



ROYAL NAVY GALAXY

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ISSUE: **First Sea Lord & Chief of Naval Staff**

AUDIENCE: **All Royal Navy Personnel**

TIMING: **Immediate**

ACTION: **Information and Cascade**

STATEMENT ON AFGHANISTAN

I wanted to recognise the sad and difficult scenes we have all been witnessing in Afghanistan and reflect on the Service's role in Afghanistan alongside our Defence colleagues and international partners and allies. The last couple of weeks have seen a humbling and remarkable effort by the three Services and their Diplomatic Service colleagues to bring over 15,000 British nationals and vulnerable Afghans to safety in very trying circumstances. It has been an extraordinary effort by all those involved and shown, once again, that in times of emergency the nation can always rely on the brave and resilient men and women of our Armed Forces.

Our 20 year-long campaign in Afghanistan is now over and many thousands of those involved or affected during that time will be reflecting in their own way. I especially want to recognise the high price paid by those who made the ultimate sacrifice, by the many more injured, and the enduring impact on some still serving, as well as veterans and families. These sacrifices have not been made in vain. It is a fact that the overarching aim to prevent Al Qaeda exporting terrorism from its Afghan havens to the UK was achieved and, as the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary have both acknowledged, you also made a huge difference to people's lives in Afghanistan. You helped build infrastructure for one of the poorest countries in the world and helped educate young women and men in that country who would never have had access to education. You gave an entire generation of young Afghans hope – and that cannot be easily undone or forgotten.

Our role is a dutiful one; we do what we are asked to do; we serve our nation; and we do the best for the people alongside us. And we do this even when it is dangerous and difficult and the outcomes might be precarious or hard to achieve. That is what the Royal Navy and Royal Marines helped to do in Afghanistan. From the very beginning in 2001 to the very end, Sailors and Royal Marines stepped daringly into the arena time and time again. You served with courage and honour, distinguishing yourselves in combat, reconstruction and development. Many were singled out over the years for individual excellence and acts of incredible bravery. But this was a massive collective effort where everyone – people back in the UK, families and friends, as well as our sister Services – all contributed so much. You all

did your duty, served the nation nobly, and did all that was asked of you and often much more. That is all that can be asked of us and all that we can do.

I know and understand that recent events will have re-opened old wounds and stirred a range of emotions. Within Defence, we are committed to supporting all of our people; serving military and civilian personnel, veterans, families, and especially when the going gets tough. Support is available and being widely signposted. I encourage you to talk to each other even where the emotions are difficult and engage with your own networks, with the NHS (Op Courage), regimental associations and our charitable partners. Please speak to your friends, family, Chain-of-Command, or Line Manager and make use of the tools and support available on the MOD and Royal Navy websites.

We made a significant, positive difference to a great many people in Afghanistan. That is what the history of the Royal Navy will record. Be very proud of what you achieved in Afghanistan. The Service is proud of you. And stay strong, look after each other, check in on families and veterans and those still serving. And, as always, also keep looking ahead and be ready to serve wherever and whenever the nation next requires us. Thank you.

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