

# House of Commons Defence Committee

CALL FOR EVIDENCE: WITHDRAWAL FROM  
AFGHANISTAN  
JAMES TUDOR-WHITE

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2 House of Commons Defence Committee  
3 September/October 2021

4 Call for Evidence: Withdrawal from Afghanistan

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### **PROFILE**

7 James Tudor-White Esq. is an Independent International Affairs Adviser and a  
8 Master's Scholar at the University of Groningen. James' focus in International Relations has  
9 been concerning topics such as; International Security, Institutions such as NATO, and US  
10 Foreign Policy. Mr Tudor-White is an International Relations Graduate from the University  
11 of Birmingham. As part of his International Affairs Advisory position, he often attends  
12 various webinars, conferences, discussions and calls on relevant and pertinent foreign and  
13 security policy topics with a wide range of academics and global politicians.

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## SUMMARISATION

2           The withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan marked the end of a 20 year-war  
3 as part of the campaign “war on terror”, which was initiated shortly after the September 11<sup>th</sup>  
4 terrorist attacks. Withdrawing from a conflict is not an easy task to undertake, it comes with  
5 significant risks, costs, and logistical challenges. This was clearly evident in the withdrawal  
6 from Afghanistan; however, it should also be noted that there were several significant flaws  
7 in the withdrawal which need to be considered so that they are not allowed to repeat.

8           It would have been significantly challenging for the United Kingdom to have  
9 remained in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the United States, without increasing  
10 troop deployments and also relying on the support of NATO allies. The assessments made  
11 had *significant* flaws especially regarding the capabilities of the Afghan National Army  
12 which were overestimated, and of the Taliban which was underestimated. This led to a broad  
13 range of estimates on the ability of the Afghan National Army to resist the Taliban ranging  
14 from weeks, months, to years – but never the time frame in which the collapse of the  
15 government occurred.

16           Following the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan efforts were made to begin the  
17 repatriation of military equipment, especially that of a sensitive nature. However, as the  
18 situation unfolded and the concern shifted from an *orderly* withdrawal to a hurried  
19 evacuation, the decision was made, and this is especially true for the United States to increase  
20 capacity for personnel and civilians on aircraft by reducing the military equipment they  
21 would transport. This additional (as some military equipment was planned to be left behind)  
22 military equipment was desensitised. This was to reduce its efficacy and in some cases render  
23 it unusable for Taliban forces in the future, or for the Taliban to deliver onwards to other  
24 states who could conduct research to counteract the military technology. The Taliban now

1 have access to a significant number of artillery arsenal and armoured vehicles such as the  
2 infamous Humvee which was either been surrendered by Afghan forces or because they were  
3 not repatriated/sufficiently decommissioned. The Taliban now also have access to a  
4 significant number of light weapons. There is a very real threat that the Taliban may export  
5 these weapons to raise funds, and these weapons could end up in the hands of terrorist  
6 organisations in the Middle East.

7       Should the United Kingdom, United States or NATO wish to conduct future  
8 operations in Afghanistan they will face a significant challenge and will most likely have to  
9 conduct an operation in scale to that of Operation Veritas and the invasion of Afghanistan.  
10 However, there will be two additional challenges to be faced: firstly, the Taliban have access  
11 to a significantly improved inventory of weaponry and equipment to make a war costlier,  
12 deadlier, and ultimately difficult. Secondly, the support of locals will be harder to attain, the  
13 perception of being abandoned will be hard to shift from the psyche of Afghan civilians.  
14 Locals will now be more sceptical of working alongside us in the future and supporting this  
15 operation as the underlying concern will be – what if there is a repeat of this very situation?

1     **WAS THE OPTION OF REMAINING WITHOUT US FORCES CONSIDERED?**

2                     **HOW REALISTIC WOULD THAT HAVE BEEN?**

3             I cannot say whether it was considered in policy circles in the United Kingdom or  
4 within NATO states or the organisation as a whole, whether remaining in Afghanistan after  
5 the United States had withdrawn was considered. The Taliban were assertive and explicit in  
6 the view that any forces which remained in Afghanistan following the withdrawal deadline  
7 would be regarded as occupiers and treated as such. Therefore, should the United Kingdom  
8 government have considered remaining in Afghanistan, they should have anticipated a  
9 significant military confrontation with Taliban forces, and an upsurge in active and  
10 aggressive fighting by insurgents. If the United Kingdom had wished to stay in Afghanistan  
11 following this deadline, it would have been necessary for there to be an increase in numbers  
12 of troops deployed from the United Kingdom and this would have also required the support  
13 of NATO forces. The Afghan Army would have *likely* been expected to be the significant  
14 actor in troop numbers and military activity. From the sudden and “*unexpected*” collapse of  
15 the Afghan government on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August it highlighted significant flaws in the  
16 intelligence available to the United States, United Kingdom and NATO. This would have  
17 created serious and potentially dire challenges had British Armed Forces remained in  
18 Afghanistan. It is likely that the assessments (if) made would have not anticipated nor  
19 calculated the ferocity of the Taliban insurgents, and it also overestimated the capabilities of  
20 the Afghan National Army to be able to withstand the Taliban. It would have been very  
21 difficult for the United Kingdom or other NATO states to have remained in Afghanistan  
22 following the withdrawal of United States Troops. The United States contributed 8,000 troops  
23 to the mission in Afghanistan which was decreased to 2,500 by January 2021. It is now  
24 clearly evident that the United Kingdom alongside its NATO allies would have had to  
25 increase their contributions to match the decline in American presence, for the mission to

1 have remained even potentially successful. It is also highly likely that the Taliban were  
2 engaging in a cessation of activity so as to avoid the United States from remaining within  
3 Afghanistan. The challenge here is that assessments of the Taliban's capabilities and the  
4 intelligence possessed were significantly inaccurate. Therefore, we need to be realistic when  
5 judging the assessments (if made) of the possibility of remaining in Afghanistan, as the  
6 intelligence used was probably flawed in a manner similar to that used in planning the  
7 withdrawal. I would be hesitant to suggest that the possibility of remaining in Afghanistan  
8 would have been realistic without the support of NATO forces and the willingness to engage  
9 in aggressive and sustained battles. I would also be hesitant to trust the assessments made,  
10 following the now public failures in the intelligence community to identify the nature and  
11 severity of the threat posed by Taliban forces.

1        **WHAT ASSESSMENT WAS MADE OF WHETHER AND HOW LONG THE**  
2        **AFGHAN ARMED FORCES WOULD BE ABLE TO RESIST THE TALIBAN?**

3 Regarding the assessment made by how long Afghan forces were anticipated to resist and  
4 withstand the Taliban assault, mistakes were clearly made. This is because the intelligence  
5 was wrong, our estimations were wrong and thus ultimately our predictions were wrong.  
6 There was an expectation within areas of the intelligence communities in the United States  
7 and the United Kingdom that the Afghanistan government would eventually collapse,  
8 following the withdrawal, of British, American, and NATO troops. This does raise an  
9 important question – if there were beliefs and concerns that this would be the case, why did  
10 the withdrawal continue? However, there appeared to be a lack of awareness of the  
11 imminence of the collapse of the Afghan Armed Forces and the Afghan government within  
12 these intelligence circles. This is something that President Biden has publicly stated that the  
13 successful takeover by the Taliban exceeded all expectations, and Jake O’Sullivan the United  
14 States National Security Advisor admitted that these intelligence miscalculations went to the  
15 highest levels of the United States Administration. There was also a lack of a specific  
16 timescale in which the Afghan government could be expected to collapse within, ranging  
17 from weeks to months and even years. This is a major spectrum on which the collapse was  
18 expected, and it is alarming that some assessments made conclusions of a matter of weeks  
19 and others expected it to be in years. The disparate nature of this is incredulous and means  
20 that the intelligence community unfortunately lacked any real ability to assess the conditions  
21 in Afghanistan, and the capabilities of both the Afghan National Army and that of the  
22 Taliban. The Central Intelligence Agency report which outlined various potential outcomes,  
23 came closest in their worst-case scenario estimated outcome, yet even that failed to account  
24 for the short time in which the government would collapse.

1 I believe the assessments made about the Taliban forces lacked a dynamic nature and were  
2 too static in that they failed to deduce the rearmament and planning the Taliban were  
3 undertaking. Since the signing of the Doha Agreement between the United States and the  
4 Taliban, it can be deduced that the Taliban utilised that time to plan their offensive. There  
5 was an excess of confidence in the capabilities of the Afghan Army and their ability to  
6 withstand the Taliban.

7 Firstly, the United States made the declaration that all troops would be withdrawn by  
8 the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2021. By setting a timescale on which the withdrawal would occur we  
9 disincentivised the Taliban from ever committing to remaining peaceful. This probably  
10 attributed to the distortion in assessments made regarding the Taliban's capabilities. By  
11 giving the Taliban a deadline, they knew they only had to bide their time and be acquiescent  
12 about troops remaining in Afghanistan until the end of August before they launched attacks  
13 and began to overthrow the government. The Taliban tried to conceal their capabilities and  
14 appear engaging so as to ensure the departure of foreign forces. Instead, a conditional  
15 approach could have handled the situation far better, the United States was not obligated to  
16 leave Afghanistan by the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2021, had the peace negotiations failed – which they  
17 had. This should have also been an indicator that the Taliban were not concerned with  
18 peaceful negotiations and were already planning their strategy following the withdrawal.  
19 Essential in assessing the capabilities of the Afghan National Army to resist Taliban pressure,  
20 was understanding the weaponry, training, strength, and tactics of the Taliban and how this  
21 had changed and adapted following the Doha agreement. Some of these metrics would have  
22 possibly become more visible if forces had remained longer in Afghanistan, as the Taliban  
23 would have potentially begun to increase their insurgent activity. Another potential blunder  
24 which should have been assessed was the exclusion of the Afghan government from the  
25 negotiations, which meant factions and tribes potentially made deals with the Taliban so as to

1 avoid punishment and retribution by Taliban forces when their campaign began. It was  
2 starkly clear that the Taliban were going to resume and increase fighting following the  
3 withdrawal of United States and NATO forces. This would have served as extremely  
4 demoralising for the Afghan forces, as they would have began thinking about their safety in  
5 the coming months during the negotiations in which the Taliban would begin their takeover.

6         There also appears to be a degree of naïvety regarding the systemic challenges and  
7 endemic nature of corruption within the Afghan National Army. Both the Army and Police in  
8 Afghanistan have suffered from corruption, desertion, and a sense of impunity for their  
9 actions, this was especially true for the Afghan National Police, who as a result had limited  
10 support from the local populace. Drug-taking was also common with the Afghan National  
11 Army, and this factored with younger individuals rising through the ranks sometimes as the  
12 result of nepotism led to poor administration. Additionally, corruption in the Afghan forces  
13 reduced morale among the soldiers, various stories have been versed with some soldier's  
14 salaries being kept behind by commanders or poor quality food being bought so they could  
15 keep the difference. This undoubtedly will have influenced the willingness of the Afghan  
16 soldiers to fight and their morale. This paints a somewhat reduced view on the potential  
17 capabilities of the Afghan National Army and shows there was still significant training  
18 needed by NATO forces before the Afghan National Army, was a self-sufficient and  
19 independently capable armed force. This now evidences that continued support for the  
20 Afghan armed forces was necessary, because when that had been the case the Afghan Army  
21 were successful in managing the security situation. This is particularly true following the  
22 NATO ISAF mission which concluded in 2014, where the Afghan Forces began taking the  
23 lead for security, and assumed full responsibility with support from NATO through the  
24 Resolute Support Mission.

1           Additionally, there was a lack of understanding on the regional and tribal  
2 characteristics of Afghanistan. Too often Afghan soldiers were deployed to areas where they  
3 have no family or tribal ties and connections. This has been one of the reasons posited as to  
4 why the Afghan National Army may have been quicker to surrender. Indeed, it has already  
5 been stated that the Taliban began negotiations with various tribal leaders to at least make  
6 them acquiesce to the Taliban to avoid retributions. Thus, when Afghan Forces realised the  
7 severity of the operation, including the inability to receive reinforcements, consideration of  
8 surrendering became more understandable especially as they heard information about troops  
9 surrendering elsewhere. They were left with a choice – of surrender and *live*, or continue  
10 fighting, dying, and being acutely aware of the risk this posed to their family.

11           There has been a continuous theme and trend throughout this report, in which the  
12 capabilities of the Taliban were significantly underestimated thus distorting the assessments  
13 made of the ability of the Afghan National Army to repel a Taliban assault. The intelligence  
14 community missed a key crucial aspect, and to an extent this was due to a change in the  
15 Biden administration policy in the days and weeks preceding the withdrawal – that was the  
16 speed at which the withdrawal would occur. The Taliban were effective in utilising  
17 motorcycle commando groups to maintain the speed and tempo after military victories. They  
18 were successful in isolating the stretched Afghan military, which had instead been dispersed  
19 with the intention of maintaining checkpoints and outposts throughout the country as a way  
20 of trying to deny the Taliban terrain. However, this made it far harder for them receive  
21 reinforcements and support one another. Once a supply line is broken, a growing sense of  
22 unease, discontent, loss of morale and fear within the troops follows. This was further  
23 compounded by the realisation that contractors would also be leaving, and the overstretched  
24 Afghan Air Force – with increasing maintenance issues – was unable to effectively support  
25 these military outposts. But additionally, the Taliban began using psychological warfare

1 techniques to target the demoralised and isolated Afghan National Army forces. A  
2 combination of using social media to undermine the Ghani government and utilising tribal  
3 ties to encourage soldiers from these outposts to surrender. This increased the armoury and  
4 capabilities of the Taliban, created a significant propaganda boost, which further demoralised  
5 the remaining soldiers, especially as they witnessed parts of the Army surrender. For many it  
6 became inevitable that the Taliban would regain control and that resistance would have  
7 ultimately been futile. It is hard to believe the assessments would have sufficiently covered  
8 this, instead expecting a significant fight by Afghan forces. This could have been more likely  
9 the case had the withdrawal not been as swift or sooner than expected. Thus, the worst-case  
10 scenario assessment, proved to be better than the reality of the situation.

1           **WHAT UK AND OTHER MILITARY EQUIPMENT WAS LEFT FOR THE**  
2           **TALIBAN AND HOW COULD IT BE USED AGAINST THE UK?**

3           It should be recognised that winding down military operations is a complex, time  
4 consuming, and challenging operation. The pace at which the Taliban seized control of  
5 various provinces in Afghanistan created further challenges in withdrawing and repatriating  
6 military equipment. As the evacuation and withdrawal continued, the decision was made by  
7 various militaries such as the British Army and the United States Army that the priority must  
8 be saving lives. Thus, the decision was made that to facilitate and enable more space on  
9 aircraft leaving Afghanistan, some military equipment would need to be left behind. Some  
10 military equipment was also too large that it would have been unfeasible to repatriate to their  
11 respective countries and thus the decision was made to desensitise or demilitarise this  
12 equipment.

13           The United States left behind a significant amount of equipment, a lot of it was  
14 demilitarised so that it would be rendered useless. This was especially true regarding aircraft  
15 which were rendered into a state that they would be unflyable. There are some exceptions to  
16 this, and the Taliban do have some usable aircraft for example helicopters. The Taliban now  
17 has access to a significant number of armoured vehicles such as Humvees, and this has  
18 strategic implications for the United Kingdom, United States and NATO. It is not so much  
19 that this equipment can be used directly against the United Kingdom in the territorial sense,  
20 however it poses a threat to the United Kingdom should it wish to conduct future operations  
21 in Afghanistan. This is because it will increase the speed at which the Taliban can traverse  
22 Afghanistan and they will also have increased protection against British, US or NATO forces.

23           Additionally, the Taliban now possess significant quantities of light arms which were  
24 not brought back or were captured from Afghan National Army soldiers. This should be a

1 more concerning threat for the United Kingdom, this is because the Taliban are now better  
2 equipped which poses challenges for conducting future “*on-the-ground*” operations as  
3 already previously elucidated. A pertinent item the Taliban now have greater access to as a  
4 result, is night-vision goggles which will add increased challenges if conducting night or  
5 stealth related operations. The other principal concern about the Taliban having access to a  
6 significant amount of equipment and weaponry is that they may export this to generate  
7 income for their regime. Who they supply this to is the primary concern, as these weapons  
8 and explosives could potentially get into the hands of terrorists. This presents significant  
9 regional and global security threats, and increases the threat of terrorism, and the potential for  
10 terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda to gain access to much needed weaponry.

1 **WHAT EFFECT WILL THE WITHDRAWAL HAVE ON FUTURE OPERATIONS,**  
2 **AND WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT ON THE WILLINGNESS OF LOCAL**  
3 **PERSONNEL TO WORK WITH, AND SUPPORT, THE UK IN FUTURE**  
4 **OPERATIONS?**

5 The expeditious nature of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from Afghanistan was as  
6 the result of *the unexpected speed* at which the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and  
7 entered the capital Kabul. Previously in this paper, I have questioned the assessments and  
8 assertions made that Afghan forces were capable of holding off Taliban fighters for the time  
9 period eschewed by politicians on either side of the Atlantic Ocean.

10 The withdrawal of the United Kingdom and other NATO forces will have had a  
11 significant impact on the ability to conduct future operations in Afghanistan. The Taliban  
12 were explicit on numerous occasions that foreign forces had to leave Afghanistan by the 31<sup>st</sup>  
13 of August. The position of the Taliban was that any forces which remained after this deadline  
14 were to be viewed as "occupiers" and thus would be treated as such (once determined by the  
15 leadership as to what this would mean). It was therefore not feasible for British Armed  
16 Forces, nor armed forces from any other NATO member state to remain in Afghanistan after  
17 this date, without the willingness to engage in a war with the Taliban. However, this  
18 withdrawal will have a significant impact on the ability to conduct future armed operations  
19 within the territorial boundaries of Afghanistan. Launching military action against a state is a  
20 dangerous and challenging endeavour with major attributable risks and costs. The terrain and  
21 topography of Afghanistan is notoriously difficult and challenging to launch a successful and  
22 prolonged invasion. The term "*graveyard of empires*" is a pertinent reminder that military  
23 assaults on Afghanistan often result in a failure with a high number of casualties to the  
24 assaulting party. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan struggled to overcome the guerrilla war  
25 insurgent fighting the Mujahideen were able to conduct. Thus, it should have come to no

1 surprise that the United States and NATO forces would face equally similar challenges when  
2 engaging in combat with the Taliban.

3         The United States, United Kingdom and NATO maintain advanced military  
4 capabilities, especially the United States. However, launching a conventional military  
5 operation will prove challenging, the capability to launch direct and strategic missile and  
6 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle [UAV] strikes remains, when utilising regional allied military  
7 bases. This is something the UK Defence Secretary has confirmed the United Kingdom will  
8 consider in certain circumstances and has also been affirmed by the United States with  
9 President Biden suggesting the use of “over-the-horizon” counterterrorism operations,  
10 primarily led with UAVs. However, the withdrawal from Afghanistan has resulted in military  
11 equipment being left in Afghanistan, which is now being utilised by the Taliban. Despite best  
12 efforts to cleanse and desensitise this machinery, weaponry, and equipment, the Taliban now  
13 possess a *significant* arsenal which whilst might not prove to be a direct threat to us at the  
14 present, it still increases the costs [in both terms of casualties and financially] of engaging in  
15 a military operation within Afghanistan once again. Should the United Kingdom, United  
16 States, or NATO decide to conduct military operations within Afghanistan again, it will be on  
17 a scale similar to operation Veritas and the invasion of Afghanistan, except the Taliban now  
18 have access to additional weaponry, vehicles and technology.

19         The United Kingdom evacuated at least 8,000 Afghan nationals who were eligible  
20 under *The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)*. This scheme was designed to  
21 enable any Afghan nationals who are either current or former Locally Employed Staff  
22 employed by the United Kingdom Government or those who fulfilled certain roles alongside  
23 the Armed Forces to reside in the United Kingdom.

1           There is not a single excusable reason as to why a single Afghan citizen was left in  
2 Afghanistan, who should have been free to reside in the United Kingdom. It is irreprehensible  
3 that individuals who applied for a position to work as Locally Employed Staff or alongside  
4 the Armed Forces are now in a position of danger as a result of this “botched withdrawal” in  
5 the words of Anders Fogh Rasmussen. The blame lies solely on us, there are lives endangered  
6 as a result of inadequate equipment to successfully and efficiently destroy confidential files, a  
7 willingness to avoid the truth within the intelligence community regarding the threat posed by  
8 the Taliban and the speed at which they would advance, and finally a populist fear of a ‘mass-  
9 migration’ event, in which Afghan refugees were perceived by some in the media as a  
10 security threat. Whilst the United Kingdom and other governments are still undertaking  
11 operations to enable other individuals to leave Afghanistan, it does not mean that everyone  
12 will have been saved who could and should have been. It is to a degree an almost certainty  
13 that the Taliban have been targeting, and executing those who have collaborated with NATO  
14 forces, despite their assurances there would be “no revenge” if they surrendered themselves.  
15 This has been evidenced most clearly by the RHIPTO Norwegian Center for Global Analyses  
16 report. These factors have culminated in the credibility of the United Kingdom, the United  
17 States, and NATO to be shattered in the central Asian region and will take a significantly  
18 long time to recover from. This is especially pertinent regarding the ability to garner support  
19 with local citizens. Whilst this might sound an overly harsh statement, we cannot  
20 underestimate the credibility damage done to the United Kingdom, United States and to an  
21 extent NATO. By leaving some citizens there after the withdrawal deadline, we have created  
22 significant concerns in the Afghan public about our credibility and reliability as partners. A  
23 perception of them having been abandoned and unvalued is going to be felt by the Afghan  
24 population, and thus this can breed either a sense of indifference to Taliban rule or lead to  
25 resentment which can be fostered into radicalisation. The situation has created demoralised

1 population who question the credibility and the future intentions of the NATO states. The  
2 United Kingdom needs to be acutely aware that whilst the withdrawal has damaged the  
3 reputation of these countries within the Afghan population, and thus makes garnering support  
4 from local populations in the future far more challenging, for fear of a repeat of this situation.  
5 There is either a degree of remedial action, or action [or lack of] which could make it even  
6 harder to garner the support of citizens, thus rendering future operations incredibly  
7 challenging. To successfully rebuild a state after a war you need the support of the people, we  
8 have now lost that support. Thus, we will find conducting future operations in Afghanistan  
9 will now be met with greater public resentment to NATO, US, and UK forces. The United  
10 Kingdom needs to engage in a strategic review of its future relationship with the Taliban, and  
11 this ultimately must revolve around supporting the Afghan population in the most efficient  
12 way possible. Aid and humanitarianism will be an area in which the United Kingdom, and the  
13 United States and NATO can create support or at least stop a decrease in popular support. It  
14 is also the morally right thing to do, this scenario has to an extent been attributable to failings  
15 by the US, UK, and other NATO governments and thus we must try to reduce the suffering,  
16 loss of life, and facilitate the transportation of those who wish to leave Afghanistan.

1

## CONCLUSION

2           The withdrawal from Afghanistan completed by the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2021, marked the  
3 end of 20 years of conflict. Dubbed a “forever war”, the operation was the longest  
4 engagement by American forces in its history, being nearly 5 months longer than the Vietnam  
5 War. As the British, US, and NATO forces left, it marked the sorrowful return to a regime,  
6 system, and society we and our partners tried to overcome.

7           A cocktail of failures ultimately led to the *fast but now not unexpected* takeover by  
8 Taliban forces. Poor assessments of the capabilities of the Afghan forces, the dejection they  
9 would feel following the withdrawal, and the overstretched nature of their deployment into  
10 outposts in which supply lines could be cut are just a few of the reasons the assessments were  
11 wrong. The failure to denote the importance of the endemic and systemic nature of corruption  
12 with demoralising effects and the deployment of Afghan troops in areas with limited cultural,  
13 family, or tribal ties only further contributed to the inevitability of the troops feeling no other  
14 choice but to surrender. Additionally, the poor assessments of the Taliban, despite knowing  
15 their troop numbers and capabilities were at the highest they had been since 2001, did little to  
16 shift the viewpoint that the Afghan government would survive or at least not capitulate for at  
17 least 6 months.

18           Ultimately as a result, Afghanistan will return to the state it was in under previous  
19 Taliban rule, human rights especially those of women will be suppressed and extrajudicial  
20 killings have already been reported. The Taliban may not be so isolationist this time,  
21 potentially needing aid support from the West, however the repression is still going to be very  
22 much present. The Taliban now have access to a significant weapons store as a result of  
23 weapons left by NATO forces (especially the United States) and also from those surrendered  
24 by Afghan Forces. The Taliban have the potential to export these weapons to generate

1 revenue, and there is the possibility these weapons could enter the hands of terrorist  
2 organisations, having a damaging effect on security regionally and afar. The weaponry also  
3 means should there be a future consideration of operations within Afghanistan, it will become  
4 significantly more challenging and costly both economically and sadly in terms of lives.

5         The withdrawal has ultimately damaged the credibility of the United States, United  
6 Kingdom, and NATO within the region and globally, especially among citizens in  
7 Afghanistan. Those who were unable to be evacuated live in fear that their associations with  
8 these states may ultimately lead to their death. The mission has failed and thus citizens will  
9 be wary of working with foreign forces again, for fear of another repeat of such a situation.  
10 This creates further challenges should the need for a future operation arise, in which support  
11 from the population is essential to rebuilding programmes.

12         However, the loss of servicemen, servicewomen, and contractors from NATO and its  
13 partner states; as well as the loss of lives of those in the Afghan Armed Forces, locally  
14 employed staff, translators and civilians is a poignant reminder of the sacrifice made by those  
15 who shared a desire, belief, and wish for change and a better future in Afghanistan. It is  
16 regrettable and heart breaking that 20 years later these heroic and selfless actions were clearly  
17 in vain.