

**AFGHANISTAN**  
**MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT**  
**March 2013**

The UK is part of a 50-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 twenty sixth report covers progress in March 2013. It 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**

Foreign Office Senior Minister of State Baroness Warsi made her second visit to Afghanistan on 4 -6 March. Key themes of the visit were emphasising the UK's enduring commitment to Afghanistan and protecting the gains in human rights, particularly women's rights, Afghanistan has seen since the fall of the Taleban.

In a speech on 4 March the International Development Secretary Justine Greening pledged to step up UK support for women and girls in the world's poorest countries. This pledge included a commitment to make tackling violence against women and girls in Afghanistan a priority in the next DFID country plan.

The Afghan Special Case Tribunal announced its verdict on the Kabul Bank fraud trial on 5 March. The former Chief Executive and Chairman of the Kabul Bank were each convicted of breach of trust and sentenced to five years in prison. In addition, the individuals received fines equivalent to the value of the assets they are deemed to have stolen from the bank. Other defendants were given shorter prison sentences. The Afghan Attorney General has lodged an appeal against the entirety of the verdict seeking stronger sentences.

On 6 March the Prime Minister hosted an Investors Forum with the Afghan Minister of Mines at Number 10 Downing Street. The event provided an opportunity to showcase Afghanistan's natural resource potential. At the Forum the Prime Minister and International Development Secretary announced a new DFID programme of £10 million over the next

three years, which will support the Ministry's work to negotiate, grant, manage and monitor contracts, appoint experts to key posts and develop the mineral and hydrocarbon sector.

The UK continues to support an Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process. Now is the time for all Afghans to sit down together to help shape a peaceful and prosperous future for their country. This process must be inclusive. The Taliban have an opportunity to engage in dialogue about Afghanistan's future by opening an office in Doha.

The Afghan National Security Forces are progressing well. 21 out of 26 Brigades are now operating either independently, or with ISAF only in an advisory role. ISAF forces continue work to build and train the key military enabling capabilities that the ANSF need to operate. By way of example, the Afghan Air Force achieved a major milestone in their Combined Strategic Flight Plan, with the first combined training exercise including multiple aircraft and supporting capabilities.

## **Strengthening the Afghan State**

### **Political**

At the end of February, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) produced a list of intended locations for polling centres across Afghanistan in advance of the presidential and provincial council elections scheduled for 5 April 2014. The list was shared with the relevant Afghan security authorities to assist in security planning for the voter registration process and election day.

On 24 March the IEC announced its intention to postpone voter registration, which was due to begin on 21 April. It will now commence on 26 May in order to allow time for further planning for enhanced security features on the voter cards. The registration campaign will issue new cards to Afghan citizens who will be 18 years of age by 5 April 2014; who have recently returned to the country; who have moved from one electoral constituency to another; who have lost their old voter registration cards or whose cards are significantly damaged; and those who are eligible voters but have not obtained cards in the past.

On the 6 March, the Afghan Parliament returned from its winter recess. President Karzai opened the inaugural session of Parliament with a speech to members of both Houses. The speech focused on the importance of the coming year for Afghanistan in terms of the peace process and transition. President Karzai reaffirmed both his intention to step down at the end of his presidential term and his commitment to ensure that elections would be held in April 2014.

The immediate priority facing the Afghan Parliament was to elect officers from amongst the membership of each House to form the Administration Boards which run the business of the Houses. The Meshrano Jirga (the Upper House) elections were uncontroversial, with three of four officers re-elected including the First and Second Deputy Speakers. In the Wolesi Jirga (the Lower House), voting took place over four rounds, with all four positions (the First and Second Deputy Speakers, Secretary and Deputy Secretary) having new officers elected.

Foreign Office Senior Minister of State Baroness Warsi made her second visit to Afghanistan on 4 -6 March. Key themes of the visit were emphasising the UK's enduring commitment to Afghanistan and protecting the gains in human rights, particularly women's rights, Afghanistan has seen since the fall of the Taleban. In Helmand the Minister met with Provincial Governor Naeem and Col Ishmail Khan, the head of the Provincial Operation Coordination Centre, who set out the role played by women in the Afghan Police in Helmand. Baroness Warsi had an opportunity to speak to female police officers about the opportunities and difficulties they encounter. In Kabul Baroness Warsi met with Foreign Minister Rassoul, opposition leaders, the out-going chair of the Independent Elections Commission, Fazel Manawi and women's leaders Sima Samar (Chair Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Council), Fawzia Koofi (Chair, Parliamentary Women's Commission), Seema Ghani (Executive Director, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee), and Selay Ghafar (Director, Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan). The Minister also had a lively discussion with young activists about the role they could play in the future of Afghanistan.

On 19 March the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2096 (2013), extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to March 2014. Speaking during the Security Council Quarterly Debate on Afghanistan on 26 March, the UK's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN restated the UK's long-term commitment to Afghanistan.

Following media reports on 24 March that Pakistan had fired missiles into Konar Province, the Afghan Government cancelled a joint army exercise in Quetta. The UK is working with the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan to support efforts to strengthen their relationship so they can more effectively handle tensions of this kind. Since the Chequers Summit on 3-4 February, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have been in regular contact with their counterparts about implementation of agreements reached. They have continued to make the case for a relationship of trust between two neighbours.

The UK continues to support an Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process. Now is the time for all Afghans to sit down together to help shape a peaceful and prosperous future for their country. This process must be inclusive. The Taliban have an opportunity to engage in dialogue about Afghanistan's future by opening an office in Doha.

### **Rule of Law and Counter Narcotics**

The International Police Coordination Board signed off the Ministry of the Interior's 10 year vision for the Afghan National Police. The UK supported the Ministry of Interior in developing this vision, which defines the structure, objectives and development needed to ensure an effective civilian police service in Afghanistan over the next decade. The vision integrates the concept of community policing into all aspects of the work of the Afghan National Police, with accountability, respect for human rights and public engagement as key themes of reform. The vision also commits to tackling corruption, and advancing the role of women, within both the Afghan National Police and the Ministry of Interior.

The Afghan Special Case Tribunal announced its verdict on the Kabul Bank fraud trial on 5 March. Khalilullah Ferozi and Sher Khan Farnoud, the former Chief Executive and Chairman

of the Kabul Bank, were each convicted of breach of trust and sentenced to five years in prison. In addition, the individuals were fined \$288m (£190m) and \$530m (£350m) respectively - the value of the assets they are deemed to have stolen from the bank. Other defendants were given shorter prison sentences. The Afghan Attorney General has lodged an appeal against the entirety of the verdict seeking stronger sentences. The UK continues to press for further prosecutions of individuals involved in the fraud and is providing technical assistance to the prosecutors and for asset recovery.

Two reports evaluating implementation of President Karzai's Decree 45 on anti-corruption were published in March. On 3 March, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission published a report entitled *Citizen's Access to Justice*, to monitor the implementation of Decree 45 across the Afghan Government. The report found that little substantive action had taken place in response to the decree, and that the Afghan people's access to justice had reduced significantly on the previous year. Among its principle findings were that across the 29 provinces included in the study, approximately 3,500 prisoners were being held without having been tried and sentenced, and 80% of reports of incidents of violence against women were either not pursued or the perpetrators had received no punishment.

Separately, the UK-supported Independent Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) released a report on the *Implementation of Anti-Corruption Related Elements of Presidential Decree 45* on 13 March. The report highlighted progress towards tackling corruption against agreed benchmarks. In particular it praised the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum for their efforts on improving transparency, the Ministry of Finance for strengthening the accountability of development funding, and DFID for improving the coordination of anti-corruption efforts across the international community. However the report criticised the Afghan Government's lack of progress in prosecuting those found guilty of corrupt practices and coordinating their own anti-corruption efforts.

The MEC also released 36 new anti-corruption benchmarks, focused on reducing corruption in infrastructure, the justice sector and land-grabbing. The UK will continue working with the international community and the Government of Afghanistan to address the important issues that the MEC's report raises.

A serious security incident at Helmand Provincial Prison began on 3 March. Afghan authorities contained the initial incident and work continued until full control and order was restored at the Prison under the direction of the Central Prison Directorate in Kabul and Provincial Governor Naeem.

As part of the UK's counter-narcotics efforts, support to Governor-led eradication of poppy crops in Helmand continued throughout March, with 1400 hectares of eradication verified by the UN Office of Drugs and Crime. Insurgent opposition resulted in 23 Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) fatalities and 34 ANSF (and 1 Verifier) casualties. Insurgent casualties are not known. The PRT's facilitation of Governor-led eradication continued on the condition that eradication was conducted within agreed target zones (set out by the Ministry of Counter Narcotics) where alternative, licit livelihoods are available.

## **Economic and Social Development**

In a speech on 4 March the International Development Secretary Justine Greening pledged to step up UK support for women and girls in the world's poorest countries. This pledge included a greater emphasis within the next Afghanistan country plan on initiatives to tackle violence against women and girls, to ensure the gains that have already been made can be built upon.

On 6 March the Prime Minister hosted an Investors Forum with the Afghan Minister of Mines at Number 10 Downing Street. Afghanistan's extractives sector offers one of the best opportunities for the country to build a sustainable economy and reduce dependency on aid. The event provided an opportunity to showcase Afghanistan's natural resource potential, show that Afghanistan is a place to do business and demonstrate the UK Government's commitment to this important agenda. At the Forum the Prime Minister and International Development Secretary announced the latest phase of UK assistance to the Afghan Ministry of Mines, a new DFID programme of £10 million over the next three years, which will support the Ministry's work to negotiate, grant, manage and monitor contracts, appoint experts to key posts and develop the mineral and hydrocarbon sector. UKTI also announced that a dedicated expert, based in Dubai, will play a key role in supporting investment opportunities in Afghanistan by UK listed companies or those based in or otherwise linked to the UK.

In Helmand, the new UK-funded Community Midwifery Training Centre building in Lashkar Gah has been completed, overseen by the UK military's Specialist Team of Royal Engineers. The number of community midwives in Helmand has more than doubled from 29 in 2008 to 69 in 2012 – this new building will help to support maternal healthcare in the province for years to come.

Also in Helmand, work has started on the rehabilitation of part of a key strategic road – 'Route 611' – linking Sangin to Kajaki in northern Helmand. This work is being jointly funded by the UK and the UAE.

The UK-funded Strengthening Municipality and Community Development programme in Lashkar Gah, Helmand, successfully concluded on 31 March 2013. The programme, implemented by UN Habitat, ran for three years and delivered sustainable results for local people, including skills training for more than 1,500 women, over 100,000 square meters of footpaths, ten water towers and three public parks. This infrastructure will now be maintained by the municipal government, thanks to the programme's support to better and more transparent revenue generation – more than 13,000 homes and plots have been registered for revenue generation over the life of the project. The programme has helped to strengthen community engagement with the municipal government by developing 63 community action plans through Community Development Councils – 38 of which were developed by all-women groups.

## **Security**

In line with seasonal norms the numbers of Enemy Initiated Attacks began to increase throughout March ahead of the poppy harvest. As ISAF maintains its gradual drawdown, the ANSF will co-ordinate the military response to the insurgency for two full fighting seasons with the support of ISAF in a predominantly advisory role. This marks a critical point in the campaign. The ANSF continue to demonstrate growing confidence and capability; further development will be vital in the months ahead as it seeks to secure Afghanistan for the future.

### Helmand Attack

On 25 March, insurgents launched a suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device attack on a UK patrol base in the Helmand Province, with several insurgents following up with small arms fire and rocket propelled grenades. The attack resulted in 14 UK troops wounded in action, one of whom, from 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Mercian Regiment, later died of his injuries.

This complex attack is a stark reminder that UK Armed Forces continue to operate in a difficult and dangerous environment.

### ANSF Capability

21 out of 26 Brigades are now operating either independently, or with ISAF only in an advisory role. ISAF forces continue work to build and train the key military enabling capabilities that the ANSF need to operate. By way of example, the Afghan Air Force achieved a major milestone in their Combined Strategic Flight Plan, with the first combined training exercise including multiple aircraft and supporting capabilities.

The capability of the ANSF in Kabul was demonstrated in early March with the seizure of a large cache of explosives, grenades and weapons, the largest seizure in Kabul since July 2012. Had the explosives been used in an attack, it would have undoubtedly resulted in a significant number of casualties and fatalities.

In some parts of Afghanistan, Taliban influence on the local population persists, principally through coercion and the offer of alternative governance. As ISAF troops become less visible to ordinary Afghans this is exploited through a Taliban narrative that claims victory and credit for forcing ISAF's drawdown. As Transition progresses, this influence can only be effectively countered by a growing confidence among Afghan citizens that the security and governance mechanisms now in place are appropriate and capable.

### UK Presence and Redeployment

By the end of March there were just 14 UK bases in Helmand, down from the 137 operating at the height of the conflict. We expect this number to fall to four by April 2014.

As at 31 March, 235 vehicles, 127 items of major equipment and 702 twenty foot equivalent units of equipment have returned home from Afghanistan as we move from a combat role to one of training, advising and assisting the Afghan security forces.

On 11 March, the first NATO Proof of Principle consignment, made up principally of UK equipment crossed the Afghan / Uzbekistan border. The Pakistan Ground Line of Communication was declared at Full Operating Capability on 1 April.

### ISAF Statistics

ISAF no longer publishes figures on Enemy Initiated Attacks (EIA) as these statistics are becoming increasingly difficult to verify with Afghan security forces taking over from ISAF in collecting the data. Consequently, data on EIAs will no longer feature in Monthly Progress Reports.

**Table One: ANSF Growth to 20 March 2013**

	Target Strength (March 2013)	Actual Strength (March 2013)	March Target Met
ANA:	187,000	177,725	NO
AAF:	6,874	6,874	YES
ANP:	157,000	151,766	NO

**Table Two: ANSF Attrition Rates**

	Target Monthly Attrition	Actual Monthly Attrition	March Target Met
ANA:	1.4%	2.5%	NO
AAF:	1.4%	1.1%	YES
ANP:	1.4%	1.3%	YES
Uniformed Police	1.4%	0.8%	YES
Border Police	1.4%	2.3%	NO
National Civil Order Police	1.4%	2.1%	NO

**Table Three: International Contributions to ISAF**

Country	Contribution	% of Total
US	68,000	67.7%
UK	9,000	8.9%
Germany	4,400	4.3%
Italy	3,067	3.0%
Poland	1,739	1.7%
Spain	1,035	1.0%
Georgia	1,561	1.5%
Romania	1,595	1.5%
Australia	1,096	1.0%
Turkey	1,093	1.0%

Others (40 nations)	7,744	7.7%
Current Total: 100,330		
<i>The above numbers are indicative of troop contributions as at 19 Feb 2013, actual numbers fluctuate daily. Source: ISAF</i>		

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**  
**April 2013**