The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

Rory Stewart MP (Conservative, Penrith and The Border) (Chair)
Mr Julian Brazier MP (Conservative, Canterbury)
Rt Hon Jeffrey M. Donaldson MP (Democratic Unionist, Lagan Valley)
Mr James Gray MP (Conservative, North Wiltshire)
Mr Dai Havard MP (Labour, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Adam Holloway MP (Conservative, Gravesham)
Mrs Madeleine Moon MP (Labour, Bridgend)
Sir Bob Russell MP (Liberal Democrat, Colchester)
Bob Stewart MP (Conservative, Beckenham)
Ms Gisela Stuart MP (Labour, Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Derek Twigg MP (Labour, Halton)
John Woodcock MP (Labour/Co-op, Barrow and Furness)

The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry.

Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP (Conservative, North East Hampshire) (former Chair)
Thomas Docherty MP (Labour, Dunfermline and West Fife)
Penny Mordaunt MP (Conservative, Portsmouth North)
Sandra Osborne MP (Labour, Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the internet at www.parliament.uk/parliament.uk/defcom.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume. Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are James Rhys (Clerk), Karen Jackson (Audit Adviser), Eleanor Scarnell (Committee Specialist), Ian Thomson (Committee Specialist), Christine Randall (Senior Committee Assistant), and Rowena Macdonald and Carolyn Bowes (Committee Assistants).

Contacts

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Fourth Special Report

The Defence Committee published its Fifteenth Report of Session 2013–14 on Afghanistan on 13 May 2014. The Government’s response to this Report was received on 11 July 2014. This is appended.

**Government response**

The Government welcomes the House of Commons Defence Committee’s inquiry into ‘Afghanistan’ and the findings set out in the Committee’s report (HC 994) published on 13 May 2014.

Largely thanks to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the polling days for the first and second round of the Presidential and Provincial elections have now passed without widespread disruption by the insurgency. Since assuming lead security responsibility for their own country last summer, the ANSF performance has exceeded expectations. This bodes well for the future as we approach the end of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) combat mission.

The UK has made a long-term commitment to Afghanistan. The Government believes that the proposed NATO Resolute Support mission is an important element of this support. We welcome the commitments given by both Presidential candidates that they would sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) and NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) as one of their first acts in office. The UK continues to plan for the Resolute Support mission in anticipation of the signatures.

The Government joins the Committee in paying tribute to the bravery of the men and women of our Armed Forces. Their efforts and sacrifices have contributed significantly to the progress that the Committee highlights, and the removal of the terrorist threat to our country that once existed in Afghanistan.

The Government recognises the detailed work that the Committee has undertaken. Our formal response to its recommendations and conclusions is set out below. The Committee’s findings are highlighted in bold, with the Government’s response in plain text. For ease of reference, paragraph numbering in brackets refers to the order in which they are presented in the Committee’s report.

**STATE OF THE INSURGENCY**

1. The insurgency remains a strong and persistent threat to the future security and stability of Afghanistan. Despite the numerical advantage and increasing capability of the ANSF, insurgent attacks have continued to target high profile targets with some success. We note the confidence of the Secretary of State for Defence that Afghanistan will not descend into civil war following the withdrawal of the majority of international forces from the country and can only hope that he is correct. (Paragraph 11)
24. The future of Afghanistan is uncertain. In the face of a determined insurgency, when international forces leave at the end of 2014 the Government of Afghanistan will find it challenging to continue to maintain security and exercise executive control across the country. However, with the continued support of the international community, we believe that these challenges can be met and overcome. (Paragraph 87)

The Government welcomes the Committee’s conclusion that, with the continued assistance of the international community, the Government of Afghanistan can overcome the security challenges that will follow the withdrawal of international combat forces. The ANSF have exceeded expectations since they assumed security responsibility for their country in the summer of 2013.

The ANSF have continued to apply pressure to the insurgency. While the insurgency remains capable of projecting violence, and conducting high profile attacks, their ability to do so on a large scale, or with significant impact, has been limited by the ANSF. Uncertainties remain, but the ANSF have shown that they are capable of matching the threat from a determined and capable insurgency. This was illustrated by the significant number of large scale clearance operations that the ANSF have conducted since last summer, in most cases independent of ISAF support. In particular, the ANSF security operations for the first and second rounds of the Presidential elections illustrated their increasing capabilities relative to the insurgency. These security operations prevented the insurgency from significantly disrupting the elections or prosecuting a single high profile attack on either polling day.

**ANSF ATTRITION**

2. The potential for post election conflict in Afghanistan will be heavily influenced by the extent to which the unsuccessful candidates accept the results and the extent to which those who are successful are able to develop consent for Afghan security forces to secure the country to allow it to develop. (Paragraph 12)

The Government agrees that stable politics are central to maintaining a secure environment in Afghanistan. The international community made clear to the Afghan Presidential candidates the need to abide by the laws regulating the conduct of the election, to show patience towards the electoral authorities, and to respect and abide by their decisions.

3. We are concerned that the rate of ANSF attrition has remained stubbornly high and significantly in excess of targets. This will hamper efforts to professionalise these forces and enhance their capability in the longer term. (Paragraph 18)

The Government shares the Committee’s concern. Senior Afghan commanders recognise that attrition is a challenge and is slowing efforts to professionalise the ANSF. They are undertaking initiatives to address the issues underlying high attrition rates. These are focused on professionalising their leaders, the proper employment of new personnel, and the introduction of an operational deployment cycle to ensure adequate training and leave is given. The continued emphasis by senior leaders is likely to improve the overall quality of the force in the long term. Improvements in attrition are taking time. However, we are
confident that attrition rates will remain manageable until the measures have been implemented and had sufficient time to have an effect.

4. We remain concerned that in the face of a determined insurgency the planned reduction in ANSF strength by a third by 2017 could undermine efforts to maintain security in Afghanistan. We call upon the Government to discuss with international partners a contingency plan to support the ANSF at a higher strength should the level of insurgency not diminish. (Paragraph 19)

The 2012 Chicago Summit saw agreement between the Afghan Government and the international community on a preliminary model for an enduring ANSF strength of 228,500. As we stated in our previous response to the Committee’s report ‘Securing the future of Afghanistan’, the growth of the ANSF to a total force of 352,000 was always regarded as a temporary surge. This is now expected to last to 2017, instead of the original intention for it to end in 2015. This is to ensure that the Afghans are able to maintain a high operational tempo after the transfer of lead security responsibility and the withdrawal of ISAF combat forces. The pace of the force reduction from the 352,000 surge peak to a sustainable level will be conditions-based and reviewed regularly against the security environment.

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

5. We note the significant increase in civilian casualties recorded by the United Nations in Afghanistan in 2013. The vast majority were the result of attacks by insurgents, with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) representing the main factor driving the escalation. We recommend that the Government maintain its counter-IED support for Afghan forces during the drawdown and consider longer term support as part of a future package of assistance. (Paragraph 24)

We share the concern about the increase in civilian casualties which, as the Committee notes, has largely been due to an increase in IED use by the insurgency. ANSF capability development is coordinated, and run, by the NATO training mission. NATO is increasingly focused on creating a sustainable ANSF training capability through the delivery of train-the-trainer courses. They have already made good progress and the ANSF are now delivering over 90% of their own training. The NATO training mission provides a variety of counter-IED training courses and assistance with equipment distribution to the ANSF. The UK has been a major contributor to the development of ANSF counter-IED capability through the provision of training courses (both in Afghanistan and in the UK) and by loaning equipment to units until their own Afghan-procured equipment arrived. ISAF believe that the ANSF will be able to continue their own counter-IED capability development without reliance on international forces after the end of 2014. The UK agrees with this assessment. The UK-led Afghan National Army Officer Academy syllabus includes counter-IED, which will ensure the next generation of Army Officers is prepared to deal with the threat.

WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS

6. We consider that the advancement of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan in the period since the fall of the Taliban government has been significant, although we
remain concerned that progress remains fragile. We understand that future financial support and development aid for Afghanistan will be dependent upon the Government of Afghanistan meeting specific commitments under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. We call upon the UK Government to confirm the commitments to women and girls which the Government of Afghanistan must meet in order to continue to receive development aid from the UK and the wider international community. (Paragraph 33)

We agree the advancement of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban Government in 2001 has been significant. Women in Afghanistan still face significant challenges. The International Development Secretary has made tackling violence against women and girls a strategic priority for DFID in Afghanistan and the UK Government will continue to make clear to the Afghan Government that they must meet their Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework commitments on women’s rights to justify on-going levels of aid. This includes implementation of the Elimination of Violence Against Women law and the National Action Plan on Women in Afghanistan. The UK and our international partners supported the Afghan Government to ensure women’s participation in the 2014 Presidential and Provincial Council elections, and will support the 2015 Parliamentary elections.

The UK and Afghan Governments will co-chair the London Conference on Afghanistan later this year. This will be the first Ministerial review of progress against the Tokyo commitments and therefore the UK will play a major role in holding partners and the Afghan Government to account for the commitments they have made. A key part of this will be ensuring Afghan civil society, including human rights and women’s rights organisations, have a platform to make their views known.

NARCOTICS

7. The counter-narcotics strategy of the UK Government in Afghanistan has failed. As we withdraw from Helmand Province, poppy cultivation is soaring to record levels and there is no sign that the Government of Afghanistan has the will or the means to tackle the problem. We are concerned that this will continue to fund organised crime, and undermine the development of democratic government and governance. We recommend that future UK Government aid to Afghanistan should be, at least in part, conditional on clear progress in developing viable alternatives to poppy farming. (Paragraph 39)

The Government agrees that there are significant challenges facing Afghanistan in tackling the drugs trade. The Home Office coordinates the cross-Government response on Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan. It recognises that sustainable reductions in poppy cultivation cannot be achieved through work to promote alternative livelihoods alone. The lasting solution is to raise people out of poverty, for good, while at the same time bolstering Afghanistan’s capacity to tackle criminal narcotics networks. Our experience from other countries suggests that progress of this kind requires significant, decade-long investment in employment, governance, anti-corruption, criminal justice and economic infrastructure. This will depend on a strong Afghan lead, supported by effective regional and international action.
The UK is supporting Afghanistan to improve its ability to tackle drug trafficking, which has had some positive results. The Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan has conducted a number of operations against senior traffickers which have resulted in successful prosecutions. The UK will help the Afghan government to enact and enforce the legal framework for fighting corruption as agreed in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. The first Ministerial review against the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework will take place at the London Conference on Afghanistan later this year which will be co-chaired by Afghanistan and the UK.

Outside of Afghanistan, the UK’s approach on drugs remains clear: we must prevent drug use in our communities, help dependent individuals through treatment and wider recovery support, while ensuring law enforcement protects society by stopping the supply. This approach is underpinned by the Government’s 2010 Drug Strategy ‘Reducing demand, restricting supply, building recovery: supporting people to live a drug-free life’. We are confident that our strategic approach is the right one. Drug use has fallen to its lowest level since records began in 1996, the number of heroin and crack cocaine users in England fell below 300,000 last year, and people going into treatment today are more likely to free themselves from dependency than ever before.

**POLITICAL TRANSITION**

8. The first round of the Presidential election passed off relatively peacefully compared to expectations. We pay tribute to the dedication and courage of the Afghan and ISAF security force personnel who ensured that the elections could take place. We also pay tribute to the dedication of those who administered the elections in such difficult circumstances and the courage of ordinary Afghans who turned out to vote in such numbers in defiance of Taliban threats. (Paragraph 43)

The Government joins the Committee in paying tribute to the dedication and courage of all Afghans who ensured that voting in both rounds of the elections concluded without large scale disruption by the insurgency. Across the country, millions of Afghan men and women exercised their right to vote, despite intimidation and threats of violence from the insurgency, and the ANSF successfully delivered a security plan to protect the Afghan people through both rounds of the election.

9. It is to be hoped that the second round will allow for the first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected President to another in the history of the country and that the newly elected President will be able to develop a constructive working relationship with the Afghan Parliament and find a way of accommodating all elements of Afghan society into the democratic political processes of the country. It is also to be hoped that the new President will be able to develop a settled relationship with the international community and consolidate and develop a constructive and enduring working relationship with the UK. (Paragraph 44)

The Government shares the aspirations of the Committee for Afghanistan’s future government. Ensuring all members of Afghan society feel represented by their government and are part of the democratic process will, we hope, be a top priority for the new President. The achievement of the first transfer of power from one elected government to another in the country’s history will be a remarkable accomplishment for the people of Afghanistan.
Afghanistan. The UK has supported the Afghan people in strengthening the democratic process, through our contribution of £20m to the United Nation Development Programme’s Enhancing Legislative and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow II programme for the 2014/15 electoral cycle, as well as other steps such as providing funds to domestic Afghan election observers. We look forward to working with the new Afghan President to build on the relationship the UK shares with Afghanistan.

SIGNING OF BILATERAL SECURITY AGREEMENT AND STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT

10. We hope that the new President of Afghanistan will move swiftly to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement and Status of Forces Agreement in order to confirm the legal basis on which international forces will operate in Afghanistan post-2014. (Paragraph 50)

The Government agrees that the new President should move swiftly to sign both the Bilateral Security Agreement with the US and the NATO Status of Forces Agreement. Both Presidential candidates have stated that one of their first acts in office will be to sign the agreements. The international community continues to plan for the Resolute Support mission in anticipation of the signatures.

11. If a new ISAF Status of Forces Agreement is signed, in addition to the UK military training mission, other UK Government Departments will be conducting activities in Afghanistan, in particular the Department for International Development will be engaged in the delivery of aid programmes. Other UK Government Departments will also be engaged in supporting a range of projects including state institution building, developing capacity in policing and justice, and facilitating commercial development. The ability of these agencies to operate will be determined by what is likely to be an uneven security situation. We therefore believe that a Comprehensive Approach to the work of all UK Government Departments and agencies in Afghanistan will still be required. We ask the Government to provide us with further details of the planning that is being carried out across Government for that transition. (Paragraph 51)

The Government can reassure the Committee that the UK Government already applies the comprehensive approach to its activity in Afghanistan. The UK's post-2014 role in Afghanistan is being planned on a cross-government basis, co-ordinated by the Cabinet Office, and the National Security Council will make the decision on an overall coherent package of UK support. This package will, as the Committee notes, include a range of UK government departments and agencies conducting activity in Afghanistan. The ANSF have had lead security responsibility for their country since summer 2013 and they will be responsible for the security of the operational environments that UK Government Departments and agencies will operate in. The UK is ultimately responsible for the safety and security of our personnel and we recognise that Afghanistan will remain a challenging working environment. Mobile and static guarding for UK government civilian employees working in Afghanistan is usually provided by G4S under a contract managed by the FCO. This contract runs until July 2015 and, as part of our post-2014 planning, the FCO are tendering for a new contract.
Following the closure of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Helmand, our non-military efforts in Afghanistan are coordinated by the British Embassy in Kabul, where officials from a range of government departments work side-by-side planning and coordinating UK activity.

THE ROLE OF PAKISTAN

12. The conflict in Afghanistan must be resolved by the people of Afghanistan themselves, but the UK and wider international community must be ready to assist if called upon. Because Pakistan has strong economic and cultural links with its neighbour and suffers similar problems with combating an armed insurgency, we believe that it is in the interests of both countries to co-operate closely in the years ahead in order to tackle common problems more effectively. We support a continuation of the trilateral process with Afghanistan, Pakistan and the UK which the Government has facilitated and encourage all efforts towards conflict resolution and reconciliation which hold out the prospect of lasting peace. (Paragraph 60)

As the Committee recognises, the conflict in Afghanistan must be resolved by the people of Afghanistan, but support from regional neighbours is essential. The Government supports an Afghan-led peace process and, with international partners, will do all we can to help its progress. We are supporters of the Istanbul Process, a regionally-led initiative to improve co-operation between Afghanistan and its neighbours. We will continue to work to strengthen relations between the Afghan and Pakistani governments, including through the trilateral process where appropriate.

13. The broad reconciliation and reintegration of Afghan Taliban affiliates into the political processes of Afghanistan will be important to an enduring peace settlement in Afghanistan in the same way that Pakistan Taliban affiliates need to reconcile with the Pakistan Government to provide stability there. Such developments would help secure the integrity of each country and allow for improved co-operation between these sovereign states enabling them to become more settled and diminishing pressures for regional instability. (Paragraph 61)

Both Afghanistan and Pakistan recognise that their long-term prosperity and security are dependent on productive bilateral relations. A stable Afghanistan requires an inclusive political settlement for all Afghans and a peaceful border between Afghanistan and Pakistan where violent extremists are prevented from operating. The Government continues to encourage Pakistan and Afghanistan to work together to stem the flow of militants from either side of the border who continue to undermine the sovereignty of both democratic governments. All countries of the region stand to gain from a stable and secure Afghanistan.

25. We believe that a lasting peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved through a process of reconciliation with the Taliban. We encourage the new Government of Afghanistan to begin a process of engagement as a matter of priority. (Paragraph 88)

The Government supports an Afghan-led peace process leading to an inclusive political settlement. Encouraging early efforts by the new Afghan government to begin a process of engagement will be a top priority for the UK government. We will continue to encourage
all Afghans, the Government of Pakistan and the wider region to support such efforts. Ultimately a political settlement which incorporates opponents of the Afghan Government willing to participate in a political process offers the best opportunity for a sustainable peace.

**PROGRESS**

14. We welcome the significant progress towards withdrawal which has been made by UK forces to date. We call upon the MoD to include detailed information about progress on redeployment in its monthly progress reports to Parliament and to provide a detailed breakdown of the costs of redeployment at the conclusion of the operation. (Paragraph 66)

The Government welcomes the Committee’s acknowledgement that significant progress has been made towards achieving the challenging objective of redeploying UK combat forces by the end of 2014. This has involved not just the physical transportation of goods, but a significant planning effort by the Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence civilians and supporting civilian contractors, and diplomatic efforts to agree and operate the various Lines of Communication. We do not underestimate the challenge that remains, but we are confident that we will succeed while delivering good Value for Money for taxpayers.

The Government remains committed to providing regular updates on redeployment progress, subject to the need to preserve operational security. The Committee will appreciate that details of the final stages of drawdown and redeployment are particularly sensitive and we will therefore be unable to provide additional details beyond those already published on www.gov.uk, or near-real time information, as this could compromise operational security.

The Department continues to gather data on redeployment and our current estimate is between £300m-£350m for redeployment activity between 1 October 2012 and 31 December 2014. After the operation has concluded, and following closure of Financial Year 14-15, we will analyse all the available financial data, including gifting/disposal and remediation, to establish the full cost of our redeployment.

**AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY OFFICER ACADEMY (ANAOA)**

15. We support the continuing UK Government commitment to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy at Qargha. The Academy will provide the Afghan National Army with the capacity to train and develop its next generation of Army officers who will lead the fight against the insurgency and help to maintain security for the Afghan people. However, without the signing of a Status of Forces Agreement between the Afghan Government and NATO we acknowledge that it will be impossible for the UK and other international partners to maintain a mentoring role at the Academy. (Paragraph 75)

The Government welcomes the Committee’s support and their recognition of the importance of the UK’s commitment to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA). We believe the planned Resolute Support mission in its current form – including our support to the ANAOA – is in all our interests. As the Committee
acknowledges, this mission is only possible if the people of Afghanistan invite us to remain in their country. Both of the Presidential candidates have stated that they will sign the US Bilateral Security Agreement and NATO Status of Forces Agreement as one of their first acts in office. The UK continues to plan for the Resolute Support mission in anticipation of the signatures.

NATIONAL LESSONS STUDY

16. We consider that it would be appropriate for an independent national lessons study into Afghanistan to be commissioned by the Government. It should receive input from all departments of state concerned, and take evidence from all those engaged and affected by the campaign. (Paragraph 77)

17. We recommend that the study should include a balanced review of the successes and setbacks of the campaign, identifying lessons from the tactical to the strategic, clearly distinguishing the pre-2006 section of the campaign from activities in Helmand from 2006 onward. It should describe the translation of national policy, within an international context, into military operations and development activities and consider whether all instruments of national power were harnessed and orchestrated to best effect in order to meet the objectives of the UK Government and the international community. It should also explore the collective experience of operating within the extended ISAF international coalition. (Paragraph 78)

18. More specifically, the study should set out what the political ends were, how they changed during the course of the campaign, and judge whether the ways and means, diplomatic, economic and military, were sufficient during the course of the campaign. The study should review whether the national decision-making, military command and governance arrangements for the campaign were appropriate, and whether they could be improved for the future. (Paragraph 79)

19. Furthermore the study should analyse how public perceptions were captured, understood and considered by policy makers and what measures were taken to shape public understanding as the conflict moved through its various phases over a decade or more. The study should examine how public perceptions and understanding became largely shaped by a range of factors outside the Government’s control, including developing social media. The study should also examine how plans to gain public understanding and support in the UK, in Afghanistan and amongst ISAF and other partner nations were determined and deployed. (Paragraph 80)

21. The Ministry of Defence, alongside other departments of state, needs to invest in its history and lessons functions if our successors are to make better informed policies and strategic plans. A relatively small investment could have a significantly beneficial impact on future planning. (Paragraph 84)

26. It is imperative that the UK learns lessons from our intervention in Afghanistan. The public will quite rightly expect a thorough analysis to be conducted to ensure that the Government and our Armed Forces have identified and assessed lessons for the future. We recommend that the Government conduct a lessons learned review, encompassing not just the military operation, but the wider intervention by the UK as
part of the ISAF and United Nations missions in Afghanistan looking at the two stages of our involvement separately, the pre-2006 intervention and the deployment to Helmand post 2006. In the longer term, we consider that it is vital that a proper historical account be produced of the campaign. (Paragraph 89)

The Government notes the extensive recommendations and conclusions that the Committee has made on a lessons study and thanks the Committee for responding to the invitation by the Secretary of State for Defence that they offer suggestions on what it should cover. The Government can reassure the Committee, and the public, that it takes the need to identify and assess the strategic lessons from the Afghanistan campaign seriously. As the Secretary of State for Defence said in his evidence session for this report to the Committee, there will be a need to review the strategic lessons from the campaign, but this will be when combat operations have finished and when all relevant information is available. The Government is still considering how best to capture lessons from Afghanistan across the military, development, and political spheres on a cross-Whitehall basis. This work is led by the Cabinet Office.

As we noted in the Government response to the Committee’s report ‘Towards the SDSR: Part One’, we have already learned some of the most significant and immediate lessons from operations in Afghanistan, and the political complexity around them. The Ministry of Defence recognises the importance of learning from past operations and already invests significant manpower and financial resource into its lessons and history functions. However, we recognise that more can be done to ensure that learning supports decision-making and underpins core outputs. Areas for improvement have been identified and the Committee were briefed about these on 9 December 2013, including development of a Defence Organisational Learning Strategy (DOLS). We have also increased investment through initiatives such as Dstl’s Strategy and History project. Like the Ministry of Defence, both the FCO and DFID have established processes to review and learn from their experiences to identify lessons. The Cabinet Office maintains awareness of these departmental processes to ensure coherence and to provide direction on our current engagement with Afghanistan and other foreign policy development.

OFFICIAL HISTORY

20. We remain firmly of the view that the Ministry of Defence should commission work to write the narrative of operations in Afghanistan as an essential precursor to an official history that should follow in future years. While the official history can wait, as typically these are written 10-20 years after the campaign concerned, the narratives should not. (Paragraph 83)

The Government agrees the requirement for a narrative of UK activities in Afghanistan. A cross-government narrative was launched online on the www.gov.uk platform in December 2013, titled the “UK’s work in Afghanistan”. The Foreign Secretary also provides monthly progress reports on Afghanistan to Parliament on behalf of the FCO, DFID and the MOD.

22. As the Afghan Presidential election process will not be concluded as this report is published, the Status of Forces Agreements remain unsigned and the withdrawal of UK
combat forces incomplete, we will continue to monitor the situation in Afghanistan and may well report further before the end of this Parliament. (Paragraph 85)

The Government appreciates the detailed work that the Committee has already conducted in this Parliament and would welcome any further reports on Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

23. The conflict in Afghanistan has been a long and arduous one. UK Armed Forces have fought with great courage and made extraordinary sacrifices in order to create and sustain a safer and more stable Afghanistan. We record here our gratitude to the many men and women who have served in Afghanistan since 2001 and the families who have given them such resolute support. We pay tribute in particular to all those who have lost their lives, and the many more who have sustained life-changing injuries. (Paragraph 86)

The Government joins the Committee in paying tribute to the men and women of the UK’s Armed Forces who have served in Afghanistan. Their efforts have made the country a more secure place for the people of Afghanistan, and has given them renewed hope for their future. They have made the UK a safer place as terrorists can no longer use Afghanistan as a safe haven, or as a launching pad for attacks on the West. Since 2001, 453 UK personnel have lost their lives and many more have suffered life-changing injuries. Their sacrifices will not be forgotten, and we will continue to offer those affected by the conflict our support.