

AFGHANISTAN
MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT
January 2011

The Government has committed itself to keeping Parliament informed about developments in Afghanistan on a monthly basis. This third monthly report covers developments in the areas of security, governance and the rule of law, regional engagement and counter narcotics.

This report reflects the combined assessment of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence and Department for International Development.

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

Overview

The number of security incidents broadly levelled out in January although at a level significantly above that seen in January 2010. We expect violence levels to rise again in the spring. Afghan National Army (ANA) personnel reached a total of around 149,500 and the Afghan National Police (ANP) reached around 117,000. Both are on track to meet their respective target numbers. International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) confirmed that we remain on track to meet the objective agreed at Lisbon of beginning security transition in a first group of Provinces in early 2011. The inauguration of the new Afghan Parliament took place on 26 January marking the completion of the 2010 electoral process. The Upper Sangin Valley (USV) peace accord between the Helmand Provincial Government and Alikhozai elders was agreed on 1 January. The High Peace Council (HPC) continued its work to lead the Afghan Government's reintegration and reconciliation strategy.

Security

January saw a greater tempo of operations than in previous winters because of the high number of ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the milder than usual weather and the insurgents' continuing attempts to intimidate the population through asymmetric attacks.

Security in the Afghan capital is led by the ANSF who have facilitated a safe environment for many high profile events, including the inauguration of the new Parliament on 26 January. But the security environment remains challenging. On 28 January a suicide bomber detonated a device in a supermarket in the Wazir Akbhar Khan District of Kabul causing 14 casualties. On 29 January, the Deputy Governor of Kandahar Province, Abdul Latif Ashna, was killed in a suicide attack whilst being driven to work in the capital of the southern province. Attacks such as these show that the insurgency has little respect for the safety of civilians or legitimate governance. ISAF forces will continue to seek to protect the population from such acts and build up the ANSF to ensure that they are ready to take responsibility for security across the country by the end of 2014. Without the security and stability necessary for governance and development, instability could return and recreate the conditions in which terrorist organisations were previously able to operate and threaten our own national security.

Violent incidents across Afghanistan

The declining number of security incidents seen in November and December broadly levelled out in January, although at a level significantly above that seen in January 2010. We expect violence levels to rise again in the spring but it is essential that ISAF and ANSF continue to fight the insurgency and disrupt their networks throughout the winter so that, when the insurgency attempts to regroup, they find their ability to operate and intimidate has been eroded.

Weapons Caches Found and Cleared

The number of weapons caches found and cleared remains high. Over the 12 weeks to 31 January, ISAF forces discovered and cleared 1,250 insurgent weapons caches. This compares with 163 over the same period last year. Limiting access to weapons is another important aspect of reducing the effectiveness of the insurgency.

Afghan National Security Forces

Progress continues to be made in developing the ANSF. By the middle of January the ANA had reached a total of around 149,500 personnel and the ANP around 117,000. Both are still on track to meet the targets numbers agreed at the London Conference in January 2010.

Throughout January the ANSF have been leading *Operation Omid Panj (Hope Five)*. This is the latest in a series of Afghan led operations. The previous operation, *Omid Char (Hope Four)* began in October 2010 and was, at the time, the largest operation in terms of size, number of soldiers and duration to have been planned, led and conducted by the ANA. *Omid Panj* demonstrated increasing ANSF capability, with the Afghans relying on even less on the supporting role of ISAF troops. The Operation is being conducted in an agricultural area to the north of the Helmand River. It is pushing the Afghan Government's influence and security bubble further into rural areas. It was devised by the 3rd Brigade of 215 Maiwand Corps of the ANA in response to a request from the Gereshk District Governor to tackle the problem zone.

Policing (Conflict Pool)

UK support for infrastructure for ANP in Helmand continues to deliver results. In January three police stations were under construction with five more being designed.

A third basic CID training course began at the Helmand Police Training Centre on 15 January, with training inputs from a range of Afghan staff. The PRT also hosted a meeting between CID, Anti-Terrorist Prosecutors and the National Directorate of Security to discuss a recent series of assassinations in Lashkar Gah. This is a significant step forward in inter-agency cooperation among Afghan investigative bodies.

The Helmand PRT supported a three-day conference in Lashkar Gah for 85 community elders and mullahs from seven districts to learn about the relationship between community-based and statutory justice systems.

Transition

ISAF's monthly assessment in January highlighted progress in several provinces, including central Helmand. ISAF confirmed that security transition remains on track to begin early this year. President Karzai said that he intends to announce the first phase of transition in his Afghan New Year address in March.

The International Community's Military Contribution

Figure 1: Contributions to ISAF

Country	Contribution	% of Total
US	90,000	68.2%
UK	9,500	7.2%
Germany	4,922	3.7%
France	4,000	3.0%
Italy	3,772	2.8%
Canada	2,903	2.2%
Poland	2,490	1.9%
Turkey	1,823	1.4%
Romania	1,693	1.3%
Australia	1,550	1.2%
Spain	1,472	1.1%
Others (37 nations)	7,907	6.0%
Current Total	131,982	100.00%

Above numbers are indicative of troop contributions as at 25 January 2011, actual numbers fluctuate daily. Source: ISAF

At the beginning of January the US announced that it would be deploying around 1,400 members of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit to Helmand for around three months. They are part of the US Theater Reserve Force. The intention is for the unit to take advantage of progress made by ISAF in Helmand and to enable coalition and ANSF to hold these areas during this winter.

On 25 January the Italian Parliament approved the financial package needed to deploy up to 200 trainers who should be in Afghanistan by the end of May. On 28 January the Dutch Parliament voted in favour of sending a new police training mission to Afghanistan, including police and military trainers. We expect them to be fully operational by May 2011. This is a welcome commitment to the important task of training the ANSF. On the same day, the German Bundestag voted to extend its military mandate in Afghanistan for a further year, retaining their current level of 5,000 troops with a 350-man reserve in Germany.

Lieutenant General Bill Caldwell, Commander of the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan, has stated that more nations are pledging support, yet NATO still faces a shortage of 740 trainers needed to get the ANSF ready to take the lead for security. The UK Government recognises this shortfall and continues to lobby nations for trainers in tandem with NATO's efforts.

Parliamentary Elections

The inauguration of the new Afghan Parliament took place on 26 January, marking the completion of the 2010 electoral process.

Parliamentary orientation programmes for new members began in mid-January. The UK will be funding a training programme specifically for female MPs. Approximately 60% of members are new to the Lower House of Parliament (*Wolesi Jirga*) and training is vital in assisting MPs to develop the knowledge and expertise necessary to fulfil their responsibilities.

The new Parliamentarians convened for the first time on 29 January and began the process of electing a new Speaker. The Special Tribunal established by the Supreme Court to investigate allegations of electoral malpractice continued to operate.

Governance

On 1 January the Helmand Provincial Government and elders from the Alikhozai from the USV agreed a peace accord. The Provincial Government, in close coordination with ISAF, is focusing on building trust with the USV communities, increasing basic security and improving freedom of movement with the construction of the 611 road, linking Sangin to Gereshk and Kajaki. The Provincial Government is also establishing a 15-man *shura* of elders to represent local communities in taking forward the agreement.

Helmand Provincial Governor, Gulab Mangal, has established a five-man provincial reintegration secretariat to support the delivery of reintegration policy within districts and communities across Helmand. The team will be assisted and mentored by ISAF and the PRT who also work at district level to assist the Government of Afghanistan in setting up local reintegration structures and processes.

Counter Narcotics

With opium prices at a six year high in autumn 2010 there had been concern that 2011, after three years of reduction, might see a resurgence in poppy cultivation. In its Opium Rapid Assessment Survey, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) predicted a small decrease in national poppy cultivation levels. The assessment also indicated that cultivation levels in both Helmand and Kandahar (the two highest cultivating provinces) would fall this year. These estimates are based on a small sample but if achieved would be a welcome success. The UNODC warned, however, that there might be an increase in poppy cultivation provinces that were previously declared 'poppy free'.

Progress is being made more widely beyond poppy cultivation. In December last year the Afghan Special Narcotics Force conducted its first "all Afghan" interdiction operation that led to the seizure and destruction of 41.5 tons of hashish. Deputy Minister of Interior, General Baz Mohammad recently announced that the first 50 interdiction operations of 2011 had seized 1,985kg opium, 61kg heroin, 1197kg cannabis and 338kg chemical precursors. Fifty eight suspects were arrested. Additionally, 911kg of bomb-making equipment was found during some of these operations - a clear reminder of the links between the insurgency and the drugs trade.

The Afghan drugs trade remains a threat to the stability of Afghanistan, has a corrosive effect on governance and provides financial and logistical support to the insurgency. The UK continues to support the Government of Afghanistan in implementing its National Drug Control Strategy by ensuring that there are credible risks at all levels of the drugs trade and by supporting incentives for licit cultivation and economic development.

Economic Development

DFID contributes to the Government of Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme, which brings community-driven development to rural and insecure areas. In January 984 communities elected Community Development Councils that support local community-driven development projects. 1,431 project proposals were approved and 372 projects completed. These included projects to improve water supply and sanitation, build rural roads, rebuild irrigation networks and generate electricity.

Construction work started on a DFID-funded 12 km stretch of the Lashkar Gah to Gereshk Road connecting the two economic centres of Helmand Province. Work to upgrade a further 35 km of roads across Central Helmand connecting Nad Ali, Marjah, and Nahr-e-Saraj with Lashkar Gah also began in January.

Over 1,000 Sangin residents, nearly a third of them women, took part in a health education event in Sangin District Centre. The PRT provided Afghan health workers with 8,000 home medical kits to distribute during such health training events.

The District Governor of Reg (a district in southern Helmand) held a Children's Day event for about 140 children: government officials distributed winter coats and hygiene kits and gave a presentation on basic hygiene.

Regional Engagement

The HPC continues its work to lead the Afghan Government's peace and reconciliation strategy. In January members of the Council visited Islamabad. They discussed Pakistan's role in Afghan peace efforts with Pakistani leaders. The UK welcomes this move as a positive sign of cooperation between the two countries and continues to support the HPC in its regional outreach.

Conclusion

We are cautiously optimistic about the steady progress we are making but we recognise that reverses could still occur. The international community will continue to urge the Government of Afghanistan to tackle the many difficult challenges that still lie ahead. The UK, along with coalition partners, will continue to work with the Government of Afghanistan to provide it with the support it needs.

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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