

HISTORIC DAY-British hand over capital of Helmand

Posted by Lucy Aldridge - 2011/07/20 12:34

SOURCE: Ministry of Defence

British troops have formally handed the lead responsibility for security to Afghan Forces in the capital of Helmand Province today - a significant milestone in a process of transition that will continue to 2014 and beyond.

Lashkar Gah, where British troops have operated since 2006, is the fourth of seven districts across Afghanistan where responsibility for security is gradually shifting from ISAF forces to their Afghan counterparts.

Afghan Army and Police units have been assuming responsibility for security in the town over recent months. Today, no coalition troops are involved in the day-to-day security of the bustling town.

British forces will stay in the remainder of Central Helmand province where they will continue to develop the capability and capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Although security in Lashkar Gah is good, work in other areas will continue to ensure UK forces remain on track to withdraw combat forces by the end of 2014.

In support of the military effort to strengthen the ANSF, British and international civilians are successfully building structures of accountable Government, with budgets and priorities tied to the populations needs, and supporting efforts to reintegrate Taliban fighters. The UK led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) continues to move away from direct delivery in Helmand, to supporting the increasingly capable afghan systems now in place. The PRT will complete its own draw down by the end of 2014.

In an open letter, Helmand's Provincial Governor, Gulab Mangal, said:

"Today sees first area in Lashkar Gah transfer to the sons of Afghanistan, who have trained hard for this job and already fight bravely to provide security over many months in Lashkar Gah, defeating the enemy everywhere. Our Afghan National Security Forces provided full security for the elections in all of Helmand last September, and the Afghan Commanders planned the event with very few problems.

"Every day I wake up in Helmand, proud to be an Afghan. Today, I am especially proud that the people of Helmand, like the other places in Afghanistan, are starting to take control of this beautiful Province that has been my proud home for many years.

"The sacrifices made by the coalition forces, in 5 years, first led bravely by the British, then the strong Americans, and alongside great warriors from Denmark, and Estonia and other nations, will never be forgotten by our people."

Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, said:

"The Afghan National Security Forces have proven they are capable of delivering security to the local people of Lashkar Gah, and today's ceremony recognises this.

"The ANSF already provide security in Lashkar Gar and the capacity of local government is improving, both of which are allowing normal life to return to large areas of the municipality. All of this means we

have a solid base to build on as we work with our Afghan and international partners towards full transition – security, governance and development - over the coming years.

“As part of ISAF, the role of the UK forces is changing – from one of combat to one of ongoing support and guidance to their Afghan partners. By 2014 the ANSF will be in the lead for all security operations across Afghanistan and UK forces will have moved from a combat role to one of support.

“I pay tribute to UK forces who have spent five years training, partnering and mentoring their Afghan colleagues in Lashkar Gah. They have achieved great things and their resolve, determination and professionalism in taking the fight to the Taliban and developing the Afghan forces has undoubtedly made the UK a safer place.”

Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said:

“The UK and our ISAF partners remain committed to helping the Afghan Government ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes an operating base for international terrorism.

“Although UK forces will no longer be in a combat role in Afghanistan by 2015, we will continue to provide military and development assistance. We are preparing a strong, long term partnership with Afghanistan based on diplomacy, trade and development that will continue beyond the end of transition.”

Secretary of State for International Development Andrew Mitchell, said:

"Improved security over the last few years in Lashkar Gah means greater freedom for Helmandis to go about their daily lives, with hugely improved life opportunities compared to those they would have had under the Taliban. Since 2003, the economy has been growing at an average of 9% per year, and now more than 5.7m children - a third of whom are girls - attend school regularly.

"Both the UK military and their civilian counterparts have worked tirelessly alongside Governor Mangal in making Lashkar Gah a more stable place.

“British military forces will continue to train, partner and mentor Afghan Forces, while civilian development assistance will also continue to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan Government in Helmand and build upon the solid foundation that has already been laid.”

<http://www.defenceiq.com/army-and-land-forces/articles/british-hand-over-helmand-capital-to-afghan-forces/>

Open Letter from Governor Gulab Mangal

http://www.williamaldrigefoundation.org.uk/images/fbfiles/images/Governor_Mangal_Transition_in_Afghanistan_Press_Release_20.jpg

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