

The Prime Minister Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP said today that our mission in Afghanistan is vital to Britain's national security. It is a campaign of necessity, not of choice. Our security services are clear that the majority of terrorist plots against Britain in recent times have had their roots in the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Either we fight extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan - or we wait for them to carry out more terrorist attacks.

And dealing with them there is not an alternative to strong defence against terrorism at home; it is complementary. As the Chief of the Defence Staff said, you can't just defend on your own goal line.

It has been a hard summer. Our troops have done a fantastic job but taken a lot of casualties. But the strategy we set out in the spring is the right one. The challenge is to deliver it.

* Afghanistanisation - training up of Afghan security forces and Afghan local government, getting them to take a lead role - is the right approach. The reason why British forces are in Afghanistan alongside over 40 other countries is because the Afghan Army isn't yet ready to do this. So we are talking to Allies about a plan for handing over responsibility province by province, district by district. In fact, in Kabul, lead responsibility has already been handed over. It is only when Afghan troops and police can secure Afghanistan for themselves that we will have succeeded and our troops will be able to come home.

* Our strategy includes combining military pressure with encouraging and supporting the new Afghan government to take a more inclusive political approach - including reaching out to those elements of the insurgency who are prepared to renounce violence.

* Our strategy also includes support for the Pakistani forces as they take on the terrorists and the Pakistani Taleban - and we should not forget the progress they have made - in Swat and Buner, and now taking the fight to the extremists with a 30,000-soldier offensive in Waziristan.

Britain is the second largest troop contributor in Afghanistan. The PM has agreed, in line with military advice, to increase the number of UK troops in Afghanistan to 9,500. But the PM has also been clear that this uplift comes with conditions that must be met. These conditions are that:

* he has the assurance of the military chain of command that every soldier and unit deployed to Afghanistan will continue to be fully equipped for the operations

they are asked to undertake;

- * the British commitment is part of an agreed approach across the coalition with all 42 countries sharing the burden; and
- * the new Afghan Government steps up to its challenges - including dealing with corruption and committing more troops to be trained and to fight alongside our forces.

We are confident these conditions will be met soon. But to deploy extra troops without certainty about equipment would be a dereliction of duty. And to deploy them without more clarity about the wider international approach and the good faith of the new Afghan Government would not make sense, as the US and other countries are now also making clear. We are confident that the rest of NATO will also commit more forces - and we should remember that, besides the UK and America, other international forces in Afghanistan have actually doubled (13,000 to 26,000) since 2006.

We are also doing everything we can to strengthen our efforts against the deadly threat of IEDs. There is no single answer, it is about more equipment, specialist troops, better intelligence and more offensive operations against the Taleban bomb making teams - and we are making progress in all these areas.

The PM has set out five tests for President Karzai's contract with the Afghan people for his second term:

- * security and the Afghanisation of the security effort;
- * governance and the fight against corruption;
- * reintegration and reconciliation in an inclusive political settlement;
- * economic development, so that every Afghan has a stake in the future;
- * relations with Afghanistan's neighbours. We need Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together: the insurgency straddles their border, so must the solution.