

Research Briefing
Number CBP 9298
By Noel Dempsey
16 August 2021

Afghanistan statistics: UK deaths, casualties, mission costs and refugees

1

Background

Since October 2001, US, UK, and other coalition forces have been conducting military operations in Afghanistan in response to the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001.

Initially, military action, considered self-defence under the UN Charter, was conducted by a US-led coalition (called Operation Enduring Freedom by the US). NATO invoked its [Article V](#) collective defence clause on 12 September 2001.

In December 2001, the UN authorised the deployment of a 5,000-strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to deploy in, and immediately around, Kabul. This was to provide security and to assist in the reconstruction of the country.

While UN mandated, ISAF continued as a coalition effort. US counter terrorism operations under Operation Enduring Freedom remained a distinct parallel effort.

In August 2003, NATO took command of ISAF. Over the next decade, and bolstered by a renewed and expanded UN mandate,¹ ISAF operations grew

¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1510 (2003)

into the whole country and evolved from security and stabilisation, into combat and counterinsurgency operations, and then to transition.

Timeline of major foreign force decisions

- October 2001: Operation Enduring Freedom begins.
- December 2001: UN authorises the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).
- August 2003: NATO assumes ISAF command.
- June 2006: ISAF mandate expanded.
- 2009: Counterinsurgency operations begin.
- 2011-2014: Three-year transition to Afghan-led security operations.
- October 2014: End of UK combat operations.
- December 2014: End of combat operations, withdrawal of ISAF.
- 1 January 2015: Afghan forces assume security responsibility. NATO establishes Resolute Support Mission.
- February 2020: Peace agreement reached between the US and the Taliban
- April 2021: US and NATO announce revised withdrawal plan.
- 1 May 2021: Coalition forces begin withdrawing, to be completed by 11 September 2021.

At its height, in 2011, ISAF was approximately 132,000 personnel strong, with troops from 50 NATO and partner nations.² Troop numbers fluctuated according to the security situation on the ground.

On 31 December 2014, coalition combat operations end, including the US Operation Enduring Freedom. On 1 January 2015, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) assumed responsibility for security in Afghanistan and NATO transitioned to a new, non-combat, mission called Resolute Support. The core mission of Resolute Support has been to support the ANSF.

This briefing looks at the UK's military contribution to the operations in Afghanistan, detailing the number of fatalities and casualties sustained by UK armed forces personnel; the cost of the operations; the number of aircraft missions flown; and the number of Afghan refugees that have come to the UK during the period.

² [NATO – Archive ISAF Placements](#)

Relevant Library briefing papers

- [Afghanistan: Fall of the Government and the transition of power](#), 16 August 2021
- [Afghanistan: July 2020 update](#), 30 July 2020
- [Troops in Afghanistan](#), 18 July 2018
- [Afghanistan: back on the agenda?](#) 27 October 2015
- [In Brief: UK withdrawal from Afghanistan](#), 24 May 2013
- [Afghanistan: the timetable for security transition](#), 9 July 2012
- [Afghanistan: Towards a handover of security responsibility?](#), 19 August 2010
- [Military campaign in Afghanistan](#), 14 July 2010
- [The International Security Assistance Force](#), last updated 9 February 2009
- [Afghanistan: the culmination of the Bonn process](#), 26 October 2005
- [The campaign against international terrorism: prospects after the fall of the Taliban](#), 11 December 2001
- [Operation Enduring Freedom and the conflict in Afghanistan](#), 31 October 2001

2 UK armed forces deaths and casualties

Over the last 20 years of deployment in Afghanistan there have been **457 deaths of UK armed forces personnel**. The number of fatalities peaked during 2009 and 2010, when over 100 personnel were killed. Of the total 457 personnel who died whilst on deployment to Afghanistan **405 died because of hostile action**.³



Source: Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces deaths: operational deaths post World War 2](#)

During Operation Herrick, the codename for which all British military operations were conducted from 2002 to 2014, there were **616 serious or very serious casualties** among armed forces and civilian personnel. As with deaths, these casualties peaked in 2009 and 2010.⁴

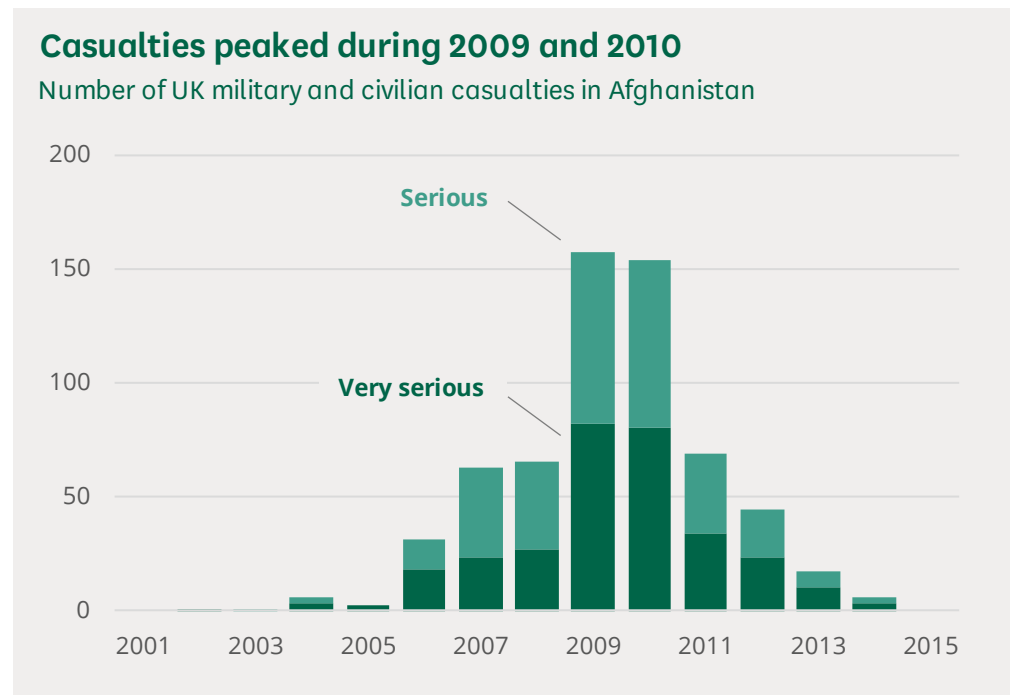
There were a total 7,807 field hospital admissions, although most admissions were related to disease or a non-battle injury. **Around 28% (2,209) of admissions to field hospitals were those wounded in action.**

Additionally, there were 7,477 medical air evacuations during the 12-year operation.

It's important to note that personnel listed as seriously or very seriously injured may also appear in field hospital admissions as well as medical air evacuations.

³ Ministry of Defence, [UK armed forces deaths: operational deaths post World War 2](#)

⁴ Ministry of Defence, [Operation Herrick casualty and fatality tables](#)



Source: Ministry of Defence, [Operation Herrick casualty and fatality tables](#)

3

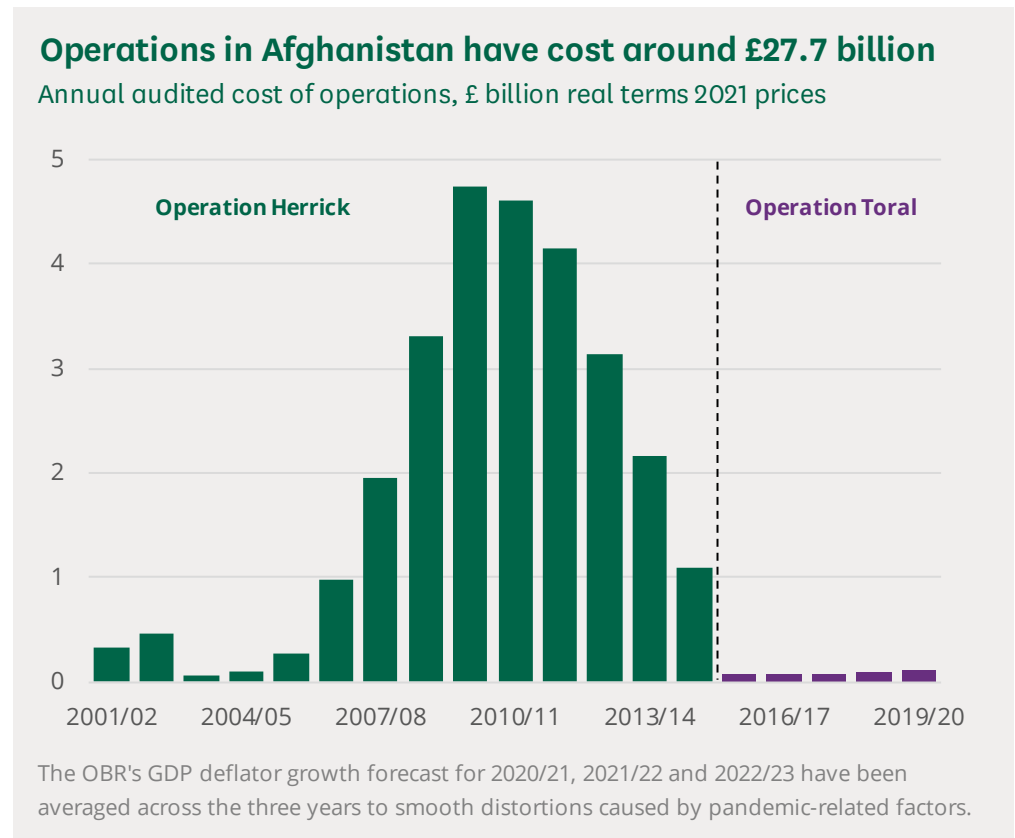
Cost of UK operations in Afghanistan

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) publishes information on [the cost of military operations and interventions](#) undertaken by the UK armed forces. The cost of these operations is reported in terms of the net additional costs, meaning costs over and above those that the MoD would have incurred if the operation not happened. For example, expenditure on pay, or savings from cancelled training exercises, are deducted from the total cost of the operation.

On this basis, the Afghanistan **operations Herrick and Toral have cost around £27.7 billion**, in 2021 prices.

The cost of initial operations in Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002 was between £300-400 million. This fell by around 85% for the following couple of years. As the focus of the armed forces shifted to Helmand province, the cost of operations began to increase quickly. Between 2005/06 and 2009/10, costs increased by an average of 132% per year.

Operation Toral, the UK operation as part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission post-2014, has cost an average of £90 million per year.

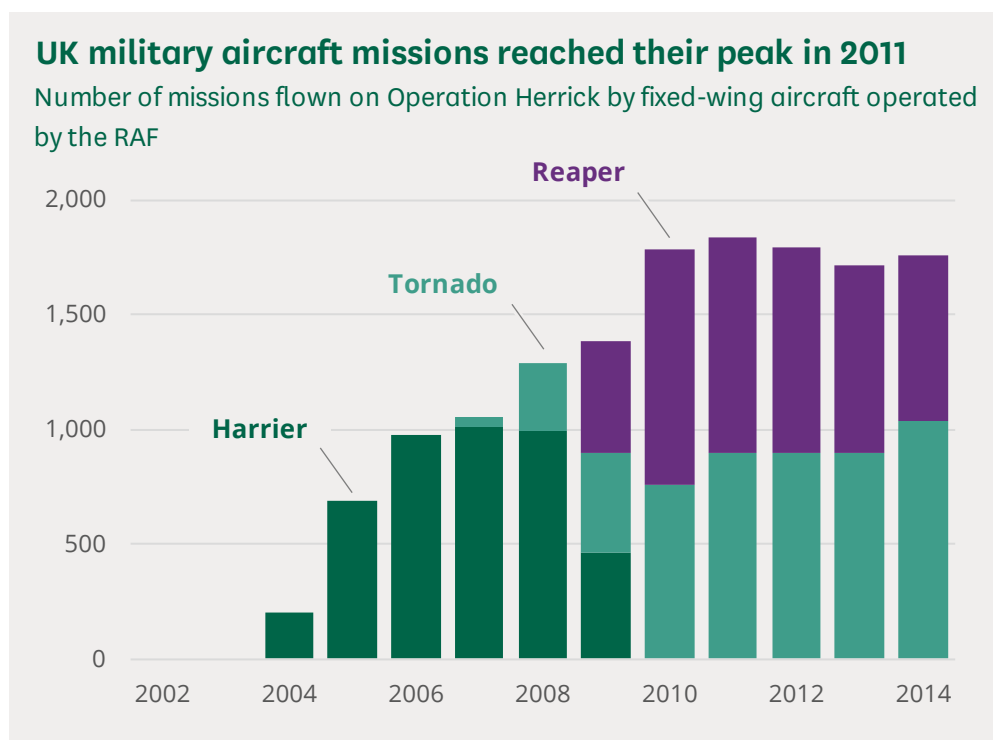


Source: Ministry of Defence, [Defence departmental resources](#); HM Treasury, [GDP Deflator March 2021](#)

4 UK aircraft missions in Afghanistan

During operation Herrick, there were a total **14,467 missions flown by the Royal Air Force**. A mission is a particular task which one or more aircraft has been ordered to complete.

At the beginning of the operation, RAF missions were mostly conducted with the Harrier jet, although by 2009 the Tornado jet and Reaper drone had an equal share of missions. From 2010 onwards, missions were roughly split equally between the Tornado and Reaper.



Source: Ministry of Defence, [Operation Herrick aircraft statistics](#)

5 Afghan refugees in the UK

Since 1996, there have been around **63,000 applications for asylum** in the UK from Afghan nationals. During the same period, **30,600 asylum applications from Afghans have been successful on the initial decision** and at least 5,400 more have been granted on appeal.

Since 2003, **354 Afghans have been resettled to the UK**. Resettlement is the process of transferring recognised refugees directly to the UK from third countries of asylum (for example, in this case, Iran and Pakistan). It is separate to the UK's in-country asylum system.

The most asylum applications submitted by Afghan nationals was in 2001 (8,918). Afghans were the largest nationality group to submit applications in that year and were the second largest group in 2002, after Iraqis. The trends can be seen in a chart on [page 17 of the Library's asylum statistics briefing](#).

These figures are for main applicants only so do not represent the total number of people applying or granted status. In general, across the asylum process, there is around one dependant person for every four applications.⁵

⁵ See House of Commons Library, [Asylum statistics](#), p19

Applications for asylum, grants of protection, and resettlement of Afghan nationals to the UK

Main applicants only

	In country asylum process			Total grants	Resettled under resettlement schemes
	Applications	Grants on initial decision	Allowed on appeal		
1996	675	440	.	.	.
1997	1,085	655	.	.	.
1998	2,395	1,535	.	.	.
1999	3,975	1,195	.	.	.
2000	5,555	1,070	.	.	.
2001	8,918	9,819	110	9,929	.
2002	7,204	4,879	230	5,109	.
2003	2,280	598	695	1,293	15
2004	1,397	451	325	776	7
2005	1,578	499	205	704	36
2006	2,398	805	135	940	1
2007	2,501	885	162	1,047	0
2008	3,503	988	153	1,141	2
2009	3,330	1,381	286	1,667	0
2010	1,596	762	319	1,081	0
2011	1,271	388	198	586	0
2012	1,008	288	174	462	3
2013	1,038	334	176	510	0
2014	1,139	328	172	500	0
2015	2,261	512	261	773	4
2016	2,329	603	400	1,003	3
2017	1,326	525	576	1,101	35
2018	1,349	546	415	961	40
2019	1,573	710	306	1,016	183
2020	1,336	355	99	454	16
2021 (to March)	257	91	24	115	9
Total since 1996	63,277	30,642	.	.	.
Total since 2001	49,592	25,747	5,421	31,168	.

Sources: Home Office, [Immigration statistics, year ending March 2021](#), tables Asy_D01, Asy_D02, and Asy_D07; Home Office, [Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2000 \[Archived\]](#); UNHCR, [Resettlement data](#), custom query [accessed 16 August 2021]

Notes: The in-country figures show main applicants only (they exclude dependents), while the resettlement figures include all individuals resettled. Appeals data is only available from 2001 and resettlement data from 2003.

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)