



EIGHTH REPORT FROM
THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SESSION 2008-09

GLOBAL SECURITY:
AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR FOREIGN AND
COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

*Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
by Command of Her Majesty
October 2009*



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ISBN: 978 0 10 1770 224

Printed in the UK by The Stationery Office Limited
on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

P002325454 09/09 484 19585

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum.

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RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Government welcomes the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into 'Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan' and the findings set out in the Committee's report published on 2 August 2009 (HC 302). Afghanistan and Pakistan remain among the Government's top foreign policy priorities. These issues deserve the widest possible engagement, and the Committee's report adds much to the debate.

The Government welcomes the detailed work which the Committee has undertaken. This Command Paper sets out our response to each recommendation. The Committee's recommendations are in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to those in the 'Conclusions and Recommendations' section of the Committee's report.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN AFGHANISTAN

NATO, ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom

1. We conclude that, particularly bearing in mind that this is the first ever NATO deployment outside of NATO's 'area', this has now become a most critical and seminal moment for the future of the Alliance. We also conclude that the failure of some NATO allies to ensure that the burden of international effort in Afghanistan is shared equitably has placed an unacceptable strain on a handful of countries. We further conclude that there is a real possibility that without a more equitable distribution of responsibility and risk, NATO's effort will be further inhibited and its reputation as a military alliance, capable of undertaking out-of-area operations, seriously damaged. We recommend that the British Government should continue to exert pressure on NATO partners to remove national caveats and to fulfil their obligations. We further recommend that where NATO allies are unwilling to commit combat troops, they must be persuaded to fulfil their obligations in ways which nevertheless contribute to the overall ISAF effort, for example, by providing appropriate support including equipment and enhanced training for the Afghan National Army. (Paragraph 23)

The Government shares the Committee's assessment that NATO's mission in Afghanistan is vital for the Alliance. At NATO's sixtieth anniversary summit in Strasbourg in April 2009, the Alliance unanimously decided that supporting the Government of Afghanistan to build a stronger democratic Afghanistan is its highest priority. Upon taking office on 1 August 2009, the new NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, stressed that Afghanistan was his top priority, and we welcomed his early visit there on 6-8 August.

The UK is in Afghanistan with 41 partner nations as part of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). We have long supported the notion that the international community must endeavour to ensure the burden is shared as equitably as possible, both within ISAF and more widely. The Foreign Secretary's speech to NATO of 27 July 2009 said, 'burden sharing is a founding principle

of the Alliance: the solidarity on which it is built. It needs to be honoured in practice as well as in theory.' The Government continues to call for others to increase their share of the military, civilian and financial burden in Afghanistan, focusing on what they can realistically deliver, while respecting their Parliamentary and political processes.

In recent months, our partners have made a number of significant announcements in ISAF. These include:

- 400 additional Polish troops;
- 450 additional Australian troops;
- 450 additional Spanish troops and one Spanish training team;
- 300 French troops;
- 200 German troops on a permanent basis and 400 troops to support the elections;
- 600 Italian troops to support the elections;
- A battalion of uncommitted Georgian troops in 2010.

We agree with the Committee that training for the Afghan National Army (ANA) is vital and we are encouraging allies to resource fully training programmes for it. Success in building Afghanistan's capability to withstand terrorism ultimately depends on building the Afghans' capacity to take control of their own security. The Prime Minister set out the UK's commitment to an ambitious training programme for Afghan security forces in his speech of 4 September, 'Afghanistan: National Security and Regional Stability.'

The Afghan National Army Trust Fund has been widened in 2009 to include the costs of sustaining the army, and more than \$220 million has been pledged for the fund this year. The UK is providing a contribution of £3 million to this fund. At the Strasbourg Summit in April 2009, NATO announced the creation of the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTMA), which is expected to begin work later this year. The NTMA will bring the majority of current army and police training under a single umbrella, drawing on and better utilising resources that are already in Afghanistan. It will comprise senior-level mentoring of the ANA and an expanded role in developing professional Afghan National Police (ANP). The mission will operate under a dual-hatted command, with a single commander for both the US-led Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan, the body which leads training and development of the Afghan security forces, and the NTMA.

The NTMA will provide higher-level training for the ANA, including defence colleges and academies, and will be responsible for doctrine development, as well as training and mentoring for the ANP. This will reflect the Government of Afghanistan's policing priorities and will complement existing training and capacity development programmes, including the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL) and the work of the International Police Co-ordination Board. The UK has already announced that we will lead a multinational Combined Arms Training school under the NTMA. The school will be multinational and will provide 'train the trainer' courses in junior officer, non-commissioned officer, infantry support weapons, armour and artillery training.

2. We conclude that no matter how difficult the circumstances facing the military in Afghanistan, the use of air power and acts of considerable cultural insensitivity on the part of some Coalition Forces over an extended period have done much to shape negative perceptions among ordinary Afghans about the military and the international effort in Afghanistan. This problem has caused

damage, both real and perceived, that will in many instances be difficult to undo. We further conclude that recent policy changes which aim to improve procedures, combined with the commitment of senior military figures to adopting better practices, are a welcome development. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government supply us with detailed information on measures that are being taken by Coalition Forces in Afghanistan to provide more pro-active and appropriate protection of civilians in the future. (Paragraph 29)

We are clear that international forces can operate successfully in Afghanistan only with the consent of the population. Since assuming command of ISAF in June 2009, General McChrystal has described the international community's highest priority as protecting the Afghan population, saying 'the measure of effectiveness will not be enemy killed; it will be the number of Afghans shielded from violence.'

Unfortunately, in any conflict situation, even when all precautionary measures are taken, there is a risk of civilian casualties. We are deeply saddened by any civilian deaths or injuries. We recognise the impact this has upon Afghan support for ISAF, and have strict procedures intended both to minimise the risk of civilian casualties and to investigate any incidents that do occur. We place the highest importance on minimising the risk of casualties to civilians. On 6 July 2009 General McChrystal issued a revised tactical directive to strengthen controls on the use of close air support and artillery and to ensure that ISAF always operates in a manner that is respectful of Afghan lives, property and culture. The directive explicitly states that air-to-ground munitions and indirect fire against residential compounds are only authorised under extremely limited and prescribed conditions, and that entry to Afghan houses should always be accomplished by Afghan security forces, with the support of local authorities and account for particular cultural sensitivities towards women. No ISAF forces will enter or fire upon or into a Mosque or any religious or historical site except in self defence. The full text of the directive is available at this link: http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official_texts/Tactical_Directive_090706.pdf

These strict procedures are frequently updated in the light of experience, and are intended to minimise the risk of casualties occurring and to investigate any incidents that do happen. For example, General McChrystal has launched an investigation into recent events in Kunduz. In addition, UK troops undergo comprehensive individual and collective training before they go on operations. This includes training on the strict rules of engagement that UK and international forces operate under. We have also invested significant resources and effort into properly understanding the operational environment, including the local civilian population who are warned of impending operations wherever possible. It is ISAF's policy to investigate fully all allegations of casualties resulting from ISAF forces. To this end a civilian casualties tracking cell has been established by ISAF to investigate reports of alleged incidents together with the Government of Afghanistan.

3. We conclude that the conditions under which prisoners and detainees are treated once in the hands of the Afghan authorities are a matter of considerable concern. We will deal with the issue of treatment of those detained by British forces further in our forthcoming annual Report on human rights. (Paragraph 33)

Ensuring that detainees are properly treated is an issue which the Government takes extremely seriously. All Government policy on the treatment of detainees in Afghanistan includes multiple safeguards to ensure detainees are treated in accordance with international law and in a fully transparent fashion. We engage regularly with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to ensure that these safeguards are maintained and we are working with the Afghan authorities to ensure they uphold the same standards. The Government recognises that conditions under which prisoners and detainees are held in Afghanistan are basic. We are continuing to work with the Government of Afghanistan and coalition partners to improve conditions. The UK has provided a Senior Prisons Adviser and three prison officers to promote the development of a fair and robust prison sector by sharing UK best practice through training and mentoring. We are funding the construction of a prison in Helmand that will conform to international standards. The project includes training and equipping prison staff and is due to commence in late September 2009. We are also working to institute good record-keeping practice with prisoner review shuras and district police. This is to ensure that anyone arrested by Afghan authorities for any crime is either detained further, if there is sufficient evidence, or released within the statutory 72 hour period provided by the Constitution.

With regards to those individuals detained by UK forces, the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Afghan governments that covers responsibility for individuals captured by UK forces is a mechanism for safeguarding detainees transferred into Afghan custody. As well as permitting access to detainees after transfer, it commits both nations to treat them properly. Both governments take any breach of this Memorandum very seriously. The Memorandum also contains an undertaking that no person handed over to the Government of Afghanistan will be subject to the death penalty.

In addition to the commitments detailed in the Memorandum, UK military and civilian officials visit detainees regularly to monitor conditions. We raise concerns about UK-captured detainees with the heads of detention facilities, and where standards are found to be below the minimum, also inform the ICRC and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). The ICRC and the AIHRC have the right to visit detainees and report on what they find. Any mistreatment, if discovered, would be taken up with the Government of Afghanistan as well as the ICRC and the AIHRC. The Government will respond on this issue additionally in its response to the Committee's report on human rights.

The role of the United Nations

4. We conclude that while the British Government's support of the UN and for proposals for the UN to play a more significant role as the overarching co-ordinator of the international community's efforts in Afghanistan are to be welcomed, it remains to be seen whether this will involve significant improvements in practice. We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government states what evidence there is, if any, of actual improvements in international co-ordination. (Paragraph 39)

UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is playing an increasing role in the international community's relationship with the Government of Afghanistan. We recognise the important steps taken to cement the overarching role of UNAMA across the full range of international civilian effort. This was demonstrated during preparations for the Afghan elections when the UN Development Programme co-ordinated the efforts of the international community to support the Afghan Independent Election Commission.

International aid assistance is also being better co-ordinated through the Joint Co-ordination and Management Board (JCMB). The JCMB is co-chaired by the UN Special Representative Kai Eide, and is now working more effectively, with a greater proportion of funding being delivered through Afghan channels. UNAMA is also consulting with donor states, including the UK, on how to increase the impact of its co-ordination efforts. In addition, major donors like the US and EU are now urgently examining how their assistance can be delivered most effectively.

However, we acknowledge that there is still some way to go until international co-ordination is as effective as it needs to be. The UN needs to continue to build its co-ordination capacity, which is a hard task given the highly disparate international effort. To improve international aid assistance, donors need to be willing to be co-ordinated and to use their resources in a joined-up way that, above all, prioritises the development of Afghan capacity.

The role of the European Union

5. We conclude that the EU's effort in Afghanistan thus far has not lived up to its potential. We further conclude that there is a need for the EU and its Member States to address the lack of coherence which exists within the EU effort if it is to have a greater impact in the future. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government should supply us with updated information on the progress it has made in persuading EU Member States and the European Commission to harmonise and co-ordinate their activities within Afghanistan. (Paragraph 44)

The EU's substantial and wide-ranging contributions to Afghanistan need to be kept under review to ensure they are as effective as possible. The UK has consistently pushed for greater and more coherent EU action in Afghanistan. At the General Affairs and External Relations Council in March 2009 and the June 2009 European Council (JEC), Member States recognised the need for the EU to enhance and improve its engagement in Afghanistan. At the JEC, the European Commission was tasked with creating a new strategy for co-ordinated engagement. The UK is currently pushing for the strategy to focus on areas where the EU can best add value, including on rule of law, governance and capacity building, education, agriculture and regional issues. We, together with other Member States, will also continue to push for improvements to the EU's coherence and co-ordination, including through more effective structures. The completed strategy will be adopted at the October 2009 European Council.

The US and its policy on Afghanistan under the Bush Administration

6. We conclude that some, though certainly not all, of the responsibility for problems in Afghanistan since 2001 must be attributed to the direction of US policy in the years immediately after the military intervention in 2001. The unilateralist tendencies of the US under the Bush administration, and its focus on military goals to the exclusion of many other strategically important issues, set the tone for the international community's early presence in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 49)

The Government does not share the Committee's assessment. The UK has worked closely with the US as part of the coalition in Afghanistan since 2001. We will continue to do so to ensure that we share a common direction and pursue the same goals.

In April 2009, the Prime Minister announced the UK's updated strategy for Afghanistan. It emphasises the need to support Afghanistan and Pakistan in tackling terrorism and violent extremism and in building the capacity of the Afghan security forces and governance at national and local levels. President Obama's strategy, announced in March 2009, reached similar conclusions to the UK; that there was a need to shift the emphasis from fighting the insurgents to training the Afghan security forces, to increase the civilian effort, and to focus on reconciliation.

We maintain regular and frequent contact with the US at both Ministerial and official level, both in capitals and in Kabul, on all aspects of the situation in Afghanistan and the region. In Kabul, our embassies share information and analysis on a daily basis, co-ordinating with the UN and international partners. Close co-ordination of UK and US resources in Afghanistan takes place through a wide range of structures. A key example is UK and US military forces and civilian experts, including development and rule of law specialists, working with Afghan counterparts and other international partners to deliver both civilian and military effect on the ground in the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Lashkar Gah.

Regional neighbours

7. We recommend that the Government continues to make clear to the Iranian leadership the total unacceptability to the UK of Iran's direct and indirect assistance to the Taliban in their operations against Coalition Forces. (Paragraph 53)

The Government will continue to underline to the Iranian government that any support to the Taliban, direct or indirect, is unacceptable. It not only puts at risk the lives of those focussed on delivering stability in Afghanistan, both Afghan and international, it also runs counter to Iran's own long-term interests, by fomenting instability along one of its longest borders. The UK's work with the Government of Afghanistan to help fight narcotics, build the Afghan economy, and fight instability and violent extremism are all objectives that are in Iran's long-term interest. We hope that Iran will recognise this, and the potential value of working more closely with Afghanistan and its international partners.

8. We conclude that the FCO should continue to use its influence to foster greater co-operation between Afghanistan and its neighbours and recommend that in its response to this Report it updates us on recent developments in this respect. (Paragraph 61)

The Government shares the Committee's view that Afghanistan's relations with the region are key to its long-term future. We are looking at ways to ensure that the instruments for delivering regional co-operation are reinforced, so that they can deliver more concrete outputs. The Regional Economic Co-operation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) is potentially an excellent forum for progress, but has so far failed to live up to its potential. We are working closely with the European Commission in Kabul to establish a Regional Co-operation Centre which will provide the capacity for the Afghan Foreign Ministry to lead, co-ordinate and deliver on regional issues on behalf of the Afghan government. Secondly, we are supporting the establishment of a joint Afghan and Pakistan Chambers of Commerce to help facilitate private sector development between both countries. Both these initiatives follow on from the last RECCA conference in May 2009.

We are already engaging with Turkey, which has offered to host the next RECCA Ministerial Meeting in 2010, to encourage it to use its considerable regional expertise to galvanise participation and put in place an ambitious agenda that looks to make real progress. We have also supported initiatives by the US, Turkey and Iran to bring Afghanistan and Pakistan together to discuss areas of shared concern and find ways to resolve them or tackle them together. The US and Turkish meetings have been particularly effective at providing a forum for discussion of economic, social and security challenges, including border management, counter-extremism, agricultural development, narcotics and cross border trade. A further priority area is building a constructive bilateral dialogue with Afghanistan's neighbours and regional partners, encouraging them to use their significant regional expertise and influence to build a more robust and mutually beneficial network of regional relationships together.

WHERE AFGHANISTAN IS NOW: AN ASSESSMENT

The Security Situation

9. We conclude that the security situation in Afghanistan, particularly in the south where the majority of British troops are based, will remain precarious for some time to come. We further conclude that the current instability is having a damaging effect on Coalition Forces and efforts to engage in reconstruction and development. (Paragraph 65)

There is no doubt that the security situation is difficult and dangerous. Progress is being made but the insurgency remains resilient. The majority of Afghans can go about their daily lives but, in certain areas of the country, particularly in the south and east, significant challenges remain.

In Helmand, successful military operations by ISAF and Afghan security forces have allowed more of the province to come under the control of the Government of Afghanistan. The US deployment to Helmand has allowed UK and US forces to oust the Taliban from some of their last remaining strongholds. The UK-led operation Panther's Claw and US-led operations Strike of the Sword and Eastern Resolve saw coalition forces move into the areas of Babaji, Khan-e-Neshin, Nawa and Nowzad, which included some of the last remaining major population centres in Helmand outside of government control. Following these operations, the Government of Afghanistan now has a presence in ten of the 13 districts, compared to just five in 2006. Two of the remaining districts are virtually uninhabited.

Despite the difficult security situation, stabilisation and reconstruction activity continues to make progress across Afghanistan. Through our 80 civilian experts (a figure which has doubled since last year) in the integrated Civilian Military Mission, we have continued to deliver prompt civilian activity alongside the military in Helmand province. We expect to allocate £40 million to support reconstruction and development in Helmand this year, which will strengthen a range of initiatives such as counter-narcotics and improving governance and the rule of law.

Afghan Security Forces

10. We conclude that the steady progress being made towards the creation of the Afghan National Army stands in sharp contrast to the disappointingly slow pace on police reform, for which Germany was the ‘lead nation’ before responsibility was transferred to EUPOL. As a consequence, the United States has considered it has no option but to invest a considerable amount of effort and resource in police reform, with assistance and training provided by the US military. We further conclude that military-led reform of civilian police institutions, no matter how well-intentioned, must run the risk of creating a paramilitary-style police as opposed to the civilian force which was originally envisaged and which will be needed in the future. (Paragraph 79)

Progress on police reform has been slow. The lack of a civilian policing culture and security challenges, coupled with a heavily illiterate and dispersed police make training and development a particularly complex challenge. EUPOL, and the UK as part of it, is making a significant contribution to police reform, especially on projects like improving Kabul’s security and developing intelligence-led policing.

We recognise the risks in creating a paramilitary style police force as a consequence of the security environment. This is why we have consistently emphasised the importance of a civilian policy lead for policing in Afghanistan, even where military resources are required for delivery of training and mentoring in a hostile environment. The Minister of Interior, Hanif Atmar, chairs the International Police Co-ordination Board, which gives clear civilian direction on strategic police reform. EUPOL has recently increased its numbers and now has a clear set of priorities under more focused leadership. This has enabled EUPOL to use its unique civilian policing expertise to greater effect and to gain credibility and influence at the strategic level in Afghanistan.

However, in a counter-insurgency environment, and particularly in the south of the country, it is inevitable that the Afghan police will have a role in providing security, and consequently will need to be properly trained and equipped for this. The fact that the Taliban has regularly targeted the police means it is even more important that the police are able to defend themselves.

Governance, justice and human rights

11. We conclude that the failure to create an effective formal justice system as promised in the Bonn Agreement means that many Afghans remain reliant on traditional, informal mechanisms of justice. We welcome the Government’s policy of developing links between formal and informal mechanisms of justice providing that full access, including to decision-taking, is sought for women in both mechanisms. However, we further conclude that the Government must guard against inadvertently endorsing any measures which could lead to the introduction, through informal mechanisms, of extreme forms of justice which retard or even reverse the slow progress that has been made towards promoting internationally accepted standards of human rights in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 88)

The Government welcomes the Committee’s support for its policy of developing links between formal and informal justice mechanisms. We are seeking to increase the accountability and transparency of informal justice mechanisms, including decision-making by local elders. Improvements include introducing better recording processes and ensuring greater consistency between decisions in the different districts. These measures will also provide added safeguards for human rights. Elders are being offered training in human rights and basic legal concepts.

We agree that ensuring women have access to both informal and formal justice systems is essential. In Helmand we are assisting a provincial women's group, which is providing training and advocacy for the rights of women and their children. The UK will continue to support the representation of women across all justice programmes.

12. We conclude that almost eight years after the international community became involved in Afghanistan, virtually no tangible progress has been made in tackling the endemic problem of corruption, and that in many cases the problem has actually become worse. We further conclude that policy commitments, action plans and all manner of strategies are of little value if they are not accompanied by the political will on the part of the Afghan President and government to drive forward change and tackle corruption at senior levels. Although corruption is a worldwide problem, the situation in Afghanistan is particularly bad and requires an Afghan-led solution if it is to be significantly reduced. (Paragraph 94)

Corruption is corrosive to public confidence in Afghanistan and abroad. It receives and deserves the highest priority. The current Government of Afghanistan, with UK support, has made some progress in building the architecture to tackle serious corruption. We have partnered the Afghan government in establishing anti-corruption investigation and prosecution offices, which are specialist teams able to target high value corruption. Work is also underway on anti-corruption tribunals. In April 2008, the Afghan government launched an Anti-Corruption Strategy and in July 2008 created an anti-corruption oversight body, the High Office of Oversight. UK support to the High Office of Oversight has helped 27 public bodies develop anti-corruption action plans, begin implementation of an asset registration process for public officials, and simplify procedures to reduce avenues of corruption. However, we agree that there is still a long way to go, and that Afghan leadership will be essential if progress is to be made. We continue to lobby them on this. The Prime Minister reiterated this in his speech of 4 September when he emphasised that action against corruption by the new Government of Afghanistan will be key to retaining the trust and support of the Afghan people.

13. We conclude that while much effort has been expended by Western governments on promoting human rights in Afghanistan, the underlying dynamics and cultural views in Afghanistan, amongst men in particular, have not shifted to any great extent. As long as security remains poor, human rights protection will not be considered a priority by many Afghans. (Paragraph 100)

Back in 2001 Afghanistan's human rights record was amongst the worst in the world. Taliban rule prevented women from working or receiving an education and religious and ethnic minorities were persecuted. Freedom of expression was severely restricted and many journalists fled the country or were killed. Government agencies, where they existed, barely functioned and the population was left without protection or essential services. There has been a great deal of progress made since then. We are aware that many in Afghanistan still face significant hardships and unequal treatment, in part due to poverty and insecurity. For women this is compounded by deeply held cultural views. However, many Afghans are actively campaigning to improve the human rights situation in Afghanistan. For example, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (which we have supported with over £2 million since 2001) has over 500 Afghan staff across the country actively working on human rights issues. British Embassy officials regularly discuss human rights with members of the Government of Afghanistan, NGOs and Parliamentarians. Protecting the hard-won freedoms that Afghans have regained since the fall of the Taliban is a matter of great concern for the UK.

14. We conclude that the proposed “Shia family law” which would have legalised rape within marriage and legitimised the subjugation of Shia women in Afghanistan, represented an affront to decent human values. We further conclude that it is a matter for alarm that these proposals were considered to be acceptable by President Karzai, by a majority in the Afghan parliament, and by significant elements of Afghan public opinion. This episode highlights the challenges that Afghan women continue to face in realising their basic human rights nearly eight years after the fall of the Taliban government. We conclude that this proposed law has had a detrimental affect on international perceptions of Afghanistan. We welcome the British Government’s announcement that it considers those aspects of the law which undermine human rights to be wholly unacceptable. We recommend that the Government keeps us fully informed if the Shia Family Law takes legal effect and, if it does, provides us with an analysis as to whether it has been brought in line with the Afghan Constitution, which guarantees equal rights for women, and with the international treaties to which Afghanistan is a party. (Paragraph 114)

The Government shares the Committee’s concerns about the original draft bill on the Personal Status of Followers of Shia Jurisprudence (the ‘Shia Family Law’), passed by the Afghan Parliament on 22 February. The bill was drafted to recognise and protect the traditions and values of the Shia community, a minority group in Afghanistan that has in the past suffered persecution for their faith. But it also contained various provisions that ran counter to the Afghan Constitution, which guarantees equal rights for women and Afghanistan’s international human rights obligations.

While we have full respect for the independence of the Government of Afghanistan and Afghan democratic institutions, we, along with other international partners, made our concerns about the bill clear to the Afghan government at a senior level, as we make human rights concerns clear to a number of governments. We therefore welcomed President Karzai’s announcement on 27 April that the law would be re-examined.

Following consultations with Afghan civil society and female MPs, President Karzai enacted an amended version of the law on 27 July. Some of the most concerning articles, such as that which restricted a wife’s freedom of movement, have been removed. But many international partners and some Afghan civil society organisations still have concerns over some of the law’s remaining provisions. For example, the law gives guardianship rights to male family members only and does not take into consideration the wishes or the best interests of the child. It also fails to recognise a woman’s equal right to inheritance. We are raising these concerns with the Government of Afghanistan in co-ordination with the EU and other international partners. We will continue to press them to meet their human rights obligations, including full respect for the equality of women before the law. We will keep the Committee fully updated on our efforts.

The Shia Family Law reflects the difficult situation many women in Afghanistan continue to face. However, some progress is being made. The Government of Afghanistan, with support and encouragement from Afghan civil-society and the international community, recently completed drafting a law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women which, once enacted, will constitute a major step forward for women’s rights. This law will apply to all communities in Afghanistan and includes a comprehensive definition of violence against women and, for the first time in Afghanistan, criminalises, among other things, the offences of rape, ‘baad’ (the exchange of women and girls as a form of dispute resolution) stalking, polygamy and underage marriage. The draft law is now before the Afghan Parliament for consideration and our Embassy in Kabul is supporting female MPs working for its enactment.

We remain committed to working with Afghan society to ensure that the basic human rights of all Afghans, including women and girls, are protected.

Counter-narcotics

15. We recommend that the Government continues to do its utmost to persuade its ISAF partners in Afghanistan to give their full support and co-operation to ISAF's expanded role of conducting operations against drugs facilities and facilitators. (Paragraph 124)

Alongside the Government of Afghanistan, the UK was instrumental in securing NATO agreement in October 2008 for ISAF to increase its emphasis on counter-narcotics in order to advance the ISAF counter-insurgency campaign. We continue to encourage our ISAF partners to take direct action against networks supporting the insurgency, within means and capabilities, and to support Afghan counter-narcotics operations. By August 2009, ISAF had conducted over 85 operations targeting the nexus between the drugs trade and the insurgency.

16. We conclude that in accepting the role of Afghanistan's 'lead' international partner in respect of counter-narcotics, the UK has taken on a poisoned chalice. There is little evidence to suggest that recent reductions in poppy cultivation are the result of the policies adopted by the UK, other international partners or the Afghan government. While the British Government is to be commended for its broad-ranging, holistic approach to tackling narcotics in Afghanistan, it is clear that success depends on a range of factors which lie far beyond the control and resource of the UK alone. The scale of the problem, the drugs trade's importance to Afghanistan's economy and its connection to corruption makes any early achievement of the aspirations set out in the Bonn Agreement highly unlikely. We further conclude that the lead international role on counter-narcotics should be transferred away from the UK, and that the Afghan Government should instead be partnered at an international level by the United Nations and ISAF which are better equipped to co-ordinate international efforts. (Paragraph 126)

The Government agrees that the UK cannot tackle the Afghan drugs trade alone. This is why we are working with partners including the Government of Afghanistan, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank, and nations of ISAF to tackle the problem. Together we are looking to deliver a common and holistic approach to building alternative livelihoods, a criminal justice system that can tackle the top end of the drugs trade and corruption, and to break support from the drugs trade to insurgents. In our G8 role we have provided support to Afghan institutions, such as the Ministry of Interior, Ministry for Counter Narcotics, and Independent Directorate of Local Governance, to build the capacity to lead on counter-narcotics. We continue to work with ISAF on integrating counter-narcotics into the ISAF effort, and call upon aid donors in the international community to invest further in agriculture and anti-corruption for the long-term. We are keeping our counter-narcotics effort under review.

We know from the experience of countries such as Thailand and Pakistan that sustainably tackling the drugs trade takes many years and can only be achieved through a comprehensive approach to economic livelihoods and law enforcement. The Government of Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy is based on this approach and has been running for eight years. We judge that Afghan and international counter-narcotics policies are now beginning to have an impact. The UNODC Opium Survey for 2009 confirms a 22 percent fall in opium cultivation from 2008, with a 33 percent fall in Helmand. In 2009, there are now 20 poppy-free provinces, up from 18 in 2008 (out of 36 provinces in Afghanistan).

These substantial falls have been driven by a combination of market forces, effective counter-narcotics policies and improved governance and security. The low price of opium coupled with 2008's high wheat price, have been major incentives for farmers to turn away from poppy cultivation. Afghan and ISAF efforts at tackling drug trafficking is also having an effect, with the amount of heroin and opium seized doubling since 2007. The Government of Afghanistan is also rolling out programmes which offer farmers sustainable alternatives to opium poppy cultivation. In Helmand, Governor Mangal's ambitious Food Zone programme has distributed wheat seed to 32,000 households, and has proved to be a major factor in the 33 percent fall in opium poppy cultivation in Helmand in 2009.

The informal share-out of international lead roles agreed in 2002 (under which the UK took the lead on counter-narcotics) has in practice been overtaken by the subsequent growth of international co-ordination in all fields, and the development of the Afghan Government's capacity. As a result, international counter-narcotics efforts are now in practice shared within the international community in support of the Afghan Government's counter-narcotics strategy.

17. We recommend that if the Government accepts our recommendation to relinquish the role of lead partner nation on counter-narcotics, it ought to re-focus its effort on facilitating regional co-operation and driving forward diplomatic efforts within international organisations to tackle the trafficking and processing of drugs. (Paragraph 129)

The Government agrees that regional co-operation is key to tackling the drugs trade. Significant multilateral co-operation is already underway. We welcome the UNODC-brokered 'Triangular Initiative', under which Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan have agreed measures to strengthen border co-operation to stem the flow of drugs from Afghanistan. In March 2009, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan conducted their first joint operation, under the auspices of the Triangular Initiative, seizing over 400 kilograms of opium, over 50 kilograms of heroin and over 90 kilograms of hashish. We see a natural role for UNODC in facilitating and supporting action on these sensitive issues, and we will continue to work closely with it. We also welcome the Dubai Process, facilitated by Canada which brings together Pakistani and Afghan officials to develop and implement concrete measures to improve border management between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Economic and social development

18. We conclude that long-term investment in education for young people of both genders in Afghanistan is both morally compelling and strategically sensible. It will enable Afghanistan to create an educated and skilled workforce equipped to develop the country and reduce its dependency on foreign funding. We recommend that the Government should consider extending educational twinning programmes to students in Afghanistan in a bid to foster educational opportunities and improve mutual understanding between students and teachers in the UK and Afghanistan. (Paragraph 136)

Long-term investment in education in Afghanistan is vital. The UK supports the Afghan education system through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) which directly funds teachers' salaries. Since 2002 the UK has contributed £300 million to the ARTF, and in July 2009 announced a further £225 million over the next four years. This will cover around 14 percent of the Government of Afghanistan's expenditure on education, and help finance an increase in the number of teachers from 160,000 today to almost 190,000 in 2013. The UK, along with other donors, is also helping the Afghan government access additional support from the Fast Track Initiative 'Education for All' scheme. Our

core support to the UN Children's Fund, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and to non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam, ActionAid and War Child also ensures that children in the most extreme of circumstances are not overlooked in educational provision.

Since 2008, the British Council has run a school cluster linking programme called Connecting Classrooms. There are currently 40 schools in four regions in Afghanistan linked to 28 schools from across nine education authorities in the UK. Schools are linked in groups rather than bilaterally, so a group of five Afghan schools are linked with three or four UK schools. The groups include primary, secondary and special schools. The links are supported by the British Council for three years, with the aim that, after this period, the link will create an international and outward-looking ethos in schools that will sustain further contact and collaboration.

The Connecting Classrooms project has various elements to it, including teacher development, school leadership development and involving students at both UK and Afghan schools in jointly agreed cross-curricula projects around three themes: intercultural understanding, skills for employability and active citizenship. This has resulted in shared learning and teaching outcomes across curriculum subjects and is highly motivational for teachers and students in both countries.

The UK also funds Chevening scholarships for a growing number of Afghan students each year to enable them to come to the UK to study for a Masters degree. This scheme is designed to attract future leaders and enables them to develop strong links with the UK and with other Chevening scholars from around the world. We have successfully worked to increase the number of female scholars.

19. We conclude that in 2009 economic and social development in Afghanistan continues to lag behind what international donors promised and what, consequently, Afghans had a right to expect as a result of Western intervention in their country. We further conclude, however, that the success of recently initiated Afghan-led projects, such as the National Solidarity Programme, which appear to offer a highly effective model for delivering change, is encouraging. We welcome the British Government's support of this and similar initiatives which are having an impact on the lives of large numbers of people in rural Afghanistan. We recommend that the Government continue to examine how it can encourage other international donors to support Afghanistan in this way. We further recommend that in its response the FCO sets out what it considers the most important priorities of the international community in Afghanistan to be. (Paragraph 140)

Economic and social indicators in Afghanistan remain weak by international standards. However, despite very challenging circumstances, the Government of Afghanistan has managed to maintain macroeconomic stability and remains broadly on track with its International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme. Afghanistan has experienced significant economic growth since 2002, with rates averaging 15 percent per year to 2007, fuelled mainly by aid inflows and agriculture. Reports in June indicated that inflation continues to fall, and the IMF is forecasting nearly 15 percent growth in 2009-10 in light of a strong recovery in agriculture and higher donor inflows.

We are pleased that the Committee recognises the success of Afghan-led projects. The UK has supported the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) with £28 million since 2006, and will contribute a further £3 million this year. The current NSP programme is due to close in 2011, and the Government of Afghanistan is developing the next phase with the World Bank. The UK is closely engaged in the design process and will consider further options for support in due course. We will encourage other donors to consider doing the same.

At the Paris conference on Afghanistan in June 2008, international donors promised to support the Afghanistan National Development Strategy under the Government of Afghanistan's lead. Donors pledged to strengthen institutions, infrastructure and economic growth, particularly in the agriculture and energy sectors, and to create opportunities for Afghans through private sector growth. To support this, we will invest over £430 million between 2009 and 2013. The UK's economic priorities in Afghanistan are to promote macroeconomic stability, improve public financial management, accelerate private sector development, strengthen markets for agriculture and rural enterprise and create jobs, which will help meet wider political priorities, such as counter-narcotics objectives.

The international community's approach and impact

20. We conclude that the international effort in Afghanistan since 2001 has delivered much less than it promised and that its impact has been significantly diluted by the absence of a unified vision and strategy, grounded in the realities of Afghanistan's history, culture and politics. We recognise that although Afghanistan's current situation is not solely the legacy of the West's failures since 2001, avoidable mistakes, including knee-jerk responses, policy fragmentation and overlap, now make the task of stabilising the country considerably more difficult than might otherwise have been the case. We recommend that in its response to this Report the FCO sets out what lessons have been learned from the mistakes made by the international community over the last seven years. (Paragraph 145)

The Government keeps its strategy for engagement in Afghanistan under constant review. On 29 April 2009 the Prime Minister published the strategy document 'UK policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan: the way forward.' As the Prime Minister explained in his statement to Parliament of the same day, the UK had the right long-term strategy set out in December 2007. Following a review which identified what was working and what needed further development, the Prime Minister set out an updated strategy for the UK's engagement in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

We welcomed the US review of strategy in Afghanistan earlier this year and the Obama Administration's focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan. The US review is very much in line with the UK's approach and builds on the very strong, positive impression that the new US Administration has made across the region. As President Obama has recognised, Afghanistan and Pakistan's futures are intimately linked; there will be no stability in Afghanistan without stability in Pakistan. The question of lessons learned from this and other conflicts is one the Government takes seriously.

PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE AND ROLE IN RELATION TO AFGHANISTAN

Pakistan's strategic importance

21. We conclude that Pakistan's strategic importance derives not only from the sanctuary that its semi-autonomous border areas provide to extremists who seek to cause instability in Afghanistan, but also because of connections between the border areas and those involved in international terrorism. We further conclude that it is difficult to overestimate the importance of tackling not just the symptoms but the root causes that enable this situation to persist. (Paragraph 158)

The Government shares the Committee's concerns that Taliban centres of operation located in Pakistan's border areas are used to prepare violent attacks in Afghanistan and that international terrorists are also able to find havens in Pakistan's border areas. Our determination to work with Pakistan on removing these serious threats to global security, regional stability, and to the Pakistani state itself, is a fundamental driver of UK strategy on Afghanistan and Pakistan, and an important element of the UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue announced by the Prime Minister on 14 May 2009.

We are working with both Afghan and Pakistani governments to help ensure effective border security and welcomed Afghanistan and Pakistan's commitment at the G8 Foreign Minister's meeting on 26 June to enhance collaboration. We continue to support the development of border co-operation centres designed to promote co-ordinated operational planning between ISAF and the Afghan and Pakistani security forces. As part of our wider programme of defence engagement, we are working to build the capacity of the Pakistani Army to conduct effective operations against violent extremists in its north-western border areas. We are also delivering a £1 million programme of capacity building support to the North-West Frontier Province police. On the other side of the border, the UK is playing a major part in training the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, who are expanding their presence in the border areas.

We agree that it is essential to address not just the symptoms of violent extremism but also its causes. Grievances associated with poor governance, poverty and lack of access to services, alongside a number of contributory factors make communities vulnerable to extremist messages. Our counter-terrorism programme includes extensive work with the media, civil society and other influencers to understand perceptions, formulate messages and build resilience against violent extremism. The UK is providing £665 million of assistance to Pakistan, including the border areas, from 2009 to 2013. By 2011, it will be the UK's second largest development programme worldwide after India.

22. We conclude that allegations raised during our inquiry about the safety of nuclear technology and claims of possible collusion between Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI, and Al Qaeda are a matter of deep concern. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government sets out its assessment of these allegations and the extent of the threat that this poses. (Paragraph 160)

The security of Pakistan's nuclear technology is clearly of vital importance. Pakistan continues to work towards ensuring internationally recognised controls of its weapons and nuclear materials. In May 2009, Pakistan's Strategic Export Control Division issued new licensing and enforcement regulations to further tighten the export of nuclear technologies, material, and equipment. The Government currently assesses that there is no reason to believe that Pakistan's nuclear technology is likely to fall into the hands of violent extremists. There is also no evidence to suggest collusion between the ISI and Al Qaeda. We will continue to monitor the situation closely as the prevention of proliferation of materials and knowledge by non-state actors is vital to our interests.

Recent Pakistani responses to militancy

23. We conclude that there is a pressing need for the Pakistani government to address the role that some madrassahs play in the recruitment and radicalisation process in Pakistan. We recommend that the British Government sets out in its response to this Report what discussions it has had with the Pakistani Government about this issue, and whether it has raised allegations of Saudi Arabian funding of radical madrassahs with the Saudi authorities. (Paragraph 164)

The Government shares the Committee's view that the Government of Pakistan needs to address the role that some madrassahs play in the recruitment and radicalisation process in Pakistan. Most recently, during the 2 July 2009 meeting of the UK-Pakistan Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, the UK agreed to share research on the drivers of radicalisation and information on madrassah regulation and curriculum reform. Madrassah regulation also forms part of the regular dialogue between British High Commission officials and the Ministry of Interior.

Tackling poverty and social exclusion is also an important part of addressing the sources of grievance that contribute to insecurity and radicalisation. Widespread illiteracy in Pakistan and the large number of young people poorly equipped to enter the world of work feeds that poverty and social exclusion. A range of institutions are relevant to raising education standards. We recognise that madrassahs often have an important social role. It is also important to ensure they provide high standards of education. We are working with the Government of Pakistan to promote the greater inclusion of madrassahs in education reform, in areas such as the curriculum, teaching techniques and textbooks. The challenge is to bring madrassahs into an improved mainstream while acknowledging their unique identity and function. Our core effort is to support on the development of government schools in Pakistan that are more attractive to parents and children, so that madrassahs are not the sole option.

The British Council has a programme of youth-focussed projects aimed at enhancing the quality of education through Pakistan. This involves curriculum change, intercultural dialogue, active citizenship, community cohesion and skills for employment. The British Council's global Connecting Classrooms project brings in an international dimension in the Pakistani education system by improving school effectiveness through linking with UK schools, and schools more involved in community and social issues. In Pakistan and the UK, 200 schools are helping to break down boundaries and draw madrassah education into the mainstream. The British Council is also working with 107 madrassahs in the North-West Frontier Province who participate in a capacity building project in English, business skills and intercultural dialogue, all funded by the UK. So far over 400 madrassah teachers, administrators and Mosque leaders have received training. Vocational training also remains key in Pakistan, and the British Council is running a 'Skills for Employability' programme to improve opportunities for young, disadvantaged people.

We have an ongoing counter-terrorism dialogue with the Saudi authorities which includes our shared concerns about the financing of extremist organisations. In recent years the Saudi authorities have introduced a range of comprehensive measures to prevent funds being sent overseas. In addition to stopping the informal collection of funds, the Saudis have introduced strict controls and reporting procedures for money being transferred overseas. However, as elsewhere, informal cash networks undoubtedly still exist. The relevant Saudi agencies remain keen to co-operate with overseas partners on this issue particularly where any evidence exists of Saudi involvement.

24. We conclude that Pakistan's civilian government has recently taken some important steps to counter insurgency at a considerable cost in terms of military lives lost. We welcome the increasing recognition at senior levels within the Pakistani military of the need for a recalibrated approach to militancy but we remain concerned that this may not necessarily be replicated elsewhere within the army and ISI. We conclude that President Zardari's recent remarks that he regards the real threat to his country as being terrorism rather than India are to be welcomed. However, we further conclude that doubts remain as to whether the underlying fundamentals of Pakistani security policy have changed sufficiently to realise the goals of long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 176)

Pakistan has a vital interest in rooting out the militant insurgency which threatens and undermines its state and the security of its people. The Taliban has used violence, intimidation and terror to gain control over civilian populations in areas of north-west Pakistan. They threaten to destroy the rule of law in Pakistan and to force people to conform to their will. Pakistan's commitment to tackling this threat is important both for regional stability and the security of the UK, in denying operational space to both domestic and international terrorists. The Foreign Secretary has acknowledged the significant efforts and sacrifices that Pakistan has made, and continues to make, to restore peace and stability in its north-western border regions.

As the UK's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan makes clear, Pakistani support is crucial to our efforts to promote long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. The UK is focussed on encouraging and assisting Pakistan to tackle all violent extremist groups operating from within its borders, including those who pose a direct threat to Afghanistan, the region and the international community. We have consistently delivered this message to the Government of Pakistan. A stable, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan is in all our interests, and we will continue to work with Pakistan towards achieving this goal.

Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan

25. We conclude that addressing long-standing concerns of the Pashtun populace on either side of the Durand Line and the respective governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan in relation to the Durand Line itself, could, in the long term, help to increase bilateral co-operation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, reduce sources of political friction and help tackle the causes, and not just the symptoms, of poverty and weak governance which Al Qaeda and other insurgent groups have exploited so effectively in recent years. Given the UK's close relationship with both Afghanistan and Pakistan and its historical ties to the region (which include the imposition of the Durand Line by British colonial administrators), we further conclude that the UK has a moral imperative to provide whatever diplomatic or practical support might be deemed appropriate by the relevant parties to assist them in finding ways of addressing the many problematic issues that are the Durand Line's legacy. (Paragraph 182)

The Government agrees with the Committee's assessment of the importance of addressing the concerns of the Pashtun populace on both sides of the border. It is not for the UK to prescribe a solution to the issue of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border: that is for those parties directly involved to determine through dialogue. We encourage Afghanistan and Pakistan to seek a lasting resolution to the issue. We welcome the continued positive engagement by Presidents Karzai and Zardari and continue to encourage both countries to work together to tackle shared challenges, including insurgent and terrorist activities, illicit trafficking of narcotics and weapons, corruption, human rights violations and limited economic opportunities. The UK stands ready to help.

We continue to support Afghan and Pakistani efforts to extend government authority to the ungoverned areas of the tribal belt and, through delivering services, security, access to fair and timely justice, and inclusion in democratic political processes, demonstrating to Pashtuns the benefits of participation and co-operation with elected governments. In Pakistan, both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have lobbied the Government of Pakistan to deliver comprehensive reform of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. We welcome President Zardari's announcement on 13 August that key political reforms, including improving local political representation and governance arrangements, would shortly be implemented.

US attacks on targets in Pakistan

26. We conclude that the use of US drones to attack Al Qaeda targets in Pakistan may have resulted in serious damage to Al Qaeda's network and capabilities. However, we also conclude that these attacks have damaged the US's reputation among elements of the Pakistani population who regard them as a violation of Pakistani sovereignty. We further conclude that drone attacks remain a high-risk strategy and must not become a substitute for the challenging yet vital task of building a Pakistani civilian government counter-terrorist capacity and army capable of conducting counter-insurgency operations and dealing with extremist threats. (Paragraph 199)

The use of US drones to attack targets in Pakistan has resulted in serious damage to violent extremist groups who pose a threat to Pakistan, the region and the international community. This has been recognised by the Government of Pakistan. However, we also acknowledge the impact the programme has had on the US's reputation in Pakistan, and the potential effect of the strikes in motivating support for extremism.

First and foremost this is an issue that calls for US-Pakistan dialogue. The threat to US and Pakistani (and UK) interests is real, the danger and damage of civilian casualties serious, and the range of options limited. US technology is vitally important, but so is Pakistani ownership of the fight against violent extremism. It is important to recognise the severity of the challenge: Pakistan faces a serious threat from a number of different terrorist and violent extremist groups, ranging from Al Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban and Baloch separatist insurgents. It has only limited capacity to tackle all these threats simultaneously. As part of our wider programme of engagement, we are working to build the Pakistani civilian government's counter-terrorism capacity, and the capacity of the Pakistan Army to conduct counter-insurgency operations in its north-western border areas.

India

27. We reiterate our previous conclusion from our South Asia Report that the UK should encourage India and Pakistan to make further progress on the peace process, but that the Government should not get directly involved in negotiations nor try to suggest solutions to the question of Kashmir, unless requested to do so by both India and Pakistan. (Paragraph 201)

Normalisation of India and Pakistan's relations is vital for regional security. We agree with the Committee that it is not for the UK to prescribe a solution to the Kashmir issue; it is for those parties directly involved in the dispute to resolve through dialogue, taking into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people. It will be for the Governments of India and Pakistan to decide the pace, scope and substance of future dialogue.

28. We conclude that the US plan marks an important and long overdue recalibration of its relationship with Pakistan. Its emphasis on civilian aid, with appropriate conditions attached, has the potential to ensure that long term improvements in Pakistan's political, economic and social capacity limit the appeal of extremism. We further conclude that it is crucial that the US addresses Pakistan's fears, both legitimate and perceived, relating to India and reassures Pakistan about the extent and nature of the US's long-term commitment to Pakistan. (Paragraph 211)

US resources and influence will be critical to efforts to help promote a stable, secure, democratic and prosperous Pakistan. The Kerry-Lugar Bill is a strong and welcome signal of the US's long-term political and economic commitment to Pakistan, and recognition of the importance of non-military as well as military and security elements in tackling extremism. Furthermore, we acknowledge the major role that the US can play in supporting regional stability. We will continue to support and encourage a US approach that is sustained and comprehensive.

THE UK'S MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

The UK's expanding mission in Afghanistan

29. We conclude that the UK's mission in Afghanistan has taken on a significantly different, and considerably expanded, character since the first British troops were deployed there in 2001. The UK has moved from its initial goal of supporting the US in countering international terrorism, far into the realms of counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics, protection of human rights, and state-building. During our visit we were struck by the sheer magnitude of the task confronting the UK. We conclude that there has been significant 'mission creep' in the British deployment to Afghanistan, and that this has resulted in the British government being now committed to a wide range of objectives. We further conclude that in its response to this Report, the Government should set out, in unambiguous terms, its first and most important priority in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 225)

The Prime Minister made clear in his speech of 4 September 2009 that the fundamental reason why we are in Afghanistan is to ensure that Al Qaeda cannot again use the region as a base to plan terror attacks across the world. As he explained, it is critical that we continue the essential work of denying the territory of Afghanistan as a base for terrorists. This is why we entered Afghanistan in 2001 and it remains the reason for our military presence today. It is vital to immediate UK national security interests that Afghanistan becomes a stable and secure state that can suppress terrorism and violent extremism within its borders, and contribute to the same objective across the border in Pakistan.

However, the Government has always been clear that the solutions to the challenges that confront Afghanistan will not be delivered by military means alone. This is why our strategy starts with short-term security, but links to medium-term Afghanisation and longer term development to create a stake for Afghans in the future of their country. This approach will allow Afghans to govern and secure their own country as, together, we shift our emphasis from short-term stabilisation to long-term development, on which their security and our security in Britain depends.

Despite the difficult security situation, stabilisation and reconstruction activity continues to make progress across Afghanistan. Through our 80 civilian experts (a figure which has doubled since last year) in the integrated Civilian Military Mission, we have continued to deliver prompt civilian activity alongside the military in Helmand province. We expect to allocate £40 million to support reconstruction and development in Helmand this year, which will strengthen a range of initiatives such as counter-narcotics, governance and the rule of law.

The UK deployment to Helmand

30. We conclude that the UK deployment to Helmand was undermined by unrealistic planning at senior levels, poor co-ordination between Whitehall departments and crucially, a failure to provide the military with clear direction. We further conclude that as the situation currently stands, the “comprehensive approach” is faltering, largely because the security situation is preventing any strengthening of governance and Afghan capacity. The very clear conclusion that we took from our visit to Helmand is that stabilisation need not be complicated or expensive, but it does require provision of security, good governance, and a belief within the local population that ISAF forces will outlast the insurgents. (Paragraph 236)

The Government agrees with the Committee that stabilisation requires security, good governance and the local community’s belief in ISAF. As the Foreign Secretary said in his speech to NATO of 27 July, a comprehensive political strategy is needed. This will involve: reintegrating and reconciling those among the insurgents who are willing to lay down arms; reassuring the wider population about the future of their country by conveying that our forces will remain until communities can protect themselves; accelerating training of Afghan security forces; creating credible and clean governance and investing in sustainable development; and building regional stability through working closely with Pakistan and Afghanistan’s key neighbours.

There is no doubt that the security situation is difficult. However, we do not agree that this has prevented any strengthening of governance. Following recent operations in Helmand province, the Government of Afghanistan now has a presence in ten of the 13 districts, compared to just five in 2006. District Governors are now in place in all of these districts and there are functioning community councils in Nad-e-Ali, Garmsir and Gereshk. Work started in mid-September to establish a council in Nawa. The four core districts of the Helmand administration now have access to a dedicated district stabilisation and development budget and in the coming months we will see the delivery of the first Afghan-driven stabilisation and development activities in Helmand, none of which would have been foreseeable 12 months ago.

The challenges facing Afghanistan are substantial and complex. They require a multi-strand approach, covering security, building more effective and accountable governance, and promoting development in an often insecure environment. This effort must be led by the Government of Afghanistan itself, with the international community’s support.

The role of, and impact on, the British armed forces

31. We conclude that the Government must ensure that our armed forces are provided with the appropriate resources to undertake the tasks requested of them, particularly in an environment as challenging as Helmand. We further conclude that in spite of well-documented difficulties, British armed forces are now gradually beginning to create and sustain the conditions that make it possible to extend good governance and the rule of law in the most heavily populated areas of Helmand. We conclude that the support provided by additional equipment and by the US ‘surge’ of troops in Helmand will be of considerable assistance, and is greatly to be welcomed. (Paragraph 248)

Sufficient resources are being made available for current operations. We have always made it clear that the Government is committed to providing all the resources commanders need to achieve operational success. The quality and versatility of the equipment we issue to our troops is far higher than it has ever been, and the Ministry of Defence is continually working to improve the range and reliability of all equipment. Repeated success in operations continues to show that our forces are not only among the best in the world but are also among the best equipped. We have always made it clear that the Government is committed to providing all the resources commanders need to achieve operational success.

Since 2006, over £1 billion has been spent from the Treasury Reserve on new vehicles for Afghanistan, including 280 Mastiffs which offer world-leading protection against improvised explosive devices. In addition we are buying another 20 Ridgeback mine-protected patrol vehicles so that more will be going into operation over the next three months. Between November 2006 and April 2009 we increased the number of helicopter hours by 84 percent. In addition to sharing coalition helicopters, we also lease hundreds of hours each month from commercial operators for routine supplies. The first Merlin helicopters will be flying in Helmand within two months. This, together with enhancements to other types of helicopters, means that by next spring we will have doubled the number of helicopters and increased flying hours by 130 percent since 2006.

The performance of UK and other international forces in Helmand has been, and continues to be, impressive and successful. US military leader General Petraeus recently praised UK troops saying, 'I have always been impressed by the courage, capacity for independent action, skill and exceptional will of your soldiers. British troops have been in a tough place and they have done exceedingly well.' Since 2006, when UK troops first deployed to Helmand, much has changed for the better. After initially taking the fight to the Taliban around the province, UK forces have achieved a deeper, more established presence in the major population areas. This has enabled the Afghan National Army and National Police to be trained in these areas and allowed development and stabilisation advisers to work closely on the ground with the local Afghan leaders and government representatives. All the major towns in Helmand are now under the Government of Afghanistan's control, and the daily lives and future prospects of ordinary Afghans have improved. However, despite the progress made by UK, international and Afghan forces in extending the control of the legitimate Government of Afghanistan into all the key centres of population in the province, the insurgency remains determined and resilient in its traditional heartlands and continues to present a significant threat to security.

The arrival of additional ISAF forces in Helmand and other parts of southern Afghanistan earlier this year was a positive development. These troops are being deployed where they are needed the most. They will provide ISAF with more resources to address the insurgent threat and consolidate gains already made, increasing ISAF's ability to support the Government of Afghanistan in delivering security to the south. This will also aid the delivery of development and reconstruction.

Substantial changes to the situation will not occur overnight. We are confident that the additional troops will make a positive impact, but our effort must be long term and comprehensive. Southern Afghanistan remains a highly complex operating environment and defeating the insurgency will take considerable time and effort. Enduring success will not be achieved by military means alone. It is essential that the Afghan authorities, supported by the international community, use the security conditions created by ISAF and Afghan security forces to deliver genuine improvements to governance, development and reconstruction that will improve the quality of life of ordinary people across the province.

The role of FCO staff in Afghanistan

32. We conclude that the ability to engage with Afghans in key local languages is crucial to the UK's effort in Afghanistan and we are concerned that nearly eight years after intervening in Afghanistan, the FCO still has no Pashtu speakers. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the FCO sets out why this situation exists and what it is doing, as a matter of urgency, to rectify the situation. (Paragraph 250)

Language training requirements for staff working in Afghanistan are kept under regular review. For many jobs in-country, such as those which require little or no contact with external Afghan stakeholders, no language skills are necessary. The majority of language training we provide for postings in Afghanistan is in Dari, which is the language spoken most widely in Kabul.

It is not the case that the FCO has no Pashtu speakers. We employ locally-recruited Afghan staff in many positions that require local language skills. In Kabul there are 66 Afghan staff, in Lashkar Gah there are 18 and a further 11 are based in Helmand's district centres, all working alongside staff from the UK. We have trained five UK-based staff in basic Pashtu for postings to southern Afghanistan, and two more are currently in training. In addition, 23 staff have finished a Dari course and two more are in training. We work to balance cost-effectiveness of training with the need to support high-quality diplomatic engagement in country.

Where we need to engage in Helmand Province at high levels, we will always use one of our ten qualified Pashtu interpreters to ensure that both sides understand the issues being discussed. The finer nuances of a discussion may be lost without the benefit of a native speaker's expertise and understanding of culture and tribe.

33. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the FCO provides details of the length of Postings which it uses in Afghanistan and whether it is considering introducing longer tour lengths to ensure continuity of knowledge and experience. (Paragraph 252)

The FCO has a duty of care to staff at Post. This requires us to take account, in setting tour lengths, of the specific security threats, the limitations and stress of working and living on a compound, and the restrictions of travelling out of the compound and in country. A posting to Kabul or Kandahar lasts 12 months, with the option to extend by another 12 months. Extensions beyond 24 months are rare because of health reasons and are only granted if there are compelling operational reasons. In light of the additional dangers and discomforts, a posting to Lashkar Gah lasts six months, with the option to extend by another six months. Extensions beyond 12 months are rare given the health implications and are only granted if there are compelling operational reasons.

All postings to Afghanistan are on a volunteer basis. In recognition of the security situation, the unaccompanied nature of the posting, and general restrictions for staff these postings have decompression breaks every six to seven weeks. The conditions in Afghanistan, especially Lashkar Gah, remain difficult and potentially stressful for staff and also their families back in the UK. The FCO does not consider it would be right to move away from the current volunteer-only deployments with a limit on the time spent in country and regular decompression breaks. We will review these arrangements when there are significant and lasting changes to the security situation.

At present we welcome high numbers of volunteers for positions in Afghanistan. To ensure continuity of knowledge and experience, succession plans for staff are reviewed on a monthly basis. This is necessary to identify any specific training requirements, to ensure that suitable replacement staff are recruited in good time and are able to undertake any necessary pre-posting training and briefing. It also enables staff to ensure that they are able to have a handover at Post before the departure of their predecessor.

We are conscious of the value of maintaining continuity of knowledge, and we are also exploring ways for staff who have served in Afghanistan to bring their knowledge to positions in London, and vice versa, as is the case with the former Ambassador to Kabul.

THE UK'S NEW STRATEGY FOR AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN: A WAY FORWARD?

Justifications for the UK's continued presence in Afghanistan

34. We conclude that while the drugs trade has an invidious effect on governance on Afghanistan and ultimately, through the flow of heroin to the West, has a damaging impact on the UK, the Government's assessment that the drugs trade in Afghanistan is a strategic threat to the UK which, in part, merits the UK's continued military presence in Afghanistan, is debatable. (Paragraph 274)

This is not the Government's assessment. As the Prime Minister made clear in his speech of 4 September 2009, the fundamental reason why we are in Afghanistan is to ensure that Al Qaeda cannot again use the region as a base to plan terror attacks across the world. We know that there are links between the drugs trade and the insurgency, and that the drugs networks are one of the most powerful forces standing against legitimate government control. That is why the UK has directed civilian and military resources to tackle the drugs trade, and in particular to break its link with the insurgency and to offer Afghan farmers alternative, licit, livelihoods.

35. We conclude that the expansion of the stated justifications for the UK's mission in Afghanistan since 2001 has made it more difficult for the Government to communicate the basic purpose of the mission and this risks undermining support for the mission both in the UK and in Afghanistan. We welcome the Government's recognition that its strategy must be grounded in realistic objectives. However, it is not easy to see how this can be reconciled with the open-ended and wide-ranging series of objectives which form the current basis for UK effort in Afghanistan. We recommend that in the immediate future the Government should re-focus its efforts to concentrate its limited resources on one priority, namely security. (Paragraph 278)

The Prime Minister made clear in his speech of 4 September 2009 that the fundamental reason why we are in Afghanistan is to ensure that Al Qaeda cannot again use the region as a base to plan terror attacks across the world. As he explained, it is critical that we continue the essential work of denying the territory of Afghanistan as a base for terrorists. This is why we entered Afghanistan in 2001 and it remains the reason for our military presence today. It is vital to immediate UK national security interests that Afghanistan becomes a stable and secure state that can suppress terrorism and violent extremism within its borders, and contribute to the same objective across the border in Pakistan.

However, the Government has always been clear that the solutions to the challenges that confront Afghanistan will not be delivered by military means alone. This is why our strategy starts with short-term security, but links to medium-term Afghanisation and longer term development to create a stake for Afghans in the future of their country. This approach will allow Afghans to govern and secure their own country as, together, we shift our emphasis from short-term stabilisation to long-term development, on which their security and our security in Britain depends.

36. We conclude that there can be no question of the international community abandoning Afghanistan, and that the issues at stake must therefore be how best the UK and its allies can allocate responsibilities and share burdens so as to ensure that the country does not once again fall into the hands of those who seek to threaten the security of the UK and the West. We further conclude that the need for the international community to convey publicly that it intends to outlast the insurgency and remain in Afghanistan until the Afghan authorities are able to take control of their own security, must be a primary objective. (Paragraph 279)

The Government agrees that there should be no question of abandoning Afghanistan. We also agree that the international community must share the burden as equitably as possible, both within ISAF and more widely. UK diplomatic effort has been deployed in encouraging others to increase their share of the military, civilian and financial burden in Afghanistan, focusing on what they can realistically deliver. As the Prime Minister has said, the UK will remain in Afghanistan until the country is ‘strong enough as a democracy to withstand and overcome the terrorist threat.’ This message forms a key element of our comprehensive approach.

The UK’s strategy for Pakistan

37. We welcome the Prime Minister’s announcement of £10 million to support the Pakistani government’s counter terrorism efforts and we recommend that the Government intensifies its help to Pakistan in this area. (Paragraph 289)

The UK and Pakistan have a shared interest in reducing the threat from violent extremism in Pakistan. Our co-operation, at strategic and operational level, is designed to help the Government of Pakistan deal with the challenge it faces. Counter-terrorism assistance is at the heart of the UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue.

The UK will continue to support the the Government of Pakistan as it develops a counter-extremism strategy. A new National Counter-Terrorism Authority has been set up, which will be key for Pakistan to co-ordinate and develop its counter-terrorism policy. Our support also includes developing the skills of the Pakistani police and other law enforcement agencies to bring violent extremists to justice, training and assistance in evidence collection, and training in countering improvised explosive devices, forensics, bomb scene management, protecting key infrastructure and tackling terrorist financing. Such support is managed through a high-level Joint Working Group, addressing issues of mutual concern relating to counter-terrorism and serious organised crime. As those responsible for counter-terrorism policy and law enforcement in the UK and Pakistan increasingly work together, we will be able to share best practice and learn from each others’ experience.

38. We conclude that the Government is correct to place a heavy emphasis on Pakistan in its new strategy for Afghanistan, published in April 2009, and to seek to build on the broad engagement that the UK has had with Pakistan in relation to counter-terrorism since 2001. We welcome the focus on long-term solutions and the Government's commitment to assisting Pakistan to strengthen its civilian institutions. We conclude the balance of the UK's relationship with Pakistan particularly regarding its co-operation on counter-terrorism has to be improved. (Paragraph 294)

Supporting Pakistan's efforts to tackle violent extremism is at the heart of the UK-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue. Ensuring that Pakistan takes full account of the gravity of the threat posed, both to the Pakistani state and to the security and stability of the region and beyond, has been a consistent theme of this engagement. The Foreign Secretary underlined this in meetings with senior governmental interlocutors during his visits to Pakistan in January and July 2009. The UK-Pakistan Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, which last met on 2 July, has also been an important driver for promoting greater practical co-operation with Pakistan and binding in Pakistani commitment. The group has worked on building institutions and improving counter-terrorism legislation, assistance to counter-terrorism policing and financial investigation capacity, and joint programming on strategic communications. We continue to work to improve this relationship.

39. We recommend that the Government should consider how best it can work with allies to develop an international policy for assisting the Pakistani government in dealing with the Taliban and Al Qaeda. (Paragraph 295)

The Government is committed to working with international partners in assisting Pakistan's efforts to counter-terrorism. In particular we co-ordinate with the US on our counter-terrorism programmes in Pakistan, and we maintain close defence and diplomatic links in order to take this agenda forward. Multilateral fora are also important. One of the key outcomes of the June 2009 EU-Pakistan Summit was a commitment to start a regular EU-Pakistan counter-terrorism dialogue and to initiate practical co-operation. This includes improving Pakistan's counter-terrorism capabilities, notably in the fields of law enforcement and criminal justice.

The UK is a key player in the Friends of Democratic Pakistan (FoDP) group, which met at Summit-level in the margins of the UN General Assembly in September. The meeting focused on stabilising Pakistan's border areas, and how to address some of the root causes of terrorism emanating from tribal areas: lack of basic security, inadequate governance and justice, and crippling under-development and poverty. Arising from the FoDP, the Malakand Strategy has been designed to tackle militancy and extremism, and to support development in the Malakand region, as a model for other affected areas. The FoDP's focus on political and material support for security and governance reform, economic growth, institution building and provision of services is, in part, recognition that efforts to tackle extremism cannot be isolated from addressing socio-economic factors.

40. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government provides us with an update on what measures it is implementing in Pakistan to strengthen the integrity of its visa application and processing operations against fraudulent applications and to what extent and in what ways it is co-operating with the UK Borders Agency on this matter. (Paragraph 297)

The UK takes allegations of corrupt visa activity in Pakistan operations very seriously. All allegations are investigated and, where appropriate, the Government liaises with the Pakistani authorities to prosecute individuals. We also take a very robust stance on forged documentation. The Immigration Rules have been amended to enable Entry Clearance Officers to refuse and apply a ban for a period of up to ten years in respect of applicants who submit forged documents or make false representations.

The Pakistan operation has historically suffered from a high level of forgery. Consequently, we continue to invest considerable resources on forgery detection. The UK Border Agency (UKBA) team in Pakistan has a specialist document verification unit and a specialist passport forgery team to assess documents submitted with applications. The operation is also supported by a Risk and Liaison Overseas Network team, who work closely with the Serious Organised Crime Agency and the Pakistani authorities to disrupt immigration crime.

UKBA has also set up a Task Force to inspect the commercial partnership arrangements for Visa Application Centres (VACs) in high risk locations. The Task Force has conducted an audit of the four Visa Application Centres in Pakistan: Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi and Mirpur. The Task Force recommended a number of measures to further improve the integrity of the commercial partner processes and concluded that the VACs run by commercial partners compared very favourably with VACs elsewhere in the global network. The Task Force inspections resulted in UKBA developing an inspection template which is now used globally to ensure that all VACs provide a high level of integrity. This and all the Task Force's other recommendations are being implemented not only in Pakistan, but across the global network, and their effectiveness will be monitored. The FCO liaises closely with UKBA in all this work.

TOWARDS A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT?

41. We conclude that a negotiated, Afghan-led political settlement with broad popular support represents the only realistic option for long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. However, we further conclude that there can be no serious prospect of meaningful discussions until Coalition Forces and the Afghan National Security Forces gain, and retain, the upper hand on security across the country, including in Helmand, and are then able to negotiate from a position of strength. For these reasons we conclude that the current increased military activity is a necessary pre-requisite for any long-term political settlement. (Paragraph 311)

The Government agrees that a political solution is essential to the success of the international community's strategy in Afghanistan and that that solution is more likely to emerge from a position of strength. As part of this political track, an enhanced, Afghan-led effort to promote reintegration and reconciliation with certain elements of the insurgency represents a key, and potentially decisive, element. President Karzai has stated publicly his willingness to engage with those who are prepared to renounce violence, work within a political process and who have no links to terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda. This needs to be complementary and parallel to military and economic measures. We agree that military pressure is a vital ingredient in creating the conditions necessary to encourage insurgents to reintegrate into mainstream Afghan society.

42. We welcome the commitment of the US and UK governments to ensuring that human rights are not undermined in any future reconciliation process and we conclude that the meaningful participation of women is an essential element in any negotiated reconciliation, as has been the case in many other post-conflict peace processes. (Paragraph 318)

We have a regular dialogue with the Government of Afghanistan on human rights, including the rights of women. We intend to continue this dialogue and the women's empowerment programmes we already fund, with the current and any future government in Kabul. Progress on human rights since 2001 must not be lost. Political dialogue and settlement with those prepared to engage in the democratic process will be essential to a durable solution in Afghanistan. This process needs to be led and supported by both the Government and people of Afghanistan.



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ISBN 978-0-10-177022-4

