

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon
Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

26 March 2021

Dear Tariq,

Government response to the International Relations and Defence Committee report, *The UK and Afghanistan*

The International Relations and Defence Committee has considered the Government's response¹ to its report, *The UK and Afghanistan*,² published on 13 January 2021. We note that this response was provided by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), on behalf of the Government as a whole.

We are pleased with the quality of the response and the level of detail provided, which was very helpful to the Committee. The document engaged with most of our conclusions and recommendations and answered most of our questions. It also provided additional helpful information, especially with regard to the Ex-Gratia Scheme and the Intimidation Policy Relocations and Assistance Scheme and addressing corruption in Afghanistan.

There are, however, six areas where the Committee requests further information in writing from the Government, as below.

Engagement with the Biden Administration and NATO Allies

1. The response to paragraphs 340-344 is very brief. Please provide more information on how the Government is engaging with (1) the Biden Administration and (2) with NATO Allies on Afghanistan, including the key forthcoming dates.
2. The response to paragraphs 546 and 547 is also brief. Has the Government pressed its NATO Allies to keep their troops in Afghanistan until a peace deal is reached, and if it has not yet done so, does it intend to?
3. With regard to paragraph 548 of our report, as the US's policy is under review, we request that you write to the Committee with the Government's assessment of the new US policy when that is made public, and implications for the UK.

Engagement with Afghanistan's neighbours

4. The response did not address the question of what further influence the UK can bring to bear on Pakistan and Iran to protect Afghan refugees' rights, or provide further information on what role the UK's aid programme to Pakistan might play in facilitating resettlement (report paragraph 162). Please provide this information.

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5087/documents/52934/default/>

² <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4185/documents/43162/default/>

5. The response did not engage with the suggestion that the Government could co-operate with Iran and Pakistan in enforcement action against the illicit narcotics trade (report paragraph 204). Please provide us with a response on this issue.
6. The response provides little information on how the UK is engaging with Pakistan in support of the peace talks in Doha, and a sustainable peace in Afghanistan (report paragraph 515). Please provide us with information on these points.

Support for Afghan women.

7. With regard to the response on funding for women's health (report paragraph 146), what percentage of the ARTF is spent on the Sehatmandi national health programme?
8. In the response to paragraphs 466-468 and 476, the response states that Afghanistan was designated as one of the top three countries globally in the FCDO's "2020 support to meaningful participation of women in peace process". We request more information on this framework, which other countries are included, and the scale of allocated resources please.

The Taliban

9. The response does not engage directly with our request for information on how the UK is seeking to address the Taliban's "ideological philosophy", as stated in your evidence to the Committee, nor provide an assessment of how successful this might be (report paragraph 509). We request this information.
10. The response indicates that the UK's approach to Afghanistan, including its aid policy, would be reviewed should the Taliban come to power. Will the Government undertake to update Parliament on this issue (report paragraph 512)?

Remittances

11. The response does not provide information on whether the Government is considering actions it could take to lower the cost of remitting money from the UK to Afghanistan (report paragraph 229). Please respond to us on this.

Support for the Afghan National Security Forces

12. The response clarifies that the UK has committed [your emphasis] "up to £70 million to continue to support the Afghan Security Forces through 2021". What is the basis on which the final sum of funding to the ANSF in 2021 will be made, and what is the timeline for this decision?

As you will see from these questions, the Committee retains a strong ongoing interest in developments in Afghanistan. I look forward to your response, and to the debate on the report in due course.

Yours, as ever



Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Chair, International Relations and Defence Committee