

**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE**

**AFGHANISTAN**

**MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT**

**November/December 2013**

The UK is part of a 49-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 report covers progress in November and December 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**

On 20 November, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the final list of 11 candidates running in the 2014 presidential elections following the adjudication of complaints by the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission. The final candidates are Abdullah Abdullah, Qutbuddin Hilal, Abdurrab Rasoul Sayyaf, Zalmai Rassoul, Abdul Rahim Wardak, Qayyum Karzai, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Daoud Sultanzoi, Gul Agha Sherzai, Mohammad Nader Naim and Hedayat Amin Arsala. There are three female second Vice Presidential candidates in the final list. The campaign period will begin on 2 February.

On 21-25 November, the text of the US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) was put to a Loya Jirga (Grand Council) for agreement. The Loya Jirga discussed the text before approving it for President Karzai to sign. President Karzai announced at the closing of the Loya Jirga that he wanted more time to negotiate the text with the US before signing. To date the BSA has not been signed.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) Annual Opium Survey for Afghanistan was published on Wednesday 13th November. The Survey reported that poppy cultivation has increased for a third consecutive year, reaching 209,000 hectares. Cultivation in Helmand increased by 34% to 100,693 hectares.

The International Development Secretary visited Afghanistan in November and announced £18.5 million of new programme funding, some of which will be focussed on promoting women’s rights. This funding includes £8 million additional support to support the 2014 Presidential and Provincial Elections and 2015 Parliamentary Elections, bringing the total amount of UK aid for elections to £20 million. The UK is one of the leading donors supporting the electoral process and democracy organisations.

On 16 December, the Prime Minister visited Camp Bastion to thank troops for their continued efforts and to see firsthand the progress in the performance of the ANSF and UK drawdown activity. Whilst emphasising the challenges that Afghanistan still faces, the Prime Minister paid tribute to UK Armed Forces and stated that they can “come home with their heads held high”. The PM was also accompanied by the retired England international footballer, Michael Owen and announced a new UK/Afghan football partnership.

The Defence Secretary visited Afghanistan on 10-11 November. During his visit he met President Karzai, the Afghan Minister of Defence, Bismullah Mohammadi, and the ISAF Commander, General Dunford. He was also joined by HRH Duke of York on 10 November as part of a poignant Remembrance Day Service which was held in Camp Bastion to pay respects to all those who have been killed while on operations in Afghanistan.

On 5 November, Warrant Officer Ian Fisher of 3 Mercian Regiment was killed following a joint UK and Afghan National Civil Order Police patrol, which was attacked by a Suicide Vehicle Borne IED on the main national highway, Route 611 near Nahr-e Saraj. A further four UK soldiers were wounded in action. On 23 December, Captain Richard Holloway of the Royal Engineers died after coming under enemy fire while on operations. Their deaths are a stark reminder of the incredible sacrifices made by our Armed Forces. The deaths of Warrant Officer Fisher and Captain Holloway bring the total number of British fatalities on operations in Afghanistan in 2013 to nine.

**Strengthening the Afghan State**

**Political**

On 20 November, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the final list of 11 candidates running in the 2014 presidential elections following the adjudication of complaints by the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission. The final candidates are Abdullah Abdullah, Qutbuddin Hilal, Abdurrab Rasoul Sayyaf, Zalmai Rassoul, Abdul Rahim Wardak, Qayyum Karzai, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Daoud Sultanzoi, Gul Agha Sherzai, Mohammad Nader Naim and Hedayat Amin Arsala. There are three female second Vice Presidential candidates in the final list. The campaign period will begin on 2 February. For the Provincial Council elections, 2713 candidates (including 308 women) made it onto the final candidate list after the adjudication process was completed. The Provincial Council campaign period will begin a month after the presidential campaigns have begun.

On 4 December, the five-member IEC Media Commission was appointed. The Media Commission is a temporary body set up prior to elections in Afghanistan, and is responsible for monitoring and reporting on fair broadcasting of the electoral campaigns once they are underway and addressing any violations or offences committed by the media.

In mid-December, President Karzai issued two decrees aimed at regulating the behaviour of government employees and members of the ANSF during the elections. The Decree on the Code of Conduct for Government Department Officials and Staff in 2014 Elections makes clear that officials must not interfere in the election process and remain wholly impartial. The Decree on the Code of Conduct of Security Forces in the Election Process sets out the requirement on the ANSF to provide security for the election process, whilst also emphasising the need for impartiality.

The Afghan Government’s budget for 1393 (2014) was introduced to Parliament on 2 November and will need to be passed before Parliament departs for winter Recess on 21 January. The Qatia (a document reviewing the previous year’s expenditure) was rejected by the Lower House on 30 November.

**Rule of Law and Counter Narcotics**

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) Annual Opium Survey for Afghanistan was published on Wednesday 13th November. The Survey reported that poppy cultivation has increased for a third consecutive year, reaching 209,000 hectares. Cultivation in Helmand increased by 34% to 100,693 hectares. The report identifies continuing high opium prices as the principle factor behind the increase. The report calculates that opium production has increased by 49% to 5,500 tonnes. The 2013 farm gate value of opium production is assessed to be US $950m.

Lessons learned from other drug producing countries show that tackling the drug trade in Afghanistan will take decades. This is a complex problem which needs a comprehensive approach. Lasting impact will only be possible with a strong Afghan lead, supported by effective regional and international action.

The UK will continue to work with the UN and international partners to support the Afghan Government in its efforts to tackle the drugs trade in Afghanistan. We will continue to provide law enforcement support the Afghan government, and engage with international partners further afield along the main supply routes to the UK.

**Economic and Social Development**

The announcement during DFID Secretary of State’s November visit of £18.5 million of new British programme funding includes initial UK support of £3 million for a new programme to provide training for those in the formal and community-based justice sectors on eliminating violence against women. This will support information campaigns for male religious leaders, educators and women. Additionally, at least ten grants of up to £2 million in total will go to civil society organisations focusing primarily on eliminating violence against women from next year, through the existing Tawanmandi programme

With UK support and Danish funding, the extension of the Afghan Government’s Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility (CARD-F) to cover Helmand province was officially launched in November. CARD-F will link Helmandi farmers and rural businesses to markets across the country. Also during November, CARD-F invited over ten producers and farmers from Nangarhar, Balkh, Badakhshan, and Helmand provinces to participate in the Kabul Agriculture Fair. Farmers from across the four provinces displayed their products including fresh and dried fruits as well as honey, beans and cotton. The Fair helps to build linkages between producers and wholesalers, increasing the market potential of farmers’ products.

On 4 November, the Afghan Government launched its first ever survey of student learning through the new National Learning Assessment system.  The development of the National Learning Assessment system has been supported by international donors including the UK who are helping the Afghan Government ensure that children can access good quality education. In 2001, fewer than 900,000 children were in school (very few of them girls) and today there are around 5.8 million children who regularly attend school (including 2.2 million girls).  However, the speed at which the education system has grown has put pressure on the quality of education across the country. With DFID and World Bank expertise and financial support, the Ministry of Education has designed Afghanistan’s first national learning assessment to drive forward improvements.

The first two-day discussion forum in Badakhshan province, funded by DFID’s programme of support to women’s political participation, took place in December. Seventy people, including religious scholars, women activists, civil society representatives, influential community members, Maliks and representatives from government and non-government departments participated. The forum ended with a number of participants pledging to encourage women’s participation in the upcoming elections within their communities.

In December, the Secretary of State approved £130 million of UK support over a five year period to support infrastructure development in Afghanistan. UK funding will be channelled through the multi-donor Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund (AITF), managed by the Asian Development Bank, which supports Afghan Government infrastructure priorities. The AITF funds infrastructure investments, including roads, rail and power, and associated sector policy reform.

**Governance**

During her November visit, the Secretary of State announced £8 million additional support to support the 2014 Presidential and Provincial Elections and 2015 Parliamentary Elections, bringing the total amount of UK aid for elections to £20 million. The UK is one of the leading donors supporting the electoral process and democracy organisations. This will include assistance to the Independent Election Commission’s Gender Unit. It will also support work including outreach workshops and radio, TV and leaflet campaigns to increase women’s electoral awareness and engagement across all 34 provinces, as well as the establishment of a voter information centre.

The Secretary of State also launched a new £7.5 million programme to strengthen political institutions and processes in 2014, including support that will build the capacity of women provincial councillors once elected into office.

Also during November, with DFID support the Afghan Revenue Department conducted an audit of one of the top five taxpayers in Afghanistan, a telecommunication company. This was one of the largest audits ever undertaken by the department and covered five tax years. Better auditing of large taxpayers will help increased revenue collection, which in turn will help Afghanistan become less reliant on international aid.

**Security**

December marked the last Christmas for the vast majority of British troops on operations in Afghanistan. This time next year the ISAF combat mission will have ended and the ANSF will be completely responsible for security across Afghanistan.

The 2013 Asia Foundation Survey was released on 5 December. Providing a snapshot of Afghan public opinion on a range of issues, it is the most comprehensive survey of its type. Along with recent ISAF polling, there is a growing body of data showing that despite concerns about security and corruption, Afghans believe the country is heading in the right direction and are confident in ANSF performance. This is helped by significant reductions in overall security incidents, IED and indirect fire attacks in 2013 compared to the previous year. Despite small increases in high profile and complex and coordinated attacks this year, they have not generated operational or strategic momentum for the insurgency and have generally been contained by the ANSF.

Insurgents are continuing to target government officials. On 20 November, the Marjah District Chief of Police was killed by small arms fire in Helmand and, on the same day, an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of Major General Abdul Raziq Sherzai, the Regional Chief of Police in Kandahar. The Taliban has attempted to assassinate Major General Raziq at least twenty-five times, owing to his pro-Government and anti-Taliban stance. This follows the attempted assassination of Hamidullah Tokhi, a Member of Parliament for Zabul Province, on 29 November, and numerous other attacks on district and provincial Governors across the country in the second half of 2013.

On 5 November, Warrant Officer Ian Fisher of 3 Mercian Regiment was killed following a joint UK and Afghan National Civil Order Police patrol, which was attacked by a Suicide Vehicle Borne IED on the main national highway, Route 611 near Nahr-e Saraj. A further four UK soldiers were wounded in action. On 23 December, Captain Richard Holloway of the Royal Engineers died after coming under enemy fire while on operations. Their deaths are a stark reminder of the incredible sacrifices made by our Armed Forces. The deaths of Warrant Officer Fisher and Captain Holloway bring the total number of British fatalities on operations in Afghanistan in 2013 to nine.

**Loya Jirga**

On 21-25 November, the text of the US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) was put to a Loya Jirga (Grand Council) for agreement. The Loya Jirga discussed the text before approving it for President Karzai to sign. President Karzai announced at the closing of the Loya Jirga that he wanted more time to negotiate the text with the US before signing. To date the BSA has not been signed. Though BSA negotiations are a bilateral issue between the US and Afghanistan, the UK is in close contact with both. The Loya Jirga has spoken for the majority of Afghans in backing the draft agreement and welcoming international support after 2014.  We look forward to the outstanding issues being resolved quickly so the agreement can be signed at the earliest opportunity.

**ANSF**

Between 9-11 November, the 3/215 ANA Brigade conducted a clearance operation in the Yakhchal area of Helmand. A combined ANSF force of around 650 personnel undertook a hard fought series of engagements with the UK’s Brigade Advisory Team in support. Eight insurgents were killed and a further 21 detained. The ANA’s treatment of their casualties during the operation was particularly impressive, with battlefield casualties evacuated by the Afghan Air Force to safe aid points and then airlifted out to the ANA hospital in Shorobak.

A significant milestone in medical capability for the ANSF was reached during the week of 18 November. For the first time, there were no Category B ANSF casualties treated by the UK Role 3 hospital at Bastion, with the ANSF’s own medical facilities handling their treatment. The ANSF facilities also treated three Category A casualties (the most serious) in the same week. By the end of 2014, the ANA will be able to take over the responsibility for all its casualties, including those with Category A injuries.

The Loya Jirga event saw the ANSF perform well following one of its biggest security challenges to date. In a major security operation, the ANSF put in place a strict layered security zone a week before the event to protect the proceedings. All elements of the ANSF cooperated and coordinated activities at regular security meetings; the ANSF interdicted 6,000 kg of homemade explosive and two IEDs in Wardek province that were intended to target the Loya Jirga. Normal movements around the city were resumed within twelve hours of the event concluding. Praise for the ANSF security operation was forthcoming from President Karzai, Ministers and ISAF.

Throughout November and December, the ANSF were proactive in seeking to detect and disrupt a series of large suicide vehicle borne IED (SVBIED) threats. Towards the end of November, around 65 checkpoints were established, enabling the ANSF to search over 9,000 trucks and passenger vehicles per day. However, on 16 November, an ANSF patrol was attacked by one of these large SVBIEDs near the venue of the Loya Jirga event in Kabul, killing 15 individuals and wounding another 30. These indiscriminate attacks continue to blight the lives of ordinary Afghans, with SVBIEDs the cause of a large number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

One of the largest multi-agency Afghan operations since the ANSF took the lead for security was launched on 7 December and concluded on 20 December. Spanning Kandahar, Zabul and Daykundi provinces in the south of Afghanistan, it involved over 4,000 ANSF personnel. The operation disrupted insurgent activity, seized weapons and explosives, and began setting the security conditions for the election. A notable success was in delivering multi-agency coordination to ensure that ANA and ANP forces, amongst other agencies, were integrated throughout the planning and execution of the operation. The ANSF cleared over 250 villages and destroyed over 600 IEDs, whilst suffering minimal ANSF casualties (6 killed and 14 wounded); over 60 insurgents were killed and 14 detained during the operation. The Afghan Air Force flew resupply missions and evacuated a number of casualties during the operation, with ISAF support limited to advising, intelligence, and a small number of supporting air operations.

**Defence Secretary’s Visit**

The Defence Secretary visited Afghanistan on 10-11 November. During his visit he met President Karzai, the Afghan Minister of Defence, Bismullah Mohammadi, and the ISAF Commander, General Dunford. He was also joined by HRH Duke of York on 10 November as part of a poignant Remembrance Day Service which was held in Camp Bastion to pay respects to all those who have been killed while on operations in Afghanistan. The Defence Secretary was pleased to see visible progress on the ground during his visit, with the ANSF firmly in the lead for providing security nationwide.

**Prime Minister’s Visit**

On 16 December, the Prime Minister visited Camp Bastion to thank troops for their continued efforts and to see firsthand the progress in the performance of the ANSF and UK drawdown activity. Whilst emphasising the challenges that Afghanistan still faces, the Prime Minister paid tribute to UK Armed Forces and stated that they can “come home with their heads held high”. The PM was also accompanied by the retired England international footballer, Michael Owen and announced a new UK/Afghan football partnership, which will involve a training session for the Afghan national team with England players and will include support for all levels of the Afghan game, from the grass roots up to the national team.

**ANAOA**

On 11 November, President Karzai attended a formal opening ceremony at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA), with the UK Defence Secretary also present. President Karzai spoke positively about the success of British training of Indian officers in the past, and his hope that the ANA would also become a highly professional force that was respected internationally.

**Task Force Helmand (TFH) Relief in Place**

As of 21 November, the TFH relief in place had deployed 100% of the HERRICK 19 force and recovered 100% of the HERRICK 18 force. The number of UK Armed Forces deployed on operations in Afghanistan has now reduced to around 5,200 - down from 9,000 at the start of 2013.

**Royal Marines Trial**

On 6 December, Royal Marines Sergeant, Alexander Blackman, was sentenced to a minimum of ten years in jail for murdering an unknown captured person in Afghanistan in September 2011. He is the first UK serviceman deployed in Afghanistan to be charged with murder.

**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 21 Nov 2013**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Target Strength(Nov 2013) | Actual Strength(Nov 2013) | Nov Target Met |
| ANA: | 187,000 | 187,595 | YES |
| AAF: | 8,000 | 6,752 | NO |
| ANP: | 157,000 | 149,466 | NO |

**Table Two:  ANSF Attrition Rates[[1]](#footnote-1)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Target Monthly Attrition | Actual Monthly Attrition | Nov Target Met |
| ANA: | 1.4% | 2.2% | NO |
| AAF: | 1.4% | 0.7% | YES |
| ANP: | 1.4% | 2.0% | NO |
| Uniformed Police | 1.4% | 1.9% | NO |
| Border Police | 1.4% | 1.6% | NO |
| National Civil  Order Police | 1.4% | 2.8% | NO |

**Table Three: International Contributions to ISAF**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Contribution | % of Total |
| US | 60,000 | 73.6% |
| UK | 5,200 (as at 1 Jan 14) | 6.4% |
| Germany | 3,084 | 3.8% |
| Italy  | 2,822 | 3.5% |
| Georgia | 1,560 | 2.0% |
| Poland | 1,099 | 1.3% |
| Australia | 1,045 | 1.3% |
| Turkey | 1,035 | 1.3% |
| Romania | 1,018 | 1.2% |
| Canada | 620 | 0.8% |
| Others (38 nations) | 4,620 | 5.7% |
| Current Total: 81,518  |

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

**November/December 2013**

1. *Attrition in the ANSF includes those Dropped from Roll (defined as absent without leave for more than 21 days (or in some circumstances 31 days)), Killed in Action, non-combat deaths, those who have completed their contracts, exempted from contract (eg medical discharge), those captured and retired. The largest component of attrition is those Dropped from Roll.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)