



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

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Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Chair
International Relations and Defence Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0AA

23 April 2021

Dear Joyce,

Thank you for your letter of 26 March about the Government's response to your report, *The UK and Afghanistan*. I am glad that the Committee found the information helpful.

You asked for further information on a number of areas. I have provided this below. This has been produced in coordination with the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office.

I also noted your question on Afghanistan during the Lords' debate on the Integrated Review yesterday. I hope that this letter reassures you of the Government's long term commitment to Afghanistan.

Engagement with Biden Administration and NATO Allies

On 14 April, NATO announced that its troops would leave Afghanistan. Ahead of that announcement, the Foreign Secretary spoke with Secretary Blinken, Secretary General Stoltenberg and various Allies. We have engaged extensively with the US throughout the decision making process.

We remain in close contact with the United States and NATO Allies as we plan an orderly and coordinated withdrawal of NATO and Coalition forces. We went in together and now NATO troops will withdraw together. NATO's military contribution over the past 20 years has helped build the conditions for a political process and our joint efforts have been crucial to paving the way for progress made so far.

The exact timeframe for troop withdrawal, and its impact on our wider presence, are being discussed at several NATO North Atlantic Council meetings over the coming weeks. We are committed to continuing to work together in NATO to support Afghanistan during and beyond withdrawal. We are discussing with the US and other NATO Allies options for an enduring partnership with Afghanistan to help the peace process to take root, continue to counter the terrorist threat and protect the progress we have made.

Our military contribution represents only a part of the UK's commitment to Afghanistan,

alongside political and diplomatic engagement and development assistance. The UK supports US-led diplomatic efforts to energise an Afghan peace process. Only a negotiated and inclusive political settlement will bring sustainable peace. We will continue to work with the US, and other countries, to support the peace process.

Engagement with Afghanistan's neighbours

The UK is in close contact with Afghanistan's neighbours about refugee issues. We support Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan. Working with the Norwegian Refugee Council, the UK recently funded a programme to distribute Covid-19 hygiene kits to Afghan refugees in Iran.

The UK is a member of the core group for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), the meetings of which are attended by Iran and Pakistan. We will continue to cooperate with international partners on refugees and refugee issues, including through this forum. The most important factor in facilitating the return of Afghan refugees is the safety and stability of Afghanistan, which can only be achieved sustainably through a political settlement which protects the rights of all Afghans.

We will continue to work with international partners to address the trafficking of narcotics from Afghanistan. Our approach will include, where practical and feasible, strengthening law enforcement cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbours, including Pakistan and Iran. In 2019, the UK offered to send a mixed delegation to Iran for informal exploratory discussions on enhanced cooperation on drug trafficking. However, this offer was not accepted. Looking ahead, the level of assistance the UK could offer is likely to be heavily limited by our serious human rights concerns in Iran.

The UK enjoys a strong bilateral relationship with Pakistan and continues to urge Pakistan, along with other regional countries, to do all it can in support of Afghan peace efforts. Pakistan has used its influence to help facilitate progress in the Doha talks. We welcome Pakistan and Afghanistan efforts to improve relations in support of peace and regional security. The joint statement by Prime Minister Khan and President Ghani in November 2020 made this determination clear. We encourage both countries to implement the commitments they set out and to further strengthen their bilateral cooperation.

Support for Afghan women

For the period 2018 to 2020, the total amount committed to the Sehatmandi programme in the Partnership Framework and Financing Programme was approximately £211m out of a total contribution to the ARTF (Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund) of £1,794.80m, which approximates to 11.8%. The actual amount disbursed under the Sehatmandi programme during this period was approximately £131m which was 7.3% of the total amount disbursed (£1,794.15m).

You asked for information about the three countries designated for support to meaningful participation of women in peace processes. In 2020, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Yemen were identified as priority countries for the UK. Afghanistan and South Sudan are also focus countries under the UK's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). These countries were selected as they are all conflict-affected countries in different stages in their peace processes. All peace processes were identified as being in need of greater inclusion of women, and all have active civil society, including women peacebuilders working at the national and local levels.

As priority countries, the UK has focused specific resource on promoting women's role in peace processes. This includes financial and diplomatic support for national and local women peacebuilders and women's organisations to strengthen their participation. We have used senior official engagement and Royal visits to highlight the importance of women's inclusion, such as HRH The Countess of Wessex's visit to South Sudan in March 2020. We have developed country gender strategies to focus internal work, including on the

importance of women's participation.

For Afghanistan, the UK Mission to the UN in New York co-chairs, with the Afghan Mission, the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan, which advocates a larger role for women, including in the Afghan peace process. In March, the UK co-hosted an event that provided a high-level platform for Afghan women, including the First Lady of Afghanistan, to promote women's rights in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister has raised with the President of Afghanistan the importance of a sovereign, democratic and united Afghanistan and to preserve the rights of civil society, women and girls.

The Taliban

You asked about the UK's activity and about the Taliban's "ideological philosophy". We continue to urge the Taliban to engage meaningfully in peace talks and end to the violence in Afghanistan. We are clear that engaging in a political process and securing a genuine power-sharing arrangement with the Afghan government is the only way for the Taliban to enter government legitimately and sustainably. The international community has made clear to the Taliban that continued development funding beyond 2021 will be closely linked to peace negotiations and further progress on poverty reduction, rule of law, protection of women and minorities' rights, human rights more broadly, and democratic governance. We will update Parliament if the Taliban enter into a political settlement.

Remittances

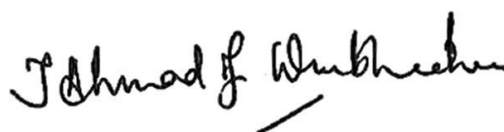
The cost of sending remittances from the UK to Afghanistan is high because such remittances are dominated by cash transfers and cash is an expensive method of sending and receiving remittances.

The Afghan financial system is nascent, under-developed and largely isolated from international financial markets due to perceived risks around money laundering and terrorist financing. The UK Government supports the Afghan government in developing more robust financial architecture, to reduce the risk involved with international financial flows. This will enable improved access to formal international channels and reduce the cost of remittances. Through the World Bank Group, the UK is supporting the expansion of Afghanistan's financial system to make formal banking services more accessible to excluded groups, including the ultra-poor and women. We also continue to work with industry and law enforcement to counter the risks of money laundering or terrorist financing.

Support for the Afghan National Security Forces

Much of the UK's support to sustain the Afghan National Security Forces is provided as ODA. Following a thorough review, the FCDO's aid budget has been allocated in accordance with UK strategic priorities against a challenging financial climate of COVID. We are now working through what this means for individual programmes, in line with the priorities we have outlined. The security support is funded through various budget areas, therefore there are sometimes adjustments over the course of each year. We will likely not know the final amount of funding to the ANDSF until the end of the calendar year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon', with a horizontal line drawn underneath.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict