

AFGHANISTAN
MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT
May 2011

The UK is engaged in Afghanistan as part of a 48-nation coalition to prevent international terrorists, including Al Qaeda, from again using Afghanistan as a base from which to operate, threatening our security and that of the region.

The Government has committed itself to keeping Parliament informed about developments in Afghanistan on a monthly basis. This is the seventh monthly report and reflects the combined assessment of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development.

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

Overview

Al Qaeda founder and leader Usama Bin Laden was killed by US forces in Pakistan on 2 May. His death, while significant, does not change our strategy in Afghanistan and we remain committed to our military, diplomatic and development work.

The Afghanistan Revenue Department (ARD) reported a 26 % increase in revenue collection for the 2010/11 fiscal year. Negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the IMF to agree a new programme of support continued but there is still much work to be done in key areas.

Good progress in Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) training and development has continued. Nevertheless, leadership training is challenging owing to inconsistent support from Afghan district level leadership. The increasing number of Afghans wishing to serve in the Afghan National Police (ANP), as officers, has enabled the Ministry of Interior (MoI) to apply higher selection standards. A pilot officer course successfully concluded in Helmand but as yet it is unclear whether Kabul will endorse any ongoing decentralised training of its officers.

Governor-led poppy eradication operations have been concluded in the south of the country, including in Helmand Province. The Governor of Helmand's teams eradicated 2,111 hectares of poppy, an increase of almost 30% compared with last year.

The Taliban's fighting season resumed in May. As expected, the number of violent incidents increased as the insurgency attempted to regain lost momentum. Overall, levels of violence, although higher than those seen in April, are broadly in line with what we would expect for this time of year.

Political

On 2 May, the US announced the death of Al-Qaeda leader Usama bin Laden in a US led operation in Pakistan. His death has significant implications both for counter-terrorism and for our wider foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan. Statements by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary welcomed the news of bin Laden's death but stressed that, although a positive development, it did not change our strategy in Afghanistan. We remain committed to our military, diplomatic and development work to build a stable and secure Afghanistan. The UK is working with the Afghans and our international partners to continue efforts to achieve stability on both sides of the Afghanistan and Pakistan border. We call upon the Taliban to make a decisive break with Al Qaeda, lay down their arms and participate in a peaceful political process.

President Obama's State Visit to the UK between 24-26 May provided an opportunity to review political progress in Afghanistan. In their joint press conference, the Prime Minister and President Obama reiterated their support for an Afghan-led reconciliation and political process. They underlined President Karzai's commitment to talk to anyone who is willing to end violence, split with Al Qaeda and accept the Afghan constitution.

At the G8 Summit on 26 May, G8 partners emphasised the importance of progress on the political settlement and reinforced their long term commitment to Afghanistan, beyond 2014 and the transition process.

Reconciliation and Reintegration

The Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) Conference took place in Kabul on 10-11 May, supported by the UK and Japan. It reviewed lessons learned from the Programme so far and helped build momentum as the Afghan Government consolidates the APRP's implementation at the Provincial level. Discussion focused on improving the flow of resources from Kabul to the Provinces and developing an action plan to take forward the APRP between now and the Bonn Conference in December.

In Sangin, Helmand, Governor Mangal inaugurated an interim District Community Council on 24 May. The Council, with Governor Mangal's continued engagement, will be key to reinvigorating the Upper Sangin Valley peace accord. Helmand PRT and Regional Command (SW) plans are in place to provide continued governance and development support and create greater Afghan Government ownership of the process.

Regional Developments

In mid-May, FCO Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Alistair Burt, and Permanent Under Secretary, Simon Fraser, visited Pakistan. They discussed a range of issues including Afghanistan-Pakistan relations and the impact of bin Laden's death on the region. The visit provided an opportunity to enhance UK-Pakistan dialogue on key Afghan issues and to demonstrate the continued strength of our commitment to the region. These messages were reiterated by Mark Sedwill, the newly appointed UK Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, when he visited Islamabad at the end of May.

The High Peace Council (HPC) continued their programme of outreach to Afghanistan's neighbours, visiting Turkmenistan on 20 May. HPC Chairman Rabbani met President

Berdimuhamedov for talks on how the Turkmen can support the political settlement process in Afghanistan.

Parliament

Following several rounds of Parliamentary scrutiny, the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament passed the national budget for 2011 on 2 May. Parliament demonstrated its ongoing involvement in Afghan security policy and external relations by calling upon key Ministers to answer Members' questions and scrutinise government policy on these areas. The Foreign Minister and National Security Advisor were called before the Lower House to discuss the future of the US-Afghan strategic partnership and foreign relations more widely. The Ministers for Defence and the Interior were called to report on the status of the Afghan National Army and current policing efforts.

Strengthening the Afghan State

Justice and Rule of Law

In Helmand, 60 Afghan legal professionals completed a training module on fair trials and the Chief Prosecutor conducted a Performance and Pay review for prosecutors in the Province. The justice strategic messaging campaign has commenced. It aims to empower the people of Helmand with the information they need to access the justice system. Counter-insurgency prosecution mentoring continues, focusing on the need for evidence-based cases over those based solely on intelligence.

Governor Mangal awarded certificates to the 57 prisoners who had graduated from the temporary vocational training centre in Lashkar-Gah prison. The last residential wing with capacity for 150 people was handed over to Afghan control. By the end of May 2011, additional specialist units and support buildings will be completed. Following the Kandahar Prison escape the PRT/TFH has given support and mentoring to the prison authorities in Helmand to help mitigate the risk of a similar incident occurring there.

Anti-Corruption Monitoring

The inauguration of the anti-corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) took place in May. The establishment of the Committee was a commitment of the 2010 London and Kabul Conferences to oversee government anti-corruption activities. It demonstrates the willingness of the Government and international community to tackle corruption. Comprising three Afghan and three international anti-corruption experts, with significant records of accomplishment in Asia, Africa and Europe, the Committee will set benchmarks and regularly monitor progress on tackling corruption.

As anti-corruption efforts in Helmand increase, the Military Prosecutor has received a growing number of cases relating to AUP corruption, which, in turn, has translated into referrals for prosecution to the Kandahar Judge.

Governance

The UK offered further support to the Independent Directorate for Local Governance to improve its ability to develop policy and manage programmes to help extend the Afghan Government's reach and its ability to meet the basic needs of people at the local level. This is crucial for the transition process. A new Director, Abdul Khaliq Farahi, was appointed on 23 May.

The Afghan Government continues to make progress with the merit-based appointment of local officials. Results published in May show that since the summer of 2010, 66 (of 248) District Governors have been recruited, in line with new processes, 11 Deputy Governors have been recruited and 14 (of 34) Deputy Governors are in the process of merit-based recruitment.

Economic Development

The Afghanistan Revenue Department (ARD) reported revenue collection of AFN 80.4 billion (US\$ 1.77 billion) for the 2010/11 fiscal year, a 26% increase year-on-year. ARD continues to improve its performance against IMF benchmarks. Revenue collection as a proportion of GDP has increased from less than 3%, when UK technical assistance started working with ARD on tax reform in 2002, to 11% in 2010/11.

The UK announced support for vocational training, including for Turquoise Mountain, to provide part-time technical and vocational training for 180 male and female students over the next three years. This will result in a pool of semi-skilled labour in carpentry and woodwork, jewellery and gem-cutting and embroidery and tailoring.

Negotiations between the Afghan Government and the IMF on a new IMF programme continued. While the Afghan Government has made reasonable progress on a number of actions necessary for an agreement on a new programme of support, there is still a lot more to do. In support of this process, the UK has agreed to co-fund a forensic audit of the Kabul Bank.

Counter Narcotics

Governor-led poppy eradication (GLE) operations took place across Afghanistan. 3,787 hectares were eradicated by mid-May, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. This is a significant increase on last year, with eradication operations likely to continue in some parts until July. With the support of the UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team, the Governor of Helmand's teams have eradicated 2,111 hectares of poppy, an increase of almost 30% compared with last year. Afghan forces took responsibility for the security of the GLE teams. Eradication operations have been completed in the south of the country, including in Helmand Province.

The Governor of Delaram District in Nimroz Province was convicted of drug trafficking offences and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by the Criminal Justice Task Force, a highly successful UK-supported institution set up to investigate and prosecute serious narcotics-related offences.

Security

Insurgent Threat

May saw the start of the Taliban's fighting season. As expected, the number of violent incidents increased as the insurgency attempted to regain lost momentum. As the month progressed, the poppy harvest in the south came to an end. This released fighting-age males for employment by insurgents and insurgent activity returned to a more familiar geographical pattern with violent incidents concentrated in southern provinces. For the month as a whole, levels of violence, although higher than those seen in April, are broadly in line with what we would expect for this time of year.

The insurgency has focused its efforts on a number of 'spectaculars' including the assaults in Kandahar on 7 May and the 21 May suicide attack at the Kabul Military Hospital. These high-profile attacks were intended to show the population that the insurgency remains active. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) showed their effectiveness in responding to the threat by preventing insurgents from reaching many of their targets. In Lashkar Gah, the ANSF successfully managed the response to a coordinated insurgent attack on 19 May. An IED attack in the district centre was executed hastily and failed to inflict any fatalities. The ANSF neutralised a second device, preventing the multiple casualties and high value strikes that the insurgency sought to achieve. Governor Mangal was quick to condemn the insurgents' actions and highlight their ineffectiveness to the local media.

Troop contributions

On 17 May, the Prime Minister confirmed to the House of Commons Liaison Committee that, by February 2012, approximately 400 UK military personnel will have withdrawn from Afghanistan, following the conclusion of specific planned tasks. Over 200 of these troops have already been withdrawn. He emphasised that the UK remains the second largest troop contributor, operating in the hardest part of the country.

The UK's enduring force level remains 9,500 conventional troops. Those troops being withdrawn are leaving on completion of specific time-limited tasks. These include the completion of the move of the UK's strategic air hub from Kandahar airfield to Camp Bastion, the associated completion of force protection at Kandahar airfield and, by February 2012, elements of HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Corp, currently augmenting HQ ISAF Joint Command in Kabul, being replaced by another of NATO's nine standing high readiness headquarters.

Table One: International Contributions to ISAF:

Country	Contribution	% of Total
US	90,000	68.0%
UK	9,500	7.2%
Germany	5,000	3.8%
France	4,005	3.0%
Italy	3,880	2.9%
Canada	2,920	2.2%
Poland	2,530	1.9%
Romania	1,870	1.4%

Turkey	1,785	1.4%
Australia	1,550	1.2%
Spain	1,500	1.1%
Others (37 nations)	7,860	5.9%
Current Total	132,400	100.00%
<i>Above numbers are indicative of troop contributions as at 16 May 2011, actual numbers fluctuate daily. Source: ISAF</i>		

Progress towards Transition

During May, representatives of the international community and Afghan Government focused on final preparation and planning for the implementation of transition in the first tranche of provinces and urban districts. This included a Strategic Directive for transition implementation and provincial transition plans that will inform a transition planning conference for Afghan Ministers, scheduled for June.

Good progress is being made towards security transition in Helmand's provincial capital Lashkar Gah, which is scheduled to begin Tier One transition in July. On 15 May, Governor Mangal held the third in a series of command-level meetings to review planning for Coalition Forces' transfer of responsibility for security in central Lashkar Gah to the ANSF. The RC-SW Commanding General made clear to Mangal's top ANSF commanders that a dedicated Coalition Forces Quick Reaction Force would remain in Helmand as Lashkar Gah enters transition. They would support the ANSF in responding to any insurgent attack in Lashkar Gah it could not handle alone.

ANSF Growth and Capability

Professionalisation of the ANSF continued in May with a further a further 6,000 soldiers and 4,000 police completing literacy training and the opening of the Military Police ANA branch school. The branch schools, of which this is the twelfth and final, are teaching the ANA the broad range of skills required to become a self-sufficient force. In addition, the ANA graduated its second female Officer Candidate School class on 19 May. This increases the total number of women in the ANA to over 320 and demonstrates the positive steps being made with gender rights and integration.

Table Two: ANSF Growth to 31 May 2011

	Objective (31 October 2011)	Target Strength (31 May 2011)	Actual Strength (31 May 2011)	March Target Met
ANA:	171,600	159,700	168,000	Yes
ANP:	134,000	126,900	128,600	Yes
ANA Officers:	26,400	24,700	21,100	No
ANA NCOs:	59,000	53,200	43,800	No

Table Three: ANSF Attrition Rates

	Target Monthly Attrition	Actual Monthly Attrition	March Target Met
ANA:	1.4%	2.3%	No
ANP:	1.4%	1.4%	Yes
Uniformed Police	1.4%	1.0%	Yes
Border Police	1.4%	1.8%	No
National Civil Order Police	1.4%	3.4%	No

Overall growth of the ANSF continues ahead of schedule with both the ANA and ANP above 95% of their October 2011 target strength. ANA attrition rates have risen since April but still represent a downwards trend when compared with preceding months.

The Ministry of Interior announced the decision to increase the length of the Afghan National Police Basic Patrolman Course from six to eight weeks. This will broaden the core police curriculum to include important courses on Human Rights and Gender Integration; Transparency and Accountability; the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program; and Intelligence-Led Policing.

The strength of the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), the gendarmerie pillar of the police force, now exceeds 10,000 and attrition was reduced to the lowest ever rate: 1.3% during April.

There is an increasing number of Afghans wishing to serve in the ANP as officers. During the Officer Candidate School selection this month, thousands of Afghans arrived at the Afghan National Police Training General Command to take the entrance exam. As a consequence the MoI is able to apply higher standards of entry. A pilot Regional Training Centre (RTC) (SW) officer course was successfully concluded in May. Ten officers graduated.

On 26 May British forces from all three services supported hundreds of Afghan soldiers in carrying out a major operation to clear insurgents from one of their last remaining strongholds in central Helmand. Operation OMID HAFT was planned and executed by the ANA and partnered by ISAF troops. It involved fighting in harsh and hostile terrain where the insurgents have intimidated and threatened the Afghan population for many years.

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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