



Our soldiers went to do the bidding of our Government, and did their job with courage, writes Robin Ashby, Director General of the U K Defence Forum..

Thousands came back with life changing physical or mental injuries. We thank them for their service and sacrifice. But we owe them a debt which goes beyond a thank you and a disability pension

Rereading the obituaries published here in Defence Viewpoints as much as 10 years ago is still heart rending.

Newcastle born Sapper Adam Moralee of the Royal Engineers – Mozza or Massive to his mates – died on 5th March 2014 in Helmand. At the time they said that his love for Newcastle United was only rivalled by his love for his fiancée Emma and parents Lynn and David.

Lisa McKinlay said of her husband JJ of The Rifles : He was a true friend to others and a loving husband – a real joker – and my one in a million.

The commanding officer of Lance Corporal Kyle Marshall, of 2 Para, who attended Churchill Community College said "He was a charismatic, upbeat Geordie, ice cool under fire and a natural leader always. He was ever optimistic, even in the bleakest of circumstances. He is irreplaceable."

Corporal Steve Dunn, who attended St Joseph's School Hebburn, was a loving husband to Cheryl, son to Vicky and doting dad to Emily. His commanders and comrades said : "Cpl Dunn epitomised all that is best in our soldiers and all that is best about Newcastle and the North East. At every turn he strove to improve the lot of his men. He tackled his work with a sense of purpose and in pursuit of making a difference."

It was his third tour of Afghanistan.

Did all this loss and the tears make a difference?

With half the population of Afghanistan under the age of 18, who have only known the freedoms and opportunities our presence brought, we must hope against hope that it did.

Religion enforced with the swish of a cane or the threat of a gun, rather than freedom of conscience, is disguised tyranny. Half the population of the country have been banished from the streets and consigned to the role of baby factory. A female reporter, now in hiding, said "There is no space left at all for working women in Afghanistan."

The music is dying. Singer Fawad Andarabi has been dragged from his home in Kandahar and shot in the head.

The motion states that need not numbers should govern our Government's policies. It a matter of some small satisfaction that over 15,000 civilians have been flown out of Kabul by the RAF. 2200 of them are children, including one who was only one day old.

Many of them are from the group to whom we owe the biggest debt of honour – interpreters who were side by side with our troops as they sought to make a difference by engaging with ordinary Afghans.

From reports, they have been cast adrift. This is dishonourable conduct by Her Majesty's Government.

And a very large number of others have been left behind too, including British passport holders or their dependants.

British citizens London shopkeeper Musa Popal, his 14 year old grandson and Farnborough taxi driver Mohammed Niazi, were killed by the Daesh suicide murderers at Kabul airport. Despite the good job done by our forces, amongst the questions the Foreign Secretary must answer is "Why were these British passport holders not given priority safe passage onto the airport, and what is the Government going to do to help their dependants still in Afghanistan to safety?" There are already Afghans in camps in countries surrounding Afghanistan. There will be more. We must help them.

There is a precedent. Not every Afghani will want to leave their part of the world, just as Syrians fleeing Assads's regime don't want to. The UK has spent £3.6 billion in the Middle East over the last 10 years, including £820 million in Lebanon, where around a quarter of the population are refugees. We've spent over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a billion in Jordan on humanitarian aid, supporting job creation and helping the country build longer term stability. Refugees making a new life in the region are less likely to try coming across the Channel in a rubber boat in despair.

The Government must promptly reverse the cuts in foreign aid, and in particular help Pakistan, to where well over a million people in this country trace their roots. Farsi speakers will be flocking to Iran in the hope of safety. At 31st March this year over 3000 Afghans whose land of origin has lurched back two decades in a few days were waiting for a decision on their applications for settlement here. That bureaucracy must be expedited too