combinations of military power and development in an entirely uncoordinated manner. There is also a real threat that NATO is seeking to impose a Western system of government in Afghanistan, which is not a practical or achievable objective.

MANPOWER AND EQUIPMENT

3. As of 13 February 2007 there were approximately 35,460 allied soldiers in Afghanistan. The largest contingent consists of 14,000 US troops. The other large contributors are Britain (5,200), Germany (3,000), Canada (2,500), the Netherlands (2,200) and Italy (1,950). The remaining 7,000 troops are provided by an additional 31 countries with smaller contingents including 1,000 French soldiers, 800 from Turkey and 550 from Spain. The current number of troops may seem like a large number, but in reality it is quite low.

Table 1

COMPARISON OF PEAK INTERNATIONAL TROOP DEPLOYMENT STRENGTH²

<i>Location</i>	<i>Peak Number of Int'l Troops</i>	<i>Int'l Troops per km</i>	<i>Int'l Troops per person</i>
Kosovo	40,000	1 per 0.3km	1 per 50
Bosnia	60,000	1 per 0.85km	1 per 66
East Timor	9,000	1 per 1.6km	1 per 111
Iraq	155,000	1 per 2.8km	1 per 161
Somalia	40,000	1 per 16km	1 per 200
Liberia	11,000 2200 (MEF)	1 per 8km	1 per 265
Sierra Leone	18,000	1 per 4km	1 per 300
Haiti	20,000	1 per 1.5km	1 per 375
Afghanistan	20,000 (OEF) 6,000 (ISAF)	1 per 25km	1 per 1,115

4. This chart dates from 2004 and thus does not reflect the most current ISAF troop levels, but even with the additional troops now in Afghanistan, the ratios are among the worst. There is one international soldier per 1,123 persons. There is no escaping the fact that if one applies low levels of economic assistance and military forces to a reconstruction operation in a post-conflict society, the results will be low levels of security, slow economics growth and a lack of public confidence in the ability of the GOA/NATO to deliver. This last factor may ultimately undermine the ability to deliver on the first two issues. There are several causes for the low levels of NATO troops in country. Chief contributors such as the US and UK are overstretched, but they have in recent months increased their military manpower in Afghanistan. The more fundamental problem is that the unresolved issue as to the exact nature of the mission, coupled with a failure to understand the gravity of the security situation in Afghanistan, means many larger allies have not deployed adequate numbers of troops and equipment. Smaller allies lack sufficient expeditionary resources—but contributions by the Danes, Macedonians, and Estonians illustrate that they are committed to the operation. One must keep in mind; however, that an inability to send more troops does not mean that some NATO members do not value the mission. Italy for example cannot send additional troops, as the government is already under pressure for the current deployment. The Germans also have serious issues in this area. The recent deployment of six Tornado aircraft for reconnaissance was met with stiff resistance. Given Germany’s strategic culture this should not be a surprise and the country has become much more involved in military action since 1991, so perhaps it is best to accept that this process does take time. Maintaining cohesion and fair burden sharing are inevitable challenges when using an alliance meant for Cold War territorial defence on an expeditionary mission far from home. Alliance transformation will take time, but the lack of sufficient manpower and enablers was a serious problem for ISAF IX under the command of UK General David Richards.

5. Between May 2006 and February 2007 ISAF faced several serious military challenges. After Operation Medusa General Richards was not able to maintain sufficient troop presence to ensure that areas cleared of Taliban during the operation remained Taliban free. There were also times during the UK led-ISAF IX that General Richards was hard-pressed to avoid defeat in what was largely a conventional battle. Had it not been for the close air-support, it is very well possible that ISAF may have lost battles to the Taliban. General Richards would have fared much better had a strategic reserve been on hand. While manpower is the primary consideration in effective counter-insurgency operations, adequate equipment is required. ISAF has also been short of key enablers. Heavy lift capacity (both fixed wing and rotary), combat support,

² M Bhatia, K Lanigan and P Wilkinson “Minimal Investments, Minimal Results: The Failure of Security Policy in Afghanistan” Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, June 2004.

logistics have all been lacking throughout the mission. Additional troops, without enablers, are in many ways an empty donation. While NATO troops are required, a key factor in long-term success is the development of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). Neither organisation is fully competent enough to handle the security situation alone, but the ANA is increasingly working alongside ISAF forces. This is progress, but they must not be rushed into extreme combat situations before they are ready. Such moves may ultimately erode the long-term development of the ANA. The ANP is significantly less developed than the ANA and has largely failed to provide adequate policing to increase the writ of government in Kabul.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

6. Despite the large percentage of the ISAF mission that has been consumed with kinetic operations, the approach to providing long-term security and stability has been defined as one that encompasses reconstruction and development, as well as military operations. This is known as the “comprehensive approach”. To be effective this approach must utilise not only the military and civilian capabilities of governments, but also of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), such as CARE and Christian Aid, as well as International Organisations (IO) such as the World Bank. While theoretically sound the current strategy has been less than optimally implemented. There exist several schisms in what is supposed to be a unified Western/International effort.

7. Within NATO there are two levels of difficulty. First, the defence ministries, development agencies and foreign ministries of most NATO member states do not adequately communicate with each other. Reports from Afghanistan indicate that there are good people-to-people relationships between MoD, DFID and FCO representatives, but those relationships do not extend upwards back to Whitehall. In addition to intra-governmental schisms, there is a failure to coordinate across NATO amongst the various national missions operating in Afghanistan. The primary tool for provision of security, reconstruction and development is the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). PRTs harness a national government’s economic, military, development and foreign affairs assets to provide comprehensive security and development assistance in a specific region of Afghanistan. The PRT, while useful, has two major failings.

8. First, there is no standard product. Every national PRT has a different mandate. Some focus on security, others development and reconstruction. Some do both. Others are obsessed with protecting their own forces and do very little at all. Furthermore, the money from each PRT comes directly from a national capitol, which means that the PRT answers to Berlin, Washington, London or Ottawa, rather than COMISAF and Kabul. Within PRTs the military side reports through ISAF, but the civilian side does not. This means that the civilian side is more susceptible to national influence, because of purse strings, than the military sides run by the ISAF commander. Some PRTs consult with the Government in Kabul and local populations about what projects are needed and engage the community. Others just blindly build schools in a random development grid, which then go unused. In the worse cases they end up as Taliban bases that need to be destroyed at a later date. ISAF IX attempted to rectify some of these deficits establishing a PRT Handbook, standardised reporting requirements and greater investment in common training for PRT staff, but more progress is needed. Brussels must establish a NATO norm for PRT deliverables. At the same time Brussels needs to provide ISAF with enough devolved power to be effective on the ground. Different institutions operating in Afghanistan take decisions at different levels; the most effective generally are those with a high degree of devolved authority.

9. Second, PRTs have largely failed to harness the NGOs that operate in Afghanistan. This does not mean that NGOs should be subordinate to ISAF, but there must be better coordination between NGOs and ISAF civilian and military forces. NGOs worry that PRTs unnecessarily duplicate the NGO mission and that the reconstruction element of the PRT confuses Afghans as to the difference between PRTs and NGOs. This is important, for whereas the military relies on armoured vehicles and guns for security, NGOs rely on the full consent of the people. If the population becomes hostile NGOs are very soft targets. NGOs also feel that the military places too much emphasis on quick-fix projects to win “hearts and minds” and not enough time and effort is spent on long-term development projects. Most NGOs have consequently decided to have nothing to do with PRTs. This is not good for NATO or Afghanistan. The NGOs criticisms are valid ones that have yet to be adequately addressed or rectified.

10. To rectify some of these civil-military issues it would make sense to split Afghanistan into three types of zones: High-Conflict, Low-Conflict, Minimal-Conflict. In High Conflict Zones (HCZ) such as Lashkar Gah and Kandahar the military would be the major presence, engaged in mainly kinetic ops, with quick relief reconstruction to support the campaign. Low-Conflict Zones (LCZ) in Bamyan, Ghazni and Gardez would be engaged by PRTs that would have a balance between military and development components. PRTs could handle insecure situations, but would not be engaged in heavy combat operations. Finally, Minimal-Conflict Zones (MCZ) in areas such as Mazar-i-Sharif, Kunduz and Herat would be engaged by NGOs with only minimal military patrols and no-PRT presence. This would avoid NATO supplanting NGOs and it would allow for better allocation of NATO forces hopefully enabling delivery of security, development and better governance from Kabul.

INTERNATIONAL FUNDING

11. It is useful to compare Kosovo to Afghanistan to see how little funding that country has received. In the first four years after major fighting concluded in Kosovo the province received \$1.8 billion in international aid for a population just under 2 million. In the four years since the ousting of the Taliban from power in 2001 Afghanistan was pledged \$15 billion but only received some \$4.7 billion. The population of Afghanistan is 29 million. Therefore, whereas the people of Kosovo received some \$900 per head, Kabul has received \$162 per head. Kosovo, located in Europe with a legacy of development in an industrialised country, was not nearly as decrepit as Afghanistan. Two hundred years as a buffer state between the Russian Empire and the British Empire, followed by occupation and conflict under Soviet control from 1979 to 1988, then a civil war, followed by Taliban rule and finally the US-led invasion in 2003 has left Afghanistan in ruins. The level of international funding has never been enough and more recent contributions (ie US, Canada) while helpful, still do not adequately match the development challenges in Afghanistan.

NEIGHBOURING STATES

12. The bulk of this report has focused on the internal facets of Afghanistan's security and reconstruction, but it is worth noting that the ISAF mission will not be a success without the assistance of Afghanistan's neighbours. No matter the number of western troops deployed, the amount of money donated or the development projects completed—there will be no security in Afghanistan without the support of neighbouring states. It is next to impossible to suppress well-established insurgencies that enjoy "external support and neighbouring sanctuary." At the moment ISAF is engaged in securing the Afghan frontier, but it is not proactively addressing the threat from the other side of the border in Pakistan. The UK and its NATO allies must address the issue of Pakistan head on.

CONCLUSION

13. NATO is not failing in Afghanistan, but it is a long-way from a successful end-point. The Alliance has assumed a massive task, which will require adaptability, patience and a long-term commitment. NATO can succeed in Afghanistan if ISAF is provided with the resources and time required for such a daunting undertaking. It should not be surprise that western militaries have been slow to adapt to the reality of conflict in Afghanistan. Conflict is no longer linear—aid, military operations and diplomacy all need to occur simultaneously in places like Afghanistan. This type of conflict is still very new to the West. It will take time to adapt. It is crucial, however, the NATO gets the equation correct in determining the proper-mix of civilian vs. military activities. This is not to excuse the fact that NATO failed in part to extend effective governance away from the Kabul and major cities, into the countryside, particularly in the South. This is not surprising in some ways given the nature of the situation in Southern Afghanistan, but it means that as renewed violence threatens, local populations are still waiting from promises to be delivered and have little incentive to risk their lives. They may not turn against NATO, but they will not go out of their way to support the Alliance either. To rectify this situation the Alliance must recommit itself to the mission. It must ensure that adequate troop numbers and key enablers in place. The Alliance must address the gaps in the comprehensive approach, standardise PR Ts and more effectively coordinate with other international actors. Without such changes there is little hope for sustained success in Afghanistan.

29 March 2007

Memorandum from Dr Shirin Akiner
"Life in the Zoo" or "Return to Natural Habitat"?
POLICY DILEMMA IN AFGHANISTAN

Debates on Afghanistan generally focus on current developments within the country. The aim here is to broaden the geographic and chronological parameters.

1. THE NATO/ISAF MISSION: GOALS AND REALITY CHECKS

The list of tasks that NATO/ISAF has assumed, or is urged to assume, is daunting. Some of the key issues are considered here.

1.1 Reconstruction

This is a dangerous euphemism: "reconstruction" implies that the situation in Afghanistan is analogous to post-war Europe and that an injection of aid will set the country back on track to stability and prosperity. The reality is very different. In 1978 Afghanistan was one of the least developed countries in the world

(eg adult literacy 8%, average life expectancy 42 years). Twenty five years later, in 2003, despite some attempts at development in the 1980s, there had been scant improvement. The task today is not reconstruction but *construction*, starting from a base line that, according to the UN Human Development Index, is on a par with countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger.

1.2 *State-building and Nation-building*

Prior to the 1990s there was a clear sense of statehood and nationhood in Afghanistan, albeit crosscut by local identities and allegiances. Today, after the shattering experience of civil war, the dual process of state-building (establishing institutions of governance and state management) and nation-building (creating a cohesive national identity) must be re-launched. Yet for this project to succeed, it must be perceived as authentic. Calls for NATO/ISAF to be involved should be treated with caution: even if there is the will and competence, the results are likely to be at best superficial, at worst, divisive.

Some progress has been made in state-building: an array of newly formed institutions is now in place (though it remains to be seen whether they acquire real significance or are mainly cosmetic). Nation-building, however, has scarcely begun. In a fragmented, multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society it is immensely difficult to create unifying symbols and narratives. Yet it is a strategic necessity, since without the articulation of a strong national identity the country could well disintegrate. Constitutional arrangements to accommodate the disparate segments of society (eg a federative system) may be a partial solution, but of themselves are unlikely to be sufficient.

1.3 *Security and the Afghan National Army (ANA)*

Assessments of the current security situation vary greatly, but if there is the political will to give NATO/ISAF adequate resources, it will probably accomplish its immediate objectives. For the longer term, the aim is to hand over responsibility for national security to the ANA and other state paramilitary forces (police etc). Yet training alone will not equip them for this task: to function effectively, armed forces need a shared ethic, underpinned by common values and purpose. If this is lacking, neither training nor money will secure loyalty. Rather, there is a heightened risk that they will switch sides or become “guns for hire”. Thus, inculcating a sense of patriotism grounded in a non-sectarian national identity is a not only a political issue, but also a security issue.

1.4 *Governance and Leadership*

Promoting good governance is another NATO/ISAF priority. In a formal sense, there is certainly scope for improving the performance of local structures. The underlying problem, however, is that governance and leadership are closely intertwined. Personal authority, based on an individual’s ability to command respect, trust and allegiance is, for better or worse, a crucial factor. President Karzai has many good qualities, but they tend to be appreciated abroad more than at home. Moreover, there is a widespread rumour that he (along with several other senior officials) holds a foreign passport. This may be untrue, but it reflects the perception that he is a transitory figure. He is still relatively new to office and may yet prove to be a leader in the mould of the visionary King Amanullah. At present, however, his ability to act as a genuinely inspirational figure in the re-creation of state and nation is limited.

2. TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY?

In 2004, economic aid worth \$8 billion was pledged by bilateral and multilateral donors. There is an expectation that this is helping to lay sound economic foundations. This is not necessarily so. Some of the problems are highlighted below.

2.1 *Aid and Debt*

Inevitably, donor fatigue will set in sooner or later. Donations will be replaced by loans and credits, thereby adding to an already substantial external debt. Illegal drugs apart, the country has few natural resources. Mineral reserves are limited, extraction and transportation costs high. Handicrafts and agricultural products will scarcely be sufficient to support a modern economy. It is hard to see how, in a competitive global market, Afghanistan will attract the investment necessary to generate jobs and development. Yet without this, it risks joining the ranks of highly indebted poor countries.

2.2 *Creating an Appropriate Infrastructure*

Many of the new infrastructural projects are driven by prestige rather than economic rationale. They are expensive to construct and given the extreme environmental conditions, will incur high maintenance costs. Unless they are incorporated into an integrated national development strategy, they will become expensive white elephants, serving no useful purpose but diverting funds from essential low-key projects.

2.3 *Demographic Pressures*

Almost 45% of Afghanistan's population is under 15 years of age—only the Gaza Strip and a few African states have a similar age structure. In 2006, the population numbered just over 31 million; by 2015 it is set to reach 35.5 million, by 2025, 45 million. Thus, each year over 500,000 additional people join the queue for food, housing, jobs and medical care. Unless their needs can be met, widespread poverty will not be eradicated.

2.4 *Alienation of the Middle Class*

The gap between the average earnings of Afghans and expatriates is vast. There is a smaller, but nevertheless large gap between salaries for Afghans in the public sector and those employed by foreign organisations. Differentials such as these have two consequences: (a) the public service sector cannot attract good calibre local staff and is thus unable to function effectively; (b) the middle class—the very group that in the past constituted the core of the progressive, pro-reformist sector of the population—has been marginalised and alienated.

3. REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

3.1 *Neighbouring States*

Afghanistan is bounded by six states—in the west Pakistan and Iran, in the east China, in the north Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Pakistan is both the principal trade and security partner, and a source of security threats. The involvement of the other states is very low. Directly or indirectly, the Western-led coalition has made it clear that they are not welcome. Yet all these states have a vested interest in regional security and could make a substantial contribution to the stabilisation and recovery of Afghanistan. In particular, many Uzbek and Tajik technical specialists worked in Afghanistan during the 1980s—their expertise is valuable and should be utilised.

3.2 *Security Assessments*

The states that are most at risk from instability in Afghanistan are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In autumn 2001 they were unequivocal in their support for Operation Enduring Freedom. They believed that this would eradicate the triple threats of drug trafficking, terrorism and religious extremism and open the way to economic cooperation. This has not happened. Rather, the security threats have increased. Concomitantly, confidence in NATO has fallen.

3.3 *Regional Organisations and Transport Networks*

Over the past decade regional organisations (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Eurasian Economic Community and the Economic Cooperation Organisation) have been actively promoting trade and investment. An expanding network of roads, railways and pipelines now links member states together, providing access to new markets and driving economic growth. Yet Afghanistan, geographically at the heart of the region, remains outside these developments, partly because of the uncertain security situation, but more especially because of the exclusive nature of NATO/ISAF policies.

4. LOOKING AHEAD

NATO/ISAF has embarked on an open-ended mission. The goals are aspirational rather than specific, hence it is difficult to set benchmarks by which to judge progress, let alone to devise an exit strategy. Yet at some point there has to be a pause for reality checks: What is the vision for Afghanistan's future? How is it to be achieved? Will it be self-sustaining? These questions can only be answered by thinking through the consequences of different courses of action.

4.1 *"Life in the Zoo" or "Return to Natural Habitat"?*

Metaphorically speaking, Afghanistan is currently experiencing "life in the zoo"—nurtured and protected by external sponsors. Let us suppose that there is no ceiling to the provision of aid and that it will flow unabated until Afghanistan has been lifted out of the category of "least developed countries" into that of "low" or even "medium" developed countries. What then? Is it to remain indefinitely an expatriate enclave or is to be re-integrated into the region—to continue the metaphor, "to return to natural habitat"?

4.2 *Spreading Democracy: "Oil Slick Theory"*

There is a school of thought that believes that NATO/ISAF can create an outpost of democracy in Afghanistan, which will then spread like an "oil slick on water" throughout the region. Yet the very metaphor reveals the weakness of this argument: oil spreads on water because it is a continuous, uniform mass. Afghanistan's neighbours are anything but uniform in history, culture or traditions, thus this is surely a vain hope.

4.3 *Can NATO/ISAF aid constructive re-integration?*

The longer that Afghanistan's isolation continues, the more difficult it will be to re-integrate it successfully into the region. Yet without this integration there can be no sustainable economic development. Regional security would also be enhanced by regional cooperation. Thus it is of vital importance that Afghanistan should be encouraged and supported to establish close ties with neighbouring states.

There are many obvious areas for cooperation, including cross-border trade and transport, border security, counter-narcotics operations and management of cross-border rivers. A range of bilateral and multilateral structures exist which could facilitate such contacts. A new initiative which could prove useful is Kofi Annan's proposal to create a UN Centre for Conflict Prevention Diplomacy in Turkmenistan. A neutral venue, this could be used to mobilise a virtuous synergy between NATO/ISAF and regional bilateral and multilateral players.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the epigraph cited above, Clausewitz emphasises the importance of defining objectives and resisting unrealistic adventures. There is much that NATO/ISAF can achieve in Afghanistan, but if mission creep is allowed to take hold, efforts will be dissipated and counter-productive, leading to resentment and disappointment for all concerned.

March 2007

Second memorandum from Dr Michael Williams

1. Mr Stewart put forward an interesting proposal—to pull out of operations in Southern Afghanistan and to focus on the development of the North. He failed, however, to connect it to the larger picture and I think failed to consider the *possible* strategic implications of his suggestion. I would therefore like to raise a number of points and questions that you should consider.

2. What does pulling back mean for the larger mission? If you cede control of Southern Afghanistan will the forces there be happy with just this plot of land? There is a strong possibility that they may then press further into the North and endanger all the progress to date made in this region. If the idea of pulling back is linked to not expending additional military resources, the reality is that the Taliban will most likely just push up on the border established by NATO between the North and South. As such, military conflict will still be an issue. Only this time, it will occur closer to areas that are currently stable and on their way towards development. Rarely is giving up ground the sound military strategy. One should also keep in mind that the security situation in Afghanistan is not created by an Afghan insurgency. This is very much an internal/external conflict. The majority of the population is complacent—they just want to be on the right side of the conflict when it ends. The insurgency in the South does not enjoy broad support across the country.

3. Geopolitically, the external dimension of this problem must be considered. What does an ungoverned southern Afghanistan mean for the region? Is it in the interest of Pakistan to have such a region abutting Waziristan? Considering that this insurgency is mainly driven by Pashtuns (NB: the insurgency involves many Pashtuns, but not every Pashtun is an insurgent!) leaving two such ungoverned spaces together may result in the creation of a new state. It is very possible that two such regions could unite and form a Pashtunistan. Does the Government of Pakistan want such a state on its border? What effects would this have on the stability of Pakistan and Afghanistan? How does an ungoverned space such as this help reduce the threat of terrorism to the UK domestic population? A peaceful Northern Afghanistan that is not a terror threat to the UK, neighboured by an ungoverned and extremist South would seem to be a rather neutral outcome and does not offer a much different situation than pre-9/11 Afghanistan. There will still be a terrorist safe-haven and a point from which both Afghanistan and Pakistan can be destabilised.

4. Pulling out of Southern Afghanistan may be an option, but it should not be suggested trivially. The one situation where this strategy should be employed is where it would prevent a total NATO pull out of Afghanistan. *If conceding the South means keeping a NATO presence in Kabul, the North and West then it would be a worthwhile sacrifice, but this should not be the first option.* It is not an easy way out. There are no easy outs in the situation. We have seen time and time again how ungoverned spaces come to affect Western security. I do not think an ungoverned space makes much strategic sense either for UK security, the future of Afghanistan or regional security.

29 March 2007

Memorandum from the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Increasing insecurity is now the greatest concern for ordinary Afghans in many parts of the country. Over the past six months, levels of violence have been at their highest since 2001. Purely military responses are clearly an inappropriate response to Afghanistan's challenges. However, calls from some policy-makers for reconstruction to be driven by quick-wins and "hearts and minds" objectives are also problematic.

2. NGOs can only operate in insecure provinces on the basis of neutrality, independence and good relations with local communities. Across much of Afghanistan, associations, whether real or perceived, with a contested military operation and central government compromise our legitimacy and acceptance among local populations.

3. The UK Government should support the adoption of country-specific civil-military relations guidelines. In-country mechanisms for dialogue between the military and civilian actors should also be strengthened to ensure higher-level engagement and follow-up on commitments made. Civil-military relations structures should promote effective dialogue between military and civilian actors, recognising their different mandates and comparative advantages.

4. The UK strategy for its NATO IX deployment to Helmand constitutes an attempt at a more appropriate approach to coordination between political, military and aid actors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the bad practice of past ISAF and Coalition forces appears to have reduced. For example, more emphasis is placed on coordination with local and international civilian agencies in support of civilian-led reconstruction—rather than programmes implemented by or subordinated to military operations. However, no evaluations have been published on the efficacy and impacts of these efforts on the ground.

5. UK aid policy towards Afghanistan is imbalanced in its emphasis on state-centred aid modalities. While NGOs appreciate the need to build the capacity of the Afghan institutions, this emphasis has led to a "service delivery gap" emerging in sectors and areas beyond the central government's capacity to deliver or political and geographic reach. This has been compounded by reduced funding available from the EU to frontline NGO livelihoods programmes.

6. Short-term and military-led approaches to counter-narcotics are ineffective. Emphasis should be placed on tackling root causes of the opium trade, and local and civilian leadership of these efforts.

MILITARY AND CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS ISSUES

Civil-military relations: Promoting force protection and "hearts and minds"?

7. In Afghanistan, as elsewhere, military approaches to civil-military coordination (CIMIC), both Coalition and NATO, emphasise force protection and hearts and minds objectives, often described in terms of "building consent". The notion that aid, and quick impact projects (QIP) in particular, contribute to building that consent has become something of an orthodoxy among some military officers and policy-makers. The operational experience of BAAG member agencies in Afghanistan suggests that the military approach to CIMIC has often proved ineffective, or even counter-productive, in terms of both military and civilian objectives. Instead of facilitating military-implemented or funded QIPs, civil-military relations capacities should rather focus on promoting effective coordination between the military and the full spectrum of civilian actors, emphasising their different roles and mandates.

8. Many of the QIPs funded or implemented by international forces are unsustainable. These failed QIPs, driven by tactical military objectives, have contributed to the disillusion—and diminishing "consent"—of local populations. The potential for CIMIC strategies to build local consent has been compromised due to the following factors:

- (a) Short-term horizons framed by tactical planning and six-month troop rotation timeframes;
- (b) Technical ineffectiveness of military CIMIC capabilities (eg wells dug in inappropriate locations due to salinity or water-table sustainability concerns);
- (c) High costs of construction projects undertaken by the military (eg estimates suggest that schools built with US PRT money have cost two to three times more than the normal price of \$50–60,000);
- (d) Lack of priority or capacity attached to ensuring effective hand-over and follow-up in terms of project maintenance;
- (e) Lack of genuine trust and good relations with beneficiary communities and local power-holders leading to a lack of local ownership of projects;
- (f) Intelligence-led analysis of local politics and QIP targeting, combined with a lack of contextual understanding of development-related political dynamics resulting in a tendency to "do harm" in terms of local power relations and conflict dynamics; and
- (g) Military QIPs building the expectations of local populations beyond the capacity of military CIMIC to deliver, which results in ever-decreasing returns in terms of building consent.

9. While to date there has been no thorough evaluation of the developmental value of UK PRT aid projects, a joint-donor evaluation report of assistance given by five European countries to Afghanistan since 2001, which included the UK, stated that these projects “could have been delivered more cheaply and efficiently by other aid providers” and that “time pressure for delivery during short assignments promotes a ‘just do it’ approach with limited concern for long-term impacts and sustainability.”³

10. Long histories of “aid culture” and military intervention in Afghanistan ensure that local actors are more experienced in “hearts and minds” strategies than most ISAF soldiers on the ground. During the Soviet occupation, small mobile columns consisting of military forces and civic action specialists, such as medics, were dispersed across the country.⁴

11. Economic incentives, such as military-funded or -implemented QIPs, cannot change deeply-held political, social and cultural beliefs, attitudes and identities. Political limitations to “hearts and minds” strategies arise from the prevailing climate of fear, suspicion and cynicism after decades of weak or oppressive government and brutal external intervention. Local populations receive information about the nature of the government and international forces from many sources, including widespread insurgent propaganda. Judgements are also formed on the basis of personal experience. Thus, the US Government is frequently portrayed as having undue influence over President Karzai and government policies. Corruption of government officials and the tactical deals struck between the international military and corrupt or brutal governors, local officials or warlords are also widely discussed and resented. Accounts of Coalition forces wrongly accusing and detaining innocent individuals as suspected Taliban or Al Qaeda members are well-known. Reports of brutal and culturally-insensitive practices during search operations by Coalition forces, such as bursting into womens’ quarters, also resonate strongly.⁵ However defined, CIMIC, reconstruction and assistance cannot compensate or substitute for the absence of a political settlement to conflict or the effective provision of security.

12. A study of local perceptions of peace operations suggests that for some communities in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, assistance is welcome regardless of the donor’s military identity or political objective.⁶ For some non-Taliban aligned communities, accepting and participating in aid projects with political significance in the Afghan context, such as school buildings, has become a gesture of defiance against the insurgency.⁷ For others, risks outweigh the benefits, causing reluctance to accept military-associated aid or aid by any international actor in some instances. Over 200 schools, both civilian and military-funded, have been attacked by insurgents in the past year, and an increasing number stand unused for fear of being targeted.⁸ Indeed, aid more generally represents a small component of most Afghans’ coping strategies in times of conflict and transition. Predominant strategies include communal cooperation on rehabilitation, or sending sons to Iran, Pakistan or elsewhere to work and post remittances. According to one project participant: “*Villagers are watching which way the weather is going. People are nervous. They want to make sure that today’s alliances will not disadvantage them tomorrow. They hear from the Taliban: ‘NATO will be gone within a year or so, and it will be us that rule then. Just you wait.’*”

UK civil-military relations strategies in Helmand

13. The UK Government should consider undertaking an independent evaluation of the contribution of integrated civil-military operations, such as PRTs, to improved governance in Afghanistan. International forces, including PRTs, have an inevitably political character and so must relate to local powerholders as well as operate in accordance with their mandate, which emphasises strengthening central government authority across the country. Several PRTs have sought to facilitate linkages between central and provincial-level governance in Afghanistan. Different NATO PRTs contain a varied mix of civilian expertise to provide support on these political and diplomatic aspects, while PRT Commanders assume a political representative role at the provincial and local levels. NATO has also played a role in establishing the Afghan-led “Policy Action Group” (PAG) initiative to support coordination on reconstruction and security at central and provincial levels. The constraints, challenges and efficacy of different approaches to this aspect of civil-military relations have only just begun to be evaluated, for instance by the Norwegian Government in Faryab province.

14. Although the ISAF southern Afghanistan strategy since 2006 resembles—in intent—a more joined-up and civilian-led approach than exercised in past years, concerns have been raised regarding continued military dominance of decision-making processes. This can be compounded by variables in military culture—so that paratroopers are more likely to emphasise military preeminence than line infantry, for example. Reconstruction requires civilian leadership and capacity to provide the necessary context understanding; political analysis and engagement with local power-holders and communities. Notwithstanding the political acumen of certain individuals within the military, the military intrinsically

³ *A Joint Evaluation: Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan from Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden and UK*, Danish International Development Agency (Danida), 2005.

⁴ Giustozzi (2000) p 186.

⁵ BAAG (2006) p 6.

⁶ Tufts (2005) p 18.

⁷ Interviews with NGO staff on condition of anonymity in Afghanistan, August 2006.

⁸ HRW (2006) p 3.

lacks these capacities and qualities. Indeed both their capabilities and their strategic, operational and tactical imperatives militate against effectively navigating and affecting change in local politics. For example, a significant component of the military CIMIC support capability consists of technical experts, for example engineers, who analyse local needs and promote QIP strategies reflecting that technical worldview. Yet, as experience in both Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrates, building wells or pumps in particular locations because local power-holders identify that as the priority does not equate to an effective political or reconstruction strategy.

Civilian “space”, NGO aid programmes and civil-military relations

15. 89 aid workers have been killed since 2003, as compared to a very small number who were targeted during the preceding 14 years. The few agencies continuing to operate in the south and east either benefit from long-established programmes in specific locations, which enable them to negotiate a degree of protection from local communities, or they opt to take considerable risks. The Afghan NGO, Afghan Health and Development Services, has had a significant number of its staff killed in its efforts to provide health services to the camps for internally displaced people to the west of Kandahar.

16. In general, agencies do not perceive a consistent or over-arching trend of targeting of NGO workers across much of the country—otherwise the attack rate would be much higher. However, in the current situation of instability and factionalised violence, the “community acceptance” approach no longer holds in a consistent fashion.

17. In insecure areas across Afghanistan, NGOs can only operate on the basis of neutrality, independence, low visibility and the acceptance of local communities. The notion of “humanitarian space” captures the moral, political and operational dimensions of our capacity to operate safely and effectively in such a chronically insecure situation. Ironically, the concept of “humanitarian space” provides a kind of correlate to the military concept of “campaign authority”. It is every bit as apparently abstract and ideological, and yet every bit as real and important to the sustainability and legitimacy of operations on the ground.⁹

18. By “blurring the lines” between aid and military operations in hostile environments, military approaches to CIMIC can undermine the “space” for civilian NGOs. By emphasising force protection and high-visibility or quick impact projects associated with their presence, military approaches to funding or implementing assistance programmes compromise the neutrality and independence of aid programmes. Regardless of whether an individual aid agency has actually associated with the military, perceptions and rumours are sufficient to compromise an aid agency’s acceptance in a given area. Furthermore, NGOs (operating independently on the basis of community acceptance and neutrality) can, over time, be scaled-up once security is improved.

19. Some commentators commonly reject the “humanitarian space” argument, claiming these concerns are dated in the context of the Global War on Terror. In contrast, humanitarian NGOs do not dispute that insecurity in Afghanistan arises from multiple factors, including economic criminality and NGO-targeting irrelevant of association or distance from international forces. However, this does not alter our basic concern regarding the security consequences of military involvement in assistance. Indeed, the very complexity of political and conflict dynamics in Afghanistan refutes the notion of a homogenous insurgency targeting humanitarian agencies in a uniform fashion. In southern Afghanistan, for example, one BAAG members’ local partner was approached by representatives of tribes aligned with the Taliban and told: *“Your aid is good for the local community and may continue. However, if you or the programmes you implement become associated with the NATO forces, then you will make yourselves a target.”*

20. International and national military forces have, without regard to the consequences for the image of NGOs, entered their compounds or, as has happened on at least two occasions, have taken these over. The most recent example of this was the entry of US forces into the Afghanaid office in Nuristan during March 2007 and their insistence that this was to be their operational base in the area. This occupation of an NGO office was taken forward without prior consultation with local authorities and without the consent of the NGO in question. Once NGOs have been perceived to be associated with the military, their neutrality and legitimacy are undermined.

21. To be effective and sustainable, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance should be led and implemented by local or international civilian agencies. In line with international guidelines on civil-military relations, the UK Government should only support the use of the military in aid operations as a “last resort” when civilian agencies are unable to respond due to capacity or security constraints. UNAMA should be strengthened in terms of political backing, human and financial resources to support aid coordination across the country, particularly in the southern provinces. In the most insecure provinces, international forces may

⁹ The British military doctrine (Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 3-90, April 2006 Edition) defines campaign authority as follows: “Campaign Authority comprises four inter-dependent factors: 1. The perceived legitimacy of the international mandate that establishes the PSO. 2. The perceived legitimacy of the freedoms and constraints, explicit or implicit in the mandate, placed on those executing the PSO. 3. The degree to which factions, the local population and other actors subjugate themselves to the authority of those executing the PSO; from active resistance, through unwilling compliance to freely given consent. 4. The degree to which the activities of those executing the PSO meet the terms of the mandate and the expectations of factions, local populations and others.

be required to implement relief programmes in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law. However, it is unclear what benefits are secured by the military implementing quasi-development projects, such as dams or schools, which become instant targets in the most insecure regions.

22. Several BAAG agencies participate in the Afghanistan “NGO civil-military relations working-group”, which is chaired by ACBAR and hosted by UNAMA in Kabul. The group is attended by NATO ISAF and Coalition representatives. Its objectives are to facilitate dialogue in order to address concerns regarding “bad practice” (eg military CIMIC activities that blur the lines with or impact negatively on aid programmes), and share information of relevance to NGO safety and security. Critical to the on-going sustainability of this working-group is its facilitation through a neutral, third-party actor (ie. UN OCHA). Equally important is the group’s careful demarcation as a forum for appropriate dialogue that respects and maintains the neutrality of aid agencies. No information can be discussed that could be perceived as alignment or intelligence-sharing with the military.

23. To make civil-military relations more effective NGOs have two specific recommendations:

- (a) The UK Government should support an initiative to develop country-specific civil-military relations guidelines that are explicit about good and bad practice in CIMIC. Such an initiative should draw on the lessons learned from UN-facilitated country-specific CIMIC guidelines in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- (b) The UK Government should support an initiative to establish an additional, higher-level forum for civil-military relations on a quarterly basis. This would supplement the current operational-level dialogue in the NGO civil-military relations working-group.

UK DONOR FUNDING, AID EFFECTIVENESS AND RECONSTRUCTION

24. Current donor aid policy for Afghanistan places significant emphasis on state-building; linked to wider political and military objectives of stabilisation and political transition. While many development NGOs support the objectives of promoting effective and accountable authorities, they are concerned that current aid policies are imbalanced. Donor policy emphasises central “state-building” at the expense of providing basic services to populations in regions outside of the capacity of government to deliver and its political or geographic reach. This has led to what the Overseas Development Institute terms a “service gap”: when relief assistance is phased out but state capacity is insufficient to ensure the provision of services.¹⁰

25. DFID, in particular, has drastically reduced UK funding available for NGO programmes. This follows DFID’s decision to place an overwhelming emphasis on channelling aid through state-centred mechanisms. While the rationale for this allocation strategy is partly legitimate, it is also partly driven by unstrategic imperatives, including the pressure to reduce DFID staff numbers and transaction costs. This is also partly shaped by the broad trend in DFID aid policy in non-conflict contexts towards larger-scale disbursements channelled through direct budgetary support to recipient governments.

26. The UK emphasis on channelling aid through the Afghan Government is placing the programmes and, in some cases, the ongoing survival of NGOs at risk. UK NGOs, including smaller, Afghanistan-focused NGOs such as Afghanaid, can offer distinct comparative advantages, in terms of their institutional memory and long-term good relations with local communities. These comparative advantages, if lost due to cuts in UK funding to NGOs, will be hard to recover in future.

27. NGOs are also concerned that the geographic distribution of humanitarian and development assistance is, in part, influenced by military imperatives. While increased donor attention on the PRT provinces is partly inevitable, this should not be at the expense of resources for other provinces. Indeed, while it proves difficult to spend assistance in the southern provinces because of the prevailing insecurity, programmes in other parts of the country are currently under-funded. One provincial governor in northern Afghanistan recently remarked that local populations in that province might need to initiate violence and increase poppy cultivation in order to attract the necessary funds for reconstruction.

28. Private military companies (PMC), often in consortia with other private sector actors, are looking to increase their involvement in aid programmes in Afghanistan. In the words of one industry representative, the PMC sector wants “to raid the humanitarian space in Afghanistan”. This is of concern to NGOs in terms of the principles and practice of aid. PMC involvement in the delivery of aid programmes, indeed any armed provision of assistance, is based on security provided through armed deterrence, rather than acceptance. As such, it undermines the basis for humanitarian access negotiated through the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality. In view of this, NGOs do not believe that PMCs present an effective strategy for reconstruction in Afghanistan.

¹⁰ “From crisis response to state-building: services and stability in conflict-affected contexts”, ODI Humanitarian Policy Group Discussion Paper (October 2006).

CIVILIAN PROTECTION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

29. ISAF and Coalition military operations are causing numerous civilian deaths and injuries and damaging property and other civilian infrastructure. The rate of strikes by the US Air Force in South of Afghanistan is far higher than in Iraq—for example, there were 750 in just one month (May) last year. President Karzai has made a number of calls in the past for the US-led coalition to exercise greater care when conducting air-strikes. International forces in Afghanistan should abide by the spirit and the letter of international humanitarian and human rights law.

30. The NATO approach to detention is to hand over detainees within a few days (72 or 96 hours). Human rights agencies, including Amnesty International, have raised concerns about handing over detainees to a country that might use torture or mistreatment. According to their sources, the handovers are now mainly to the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and it is likely that some of these detainees will be tortured. Some ISAF troop-contributing countries have established monitoring mechanisms to keep track of what happens to the detainees. However, concerns have been raised about access to detainees, reliability of monitoring mechanisms and access to redress if the monitoring agency finds cases of abuse.

31. The US continues to hold Afghan detainees in Guantanamo and Bagram. There are “plans” to handover these to Afghan authorities and place them in the high detention facility at Pulicharki refurbished by the US. US detention practices in both Guantanamo and Bagram raise concerns both in terms of human rights and local Afghan perceptions of the international community’s commitment to a just resolution to Afghanistan’s challenges.

COUNTER-NARCOTICS

32. The international community is increasingly concerned by Afghanistan’s opium economy, which has evident implications for security and stability. Some parliamentarians, the media and other commentators in donor countries push for a “quick fix” to poppy cultivation. However, a short-term approach to counter-narcotics would be ineffective and counter-productive. Our operational experience, that of local partners and the communities we work with, suggest that an effective strategy must involve holistic and properly sequenced assistance to tackle problems of security, governance and development: *“One cannot speak of creating legal livelihoods until there is a legal and legitimate context within they can function.”*¹¹

33. Political pressure for NATO military forces to become involved in counter-narcotics operations, in particular eradication programmes, should be opposed.¹² Sustainable and consent-based strategies should be led by local and civilian authorities, with a particular emphasis on effective action by the police and judiciary. Due to the recent substantial growth in opium poppy production—last year’s harvest was the largest on record—the US government has been exerting pressure on other NATO countries to involve their troops in counter-narcotics operations. This is a policy already pursued by US troops operating under the OEF mission. Although such an approach was resisted initially by other countries, a communiqué issued by NATO in December 2005 gave the green light for ISAF to support to the Afghan government’s counter-narcotics effort. Over the last year there have been a number of incidents where ISAF or US OEF troops have provided logistical support and “second-tier” security for opium eradication by the Afghan police and military. Involving ISAF troops in counter-narcotics work is wrong for several reasons. Firstly, it diverts overstretched military resources away from the main task of providing security. Secondly, experience from South America shows that using troops to eradicate drug crops tends to undermine the role of legitimate civilian authorities (eg the police and the courts) in dealing with the problem and carries a high risk of human rights abuses and conflict escalation. Thirdly, it associates ISAF with an eradication policy that is not working and is damaging to the livelihoods of poor farmers.

34. The premise that farmers can be strong-armed into abandoning opium cultivation is flawed. Eradication and cultivation-bans alienate the very communities we need to work with. For example, in Thailand, after early failed experiments in eradication, the Thai Government waited until more than a decade of development efforts had produced sufficient economic alternatives before resuming eradication.¹³ Recent experience in Afghanistan suggests that eradication merely displaces production to new regions. Furthermore, in some regions, such eradication programmes have been used to target political opponents or economic competitors; thereby contributing to weak and corrupt governance.¹⁴ This contributes to local-level conflict and further erodes support for counter-narcotics efforts and the Government of Afghanistan. Eradication should only be implemented when the state is capable, trust in communities has been built, and poor people have access to economically-attractive, legal livelihoods.

35. The opium economy in Afghanistan is a deeply rooted and complex phenomenon, which requires a long-term and multi-faceted response. Critical factors include inequitable and exploitative patterns of land tenure, share-cropping arrangements, and credit/debt systems. Many small farmers simply have no viable

¹¹ Mansfield, D, Pain, A, *Opium Poppy Eradication: How to raise risk when there’s nothing to lose?* AREU Briefing Paper, August 2006, p 2.

¹² *Losing Ground Drug control and war in Afghanistan*, Transnational Institute, TNI Briefing Series, December 2006.

¹³ CARE International, *No Quick Fix: Curbing Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan*, December 2006, p 1.

¹⁴ Pain, A, *Opium Trading Systems in Helmand and Ghor*, AREU, Kabul, January 2006, p 21.

alternatives; their access to land, credit and livelihoods depends on participating in poppy cultivation. The first measure of success for programmes dedicated to fostering alternatives to opium poppy cultivation must be the quality of life of poor farmers and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding civil-military relations

36. The UK Government should support an initiative to develop country-specific civil-military relations guidelines that are explicit about good and bad practice in CIMIC. Such an initiative should draw on the lessons learned from UN-facilitated country-specific CIMIC guidelines in Iraq and Afghanistan.

37. The UK Government should support an initiative to establish an additional, higher-level forum for dialogue on civil-military relations issues; possibly on a quarterly basis. Its purpose would be to ensure greater follow-up and political engagement on issues raised in the operational-level discussions of the NGO civil-military relations working-group, co-hosted by UNAMA and ACBAR.

38. The UK Government should commission independent research on the contribution of integrated civil-military operations, such as PRTs, to improved governance in Afghanistan.

39. UK forces should abide by the spirit and the letter of international humanitarian and human rights law. Specific concerns regarding the conduct of US Coalition and NATO ISAF operations should be addressed, with particular attention to issues of detention and use of “rendition” practices and interrogation at US facilities; and the detention and hand-over of prisoners to Afghan national authorities.

Regarding aid policy

40. The UK Government, and specifically DFID, should review and change course in its current aid policy for Afghanistan. An emphasis on state-centred aid modalities to deliver “state-building” has led to the emergence of a “service gap”. Particular attention should be paid to the NGO capacity to provide basic services and livelihoods support for populations outside of the capacity and political or geographic reach of government to deliver. DFID should identify creative mechanisms to provide funding to NGOs for frontline services, such as support to consortia funding, use of “local funds” arrangements, joint programming and increased DFID staff capacity to manage NGO funding.

41. Decisions on aid allocations should be made according to levels of humanitarian need and the potential for sustainable reconstruction; and not driven by the geographic focus of military operations.

REGARDING COUNTER-NARCOTICS

42. Political pressure for NATO military forces to become involved in counter-narcotics operations, in particular eradication programmes, should be opposed.¹⁵ Sustainable and consent-based strategies should be led by local and civilian authorities, with a particular emphasis on effective action by the police and judiciary.

43. Counter-narcotics strategies should rely on an appropriately sequenced combination of economic development within the communities on the one hand and eradication and law enforcement efforts on the other. The first measure of success for programmes dedicated to fostering alternatives to opium poppy cultivation should be the quality of life of poor farmers and their families.

The British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) is an information and advocacy network of 26 British and Irish Non Governmental Organisations that support relief and development programmes in Afghanistan. BAAG also provides a secretariat function for 15 European NGOs through the European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA). It is the only network of NGOs within the UK, Ireland and Europe with a primary focus on Afghanistan. for a list of current members, please see BAAG’s website: http://www.baag.org.uk/about_baag/current_members.htm, which also provides links to individual agencies websites.

BAAG was originally set up in 1987, as an umbrella group to draw public attention to the humanitarian needs of the population of Afghanistan and of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan. BAAG’s role and structure has changed over the years reflecting the evolving situation in Afghanistan. BAAG’s primary aim is to help create “an environment where Afghans can take control of their own development and bring about a just and peaceful society”. It works towards this goal by means of advocacy work, research and analysis, and information sharing informed by staff from member agencies that are based in Afghanistan and transnational networks.

The content of this submission may not represent the views of all BAAG member agencies.

9 May 2007

¹⁵ *Losing Ground Drug control and war in Afghanistan*, Transnational Institute, TNI Briefing Series, December 2006.

Memorandum from Christian Aid

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Poverty and weak governance are two of the main causes of the escalating insurgency in Afghanistan—a conflict that claimed 4,000 lives in 2006 and continues to hamper reconstruction efforts and humanitarian assistance to 1.9 million people affected by last year's drought. While public attention has been drawn to the military dimensions of Britain's engagement, Christian Aid believes that a renewed focus by the UK on the conflict's underlying causes would bring benefits for Afghans in 2007.

1.2 The insurgency is viewed by the majority of our Afghan partner NGOs as a symptom rather than a cause of basic social and political problems affecting the country, although it has certainly worsened the situation by weakening the authority of the government.

1.3 The UK government should:

- present a clear strategy to support the building of Afghan state capacity to tackle poverty;
- push for a counter-narcotics policy focused on rural development and not on the unsustainable eradication of opium poppy; and
- avoid an over-reliance on the military for reconstruction and development work.

2. STATE CAPACITY

2.1 The Afghan government has in place a number of ambitious strategies to improve living standards and rights for its citizens,¹⁶ but many of these aspirations remain unfulfilled. Life expectancy is still just 44, pregnant women have roughly a one in 50 chance of dying while in labour, and six million Afghans living in rural areas suffer food shortages or are at risk of them every year.¹⁷ Citizens' access to the formal justice system is hugely restricted by the absence of skilled lawyers, judges and justice buildings in many parts of the country, as well as by corruption in the judicial process.

2.2 Aid given to Afghanistan needs to be sustainable and focussed on building the capacity of state institutions *now*, so that *in future*, when levels of foreign aid decline, the government can provide its own healthcare and education and stimulate economic development. For example in the health sector, while donors have been generous with funding since 2001, it is nonetheless the case that NGOs are in charge of operating primary care services in all but three of the country's 34 provinces—through government contracts funded by foreign donors.¹⁸ Increasing government delivery of healthcare would reduce the cost of services (through economies of scale), avoid long-term dependence on foreign aid and enable uniform standards to be implemented across the sector. It would also help reinforce government legitimacy in the eyes of citizens.

2.3 Another factor that tends to reduce government accountability and the overall coherence of the reconstruction effort is the low proportion of the national budget that is currently controlled by the government: only one-third of the total budget, or US\$1.03 billion, is directly managed by the Ministry of Finance (this is referred to as the "core budget" and includes both external aid and government revenues); the other two-thirds of expenditures pass through an "external budget", for example when a donor country's development agency funds an NGO or private contractor directly.¹⁹

2.4 The majority of UK development aid already goes directly to the Afghan Government, which is a policy that we strongly support and one that we believe more donors should follow. But there is a question-mark at present over the extent to which this aid has been used to build state capacity to deliver basic services, as the example from the health sector shows. We therefore call on the UK government to re-examine its policy in this area and consider how donors can better support an expansion of *government* service delivery in key sectors.

3. DRUGS POLICY

3.1 It will take decades to solve the drugs problem in Afghanistan. Opium production will only be cut when the rule of law exists in all parts of the country and when the agricultural sector is advanced enough to give farmers real alternatives to poppy cultivation. The current policy of eradicating opium poppy crops is unlikely to succeed because neither of these conditions has yet been met in Afghanistan, ie the criminal

¹⁶ Notably the millennium development goals 2020 plan, the Afghanistan Compact signed in London last year, and the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

¹⁷ The regional average for maternal mortality is one in 300. Sources: UN agencies, Asian Development Bank, 2005 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment.

¹⁸ N Palmer *et al* *British Medical Journal*, Vol 332, 2006.

¹⁹ 2005–06 figures. Agency Co-ordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), May 2006. The larger external budget pays for the development and some operating costs of the army, police, health services, education and elections, as well as national programmes such as the National Solidarity Programme.

justice system is too weak to prevent farmers re-planting poppy if their crop is destroyed, and a lack of alternative income sources means that farmers have little option but to break the law by growing an illicit crop.

3.2 Since 2001 the UK has been one of the leading funders of measures to support legal, alternative livelihoods for Afghan farmers. However, last year saw an increase in the number of eradication actions taking place outside areas where these programmes were in place. The use of NATO troops to back up eradication work is a further sign of a hardening stance by some countries on this issue. We believe that such a hardline approach is unlikely to succeed for precisely the reasons explained above. The UK should target its efforts instead on improving the growing conditions and markets for legal crops and also tackling the drugs trade higher up the supply chain. It should not support eradication unless it takes place in areas where alternative livelihoods programmes have been given a real chance to work. Finally, it should also recognise that involving the military in counter-narcotics work increases the potential for conflict and is not a sustainable solution.

4. MILITARY-LED AID PROJECTS

4.1 In line with the UN mandate for the NATO/ISAF mission in Afghanistan, the main tasks facing peacekeeping troops at present are:

- tackling the insurgency and stabilising insecure provinces, particularly in the south;
- disarming the remaining illegal armed groups;
- training Afghan police and army units to gradually take on more security tasks; and
- helping to provide a secure environment in which government employees, NGO staff and private sector contractors, etc can operate with minimum risk.

4.2 All of the above are hugely challenging tasks and none has so far been fully achieved. However, rather than focussing exclusively on these objectives, British and NATO troops have been diverted into aid delivery (eg building roads, digging wells, building and equipping health clinics and schools, and undertaking other community development projects). Concerns about these projects were raised in a joint donor evaluation report in 2005, to which the UK was a party. It stated that military aid projects “could have been delivered more cheaply and efficiently by other aid providers” and that “time pressure for delivery during short assignments promotes a “just do it” approach with limited concern for long-term impacts and sustainability.”²⁰

4.3 Aid is best delivered by relatively neutral operators, such as NGOs and the UN, as well as by government agencies such as the Afghan government and DFID. These civilian bodies have the necessary staff on the ground and greater experience of delivering assistance tailored to meet the needs of the local population.

4.4 The military can play a useful role in providing short-term humanitarian relief to communities affected by ongoing fighting, but when this phase ends, the priority should be to hand over reconstruction and other tasks as quickly as possible to civilian bodies. The 2002 International Development Act clearly states that UK aid must contribute to poverty reduction. Giving aid over a *long period* to military-led and military-focused Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)—the main NATO structure in provincial areas—risks undermining this important principle.

4.5 DFID should review its current policy of channelling development aid through PRTs. The MoD should adjust the role of PRTs so that they concentrate exclusively on security tasks. A new name, such as Provincial Stabilisation Team, should be adopted to reflect this change.

2 April 2007

Memorandum from Olivia Holdsworth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. After five years of international assistance to reform of the formal justice system²¹ in Afghanistan, it remains weak. It carries the legacies of its turbulent history and lacks capacity to address the challenges it faces, challenges which are magnified in the unstable environment of Afghanistan. The reasons for this are numerous and include:

- The impoverished context of the justice system must be considered.

²⁰ Danish International Development Agency (Danida), *A Joint Evaluation: Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan from Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden and UK*, 2005.

²¹ References to the “justice system” in this document includes the judiciary and court system under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court; prison and legislative drafting departments under the Ministry of Justice; public prosecutors and detention centre oversight under the jurisdiction of the Attorney General’s Office; the Afghan National Police and all its departments and adjuncts (including for example the Auxiliary Police). It excludes non-State justice fora.

- Illiteracy in Afghanistan of between 50% to 90% in parts, hinders reform efforts. The poor state of the legal education system, and the fact that not all justice officers, including judges receive a formal legal education and many legal officers and police are illiterate aggravates the situation considerably.
 - Further the justice system is riven with corruption and are mistrusted by the people.
 - There is little cohesion between the sectors of the system: police, prosecutors, judiciary and courts, and prisons. A lack of technical understanding, turf wars and distrust mean that the inter-linkages between the sectors is very weak.
2. Governance is weak and the influence of the Afghan Government is not country-wide:
- It is unable to provide its citizens with basic services in large parts of the country and is unable to protect its citizens against violence, extortion and intimidation by individuals, who include rogue commanders and government officials.
 - Factional, ethnic, political and criminal networks (many related to the narcotics trade) compete for the control of state institutions; corruption and abuse of power are endemic, particularly in the justice and law enforcement institutions.
 - Thus the State does not have the monopoly on the use of force.
3. Despite the extreme nature of the problems with the Afghan justice system, expectations have been high on the part of the Afghan people and the international community that reform efforts would produce considerably more improvement than has been the case.
- Billions of dollars will have been spent on security and justice sector reform, mostly on the “harder” security aspects, yet only between 10-40% of the population use the formal justice system; most use traditional fora such as tribal, religious or customary dispute resolution mechanisms, including for criminal issues. Thus the majority of the population are relatively untouched by reform efforts in the sector.
 - Negative attitudes towards the formal system are compounded by the fact that it is seen as a threat by those who wield power. In significant areas of Afghan life, power is exercised not through state institutions but remains in the hands of individual powerbrokers, tribal structures and warlords, often connected to the narcotics trade. These groups have little interest in the rule of law and at times actively undermine the reform process aimed at strengthening rule of law. This dynamic has been most visible in the senior legal appointments system. Thus, the credibility of the State, and its ability to nurture and sustain the rule of law is greatly impaired.
 - There is a culture of impunity which protects those abusing power, both within and without the State structures. Presently, the justice sector does not serve as a safeguard for individuals against such abuses, whether committed by the State or by non-State actors. Instead, the formal legal system is increasingly used by power brokers as a political tool to exert control and to galvanise their power and influence.
4. International assistance efforts to this sector are fragmented, and have lacked adequate coordination or comprehensive approach. In some respects it can be said that international assistance efforts have aggravated the situation.
- The Italians who were the key partner on Justice Reform have been criticised for amongst other things, failing to bring cohesiveness across reform activities, and because its reforms have lacked a strategic approach.
 - On policing reform, Germany, as partner nation has been in a battle with the US, which has invested billions of dollars in police and security sector reform, over the policing philosophy to be introduced: the Germans favouring a more traditional, European policing philosophy and the US preferring a highly militaristic approach. The fact is that the former, with specialist gendarmerie-type elements is what is necessary, but the two have not been able to constructively find this solution and policing reform has suffered as a result.
 - The lack of cohesive strategy has resulted in imbalanced reform across the sector, anomalies, inconsistencies and further confusion.
 - Public administrative and civil service reform is also fragmented and hasn't been tied in with justice sector reform, such that anomalies have occurred there as well.
 - As key partner on Counter-Narcotics (CN), the UK has lead on establishment of the Criminal Justice Task Force to enable the investigation and prosecution of medium-high level narcotics-related offences. This was a pragmatic response to the reality that the criminal justice system did not, and will not have for a while yet, the capacity to effectively deal with serious cases, on the one hand, and the political robustness to deliver on CN issues on the other. The UK has however come under some criticism as a result for creating a parallel system, which complicates the system and is not sustainable. The UK acknowledges this and an element of the strategy on CN now is to mainstream the activities of the CJTF.

5. There is recognition that the situation with the justice sector is critical. It is now being acknowledged that a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to police and justice sector reform are crucial for post-conflict stabilisation, though it has come late in the day.

6. EU Commission and Council will launch justice sector and police reform programmes this summer. It is hoped that they will bring some cohesion and coordination to reform as well as the weight to be influential in reform policy.

INTRODUCTION

7. This document aims to assist the *Defence Select Committee of Inquiry into UK Operations in Afghanistan* by providing a picture of the justice system in Afghanistan. Essentially it is in summarised form as the problems and activities in Afghanistan in this sector are so extensive and complex that detail would demand a far longer document.

8. My evidence will cover the context, including the historical, socio-political, developmental and legal; the current situation in the justice sector; it will summarise the international assistance efforts; and finally, it will form some conclusions.

9 My evidence assumes the admission of evidence by the relevant departments of Her Majesty's Government relating to specific policies and programmes in Afghanistan.

CONTEXT

10. Any discussion on the justice sector in Afghanistan should be placed into the context of poverty and conflict from which that the country has, and continues to suffer, and also its rugged terrain.

11. The two decades of conflict have resulted in the decimation of the education system. Illiteracy rates in Afghanistan are upwards of 50% amongst male adults and upwards of 79% amongst women, in part due to the Taliban policy of denying women and girls the right to education. These statistics are significant because it is from this pool that the justice system draws its future administrators, judges, police, prosecutors and prison officers, and it is a largely uneducated, illiterate society that the justice system must service. A national Government of Afghanistan (GoA), donor assisted literacy programme, the Literacy Initiative is underway, but the challenges are huge and the creation of a pool of literate future jurists, lawyers, administrators and defendants/complainants is a long way off.

12. Afghanistan is a largely rural nation, with most of its population living in relatively small villages, isolated from each other by rugged terrain. Many of its regions are challenging to reach due to the rugged terrain and others are totally cut off for several months of the year due to the severe weather conditions. This physical isolation makes it extremely difficult for the Government administration to control its officials and civil servants and has contributed to Afghanistan evolving as a non-literate society, except in the major urban areas.

13. Low literacy rates and the general deficit in formal education impose severe limitations on the effectiveness of any assistance. The legacy of the near collapse of the educational system is also evident in the at times poor performance of decision makers. As a result, institutions charged with complex and demanding tasks experience difficulties in fulfilling their legal and constitutional duties.

14. At the beginning of 2002, Afghanistan's legal system barely existed. The Taliban had circumvented and avoided the official legal system to a large extent, preferring its own system of archaic Islamic justice and courts. The structures of the old, pre-Taliban legal order were still visible, in the form of buildings and personnel, but its staff had not been paid, were untrained and had not worked for many years. Its libraries and archives had been emptied, courts and prisons had fallen into disrepair, and its range of activities were limited. Even the most basic of resources such as a set of statutes and laws, were missing from most courts and libraries. There was no legitimate government in place to exercise state authority, infrastructure was in disarray, and militias and warlords were filling the functions of army and police. Many qualified personnel had left Afghanistan.

15. Justice and Security Sector Reform was a crucial issue in the effort to rebuild state institutions in this dire situation. The framework for the reform process, aimed at setting up functioning state institutions, was provided by the Bonn Conference in December 2001.²² Five years after the beginning of the Bonn Process, while the institutions of a modern democratic state may technically exist, they are very weak at best in most cases and are unable to field international assistance let alone face the challenges of the security and development realities of Afghanistan. The administration is highly centralised, most decisions are taken at a very high level and any substantial work is done by very few individuals. New political institutions such as Parliament and the Provincial Councils are struggling to define their roles. Formal development of "civil society" is in its infancy.

²² *Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions*, Bonn, 5 December 2001.

16. Corruption is endemic and citizens have no effective avenues of redress. It ranges from petty corruption, for example to influence service delivery; grand corruption, influencing decision making processes; and political corruption, influencing legislation, elections, appointments. There is little opportunity for citizens to influence or challenge the actions and decisions of the government or other actors, including the donor community, or to seek redress in the case of grievances.

17. It is perhaps little surprise then that between 60–90% of the population do not turn to the formal justice system for resolution of their disputes; but rather to traditional/customary/religious/tribal fora. The issues dealt with by such fora include not only civil issues and disputes, but also those of a criminal nature. While their processes and decisions often fall short of minimum international standards, they are accessible and offer a degree of certainty and security in many communities.

The Current Situation in the Justice Sector

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE EFFORTS

18. In early 2002, five G8-nations took responsibility as lead nations (now key partners) in Security and Justice Sector Reform: Germany—Police; Italy—Justice; Japan—Demobilisation, Disarmament, Reintegration (DDR) (now Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG)); UK—Counter-Narcotics; and the USA—Army. ISAF is also a major actor in the stabilisation of Afghanistan and the EU (EC and Member States) is a significant donor. The Commission and Council will launch a justice and police mission (respectively) this summer. Other States involved in the justice sector include Canada (mainly civil/commercial law), Norway (linked to police), Denmark through its support for human rights, and the Netherlands through its support for transitional justice. UN Agencies involved in justice sector reform include the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), UNDP Justice Project, UNODC, UNIFEM and UNICEF. In addition the World Bank has done much work on anti-corruption. Considerable work in justice sector reform is implemented by NGOs.

19. The Afghanistan Compact and the interim Afghan National Development Strategy (i-ANDS) lay out the framework for international engagement with Afghanistan over the next five years in a number of vital areas: security, governance (including human rights and rule of law), social and economic development and cross cutting themes such as counter-narcotics, gender equity, and anti-corruption. The GoA adopted a strategic framework for the justice sector, entitled “Justice for All” in October 2005. This document constitutes a coordinating framework for reform efforts and donor assistance for the next 10 years in the justice sector and is directly linked to the benchmarks in the Afghanistan Compact.

20. A high-level Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) was established in April 2006 to oversee and support the strategic implementation of the Compact. The JCMB’s network of sectoral working groups monitor progress and identify activities to achieve the Compact’s benchmarks. UNAMA leads the support to this process. Lending political support to this whole process is a group of key donors, including the US, Italy, UK, Germany, European Commission and EUR, Spain and Japan. Known as the “Tea Club”, this group meets informally at Ambassadorial level under the chairmanship of UNAMA. The Tea Club aims to inject momentum and direction into the implementation.

21. Although the JCMB/i-ANDS process provides a framework for co-ordinating reform efforts, Afghan interlocutors and the donor community alike have criticised it for its complexity and the absence of a cohesive approach. The highly complex picture of international assistance in some respects aggravates the situation: the Afghan authorities do not have the capacity to field them and short politically-lead deadlines do not always take account of the pace at which the Afghan institutions can field and constructively absorb the assistance offered, thus undermining Afghan ownership.

22. This is compounded by differing priorities amongst the donors themselves and the project-driven approach, often adopted by donors, which also leads to a fragmentation of actions and the by-passing of Afghan institutions: The bulk of the country’s budget is paid by international donors, often in a rather fragmented manner, thus inhibiting the administration from formulating coherent policies. So far, donors have concentrated on the central Ministries in the reform effort meaning that there is now an urgent need to focus on Provinces.

23. This means that Government institutions are not being strengthened and the sustainability of the assistance given is questionable. This combination of factors has resulted in little attention to systemic strengthening across the legal chain or to sustainable capacity building.

24. In the recognition of the need for greater coordination of GoA and international community assistance, President Karzai created a small Policy Action Group (PAG) to act as a key policy and decision-making body. It is chaired by him and therefore Afghan-led. The PAG is designed to reach down to the provincial, district and community levels in order to provide integrated programmes to implement policy and serve the interests of the Afghan people.

25. Government reform is being addressed through at least two programmes of public administrative reform, and this is set to increase and additional programmes are pending. The Public Administration Reform (PAR) process applies to Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, and their permanent civil servants. This includes the MoJ and MoI, but excludes police (who are not classed as civil servants), prison officers (who were formerly within the jurisdiction of the MoI and had the same status as police

officers), or the judiciary, who are clearly not civil servants. The approach of the international community in this respect is fragmented and has left several anomalies, including for example that police officers are paid more than judges.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

26. Afghanistan's legal landscape is shaped by its cultures, conflicts and the legacy of external influence. In its substantive laws it follows a civil law tradition, having been influenced by Egyptian, Turkish and Italian laws since the beginning of the 20th Century. In many instances these statutes incorporate Islamic law. Procedural laws and the administrative framework of the main legal institutions continue to be marked by the legacy of the Soviet occupation and Taliban policies.

27. The current legal system is also the outcome of a transitional process which started with the Bonn process. The Bonn Agreement provided for the establishment of the political and administrative institutions of government and governance, including a new Constitution, in accordance with agreed timetables. The new Constitution of Afghanistan was adopted on 4 January 2004. The Constitution determines the basic structure of Afghanistan's legal and judicial system and constitutes the basic law with which all other legislation and governmental action must comply.

28. Several fault lines run through the legal system which have not been addressed by the international assistance provided. These include tensions between the official legal system and traditional fora for the resolution of disputes; between different sources of law, in particular Islamic law, custom, constitutional provisions and international law; and between the justice institutions: the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's Office (AGO), the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior. These tensions reflect Afghan society, its politics and economy, including links to illegal narcotics-related activity.

29. Legal uncertainty and inconsistency exists due to the complex hierarchy of laws and legislation introduced by differing regimes. Significantly, some uncertainty and inconsistency has been created by legislation introduced by international reform efforts. This includes the 2006 Counter-Narcotics law, which contradicts provisions of the 2004 Interim Criminal Procedure Law.

30. The tensions between the justice institutions, including the MoJ, the AGO, the Supreme Court and the MoI are in part due to unclear delimitations of mandates and different political affiliations. The situation has improved recently, under the leadership of the Minister of Justice, the new Chief Justice, Azimi, and a new Attorney General.

31. Moreover ethnic and tribal allegiances remain important even within state institutions; political alliances influence appointments and promotions, and corruption influences the way decisions are taken and implemented at every level.

THE JUDICIARY AND COURTS

32. In August 2006, a new panel of Supreme Court Justices, including a new Chief Justice were appointed by President Karzai and approved by Parliament. The new Chief Justice, Azimi has laid out a promising vision for Supreme Court reform, in which he stressed that he wanted to see the Supreme Court supervising the administration of justice in the provinces more closely. However, the Supreme Court is all-male, despite the lobbying efforts of the international community for the inclusion of female judges. There is reason to believe that there is less factional influence with the new court.

33. The Supreme Court heads the administration and supervision of Afghanistan's judiciary and court system. While the quality of the Supreme Court is fundamental to reforms, administrative and remuneration reform programmes have not yet addressed the judiciary. This is an urgent priority that will be addressed in a reform programme planned by the European Commission, to be launched in the summer of this year.

THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

34. The MoJ has, amongst others, departments for legislative drafting (the "Taqnin"), for the provision of legal advice to the government and it has jurisdiction over the administration of adult prisons.

35. The Taqnin is clearly critical for the re-building of Afghanistan's legal system, but it lacks capacity to address current challenges. However, there have been a number of recent laws which were drafted not by the Taqnin, but by international advisers and consultants, often with little or no communication with the MoJ. This consequently sidelines the Taqnin, and negates Afghan ownership in the building of its legal system. It has also led to a number of practical problems. For example, there are difficulties in creating reliable translations of these laws into Dari and Pashtu. Further, some newly drafted laws are informed by concepts and ideas, which are foreign or incompatible with Afghan legal traditions.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

36. The Attorney General's Office (AGO) has responsibility for the investigation and prosecution of crimes²³ and for monitoring the legality of detention²⁴. Of all the legal institutions, the AGO suffered most during the reign of the Taliban, when it was almost completely ignored and its functions were performed by the religious police.

37. As with the other justice institutions it has received a considerable amount of badly or uncoordinated international assistance which it has little capacity to field or absorb. Indeed, as with the other justice institutions, the AGO has little capacity to field the assistance offered. Significantly, the AGO together with the ANP are key players in the challenge of rooting out extrajudicial or arbitrary detentions which are in turn linked with corruption and exploitation by power-brokers and warlords in many provinces. However a particular difficulty with the AGO is its responsibility with regard to investigations and the procedural rules which link prosecutors and the police has not been addressed. There is a lack of clarity and understanding as to the role of police and prosecutors in investigations and the situation is complicated by the impracticalities of the procedural law.²⁵ Due to lack of cooperation between prosecutors and the police, lack of clarity between the roles and lack of training (a significant proportion of prosecutors have not graduated from the Faculties of Law or Sharia nor received criminal investigation training), and resources, investigations are frequently not properly finalised.

POLICE

38. In 2002, the Afghan police had no functioning infrastructures or organisational structures. The police force consists mainly of an older generation of police trained in the 1960s and 1970s, and the vast majority have a Mujahideen background and little or no police experience, were untrained, factional and more than 70% illiterate.

39. In April 2003, the Afghan National Police (ANP) was created by presidential decree. The decree defined the role of the police and the Ministry of the Interior (MoI). It set a target for the police of 62,000, reducing the number of armed men affiliated with the police at that time from 150,000. The ANP is structured into various separate departments including, Border Police, Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Training, Administration and Logistics, which themselves have various sub-departments.

40. Today most police personnel possess very little if any knowledge of basic law. This corresponds to the illiteracy rate within the police ranks. As a rule, police work and criminal investigations lead to a confession and the criminal justice system does not produce cases where the evidence is gathered by forensic techniques or by other means. This state of play is a result of unsatisfactory, often non-existing, cooperation between the criminal branch of the police and the prosecution service. Laws are not harmonised and interpretation of laws and rules is arbitrary. Moreover organisational structures and institutional procedures do not support effective cooperation between police and prosecutors.

41. Much work has been done on police reform. Over 70,000 policemen have been trained. Germany is the key partner on reform of the ANP. Since 2002, it has spent about €70 million on police reform. Other large donors include the European Community, which funds nationwide payment of police salaries through the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA).²⁶ The US has a formidable SSR and police reform programme that touches all aspects of the reform process.²⁷ The UK, as part of its CN programme, has led the establishment and training of the Counter-Narcotics Police (CNPA).²⁸

42. The restructuring of the police and the MOI are underway in two separate reform programmes: the MoI, under the PAR programme described above, and the police, under the pay and rank review process, which is funded by the Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA) set up and administered by the international community.

43. The ANP itself is undergoing significant restructuring designed to rebalance the previously top-heavy structure and introduce merit-based appointments and appropriate administrative systems aimed at professionalising the police. However, there is no comprehensive survey of all the equipment that has been donated to the ANP, including a very large number of uniforms, vehicles, communication equipment and weaponry; and the performance, public perception of and the confidence in the police remain very low. Despite the ongoing reform process, the continued influence of factional politics and individual power brokers is in evidence at the national and provincial levels. There are no effective systems to deal with this; it is dealt with in an ad hoc manner and the international community must apply considerable political pressure in order to have the GoA address the problem in an appropriate manner.

²³ Article 134 of the Constitution and the 2004 Interim Procedure Code.

²⁴ 2005 Prison Law.

²⁵ The law requires the police to hand detainees over to the prosecutor within 72 hours; the prosecutor may order the detention of prisoners for up to 15 days before a judge becomes involved. The prosecutor supervises and directs all investigative actions after the 72 hours period.

²⁶ The European Community's annual contribution to LOTFA has been around €30 million.

²⁷ The US budget for 2006 was around US\$1 billion and an estimated US\$1.6 billion for 2007.

²⁸ The UK spent around €25 million in support of the CNPA in 2006.

44. Little progress has been made however in the restructuring of the civilian elements of the MoI and there is a serious risk that continued failure to reform this Ministry will undermine the wider police reform and the improvement in rule of law as a whole. Further, the links between the police and the rest of the justice sector are underdeveloped both between the Afghan institutions, and amongst donors. To some degree these problems are technical, requiring legislative reform, but it is also as a result of the lack of overall coherent strategy between the international community across the sector.²⁹

45. Lack of coherent strategy specifically for police reform, and the lack of coherence in international community assistance has resulted in short-term measures employed to address security needs which are not necessarily of medium-long term benefit and may undermine reform efforts. For example the ANP is expected to carry out very dangerous border duties and to fight military battles in the South—tasks which they either are not trained or equipped for. Consequently, ANP personnel have suffered heavy losses in the south of Afghanistan. At the same time, criminal or unprofessional behaviour by the ANP in these same areas has fuelled the discontent that fosters local support for the insurgency.

46. Part of the problem in police reform is that two of the main sources of international assistance, Germany and the US have a fundamental philosophical disagreement on the type of police force to be created for Afghanistan, and as stated above, the capacity of the Afghans through the MoI to form their own vision is very limited: the US prefer a heavily militarised police, while Germany preferring a more traditional western-style police force. Further the US appears to prefer quantity of police officers rather than quality, and this is reflected in the training programmes the US provides, and brings additional problems. While Afghanistan probably requires a police force with the professional standards envisaged by Germany, it also needs a gendarmerie-type wing to deal with the higher level of internal violence.

47. This disagreement has gone some way to prevent the necessary leadership, coherence and strategic thought and assistance from the international community. In the meantime short-term measures have been introduced, such as the creation of the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) last year, which was advanced by the GoA. The idea was that personnel would be brought into the ANAP from illegal armed groups/militias, trained, contracted and under the MoI/Chief of Police chain of command. There risks of legalising irregular forces with questionable loyalties are clear, but it is the lack of strategic thought behind such measures that is of concern.

PRISONS

48. The penal system in Afghanistan reflects 25 years of conflicts, which have resulted in an extremely low level of institutional capacity, managed by unqualified and untrained individuals.

49. Prison administration falls under the jurisdiction of the Prisons Department of the MoJ. Each of the 34 provinces has a prison, which fall under the jurisdiction of the Central Prison Administration. Most of them are old and in poor conditions, and some are uninhabitable. Furthermore, nationwide there are an estimated 300 or so small district detention facilities of which little is known in terms of standards or even number of detainees. A cause of great concern is that many of these detention facilities are controlled by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and the police, who are known to carry out arbitrary arrests and detention.

50. The philosophy behind imprisonment in Afghanistan is aimed at punishment: concepts of rehabilitation and reintegration are practically unknown. While human rights are limited in society in general, they are virtually non-existent in the context of detention/imprisonment. Furthermore, there is little independent oversight, including by the AGO, statutory role of which is to oversee the legality of detention. The prison system lacks transparency and offers an environment for violations including unlawful and arbitrary confinement, corruption and torture. The situation is particularly bad for vulnerable persons, including women, who although constitute less than 3% of the prison population, are often accompanied by their children.

LEGAL AID AND THE INDEPENDENT BAR

51. Minimum international standards of justice and human rights require access to justice, which implies access to an independent and effective lawyer. Only 170 lawyers are registered with the Ministry of Justice; some assessments suggest that only around 50 actually practice. Further the requirement that lawyers must register with the Ministry of Justice in order to be licensed undermines their independence.

52. The right of an accused to be represented by a defence lawyer of his own choice is protected in Afghan law, yet there is no State funded legal aid system, and in practice the vast majority of defendants are tried without any defence lawyers representing them at any stage of their trial or appeal. Judges and prosecutors do not recognise the role of defence lawyers in court proceedings. The establishment of an Independent Afghan Bar Association is in its early stages and is being supported by the International Bar Association (IBA) in collaboration with the Union of Afghan Lawyers.

²⁹ For example, the Criminal Procedure Code requires detainees to be presented to a prosecutor within 72 hours, along with a completed supporting investigation file. In most parts of the country this is simply a practical impossibility due to geographical challenges and shortage of resources and professional expertise.

COUNTER-NARCOTICS

53. Counter-Narcotics (CN) is a political priority for the GoA. CN appears as a major strand in all the strategic thinking on Afghanistan, including the Afghanistan Compact, the National Drugs Control Strategy (NDCS) and the i-ANDS. The UK is the key partner to the GoA in this area.

54. One aspect of the UK's assistance on CN is in the justice sector. Given the lack of capacity in the criminal justice system, and in order to ensure that the appropriate legal framework is in place, and that there is the capacity to investigate and prosecute those involved in illegal narcotics activity, the UK has developed, together with other international partners, the Criminal Justice Task Force (CJTF). The CJTF seeks to ensure the investigation, prosecution, trial and imprisonment of those involved in a medium to high level seriousness of illegal narcotics-activity.

55. This has put in place a specific legal framework (the 2005 Counter-Narcotics Law), team of judges (administered by the Supreme Court), prosecutors (administered by the Attorney General's Office), police and investigators (administered by the Ministry of the Interior) prison facilities (administered by the Corrections department of the Ministry of Justice) and defence lawyers have been trained. The Ministry for Counter Narcotics plays a coordinating role, and has established regulatory bodies and a sentencing commission.

56. The creation of this parallel legal system has been criticised for creating procedural inconsistencies between it and the mainstream system,³⁰ unsustainable parallel structures, and a system which gives more serious criminals greater protections of their rights than those who are dealt with under the mainstream system. The UK and major players in this field acknowledge the need to mainstream the CJTF system and to increase sustainability and Afghan ownership, and this is now a shared strategic objective.

TRADITIONAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS

57. The traditional dispute resolution mechanisms are tellingly referred to as the "People's System" by Afghans. They correspond to a deeply rooted system of self government, still existing in Afghanistan, especially in remote districts that the central government does not reach. Despite the very centralised form of government reflected in the 2004 Constitution, Afghanistan retains a highly fragmented structure at grass roots level.

58. The informal legal system is used by around 60 to 90% of Afghans. Outside urban areas, the official legal system is of little importance to the resolution of disputes. Traditional systems for the adjudication of disputes form the backbone of the legal reality for most people. These traditional systems are deeply embedded in local customs and traditions, as well as power structures and hierarchies. Whilst the official legal system does not have any formal links with these traditional systems, they are in practice interlinked and interwoven: outside Kabul, even officials working in the state legal system readily acknowledge the existence and importance of traditional justice for the adjudication of disputes; for example, the decisions of *jirgas* and *shuras* are often registered with local courts. In practice, the sharp division between state law and traditional/customary law is blurred and at times barely recognisable.³¹

59. In spite of the fact that the majority of Afghans use informal fora rather than the formal state justice system, the GoA, and the international community have not adopted a policy or strategy regarding informal justice. Opinions amongst national and international stakeholders are divided and some are reluctant to give any form of official recognition to the informal system.

60. The difficulty is that while informal justice is a legitimate source of Afghan law and ensures social order and a degree of security and certainty, they are not always consistent with other Afghan laws, international human rights standards or with Sharia. Access to justice for women remains scarce both in the formal and the informal systems. Women are poorly represented in the formal system and not at all in the traditional systems and discriminatory decisions are common in both.

61. The reasons for the survival, and indeed prospering, of the informal, traditional systems of justice and dispute resolution, are complex and instructive to those assessing progress in justice sector reform in Afghanistan. The formal system is widely seen as inefficient, costly, and corrupt. It is also often regarded as foreign to, and incompatible with, local customs, values and traditions. To the vast majority of Afghans, who are illiterate, the formal system is largely inaccessible due in part to its lack of capacity to meet their additional needs. Furthermore, the geography of Afghanistan makes it difficult for many Afghans who live in rural areas to travel to urban centres where the formal legal system is based. Thus there is little incentive or reason for people to approach the formal legal system for the resolution of disputes or the redress of wrongs.

³⁰ There are apparent inconsistencies between the 2006 Counter-Narcotics law, the 2004 Constitution and other parts of the legal framework.

³¹ The informal system is traditionally administered by bodies like *jirga* or *shura*, which are customary tribunals, composed of village elders who enjoy the trust of the community and who apply a set of rules accepted and recognised as fair by the members of that community. The *Pashtunwali*, in the Pashtun areas, is an example of this: their ruling is normally expeditious, free of charge and accepted by the parties, thus ensuring social order in the respective communities and reducing the workload of the courts.

62. Until the capacity of the formal justice system to deliver justice fairly and effectively is sufficiently improved, an interim approach adopted by several actors is to address the informal system's shortcomings by raising awareness on human rights and Sharia across the country, aiming at educating people.

CORRUPTION AND IMPUNITY

63. The formal legal system has so far failed to address the legacy of human rights' abuses committed by almost all factions in the course of decades of civil war.³² This is compounded by the fact that even current human rights abuses, extortion and corruption remain unchecked.

64. Although low salaries are a structural impediment to fighting corruption and enhancing the public's trust in the justice sector institutions, (there are a number of schemes planned or under way to address this), there are other more fundamental problems such as the highly politicised nature of the Afghan justice sector and the culture of impunity and plunder that seems to have permeated all levels of government. Attempts to reform the justice sector must acknowledge these facts and take into account that many government representatives will not be in favour of reform and increased accountability.

65. The legal institutions themselves lack internal systems and mechanisms to address corruption, inefficiency, systemic and structural weaknesses. There is a lack of capacity in areas crucial for the establishment of accountability and ending the prevalent climate of impunity that local, regional and national persons of influence still hold. To date there has been little work done in the development of systems to increase the Afghan capacity to fight corruption.

PROSPECTS AND CONCLUSIONS

66. The expectations of Afghans and international partners alike have been wildly optimistic, and slow progress has inevitably engendered resentment and increased vulnerability to anti-government propaganda. The scale of the problem should not be underestimated. In the wake of decades of war, there are shortages of capacity at all levels of the education system—which impedes efforts to improve capacity in government or in the rule of law institutions. The international community has to reassess its expectations for where the Afghan legal system could be within the next 10–20 years. There are still considerable challenges after five years of sustained effort.

67. A number of prerequisites to make the justice system in Afghanistan effective lie outside the responsibilities of the sector itself: the weak Government and State structures, undermined by official and unofficial power brokers who seek to maintain the current state of de facto impunity and abuse their positions, or political networks, in order to further their personal economic interests or criminal activities.

68. There is a clear sense that the legal institutions which have emerged from the Bonn process are failing to fulfil their constitutional duties, and are still a long way from being able to protect people and ensure rule of law. These weaknesses mean that the political realities of a country which is driven by power struggles and the corrosive influence of narcotics-related activities are increasingly being reflected in formal institutions both in Kabul and in the provinces. Where the state has continually proved unable or unwilling to provide security, services or justice, people rely on networks of personal relations, which are themselves manifestations of ethnic, regional, tribal or criminal alliances; the continued operation of these informal networks continues to undermine the establishment of a rational state.

69. The State legal system provides no legal gateways to fight governmental lawlessness, to complain about or seek redress from government actions that they consider unfair or arbitrary. To date the donor community had failed to tackle corruption which has facilitated its growth at all levels. The international community should identify an acceptable level of tolerance for corruption with the GoA and then take a firm stand against that which goes above this, making the continuation of support dependent on proven efforts by the GoA to eradicate corruption. Along with this is the need to strengthen institutional structures and oversight mechanisms and avenues of redress for citizens.

70. An effective system of checks and balances is needed, which is sufficiently robust to stem both lawlessness and the abuse of power by those operating within and outside the State. This requires greater attention be given by both the international community and the GoA to developing the capacity of and access to independent defence lawyers, which will have an impact on both individual cases and on the legal process as a whole.

71. A well-performing police force is integral to ultimate success in Afghanistan: a crucial element in any exit strategy. It has been acknowledged that a more strategic and cohesive approach to police reform is necessary to achieve this. It is essential that the police institutions, in particular the MoI are strengthened. It is hoped that the police reform programme planned by the European Council, under its ESDP mechanism, to be launched in summer 2007 will bring the necessary coordination and cohesion and a more qualitative approach to police reform than the numbers game currently being pursued by the US reform strategy: Afghanistan doesn't need more well-armed men running around pursuing their own political/tribal/factional power games.

³² A recent law passed in Afghanistan which gives a degree of amnesty for war crimes is a further set back for transitional justice.

72. The lack of strategic coherence and coordination amongst the international community has aggravated the situation. Justice and security sector reform must be carried out as a seamless tapestry of inter-linking sub-systems and processes. For example, having a reformed police service which is professional and operates in accordance with acceptable codes of conduct is of little benefit if the public prosecutors cannot progress cases, the courts do not dispense justice or suspects and prisoners are arbitrarily detained or mistreated in prisons and detention facilities.

73. The fragmentation of reform efforts has meant that some categories have been excluded from reform programmes; this is an unfortunate oversight rather than a strategic decision, which is both symptomatic of the lack of cohesion in the organisation of assistance, and also of the scale of the task at hand.

74. Current international support for legal reform activities has been heavily weighted towards those aspects of the legal system which accord with the values, experiences and models of Western donor agencies. Countrywide campaigns on human rights need to be supported, in coordination with ongoing efforts and through local NGOs, aimed at addressing the ignorance and mentality that allows acceptance and gives legitimacy to traditional and customary practices which violate the Afghan Constitution and basic human rights.

75. Much of the international community justice and security sector reform budget is spent on the harder and more visible aspects of security. This has not resulted in a greater degree of security. More attention and resources should be given to the provision of qualitative and well-coordinated support to the "softer" elements of security including a cleaner government system which gives access to fair justice, the officials of which do not prey on the people and redress for the victims of those who do, and a degree of public service culture. While it is hoped that the planned European Commission justice programme will contribute the achievement of this, a different focus is required from the international community and the GoA in general.

3 April 2006

Memorandum from the Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit (ADIDU)

AFGHANISTAN COUNTER NARCOTICS STRATEGY

1. Drugs are one of the gravest threats to the long term security, development and effective governance of Afghanistan. The threat from drugs to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development ranks alongside the threat from the Taliban. The opium trade accounts for more than 30% of Afghanistan's total economy and drug related crime and corruption are rife and permeate all levels of society.

2. The UK supports the implementation of the Afghan government's National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) and its four priorities (targeting the trafficker, strengthening and diversifying legal rural livelihoods; reducing demand and developing state institutions). There are already signs of decreasing cultivation in areas where there is access to governance, security and development, such as parts of the north and the centre of the country. Progress is also being made in other areas:

- The last 18 months has seen: Vital counter narcotics (CN) legislation passed; over 350 traffickers convicted; and increased drugs related seizures.
- Over 22,000 community projects financed and over 16,000 community development councils established.
- \$283 million community grants dispersed, 9,000 km roads reconstructed, and micro-finance loans given to over 300,000 Afghans.
- Drug treatment centres operating in several provinces including Helmand and Kandahar.
- \$87.1 million committed to the CN Trust Fund and efforts to build Afghan institutions continue.

3. But in the South, security challenges, insurgent activity and the lack of extension of rule of law continue to present serious obstacles toward poppy elimination. Both the drug traffickers and the Taliban have a common interest in resisting Afghan government authority and international forces. There are indications of extensive financial and logistical links between Taliban and traffickers at all levels. A recent raid by Afghan counter narcotics forces on a laboratory found an insurgent training manual and weapons.

MILITARY ROLE IN CN

4. The drugs trade feeds on and contributes to insecurity in Afghanistan and the region. ISAF support to CN is outlined in the CN Annex to the NATO Operational Plan. ISAF can provide support to CN operations, such as training of Afghan counter narcotics forces and in extremis support (eg medical) to their operations within means and capabilities. They can also help the Afghan government explain their policies to the population. But they do not play a direct role on CN or take part in eradication.

ERADICATION

5. Eradication is one of the eight pillars of the NDCS. The NDCS recognises that eradication plays an important role in injecting risk into the system and acting as a deterrent to planting poppy. The NDCS also makes clear, as has President Karzai, that eradication is a job for the Afghan government, should be ground based and targeted where there is access to legal livelihoods. Eradication on its own will not solve the problem. It needs to be balanced with measures to interdict drugs, bring criminals to justice, build institutions and encourage development of rural communities to provide alternatives for poppy farmers.

6. The UK provides support to the planning, monitoring and targeting work of Afghan eradication forces. The UK has helped the Afghan authorities map those areas where people have access to legal rural livelihoods. These target areas are determined by a set of criteria that take into account a wide range of factors. In addition to rural livelihoods projects, the criteria include: distance to markets, water availability, agricultural diversity, population density, extension of government, access to non-farm income and credit. They also include local security conditions, based on ISAF assessments.

7. There has been some resistance to eradication efforts. But in Helmand, there is no evidence to suggest that the resistance met by the Centrally Directed Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) came as a result of them being mistaken for ISAF forces. Neither do we know of any incidents in which it is believed that ISAF troops were attacked because they were mistaken for the AEF. The eradication campaign is accompanied by a carefully worded information operation, which explains who the AEF are and what they are there to do.

BRITISH EMBASSY DRUGS TEAM

8. The Committee was briefed on the Afghan Drugs Inter-departmental Unit on 7 March 2006. The British Embassy Drugs Team (BEDT) was established in 2003. It had approximately 20 staff by the end of 2006. As part of the enhancement of the Embassy in Kabul, the BEDT has been split into two teams—a CN Team and a Rule of Law Team. Both are overseen by a Counsellor who reports to the Ambassador.

9. The Counter Narcotics Team is responsible for co-ordinating the UK's work to support the NDCS, in particular the delivery under three of the four key priorities—institution building, strengthening and diversifying rural livelihoods and demand reduction. The team works closely with DFID (it has DFID staff within it) and supports the wider counter narcotics information effort. It also supports the Afghan government on the targeting and planning of eradication and plays a key liaison role with the wider international community, especially ISAF. A key element of the team's work is to support the Afghan National Development Strategy and ensure that counter narcotics is mainstreamed throughout.

10. The creation of the Rule of Law team recognised the need for the UK to play an active role in not only the counter narcotics law enforcement and criminal justice system, but also the wider rule of law system in Afghanistan. For Counter Narcotics, this team supports delivery of the NDCS' key priority of targeting the traffickers, which includes support for the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan, working closely with SOCA and international partners. HMRC have also deployed a team of trainers and mentors to support this work. The concept is to support the Afghan Criminal Justice Task Force by training and mentoring investigators, prosecutors, judges and prison staff and providing them with the necessary facilities. The team will also work on the wider rule of law agenda.

2 May 2007

Supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence

ANSWERS TO FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS FROM EVIDENCE SESSION ON 20 MARCH 2007

Q. A comprehensive list of the completed, current, and planned development projects in Helmand and its neighbouring provinces. The list should comprise projects sponsored by the UK and other countries and include detail of the nature, location and the cost of each project (Q 62 and Q 63)

A. Attached at Annex A.

Q. An update on the deployment of Mastiff and Vector vehicles to Afghanistan. (Q 84)

A. The first Mastiff and Vector vehicles have already been delivered to Afghanistan. We do not specify exact numbers for reasons of operational security. We will continue to deliver Mastiff and Vector vehicles to Afghanistan over the coming months; we are working as quickly as possible alongside industry to integrate additional protection, electronic counter measures equipment, communications equipment and self defence weapons to these vehicles.

Q. *To what extent did ISAF IX (the ARRC), led by General Richards, achieve its objectives?*

A. Under the command of the ARRC, ISAF unified the military mission in Afghanistan, broadening its operations to encompass the whole of the country thereby extending the authority of the Government of Afghanistan into areas which had previously had little contact with the GoA. Large scale operations such as Op MEDUSA delivered a series of defeats to the Taliban and demonstrated that in the face of ISAF action, the Taliban are unable to succeed. Substantial progress on reconstruction and development was also made particularly in the more stable areas of the country. Clearly there is still much to do but ISAF IX achieved a great deal.

Q. *What lessons have been learned from ISAF IX?*

A. While the central tenets of our original plan remain sound, we have had to modify some of our assumptions in the context of a better understanding of an unfamiliar operating environment and the culture and customs of the population who reside there. The ferocity of the Taliban's resistance and their willingness to confront ISAF forces despite massive losses was not expected. This constrained reconstruction and development initially. Furthermore we encountered some initial teething problems in PRT operations. We have also had to come to terms with the pace of Afghan life and politics, which can at times be glacial. Nevertheless, the issues that we identified in the Helmand Review have been addressed and we are confident that we will continue to build on the substantial progress that is being made in the province. Afghanistan is undoubtedly in a more advanced state than when we first went South last year.

Q. *What contribution is the UK making to ISAF X Headquarters?*

A. The UK is filling 136 posts (of 1,108) in the ISAF HQ including the 2 Star Deputy Commander Stability.

Q. *How has continuity between the ISAF IX and ISAF X missions been achieved?*

A. The mission remains the same. General McNeil shares General Richards' comprehensive approach to development in Afghanistan and is continuing the work of Op OQAB (EAGLE) but he will rightly wish to apply his own interpretation to the challenges posed. Furthermore, all key personnel in the ISAF X headquarters have undergone training exercises related to their deployment at the NATO Joint Warfare Centre in Stavanger where they will have become fully acquainted with the issues arising in ISAF IX.

Q. *Which civilian aid agencies are currently working in Helmand and its neighbouring provinces?*

A. Attached at Annex A

Annex A

COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF COMPLETED, CURRENT AND PLANNED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN HELMAND NEIGHBOURING PROVINCES

1. The Committee requested a comprehensive list of the completed and planned development projects in Helmand and its neighbouring provinces for its inquiry into the UK deployment to Afghanistan.

QUICK IMPACT DEVELOPMENT

2. For all nations operating in Afghanistan development activity falls into two categories: local community based rapid effect programmes; and, longer term national development programmes. Local community based rapid effect programmes are carried out under the Quick Impact Project (QIPs) programme. UK QIPs draw upon funding contributed by the FCO, DFID, the MoD and the interdepartmental British Embassy Drugs Team. Projects in Helmand are proposed by UK government officials and military commanders and are scrutinised and approved by senior representatives of the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (the PRT). To date 103 projects at a value of \$12.3 million have been authorised for development (19 security projects, 10 governance projects, 60 social and economic development projects and 14 for counter narcotics). Projects are carried out through a combination of on the ground military engineering and contracting through of local contractors and NGOs. Details of projects currently on record at the UK Task Force under the UK QIPs programme for development activity are attached (Enclosure A).

3. In addition to UK funded quick impact projects to deliver rapid development effect, the US Government and Government of Denmark also fund some development activity in Helmand.

4. Further to the activities of these countries within Helmand, Canada, the Netherlands and the US are also active in local community based projects in neighbouring provinces in the southern region.

LONGER TERM DEVELOPMENT

5. DfID has allocated around \$60 million over three years (2006–07 to 2008–09) for the Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Programme. The programme includes the following activities:

Rural Development

Rural development activities are implemented through the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development to accelerate the roll-out of key National Programmes in Helmand. Where the Ministry's capacity is limited Helmand contractors are deployed to deliver services. This programme includes activity in the following areas:

- (1) *The National Rural Access Programme* is expected to receive around \$17 million over three years to deliver improved infrastructure, including roads, bridges, drainage and protective walls.

Construction of four roads in Bost is now under way with the following progress: Bolan Road (12 km)—10% complete; Qali-i-Bost (14 kms)—20% complete; Lashkari Bazar (8 kms)—25% complete; Sarkar (17 kms)—25% complete. Three additional roads at Musa Qala have been surveyed and designed. However, construction has been delayed because of security concerns.

- (2) *The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme* is expected to receive around \$4 million over three years for the construction of water points, pipe schemes and latrine blocks.

The original 150 contracted wells are now 80% complete. The second batch of 150 wells has been contracted, and authorisation to start work will be issued this week. Further to this, an additional 720 wells have been surveyed and designed and are ready for tendering to those already completed.

- (3) The Microfinance Investment and Support Facility Afghanistan is expected to receive around \$11 million over three years to provide loans for income generating activities, such as small shops, small scale manufacturing, handicrafts and agriculture.

A Bangladeshi NGO, BRAC, will be the first microfinance institution to expand its operations to Helmand under the Microfinance Investment and Support Facility Afghanistan.

- (4) *The National Solidarity Programme* is expected to receive £10.6 million over three years to establish Community Development Councils and provide grants for projects that will bring benefits to these communities. National Solidarity Programme is implemented by a wide range of "Facilitating Partners" on behalf of the Government.

To date, using core funding from a number of donors including DfID, National Solidarity Programme has engaged with 556 communities in Helmand, although work with 185 of these has been suspended due to the security situation. A total of 515 community-level projects have been approved, of which 185 are completed. The programme is now entering a second phase (funded by Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Programme), which will see expansion to more districts in Helmand. Expressions of interest for Facilitating Partners were called for the districts of Kajaki, Bagran, Washer, Nad Ali, Dishu, Sangin and Reg, and have now been received. Short listed candidates have been submitted to the World Bank.

Agriculture

DfID are working with the Ministry for Agriculture to develop agriculture programmes for Helmand. Two Non-Governmental Organisations (one international and one local) have already approached with proposals for projects. These projects are expected to:

- Assist with the production and marketing of local fruit and nut, animal and vegetable products.
- Build the capacity of local government officials to provide the policies and services required by Helmand farmers and businesses.
- Support agricultural and business education for young people in Helmand.
- Build local research capacity, and identify cost effective and innovative solutions to challenges in the agricultural sector.

The implementation of these projects is expected to start in the summer 07, in line with the Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Programme plan.

6. Similarly to the activities undertaken to fund local community rapid effect based projects Canada, the Netherlands and the US are also active in pursuing longer term development activities. The principle international donor in the southern region is USAID.

7. The largest long term development project being undertaken in Afghanistan is the USAID funded Kajaki Dam Project in Helmand. At a \$150 million+ cost, the project aims to deliver increased hydroelectric power to the southern region. The project involves reconstruction of the power transmission infrastructure throughout northern Helmand and Kandahar as well as redevelopment of the hydroelectric

plant at Kajaki and will take a number of years. ISAF forces are assisting the project through close liaison with the project planners and contractors and by creating the conditions for the long term success of the project.

CIVILIAN AID AGENCIES CURRENTLY WORKING IN HELMAND AND ITS NEIGHBOURING PROVINCES

AFGHAN NGOS

- HAPA—UN main implementing partner in Helmand (eg distribution for World Food Programme).
- AURC—Ariana Unity Reconstruction Committee (quasi-NGO running construction and municipal development projects for donors).
- HAFO—Helping Afghan Farmers Organisation—agricultural development.
- AWDA—Afghan Women’s Development Association—women’s rights/gender issues.
- PEACE—(acronym not known)—Alternative Livelihoods.
- WADAN—Welfare Association for Development of Afghanistan—drugs rehabilitation/CN.

INTERNATIONAL NGOS

- IWPR—Institute of War and Peace Reporting—UK—development of an independent media sector (implementing partner for FCO project in Helmand).
- ICARDA—International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas—Syria—agricultural development (implementing partner for one DfID project in Helmand).
- Mercy Corps—US—agricultural development.
- BRAC—Bangladesh—lead agency for the Afghan MRRD National Solidarity Programme in Helmand.
- Ibn Sina—Islamic charity (nationality not known)—main primary health provider across province.
- Emergency Hospital—Italian—treatment of the civilian victims of conflict.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

- Afghan Red Crescent
- UNHABITAT
- WFP
- UNICEF
- WHO

The main UN agencies do not have an office here, but their programmes are still running, often through a local implementing partner, eg HAPA. UNAMA have stated their intention to open an office in Helmand by June.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT BUSINESSES

- Chemonics—contractor for USAID Alternative Livelihoods Programme/South (ALP/S).
- CADG—Central Asian Development Group—contractor (primarily building and construction) for NGOs and development agencies.

Annex A

QUICK IMPACT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS BEING CARRIED OUT IN HELMAND

The UK QIP impact project fund also incorporates funding for consent winning and outreach activity. The list below only included those projects which are considered development.

In addition to UK projects there are also projects being undertaken by the US and Denmark. Projects range across many sectors including education, irrigation, telecommunications, urgent humanitarian and reconstruction projects, and rule of law and governance projects.

SECURITY

<i>Project No</i>	<i>Responsible Agency</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Total Cost (\$)</i>
0006	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Permanent Vehicle Check Point	21,387 Complete
0009	Royal Engineers	Gereshk	ANP Infrastructure in Gereshk	240,000 Complete
0010	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	ANA Platoon House	40,387 Complete
0028	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	ANP Outposts	143,964 Complete
0029	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	4 x Permanent Vehicle Check Points	155,000 Complete
0030	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	4 x Enhanced Permanent Vehicle Check Points	110,000 Complete
0032	Royal Engineers	Helmand	Construction resources for 12 modular Military Construction Force built ANP temporary police stations/PVCPs	600,000 Complete
0039	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	New Joint Provincial Co-ordination Centre	161,147 Complete
0053	Governor's Office	Lashkar Gah	2 x PVCPs	16,800 Complete
0054	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Ablutions at USPI compound for ANAP training	5,265 Complete
0057	Royal Engineers	Tombstone	Camp Shorabak (ANA) Mosque	100,000 Planned
0058	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Provision of security infrastructure for Governor's office and Bost Hotel	84,227 In progress
0068	OMLT	Kajaki	Water/Fuel storage for the ANA	1,200 In progress
0070	Royal Engineers	Gereshk	Upgrade to ANA compound in Gereshk	15,000 Complete
0075	Ops Cpy	Laskhar Gah	Upgrade to Muktar Gate	6,475 In progress
0077	42 Cdo	Nowzad	Rubble Clearance	0 In progress
0078	RMP	Lashkar Gah	Bonus Scheme for ANP top-performers at PVCPs	3,000 In progress
0083	IX Gp	Garmsir	Garmsir PVCP repairs	700 In progress
0086	PRT	Lashkar Gah	Afghan Meeting facility	651 Complete
19 security projects			Total	1,705,203

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

<i>Project No</i>	<i>Responsible Agency</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Authorised funding level (\$)</i>
0001	HAFO	Gereshk	Sayed Tajdar Shrine: wall and gate construction	21,224 Complete
0002	HAFO	Gereshk	Sayed Tajdar Shrine: road and footpath construction	33,076 Complete
0003	HAFO	Lashkar Gah	Improvement of Friday market and Gabion wall	140,623 Complete
0004	HAFO	Cha-i-Anjeer	Improvement of Friday market	24,950 Complete
0007	HAFO	Lashkar Gah	Gabion Extension	34,108 Complete

<i>Project No</i>	<i>Responsible Agency</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Authorised funding level (\$)</i>
0022	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Safean Playground	50,000 In progress
0023	PRT	Lashkar Gah	Support to Office of Governor to respond to IDP needs	60,000 Complete
0027	IO	Lashkar Gah	Improvements to Media Centre	8,336 Complete
0033	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah/ Gereshk	Installation of solar-powered lighting	280,960 In progress
0034	IO	Lashkar Gah	Support to Radio Stations	150,000 In progress
0035	HAFO	Lashkar Gah	Weir on Helmand River	161,848 Complete
0036	HAFO	Lashkar Gah	Extension of Gabion walls on Helmand River	168,045 Complete
0037	HAFO	Lashkar Gah	Silt Removal from Helmand River	259,479 Complete
0042	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Bost Hospital Generator and Mortuary	130,400 Complete
0043	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Security wall for Women's Centre	30,000 Complete
0044	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Building work for Kartelegan and Toortank day care centres	86,052 Complete
0047	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah	Women's Centre sewing ISAF badges to UK mil uniforms	750 Complete
0052	Governor's Office	Nahrisiraj	Work to clear and strengthen stretch of Nahrisiraj canal	12,000 Complete
0060	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Construction of eight new classrooms at Zacor School	80,008 In progress
0061	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Connection of a new school to electricity grid	1,809 Complete
0062	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Construction of a 20 room midwifery hostel	221,762 In progress
0063	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Construction of a perimeter wall for Cha I Anjeer school	25,000 Complete
0064	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Essential repairs to Bolan Bridge	231,728 In progress
0065	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah	WADAN Playground	1,090 Complete
0066	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Repairs to three schools	185,062 In progress
0067	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Improvements to Lashkar Gah library	13,925 Complete
0069	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah	Sports equipment for eight schools	0 Planned
0073	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah	School sports equipment	30,000 Planned
0074	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Kartelegan Playground	52,237 Complete
0079	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah	Welfare Centre Kitchen	15,819 In progress
0080	HAFO	Lashkar Gah	Women's Park	840,813 In progress
0081	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	New School in Qala-e-Khana	0 Complete
0082	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Refurbishment of Nawa School	72,713 In progress
0084	Ministry of Public Health	Lashkar Gah	Rapid Assessment of Mukhtar IDP camp	973 Complete

<i>Project No</i>	<i>Responsible Agency</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Authorised funding level (\$)</i>
0085	Royal Engineers	Musa Qaleh	Repairs to three mosques	350,000 Planned
0088	Royal Engineers	Gereshk	Playground and Football pitch	39,098 In progress
0090	Royal Engineers	Gereshk	Seminar Awal School repairs	0 Planned
0091	Royal Engineers	Gereshk	Technical School repairs	0 Planned
0092	Royal Engineers	Gereshk	Abolfathi Botsi Boys School Repairs	0 Planned
0093	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah	Ministry of Agriculture Tree Planting	6,750 In progress
0095	Royal Engineers	Garmsir	Reconstruction using local labour—road, wells, ditches	4,000 In progress
0096	Royal Engineers	Garmsir	Culvert bridge	500 In progress
0097	Royal Engineers	Garmsir	Bore Hole and Hand Pump	1,750 In progress
0098	Royal Engineers	Nahr-e-Saraj	Lashkar Gah-Gereshk canal road culvert and gravel track repairs	28,272 In progress
0099	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	3km asphalt road and solid drainage Kartelegan-601	429,950 In progress
0102	CIMIC	Garmsir	CHC Generator Repair	505 In progress
0103	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah/ Gereshk	Midwifery Kits	5,416 In progress
0107	STABAD	Lashkar Gah	Carpet weaving pilot project	82,733 In progress
0108	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah	Furniture for Zacor High School	20,000 Complete
0109	PRT	Helmand	Support to DRRD for MQ IDPs	800 Complete
0110	CIMIC	Gereshk	Refuse Collection Points and new trucks	34,000 In progress
0111	CIMIC	Lashkar Gah	Upgrade to Bost Hospital Grounds	150,860 In progress
0112	CIMIC	Gereshk	Furniture for Gereshk Women's Group	1,920 Complete
0114	HAFO	Lashkar Gah	LKG Bus Station	854,327 In progress
0119	UKTF	Garmsir	Wells and Water Tower	10,800 In progress
0120	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Covered waiting area at Bost Hospital	7,000 Complete
0122	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Reconstruct Dept of Land Registry	98,142 In progress
0123	CIMIC	Helmand	Procure three GPS units	500 In progress
0124	PRT	Helmand	Provide Plant Machinery to DRRD	2,268,000 In progress
0126	Police Mentors	Lashkar Gah	Additional Support to the Traffic Division	40,000 In progress
60 Social and Economic Development projects			Total	7,860,113

GOVERNANCE

<i>Project No</i>	<i>Responsible Agency</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Authorised funding legal (\$)</i>
0014	BBCWS	Lashkar Gah/ Gereshk	Radio Transmitter	94,231 Complete
0019	RMP	Helmand	ID card making facility (ANP)	30,295 Complete
0020	PRT	Lashkar Gah	Generators for the Governor's Office and compound	220,186 Complete
0024	Justice Advisor	Lashkar Gah	Wall for the Office of the Prosecutor	10,000 Planned
0040	Governance Advisor	Lashkar Gah	Refurbish of Offices for Provincial Government Departments	32,000 In progress
0045	IO	Lashkar Gah	Rehabilitate Printing Press	224,098 In progress
0059	Governor's Office	Musa Qaleh	Set up costs for Musa Qaleh District Administration	10,000 Complete
0089	RMP	Lashkar Gah	Equipment for eight PVCs	32,584 In progress
0101	PRT	Lashkar Gah	Additional support to the Dept of Hajj	24,167 In progress
0115	Police Mentors	Lashkar Gah	Support to ANP Traffic Division	32,631 In progress
10 Governance projects			Total	710,192

COUNTER-NARCOTICS

<i>Project No</i>	<i>Responsible Agency</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Authorised funding level (\$)</i>
0008	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Regrading of Bost Airfield	555,000 In progress
0012	MNCC	Lashkar Gah	Windmill Wells	10,640 In progress
0026	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Upgrade to Lashkar Gah prison	45,385 Complete
0041	BEDT	Lashkar Gah	Comms equipment for the CNPA	8,900 Complete
0048	BEDT	Helmand	PA Systems for 12 District Centres	3,000 Complete
0049	BEDT	Helmand	CN Tractor Repairs	12,000 Complete
0050	BEDT	Helmand	CN Tractor Ploughs	30,000 Complete
0071	BEDT	Lashkar Gah	Tractors and equipment for the Governor	884,718 In progress
0072	Royal Engineers	Lashkar Gah	Repair to bomb-damage at the Directorate of Counter-Narcotics	21,079 Complete
0100	BEDT	Lashkar Gah	Upgrade to Counter Narcotics Provincial Administration	88,925 In progress
0105	BEDT	Lashkar Gah	Incinerator for Bost hospital	30,000 In progress
0106	BEDT	Lashkar Gah	Uniforms for the Prison Staff	5,000 Complete
0113	BEDT	Lashkar Gah	Computer for Chief of Police	1,761 Complete

<i>Project No</i>	<i>Responsible Agency</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Authorised funding level (\$)</i>
0125	BEDT	Lashkar Gah	Support to the Counter Narcotics Provincial Administration	340,000 In progress
14 Counter-Narcotics projects			Total	2,031,408

3 May 2007

Further supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence

ANA EQPT

ANA is equipped primarily as a light infantry force, though the newly-enhanced (\$5.9 billion over the next 18 months) programme of support from the US will provide them with enhanced protection (armoured humvees), firepower (light and medium machine guns and mortars and Mi-35 attack helicopters) and mobility (Mi-17 support helicopters) as set out below. The US is also helping the ANA create six Commando battalions within the ANA, the first of which is currently undergoing training in Jordan. These will have enhanced infantry skills and will be equipped to almost the same standard as US Ranger battalions.

ANA soldiers are individually equipped with:

- Personal weapon, currently AK 47 but in due course M16 and M-4 (smaller, lighter version of M-16); and
- Uniform, boots, webbing, helmet and body armor (supplied from India).

Their units are equipped with:

- A range of soviet-made light and medium mortars and machine guns (such as Dushkas and 80mm mortars), though these will progressively be replaced with NATO-standard weapons; and
- Ford Ranger pickups and medium and heavy US-supplied trucks for troop mobility and logistical resupply. The Ford Rangers used by combat units in the south are progressively being replaced with armoured humvees, which will give them greater protection.

In addition:

One ANA battalion, based in Kabul, is equipped with T-72 tanks and M-113s (US 1960s armoured personnel carriers) [they are unable to deploy outside the city].

The ANA Air Corps currently possesses a small number (15-20) of former soviet attack (Mi-35) and support (Mi-17) helicopters and AN-32 transport aircraft. These will be augmented with additional purchases but plans are not yet mature.

Further supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence

Detail of the number and role of any Political Advisers that are attached to the UK military in Regional Command (South) (Q329-Q331)

HQ RO South currently has two Political Advisers; one MOD and one FCO (the latter due in theatre mid-July). There is also one Stabilisation Adviser from the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit and one Dutch Development Advisor (due in theatre mid-June).

In the PRT in Helmand there is currently one MOD POLAD supporting the Commander of Task Force Helmand, Brigadier John Lorimer. The POLAD also works alongside representatives from the FCO, Df ID and PCRU who fulfil roles in the PRT. Current civilian staff numbers are judged to be sufficient and the PRT has received praise from ISAF for the way in which it integrates the civilian and military effort.

Political Advisers act as personal advisors to deployed commanders and function as part of the Command Group in the relevant headquarters. Their role is to support Ministers, Defence Management Board and Chiefs of Staff in the formulation of defence policy and the delivery of defence activities overseas by:

- (a) Developing and articulating British Defence policy and priorities within the broader policy and strategic context within which Defence operates;
- (b) Shaping and managing both defence relations with other countries and the roles and functions of international organisations;
- (c) Understanding and shaping the context within which defence activities, including military operations, are conducted.

In carrying out these tasks civilians have a responsibility to ensure: coherence with wider governmental policy and the United Kingdom's international obligations and relations; and that the resource implications and Ministerial and Departmental accountability to Parliament, the public and the law are understood and properly taken into account.

Confirmation of the number of battlegroups requested by General Richards. COMISAF. in the 2006 NATO CJSOR for Afghanistan. The note should identify which of these requests have been met and identify those requests that are outstanding (Q332-Q336).

Answer provided in a footnote to the transcript amendments sent on 30 May.

A note on how the Government is assisting President Musharraf in addressing the problems caused by the radicalisation of people being educated in Pakistan-based madrassas (Q391)

We recognise the importance of education in reducing radicalisation among young Muslims and in pursuing regional stability on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. These issues are of crucial importance for the UK's interests both at home and in the region and we are working in concert with the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan and other partners to address them. In November 2006, during his visit to Pakistan, the Prime Minister signed a ten-year development partnership which included agreeing to double aid to Pakistan to 240 million for the 2008-2011 period meaning that Pakistan will become one of the biggest recipients of direct UK aid. This will include support for the development of state education in Pakistan.

We fully support President Musharraf's vision and policy of Enlightened Moderation, and we are working to improve dialogue on countering extremism both at governmental and local level. This work includes: encouraging madrassa administrators and government officials to work together to bring more madrassas and Islamic schools under state regulation; the creation of a Pakistani youth TV forum, promoting tolerance and understanding through a civilised and peaceful expression of opinions; improving the access of women to justice and sensitising government officials of their obligation to protect and promote women's rights; and facilitating visits of young British Muslim delegations to Pakistan to improve dialogue and understanding between both nations. DFID is currently reviewing how we can best increase our support to local education, including skills training for disadvantaged young people as part of their Pakistan programme for the next five years. The British Council also supports the development of education in Pakistan and have facilitated 170 school and 50 university links between the UK and Pakistan. Furthermore, 230,000 UK examinations were delivered in Pakistan in 2006 and 8,000 Pakistani students currently study in the UK. We expect these figures to continue to rise.

The Pakistani authorities are making significant efforts to curb cross-border infiltration on the Afghan-Pakistani border, and we recognise their commitment to continue this work. We share their concern about Taliban influence in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and continue to monitor the results of the peace agreements signed with tribal elders in North and South Waziristan. We work closely with the Pakistani authorities on counter-terrorism including capacity-building where the FCO currently spends approximately 34% of their overall overseas counter-terrorism budget. Work also continues in a number of other areas, including exchanges in forensic training, investigating the financing of terrorism and the sharing of crisis management experience.

7 June 2007
