

AFGHANISTAN
MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT
March 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 fifth 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

Progress across the political and security spectrum was, by and large, positive in March. The continuing rise in the number of weapons caches found, the attack on the UN compound in Mazar e Sharif on 1 April and other protests against the burning of the Koran in the US, are clear signs however that the insurgency remains a serious threat to stability in Afghanistan.

President Karzai repeated his invitation to the Taliban to return to peaceful Afghan society. He invited *“all Afghanistan’s neighbours and in particular officials in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to give their full and cordial support to our efforts for peace and reconciliation”*.

UN Security Council Resolution 1974 renewed the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission (UNAMA) in Afghanistan on 22 March.

President Karzai announced the first seven provinces and urban districts to begin the process of transition to Afghan led security responsibility, the first step towards Afghanistan assuming full responsibility for its own security by the end of 2014. President Karzai’s announcement on security transition was warmly welcomed by Afghans.

The Afghan National Army (ANA) led an important operation in Helmand, clearing a route of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and seriously disrupting the insurgency without the active support of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF).

The lack of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, which is used by the international community as an indicator of sound economic and financial management, remains a serious concern.

Political

President Karzai's visit to the UK in early March provided an opportunity for the UK to underline our on-going commitment to Afghanistan through a long-term enduring partnership, based on diplomacy, trade, aid, development, military and friendship.

The Organisation for the Islamic Conference (OIC) hosted a meeting of the International Contact Group, a group of over 50 countries' Special Representatives for Afghanistan and Pakistan and representatives from the UN, EU and NATO, in Jeddah on 3 March. High Peace Council Chair Burhanuddin Rabbani represented the Afghan Government.

The mandate for the United Nation Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) was renewed for a further year on 22 March. UN Security Council Resolution 1974 on the situation in Afghanistan highlighted UNAMA's core role in co-ordinating aid, working with ISAF on security transition, supporting the Afghan Government in electoral reform and supporting Afghan-led reconciliation. The UK played a key role in the negotiations to ensure the new mandate reflects our aim to help establish a secure and stable Afghanistan.

Reconciliation and Reintegration

During his speech announcing transition on 22 March, President Karzai stressed his commitment to peace and reconciliation, along with reaching out to insurgents and neighbouring countries to support a peace process.

High Peace Council Chairman Rabbani and Head of the Joint Secretariat for the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme, Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai chaired the inaugural meeting of the Peace Support Group on 24 March with representatives from the US, UK, Japan, Turkey, Germany, Pakistan the OIC, UNAMA and EU. The aim of the Peace Support Group is to enable Afghan and international partners to share ideas and co-ordinate efforts on reconciliation.

28 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, including Helmand, have now established Provincial Peace Councils, and supporting secretariats. Reintegration teams from five districts have received training in Lashkar Gah, others will follow. In addition, the Helmand Peace Council will soon be travelling to districts to give guidance on implementing the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme.

Parliament

Further members and chairs were appointed to the various Afghan Parliamentary committees and the First and Second Deputy Speakers of the Lower House were elected.

On 28 March the Lower House rejected the proposed national budget for this year. MPs were particularly concerned that too small a portion of the budget had been allocated to infrastructure development and healthcare. The budget has now been returned to the Ministry of Finance for amendment.

Strengthening the Afghan State

Justice and Rule of Law

The international community, including the UK, continued its efforts to develop the justice sector, a key priority. UK and US lawyers trained Afghan counter narcotics investigators, prosecutors and lawyers in the Criminal Justice Task Force.

The Helmand Chief Justice, Chief Prosecutor and Director of Justice visited the UK in late March to learn how the British criminal and civil justice systems work. They met the Attorney General, members of the judiciary, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Ministry of Justice; Non-Governmental Organisations and the Bar Human Rights Committee.

A USAID funded court opened in Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province in March, expanding local access to justice.

Afghan women's rights were the focus of visits to the UK by two delegations of Afghan women, including the Governor of Bamyan Province, and representatives of Afghan civil society. They saw, at first hand, the UK parliamentary system in action and learned how women's rights were protected and advanced in the UK.

Development

Without agreement on a new IMF programme for Afghanistan, DFID postponed a planned payment of £85 million due in 2010/11 to the multi-donor Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which channels donor assistance to the Government of Afghanistan. DFID expects to resume disbursements to the Trust Fund when a new IMF agreement has been made.

During a visit to Afghanistan in March the Development Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, announced UK assistance for the Civilian Technical Assistance Programme, which provides international technical expertise to strengthen the structures, systems and skills of the Afghan civil service. The Development Secretary also announced DFID's new programme to provide vocational training to 10,000 Helmandis over the next three years. This training will support private sector development and job opportunities in Helmand.

New tax offices were opened in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province. Jalalabad is a key economic centre that will generate increasingly significant revenue for the Government of Afghanistan. The offices, equipped through UK funding, will provide taxpayers in Nangarhar with a local source of information and assistance in filing tax returns. The UK has provided technical assistance to the Afghanistan Revenue Department since 2002.

The Helmand Provincial Governor's Office approved its first Provincial Development Plan since 2007. The new plan was written by the Provincial Governor's Office, in close co-ordination with the UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team and other donors. It marks a further step towards an Afghan provincial lead on development co-ordination.

Security

Insurgent Threat

Across Afghanistan, there has been an expected increase in violent incidents, a trend consistent with previous years.

The number of weapons caches found and cleared rose again in March and remains significantly higher than the same time last year, reinforcing the earlier assertion that the insurgency will attempt to regain momentum over the coming months.

In central Helmand commanders on the ground have seen signs of the insurgency returning to the fight and there has been an increase in the rate and intensity of operations. However, we judge that this increase has been on our terms rather than the insurgency's.

Troop contributions

The latest figures from ISAF on troop contributions are unchanged from the February report.

Table One: International Contributions to ISAF:

Country	Contribution	% of Total
US	90,000	68.2%
UK	9,500	7.2%
Germany	4,909	3.7%
France	3,979	3.0%
Italy	3,815	2.9%
Canada	2,900	2.2%
Poland	2,527	1.9%
Turkey	1,799	1.3%
Romania	1,726	1.3%
Australia	1,550	1.2%
Spain	1,499	1.1%
Others (37 nations)	7,907	6.0%
Current Total	132,203	100.00%

Above numbers are indicative of troop contributions as at 4 March 2011, actual numbers fluctuate daily. Source: ISAF

Progress towards Transition

President Karzai announced the first group of provinces and urban districts to begin security transition on 22 March. These are the provinces of Panjshir, Bamyan and Kabul (with the exception of Surobi district) and the urban districts of Lashkar Gah in Helmand, Mehtar Lam in Laghman, Herat City in Herat Province and Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh.

Transition is primarily about strengthening and transferring security functions. It is a conditions-based process, not a calendar-driven event, and must lead to a sustainable hand over. Assessments of these conditions are made by a high-level Joint NATO-Afghan Board and based upon district and provincial level reports. Significant progress has been made, but it will take time to build the capability of the ANSF so they can take lead responsibility for security across the country.

It is a strong sign of the work that UK forces have done in Lashkar Gah that the city is now ready to begin formal transition. The ANSF already provide the security within the city. The Afghan Government will use the next three months to develop a programme of enhanced development and governance activity that will contribute to sustainable security transition. President Karzai has said that he wants transition to be underway by July.

ANSF Growth and Capability

Overall ANSF growth continues ahead of schedule but in the three key areas of ‘leadership, literacy and losses’ there is a mixed picture. Growth in ANA officers and non-commissioned officers remains below target, but a new ANP officer training course has started in Helmand. Similarly, whilst attrition rates across the ANP as a whole are now within target, the rates across the ANA are falling short.

Progress continues to be made in the professionalization of the ANSF, with the steady increase of literacy graduates and the full functionality of the Police Staff College in Kabul.

The improved professionalization of the ANA was demonstrated through ANA led operations on the ground. In March, *Operation Tora Ghar 15* saw the *4th Tolay* (a company-sized unit of the ANA) clear a route of improvised explosive devices and cause serious disruption to insurgent activity in the village of Zangal in Helmand province.

Table Two: ANSF Growth to 31 March 2011:

	Objective (31 October 2011)	Target Strength (31 March 2011)	Actual Strength (31 March 2011)	March Target Met
ANA:	171,600	155,000	159,000	Yes
ANP:	134,000	122,000	125,500	Yes
ANA Officers:	26,400	24,000	20,000	No
ANA NCOs:	59,000	50,500	41,500	No

Growth in the overall size of the ANSF continues ahead of schedule to meet the October 2011 target, with 159,000 soldiers and 125,500 police officers as of 31 March. While overall numbers of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the Afghan National Army remain short of the target for the month’s end, progress is being made in building a cadre of junior leaders across the ANSF.

Table Three: ANSF Attrition Rates:

	Target Monthly Attrition	Actual Monthly Attrition	March Target Met
ANA:	1.4%	2.6%	No
ANP:	1.4%	1.0%	Yes
Uniformed Police	1.4%	0.7%	Yes
Border Police	1.4%	1.5%	No
National Civil Order Police	1.4%	2.0%	No

In March the number of personnel leaving the Afghan National Police was below the threshold of 1.4% a month. The percentage of personnel leaving the Afghan Uniformed Police – who make up the majority of the force – was at its lowest rate to date at 0.7% a month. Whilst more needs to be done to address attrition, this month’s figures show the steady decline of attrition across all pillars of the ANP, demonstrating that efforts to tackle the causes of attrition - such as increased police pay, better working conditions and mandatory literacy training - are having an impact.

Afghan Police Services

The UK-led Helmand Police Training Centre was transferred to the command of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, in the lead up to transition to an Afghan training-lead. The Centre is recognised as one of the most successful police training centres in the country, due to the quality of the British-led training. The new Police Staff College in Kabul is now up and running and in March delivered two days of leadership and anti-corruption training for 24 District Commanders from Helmand and Kandahar.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office May 2011