



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**Reconstructing
Afghanistan:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fourth Report of
Session 2007–08**

**Third Special Report of Session
2007–08**

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International Development Committee

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Third Special Report

On 14 February 2008 the International Development Committee published its Fourth Report of Session 2007–08, *Reconstructing Afghanistan*, HC 65-I. On 21 April 2008 we received the Government’s response to the Report. It is reproduced as an Appendix to this Special Report.

In the Government Response, the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations are in bold text. The Government’s response is in plain text.

Appendix: Government response

DFID welcomes the International Development Committee’s positive report on our programme in Afghanistan. We are pleased that the Committee fully supports the UK’s long-term commitment to Afghanistan. We welcome the Committee’s clear acknowledgement of both the progress achieved to date in Afghanistan and the challenges for the future. We agree with the majority of the Committee’s recommendations, and in most cases are already addressing the issues raised. Our response to each recommendation is set out below.

We welcome the Committee’s strong endorsement of an increasing “Afghanisation of development”. It is helpful that, having heard evidence from the Afghan Government, other donors, and civil society, the Committee fully supports our use of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund as a mechanism for supporting the Afghan Government’s budget, building Afghan capacity, and ensuring an Afghanistan-wide approach. We also welcome the Committee’s support for the UK’s civilian/military work in Helmand, our broad-based approach to counter-narcotics, and our support to sub-national governance.

DFID Afghanistan is developing its Country Assistance Plan 2008-11 over the next few months. We will take the Committee’s recommendations fully into account as we discuss our future support to Afghanistan with the Afghan Government, other donors, and other UK Government Departments. We recognise the need for more coordinated and effective international support to Afghanistan, which puts the Afghan Government in the lead. We will continue to work closely with other donors towards improved aid effectiveness.

The importance of being in Afghanistan

[Paragraph 10] We fully support the continuing commitment of the UK Government, in partnership with the Government and people of Afghanistan, to help to bring peace and security to Afghanistan and to promote political reform and reconstruction and development. We accept that the commitment, in terms of development assistance, is likely to last at least a generation. As one of the poorest countries in the world, with continuing humanitarian needs, Afghanistan should remain a major focus for DFID.

We welcome the Committee’s support for UK commitment in Afghanistan. As the Prime Minister announced to the House of Commons in December, we believe the best way for

the UK to support the Afghan Government and people is through a long-term and comprehensive framework. Afghanistan is a key UK priority for reconstruction and development support. The UK signed a ten year Development Partnership Agreement with the Afghan Government at the 2006 London Conference, and DFID has set out its funding to Afghanistan for the next four years.

[Paragraph 15] It is important that the job of helping to bring security to Afghanistan, in which over 7,000 British troops are engaged, is given full support by the British public. We recognise the strong UK media interest in this involvement given that British troops are putting their lives on the line. While acknowledging that continuing insecurity threatens to set back progress, we are also conscious that the media focus on this has meant that achievements in political reform, economic growth and in the provision of basic services are not getting the attention they deserve. We recommend that DFID's media strategy for Afghanistan is strengthened to ensure that development achievements in Afghanistan are given the press coverage in the UK which they merit.

We agree with this recommendation. Work has already started on strengthening the UK Government's efforts to ensure that development achievements in Afghanistan are given more press coverage in the UK. As part of a cross-governmental media strategy, DFID is providing additional resources to work on communications. There is now an additional DFID Press Officer located in the British Embassy Press Hub in Kabul, and a new Press Officer post within the DFID Press Office in London, focusing primarily on Afghanistan. These new resources will help improve our ability to effectively communicate development achievements in Afghanistan to the UK media and public.

[Paragraph 17] Expectations need to be managed so that they accord more realistically with the capacity—both of the Government of Afghanistan and of the donor community—to deliver. Greater publicity of successes and of the nature and scope of DFID's work in Afghanistan would help in this regard. We recommend that DFID develop a new communications strategy in Afghanistan to ensure accurate information about the scale of its work is widely circulated.

We agree with this recommendation. DFID and other Government Departments have agreed a new cross-departmental communication strategy, part of which is aimed at raising awareness amongst ordinary Afghans of the UK's support to Afghanistan. DFID is also helping to strengthen the Government of Afghanistan's ability to communicate to its own media and people. DFID has recently provided £3 million to UNDP to help build the capacity of the Office of the President's media centre. It is important that the people of Afghanistan recognise the efforts made by the Government of Afghanistan to lead the reconstruction and development of their own country. DFID will also continue to organise press conferences in conjunction with key Afghan ministries to inform the Afghan population about the UK's support to the Afghan Government.

[Paragraph 19] We believe it is fundamental to the rebuilding of Afghanistan that international commitments made by the Government of Afghanistan and by donors on the rights of women are honoured and given greater priority.

DFID is committed to supporting the Afghan Government to meet its national and international commitments on women's rights. We recognise this is a long-term agenda

which requires a locally sensitive approach driven by Afghan men and women. DFID is supporting the Afghan Government and local NGOs (through Womankind International and UNIFEM) to tackle issues related to women's rights and eliminating violence against women. DFID Afghanistan is currently developing a new Country Assistance Plan (2008–11) and will use detailed analysis of gender issues and inequality to determine how we will address women's empowerment in our future programmes. We will spell out the specifics of our response in the Gender Equality Action Plan, the DFID-wide tool to ensure DFID addresses gender issues.

Conditions of service for UK staff in Afghanistan

[Paragraph 24] The work DFID staff undertake in environments such as Afghanistan is demanding and context-specific. We believe that they should be given a level of support which is commensurate with the responsibilities they are asked to bear, including an appropriate level of language, cultural and security training.

DFID takes the security of its staff and consultants very seriously. All DFID staff and consultants attend a Hostile Environment Training (HET) course in the UK prior to visiting Afghanistan or starting a posting. All new staff and consultants in country receive briefings on arrival from the DFID Security Manager and from the Embassy's Senior Overseas Security Manager (SOSM). These cover the use of security equipment, the security situation across the country, and an explanation of security procedures. During their first week they complete the three hour in-country security induction course, which covers first aid, vehicle protocol, incident protocol and other security matters. They repeat this training every six months while in country. The SOSM provides weekly security updates for all staff and monthly security awareness sessions with locally-engaged Afghan staff. The DFID Security Manager provides weekly security updates. DFID Afghanistan recently commissioned an independent report on security which has provided some useful recommendations which we are now working to implement.

Appropriate language and cultural understanding are important assets for operating effectively in Afghanistan. Dari classes are available on arrival in post for all UK-based staff and English lessons are available for all Afghan staff. It is currently DFID policy to offer formal full-time pre-deployment language training only for postings in those countries where the formal or informal working language of the government is not English. DFID Afghanistan appreciates the value of cultural induction and will look into the feasibility of offering Afghan cultural awareness training to UK-based staff and British cultural awareness training to Staff Appointed in Country.

[Paragraph 26] We agree that Afghanistan should be a priority for DFID. We understand that consideration is being given to how best to encourage staff to work in insecure environments and to increasing the length of postings. We believe that this is an important issue if DFID intends to remain in countries such as Afghanistan since there is a limited pool of staff who will undertake such postings. Current working conditions are comparable with those of other donors but consideration should be given to the impact of six-week periods of work on overall efficiency. We would urge DFID to encourage those staff who gain experience of working in Afghanistan to return to similar posts after a sufficient break so as to build up a cadre of DFID staff with experience of working in insecure environments.

DFID Afghanistan has been looking at how best to maximise the contribution of those willing to undertake a posting in Afghanistan. The maximum posting length in Afghanistan is currently 2 years. Staff are not allowed to move from one Afghanistan/Iraq posting to another without a six month gap in between. We recently commissioned a light-touch survey into posting length. This surveyed both present and past DFID Afghanistan staff. DFID Afghanistan is looking to maintain the flexibility to enable us to respond to operational necessity whilst ensuring that professional health advice is followed. All DFID Afghanistan staff now complete pre-deployment personal awareness training. This includes an in-depth session with a CAPITA psychologist to discuss their suitability for such a posting. This training is also mandatory for staff wishing to extend beyond 12 months. This ensures that only staff who are and remain suitable for working in Afghanistan are deployed.

Since the attacks on foreign targets near the DFID houses in November 2007 and on the Serena Hotel in January 2008, the opportunities for social life outside the Embassy have been severely curtailed. This has impacted on the opportunities staff have to get "down time". In this climate, it is judged that it would not be appropriate to extend the length of the work/breather break cycle beyond six weeks on, two weeks off.

[Paragraph 28] We welcome the approval of an increased number of helicopters in Afghanistan for the military effort announced by the Prime Minister on 12 December 2007. We would also welcome an update on the deployment of those helicopters and confirmation of how much increased effective capacity will be available. In addition we noted the use we made of US operated helicopters in Helmand and would like to know if they will still be available after the increase in the UK contribution.

We welcome the Committee's acknowledgement of the efforts made by the Ministry of Defence to improve the provision of helicopter availability for UK forces in Afghanistan. The six additional Merlin helicopters purchased from Denmark are intended to supplement the Merlin fleet in Iraq by between one and two aircraft on an enduring basis. This has allowed us to free up our remaining Sea King helicopters from Iraq, which we have upgraded and redeployed to Afghanistan. The eight Mk3 Chinooks are expected to be delivered for operations from late 2009 to 2010; it is expected that an average of two of these aircraft will be available at any one time to supplement the Chinook fleet currently in Afghanistan. The US has provided a valuable source of rotary airlift for UK forces in Helmand, and we remain able to bid for the use of these assets as appropriate.

[Paragraph 29] We also note that DFID and Embassy employees are hindered in carrying out their jobs in a timely fashion when they are subject to lengthy waits for secure transport. Given the priority which the UK Government has placed on Afghanistan, we consider that appropriate logistical support for the civilian effort is essential. We recommend the early provision of a dedicated aeroplane for the use of DFID and other Embassy staff to carry out their work in Afghanistan.

Civilian staff have been hindered by the lack of predictable air transport. The current leased aircraft has been renewed for a further 12 months from April 2008. Ministers have agreed the overall 2008/09 Stabilisation Aid Fund allocation for Afghanistan. Within this allocation, Ministers will consider the purchase and running of a dedicated Embassy aeroplane.

The UK military is also strongly supportive of the comprehensive approach in Afghanistan and makes every effort to accommodate the requests of FCO and DFID staff for the use of military transport throughout the country within the constraints of the military requirements.

DFID's programme in Afghanistan

[Paragraph 31] We welcome the allocation of additional funds for development and stabilisation assistance across Afghanistan. We wish to be given more details on the allocation of the funding in response to this report.

The Prime Minister announced in December a new commitment of £450 million for development and stabilisation assistance between 2009 and 2012. This comprises £345 million DFID funding (£115 million each financial year) and £105 million from the new inter-departmental Stabilisation Aid Fund.

The Prime Minister's statement set out a renewed UK focus on development and stabilisation work. On development, this includes:

- £30 million over three years for a new Afghanistan Investment Climate Facility to help remove obstacles to investment and make Afghanistan a better place to do business
- Further support for the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), capacity building support on tax and budget management and on private sector development
- Stronger support to provincial and local governance—including £1.3 million support to the Independent Directorate of Local Governance this year, and an additional £10 million funding for the National Solidarity Programme
- New programmes to support civil service reform, a new National Justice Programme, conflict resolution, civil society, and urban governance and service delivery in Helmand
- £10 million further support to provide small loans to help start up or expand small businesses (through the Afghan Government's Microfinance Investment Support Facility to Afghanistan)
- Further support for programmes on horticulture and livestock, and agriculture and rural development in Helmand.

DFID's programme in Afghanistan over the next five years is being developed in support of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (April 2008), and in coordination with other donors. This will be outlined in DFID Afghanistan's Country Assistance Plan, to be published later this year.

Stabilisation assistance over the next year will be funded through the Stabilisation Aid Fund and will focus around six key areas: counter-narcotics, strategic communications, political reconciliation, rule of law, governance, and Helmand area-based stabilisation.

Since the Prime Minister's statement in December, stabilisation activities have continued to extend work beyond Lashkar Gah to Gereshk, Sangin, and Musa Qala. Stabilisation assistance in Musa Qala has centred around three principal elements: quick impact projects, supporting the Afghan Government to deliver services, and creating regional and district Afghan ownership of the stabilisation and development process. Progress has been made in Musa Qala. For example, quick impact projects through a local NGO have cleared rubbish and improved basic sanitation, and the main school has now reopened after extensive refurbishment, with 500 pupils and around 30 teachers.

[Paragraph 38] We agree that DFID's objectives should be to help build and support a viable sovereign state in Afghanistan and that the majority of DFID funds should therefore continue to be directed through the Government of Afghanistan. The priority for donors should be the "Afghanisation of development"—building up Afghan capacity at all levels for successful development and reconstruction. However DFID must also continue to ensure that funding is available for NGOs in their key advocacy tasks including helping to establish a robust civil society capable of holding the government to account. DFID should also ensure that NGOs promoting women's rights are adequately funded.

We agree with this recommendation. We welcome the Committee's support for Afghan-led development and for DFID's policy of channelling the majority of our funding through the Afghan Government. DFID will be looking at how best to further support and strengthen civil society in Afghanistan as we develop a new Country Assistance Plan (CAP) for Afghanistan this year. In the mean time, DFID continues to provide funding centrally for NGOs, for which NGOs working in Afghanistan are able to apply. Our CAP will be underpinned by detailed analysis of gender issues and inequality, which will help us to determine how best to address these issues through our policies and programmes.

[Paragraph 40] We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to continue to work towards International Monetary Fund revenue mobilisation targets as a means to ensuring that its future funding base is secure. We believe that DFID's assistance in this respect is vital to progress.

We welcome the Committee's focus on domestic revenue mobilisation in Afghanistan. At 7% of GDP, revenue mobilisation rates are amongst the lowest in the world. This has made it difficult for the Government to cover its operating costs and has led to over-reliance on external assistance for support to the national budget.

DFID has provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Finance on tax policy and administration reform since 2004. This programme has been successful in helping the Afghan Government build technical capacity on tax administration reform (including the establishment of the Large Taxpayer Office) and achieve the 2006/07 revenue mobilisation targets in the IMF programme.

Despite these achievements, the environment for increased domestic revenue mobilisation remains tough and there are indications that the Afghan Government may have missed the

latest IMF revenue target for 2007/08. The current DFID tax reform programme completes in June 2008 and will be succeeded by a three year, £11 million follow-up programme. DFID will also continue to work with the IMF (and other major donors) to effectively lobby the Afghan Government on the importance of ensuring progress on tax reforms

[Paragraph 44] We do not consider that the UK Government's development programme is unduly slanted towards Helmand at present. 80% of DFID's funding is channelled through the Government of Afghanistan. The UK effort in Afghanistan is thus a "whole of Afghanistan" one. Misunderstandings about this need to be countered in Afghanistan, and in the UK, by improved media strategies.

We agree with this recommendation. DFID has been working with the FCO and MOD on the UK Government's cross-departmental communication strategy which aims to improve the balance of reporting, to ensure that the civilian elements of the UK's work in Afghanistan are given appropriate coverage in the British, international, and Afghan media.

[Paragraph 45] Given the UK leadership of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Helmand it is important that sufficient resources are available to ensure that stabilisation and development follow military action speedily. This need not be solely the responsibility of the UK since other donors are present there. DFID should also try to ensure that gains made in more secure provinces are not lost for lack of funds and should coordinate with other donors more effectively in this regard.

We agree that sufficient resources should be made available to support stabilisation and development in Helmand. It is also important that stabilisation and development planning is coordinated with military planning, to ensure that both areas of operation are as effective as possible. An example of effective joined-up planning was the joint Afghan and UK, civilian and military stabilisation plan for Musa Qala, which was prepared alongside the planning for the military operation. This resulted in a more immediate and effective stabilisation effort in Musa Qala after the military operation had concluded.

DFID's policy of channelling a high proportion of our aid through Afghan Government systems promotes a system of equitable distribution. We will continue to lobby and coordinate with other donors as we discuss with them our support to the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS).

Donor coordination

[Paragraph 53] We look forward to receiving confirmation of the start of the maternity training programme in the unit built with UK funds in Lashkar Gah.

Ibu Sina, the main implementing partner of the Ministry of Health, started the training programme on 1 March 2008.

[Paragraph 59] We note that, according to the Peace Dividend Trust, out of a total of US\$1.36 billion spent between March 2005 and March 2006 from major donors the local impact was around 31% or the equivalent of \$424 million. Data provided by the Peace Dividend Trust for 2005 also suggests that, although US Official Development Assistance was six times as large as UK ODA, its local impact was only twice as much.

DFID is a strong advocate of aid effectiveness, and is leading by example. We align our support to Afghan Government priorities, channelling 80% of our funding through Government systems, and have untied all our development assistance. We discuss aid effectiveness issues regularly with the international community in Kabul, and will continue to lobby for more aid to be untied and to be reflected in the Afghan Government's budget.

[Paragraph 60] Development agencies need to come to international agreements among themselves about what constitutes good practice for post-war reconstruction and development in fragile states, especially when they are working in partnership with the military. The development community needs a body of agreed principles every bit as much as the military.

We agree with this recommendation. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is the key forum for agreeing best practice within the donor community. DFID has played a leading role within the DAC to ensure that donors address the specific challenges of working in fragile states. The "Principles for good international engagement in fragile states and situations" were agreed at the DAC's High Level Meeting in April 2007. In the last few months, DAC donors have met to take forward the "Whole of Government Approach" through discussions on integrated planning, public financial management, and security sector reform in fragile states. The Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, to be held in September 2008, will include a half-day roundtable on "Aid effectiveness in fragile states and conflict situations".

In addition, DFID and the Stabilisation Unit participate in regular civilian-military exercises and work closely with military units about to deploy into theatre. This helps to build our understanding of best practice and to contribute to exercises and discussions with international partners on working effectively with the military in fragile states.

[Paragraph 63] The international community committed themselves to the Afghanistan Compact under which they have agreed to provide an increased proportion of their assistance through the core government budget. While DFID is exemplary in this respect, other donors are not. This means that the Government of Afghanistan does not "own" the development and reconstruction process and that the local impact of donor assistance is greatly reduced. DFID's efforts at improving donor coordination in this regard are commendable but the results are currently unsatisfactory. The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund has been shown to be effective. The use of parallel structures to deliver assistance by the US does nothing to build up Afghan capacity, and will therefore lengthen the time-period for which aid is necessary. Such policies are also contrary to Paris Declaration principles and commitments made under the Afghanistan Compact. We believe DFID should make renewed efforts to encourage the US and other donors to channel a greater proportion of their funding through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund.

We agree that the two-thirds of international aid spent "off-budget" is creating parallel structures and undermining the Afghan Government. DFID discusses aid effectiveness issues regularly with other major donors in Kabul. Recognising the constraints other donors face in delivering development assistance (legal and Congressional constraints in the case of the US), we consistently encourage other donors to do more to support National Programmes, to fund through the Government's budget where possible, and to

coordinate effectively with other donors. Most importantly, we want to see the Afghan Government taking a lead in directing how donor funding is spent. DFID supports and encourages the Government to do this. We hope that the new UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Kai Eide, will take a strong lead on donor coordination and will help the Afghan Government send clear messages to donors.

[Paragraph 64] We urge the UK to use its leadership role in the Provincial Reconstruction Team to encourage donors to provide more resources to Afghan government health services in Helmand.

We have been actively lobbying our PRT partners and an Estonian Health Adviser joined the PRT in the first week of March 2008. The Afghanistan National Development Strategy proposes increased donor investment in health, which DFID welcomes and we are lobbying for a new investment window in the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund to facilitate the provision of additional aid for this sector from a range of donors, which should flow to all provinces including Helmand.

A high level UN coordinator

[Paragraph 67] We are disappointed that sufficient international momentum could not be gained for the appointment of a high level joint UN, NATO, EU coordinator for Afghanistan. Criticisms by the Afghan Government of the UK and the international community's efforts seem to be becoming more frequent. Problems of donor coordination are leading to a proliferation of disparate projects, low local impact of funding and creating a poor impression in Afghanistan about donors' lack of agreement. We believe such outcomes are harmful to the international effort in Afghanistan and may set back progress in reconstruction. If the international community will not agree the appointment of a super-envoy, ways must be found to ensure that the role of UN Special Representative is properly resourced and that the incumbent has sufficient weight in dealing with partner countries. We hope that the Government of Afghanistan can recognise the long-term benefits for them of the UN appointing a strong representative to improve coordination.

We agree that strong co-ordination of the international community's effort is vital to provide effective support to the Afghan Government. We welcome the UN Secretary-General's appointment of Kai Eide as the new UN Special Representative (SRSG). We welcomed the adoption in March of a strong Security Council Resolution (1806) which renewed the UNAMA's (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) mandate by 12 months. This resolution explicitly spells out key responsibilities of the mission and the Special Representative—to lead international civilian effort in support of the Afghan Government; to strengthen co-operation with ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) and to undertake political outreach. This robust mandate should assist SRSG Eide to coordinate international activities, including aid, in support of Government of Afghanistan priorities. It will be important that he works as closely as possible with NATO and the European Union in supporting President Karzai and the Afghan Government. The international conference on Afghanistan, to be hosted by France in June 2008, will provide an opportunity to renew international community and Afghan Government commitment to progress in Afghanistan.

Security conditions

[Paragraph 73] We note the UK Commander of Taskforce Helmand's explanation that the key objective of the military was to gain the consent of the local population and to marginalise the insurgents and starve them of their support base. We also note that most people in Afghanistan do not support the insurgency so that influence-winning activities are more important than overt military force. Cooperation and understanding between NATO forces and the Afghan Government and armed forces are crucial to success.

We acknowledge and agree that influence-winning activities are at the core of the UK Government's approach.

[Paragraph 74] We would like to pay tribute to the commitment and sacrifice being made by UK forces in this difficult environment. We were disappointed by the tone and timing of the recent criticisms made by President Karzai of UK military operations in Helmand, particularly as these concerns were not raised with us by the Government of Afghanistan during our visit. We are concerned that such comments risk undermining the support of the British people for the UK's long-term commitment to Afghanistan.

The UK remains committed to the long term reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. Good progress has been made. The Foreign Secretary and US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, visited Afghanistan on 7 February 2008. This long-planned visit reaffirmed the strong relationship of both the UK and US with Afghanistan.

At the joint press conference during the visit, President Karzai restated his respect and gratitude for British development and military assistance—saying he had been misquoted in earlier media reports on 25 January where he had appeared critical of the British.

[Paragraph 77] Increasing insecurity and the continuing insurgency are threatening the reconstruction effort in many parts of Afghanistan. The relationship between security and development is a key determinant of success in post-conflict environments. While it is important that the NATO forces remain in Afghanistan to help provide the security which is a necessary precondition for reconstruction, it is clear to us that without tangible improvements in people's lives the insurgency will not be defeated.

We agree that delivering tangible improvement in people's lives is a key element in defeating the insurgency.

[Paragraph 80] We believe that greater international pressure should be placed on Pakistan to control more effectively the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Unless this happens the Taliban will have a steady supply of recruits and the international effort to bring stability and security to Afghanistan will be futile.

Countering the growing threat from violent extremism in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is vital for the success of the international community's efforts in Afghanistan. The UK has worked closely with the Government of Pakistan to tackle this threat and we are grateful for their efforts to date. But we recognise the importance of

further progress. We are working to deepen our cooperation with Pakistan on counter-terrorism, and look to couple this with support for the longer-term economic and institutional development necessary to underpin any lasting solution in the FATA. We look forward to working with the new Government of Pakistan to drive forward this vital agenda.

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the UK troop contribution

[Paragraph 82] We support the Government's commitment to bringing security and stability to Afghanistan and commend the work of our armed forces there.

We welcome the Committee's support, and share in commending the work of the UK Armed Forces in Afghanistan.

[Paragraph 84] We support the conclusion of the Defence Committee that the excessive use of national caveats increases the risk of impairing the effectiveness of the International Security Assistance Force and will increase the length of time which NATO troops are required to be in Afghanistan. The UK Government should continue to press contributing nations to reduce these to facilitate more effective ISAF operations.

The UK Government recognises the effect that caveats have on the operational utility of other nations' forces to the International Security Assistance Force, but also notes that these caveats are often a necessity deriving from the political climate in a given country. Nevertheless, we continue, where appropriate, to take every available opportunity to press for the removal of unnecessary caveats in Ministerial summits and bilateral meetings.

[Paragraph 85] We are concerned that civilian-military co-operation is weakened because UK military commanders serve only a six-month tour of duty while the civilians are in post for longer periods. We ask the Secretary of State to discuss with the Ministry of Defence the feasibility of extending UK military commanders' tours of duty in Helmand to, say, one year.

The MOD is currently addressing issues around campaign continuity and the civilian-military relationship. The six month rotation of Commander Task Force Helmand and front line forces is considered to be vital for the maintenance of combat effectiveness. But one proposed solution is the increase of tour lengths for key civilian-military interlocutors, and the staggered rotation of selected staff posts. For example some officers in key appointments are already serving for nine or twelve months.

Security Sector Reform

[Paragraph 87] There has been significant progress in the building up of an effective Afghan National Army. There is still some way to go before it is a fully capable force and we commend the role played by the UK to date in training and mentoring.

We agree with the Committee's comments on the strong progress made by the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the role played by UK forces in this improvement. The seven Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) which the UK is providing have

proved to be a key tool in improving the capability of the ANA. The key role that the ANA played in the liberation of Musa Qala is an example of the results now being seen.

[Paragraph 91] Progress in creating an effective and legitimate Afghan National Police force has been slow. Corruption and bribery are rife and this is hampering acceptance of the police as a force for good. There are insufficient police trainers and there is no clear consensus about what type of police force—paramilitary or civilian—is required. We believe that the issue of remit must be clarified as quickly as possible.

A clear vision shared by both the Afghan Government and the international community of the type of police force required is an essential next step for policing in Afghanistan. Work on such a vision was commissioned through the International Policing Co-ordination Board at the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board in January 2008. Numbers of UK policing experts in Afghanistan are rising, with a particular focus on providing support to the European Union Police Mission to Afghanistan (EUPOL), working with the US-led policing programme and providing tactical mentoring in Helmand province. There is undoubtedly more to be done, and we will continue to work with the Afghan Government and our international partners to identify where the UK can add the most value.

[Paragraph 94] We believe that the new EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) is a step in the right direction in that it makes policing a shared EU responsibility. However we are disappointed that progress has been so slow. This mission should ensure that the recruitment, training and retention of female police officers is given appropriate priority within the overall imperative of building an efficient and effective police force.

The EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) has the full support of the UK government. We believe that combining the effort of member states is the best way to maximise the impact of the EU contribution to police reform in Afghanistan. The mission is showing real signs of progress. EUPOL's 2008 Action Plan builds consideration of gender issues, including the employment of female officers, comprehensively into the delivery of the mission's strategic objectives.

[Paragraph 96] We have reservations about the suggestion of arming local communities to defend themselves. While we accept that there are many people who already have weapons, we believe that it is important that donors do not encourage or exacerbate factionalism and tribalism.

The approach to improving community-level security is being developed by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, as part of broader efforts to improve relations between communities and the Government of Afghanistan, in those areas affected by the insurgency. Under this approach, security is one of several issues that the Afghan Government and communities will seek agreement on, including improvements in the delivery of services and reconstruction assistance by the Government, and undertakings by community leadership to reduce poppy cultivation, improve security in partnership with ANSF (Afghanistan National Security Forces) and liaise regularly with local Government representatives. Under this Government of Afghanistan lead, the risks of factionalism and tribalism will be reduced.

The justice sector

[Paragraph 100] Violence against women is still pervasive and without a functioning formal justice sector threatens to set back progress made thus far in the realisation of women's rights. A key part of protecting women's rights is ensuring they have proper access to justice. Funding for the justice sector is disproportionately low and we believe its reform should now be a priority for donors and for the Government of Afghanistan. We recommend that the UK Government play its part in this through increased funding for the justice sector from the Stabilisation Aid Fund. We accept that changing the values of society is a long-term process; however, we reiterate that the Government of Afghanistan should seek to honour its commitments to international human rights law in respect of women. Consideration should also be given to inviting Islamic countries to advise the Government of Afghanistan on establishing a justice system that would meet the needs of women, children and minorities and protect their fundamental human rights.

The UK is increasing its funding to the justice sector, with an additional £0.5 million in 2007/08 added to the £2 million already committed. These funds will be channelled through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund to a new Justice Sector Reform Project. This project will concentrate on delivering improvements in human and physical infrastructure in the state justice system, and extending provision of legal aid to support greater access to justice. The project will also provide training in legal awareness to community leaders to enhance knowledge of people's rights and the justice system. The project will facilitate exchanges between Afghan justice sector officials and those from other Islamic countries, to increase Afghan understanding of how Islamic law can operate with respect to international human rights standards, among other issues. DFID is working closely with the new project to maximise the opportunities for it to address the particular needs of women and children.

Sub-national governance

[Paragraph 112] The Government of Afghanistan has recognised the need to address sub-national governance and to make the existing system work better. To this end the Independent Directorate for Local Governance has been established and has set out for itself an ambitious programme. We believe that clarification of the role of provincial governors and the establishment of local tax-raising powers should be a priority. We welcome the allocation of £1.5 million of DFID funding to support the work of the IDLG.

One point of clarification: DFID funding to the IDLG this year will be £1.3 million. During this next year, the Afghan Government will undergo an intensive policy review process for sub-national governance, which will seek to reach consensus on the roles and responsibilities of a range of posts and organisations at the municipal, provincial and district levels. This will include the role of provincial Governors (including the question of whether these should be elected or appointed posts), and the question of local tax-raising powers. Given the unitary nature of the Afghan state under the 2004 Constitution, extensive local revenue-raising authority is unlikely.

[Paragraph 119] Community Development Councils have created elected forums for inclusive community level decision-making. Communities have been empowered and linkages established between neighbourhoods. Funding from the National Solidarity Programme has enabled CDCs to identify needs and acquire funding for specific community priority projects which deliver basic services. Such developments are important for creating an active and engaged civil society. CDCs have also been effective in encouraging the proper involvement of women in local decision-making.

[Paragraph 120] Concerns have been raised about the future of Community Development Councils as the future of their funding mechanism, the National Solidarity Programme, is itself uncertain. We consider that the tangible benefits of CDCs are significant. Decisions about future NSP funds need to be made before current funding expires. Community Development Councils have enabled valuable community level decision-making in a context where the rest of government is highly centralized. Given the limited reach of central government and the need for rural development as part of the counter-narcotics effort, we recommend that the UK Government actively encourage the continuation and formalisation of CDCs in the medium term recognising it will require a significant share of the limited funds under Government of Afghanistan control.

We agree that the Afghan Government's National Solidarity Programme has proved to be very successful in supporting community-led development. The future of Community Development Councils (CDCs) is under considerable scrutiny and discussion within the Afghan Government at present. The World Bank is proposing a third phase of the National Solidarity Programme to provide further support to existing CDCs, and this may include a widening of CDCs' role to articulate communities' priorities in other sectors, such as health and education. The UK and other donors are working closely with the Afghan Government and the World Bank on this issue. The final decision regarding the continuation or formalisation of CDCs rests with the Afghan Government. In parallel, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance will shortly launch a year-long policy process to clarify the Government architecture at the sub-national level. This process will include consideration of CDCs in relation to village councils, which are mandated by the Constitution.

Narcotics and counter-narcotics

[Paragraph 124] Opium poppy production is causally linked to insecurity and corruption in Afghanistan. Suggestions of the involvement in narcotics of high-ranking officials are worrying. We believe greater effort on the part of the President and donors is essential to ensure that involvement in opium poppy production is stamped out at every level of government.

We agree that greater effort is needed to sever links between the narcotics trade and Afghan Government officials. We are working with the Afghan Government to reduce corruption. Donors including DFID and the World Bank presented anti-corruption options in a proposed 'roadmap' to President Karzai's high level Committee on Anti-Corruption. The Policy Action Group—a high level group which includes the Ambassadors from key contributing nations, UN, EU, plus Afghan Cabinet ministers—has endorsed a counter-narcotics action plan which includes identifying officials involved in

narcotics. Mechanisms for holding corrupt officials to account were also endorsed at the most recent Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board meeting in Tokyo in February 2008. In addition, DFID, the World Bank and other donors are supporting public administration and finance reforms to strengthen corruption prevention systems and improve Government performance. The UN is helping the Afghan Government to introduce vetting for senior appointments. DFID and others are also helping to build the capacity of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, which appoints provincial and district leaders.

[Paragraph 131] A key part of any counter-narcotics policy is tackling the traders of opium. Controlling drug trafficking between Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular requires, as a necessary condition, greater knowledge of and control over the borderlands and assistance from the Government of Pakistan.

We agree that tackling the traders of opium must continue to be central to our and the Afghan Government's counter-narcotics policy. We are increasing our dialogue with Pakistan on this issue and are assisting the Government of Afghanistan to have more engagement with their neighbours through the Good Neighbourly Relations Declaration.

[Paragraph 132] We agree with the UK and Afghan Governments that aerial spraying of poppies is not desirable for health and safety reasons and because it risks increasing insecurity in already insecure provinces.

We strongly agree with this conclusion and have no further comment.

[Paragraph 134] Wide-scale eradication has not contributed to a sustainable reduction in poppy cultivation in many provinces. We believe that while eradication has a legitimate role, for example in targeting large landowners, an excessive focus on it and on reducing acreage under poppy cultivation has been at the expense of the creation of qualitative changes in rural livelihood opportunities

We agree that eradication alone will not lead to a sustainable reduction in poppy cultivation. That is why the UK is investing significant resources to support a range of programmes under the Afghan Government's National Drugs Control Strategy, including on legal livelihoods, criminal justice and law enforcement, and communications. We also strongly agree that it is important to look at a number of measures of success in our counter-narcotics work, rather than focusing exclusively on acreage under poppy cultivation. Developing such measures will be a priority for our work in the next year.

Alternative livelihoods

[Paragraph 139] The increase in opium poppy cultivation is directly linked to continuing insecurity in many parts of Afghanistan. Insecurity prevents the development of alternative and sustainable income sources. Poppy cultivation can be an attractive choice in a high risk environment, especially for poor farmers. We believe that expectations that poppy cultivation will be reduced over a short period are misplaced. Given the heavy reliance on poppy cultivation for household income, any enforced dramatic reduction would have significant negative social, political and economic consequences. We welcome the shift in thinking towards a more holistic and

integrated approach to alternatives. We commend the World Bank and DFID for their commitment to undertake research and reformulate policies based on evidence.

We welcome the Committee's conclusion that insecurity is a major driver of poppy cultivation, and its support for our work on establishing an evidence base for policy formulation. We agree that strengthening alternative livelihoods is a long-term agenda that needs to be taken forward in an integrated and holistic way.

[Paragraph 140] We are disappointed that the Counter-Narcotics Trust Fund has not been more successful in its efforts thus far. Given research findings on the need to include a counter-narcotics perspective in all development programmes, consideration should be given to whether a separate counter-narcotics fund is the appropriate mechanism for driving this forward.

We share the Committee's disappointment with the Counter-Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF) and have outlined to the Committee the multiple reasons why success has been so elusive. The multi-stakeholder review we commissioned has led to broad agreement among stakeholders that the Trust Fund needs to be restructured and this process is currently underway. Discussions are ongoing with the Afghan Government on the precise objectives of the CNTF going forward. We strongly agree that these objectives must reinforce, rather than undermine, wider action on counter-narcotics mainstreaming. We also want to see a sunset clause in place to review whether these objectives are being met.

Rural livelihoods

[Paragraph 149] There has been insufficient attention to and funding for the agricultural and livestock sectors which could provide a range of alternatives to poppy cultivation. Improved irrigation would help to increase yields and thus income from agriculture. We would welcome an update on the possibilities of restoring and improving irrigation and drainage systems. The provision of relevant agricultural extension services to farmers could help to reduce poppy cultivation. The UK has long experience of working on agriculture. We recommend that DFID establish a programme to offer technical advice and training in agricultural extension services.

We agree that there is a need to increase donor funds for agriculture. The new Afghanistan National Development Strategy proposes fifteen priority programmes to ensure implementation of its agriculture and rural development strategy. These include specific programmes for irrigation (with a target of 105,000 hectares of new irrigated land by 2018, accompanied by improved on-farm water use efficiency), livestock (leading to a reduction of imports from almost half a million US dollars in 2008 to less than a quarter of a million US dollars by 2012) and agricultural extension (with a view to establishing a research and extension capability).

Further work is needed to develop the detail of these programmes, and we will provide an update to the Committee in due course, including on specific opportunities to improve irrigation and drainage systems. We agree it would be helpful to make use of UK expertise in agriculture where appropriate, and will discuss with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) how best this can be done in support of the Ministry's own planned activities in this area.

[Paragraph 150] Whilst we support DFID’s work with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, ways must be found to support and build capacity in the Ministry of Agriculture so that appropriate programmes in this sector can be developed. In addition, programmes must be devised to ensure that a range of social protection and safety measures are in place. In order to achieve these two goals, donors will need to allocate more funds to this sector—most effectively in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture.

We agree that donor funds for agriculture will be most effectively if spent in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). We also agree that MAIL needs support to develop its programmes and projects. DFID is currently considering how best it can provide further support to the agricultural sector, in the context of our wider response to the new Afghanistan National Development Strategy. This will build on the technical assistance we already provide to MAIL, which includes specific support to programme development and monitoring.

[Paragraph 154] We agree that counter-narcotics strategies need to reach as many poor people as possible and offer income and employment opportunities. We recommend that the UK Government gives greater priority to a multifaceted rural livelihoods approach.

We agree that effective rural livelihoods programming requires a multifaceted approach. We have tried to reflect this in our overall programme which is designed to address a wide range of constraints to legal economic activity. However, we agree there is much more to be done to improve coordination and integration of activities on the ground; this should be a priority going forward.

[Paragraph 155] Microfinance initiatives are an important way of bringing women into the workforce. They may also act as a vehicle for women’s empowerment in Afghanistan. We support attempts to scale up microfinance initiatives under the Government of Afghanistan’s Microfinance Investment and Support Facility. We recommend extending the outreach of microfinance to rural areas to encourage the growth of rural enterprises and the displacement of the role of poppy traders in providing credit.

DFID has recently announced a further contribution of £15 million to the second phase of the Government’s Microfinance and Investment Support Facility in Afghanistan (MISFA). By 2011 it is estimated that MISFA will have provided financial services to more than 625,000 people in at least 30 provinces. After an initial urban bias, MISFA has expanded its rural outreach, with a third of clients now being in rural areas. We will continue to encourage MISFA to do more in this area, with a view to maximising the impact of its activities on poppy cultivation.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

[Paragraph 162] It is important that aid is evenly distributed in Afghanistan based on need and that the donor effort should be a ‘whole of Afghanistan’ effort. We accept that each Provincial Reconstruction Team has its own national funding mechanism which means that some PRTs are better funded than others. This is unavoidable. We do

however believe that there needs to be a robust debate about the continued role of PRTs in more secure provinces. There is a lack of a clearly defined exit strategy for PRTs and accordingly uncertainty amongst communities in Afghanistan as to when and how functions of the PRTs will be transferred over to domestic provincial and local government. If the goal of the international effort is to build up Afghan capacity, PRTs should not perform functions which could be performed by Government of Afghanistan structures. We are mindful of the concerns expressed by NGOs about the need to preserve their humanitarian space and consider this to be an important issue which the donor community needs to take into account.

We agree with the recommendation. In Helmand, the PRT, with DFID, actively encourages and promotes the delivery of services and programmes through national, provincial and district structures. We agree that PRTs should have a clearly defined exit strategy and will work with the Afghan government, NATO, UNAMA, and other donors to reach agreement on how this can be best achieved. We recognise the need to preserve NGOs' humanitarian space and regularly meet with NGOs to ensure we and others take practical steps to maintain this.

The UK effort in Helmand province

[Paragraph 171] We would welcome an update on how the new school being built in Sangin will be staffed and operated.

Construction on the new school continues and is expected to be complete in approximately 3 months. A representative from the Department of Education recently visited Sangin to review progress and consider staffing availability in the area. He will shortly be reporting back to the Provincial Director for Education with options for staffing and operating the school.

[Paragraph 173] The Provincial Reconstruction Team in Helmand is trialling new methods of joint military-civilian cooperation in difficult circumstances. However we note that it is extremely difficult for the civilian teams to move out from the base to meet with local people. This means that the military are often closely involved with the work of DFID and the Stabilisation Unit. We accept that in such an unpredictable security environment this may be necessary but it may mean that DFID's work is viewed by local people as one and the same as that of the military. Where there is still an ongoing insurgency this is potentially dangerous for DFID and its staff. It is important that the distinction between development and military activities is maintained. We welcome the increase in staff for the Stabilisation Unit if such staff are able to travel around more easily without compromising their security.

We agree with the recommendation to maintain a clear distinction between longer-term development and military activities.

The importance of improving the mobility of the civilian element of our efforts in Helmand is recognised by all Departments. This has improved since the Committee visited. The Stabilisation Advisers provided by the Stabilisation Unit now operate in the District Centres in Gereshk, Musa Qala, and Sangin, and are able to move around the

districts and participate in Shuras. DFID is considering the scope for any further flexibility whilst ensuring continued robust management of security.

[Paragraph 174] Quick Impact Projects are not a substitute for development and reconstruction. We believe that DFID should continue its work through Government of Afghanistan programmes in rural development as these present greater opportunities for long term development, including building up the capacity of local governance structures.

We agree that QIPs are not a substitute for development but can play an important part in the broader stabilisation effort. We agree with the recommendation that supporting National Priority Programmes through Government systems is the only sustainable way to achieve long term development in Afghanistan.

QIPs can however help to create the conditions for longer-term development as part of a wider comprehensive stabilisation process. They can enhance our understanding of the environment in which we are working, and by demonstrating evidence of the benefits of extending the authority of the state, they can help create the space for the political dialogue needed to build a sustainable peace. DFID has been part of the QIPs approval process to ensure that selected QIPs are consistent with development best practice.

[Paragraph 175] The co-location of the civilian and military teams is designed to ensure joined-up decision-making. We believe this is a good idea. It is of utmost importance that the military do not seek to extend their operations at a faster pace than the civilian Provincial Reconstruction Team capacity and advice. This may mean scaling back political objectives in Helmand.

We agree and note the importance of civilian and military actions being planned and delivered in concert behind a unified political objective.

[Paragraph 176] Differences have recently emerged between the Government of Afghanistan and the UK and the international community over the effectiveness of the military strategy in Helmand, the choice of governor and who should take the lead in any dealings with the insurgents. Such disagreements highlight the importance of ensuring that the process of reconstruction becomes an Afghan-led one.

We agree that the process of reconstruction must be Afghan-led. Through the stabilisation programme process and by engaging with local provincial development committees, we are encouraging Government of Afghanistan ownership and building local capacity. This approach has worked well in Helmand where we have moved from security to stabilisation and development activities.