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Ian M Galloway

Thank you for your letter of 9 August to the Foreign Secretary, about the war in Afghanistan. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with Afghanistan.

The use of Afghanistan as a base for international terrorism has been one of the most important security challenges of the past decade. To address the threat that this poses to the UK, our Armed Forces have played a central role in the UN-
authorised International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). As you are aware, ISAF's mandate is to help the Afghan Government maintain security, while developing the capability of its own army and police to counter the threat from international terrorism and protect its population from an aggressive insurgency. I am clear that fulfilling this mandate must be our and NATO's priority over the next three years. The UK, along with our ISAF partners, has agreed with President Karzai that Afghanistan's National Security Forces (ANSF) should take the security lead across the country by the end of 2014. This transition process will help set the conditions for the drawdown of our forces, which will not be in Afghanistan in a combat role (or in the numbers they are now) by 2015. However, the UK will form a long-term partnership with Afghanistan post-2014 through trade, development and aid, diplomacy and training and mentoring of Afghan security forces.

It is important that civilians are protected and detainees treated appropriately and over the past two years, changes to ISAF's procedures and tactics have steadily reduced the number and proportion of civilian casualties caused by international forces. This is in stark contrast to the insurgents, who both deliberately target civilians and use tactics such as improvised explosive devices that fail to discriminate between civilians and combatants. The UN's monitoring has shown the effect of these contrasting approaches. According to their most recent figures, the proportion of civilian casualties caused by the insurgents has risen to 80%, while the proportion attributed to ISAF and Afghan forces has fallen to 14%. We will continue to work with ISAF partners to take the strongest measures to protect civilians while working towards stability and security for the whole of Afghanistan.

Further information about the UK's involvement in Afghanistan is available on our website at www.fco.gov.uk/afghanistan.

May I also take this opportunity to commend the representatives of all faiths in their work supporting our armed forces personnel and their families.

Yours sincerely

A. Burt

ALISTAIR BURT

I very much appreciated the care and attention which had gone into the report. Although I do not share your conclusions, the arguments you raise are important and ensuring that the people of Afghanistan have a role and secure future is a huge priority for the Government.