

## Statement on Afghanistan

7 December 2007

The Prime Minister has outlined Britain's future strategy in Afghanistan in a statement to MPs. Mr Brown announced a long-term and "comprehensive" framework for security, political, social and economic development for Afghanistan.

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**PM outlines Afghanistan role**

### Read the statement

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Mr Speaker, with the support I know of the whole House I start by paying tribute to our Armed Forces - both in Afghanistan and elsewhere. They are doing vital work, giving so much every day in dangerous places in the service of our country.

Let me particularly pay tribute to the 86 British servicemen and women who have lost their lives in Afghanistan, 42 of them this year alone. And I know the whole House will join with me in honouring the memory of the fallen, and saluting the courage of our military and our civilian personnel.

And let me on the morning of the capture of Musa Qaleh praise the professionalism and resolve of our forces who have helped defeat the insurgents and in a vital district of Afghanistan restored peace. And let me make it clear at the outset that as part of a coalition we are winning the battle against the insurgency - isolating and eliminating the leadership of the Taliban, not negotiating with them.

For six years, Mr Speaker, 38 countries have come together with the people and Government of Afghanistan to rebuild this failed state, to prevent the return of the Taliban, and to root out Al Qaeda.

And I can tell the House that Britain will continue to meet our obligations, honour our commitments, and discharge our duties to this task and to the people of Afghanistan.

Having been reviewing our strategy since July, I now want to announce the next stage: a long-term and comprehensive framework for security, political, social and economic development for Afghanistan.

This long-term comprehensive framework entails:

First, Afghan ownership: Afghan army, police and Government building on NATO military achievements and taking over responsibility for their own security.

Second, localisation and reconciliation: Afghans building on the creation of a democratic constitution by developing and strengthening their institutions not just at national but at provincial and local level - as we also support their search for political reconciliation.

Third, reconstruction: in what is still one of the poorest countries on earth where only one in three have clean drinking water, where life expectancy is just 43, and where 80 per cent of women cannot read, we will help ensure through reconstruction and development that more Afghan people have an economic stake in their future.

Fourth, to underpin this, greater burden sharing by all partners and allies: each of us playing our part - as hard-headed realists not idealists - in the long haul to help the Afghans themselves govern and secure their own land ----- and together shifting our emphasis from short term stabilisation to long term development.

### Dismantling the insurgency

Mr Speaker, the foundation now and in the future for our comprehensive framework of support for Afghanistan is military support for

the Afghan Government against the Taliban-led insurgency, and denying Al Qaeda a base from which to launch attacks on the world.

Throughout last winter, Taliban propagandists repeatedly promised a 'spring offensive'. Instead, it is the British and other NATO forces, together with the Afghan army, who have taken the initiative --- driving the insurgents and extremists out of their hiding places; preventing them from regrouping and attacking the areas around the provincial capitals where stability is taking hold.

It is this military success that has preserved Afghanistan's emerging democracy - a constitution, fragile but still intact; a free media; and a changing society where unlike six years ago when women were banned from education, from work, from virtually all of public life, now there is a higher proportion of women MPs in Afghanistan than in many western countries and five million children are at school - two million of them girls once denied education.

Mr Speaker, we need to hold and to reinforce what together we have achieved. So Britain will maintain a strong military force in Afghanistan of around today's figure of 7,800. It is a contribution second in size only to America. And we will increase our support for our forces: I can announce today, fully funded from the Reserve, 150 new protected patrol vehicles specially procured for Afghanistan -- bringing to 400 the total of new protected vehicles bought in the last 18 months for Iraq and Afghanistan. We will combine this with increasing the number of Sea King helicopters in Afghanistan and through NATO negotiating new contracts for hiring commercial helicopters to move routine freight, freeing up military helicopters for military tasks.

But because we know that military success is only one part of the framework - a necessary but not sufficient condition for progress - we will train Afghan forces to take ownership of their own security.

Next year we will aim for 70,000 trained Afghan soldiers, 20,000 more than now, supported by a rising number of British trainers and mentors - 340, part of an overall NATO training force of over 6,000. And already the Afghan Army is proving itself in Musa Qaleh.

But the challenge of supporting an Afghan lead on security goes wider than the armed forces to include the police and courts and prisons. Here we are dealing with decades of failure and corruption, and progress has been slow. By March 2008 there will be over 800 international police trainers, including 65 British, and this must be matched with a wider effort across civil society - which we will continue to support - on judges, courts and prisons ---- working with the grain of Afghan traditions but within international norms. And one way forward is to increase our support for community defence initiatives, where local volunteers are recruited to defend homes and families modeled on traditional Afghan 'arbakai'.

### **Governance and political reconciliation**

To ensure that longer term political and economic objectives are the guiding force behind the security campaign, we have brought the British civilian and military personnel together into a co-located headquarters - and we will continue to strengthen their integration, and at the same time recruit and deploy more specialists who speak the local languages and understand the tribal dynamics.

But again the Afghans themselves must take the lead in improving local and national government, and I saw on my recent visit the scale of the challenge but also the opportunity, and the importance of our support. I can announce today that from our Afghanistan aid programme, which has already spent £490 million pounds in six years, Britain will fund two additional programmes. First, to help the Afghans create stronger provincial and local governance - including building the capacity of the Directorate of Local Governance and supporting civil society groups to hold local government to account. And second, more financial help this year for the National Solidarity Programme which builds the capacity of local communities to run their own development projects. And as a measure of the importance we attach for stability to building local capacity we will immediately move local infrastructure projects forward in Musa Qaleh. This will include a cash-for-work programme for up to 10,000 people and plans to rebuild and refurbish the district centre, the main high school and four mosques.

Mr Speaker, our objective is to defeat the insurgency by isolating and eliminating their leadership. I make it clear that we will not enter into any negotiations with these people. As I have also made clear on countless occasions - most recently in Afghanistan - our objective is to root out those preaching and practising violence and murder in support of men and women of peace. But President Karzai's message to former insurgents is that if they are prepared to renounce violence and abide by the constitution and respect basic human rights. then there is a place for them in the legitimate society and economy of Afghanistan. He and his Ministers told me this

week that already some 5,000 fighters have laid down their arms. And we will support the Government in their efforts to reconcile all parties to Afghanistan's democratic constitution.

Mr Speaker, we know also that Afghanistan will never be stable without the constructive engagement of its neighbours. During my visit, President Karzai agreed with me on the need for greater regional cooperation. We continue to work with the Afghan and Pakistan governments, the G8 and others, to help bring stability across the Afghan-Pakistan border. Iran too must start to play a more constructive role. And I urged President Karzai to turn the current ad hoc meetings and structures into more substantive mechanisms to bring stability and security to the region.

### **Economic development**

Mr Speaker, the third priority is reconstruction and development - always at its most challenging where poverty is combined with insecurity and insurgency but a strong long-term commitment to which is vital for the Afghan Government in taking responsibility for the future of their country.

So I can announce to the House today that, in total, Britain will make available £450 million pounds in development and stabilisation assistance for Afghanistan between 2009 and 2012, covering both short and long term priorities.

When I was in Afghanistan and met local business leaders, President Karzai and I agreed a comprehensive plan - to be taken forward jointly by the Afghan and British governments and the Aga Khan Development Network - to attract private sector investment into the country and stimulate new businesses. A new Growth Fund, starting with an initial £30 million pounds from Britain, will kick-start the development of a basic legal and regulatory framework, build government capacity to involve the private sector in providing public services, and pilot business training programmes. This will be led by a council of Ministers, business representatives and other experts, who will build contacts with the private sector inside Afghanistan and abroad, advise the government on how to increase investment and economic growth, and monitor the progress being made.

Britain is also providing an additional £10 million pounds for small loans, that will be of special help particularly to women, to start up or expand businesses - and 70 per cent of the initial applicants have so far been women.

Our long term objective is to support Afghanistan's own National Development Strategy by channelling our aid through the Afghan Government - the best route to achieving sustainable progress and the best value for money ---- and doing so on a long term basis, helping the Afghans plan ahead and with good governance focus on their own priorities: economic growth, health and education, and rural livelihoods.

But we also recognise the need for short term, high impact stabilisation projects - better roads, more reliable power supplies, clean water and sanitation - which make an immediate difference to the lives of ordinary Afghans and show them the benefits of improved security and governance. Part of the £450 million pounds I announce today will help fund Britain's new cross-government Stabilisation Unit which has Afghanistan as its first priority --- and with a global budget of £260 million pounds over the next three years will drive forward reconstruction projects and provide expert civilian support to rebuild basic services.

### **Counter-Narcotics**

Afghans cannot hope for stability while the poison of the narcotics trade continues to flourish, so Britain - Afghanistan's lead partner nation on counter-narcotics - continues to support the Afghan authorities, providing £90 million pounds this year to help them in their long term efforts against the drugs trade.

While the situation with the poppy crop in Helmand is difficult, it must be our aim to match progress in the rest of Afghanistan - where the number of poppy-free provinces has increased from 6 to 13 - through a combination of stronger governance, targeted eradication, disruption of traffickers, strengthening the justice system, and promoting legitimate agriculture.

### **Conclusion**

Mr Speaker, we will continue to work with our partners who have proved steadfast in Afghanistan, and I welcome the recent announcements from Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Estonia that they will maintain or increase their troop

announcements from Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Estonia that they will maintain or increase their troop numbers. This progress must, I believe, now be matched by contributions from other countries in NATO, the EU and beyond. And we are talking to all our partners to address the immediate needs for more training teams for the Afghan security forces, especially the police, and - with a number of countries - detailed talks on more support helicopters. Where countries are unable to deploy their own troops or equipment, we are urging them to look at innovative ways to burden share and help fund those who can.

Having described the challenges we face in Afghanistan, I have set out our long term commitment: to build on the military progress made so far by helping the Afghans take greater leadership across security, governance, and economic development. And because this priority and the need for a more consistent, integrated, and more co-ordinated international approach are now recognised across our partners, Britain continues to push for the next step in this process: the appointment of a strong UN envoy to bring greater coherence across the international effort in security, governance and development - and in relations with the Afghan government.

Mr Speaker, Britain will continue to fulfil our obligations to the Afghan people and the international community. We will support the Afghan army, police and government as they progressively take over greater responsibility for their own security. And we will work with our international partners and help the Afghans themselves strengthen their stability, foster democracy, and build prosperity.

At all times we will support the hard work, dedication, professional and courage of our Armed Forces who are doing everything in their power to defeat terrorism and lay the foundations of a stable and secure future for Afghanistan.

I commend this statement to the House.