



Defence Committee

Chairman, Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP

Committee Office, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

020 7219 6872 defcom@parliament.uk www.parliament.uk/defcom

Rt Hon David Lidington CBE MP

Minister for the Cabinet Office

70 Whitehall

London

SW1A 2AS

17th
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Dear David,

Official History of the UK Intervention in Afghanistan

For a number of years the Defence Committee has been concerned at the lack of any indication that an Official Historian will be appointed to undertake a definitive examination of this crucial campaign. Our predecessors first recommended such an appointment in 2013 and were fobbed off with the claim that insufficient time had elapsed since the events concerned. We believe that this line of argument—if it ever had validity—has none now.

It is absolutely essential that both the public and future decision-makers should benefit from an understanding of how and why this country embarked on the Afghan campaign, and especially what happened in the run-up to the British move into Helmand province early in 2006. It is already over 12 years since that fateful change of course which transformed our involvement from one in which a very small number of casualties had been incurred to one in which hundreds died and thousands were injured.

We believe that if an Official Historian were appointed now it would be possible to publish the first volume of a two volume History (covering the period up to the point of the Helmand deployment: the conduct of the operation in Helmand being a natural second volume) by 2027—and that is assuming that we would want to await the full 20 year period before official documents are released. It is worth remembering, however, that most of the volumes of the Official History of the Second World War were published long before the release of the documents on which they were based, albeit without specific footnote references.

We simply do not accept that there is any good reason for failing to establish the objective facts of what happened this long after the events concerned. There is a long and honourable tradition of holding inquiries into military campaigns which did not go to plan—the Dardanelles being a case in point. However, the experience of the Chilcot Inquiry has understandably discouraged this sort of approach, with its delays and expense.

By contrast the Official History of the Afghanistan campaign will undoubtedly happen at some point and—in our view—ought to happen soon, so that those who were involved, and especially those who lost loved ones, can be told the truth and can at least feel that it may help current and future politicians make wiser decisions.

We hope that common sense and decency will prevail, so that it is not necessary for the Committee to embark on one of our persistent and repetitive campaigns to achieve a sensible outcome; but, if that is what it takes, so be it.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister and to the Defence Secretary.

Yours ever,
Julian