

# Written evidence submitted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Drones and Modern Conflict (AFG0031)

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## Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry: *UK Policy on Afghanistan*

**About us:** The [APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict](#) is an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) established in 2012. The Group is cross-party, non-partisan and cross-House. In the past two years, the scope and work of the Group has expanded, looking comprehensively at the implications of drone use combined with other ‘remote’ measures, such as conventional airstrikes, explosive weapons in populated areas, and covert Special Forces operations, enabling comprehensive examination of the implications of current approaches to security challenges. The Group has [7 Officers](#), [62 official members](#), a range of active non-registered MPs and Lords, and an expert network of 50+ individuals and organisations.<sup>1</sup>

**About this submission:** This submission has been drafted following an expert briefing to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Drones and Modern Conflict, ‘Afghanistan: Understanding the long-term strategic failures and addressing the current crisis’ on 22 September 2021. Experts who briefed the Group included Razia Sayad, Commissioner, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission; Sahr Muhammedally, Director for MENA & South Asia at Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC); Denisa Delić, UK Advocacy Director, International Rescue Committee; Frank Ledwidge, Barrister and former military officer; author of *Losing Small Wars* (Yale 2011) and *Investment in Blood* (Yale 2013). Additional interviews were conducted to inform this submission with Fiona Frazer, Human Rights Chief, UNAMA and Joseph Stefanelli, Head of Protection of Civilians and Child Protection, Human Rights Office, UNAMA; Anand Gopal, journalist and Pulitzer finalist for his book on Afghanistan, ‘No Good Men Among the Living’; Mark Goodwin-Hudson, former British Army Officer and head of the NATO Civilian Casualty Investigation and Mitigation Team in Afghanistan in 2016; Dr. Larry Lewis, Vice President and Director at CNA, and the lead analyst and co-author of the Joint Civilian Casualty Study in Afghanistan for GEN Petraeus, GEN McChrystal, and ADM Olson; and Prof. Michael Clarke, former Director General and Distinguished Fellow Royal United Services Institute, and Specialist Adviser to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that this submission does not necessarily reflect the views of all APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict Members and Officers.

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## Summary and Recommendations for the UK

### Immediate response: recommendations

#### **The UK must lead on humanitarian diplomatic efforts to address the crisis**

- The UK should use its influence with key allies such as Pakistan and Qatar to maintain humanitarian dialogue with the Taliban and ensure specific protection needs of vulnerable communities are met. For example, working with neighbouring countries to allow visas and access for humanitarian workers.
- The UK should set an example by fast-tracking all 20,000 UK Afghan Resettlement scheme places and ensure those who are particularly vulnerable and in need are evacuated and resettled as soon as possible.

#### **Provide immediate, people-focussed, and effective humanitarian aid:**

- **Work together with the international community to urgently address the funding shortfall.**
  - As of 21 October, the Flash Appeal<sup>2</sup> remained only 45% funded, with a shortfall of \$334 million. Donors are urged to fast-track funding to mitigate against avoidable deaths, prevent displacement and reduce suffering.
  - Humanitarians in Afghanistan are in a race against time to deliver life-saving aid to crisis-affected people and preposition supplies ahead of winter. However, the Winterisation plan currently remains only 33% funded.<sup>3</sup>
- **Humanitarian action should never be conditioned to political, development, human rights or other non-humanitarian objectives.**
  - Donors are urged to ensure transactions and other activities required for humanitarian operations are excluded from the scope of sanctions regimes. This is to allow humanitarian activities to continue without impediment, and to avoid punishing the population for the actions of the de facto authorities.<sup>4</sup>
- **Spend funds effectively.**
  - UK spending on development assistance is positive but the government must demonstrate it can spend money effectively so it reaches those most in need; this will involve working with multiple delivery channels, including the UN and NGOs to support Afghan civil society, to bypass the de facto Taliban authorities whenever possible. Donors are also urged to ensure that funding is flexible enough to adapt to the fast-changing conditions on the ground.
- **Funding must be followed by action.**
  - Humanitarian investment needs to be matched by diplomatic treatment and dialogue with the de facto authorities and a continued commitment to the humanitarian diplomacy priorities outlined in the UK's Integrated Review; particularly looking at constraints on humanitarian access, and the promotion and protection of the rule of law.

#### **The UK should lead on ensuring female aid workers can resume work at all levels:**

- The humanitarian and human rights crisis needs to be understood as intimately interlinked. Robust female staff presence in all areas and aspects is crucial as women and children constitute 75% of

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<sup>2</sup> Aimed at providing prioritised multi-sectoral assistance to 11 million people in the four remaining months of 2021

<sup>3</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Afghanistan: ICCT Real-Time Response Overview Situation Report (21 October 2021), available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-icct-real-time-response-overview-situation-report-21-october-2021>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

those in need.<sup>5</sup> Without allowing female aid workers to work and move freely, agencies are unable to conduct assessments of who is most in need, particularly with regards to single female parent households, and respond to the scale of demand.

### **The UK should lead on diplomatic innovation to prevent the collapse of public services and the economy**

- Before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan was dependent on international aid that accounted for 75% of state spending. Assets remain frozen and disbursements from international organisations have been put on hold. The Taliban does not have access to sufficient alternative funding; neither Chinese, Russian nor alternative Taliban revenue will bridge the funding gap. Without funding Afghans will not have access to life-sustaining necessities and, moreover, the economy will collapse. This will be detrimental to the Taliban's success. As such, the Taliban will likely feel forced to engage with long-term funders of Afghanistan.
- Support efforts by multilateral organisations to inject funds to the country without recognition of the Taliban. For example, supporting the UNDP and World Bank to pay the salaries of public sector workers to avoid economic collapse. A useful precedent has already been set by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency which pays the salaries of 28,000 vital Palestinian public sector staff in Gaza and provides loans and grants to civilians, bypassing the Palestinian ( Hamas) de facto authorities.<sup>6</sup>

### **The UK should support international efforts to maintain an independent human rights presence in-country in Afghanistan**

- The UK should support the renewal of UNAMA's mandate in March 2022, thus ensuring robust monitoring is able to be conducted on the ground, rather than relying solely on testimony of those who have fled the country.
- The UK should support the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan ensure financial support for fact-finding missions, once a person is appointed.
- The UK should support the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission's request for establishing a mechanism to monitor the evolving human rights situation throughout Afghanistan, document Human Rights violations and advocate for protection and promotion of Afghan fundamental rights; and provide political support to the national initiatives for victim-centred justice.

#### Medium-term response: recommendations

### **The FCDO should lead a cross-departmental effort to bring together disparate strategies and responsibilities to ensure in future the UK government can respond to crises with one voice and shared aim**

- This should engage both the longer-term strategic mandates in government, such as the role of the National Security Council, whilst ensuring disparate strategies are brought together holistically in responsively addressing multi-agency crises.

### **The UK Government should conduct a thorough after-action review of the evacuation itself to capture lessons learnt**

- This review should be cross-departmental and aim to identify the areas where joint responsibility and planning can be strengthened, including civilian-military engagement, with actionable recommendations.

#### Long-term response: recommendations

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<sup>5</sup> Briefing by Denisa Delić to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>6</sup> Jackie Abramian, Funding Shortfall Jeopardizes UNRWA's Critical Sustenance For Over 27,000 Palestinians, *Forbes*, 24 November 2020, available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackieabramian/2020/11/24/funding-shortfall-jeopardizes-unrwas-critical-sustenance-for-28000-palestinians/?sh=78fdd81443cc>

**A clear FCDO-led political strategy should inform all future military operations.**

- This should include well-articulated and measurable political objectives and must consider, and take into account, context on ground.
- It is essential that military operational decision-making is based on, and conducted to achieve the political strategy and top-line priorities.

**To successfully address insecurities and violence, it is essential to identify the root causes of harm to civilian populations as well as national interests**

- This requires a comprehensive analysis and understanding of local complexities and contexts and working with, and listening to, local communities. Most importantly, it requires a whole-of-government approach and drawing on all the tools available to the UK foreign policy machine.

**Civilian protection should be a top-line priority in all UK military operations, alongside the primary military objective.**

- The failure to adequately protect civilians severely undermines political and military objectives. In Afghanistan, significant civilian harm caused by the UK and its allies, resulted in weakened support for the mission and pushed people to seek protection elsewhere, including from the Taliban.

**Tracking the civilian harm caused by our military operations is important for transparency and accountability, both towards the UK population and local populations, and will strengthen the UK's international standing.**

- The UK should establish a dedicated Civilian Casualty Mitigation and Tracking Team that investigates and tracks civilian harm, analyses trends and implements operational, tactical and doctrinal improvements to minimise harm.
- The remit of civilian harm tracking mechanisms should include the activities and operations of special forces and other government agencies, including intelligence units.

**Establish an inquiry into the UK's engagement in Afghanistan, including allegations of civilian harm and unlawful behaviour by special forces.**

- Civilian harm by the UK in Afghanistan must be investigated, including alleged harm caused by UK Special Forces.
- Following this, serious consideration needs to be given to increased oversight into Special Forces operations across military engagements.<sup>7</sup> Useful precedents have already been set by the Australian Brereton Inquiry into allegations of civilian harm, and the US government's ongoing review of their Special Forces operations.

**The UK should develop mechanisms to ensure meaningful scrutiny and oversight over partner assistance, and integrate good governance and adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law into our security partnerships.** This should include:

- Incorporation of appropriate conditions to partner support based on adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law and best practices for protecting civilians and ensuring transparency, oversight and accountability. Enact mechanisms to meaningfully monitor and evaluate such conditions in partner assistance.
- Requirements for partners to develop mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and investigate civilian harm and provide effective remedy.

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Ledwidge, [There will be a UK Afghanistan inquiry – just don't expect any accountability](#), *The Guardian*, 6 September 2021

- Undertake a review and identify lessons on the integration or absence of civilian harm mitigation within partner assistance activities in Afghanistan to inform current & future partner operations by the UK.
- The UK should systematically integrate a robust approach to civilian harm mitigation in their “train, advise, and assist” activities and further expose partner forces to better understand how to translate protection of civilians’ requirements into practice, including through adjustments in guidance, policies, and tools.

**Develop robust mechanisms to document and institutionalise lessons learnt.**

- The UK should investigate, record and analyse lessons learnt - political, strategic, tactical, operational - from Afghanistan. These will provide significant opportunities to improve UK political, bureaucratic and operational decision-making, mechanisms and processes.
- There is a need for an FCDO-led body that can provide independent and accurate analysis of the progression and effect of military activities, including continuing impacts on the civilian population, to inform ongoing engagement and be institutionalized for future engagement.

**Safeguard future UK operations by ensuring that these recommendations are implemented,** including oversight over special forces and safeguarding mechanisms to ensure partner assistance is used in accordance with best standards and international law and based on a long-term understanding of security

- These, along with other lessons learnt on partner assistance from Afghanistan and elsewhere must inform the UK’s Persistent Engagement strategy<sup>8</sup> if we are to rely on partnerships in the future without exacerbating local protection risks.

**Future UK engagement, including assistance to partners, must ensure civilian protection is a top-line objective and be subject to robust scrutiny and oversight.**

- The withdrawal does not mark the end of the so-called “war on terror”. President Biden has announced the US’ ‘Over the Horizon’ strategy, and the Secretary of State for Defence in the UK has said the government is not ruling out future drone strikes in Afghanistan.
- Civilian protection and adherence to international law must be a top-line priority in all future military engagement and assistance to partners
- Considering the UK’s comprehensive and diverse assistance to the US drone programme, it is essential that assistance is scrutinised, and adheres to the letter and spirit of UK and international law.

## 1. The immediate response: *Impact of the Taliban takeover and decades of war*

### 1.1. Humanitarian situation:

- 1.1.1. Even before the Taliban swept to power, Afghanistan was facing an acute humanitarian crisis. This is only going to get worse.<sup>9</sup> Years of violence have already left 3 million Afghans displaced inside their own country, and forced 2.6 million more to become refugees, mainly in Pakistan and Iran.<sup>10</sup>
- 1.1.2. Escalating violence and withdrawal of international troops have exacerbated this situation, leading to a massive humanitarian and displacement crisis. Afghanistan is also facing a “triple-C threat of Covid-19, conflict and climate”, with a harsh and deadly winter approaching.<sup>11</sup> 18.4 million people (including 9.7 million children) need humanitarian

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Defence, [Defence in a competitive age \(accessible version\)](#), Updated 30 July 2021; Saferworld, ‘[Persistent Engagement](#)’, [Persistent Risk: The impact of UK security assistance on rights and peace](#)’, October 2021

<sup>9</sup> Briefing by Denisa Delić to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation Homepage: <https://www.unrefugees.org.uk/where-help-is-needed/afghanistan-situation/>

<sup>11</sup> Briefing by Denisa Delić to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

assistance, and this has doubled since last year. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report has found that more than one in two Afghans will be facing crisis (IPC Phase 3) or emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity through the November 2021 to March 2022 lean season - the highest number of acutely food insecure people ever recorded in the ten years the UN has been conducting IPC analyses in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, 90% of the population are living on less than \$2.00 a day - and 97% of Afghans are projected to be in poverty by mid-2022.<sup>13</sup> The UNHCR also reports that 48,180 Afghans in need of international protection have arrived in neighbouring countries since 1 January 2021.<sup>14</sup>

1.1.3. This crisis is being compounded by economic and public services on the verge of collapse, shortages of cash in banks, and the Afghani dropping in value by almost 10% in August. Food prices have increased by over 50% compared to pre-Covid levels, the salaries of public sector workers have not been paid since August, and unemployment is rising. Even if individuals do have savings, they are not able to access them, with withdrawals limited to \$200 per week.<sup>15</sup> The end of development funding and withdrawal of NGOs now risks the integrity of public services, increasing the pressures already faced by drought and the existing food insecurity crisis. Around 2000 Ministry of Health facilities are at risk of closure, and with less than 6% of the population vaccinated against Covid-19, a new wave of infections is looming.

1.1.4. The current humanitarian and economic crisis, and the Taliban's inability to address it alone, will likely further undermine its domestic (and international) legitimacy. Since 2014, 75% of the public economy has been funded by foreign aid and assistance, in particular from the US and its allies.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the majority of the country's assets are kept overseas and frozen. The US, for example, confirmed it has frozen \$9.5bn of the Afghan Central Bank's assets.<sup>17</sup> The Taliban can only access about 0.1-0.2% of Afghanistan's total international reserves.<sup>18</sup> Without engaging with long-term funders, such as the UK, US and UN, the Afghan people will not have access to life-saving necessities and the Afghan economy will collapse. This will be detrimental to the Taliban's success. Even if China, Russia, Pakistan, and other countries were to step in, and provide the Taliban with some funding, this will not amount to anything near the funding previously provided by the UK and its allies. As such, it would be in the interest of the Taliban to engage, and moreover, in the medium-term, the UK and its allies could leverage this to increase the influence of the more moderate wing of the Taliban.

## 1.2. Human rights and security

1.2.1. Simultaneously, Afghanistan is facing an urgent protection crisis. More women and children have been killed and wounded in the first half of 2021 than in any full year since records began in 2009.<sup>19</sup> Razia Sayad, a Commissioner at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, briefed the Group on reports of violations of human rights being committed by the Taliban, despite their prior commitment to grant amnesty for former allied personnel, civil servants, and employees of other local actors. These include arbitrary detention, extra-judicial killings, house to house searches for former government employees, including police and army personnel and their families, though this differs across localities.

<sup>12</sup> World Food Programme, [Half of Afghanistan's population face acute hunger as humanitarian needs grow to record levels](#), 25 October 2021

<sup>13</sup> International Rescue Committee Parliamentary Briefing, 'Afghanistan at crossroads: What humanitarians need to stay and deliver', August 2021

<sup>14</sup> The number of new arrivals includes those who approached UNHCR and Partners in Tajikistan (5,420), Iran (19,640) and Pakistan (19,470), as well as the Afghans who were kept by the Iranian authorities at border locations (3,650) since 1 January 2021, although only 807 individuals of the latter group remain in the country. The vast majority of those interviewed report leaving Afghanistan for security-related reasons. The overall number of Afghans with international refugee protection needs is likely to be much higher. The increase on the overall figure does not necessarily reflect the displacement of that same period, but rather the date of assessment [accessed here: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021\\_10\\_15%20EXTERNAL%20AFG%20Situation%20Emergency%20Update.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021_10_15%20EXTERNAL%20AFG%20Situation%20Emergency%20Update.pdf)]

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Fiona Frazer, Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Afghanistan, UN Assistance Mission Afghanistan; Business Standard, [Taliban restricts bank withdrawals in Afghanistan to \\$200 per week](#), 29 August 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Loft, Claire Mills, [Afghanistan: Development, UK aid, and the future](#), House of Commons Library, 21 September 2021; Mujib Mashal, [Afghanistan Needs Billions in Aid Even After a Peace Deal, World Bank Says](#), New York Times, 5 December 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Saleha Mohsin, [US freezes Afghan central bank's assets of \\$9.5bn](#), Al Jazeera, 18 August 2021

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Thomas, [Taliban will not be able to access most Afghan central bank assets](#), BBC, 18 August 2021

<sup>19</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan: Record number of women and children killed or wounded, 26 July 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096382>

- 1.2.2. Ultimately, the many gains that the UK and its allies had made in Afghanistan are at stake. This means that the thriving community of civil society, media, academics, and human rights activists that flourished in Kabul are now all under threat. Women's rights are of particular concern, with women being prevented from going to work and university; and girls to higher education. Pre-takeover, 7.4 million women and girls were in need of life-saving gender-based violence services which have since been forced to close. The Taliban has resurrected its draconian rules, banning the playing of music, closing 153 local media outlets in the past months, and is suppressing freedom of travel by withholding passports and travel documents needed to leave the country.<sup>20</sup>
- 1.2.3. In addition to women and girls, there are vulnerable populations who require specific protection, including people with disabilities<sup>21</sup>, journalists, civil society, and minorities including the Hazara and Sikh minorities. For example, on 30th August, the Taliban killed 13 Shi'a Hazaras<sup>22</sup>, including a 17-year-old girl, in Daikundi province.<sup>23</sup> ISIS-K has also carried out targeted attacks against religious minorities, including a suicide bombing against a Hazara mosque in Kunduz, reportedly killing between 43-70 people, an attack in the same week at a mosque in Kandahar, killing at least 47 people and injuring more than 80<sup>24</sup>, and an attack at a Sikh Gurdwara in Kabul, reportedly killing 25 people.<sup>25</sup>
- 1.2.4. Prof. Michael Clarke explained to the Group "we encouraged these community and civil society groups to grow based on the promise that we [the international community] will be there to protect you. It is shameful that we have not lived up to our side of the bargain." Those who manage to escape face further barriers and persecution from neighbouring countries. On 15th September, the Balochistan authorities criminalised anyone offering refuge to Afghan refugees and warned of strict repercussions. They also deported more than 500 refugees.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Lessons from the Evacuation and Withdrawal

### 2.1. Lack of diplomatic leadership and international dialogue in the run-up to the evacuation:

- 2.1.1. There was awareness in government that the withdrawal of US and allied forces was approaching after President Trump's announcement in February 2020 - and of serious risks attached to this which required tailored contingency planning.
- 2.1.2. In briefing the Group, Prof. Michael Clarke explained the Government, in effect, focussed strategies on three potential scenarios:
- The Afghan government were able to successfully fight off the Taliban and be in a strong position to form a joint administration in the future
  - There would be a rapid collapse of the Afghan government, and the Taliban would simply seize power
  - The Afghan government would fight more effectively, but would eventually lose to the Taliban over 12-18 months
- 2.1.3. Prof. Clarke explained that the most likely scenario seemed to be assessed to be the third by both the MOD and FCDO, cementing the idea that there were many months left to respond as events developed. The vital plans needed to prepare for the second 'rapid collapse'

<sup>20</sup> Briefing by Razia Sayad, Commissioner Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Drones

<sup>21</sup> Afghanistan has the largest population per capita of persons with disabilities in the world [interview with Fiona Frazer, UNAMA]; Question for written answer to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-005913\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-005913_EN.html)

<sup>22</sup> Eleven of the victims were former members of the Afghan National Defence Security Forces (ANDSF), and two were civilians.

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, [Afghanistan: 13 Hazara killed by Taliban fighters in Daykundi province](#) – new investigation, 5 October 2021

<sup>24</sup> Abdul Rauf Wafa Emma Graham-Harrison, [Shia mosque bombing in Afghanistan that killed at least 47 claimed by ISKP](#), The Guardian, 15 October 2021

<sup>25</sup> TOLO News, [25 Killed in Attack at Dharamshala, Sikh Temple in Kabul](#), 25 March 2020; The Supreme Sikh Council UK (the largest representative body of British Sikhs) had issued a statement raising concerns of state of human rights of minorities especially Sikh and Hindus in Afghanistan and Pakistan on 8th Oct 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Jaffer A. Mirza, [From Afghanistan to Pakistan, the never-ending ordeals of Shi'a Hazaras](#), Institute for development Studies, 20 October 2021

scenario were not in place when MPs and committees were looking for answers from the moment the withdrawal was announced in May 2021.<sup>27</sup>

2.1.4. This lack of urgency and failure to take the second ‘rapid collapse’ scenario seriously is reflected in the Foreign Secretary’s decision to go on holiday on 6th August despite receiving dire warnings from the British Ambassador in Afghanistan on 2nd August. These stated that, “the gloves are off. We are entering a new, dangerous phase of the conflict.”<sup>28</sup> He said that, absent a major turnaround, it looked likely the Taliban would take their first city with maybe more to follow. This gap in FCDO leadership at a time of crisis was compounded by the Prime Minister and Permanent Undersecretary also going on holiday, delaying vital decisions on the evacuation. Discussions with regional powers to aid international cooperation were also delayed, with the Foreign Secretary missing opportunities to collaborate with the Uzbekistan and Pakistan governments to ease the movement of people who needed to be evacuated.

## 2.2. **Lack of cross-departmental strategy highlighted the flaws of cross-Whitehall coordination in addressing the crisis**

2.2.1. According to existing structures, the responsibility for the plan should have resided with the National Security Council. However, instead planning was done piecemeal without the effective cross-Whitehall coordination needed to address all aspects of the unfolding crisis.

2.2.2. Denisa Delić of the International Rescue Committee emphasised the Afghanistan crisis is a tragic example of the need to strengthen Whitehall foreign policy machinery and instate integrated cross-departmental approaches: “we’ve seen over the last few weeks departments blaming each other within the UK<sup>29</sup> and not having a clear lead about who’s leading on what aspect of the response. At the same time, we’ve had a fairly quiet National Security Council. The recently published report by the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy argues that structures were abandoned for more of an ad hoc approach”. This ad hoc approach is also seen in the creation of multiple strategies under the FCDO’s remit as a result of the Integrated Review - for example the international development, conflict, protection of civilians in conflict and humanitarian frameworks. This has resulted in piecemeal responses to a multi-agency need crisis like Afghanistan to the detriment of holistic preventative strategy.

## 3. **How did we get here?: Key lessons from Afghanistan**

3.1. Two decades of war have had an immense toll on Afghan citizens, heightening the suffering of a population already battling successive humanitarian crises.<sup>30</sup> The majority of the fighting has taken place in rural areas.<sup>31</sup> There civilians have experienced night raids, airstrikes, attacks on healthcare facilities, schools and homes, indirect fires, IEDs and landmines, said Sahr Muhammedally, the Director for MENA and South Asia at the Centre for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC).<sup>32</sup> In urban areas, civilians have been faced with suicide bombings and attacks against ethnic minorities and women.<sup>33</sup> To understand how the current humanitarian crisis arose, it is necessary to look at the role of the UK and the wider international community in the conflict, including several factors which contributed to the alienation of the civilian population and rise of the Taliban.

### 3.2. **Lack of political strategy**

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<sup>27</sup> Briefing by Prof. Mike Clarke to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>28</sup> Dominic Kennedy, ‘[Dominic Raab was warned that Kabul would fall quickly](#)’, The Times, 18 October 2021

<sup>29</sup> James Forsyth, ‘[Crisis shows Foreign Office needs a reboot](#)’, The Times, 2 September 2021

<sup>30</sup> Briefings by Denisa Delić and Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>31</sup> Briefing by Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>32</sup> Also, Briefings by Anand Gopal and Razia Sayad to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>33</sup> Briefing by Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

3.2.1. We asked a number of experts what the UK's strategy was in Afghanistan. Professor Michael Clarke, former Director General of the Royal United Services Institute, identified only one overall strategic driver, dated 2001: to support the US, regardless of whether its strategy was sound or not. All subsequent decisions were, in effect, tactical, not linked to a UK political strategy for this country's national interests in Afghanistan, Prof. Clarke emphasized. Similarly, Frank Ledwidge, a Barrister and former military officer and diplomat, said: 'I have asked eight Defence Secretaries what our strategy was', adding: 'I have not been able to identify a national strategy'. This, albeit anecdotal, illustrates the broader expert opinion, namely that the UK strategy was unclear, and as the conflict progressed, failed to consider developments and the reality on the ground.<sup>34</sup>

3.2.2. This one-track strategy represents a missed opportunity for the UK to employ its expertise and promote its priorities in Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup> British expertise from successful operations in Bosnia and Sierra Leone could have provided meaningful expertise.<sup>36</sup> However, multiple experts have highlighted the decision to invade Iraq, and the subsequent shifting of focus, commitment, and resources to Iraq, as detrimental to the objectives in Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> Thus, by 2004, in switching focus to stabilisation in Iraq, the Afghanistan war became effectively impossible to win in the way originally envisaged in 2001, the Afghanistan war was impossible to win, Prof Clarke said.

3.2.3. Throughout the conflict, military responses and priorities repeatedly took precedence over any political settlement and seemingly failed to properly factor in local realities.<sup>38,39</sup> The US strategy in Afghanistan centred around counterterrorism and taking out the Taliban, Anand Gopal, a Pulitzer-nominated journalist and Afghanistan expert told us.<sup>40</sup> This counterterrorism strategy relied heavily on conventional airstrikes, drone strikes and special operations, with civilians bearing the brunt of violence in an environment of impunity.<sup>41</sup> Nation building and democracy was never a central part of the US strategy, Gopal said. Key priorities such as civilian protection and engagement, accountability and effective public service delivery therefore were consistently side-lined in favour of short-term counter-terrorism approaches.

3.3. **The rise of the Taliban: UK Contribution to the environment of violence and impunity which strengthened the Taliban's hold and undermined the Afghan government's legitimacy:** Civilians in Afghanistan, in particular rural populations, have been subject to violence from multiple actors and all sides of the conflict.<sup>42</sup> More than 48,000 Afghan civilians have been killed, and at least 75,000 have been injured since 2001—both likely significant underestimations according to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).<sup>43</sup> It is clear from the UN's report on civilian harm that the Taliban has been the biggest perpetrator.<sup>44</sup> Yet, allied forces contributed to an overall environment of impunity via flawed partner assistance, failure to prioritise civilian protection or capture institutional lessons necessary to do so, and to address allegations of civilian harm by UK and allied Special Forces.<sup>45</sup> This left civilians in a perilous place with no means of accountability or remedy, and unable to turn to or rely on the Afghan government for security.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Briefings by Prof. Mike Clarke and Frank Ledwidge to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict; Prof Mike Clarke, [Afghanistan and the UK's Illusion of Strategy](#), RUSI, 16 August, 2021; Thomas W. Cawkwell, [UK Communication Strategies for Afghanistan](#), 2001–2014, Routledge: 2015,

<sup>35</sup> Briefing by Prof. Mike Clarke to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Briefings by Prof. Mike Clarke and Anand Gopal to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict; Aimen Dean on Conflicted podcast, episode titled: Afghanistan and the Taliban, available at: <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/conflicted/id1443491069?i=1000533261539>

<sup>38</sup> Briefings by Prof. Mike Clarke and Anand Gopal to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>39</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, [What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction](#), August 2021

<sup>40</sup> [Anand Gopal's book, No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban and the War Through Afghan Eyes](#), was a finalist for the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction and the 2014 National Book Award.

<sup>41</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal and Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict; UNAMA, Afghanistan: Record number of women and children killed or wounded, 26 July 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096382>

<sup>42</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal, Sahr Muhammedally, Razia Sayad and Prof. Mike Clarke to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict; UNAMA reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict 2007-2021, accessed here: <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>

<sup>43</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, [What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction](#), August 2021; Neta Crawford, "Update on the Human Costs of War for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001 to mid-2016," Watson Institute, August 2016, pp. 3, 9; UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021," July 2021, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> UNAMA, Afghanistan: Record number of women and children killed or wounded, 26 July 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096382>

<sup>45</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal, Sahr Muhammedally, Razia Sayad, Prof. Mike Clarke, Frank Ledwidge and Mark Goodwin-Hudson to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>46</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal, Sahr Muhammedally and Razia Sayad to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

### 3.3.1. Flawed partner assistance:

- Numerous experts have questioned whether the training provided by the UK and its allies to Afghan forces was appropriate.<sup>47</sup> The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) wrote that allied forces built the Afghan army in the image of Western militaries, and failed to take into account the local context, culture or terrain.<sup>48</sup> This included training the Afghan army to conduct a conventional war in an insurgency environment, and making it entirely reliant on international military and logistical support.<sup>49</sup> Data available for much of the war showed that forces' salaries were not being paid, they suffered heavy casualties, and their welfare was neglected; all indicating that Afghan officers and foot soldiers were likely to put down their weapons in a full-on confrontation with the Taliban in the absence of foreign military support.<sup>50</sup> These warning signs were not considered in the months preceding the withdrawal, leading to misplaced confidence in the Afghan National Security Forces' ability to continue fighting the Taliban without international support.<sup>51</sup>
- SIGAR confirmed that the decision to partner with corrupt militias and warlords, combined with a lack of accountability, undermined central Afghan institutions, including the police and army, which NATO forces were working to build up.<sup>52</sup> The absence of good governance and unchecked corruption was a meaningful source of grievance among civilians.<sup>53</sup> Gopal said that the US' decision to partner with corrupt elites and warlords was primarily driven by their willingness to take on the Taliban and Al Qaeda, not conditional on adherence to international law or principles of good governance. In addition, the allied and Afghan forces' overreliance on signals intelligence, combined with monetary rewards and assistance to identify targets, left room for corruption to flourish and further empowered the warlords that benefited from this strategy.<sup>54</sup> As such, civilians were not immune from their violence, and sought protection elsewhere, including from the Taliban.<sup>55</sup> In fact, it has been common knowledge for years that the Taliban has run a shadow government across parts of rural Afghanistan.<sup>56</sup>
- Since the fall of Kabul, corruption within and ineffectiveness of the Afghan government and military, and their consequent lack of public legitimacy and standing, have been identified as key contributing factors to the Taliban's rapid takeover.<sup>57</sup> These significant short-comings of central government institutions have been well known, yet the international community has continued to provide largely unconditional assistance and support.<sup>58</sup> This, combined with the failure to consider local context and incorporate popular demands for greater accountability and better governance undermined the possibility of a more responsive and efficient Afghan administration that could provide a clear alternative to the Taliban.<sup>59</sup> The current situation thus cannot be divorced from allied decision-making.

### 3.3.2. Erosion of trust in allied forces due to reliance on opaque Special Forces operations

- British (as well as US and Australian) Special Forces have been accused of killing civilians.<sup>60</sup> Recently, Major General Brereton's four-year inquiry found that 39 Afghans were allegedly

<sup>47</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal, Prof. Mike Clarke and Mark Goodwin-Hudson to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>48</sup> Briefing by Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>49</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal, Sahr Muhammedally, Prof. Mike Clarke and Mark Goodwin-Hudson to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict; Yaroslav Trofimov, How the Taliban Overran the Afghan Army, Built by the U.S. Over 20 Years, *The Wall Street Journal*, 14 August 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghanistan-army-collapse-taliban-11628958253>

<sup>50</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal and Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>51</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal and Prof. Mike Clarke to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>52</sup> See also Jodi Vittori, [Corruption and Self-Dealing in Afghanistan and Other U.S.-Backed Security Sectors](#), *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 9 September 2021

<sup>53</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal and Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Briefing by Anand Gopal to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>56</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal and Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>57</sup> Yaroslav Trofimov, How the Taliban Overran the Afghan Army, Built by the U.S. Over 20 Years, *The Wall Street Journal*, 14 August 2021; Chas Danner, [Why Afghanistan's Security Forces Suddenly Collapsed](#), *The New York Magazine*, 17 August 2021; Jodi Vittori, [Corruption and Self-Dealing in Afghanistan and Other U.S.-Backed Security Sectors](#), *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 9 September 2021

<sup>58</sup> Briefings by Anand Gopal and Prof. Mike Clarke to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>59</sup> Briefing by Anand Gopal to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict; Aimen Dean on Conflicted podcast, episode titled: Afghanistan and the Taliban, available at <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/conflicted/id1443491069?i=1000533261539>

<sup>60</sup> Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force Afghanistan Inquiry Report, 2020, available at: <https://afghanistandinquiry.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/IGADF-Afghanistan-Inquiry-Public-Release-Version.pdf>; Panorama, 'War Crimes Scandal Exposed', *BBC One*, 18 November 2019,

killed by Australian Special Forces, none in the heat of battle. Brereton described the alleged conduct as “shameful” and “deeply disturbing”. One special forces informant was recorded saying: “Whatever we do, though, I can tell you the Brits and the US are far, far worse.”<sup>61</sup> The over-reliance on Special Forces operations by allied governments to counter the threat of the Taliban without addressing allegations of this harm eroded trust in international actors and further undermined the legitimacy of the Afghan government.<sup>62</sup>

- In January 2020, the APPG Chair, [Stewart McDonald MP, brought a debate before Parliament](#) on UK Special Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, following a joint investigation by *BBC Panorama* and *The Sunday Times*. In his introductory remarks he said: “The investigation contained some of the most serious allegations, including allegations of war crimes that have been committed and subsequently covered up by members of the armed forces and perhaps even Ministers themselves.”<sup>63</sup> Along with other Members of Parliament, he called for appropriate Parliamentary scrutiny and oversight over the Special Forces, and an independent judge-led inquiry into special forces activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. He highlighted that legislators in the US, Norway, and Denmark all have oversight powers over their special forces. “In this modern age, the public expect there to be proper parliamentary scrutiny and parliamentary oversight. The system needs updating.”<sup>64</sup> Yet, the UK has both expanded the size and capabilities of its special forces, without addressing allegations of past wrongdoing or updating scrutiny mechanisms.

### 3.3.3. Repeating the same mistakes: failure to prioritise the protection of civilians in conflict and institutionalise learning

- A central failure throughout the two decades in Afghanistan was the inability to institutionalise learning and good practice that could have better protected civilians, and build the trust and legitimacy of the Afghan government and allied partners.<sup>65</sup>
- Essential lessons learnt on how to avoid excessive civilian harm during NATO’s ISAF mission were not institutionalised or carried over to NATO’s Resolute Support Mission.<sup>66</sup> The ISAF mission developed history’s most progressive civilian casualty mitigation policies and tracking mechanisms.<sup>67</sup> In response to airstrikes causing civilian casualties, commanders issued new tactical directives and instituted new policies to mitigate civilian harm, and were engaging with NGOs and the media.<sup>68</sup> UNAMA records of civilian casualties show that this ultimately led to a significant reduction in civilian harm over time.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.3.4. Good practices did not fully carry over into following missions and strategies for Afghanistan

- “Unfortunately, these lessons and good practices implemented under ISAF were not fully carried into the following mission”, explained Muhammedally. After 2017, as the strategy changed to get the Taliban to the negotiating table, the pace of operations increased dramatically.<sup>70</sup> “In 2019, more bombs and munitions were dropped by the US than at the height of the surge in 2010-11, which led to a high civilian toll from airstrikes”, explained Muhammedally. The scale of bombing during this active period also helped the Taliban gain new recruits who had lost loved ones due to civilian harm caused. Furthermore, the lack of proper investigations into civilian harm incidents, and an overreliance on signal intelligence (and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance platforms) rather than on the ground

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<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000bh87>; Insight Staff, War crimes scandal: as they drank tea, the Afghan boys were shot in the head — and blood filled their cups, *The Sunday Times*, 17 November 2019;

<sup>61</sup> Lucy Fisher, Call for inquiry into Afghan ‘war crimes’, *The Times*, 21 November 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/call-for-inquiry-into-afghan-war-crimes-zbjv5fg75>

<sup>62</sup> Briefing by Frank Ledwidge to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>63</sup> House of Commons debate into ‘UK Special Forces: Iraq and Afghanistan’ on 7 January 2020, available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-01-07/debates/4B913D4B-8058-456B-A485-B56C447DE042/UKSpecialForcesIraqAndAfghanistan>

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*; Briefings by Frank Ledwidge and Prof. Mike Clarke to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict; Panorama, ‘War Crimes Scandal Exposed’, *BBC One*, 18 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000bh87>; Insight Staff, War crimes scandal: as they drank tea, the Afghan boys were shot in the head — and blood filled their cups, *The Sunday Times*, 17 November 2019; The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution: Authorising the Use of Military Force](#), 6 August 2019,

<sup>65</sup> Briefings by Dr Larry Lewis and Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> UNAMA reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict 2007-2021, accessed here: <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>

<sup>70</sup> Briefing by Sahr Muhammedally to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

investigations with witnesses, combined with a general lack of transparency and engagement with NGOs and media, was detrimental to the legitimacy of the mission in the eyes of civilian populations.<sup>71</sup>

- However, the provision of technical and advisory support to the Afghan government and security forces by NATO and US forces should be recognised for its positive impact on civilian harm mitigation.<sup>72</sup> With NATO's support, the Afghan government passed a Protection of Civilians policy in 2017 which committed to good practices to reduce harm; enacted a new policy on airstrikes and targeting; and improved mechanisms for conducting civilian casualty investigations.<sup>73</sup> However, these slow gains were lost with the collapse of Afghan forces post-withdrawal.
- Experts have also emphasised the failure to accurately report developments on the ground.<sup>74</sup> Throughout the 2000s and 2010s warnings about the failures of military intervention were ignored, and overly positive reports of ineffective operations.<sup>75</sup> In 2008, the US Congress created the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) to provide independent and objective oversight of reconstruction projects and activities. Consecutive rigorous and detailed SIGAR reports identified significant short-comings and failures on the ground. However, these warnings were not heeded. Instead policy priorities were made on the basis of rosy reports by the armed forces, portraying their work in Afghanistan as successful - and effectively marking their own homework.<sup>76</sup> Dr Larry Lewis, Vice President and Director at CNA, and the lead analyst and co-author of the Joint Civilian Casualty Study in Afghanistan for GEN Petraeus, GEN McChrystal, and ADM Olson, told us that if you look at the reports produced by military officials at the end of each one-year rotation, they all essentially say the same: when we arrived things were really bad, but we fixed it and now it is great. Similarly, Prof. Clarke and Mark Goodwin-Hudson, former British Army Officer and head of the NATO Civilian Casualty Investigation and Mitigation Team in Afghanistan in 2016, both identified careerism and a culture of inadequate reporting, driven often by personal career motives, as undermining the UK's ability to understand the effectiveness of its operations and decision-making.<sup>77</sup> On both sides of the Atlantic, a combination of ignoring evidence-based reporting about the lack of progress and biased self-reporting prevented data-led decision-making.

### 3.4. Looking to the future: Mitigating the repetition of past risks in future operations

- 3.4.1. The UK's future military engagement will be characterised by the Government's 'Global Britain' approach and the Ministry of Defence's 'Persistent Engagement Strategy'. At the heart of this Strategy, very simply put, is small, long-term deployments of UK military personnel and capabilities overseas, the remote deployment of force, and partner assistance.<sup>78</sup>
- 3.4.2. Special Forces will be central to this strategy, and have recently expanded in size and capabilities.<sup>79</sup> Repeated reports of alleged wrongdoing by UK Special Forces (as well as those of the US and Australia) in Afghanistan,<sup>80</sup> and the complete lack of Parliamentary oversight or scrutiny over Special Forces activities, highlight the risk that comes with largely unaccountable and secretive deployment of force.<sup>81</sup> This risk is only heightened as the UK moves to employ larger numbers of Special Forces and with more frequency, including the creation of a new Special-Forces style 'Rangers Regiment'.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, [The Reasons for the Collapse of Afghan Forces](#), *the Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 17 August 2021

<sup>75</sup> Briefing by Dr Larry Lewis to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid Prof. Mike Clarke and Mark Goodwin-Hudson to the APPG on Drones and Modern Conflict

<sup>78</sup> See HM Government, [Global Britain in a competitive age The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#), March 2021

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.: Simon Newton, [Soldiers To Take On Special Forces Roles In New Army Unit](#), *Forces Net*, 19 March 2021

<sup>80</sup> Panorama, ['War Crimes Scandal Exposed'](#), *BBC One*, 18 November 2019; Insight Staff, *War crimes scandal: as they drank tea, the Afghan boys were shot in the head — and blood filled their cups*, *The Sunday Times*, 17 November 2019

<sup>81</sup> The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution: Authorising the Use of Military Force](#), 6 August 2019

<sup>82</sup> Simon Newton, [Soldiers To Take On Special Forces Roles In New Army Unit](#), *Forces Net*, 19 March 2021

- 3.4.3. Similarly, a number of UK defence partnerships and assistance have highlighted the risks that bad partnerships pose to our security, security overseas and our military objectives.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, they expose the UK, British personnel and Ministers to legal criminal liability.<sup>84</sup>
- 3.4.4. President Biden's 'Over the Horizon Strategy',<sup>85</sup> and the UK Secretary of State for Defence's statement the UK will not rule out the future use of UK drones in Afghanistan,<sup>86</sup> indicated a return to a counter-terrorism strategy reliant on remote force and signal intelligence by both countries. However, the 29 August US drone strike in Kabul illustrates the multiple risks of returning to the same counter-terrorism strategy that has caused considerable civilian harm and driven the past two decades of flawed engagement in Afghanistan. This drone strike was initially promoted by the White House as "righteous"<sup>87</sup> and a validation of its strategy, as outlined by the White House Spokesperson a day after the strike: "I would say the fact that we have had two successful strikes confirmed by CENTCOM tells you that our over-the-horizon capacity works and is working". On 17 September, however, it was acknowledged that this strike was in fact "a horrible mistake".<sup>88</sup> It killed 10 members of one family, all of whom were civilians. One of the victims had served as an interpreter for the US in Afghanistan and had a Special Immigrant Visa ready. Seven victims were children.<sup>89</sup> Multiple experts have pointed out that this strike is not unique - with hundreds of other incidents in Afghanistan - as well as across Iraq, Syria and Somalia and other countries - tragically echoing this one.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> BBC, [UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia unlawful, court rules](#), 20 June, 2019; APPG on Drones, [The UK's Use of Armed Drones: Working with Partners](#), 2018; Peter Burt, [Joint Enterprise: An overview of US-UK co-operation on armed drone operations](#), *Drone Wars*, June 2020; Amnesty International, [European assistance to deadly US drone strikes](#), 19 April 2018; Helen Warrell, [UK faces legal challenge to detail policy on lethal drone strikes](#), *The Financial Times*, 21 May 2021

<sup>84</sup> APPG on Drones, [The UK's Use of Armed Drones: Working with Partners](#), 2018

<sup>85</sup> Remarks by President Biden on the Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, 8 July 2021, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/07/08/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-drawdown-of-u-s-forces-in-afghanistan/>

<sup>86</sup> Dan Sabbagh and Amelia Gentleman, [UK would be prepared to launch Afghanistan drone strikes, says Wallace](#), *The Guardian*, 9 September 2021

<sup>87</sup> Transcript, [Secretary of Defense Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Milley Press Briefing on the End of the U.S. War in Afghanistan](#), 1 September 2021

<sup>88</sup> Release, [Statement by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III on the Results of Central Command Investigation Into the 29 August Airstrike](#), 17 September 2021

<sup>89</sup> [Afghan Family Says Errant U.S. Missile Killed 10, Including 7 Children](#), *The New York Times*, 21 September 2021

<sup>90</sup> Nick Turse, [How Biden is trying to rebrand the drone war](#), *Responsible Statecraft*, 25 October