

Debate Pack

CDP-0174 (2021)

By Claire Mills,
Nigel Walker

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Proposal for an inquiry into the UK's involvement in the NATO-led mission to Afghanistan

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Background

In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States led a coalition of the willing into Afghanistan to conduct counterterrorism operations (Operation Enduring Freedom). British forces were part of that initial military action, considered self-defence under the UN Charter (Operation Veritas).

In December 2001, the UN authorised the deployment of a 5,000-strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to deploy to the region in, and immediately around, Kabul, to provide security and to assist in the reconstruction of the country. Counter terrorism operations under Operation Enduring Freedom also continued but as a distinct US operation in parallel. The British deployment to Afghanistan became part of that UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (Operation Fingal/Herrick).

In August 2003 NATO assumed command of ISAF. Over the next decade, and bolstered by a renewed and expanded UN mandate, ISAF operations expanded into the whole country and evolved from security and stabilisation, into combat and counterinsurgency operations, and then to the transition of security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

The expansion of ISAF operations saw the UK assume responsibility for operations in southern Afghanistan in May 2006 and a significant increase in the number of British forces deployed in the country. By October 2006 there were approximately 5,845 British personnel in Afghanistan, with 4,500 of those troops deployed as part of the Helmand Task Force in the south. Further deployments were subsequently announced and over the course of 2007 British force levels reached 7,700 personnel.

At its height the British contribution to ISAF peaked at 9,500 personnel in 2011/12, making the UK the second largest contributor to ISAF, after the United States.

In 2011 ISAF began a three-year period of transition that would see primary security responsibility across the country transferred to the ANSF.

In 2012 the UK began a process of gradual drawdown of personnel from Afghanistan and in October 2014 the UK's combat mission formally ended. ISAF formally withdrew from the country in December 2014.

On 1 January 2015, the ANSF assumed security responsibility for Afghanistan and NATO transitioned to a new, non-combat, mission: [Resolute Support](#). The core mission of Resolute Support has been to support the ANSF. Approximately 1,100 British personnel were deployed in Afghanistan purely as part of that non-combat training mission (Operation Toral).

In April 2021, and in line with the US and wider NATO decision to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan, Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, [confirmed](#)

[British troops would also withdraw](#). Coalition forces were withdrawn by 31 August 2021.

Over the last 20 years, [150,610 British service personnel have served in Afghanistan](#). Over 600 personnel have suffered life changing injuries, and 457 personnel have been killed.

Calls for an inquiry

Over the last few months there have been renewed calls for an independent inquiry to consider the UK's military role in Afghanistan and lessons learned.

[The Government has so far rejected a “Chilcot-style public inquiry”](#), suggesting that an internal review into Operation Herrick in 2014 had already outlined lessons learned, and that the benefits of an inquiry would not outweigh the costs of conducting it. In July 2021 [the Prime Minister suggested](#) that the Defence Committee conduct their own parliamentary inquiry. Previous committees have conducted similar “lessons learned” inquiries in the past.

At the beginning of September 2021 the Defence Committee opened an inquiry specifically into the conduct of the [UK's withdrawal from Afghanistan](#) in 2021. The Foreign Affairs Committee has also launched an inquiry into [the future of UK policy towards Afghanistan](#).

[Calls have also recently been made for a Joint Committee](#) to be established to consider Government policy on Afghanistan between the signing of the [Doha Agreement](#) between the US and the Taliban in February 2020 and the conclusion of UK operations in August 2021.

To date, [Norway is the only coalition country to have concluded an independent inquiry](#) into its role in Afghanistan.

Further reading

A reading list providing links to Parliamentary and other material on the conflict in Afghanistan since 9/11 is available online: [The conflict in Afghanistan: A reading list](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper, 2 November 2021.

A briefing paper examining non-statutory inquiries, including: non statutory ad hoc inquiries, committees of Privy Counsellors and Royal Commissions is also available. This paper considers several high profile inquiries, including both the Butler and Chilcot inquiries on the Iraq war: [Public Inquiries: non-statutory commissions of inquiry](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper, 1 July 2016.

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Examples of Afghanistan inquiries in other allied countries

Australia

In 2016 the Australian Government conducted a lessons learned inquiry with respect to involvement in Afghanistan.

It was very specific in its mandate and focused solely on the “whole of government” approach that was taken: what worked and what didn’t.

As the report itself notes: “The report does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of either Australia’s military role in Afghanistan or the police, diplomatic or aid contributions. Nor is this report intended as a history of Australia’s role in the international intervention in Afghanistan”.

The report is available on the Australian Civil-Military Centre’s website: [Afghanistan: Lessons from Australia’s Whole-of-Government Mission](#).

In addition, there was an Australian inquiry into alleged war crimes: [Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force: Afghanistan Inquiry Report](#).

Denmark

Denmark opened a Commission on Inquiry into their role in Afghanistan in 2012.

It was subsequently closed down after the election of a new Government in 2015, as the incoming Government believed “the issues covered by the Commission had already been adequately examined”.

The inquiry was reinstated with a much narrower remit in 2018 and is currently ongoing: [Review of the Danish Engagements in Afghanistan 2018-2020](#).

Norway

In November 2014 an independent commission (The Norwegian Commission on Afghanistan) was established by Royal decree. Its task was to evaluate and extract lessons from Norway's civilian and military involvement in Afghanistan during the period 2001–2014.

The report was published in June 2016: [A Good Ally: Norway in Afghanistan 2001–2014](#).

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Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[**Afghanistan: National security adviser admits lives 'potentially put at risk' by documents left in embassy**](#)

Independent
Ashley Cowburn
20 October 2021

[**Defence Committee launch inquiry into withdrawal from Afghanistan**](#)

Defence Committee
9 September 2021

[**There will be a UK Afghanistan inquiry – just don't expect any accountability**](#)

The Guardian
Frank Ledwidge
6 September 2021

[**Foreign Affairs Committee launches inquiry on UK policy towards Afghanistan**](#)

Foreign Affairs Committee
3 September 2021

[**MPs launch inquiry into government's Afghanistan policy after 'catastrophic' withdrawal**](#)

Independent
Adam Forrest
3 September 2021

[**Afghanistan blame game erupts as British soldiers fly home**](#)

Sunday Times
Tim Shipman and Chris Smyth
29 August 2021

[**Afghanistan: UK's exit branded a 'humiliation' by senior Tory MP - as final military jet returns home**](#)

Sky News
Rob Powell
29 August 2021

[**Inquiry call into Afghanistan withdrawal as troops prepare to leave Kabul**](#)

The Herald
Hannah Rodger
27 August 2021

[**Senior Conservatives pile pressure on Boris Johnson to launch rapid Afghanistan inquiry**](#)

Independent
Ashley Cowburn
21 August 2021

[**MPs should launch Afghanistan inquiry, says Dominic Grieve**](#)

The Guardian
Aubrey Allegretti
19 August 2021

[**Boris Johnson faces anger of MPs over UK response to Afghanistan**](#)

Financial Times
Sebastian Payne and Jasmine Cameron-Chileshe
18 August 2021

[**UK PM rejects Afghanistan inquiry as MPs debate Taliban takeover**](#)

Al Jazeera
18 August 2021

[**Twelve Dilemmas Behind the UK's Afghan Defeat**](#)

RUSI
Tim Willasey-Wilsey
2 August 2021

[**We made mistakes in Afghanistan: The dead are owed a full inquiry**](#)

Evening Standard
Tom Newton Dunn
16 July 2021

[**Boris Johnson announces end of UK military mission in Afghanistan**](#)

The Guardian
Dan Sabbagh
8 July 2021

[**UK MPs call for Iraq-style inquiry amid Afghanistan exit anger**](#)

Politico
Cristina Gallardo
20 April 2021

Transcript: The case for an inquiry into Afghanistan

Prospect

20 September 2013

The case for an Afghanistan inquiry

Prospect

Bronwen Maddox

21 August 2013

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Press releases

Military operation established to support the drawdown of British nationals from Afghanistan

Ministry of Defence

13 August 2021

Operation Pitting will be commanded from the UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters in Northwood and is the name for military support to the evacuation of British Nationals and former British staff eligible for relocation under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP).

This will be led by the 600 members of the Armed Forces who have already begun to deploy, with members of 16 Air Assault Brigade leaving this weekend.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Protecting British Nationals and ensuring their safety as they leave Afghanistan is our top priority, which is why we are commencing Operation Pitting, for which our military are very well prepared.

Over the next few weeks, we shall all do our very best to support the Afghan Government and those that have worked with us over 20 years.

As announced yesterday, UK troops will be providing force protection and logistical support for the relocation of British nationals where required and assist with the acceleration of the ARAP.

To accelerate this process the Home Office will be deploying a small team of officials to assist the FCDO in Kabul. They will be tasked with streamlining the processing of new visas and other documents needed for British nationals, former UK staff and other eligible people to leave Afghanistan and travel to the UK.

Over 2,000 eligible local staff who supported the UK Government in Afghanistan, and their families, have been relocated to the UK since April this year. Over 3,000 locally employed civilians and their families have been relocated since 2014, demonstrating the UK's commitment to ensuring the safety of those who supported the government.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

We have a moral obligation to support the fearless Afghan staff and their family members, who served alongside our brave troops in Afghanistan.

No one should have their lives put at risk for working with the UK Government, which is why we have significantly expanded and accelerated our dedicated resettlement scheme, deployed Home Office officials to help process British nationals for evacuation, and waived visas for their dependants.

The UK urges British nationals to leave Afghanistan immediately, given the deteriorating security situation. We are providing support to help British nationals leave, including providing where appropriate emergency travel documents and loans.

British nationals who have not already done so should call the British Embassy Kabul on +93 (0) 700 102 000 and select the option “Consular services for British nationals” as soon as possible to discuss their departure plans.

Defence Secretary statement on UK forces in Afghanistan

Ministry of Defence

14 April 2021

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The people of Afghanistan deserve a peaceful and stable future.

As we drawdown, the security of our people currently serving in Afghanistan remains our priority and we have been clear that attacks on Allied troops will be met with a forceful response.

The British public and our Armed Forces community, both serving and veterans, will have lasting memories of our time in Afghanistan. Most importantly we must remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, who will never be forgotten.

Armed Forces Minister confirms increase in support to Afghanistan

Ministry of Defence

27 January 2017

Speaking on his first visit to Afghanistan the Minister reaffirmed the UK's enduring commitment to the country.

Britain stepped up its support to Afghanistan this year, increasing by 50 the number of personnel in the country. They join personnel in country who are helping to train Afghan officers, advising the fledgling Afghan Air Force and working as advisors in the Afghan Security Ministries.

While UK and NATO combat operations drew to a close in 2014, Britain continues to support Afghanistan by training, advising and assisting the Afghan defence and security forces, as they continue to fight with increasing skill and capability. This year's increase in support brings the total number of the personnel committed to the operation to 500; Britain's second biggest overseas commitment after the campaign against Daesh.

During his visit, the Minister met with Afghan Cadet Behzad Hiedari, who won Sandhurst's Overseas Sword of Honour. The prestigious honour is awarded to the best overseas cadet in each year's class at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. The award highlights the talent in Afghanistan's security forces, which are being developed by the UK and our NATO Allies and partners.

One way in which British personnel are helping to develop Afghanistan's security forces is through the Afghan National Officer Academy (ANAOA). Minister Penning visited the site during the visit and met with the UK personnel helping to 'mentor the mentors'. Just as Afghan forces are in the lead for the security of their country, so are their UK-mentored officers, who are helping to train their country's next generation of leaders.

Mike Penning meets with a British adviser to female Afghan instructors for female cadets at ANAOA

Armed Forces Minister Mike Penning said:

Britain has an enduring commitment to Afghanistan. This year we're stepping up our support to the country, and have deployed 50 extra personnel, some of whom I visited at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, where the next generation of Afghan army leaders are being trained. The UK, along with our NATO Allies, is committed for the long term to developing the ever more capable Afghan National Security and Defence Forces to ensure Afghanistan is not a safe haven for terrorists.

Since 2014, UK mentoring assistance has helped the ANAOA train over 1500 high quality officers.

The Government committed last year to provide £210 million to the Afghan security forces, until 2020, giving around £70 million a year.

[Defence Secretary pays tribute to British military helping secure Afghanistan's future](#)

Ministry of Defence

5 August 2015

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon has thanked UK troops working towards a more peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan during a visit to Kabul yesterday.

Visiting 10 months after the draw down from UK combat operations, Mr Fallon also reaffirmed our long-term commitment to Afghanistan through the NATO Resolute Support mission. Almost 500 British service personnel are currently deployed in Afghanistan, assisting with a range of tasks including mentoring, counter terrorism and force protection.

During his visit, Mr Fallon received an update on British military mentors helping to develop the next generation of army officers at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA). The first 249 graduated from the ANAOA in 2014 and the first female Afghan cadets successfully completed their training in June; a landmark event for the country's National Army. And he saw the UK mentored Afghan security force in action, performing a complex training operation.

Speaking from Afghanistan, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said:

The UK can be proud of what has been achieved here. The terrorist threat in Afghanistan and also back home in the UK has been significantly reduced. People of both nations are safer thanks to the work of our service men and women.

The Afghans are now determining their own future and leading security across their country. With our continued support, there is a real opportunity to cement this progress and secure a better future for Afghanistan.

Mr Fallon also met Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, acting Minister of Defence Masoom Stanekzai, Minister of the Interior Nur ul-Haq Ulumi and National Security Adviser Hanif Atmar. The Defence Secretary assured them of the UK's unwavering commitment to helping them build a stable and successful future for their country. He urged them to press on with implementing their plans for political and economic reform. And he underlined Britain's full backing for the peace process they have initiated with moderate taliban to end internal conflict.

UK drawdown in Afghanistan enters final phase

Ministry of Defence

6 June 2014

The incoming command team will oversee the return to the UK of the majority of the UK troops and equipment still deployed in Afghanistan.

Joint Force Support (Afghanistan) (JFSp(A)) is in charge of sustaining UK forces in Afghanistan at approximately 5,000 personnel while simultaneously

managing the drawdown and redeployment of UK personnel and equipment from locations across the country.

With combat operations due to finish by the end of 2014, the new command team has arrived in Helmand province under Herrick 20. Their task is to finish the job of bringing the majority of UK troops and equipment home.

By the end of operations, approximately 5,000 standard 20-foot shipping containers worth of materiel, including 400 tonnes of ammunition, plus 3,400 vehicles and major equipment, including 50 aircraft, will have been redeployed; a process which only began on 1 October 2012.

By the incoming headquarters' arrival, 64% of the materiel and 63% of the vehicles and major equipment had already been redeployed.

Brigadier Martin Moore, the outgoing commander of JFSp(A), said:

The figures stand for themselves, and I am exceptionally proud of the way that all personnel have contributed to the redeployment effort.

However, it has not solely been about redeployment. There are a lot of people that we are responsible for supporting, and it has been the mission of JFSp(A) to ensure that these people are adequately resourced, from food to gymnasium equipment, ammunition to internet booths; all are vital to sustain a military force on operations.

The new commander, Brigadier Darrell Amison, said:

It is my privilege to assume command of Joint Force Support (Afghanistan) in the final stage of Operation Herrick. The redeployment effort is in full flow, going well, and Martin and his team have done a superb job to ensure that my team are able to complete the mission.

We will continue to make sure that the force remains supported, as well as being able to conduct their jobs safely and to the usual high standard of UK armed forces.

Whilst we will transition to more expeditionary conditions towards the end of the campaign, I am absolutely committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of our personnel throughout.

Though the new command team will be the final JFSp(A) team to deploy to Afghanistan under Operation Herrick, the UK plans to continue to support the Afghan government post-2014.

Alongside financial support and institutional development, the UK is the lead nation in developing the Afghan National Army Officer Academy in Kabul, the

aim of which is to select and train Afghanistan's officers and leaders of the future.

The future of Afghanistan

Ministry of Defence

10 April 2013

The report focuses on the planned withdrawal of combat troops by the end of 2014 and the transfer of responsibility for security to the Afghan National Security Forces.

It also raises concerns that Afghan forces may lack 'enablers' like helicopter support and medical care after the drawdown of international forces and calls for the start of an Afghan-led peace process, including the Taliban, before the UK and other forces end operations.

Philip Hammond said:

I welcome the publication of this report, which shares our vision of an Afghanistan that can maintain its own security and never again be a safe haven for international terrorism. The fact that Afghan security forces are now leading on more than 80% of all security operations across the country shows we are well on the way to achieving that aim.

As part of our enduring commitment to Afghanistan we will continue to support the development of Afghan forces through mentoring and training at the Afghan National Army Officer's Academy near Kabul. That is in addition to our £70 million commitment to the international fund to sustain the Afghan security forces after 2014.

The UK is dedicated to helping the Afghan Government make progress towards a sustainable political settlement and a stable regional environment, and to help the Afghan people build a viable Afghan state.

We will continue to support governance and development in Afghanistan through the next decade - with £178 million per year of development aid agreed until 2017 - to ensure that the progress made will not be lost.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme this morning, the Defence Secretary said:

Let's be clear what we have achieved. We have essentially seen the removal of international terrorists able to use Afghanistan as a base (from which to conduct attacks) and we have created a 350,000-strong Afghan National Security Forces from scratch.

Eighty per cent of operations are now led by the Afghans, planned by the Afghans and executed by the Afghans; increasingly the ISAF

(International Security Assistance Force) forces in the country are in the barracks as a back-up reserve, with the Afghans actually doing the fighting on the ground. This is very significant progress and we shouldn't underplay it.

The Defence Secretary later emphasised that:

Turning Afghanistan from a piece of completely ungoverned space with no ability of the government in Kabul to project its authority at all, no security forces to speak of, utterly dependent on short-term Western combat interventions, we've now got a situation where international forces are able to draw down, where the Afghan security forces are delivering working security on the ground, and there is an elected government in Kabul with a presidential election due next year which will elect a new one with a different president. I think that's progress.

On the subject of the possibility of Afghanistan descending into civil war post-2014, the Defence Secretary said:

The report says that they have been offered a range of views about the outcome, from what they describe as the 'overly optimistic' to the prospect of degeneration into civil war. And I completely accept that nobody can say with certainty what the future for Afghanistan will be, but what I can say is that the future of Afghanistan will have to be determined by the Afghan people.

Foreign Secretary William Hague on the UK's role in Afghanistan

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

23 June 2011

Speaking shortly after President Obama's announcement of the US plans to draw down their troop surge from Afghanistan, William Hague said:

We welcome President Obama's announcement and it is in line with our own thinking. There is clearly progress being made in Afghanistan and I've seen that for myself on this visit.

What [Obama's statement] amounts to is the recovery of the surge of US forces. The Prime Minister announced a few weeks ago that there will be a reduction of 400 over this year in the number of British forces with the base level remaining at 9,500.

The Foreign Secretary addressed the work that has been done by the international effort to enable the Afghans to forces to take the lead for security in a number of areas:

We're building up Afghan national security forces, now nearly 300,000 strong, and increasingly they will be taking over security of more and more areas of Afghanistan.

We will continue to assess the level of British forces required based on the conditions on the ground. But of course leading to a point by 2015 where we will not have combat troops fighting in Afghanistan or in anything like the numbers they are today.

On Radio 4's Today programme, he talked about UK's contribution to the reconciliation process and its importance alongside military efforts:

Contacts do take place with the Taliban. Britain is connected to that, and supportive of that. We have been at the forefront of arguing for reconciliation in Afghanistan.

The efforts to arrive at a political reconciliation in Afghanistan must run alongside military efforts. The military efforts are part of keeping up the pressure for such a reconciliation to take place.

We have done enormous damage to Al-Qaeda. The death of Usama bin Laden is an opportunity for the Taliban to break its links with Al-Qaeda. But they haven't yet done that, and it is important to keep up the military pressure on them.

Prime Minister David Cameron also spoke with President Obama and welcomed his announcement to draw down the US troop surge from Afghanistan. David Cameron said:

"We remain side by side with Afghanistan and our international partners to achieve a military and political solution in Afghanistan that will allow the Afghan people take full responsibility for their own sovereignty and national security."

[UK welcomes US review of Afghanistan](#)

Ministry of Defence

17 December 2010

A five-page summary of the review was published by the White House yesterday.

The review follows US President Barack Obama's direction to his national security team to regularly assess their efforts and to review progress a year after the new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan was launched last December.

Announcing the review yesterday, Mr Obama said:

I want to be clear; this continues to be a very difficult endeavour, but I can report that thanks to the extraordinary service of our troops and civilians on the ground, we are on track to achieve our goals.

It's important to remember why we remain in Afghanistan. It was Afghanistan where Al-Qaeda plotted the 9/11 attacks that murdered 3,000 innocent people. It is the tribal regions along the Afghan-Pakistan border from which terrorists have launched more attacks against our homeland and our allies.

And if an even wider insurgency were to engulf Afghanistan, that would give Al-Qaeda even more space to plan these attacks.

Mr Obama said that in Afghanistan we remain focused on the three areas of our strategy: our military effort to break the Taliban's momentum and train Afghan forces so they can take the lead; our civilian effort to promote effective governance and development; and regional co-operation, especially with Pakistan, because our strategy has to succeed on both sides of the border.

He continued:

The additional military and civilian personnel that I ordered in Afghanistan are now in place, along with additional forces from our coalition which has grown to 49 nations.

Along with our Afghan partners, we've gone on the offensive, targeting the Taliban and its leaders and pushing them out of their strongholds.

"To ensure Afghans can take responsibility, we continue to focus on training. Targets for the growth of Afghan security forces are being met. And because of the contributions of additional trainers from our coalition partners, I'm confident we will continue to meet our goals.

I would add that much of this progress - the speed with which our troops deployed this year, the increase in recruits ... in recruiting and training of Afghan forces, and the additional troops and trainers from other nations; much of this is the result of us having sent a clear signal that we will begin the transition of responsibility to Afghans and start reducing American forces next July.

This sense of urgency also helped galvanise the coalition around the goals that we agreed to at the recent NATO Summit in Lisbon; that we are moving toward a new phase in Afghanistan - a transition to full Afghan lead for security that will begin early next year and will conclude in 2014, even as NATO maintains a long-term commitment to training and advising Afghan forces.

Welcoming the review, a spokesman for the UK's Prime Minister said:

We very much welcome President Obama's review of the campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It is consistent with the British Government's assessment and strategy, and with the agreements made by the international coalition and the Afghan Government at the Lisbon NATO Summit.

International forces are in Afghanistan because Al-Qaeda must never again be allowed to use the country as a base from which to threaten the UK, the US and our allies.

It is important to remember that this is why UK forces are there - to protect our national security.

Like President Obama, we see 2011 as the year in which we have to make progress both lasting and irreversible.

We also agree that we must use our civilian and military momentum to support a durable and favourable political resolution of the conflict

Success in the campaign in Afghanistan remains this Government's highest foreign policy priority. We will continue to work hand in glove with the United States and our allies to achieve this.

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PQs

Topical Questions

05 Jul 2021 | 698 c523

Asked by: Tobias Ellwood

I am pleased to welcome reports in the weekend papers that suggest that the aid budget may return to 0.7%. The utility of hard power without soft power invariably leads to failure, as sadly illustrated in Afghanistan, where the sudden exodus of NATO forces means that there is now a high risk of civil war, with the Taliban advancing and securing more districts by the day. I repeat my call for a formal inquiry so that we can understand how this NATO mission, endorsed by the UN, lasted two decades, has now ended in failure. We are now abandoning the country to the very insurgent organisation that we went in to defeat in the first place. This cannot be what we expected when we went in, and it is not the exit strategy that we anticipated. Our presence gave legitimacy to the Afghan authorities, and our exodus will be seen as a victory for the Taliban. Please let us have the inquiry.

Answered by: Ben Wallace | Ministry of Defence

I would say two things. First, my right hon. Friend, as I said earlier, has the means of his own salvation. He chairs the Select Committee, and if the Select Committee wishes to have an inquiry, I will be happy to make sure the Department services it.

Afghanistan: Withdrawal of UK Forces

24 May 2021 | 696 cc5-6

Asked by: Tobias Ellwood

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Let me begin by wishing the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier battle group all the very best on her maiden voyage.

Operation Telic, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, cost the taxpayer £8 billion and the lives of 179 UK military personnel, and there was a full independent inquiry. Operation Herrick, the invasion of Afghanistan, cost the taxpayer £28 billion and resulted in some 450 UK military deaths, but to date the Government have not announced an inquiry. We now withdraw from Afghanistan just as the Taliban are on the ascent and another civil war looms. That cannot be the exit strategy that we ever envisaged, and we must understand what went wrong. For example, why did Donald Rumsfeld exclude the Taliban from the first peace talks in December 2001? If we do not understand and learn from the strategic errors of the past, this House will be hesitant to vote in favour of deploying our hard power in the future. Please, let us have that inquiry.

Answered by: Ben Wallace | Ministry of Defence

I hear my right hon. Friend's requests—I know he has recently written a letter to the Prime Minister making that request. First, there is a stark difference between Iraq and Afghanistan; the article 5 triggering of that deployment and the causes behind it were not in doubt. Secondly, as our former Speaker would have said, part of my right hon. Friend's salvation is in his own hands: as Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, he obviously has significant capabilities and powers to bring forward an inquiry, if that is what he wishes. At present, the Government are reflecting on his letter and do not think there is a need for the same type of inquiry that we saw into what happened in Iraq. Of course, we do learn lessons; there have been a considerable amount of internal looks by military professionals at what is going on.

On Donald Rumsfeld and the United States Administration, that is a matter for the US Administration and not for me. I am not able to ask what lay behind their motives as to decisions they have made over the past 20 years and I cannot therefore venture into that space.

[Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations](#)

07 Oct 2019 | 292892

Asked by: Dr Matthew Offord

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a committee of inquiry into the causes and effects of the Afghanistan operation between 2003 and 2014.

Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence

The Department currently has no plans to conduct an inquiry into the causes and effects of the Afghanistan operation. Following the conclusion of Operation Herrick in 2014, the Army conducted a thorough internal review. We remain focused on supporting the Government of Afghanistan as part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission.

[Afghanistan: Armed Forces](#)

11 Jun 2015 | 1262

Asked by: Paul Flynn

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will bring forward plans to hold a public inquiry into the British military involvement in Afghanistan since 2006.

Answering member: Penny Mordaunt | Ministry of Defence

No decisions have been taken by the Government on a review of our engagement in Afghanistan. We remain focused on supporting the National Unity Government of Afghanistan as part of NATO's Resolute Support mission.

We have been learning tactical lessons of our operations in Afghanistan throughout the campaign. However, combat operations have only recently ceased, and our focus has been on a successful drawdown from the ISAF combat mission and transition to the NATO Resolute Support mission. We still have around 470 military personnel in Afghanistan, and we need to maintain our focus on supporting them. We will, of course, want to look at the broader lessons that can be learned from the campaign in due course, but the Government will want to do this in a way that would enable us to implement lessons identified quickly and practically, so that they have a real impact.

Afghanistan

05 Mar 2015 | 225324

Asked by: Ian Paisley

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will launch an inquiry into the conduct of the war in Afghanistan.

Answering member: Mark Francois | Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence has been learning lessons through our operations in Afghanistan, from better detection and defusing of IEDs to the training of Afghan forces to ensure they can provide their own security. Our recent focus has been on successful drawdown from the ISAF combat mission and transition to the NATO Resolute Support Mission. The Government will want to look at broader lessons that can be learned from the campaign. The Government will consider how best to do that in a way that would enable it to implement any lessons learnt quickly and practically so they have a real impact.

Afghanistan

05 Jan 2015 | 218898

Asked by: Caroline Lucas

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will establish without delay a Judge-led inquiry into any (a) direct and (b) indirect UK involvement in the use of torture or rendition following the events of 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

In July 2010, the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) asked Sir Peter Gibson to lead an inquiry into whether Britain was implicated in the improper treatment, or rendition, of detainees held by other countries in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. In January 2012, the then Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, my right hon. Friend the member for Rushcliffe (Mr Kenneth Clarke)

announced the Government's decision to bring the Detainee Inquiry to a conclusion following the launch of a new police investigation into related matters. In doing so, he said that Sir Peter Gibson had agreed to provide the Government with a report on its preparatory work. In December 2013 the Detainee Inquiry published its report setting out a series of questions which the Government asked the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament to consider. This Committee will report to Parliament and to the Government on the completion of its work.

I do not want to pre-judge its findings. In light of the Committee's report and the outcome of the related police investigations, the Government will be able to take a final view on whether another judge-led inquiry is necessary to add any further information of value to future policy-making in this area and the national interest.

Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

10 Jan 2011 | 521 c219-20W

Asked by: Paul Flynn

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate an inquiry into the reasons for the UK incursion into Helmand province in 2006.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government announced their first deployment of troops to Helmand in January 2006, as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) expansion to the south of the country. Since 2006, the UK's troop presence in Helmand has grown from an initial deployment of 3,150 to approximately 7,700 troops. This Government remain committed to the international effort in Afghanistan. Our aim, along with that of other ISAF partners, is that the Afghan National Security Forces should be in a position to take the security lead across the whole country by the end of 2014. The role of UK and other international forces and their number will gradually change as this happens. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is clear that that there will not be British troops in a combat role or in the numbers they are now in Afghanistan in 2015. At the present time, there are no plans to initiate an inquiry into the reasons for the UK deployment to Helmand. It would be wrong to consider holding an inquiry while our troops are still risking their lives and while operations are ongoing.

Departmental Inquiries

23 Jun 2008 | 478 c43-5W

Asked by: Theresa May

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what independent inquiries have been commissioned by his Department in the last five years; what the (a) purpose and (b) cost was of each; and what steps were taken following each.

Answering member: Bob Ainsworth | Ministry of Defence

In the last five years, the Ministry of Defence has commissioned the following independent inquiries and reviews:

THE BAHA MOUSA INQUIRY

We announced on 14 May 2008, Official Report, columns 60-61WS, an independent inquiry into the death of Baha Mousa, who died in British custody in Iraq in September 2003. The terms of reference are being determined.

THE REVIEW OF THE LOSS OF MOD LAPTOPS

On 21 January 2008, Official Report, column 1255, we announced an independent review of the loss of MOD data. The terms of reference are:

To establish the exact circumstances and events that led to the loss by MOD of personal data; to examine the adequacy of the steps taken to prevent any recurrence, and of MOD policy, practice and management arrangements in respect of the protection of personal data more generally; to make recommendations; and to report to MOD's Permanent Secretary not later than 30 April 2008.

The review is complete and a ministerial announcement will be made soon. The costs of this review were £44,961.

THE NIMROD REVIEW

On 4 December 2007, Official Report, column 685, we announced an independent review into the loss of RAF Nimrod XV230 in Afghanistan on 2 September 2006. The terms of reference are:

In light of the board of inquiry report: to examine the arrangements for assuring the airworthiness and safe operation of the Nimrod MR2 in the period from its introduction in 1979 to the accident on 2 September 2006, including hazard analysis, the safety case compiled in 2005, maintenance arrangements, and responses to any earlier incidents which might have highlighted the risk and led to corrective action;

To assess where responsibility lies for any failures and what lessons are to be learned;

To assess more broadly the process for compiling safety cases, taking account of best practice in the civilian and military world; and

To make recommendations to the Secretary of State as soon as practicable, if necessary by way of interim report.

This review is still under way.

THE IRAN HOSTAGE REVIEWS

On 16 April 2007, Official Report, columns 23-26, we announced two reviews of Iran's illegal detention of 15 service personnel.

The first was on operational aspects of the incident including risk and threat assessment, strategic and operational planning, tactical decisions, rules of engagement, training, equipment and resources. The HCDC has been fully briefed on recommendations, and on progress in relation to the full implementation of the resulting action plan. The costs of this review were not collated centrally but were restricted to travel costs.

The terms of reference of the second were:

“To conduct a review of media access to individual personnel involved in operations, particularly in such high-profile incidents. The review is to draw on all relevant experience, including recent incidents and other high-profile incidents; consider how best to manage the complex issues at play, including in balancing our responsibilities to support our people and their families, to safeguard the security of our people and operations, to protect the reputation of the services, and to meet the requirements of transparency in a demanding media environment; and identify lessons and make recommendations for any necessary changes in policy, regulations, processes and practice, including in relation to media payments to our personnel.”

Where costs have been provided they do not include the staff costs of MOD personnel seconded to the review team.

The Government's response, accepting all the review's recommendations, was announced on 19 June 2007, Official Report, column 1255. The costs of this review were £7,200.

THE DEEPCUT REVIEW

On 30 November 2004, Official Report, column 500, we announced an independent review into the deaths of four soldiers at Deepcut barracks between 1995 and 2002. The terms of reference were:

Urgently to review the circumstances surrounding the deaths of four soldiers at Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut between 1995 and 2002 in light of available material and any representations that might be made in this regard, and to produce a report.

The total cost of the review was £866,980. The Government's response was announced on 13 June 2006, Official Report, column 637W. Since then, Dr. Susan Atkins has been appointed as the first Service Complaints Commissioner, and a new service complaints process came into effect on 1 January 2008.

6

Debates

Afghanistan

11 Feb 2015 | 592 cc271-293WH

Debate on learning lessons from Afghan wars and UK involvement.

Combat Troop Withdrawal (Afghanistan)

07 Nov 2012 | 552 cc223-245WH

Debate on withdrawing UK troops from Afghanistan.

UK Armed Forces in Afghanistan

09 Sep 2010 | 515 c494-570

Third backbench debate.

Afghanistan: Provincial Reconstruction Teams

11 Jul 2007 | 693 c1458-75

Lords question for short debate on what progress has been made by provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan.

Coalition against International Terrorism

16 October 2001 | 372 c1053-1141

Debate on a motion for the adjournment on the coalition against international terrorism.

Coalition against International Terrorism

8 October 2001 | 372 cc830-902

Debate on a motion for the adjournment on the coalition against international terrorism. (Third recall of Parliament during summer recess).

International Terrorism

4 October 2001 | 372 cc689-810

Debate on a motion for the adjournment on international terrorism. (Second recall of Parliament during summer recess)

International Terrorism

14 September 2001 | 372 cc617-670

Debate on a motion for the adjournment on international terrorism and the attacks on New York and Washington DC. (First recall of Parliament during summer recess).

7

Urgent Questions

Afghanistan

20 April 2021 | 692 cc850-866

Urgent question on Afghanistan.

Taliban and IS/Daesh Attacks: Afghanistan

29 Jan 2018 | 635 cc564-573

Urgent question on recent Taliban and Daesh attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers in Afghanistan, and on the UK Government's response.

8

Statements

[Afghanistan](#)

08 July 2021 | 698 cc1102-1120

Statement on the UK's policy towards Afghanistan.

[Afghanistan](#)

21 April 2021 | 811 cc1846-1850

Statement on Afghanistan.

[Afghanistan](#)

27 Nov 2014 | 588 cc1117-1130

Statement on Afghanistan.

[Afghanistan](#)

10 Feb 2014 | 575 cc582-598

Statement on Afghanistan.

[International Assistance Force \(Kabul\)](#)

10 January 2002 | 377 cc688-700

Statement on the deployment of an international security assistance force to Kabul.

[International Coalition Against Terrorism](#)

14 November 2001 | 374 cc861-879

Statement on the coalition against international terrorism and events in Afghanistan.

[Coalition against International Terrorism](#)

8 October 2001 | 372 cc811-830

Prime Minister's Statement (Third recall of Parliament during summer recess).

[Coalition against International Terrorism](#)

4 October 2001 | 372 cc671-689

Prime Minister's Statement (Second recall of Parliament during summer recess).

[International terrorism and attacks in the USA](#)

14 September 2001 | 372 cc604-617

Prime Minister's Statement (First recall of Parliament during summer recess).

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