



House of Commons
Defence Committee

Afghanistan—Camp Bastion Attack

Thirteenth Report of Session 2013–14

Report, together with formal minutes

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 26 March 2014*

HC 830
Published on 16 April 2014
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£6.50

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The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume. Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

Committee staff

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Conclusions and recommendations

Background

1. We pay tribute to the bravery of all those ISAF personnel who engaged the enemy during the attack on Camp Bastion that night. We express our deepest sympathy to the families of Lieutenant Colonel Raible and Sergeant Atwell for their profound loss. (Paragraph 3)

The burning man incident

2. At the time of the attack the Memorandum of Understanding between USCENTCOM and PJHQ had not been revised, despite the fact that all parties appeared to agree on the necessity to make revisions in the aftermath of the “burning man incident”. Witnesses were neither able to explain to us which members of the Executive Steering Group rejected the revised draft MOU nor what the reasons for the rejection were. The delays to the process of revision allowed weaknesses in command and control arrangements for force protection to persist. It is an enduring characteristic of conflict that the enemy fights back. ISAF personnel were exposed to unnecessary risk. In response to our report the MoD must explain why the failure to revise the MOU prior to the September 2012 attack should not be regarded as an act of omission. (Paragraph 24)

Security incidents recorded in Helmand Province

3. The inference we drew from the Chief of Joint Operation’s evidence was that the number of security incidents was unusually high in Helmand Province in 2012. Unfortunately the MoD declined to provide us with comparable details of the level of security incidents recorded in Helmand for previous years as this information was classified. This would have allowed us to make an informed assessment of the relative threat levels in the area at the time. (Paragraph 26)

Camp Bastion Guard towers

4. The arrangements for manning of the guard towers around the perimeter of Camp Bastion were exposed by the attack as inadequate. The decision not to man Tower 16 on the night of 14–15 September 2014 contributed directly to the failure to detect the insurgents at an early stage which might have limited the impact of their assault. We note that all guard towers are now manned constantly. (Paragraph 33)

Perimeter security

5. We were concerned to learn of the number of breaches of the perimeter fence of Camp Bastion in the two years prior to the attack and the apparent tolerance of poppy cultivation immediately outside the fence. We consider that the failure to take concerted action to prevent these activities increased the risk of surveillance and

intelligence gathering by Afghan nationals which could have assisted insurgent planning for an attack on the base. (Paragraph 38)

Force protection projects and expenditure

6. Media reports suggested that prior to the September 2012 attack additional security measures at Camp Bastion were denied funding by the MoD on cost grounds. We have seen no evidence that proposals for improved force protection measures were turned down by the UK chain of command. (Paragraph 45)
7. The “burning man” incident in March 2012 prompted a review of security measures around the perimeter of the Bastion airfield. We consider that the decision by the Executive Steering Group to create a ditch and berm defensive obstacle rather than erect additional fencing was a proportionate response to the threat of an insider attack through vehicular incursion onto the airfield from within the base. It is unlikely that additional fencing around the airfield perimeter would have presented a significant impediment to the insurgents on 14-15 September 2012 and altered significantly the outcome of the attack. (Paragraph 46)

Conclusion

8. The MoD were wrong to refuse to share the report on the attack prepared by Lieutenant General Bradshaw, in his capacity as Deputy Commander ISAF. As this was the highest level UK report into the attack, its status as an ISAF document should not have prevented its release to us. The MoD has been obstructive and unhelpful to us as we tried to establish the facts surrounding the attack. (Paragraph 48)
9. We are concerned that the perimeter security and force protection measures in place at the time of the attack were inadequate. We were told that the focus of ISAF commanders had been on security incidents elsewhere in Helmand Province and on threats from insider attack. Insufficient attention was given to the fundamental requirement of defending Camp Bastion from external assault. We believe that this was complacent. Given that the attack took place in the British sector of the camp, British commanders must bear a degree of responsibility for these systemic failures and associated reputational damage. (Paragraph 49)
10. We note the acknowledgement by the MoD that errors were made which, collectively, created the vulnerabilities which were so devastatingly exploited by the enemy. From the evidence we have received, we are satisfied that as far as possible, these vulnerabilities have now been addressed. (Paragraph 50)
11. We recommend that the MoD capture the lessons identified from this extraordinary attack as part of its wider efforts to learn lessons from Afghanistan for future operations. It should explain how it intends to do so in its response to our report. (Paragraph 51)

1 Introduction

Background

1. On 14 September 2012, at around 2200 local time, 15 heavily-armed Taliban insurgents dressed in US Army uniforms cut the perimeter wire on the eastern perimeter of Camp Bastion, Afghanistan and commenced a coordinated attack on the Camp Bastion airfield. The ensuing engagement with ISAF forces which lasted into the early hours of 15 September resulted in the deaths of US Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Raible and Sergeant Bradley Atwell, the wounding of eight other US personnel, eight UK personnel and one civilian contractor, the destruction of six US Harrier jets, and significant damage to several other aircraft, vehicles and the infrastructure of the base.

2. Quick Reaction Forces, supported by other US and UK personnel and helicopters, killed 14 of the Taliban attackers and wounded the remaining attacker, who was detained and interrogated.

3. We pay tribute to the bravery of all those ISAF personnel who engaged the enemy during the attack on Camp Bastion that night. We express our deepest sympathy to the families of Lieutenant Colonel Raible and Sergeant Atwell for their profound loss.

US accountability review

4. On 30 September 2013, General James Amos, US Marine Corps commandant, announced that following a review of the attack, focused on determining accountability, he had asked for the retirement of Major General Charles "Mark" Gurganus, who was commander of Regional Command Southwest (RC(SW)) in Afghanistan, and Major General Gregg Sturdevant, who was commander of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD) at the time of the attack.¹

5. A redacted version of the US Department of the Army report ("the US report") of the investigation into the attack was published on the internet in October 2013 along with a series of associated exhibits and enclosures.²

Our inquiry

6. We launched an inquiry to examine the events surrounding the insurgent attack on Camp Bastion of 14-15 September 2012 and the subsequent response from the UK and ISAF. Our purpose was to establish the authority, responsibility and accountability within the UK chain of command for security and force protection at Camp Bastion at the time of the attack.

¹ "Two generals asked to retire in wake of Bastion attack", USA Today, 30 September 2013

² US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

7. We held an oral evidence session on 17 December 2013 in which we took evidence from the Chief of Joint Operations and senior officials from the Ministry of Defence. Following the public evidence session, the meeting continued in private in order to examine details of the attack which could not be discussed in public for security reasons. A redacted transcript of this private evidence session has been published and is referred to in this report.

8. Following the evidence session, the MoD released a redacted copy of the Operational Learning Account and After Action Report (OLAAAR) produced within 48 hours of the attack.³ We asked the Secretary of State for Defence for access to a copy of the subsequent Administrative Review conducted by Lieutenant General Bradshaw, then Deputy Commander ISAF, but this was refused on the grounds that it was owned by ISAF.

9. Members of the Committee were able to view the location of the attack during a visit to Camp Bastion in October 2013. Members visited guard towers close to the point where the perimeter fence was breached and spoke to RAF Regiment personnel. This gave us a better understanding of the topography between the perimeter and the airfield and the extent of the security measures now in place.

³ Ministry of Defence, *Operational Learning Account and After Action Report (redacted version)*, 16 September 2012

2 Accountability review

US Department of the Army report (redacted), 19 August 2013

11. Prepared by Lieutenant General William B. Garrett III, U.S. Army, Investigating Officer, and Major General Thomas M. Murray, U.S. Marine Corp, Deputy Investigating Officer, the report set out the circumstances surrounding the attack on Camps Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak, collectively referred to as the BLS Complex⁴, in Afghanistan, that occurred on 14-15 September 2012. The investigating officers were also asked to report any fault, negligence, or failure of responsibility.

12. The scope of the investigation was “to determine the accountability of US commanders and staff at all levels for the planning and execution of force protection in relation to the attack”. The scope of the investigation did not include a directive to assess any potential responsibility of other coalition forces and so it did not include findings regarding the effectiveness or efficiency of UK forces.⁵

13. The review found that Major General Gurganus and Major General Sturdevant were responsible for force protection in the BLS Complex and accountable for the failure to take adequate measures to mitigate the vulnerabilities which the attack exposed. The review also found that the underlying causal factor for the attack was the failure of Major General Gurganus and Major General Sturdevant “to adequately ensure that an integrated, layered, defense-in-depth was in place to protect US personnel and equipment on the Camp Bastion airfield”.⁶ Three contributing factors were cited in the report:

- Underestimation of the enemy;
- A lack of overall unity of command and effort for anti-terrorism/force protection on the BLS Complex; and
- A failure to provide adequate command direction and oversight.

UK accountability

14. In oral evidence, Lieutenant General Capewell, Chief of Joint Operations, acknowledged that errors had been made by UK personnel but that “they were not culpable errors”. He pointed out that the US investigation had determined that the two US Generals, as general officers in command of RC (SW), were culpable:

Fundamentally, at the end of the day, that is why those general officers were found to be accountable, because the causal errors evident in the aftermath contributed to that

⁴ In the UK, the BLS complex is commonly referred to as Camp Bastion but is in fact a complex of camps accommodating UK (Bastion), US (Leatherneck), Afghan (Shorabak) and other coalition personnel and contractors.

⁵ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

⁶ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

vulnerability. That vulnerability cannot be put down to a single item that failed. The single item that failed may or may not have had a British officer or serviceman in the chain of command, but fundamentally they could not make judgments about the whole picture. It is the business of general officers commanding in-theatre to make that judgment. That was why the US determined the outcome that they did.⁷

Memorandum of Understanding between USCENTCOM and PJHQ

15. According to the redacted US report, a January 2011 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between US Central Command (USCENTCOM) and the UK Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), titled “The Command and Support Arrangements for UK/US Forces Based at Bastion/Leatherneck Combined Operating Base Afghanistan” established the anti terror/force protection command and control arrangements for the BLS Complex. This MOU has not been published.

16. The US report stated that the 2011 MOU established that the separate camps would “run on national lines,” and several personnel interviewed by the Investigating team described the two camps as separate “sovereign” territory. The 2011 MOU established the separate camps, in addition to the Bastion airfield, which was a UK-US shared airfield located on Camp Bastion and operated by the UK 903 Expeditionary Air Wing, as the Airfield Operating Authority. The 2011 MOU further specified that the US would protect Camp Leatherneck and conduct security operations in Area of Operation Belleau Wood (AOBW), which included the area surrounding the BLS Complex.

17. The MOU also specified that the UK was responsible for protection of Camp Bastion, including the airfield, and for security patrols in AOBW. The MOU stated that US and UK force protection standards would be in accordance with national command element requirements, but it did not specify those standards. This arrangement “effectively created two different camps with two different protection standards”.⁸

18. In the wake of the attack Lt Gen Bradshaw, the Deputy Commander ISAF, is reported to have characterised the USCENTCOM-PJHQ MOU as a “sub-optimal C2 (command and control) solution”.⁹

The burning man incident

19. On 14 March 2012, Major General Gurganus and other members of the RC(SW) staff were waiting on the airfield for the arrival of US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta when a local national interpreter working for coalition forces commandeered a vehicle and drove it onto the airfield. He narrowly missed Major General Gurganus and his party before being

⁷ Q44

⁸ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

⁹ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

pursued into a ditch. The individual then set himself on fire, dying of his wounds that evening. This became known as the “burning man incident”.¹⁰

20. A revised draft MOU, which, if agreed, would have unified command by providing one commander for the base and for the security forces, was drafted following this incident, but the BLS Executive Steering Group (ESG) did not agree to it. The ESG was a combined US-UK board designed to integrate actions affecting both Camp Bastion and Camp Leatherneck. Following the ESG’s decision, the command and control issue was escalated to ISAF Joint Command (IJC) and ISAF. The US report stated that the proposals met with “friction” from the IJC and ISAF staffs, and that neither were supportive of combining the two camps, instead directing Commander RC(SW) to work on a supported/supporting command relationship.¹¹

21. In oral evidence, Lieutenant General Capewell told us that the MOU in force at the time of the attack was the one which had been agreed in 2011. He described it as “very adequate” but subject to “dynamic review” as circumstances changed and the size of Camp Bastion grew over time. Rather than having been rejected by the ESG, Lieutenant General Capewell considered that a revised MOU had been “under development”.¹²

22. Paul Rimmer, Chief of Staff (Policy and Finance), Permanent Joint Headquarters, Ministry of Defence, tried to provide an explanation of the process:

My understanding at the time was that there was the MOU, which was signed in 2011. After the March 2012 incident, that shone some light on some of the command and control arrangements within the broader complex. The Americans raised some concerns about how that was reflected in the MOU, and that was discussed by the Executive Steering Group, but I am not familiar with all the detail and the argumentation at the time. The Americans then raised that up to ISAF Joint Command (IJC), but it got pushed back. My recollection from the review is that it didn’t go any further at the time, and that was one of the points that the American accountability review raised. Having touched on an issue with the MOU, the Americans did not pursue it as far as they might have done. What we can say subsequent to the [September 2012] attack is that that MOU was annulled and the issues that it covers have each been dealt with.¹³

23. We were not satisfied by the responses we received and asked further questions about the MOU following the evidence session. In its response, the MoD told us that the principal differences between the 2011 MOU and the revised MOU now in force related to command relationships and organisation which had been streamlined under Commander Regional Command (South West). Specifically, the Bastion-Leatherneck-Shorabak

¹⁰ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

¹¹ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

¹² Qq16-24

¹³ Q25

complex now operates under the command of the US Marine Corps Commander of RC(SW).¹⁴

24. At the time of the attack the Memorandum of Understanding between USCENTCOM and PJHQ had not been revised, despite the fact that all parties appeared to agree on the necessity to make revisions in the aftermath of the “burning man incident”. Witnesses were neither able to explain to us which members of the Executive Steering Group rejected the revised draft MOU nor what the reasons for the rejection were. The delays to the process of revision allowed weaknesses in command and control arrangements for force protection to persist. It is an enduring characteristic of conflict that the enemy fights back. ISAF personnel were exposed to unnecessary risk. In response to our report the MoD must explain why the failure to revise the MOU prior to the September 2012 attack should not be regarded as an act of omission.

Security incidents recorded in Helmand Province

25. Lieutenant General Capewell told us that in 2012, prior to the attack on Camp Bastion, the focus of attention for ISAF commanders in terms of security incidents had been elsewhere in Helmand province:

The activity on the ground at the time in the Helmand area, the Sangin valley and in the vicinity of the ISAF footprint in and around northern and southern Helmand was a very high incident rate. Commanders’ minds were focused on that.¹⁵

26. The inference we drew from the Chief of Joint Operation’s evidence was that the number of security incidents was unusually high in Helmand Province in 2012. Unfortunately the MoD declined to provide us with comparable details of the level of security incidents recorded in Helmand for previous years as this information was classified. This would have allowed us to make an informed assessment of the relative threat levels in the area at the time.

Security and force protection operations in Camp Bastion

27. According to the US report, security and force protection for Camp Bastion and the airfield was the responsibility of UK Number 5 RAF Force Protection Wing (5 FP Wing), who reported directly to Commander Bastion. It comprised members of: the Wing Headquarters, 51st Squadron, RAF Regiment; 2622 (Highland) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment; RAF No 2 (Tactical) Police Squadron; the Tonga Defence Services; and elements of the 16th Regiment Royal Artillery. The 5 FP Wing provided counter-threat activity, airfield security, and air transport security for Camp Bastion.

28. Asked to clarify who was in overall charge of security and force protection for Camp Bastion and the airfield at the time of the attack, the MoD told us:

¹⁴ Ministry of Defence (ACB0001)

¹⁵ Q2

In accordance with the then extant MOU (dated January 2011), Commander Leatherneck was designated as the Battlespace owner of Area of Operations Belleau Wood and a Security Force Commander (US Marine Corps officer) was responsible for executing security operations in Area of Operations Belleau Wood, within which Camp Bastion is located. The Bastion Force Protection Commander (a UK officer) was responsible for providing perimeter and on base Force Protection of Bastion, including Bastion Airfield. The Bastion Force Protection Commander worked for Commander Bastion who was in turn the Commanding Officer 903 Expeditionary Air Wing.¹⁶

29. In oral evidence, Lieutenant General Capewell told us that since the attack in September 2012, there had been significant enhancements to force protection at the BLS complex in terms of manpower, obstacles, defences and military capabilities, including the deployment of additional personnel, improved command and control arrangements and enhanced base surveillance measures.¹⁷

30. In a subsequent submission, the MoD explained that additional manpower had been provided in 2009 to “mitigate the increased threat against air operations and increased steadily from approx 110 personnel in 2009 to 293 personnel by September 2012”.¹⁸

Camp Bastion Guard towers

31. Eleven of the twenty-four guard towers on Camp Bastion were manned at the time of the attack. The UK 5 FP Wing did not employ a dedicated security force on the Camp Bastion perimeter. Instead, they relied upon a “camp tax” (tasking to provide guards) from various UK tenant units at the BLS Complex to augment the Tonga Defence Services in the perimeter guard towers. It was also typical on Camp Leatherneck to man approximately 50 percent of the existing towers.¹⁹

32. On the night of the attack Tower 16, in closest proximity to the point of incursion, was not manned. Tower 15 did not have direct line of sight to the route taken by the insurgents or the breach point due to high ground in between. Tower 17 was 250 metres from the breach site and it was very dark with just two percent illumination on the night. The US report stated:

it would have been difficult to observe an approaching attacker who was attempting to conceal his movement, even on a night with better illumination, and even if the guard was constantly scanning back and forth with a night vision device. The attackers’ movement was partially obscured by the route through a shallow wadi, and if the guards would have oriented their observation primarily east (forward from the

¹⁶ Ministry of Defence (ACB0001)

¹⁷ Q1

¹⁸ Ministry of Defence (ACB0001)

¹⁹ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

tower), the breach point, although definitely visible, would have been to the right side of their vantage point in an area of low ground.²⁰

33. The arrangements for manning of the guard towers around the perimeter of Camp Bastion were exposed by the attack as inadequate. The decision not to man Tower 16 on the night of 14–15 September 2012 contributed directly to the failure to detect the insurgents at an early stage which might have limited the impact of their assault. We note that all guard towers are now manned constantly.

Perimeter security

34. According to the redacted US report, the RC(SW) command knew of external fence breaches before the 14-15 September 2012 attack, including a breach of the perimeter fence in the Camp Leatherneck sector near Tower 40 or 41 that occurred in late June 2012 and three breaches that occurred in the Camp Bastion perimeter in July-August 2012, identified by UK patrols after the breaches occurred. The cause or purpose of the breaches was unknown, but the 5 FP Wing had assessed them as “scrapping” activity by individuals who would try to come near the base to take or steal metal to sell.²¹ Statements by US personnel suggested that on at least one occasion intruders were able to enter unoccupied guard posts.²² The US Army also released, as one of the exhibits associated with the investigation report, surveillance video footage dated 18 July 2012 of a night time breach of the perimeter by two individuals who moved near the cryogenics lab by the airfield and then departed out of the same breach.²³

35. The MoD told us that there had been around nine breaches in 2011 and 12 breaches in 2012 in both the UK and US sectors. The breaches were considered by UK personnel to be low-level scrapping and criminal activity and any identified breaches had been repaired.²⁴

36. Several US personnel, including Major General Gurganus and Major General Sturdevant, expressed concerns they had about encroachment on the south east side of the base by poppy farmers. Major General Sturdevant, interviewed as part of the US investigation following the attack, stated:

We literally had poppy growing right up against the perimeter fence. That was another thing that Maj. Gen. Gurganus tried to take action on, but he wasn’t able to accomplish that. It was because the Afghans had to do it. We weren’t allowed to. The

²⁰ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

²¹ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

²² US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

²³ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

²⁴ Ministry of Defence (ACB0001)

biggest external threat to the base came from there, and Task Force Belleau Wood was down there running patrols every single day.²⁵

37. In oral evidence, Lieutenant General Capewell characterised the decision to allow poppy cultivation close to the perimeter fence as a “minor tactical error” which had contributed to the enemy’s success.²⁶

38. We were concerned to learn of the number of breaches of the perimeter fence of Camp Bastion in the two years prior to the attack and the apparent tolerance of poppy cultivation immediately outside the fence. We consider that the failure to take concerted action to prevent these activities increased the risk of surveillance and intelligence gathering by Afghan nationals which could have assisted insurgent planning for an attack on the base.

Risk assessment of intruder access to the flight line

39. According to the US report, the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) (3d MAW (FWD)) and RC(SW) chains of command were aware of the threat of both vehicle and pedestrian access identified by the airfield incursion on 14 March 2012.²⁷ In a written submission, the MoD told us that following the incident a security survey had highlighted the following:

The current Airfield perimeter defences, in place to defend against incursions onto the flight line, are not appropriate for the size and number of personnel requiring access.

And that:

The almost constant construction work and continuous redevelopment has seen the airfield outgrow the previously recommended protective measures.²⁸

40. Based on the assessed threat, the UK, in coordination with the 3d MAW (FWD) anti-terrorism/force protection Officer, submitted a project request for vehicular and pedestrian restrictions to the airfield.²⁹

41. The MoD explained that this had led to proposals from the Executive Steering Group, which had resulted in a request to PJHQ for authority to install a ditch and berm, which was started in September 2012, just prior to the attack.³⁰ Neither this nor the concertina

²⁵ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

²⁶ Q100

²⁷ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

²⁸ Ministry of Defence (ACB0001)

²⁹ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

³⁰ Ministry of Defence (ACB0001)

wire, which was breached using wire cutters, had presented significant obstacles to the Taliban attackers on their way to the airfield.³¹

Force protection projects and expenditure

42. The main US report suggested that both the ESG and PJHQ had denied a request for construction of a fence all the way around the airfield following the review conducted in the wake of the “burning man” incident. However, associated interviews published by the US Army provided clarification that the ESG had considered various options including fencing, but instead approved measures designed to counter vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIED), through construction of an anti-vehicle ditch and berm obstacle, and to restrict pedestrian access through the placement of concertina wire. The threat from a VBIED was considered to be the biggest threat to the flight line at the time.³²

43. Paul Rimmer told us that he had not seen any evidence that any proposals for improved force protection had been turned down.³³ Lieutenant General Capewell expressed the view that additional fencing would not have prevented the attack.³⁴

44. We asked what force protection projects had been implemented in the 12 months prior to the September 2012 attack, the MoD explained that a total of 21 infrastructure projects had been completed, covering, in the main, installation or modification of protective walls, CCTV, additional fencing and a range of other enhancements. For those projects completed under the in-theatre delegation of £500,000, the total contract value was around £680,000.³⁵

45. Media reports suggested that prior to the September 2012 attack additional security measures at Camp Bastion were denied funding by the MoD on cost grounds. We have seen no evidence that proposals for improved force protection measures were turned down by the UK chain of command.

46. The “burning man” incident in March 2012 prompted a review of security measures around the perimeter of the Bastion airfield. We consider that the decision by the Executive Steering Group to create a ditch and berm defensive obstacle rather than erect additional fencing was a proportionate response to the threat of an insider attack through vehicular incursion onto the airfield from within the base. It is unlikely that additional fencing around the airfield perimeter would have presented a significant impediment to the insurgents on 14-15 September 2012 and altered significantly the outcome of the attack.

³¹ US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

³² US Department of the Army Report, *Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 Investigation of the 14-15 September 2012 Attack on the Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan (redacted version)*, 19 August 2013

³³ Q51

³⁴ Q56

³⁵ Ministry of Defence (ACB0001)

3 Conclusion

47. The attack on Camp Bastion on 14-15 September 2012 by a group of heavily armed Taliban insurgents was a carefully planned and orchestrated assault which exploited serious weaknesses in the base's perimeter security.

48. **The MoD were wrong to refuse to share the report on the attack prepared by Lieutenant General Bradshaw, in his capacity as Deputy Commander ISAF. As this was the highest level UK report into the attack, its status as an ISAF document should not have prevented its release to us. The MoD has been obstructive and unhelpful to us as we tried to establish the facts surrounding the attack.**

49. **We are concerned that the perimeter security and force protection measures in place at the time of the attack were inadequate. We were told that the focus of ISAF commanders had been on security incidents elsewhere in Helmand Province and on threats from insider attack. Insufficient attention was given to the fundamental requirement of defending Camp Bastion from external assault. We believe that this was complacent. Given that the attack took place in the British sector of the camp, British commanders must bear a degree of responsibility for these systemic failures and associated reputational damage.**

50. **We note the acknowledgement by the MoD that errors were made which, collectively, created the vulnerabilities which were so devastatingly exploited by the enemy. From the evidence we have received, we are satisfied that as far as possible, these vulnerabilities have now been addressed.**

51. **We recommend that the MoD capture the lessons identified from this extraordinary attack as part of its wider efforts to learn lessons from Afghanistan for future operations. It should explain how it intends to do so in its response to our report.**

Annex – List of abbreviations

3d MAW (FWD)	3 rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward)
5 FP Wing	No. 5 Force Protection Wing RAF
AO	Area of Operations
AOBW	Area of Operations Belleau Wood
AT/FP	Anti-Terrorism and Force Protection
BLS	Bastion, Leatherneck and Shorabak
C2	Command and Control
CO	Commanding Officer
ESG	Executive Steering Group
IED	Improvised explosive device
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OLAAAR	Operational Learning Account and After Action Review
PJHQ	Permanent Joint Headquarters
RAF	Royal Air Force
RC(SW)	Regional Command – South West
TFBW	Task Force Belleau Wood
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
VBIED	Vehicle-borne Improvised explosive device

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 26 March 2014

Members present:

Mr James Arbuthnot, in the Chair

Mr Julian Brazier

Mr James Gray

Mr Dai Havard

Mrs Madeleine Moon

Bob Stewart

Ms Gisela Stuart

Derek Twigg

Draft Report (*Afghanistan: Camp Bastion Attack*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 51 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Thirteenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 1 April 2014 at 2.00p.m.]

Witnesses

(published in Volume II on the Committee’s website www.parliament.uk/defcom)

Tuesday 17 December 2013

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Lieutenant-General David Capewell OBE, Chief of Joint Operations, Ministry of Defence, **Mr Paul Rimmer**, Chief of Staff (Policy and Finance), Permanent Joint Headquarters, Ministry of Defence and **Dr John Noble**, Head, Afghanistan/Pakistan Current Communications Team, Operations Directorate, Ministry of Defence

Ev 1

List of written evidence

(published in Volume II on the Committee’s website www.parliament.uk/defcom)

1 Ministry of Defence

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List of Reports from the Committee in Session 2013–14

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2013–14

First Report	MoD Supplementary Estimate 2012–13	HC 291 (HC 644)
Second Report	Ministry of Defence Main Estimates 2013–14	HC 517 (HC 670)
Third Report and First Joint Report	Scrutiny of Arms Exports and Arms Control (2013): Scrutiny of the Government's UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2011 published in July 2012, the Government's Quarterly Reports from October 2011 to September 2012, and the Government's policies on arms exports and international arms control issues	HC 205 (Cm 8707)
Fourth Report	The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the Children of Service Personnel	HC 586 (HC 771)
Fifth Report	The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel	HC 185 (HC 759)
Sixth Report	The Defence Implications of Possible Scottish Independence	HC 198 (HC 839)
Seventh Report	Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part One	HC 197 (HC 1175)
Eighth Report	Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2012–13	HC 653 (HC 1198)
Ninth Report	Future Army 2020	HC 576
Tenth Report	Remote Control: Remotely Piloted Air Systems—current and future UK use	HC 772
Eleventh Report	Deterrence in the twenty-first century	HC 1066
Twelfth Report	UK Armed Forces Personnel and the Legal Framework for Future Operations	HC 931
