

By Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth MP, Minister for the Armed Forces

The then Secretary of State for Defence's statement on 16 June 2008 (Official Report column 677-678) referred to the decision to withdraw the Harrier force and replace it with an equivalent force of Tornado GR4s by Spring 2009 to Kandahar airfield. Delays in construction of the necessary supporting infrastructure and our current estimate of the time required to complete the Tornado Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) enhancements means that the Tornado GR4s will now deploy in Summer 2009. We expect delivery of the UORs in advance of completion of the infrastructure project and will keep both programmes under constant review to ensure completion as quickly as possible. In the interim, Joint Force Harrier will continue to contribute to the provision of close air support to UK and Allied Forces in Southern Afghanistan; 1 (Fighter) Squadron will therefore replace IV (Army Co-operation) Squadron in mid-April.