



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Operations Directorate
Ministry of Defence
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Whitehall
London SW1A 2HB
United Kingdom

Our Ref: TO03710/2011

Reverend I Galloway
Convener
Church & Society Council
The Church of Scotland
121 George Street
Edinburgh
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24 August 2011

Dear Reverend Galloway

Thank you for your letter dated 9 August 2011 to the Secretary of State for Defence about the British military involvement in Afghanistan. Your letter has been passed to the Afghanistan Team in the Operations Directorate for reply.

The mission in Afghanistan remains the highest foreign policy priority of this Government. It is vital to the UK's national security that Afghanistan becomes a stable and secure state, capable of suppressing violent extremism within its own borders. It must never again become a safe haven from which terrorists are allowed to operate freely, planning and executing attacks against the UK and our allies.

The British Government is under no illusions about the difficulties and challenges we face in Afghanistan but British Forces continue to be needed there to protect the population, degrade the insurgency, and to build up the Afghan national security forces. The overall goal is for the Government of Afghanistan to provide, on a sustainable basis, the capability and governance required to manage their own security.

We are now entering a new phase in which the Afghan forces will do more of the fighting and patrolling, and our forces more training and mentoring. The Afghan forces are growing rapidly. They are deploying in formed units and carrying out their own operations. There has been real progress in the last two years. It is this growing strength and capability which will allow us over time to hand over control of security to the Afghan forces and draw down our own numbers. Seven locations announced by President Karzai in March (covering about a fifth of the Afghan population and including Lashkar Gah urban centre) have begun the first phase of security transition. This is the start of a process which will be completed across the country by the end of 2014.

The Prime Minister said in May that we will withdraw 426 UK military personnel by February 2012. He announced on 6 July that the UK will be able to reduce its force levels by a further 500 - from 9,500 to 9,000 by the end of 2012, reflecting the progress that is

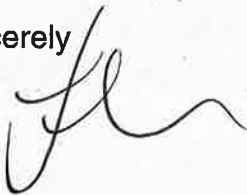
being made in building up the ANSF. This marks the start of a process which will ensure that by the end of 2014 there will not be anything like the number of British troops there as there are now – and they will not be serving in a combat role.

The last two years have seen an extremely hard fought campaign in Afghanistan which, regrettably, has resulted in the loss of a number of lives and some life-changing injuries. Our Armed Forces and their families continue to face the challenges of Afghanistan with extreme courage day in and day out, and the country owes them an immense debt of gratitude for what they do on our behalf. It is important to make it clear that sacrifices of our Service personnel have not been in vain.

Our actions in Afghanistan have dramatically reduced the security threat emanating from that region. As the security situation on the ground improves we are increasing the emphasis on providing support to regional development. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) is working in partnership with the Afghan Government to create economic incentives that will help to reduce opium production and, through the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, we are supporting opportunities for investment and trade. We must continue to show the people there that a more prosperous and secure future lies in supporting the new Afghanistan rather than returning to the repressive, brutal days of the Taliban.

Thank you for your continuing interest.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JL', written over the 'Yours sincerely' text.

Operations Directorate
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