

The following quotations from Hansard show what the former Secretary of State for Defence John Reid promised, pledged, expected or hoped about the arrival of UK troops in Helmand province/ Afghanistan and in particular that the mission would be completed easily, speedily or entirely peacefully.

Hansard 13th July 2009 Columns 3-4

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes) (Con):on what basis was it said on behalf of the Government before we deployed that it was hoped that

not a shot would be fired?.....

Mr. Ainsworth: It never was said that there was hope of not a shot being fired. What was said.....by the then Secretary of State was that we would be happy if not a shot were fired....., but he would not have been putting 16 Air Assault Brigade into a theatre of war if he thought that there would not be a little bit of trouble in the area.

John Reid :.. May I confirm what the Defence Secretary has just said? May I tell ..Mr. Ancram that.. he has just misled the House? I never at any stage expressed the hope, expectation, promise or pledge that we would leave Afghanistan without firing a shot.

I did, however, insist that we would not be aggressors. We did not seek war. We did not go there as part of an invasion. For our part, we would be happy to go and work with the Afghan Government and leave without firing a shot. It was clearly in that sense that it was said, and I would be extremely obliged if that could be confirmed again from the Front Bench, and that Opposition Members would stop the misrepresentation of what was said when we went in.

Mr. Ainsworth: That is my memory of what I heard at

the time.....that is what I recall my right hon. Friend saying at the time.

What was said in 2005-2006 (in reverse datal order)

27 Mar 2006 : Column 529

The Secretary of State for Defence John Reid:..... I fully accept that it is more dangerous in the south than anywhere else where we have been present hitherto, but whatever the dangers, they are less than the danger of the Taliban and the terrorists taking over Afghanistan again, which would be a danger to not only our forces but the people of that country.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes) (Con):..... Why is there such hesitation about the

announcement of the deployment of additional troops to Afghanistan, which only yesterday the Chief of the General Staff conceded would be necessary? Surely, the military implications of expanding ISAF into south Afghanistan are already well known? Is the delay not the result of failure to reach agreement with other participants on operational issues, not least as to whether the task is to be expanded into counter-insurgency, and is there not damaging confusion about the rules of engagement under which they will operate? Surely, the Secretary of State can be a little more forthcoming.

John Reid: .. the delay was caused not by the two elements mentioned by the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but by my desire to be assured that our international and multinational colleagues will provide the necessary elements of force configuration not only in Helmand, but around Helmand. In other words, I hope that he agrees that I am right not to announce the deployment until I am satisfied by not only our configuration, but the supporting elements of military forces in the area

27 Mar 2006 : Column 538

David Wright: Further to the Secretary of State's earlier reply about British forces in Afghanistan undertaking predominantly a policing role.....

John Reid: I would not accept the description of a policing role, although my hon. Friend is correct in that I did make the point that we are not in Afghanistan primarily to wage war or to search for and destroy terrorists. Rather, we are there to act as a protective military force, protecting not only ourselves but the Afghan Government and those working with them to build their economy, their democracy and their security.

27 Mar 2006 : Column 539

There are two elements to our force protection. The first is our force configuration—including air mobile components and Apache helicopters deployed for the first time in action—which was specified by our chiefs as the necessary one to defend our forces. Secondly, we are of course not going into the south of Afghanistan alone: to the east of us will be about 2,500 Canadian troops; and to the north in Oruzgan province there will be 1,400 Dutch troops, several hundred Australians, and Estonians and troops from the Afghan national army. There are around 9,000 troops there, and although I do not for one moment belittle the difficulties and dangers of deployment to the south, I am satisfied that, subject always to preliminary operations of our forces on the ground and what they discover, we have the configuration necessary to protect our troops.

27 Feb 2006 : Column 2

Anne Milton: Is the Secretary of State satisfied that there are enough troops in Afghanistan, bearing in mind the lessons from Iraq that ground troops are essential in order to complete missions adequately?

John Reid: Yes, I am satisfied. The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that the Chiefs of

Defence Staff fully endorse the force package we are sending. One of the three or four criteria that I laid down before the move south was that the military configuration I do not hide from my hon. Friend the fact that it is more dangerous and difficult than the first two stages,

27 Feb 2006 : Column 5

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring) Unless a full programme is in place to compensate Afghan farmers, we might find that the war against opium makes the war against terror more difficult by creating a resurgent Taliban. Exactly what steps will be taken to provide alternative income to Afghan farmers and in what time scale, so that the risks to our troops are minimised?

John Reid:I agree with the hon. GentlemanThe Department for International Development will put some £20 million into Helmand, and the American moneys allocated to that area, which amount to some \$100 million, will continue for at least 18 months. Every effort will be made to ensure that any intervention to cut off income is supplemented by alternative income in the first instance and, eventually, by alternative livelihoods; otherwise, as the hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out, we will create not stability, but further insurgency.

26 Jan 2006 : Column 1530

John Reid ...Southern Afghanistan is undeniably a more demanding area in which to operate than either the north or the west. The Taliban remains active. The authority of the Afghan Government—and the reach of their security forces—is still weak. The influence of the drugs traffickers, by contrast, is strong.

26th Jan 2006 ; Column 1530

John Reid ...ISAF must be prepared to meet these challenges. It means different forces and it may mean different tactics—not because we want to wage war: that is not our aim..... But just as the threat is greater, so must be our ability and willingness to deter and defend ourselves against attack.

26 Jan 2006 : Column 1532

John Reid ...The size and structure of the task force has been guided by a careful assessment of the likely tasks and threats that it will face.

Attack helicopters are certainly formidable, but they are also necessary. The roads in Helmand are very poor, and that means that support helicopters are essential. They in turn need attack helicopters to protect them and the forces that they deploy.....

26 Jan 2006 : Column 1533

John Reid ..The House will be concerned about the risks and dangers of the deployment. Whatever the difficulties and dangers— and I do not hide them from the House or the country—those risks are nothing compared to the dangers to our country and our people of

allowing Afghanistan to fall back into the hands of the Taliban and international terrorism.....

26th Jan 2006; Column 1533

John Reid . I am the first to accept that there is a long, long way to go. Extending ISAF into stage 3 in the south is a small but hugely significant step on the journey.

26 Jan 2006 : Column 1536

.....if we are attacked while pursuing our reconstruction objectiveswe will respond robustly.

26 Jan 2006 : Column 1537

I do not envisage that building a modern Afghanistan.....will be an easy or a short process. It will not be done during the three years in which we are there.....

25 Jan 2006 : Column 1434

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Reid):

Let me tell the House why I have refused at this stage to make an announcement about deployment. As I continually said to the House under questioning more than four months ago, I will not announce the detailed deployment to the south, although the principle of deploying to the south has already been announced, until I am absolutely satisfied about three things. The first is that the British military configuration is sufficient to meet the task in hand in the opinion of my commanders who advise me. The second is that the economic development aid and moneys are sufficient to offer alternative livelihoods and development if we are to tackle narcotics. The third is that we have a NATO configuration of military troops around us that satisfies me. As I pointed out to the House on Monday, I am satisfied on the first and I am satisfied on the second, but I am not yet satisfied on the third.

23 Jan 2006 : Column 1159

Michael Moore. The Secretary of State said last month that there was not a complete distinction between counter-terrorist and counter-narcotics activities. How will those different demands be reconciled?

John Reid: They will be reconciled through two separate missions: "seek and destroy" against terrorists; and building and reconstructing Afghanistan's democracy, governance, economic development and security forces. However, only someone who is dreadfully naive would think that we will be allowed to carry out the second of those tasks—the NATO task, in which we will be involved when we go to the south—unhindered by any attacks. if our troops are attacked while reconstructing Afghanistan, or helping and protecting the aid workers, or helping President Karzai's Government to extend, we will robustly defend ourselves.We are still there for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, but we will defend ourselves if attacked.

23 Jan 2006 : Column 1158

Mr. Pelling: If more of our troops are deployed, what assessment has been made of the risks that they will face as a result of the separate command structures for ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom? What work has been done to mitigate the identified risks?

John Reid: A great deal of work has been done, and... more will be done. We have agreed to begin phase 3 in principle, but I have said that we will not begin it until I am convinced that we have the correct British configuration and adequate complementary economic development aid money.

23 Jan 2006 : Column 1160

John Reid: nor do I suggest for one minute that we are embarked on a project in Afghanistan that will be without its difficulties, or that will be finished, for the Afghans, within five or 10 years.

23 Jan 2006 Column 1160

John Reid: I would not pretend that Afghanistan is more benign in the south than in the north.....the area is a difficult one to go into,

23 Jan 2006 : Column 1161

John Reid ...That does not mean to say that those who are there are not dangerous. A relatively small number of terrorists, particularly those unconstrained by any convention of morality or legality and prepared to murder civilians and to make no distinction between civilians and combatants, can be very strong. I do not believe, however, that we are putting in, or considering putting in, a force of insufficient configuration of size.

12 Dec 2005 : Column 1092

John Reid: In principle, I am prepared to see a significant contribution from British troops to the south of Afghanistan as NATO expands from the north, the west and to the south. I also said that that last decision, in principle, had to be subject to the correct military configuration from the British point of view, the correct multinational dimension and configuration within NATO and the correct complementary assistance in aid and development resources in terms of our counter-narcotics strategy to offer alternative livelihoods. All of those issues stand and no final decision has been made on the second point regarding British troops.

12 Dec 2005 : Column 1094

John ReidI can confirm that we continue to hold discussions with the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and with NATO. I have spoken to Bill Graham, Robert Hill and Henk Kamp, my opposite numbers in Canada, Australia and the Netherlands about the possibility of going into the south and the configuration that we will use. However, as I have said, we have not

achieved a final configuration that satisfies me that the configuration that Britain is prepared to provide is suitably encompassed within a NATO configuration. When we reach that stage I will, of course, make an announcement on deployment to the House. I would merely say that the delay in that final decision has not caused any risk of lack of preparation or training for our troops, because my right hon. Friend the armed forces Minister announced some weeks ago that training and preparations would go ahead on a contingency basis.

12 Dec 2005 : Column 1093

John Reid: Our contribution to the ISAF operation will essentially be the reconstruction remit, which is the responsibility of NATO, rather than counter-terrorism, which is the purpose of the American mission—Operation Enduring Freedom. However, I stress that wherever NATO troops are in Afghanistan they may be liable to attacks from insurgents. If they are attacked by insurgents and terrorists, of course we will defend ourselves — that is the nature of the rules of engagement and of our remit. There is not a complete distinction between counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics.....The distinction is therefore not a neat one, ...

14 Nov 2005 : Column 679

4. Mr. David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): If he will make a statement on the security situation in Afghanistan. [27267]

14 Nov 2005 : Column 682

John Reid. I will not announce the deployment to Helmand until I am satisfied that we have the military configuration that we ourselves need, and until we have the necessary back-up and resources across government here to provide alternative livelihoods to farmers whose current livelihood may be dependent on narcotics. To take away one form of income without substituting another would encourage insurgency rather than stability. Finally, I will not make that announcement until I believe that the multinational jigsaw has been put together and we have the necessary input from our NATO colleagues both in and around Helmand.