

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

RADIO 4

TRANSCRIPT OF "FILE ON 4" "IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES"

CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP

TRANSMISSION: Tuesday 2nd February 2010 2000 - 2040

REPEAT: Sunday 7th February 2010 1700 - 1740

REPORTER: Allan Urry

PRODUCER: Gail Champion

EDITOR: David Ross

PROGRAMME NUMBER: 09VQ4568LH0

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ACTUALITY OF BANG

URRY: British Army experts exploding Taliban bombs.

ACTUALITY OF MORE BANGS

URRY: The Improvised Explosive Device or IED has become the biggest danger to coalition forces fighting the Taliban, causing around 80% of casualties.

TOOTAL: It's extremely demanding going out on a patrol where you know there is a very high certainty of running into an IED. It has an emotional and a psychological impact on troops as they go out.

URRY: But has the Ministry of Defence been doing enough to counter the threat? Some families say they've failed those on the front line.

MINTER: Why do you send people out to an area known to be infested with IEDs without the equipment necessary to detect and defuse them. It's a waste of life, it's a waste of our forces and our men.

HUNT: The bomb went off basically directly underneath where he was sitting and he had a broken left femur, he had two broken vertebrae and he had a broken jaw, because of the percussion and concussion that literally lifted him straight up and down within the confines of the driver's cab. It caused his brain to swell and it caused catastrophic brain injury.

URRY: He was flown home to Britain for emergency treatment to try to save his life. His family went to the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine at Selly Oak to be with him.

HUNT: The critical care team that flew home with him came straight in. He said, 'We stopped the sedation over two hours ago and unfortunately he's not making any effort to breathe for himself anymore. His eyes are fixed and dilated. We've done everything we possibly can, and I'm sorry but it's literally a matter of time.'

URRY: You had some time to spend with him, didn't you?

HUNT: Yes, we had about two, two and a half hours with him on the intensive care unit. We held him, we stroked him, we kissed him, we laughed, we cried, but at least we were able to say goodbye to him, which is more than so many other poor families have been able to do, and I firmly believe that he knew we were there.

URRY: Since 2001, more than 250 UK forces personnel have died in Afghanistan. Most have been killed by these improvised devices. In December, the Government announced £150 million of extra spending on countermeasures and training to add to the 200 strong Counter IED force configured last year. Armed Forces Minister Bill Rammell argues the Government has made it top priority.

RAMMELL: The threat is very significant. The Taliban took a decision eighteen months, two years ago that they couldn't beat us in head on confrontation, and they therefore went down the road of planting indiscriminately Improvised Explosive Devices to target our military, the military of others within the coalition and equally the civilian population. There has been a significant increase in the numbers being planted. We are being much more successful in detecting them. But we are facing a bloody and a ruthless

RAMMELL cont: enemy in the body of the Taliban that have hugely increased the numbers of devices that they plant and what they are trying to do is to deliberately sow the seeds of fear and encourage instability. We are, as I said, however, being much better in detecting and targeting the devices, but it is an ongoing challenge.

URRY: It's a challenge that some battlefield commanders and their troops have to face almost daily. Colonel Stuart Tootal was in charge of the 3rd Battalion Parachute Regiment which in 2006 was the first British battle group to deploy to Helmand Province.

TOOTAL: It's extremely demanding, particularly if you are going out on a patrol where you know there is a very high certainty of running into an IED, and of course there's a training and approach to minimise that risk as much as possible, but it's very difficult to eradicate it, and that figures on people's minds. It's frightening to know that you're going out into that environment and soldiers generally have a pathological hatred of things like mines and IEDs because they are so indiscriminate. It's not fair fighting – not that we should necessarily expect the Taliban to fight fairly. But actually warfare generally has a psychological challenge and soldiers deal with it and they cope with it, they're well trained, they have strong leaders and that pulls them through the challenge of having to go out on patrol and face difficult circumstances.

URRY: The terrain gives the Taliban a tactical advantage which is difficult to counter. It's a country with few surfaced roads, so digging holes is easy. There aren't many options to vary routes, leaving troops vulnerable to ambush. Chris Hunter is a former major in the British army and, as a bomb disposal specialist, did one of its most dangerous jobs. He neutralised 42 IEDs during a four month deployment to Iraq. He's also been to Afghanistan.

HUNTER: There's a number of different means that are employed; everything from jammers through to specialist detection equipment. But the most effective counter measure of all is actually the human mind, and it's, you know, a combination of training, of good intelligence and just that sort of soldier's intuition when he's out on the ground when they go into an area and something just doesn't quite seem right. An area that's usually busy and full of people suddenly being empty, when they travel

HUNTER cont: down a road back and forth everyday and suddenly they see something, an anomaly at the side of the road - maybe its an unusual-shaped boulder or something, but it wasn't there before, or perhaps it's, you know, something hanging from a telegraph pole, which could be an aiming marker, for example. And it's those sort of things that sort of, you know, make the hairs on the back of the neck stand on end and that say, 'Right, stop, there's something not quite right here,' and then perhaps they'll debus and go and actually investigate. And in many cases just that intuition alone has caused them to find devices before they've detonated and caused any injuries.

URRY: But it's an evolving scenario with each side trying to get the upper hand. Chris Hunter's been watching how the Taliban have developed their tactics to try to avoid bomb detection.

HUNTER: If an insurgent group brings in a type of device, let's say for example a pressure plate device using metallic saw blades, we then bring in metal detectors to detect those. We have successes detecting those. The Taliban watch us, they see that we're being successful, they get very upset. They don't like it, then they want to do something very very quickly to get the upper hand, so they then retire, re-plan, come up with a new type of weapons system, which is exactly what they did. And instead of using military ordinance with large metallic content, they started using fertiliser-based explosive, bulk explosive and relying on that bulk explosive charge to cause the fatalities rather than a smaller explosive charge with lots of fragmentation in the form of what we used to call shrapnel.

URRY: The power of the blast?

HUNTER: Yeah, that's exactly it. So what you're seeing is this sort of metamorphosis, this evolution where it's a kind of cat and mouse measure, counter-measure game. They bring in a type of weapons system, a type of Improvised Explosive Device, we bring in a counter-measure to defeat that and then they bring in a different type of device and we then have to bring in a new counter-measure to defeat that.

URRY: But has the Ministry of Defence responded effectively to the many challenges of countering IEDs? Some families who've lost loved ones in the conflict say no.

MINTER: I think it was in his blood, it was a thing that he was always going to do. Joined the army as soon as he could, he was a good soldier, he would have without doubt passed selection for the SAS.

URRY: Paul McAleese was one of the best of his generation, according to the Army. At 29, Mac as he was known, was a Platoon Sergeant, in charge of snipers in 2 Rifles battle group. Senior officers say the men looked up him, a supremely fit, tough and capable soldier. He too was killed by an IED. On 20th August, election day in Afghanistan, he led an infantry patrol from a Forward Operating Base called Wishtan on the outskirts of the town of Sangin. Mac's father-in-law, Stephen Minter, is a former military man who's served alongside bomb squads in Northern Ireland. He's built up his own picture of what happened, helped by Mac's colleagues who were there. Out in front of the patrol was an 18 year old Private, Jonathon Young, carrying a metal detector and on the look out for IEDs and other dangers. He'd been in Afghanistan just three weeks. He wasn't an ordnance specialist and his training for that task was minimal.

MINTER: The person with the metal detector which clears the route thought he'd found something, knelt down and activated the device, which blew him into the area that hadn't been cleared. So a radio message was sent out to Bastion to ask for an IED team to come and clear the area. They were told that they couldn't come for couple of hours, lack of helicopters. They couldn't wait a couple of hours because IEDs normally trigger an attack by the Taliban.

URRY: It's a prelude to an ambush usually?

MINTER: Yeah, so you can't stop on the ground for hours waiting to retrieve a casualty or a body. But Mac then got the metal detector, cleared a path to Private Young to recover him. They were retrieving the body, as it turned out, at the time when the Mac activated an IED that he hadn't detected and that killed him.

URRY: The more Stephen Minter found out about the circumstances in the area where Mac was stationed, the more he became convinced there were serious shortcomings which influenced what happened on the fatal day. There were two

URRY cont: Forward Operating Bases, or FOBs as they're called, just a few hundreds metres apart, where troops patrolled. He's been told that they struggled to control that territory because of shortages.

MINTER: Purely lack of numbers and lack of equipment, lack of monitoring equipment such as CCTV and lack of manpower to physically have men observing the ground 24 hours a day.

URRY: What was your son-in-law telling you about that?

MINTER: As soon as IEDs were found and defused and dug up, more were planted, because of this lack of observation of the ground. You know, once darkness fell, effectively it was a no mans' land. So it was like groundhog day - every day they got up in the morning and they went out and they were putting their lives in their hands.

URRY: So they could clear the area, but it was re- mined after, almost straightaway?

MINTER: Yes, the Taliban even put them in the same holes sometimes.

URRY: In the same holes?

MINTER: Yes, but obviously with a different sort of trigger or, you know, a slight twist to it. But they linked them. They had soldiers killed in one incident where three IEDs were activated. At the end of it there was another four IEDs which hadn't gone off. The death toll could have been a dozen that day if the Taliban's plan had worked out.

URRY: Such was his concern that, after his son-in-law was killed, Stephen Minter wrote to the Prime Minister questioning what went wrong.

MINTER: Why do you send people out to an area known to be infested with IEDs without the equipment to detect and defuse them?

URRY: And have you had an answer to that question?

MINTER: Not a satisfactory one, no.

URRY: What have you been told?

MINTER: It's necessary to send troops on the ground to win the hearts and minds of the local population. If you want to put Mac's life in monetary terms, the money that the army had spent on him to train him to the standard that he was is phenomenal, you know, and they just waste him.

URRY: 29 year old Paul McAleese is survived by his wife and young son, born just a week before he left for Afghanistan. Because the family say the Government hasn't addressed their specific concerns, we asked Armed Forces Minister Bill Rammell to respond.

RAMMELL: Look, my heart goes out to any family who have lost their loved ones, people who were doing incredibly dedicated, brave, professional work. But if you engage in warfare, and it's bloody warfare that we're engaged in with the Taliban, you cannot guarantee against the loss of life. Don't just listen to what I'm saying as a politician. David Richards, the chief of the general staff, the head of the army, has gone on the record saying this is the highest priority for the military and we are getting it right. Does that mean that we can guarantee in every circumstance against a loss of life? No, it doesn't.

URRY: To be fair to the family, I don't think they were looking for guarantees, nobody we've spoken to on this programme is looking for a guarantee that no one will be killed. What they want answers to is why there was a lack of closed circuit TV, surveillance equipment, why helicopters couldn't get a bomb disposal expert team in fast enough when there was a known threat in this area. They have got specific questions about that.

RAMMELL: Sure, and I don't believe that the items that you have listed there were accurate. But there is a process. Whenever there is a fatality that takes place, there is a service investigation and ultimately an inquest, and the purpose of that is to learn any lessons that need to be applied - and that process is ongoing.

URRY: The family must wait for the results of those inquiries in the hope that will cast light on any failings. Even the most highly skilled and experienced bomb specialists are becoming victims. They're known as ATOs - Ammunition Technical Officers. Four have been killed by IEDs in the last sixteen months. Staff Sergeant Olaf Schmid was among them. He too died in an explosion in the Sangin area of Helmand last October whilst trying to disarm a device. His widow, Christina, explained to BBC Radio 5 Live the sort of conditions he had to cope with.

SCHMID: He basically, day in day out in Afghanistan, would, without a break, without being at a camp, just living in a shell, scraping in the ground, without any showers, no toilet facilities, and he would be the one that would take that lonely walk and basically stop devices from functioning and deal with them. He's been under fire while he was dealing with these devices, so he had to keep calm and collected, and that's what they're expected to do.

URRY: Christina Schmid said when she spoke on the telephone to her husband just 24 hours before he was killed, he was exhausted.

SCHMID: He had been up for four days, just a few hours of sleep. But more than that, he was weary after weeks and weeks and weeks of living like that, under that relentless pressure, and I think that mental weariness, as we all know, has a massive massive effect on us. There just aren't enough of them out there, there's just not enough hours in the day for the amount of IEDs. It's just absolutely relentless.

URRY: This isn't only affecting bomb disposal specialists. The former commanding officer of 3 Para, Stuart Tootal, says it slows down military operations.

TOOTAL: Commanders on the ground will be very clear that they do not want to be constrained by IEDs. I mean, of course they are, but they want to be able to carry on with whatever mission they've been given. So in dealing with some of those IEDs and not necessarily having enough specialists to hand will mean that it will slow the tempo, the rate of activity of operations, because each time they come across an IED you have to deal with it. It makes it a very intensive troop activity, because you need lots of

TOOTAL cont: people on the ground to reduce some of the threats. It's obvious if we're going to speak very plainly that it will increase risk if you don't have enough specialists, and that's just an obvious and very logical deduction.

URRY: So why aren't there enough? The actual number of ATOs is a military secret so any shortfall is difficult to gauge. But in the MOD's most recent annual performance report published last year, it shows a 38% shortfall of Ammunition Technicians at corporal to staff sergeant rank. These are the backbone of the specialist bomb disposal service. How come Britain has shortages at a time when explosive devices are by far the single biggest killer of troops in Afghanistan? Armed Forces Minister Bill Rammell argues the Government is trying to address the shortfall.

RAMMELL: I'm not going to get into specific numbers, and there's a very good reason for that. In terms of the specific numbers of personnel, in terms of the specific capability that we have, if I tell you, I also tell the Taliban. And it's not a ministerial concern, it's a genuine military concern about operational security ...

URRY: I understand that but it's already published in the annual performance report.

RAMMELL: Sure, and what I can say to you is that we have already significantly increased the numbers. We made an announcement just before Christmas that we were redeploying a further £150 million over the coming period to do a number of things, including increasing the number of trained bomb disposal experts.

URRY: But given that this is one of the most crucial areas – IED and counter IED – isn't this where the military should be fully staffed?

RAMMELL: Sorry, the military is staffed and this is And this is ...

URRY: ... we shouldn't be reporting shortages here, should we?

RAMMELL: Yes, but hold on, you can't just conjure people out of thin air. We have been doing everything possible to increase the numbers. We announced last April that we were creating a 200-strong specialised force to go to Afghanistan. That is now in place. There is no area that is a higher priority for us, but we are facing a bloody and a ruthless enemy in the body of the Taliban that have hugely increased the numbers of devices that they plant, and we're trying to respond to that.

URRY: Part of that response is to try to find out more about where the Taliban get their IED components and supplies from. Dr Tim Bird is a member of the Defence Studies Department at Kings College. He's helped write the recently published new military doctrine for stabilising Afghanistan. Dr Bird believes those who are trying to disarm IEDs in the field do so as part of a new drive to help gather more information.

BIRD: There is a desire to diffuse these bombs for the intelligence pay-off that these IEDs can provide.

URRY: Rather than blow them up?

BIRD: Yeah, I mean, you can avoid them but just simply avoiding them if you detect them, then you're not really enhancing security of the population. There are a range of reasons why it is valuable to defuse these devices. You want to try and get identified and convicted bombers through a criminal justice system. You want to defuse these items because you can perhaps get evidence of who planted them, you can get evidence of who made them, you can try and build up an intelligence picture surrounding their production and who is laying them and then target that network.

URRY: Much of the work being done around this is classified. But, File on 4 spoke to the former head of counter terrorism for M16, Richard Barrett, for an assessment. Mr Barrett now heads a team advising the United Nations Security Council on the threat of Al Qaeda and the Taliban. He says they are resourceful enemies who've found numerous ways of making IEDs, including using fertiliser.

BARRETT: It's interesting, I think, the development of IEDs in Afghanistan, which have gone rather from commercial explosive and old artillery shells and things like that, more to the sort of fertiliser and home made explosives that we've seen elsewhere. Afghanistan, of course, is an essentially rural country and almost all the population live in villages and survive through farming, so it's natural, I think, that there should be a lot of fertiliser.

URRY: Where are they getting that from?

BARRETT: Well, it can come over the border, it may be trucked in. There are not very many approved routes over the border from Afghanistan to Pakistan, but there are innumerable unapproved routes and the border between the two countries, runs through villages and across areas where there is very little or no police presence, so it is actually very easy indeed.

URRY: It can't be that difficult to track fertiliser, can it, and stop that getting through? There seems to be shortage of this material.

BARRETT: But again, what are we trying to do here? One of the key things in Afghanistan is to promote development, and if a farmer needs fertiliser in order to be able to grow a wheat crop rather than a poppy crop or whatever, then I think that's only right and proper that we should give it to him. The problem then comes in controlling the use of that fertiliser, because if somebody comes along to him with a gun and says, 'Okay, I want your bag of fertiliser,' he is not really going to argue, 'Well, I'm sorry, this was given by an aid donation, and I want it for my wheat.' There have been cases, I'm sure not very many, where fertiliser provided by aid organisations has turned up in Taliban safe houses and so on.

URRY: File on 4 has also been told that supplies are sometimes run through drug smuggling routes as insurgent commanders and heroin traders form alliances. Richard Barrett says he's heard estimates of 20% of Taliban funding coming from the drugs trade, through protection of convoys or production itself. In addition, the Taliban levy taxes on locals, and revenue collection in the areas they control is much more

URRY cont: effective than those parts under the state government. They're also getting funding from abroad, something which intelligence services are trying to penetrate. But Richard Barrett has a stark warning about the scale of the challenge.

BARRETT: The financing of the Taliban is still quite obscure. You know, we see them collecting money in the Gulf, for example, and we see the money arriving in Pakistan or Afghanistan. It's quite hard though to tell absolutely where it's come from and absolutely how it has got there. This, I think, is still something that we are all working on quite hard.

URRY: But why is there this intelligence gap?

BARRETT: If you think of the amount of money laundering or the amount of fraud that goes on in the world, the amount of money that's financing terrorism is absolutely minute, and first of all you have to deal with the whole thing in order to be able to see the little bit that we're most interested in. It is quite incredible how much money moves around, particularly in cash-based economies where not many people will go to banks. You can't imagine, for example, in the Afghan Pakistan border area there being many commercial banks or ATMs or anything. Everything is done by hawala, this informal transfer of money system. Therefore, to pin down what is a legal transaction and what is an illegal transaction, when there are so many informal networks involved and so much money involved going to and fro, it's incredibly difficult. It really has to be intelligence led, because if you have the names of the people who are donating and the names of the people who are spending at the other end, then that's good, then you can start really taking action against them. But just to sort of work it out from looking at the money flows is quite difficult.

URRY: And if the money's hard to track, so are the crude components used by the Taliban for many of their homemade bombs, according to Dr Tim Bird of Kings College.

BIRD: In terms of the difficult in sourcing materials and in terms of the high levels of expertise to build them, this is a totally different level than, say, a nuclear capability where they are very very specialised components which make it easy for

BIRD cont: intelligence services to identify and trace and track. We're not talking about that level of capability at all. The insurgents who are placing the IEDs are being targeted, they are being interdicted, there will be – I am sure – workshops that are being taken out, there will be people being arrested, but it's quite a large scale operation.

URRY: It sounds as though they are getting help from outside their own country. Where would that be coming from?

BIRD: It will be coming from a whole range of places. I would be surprised if it's possible to trace state-sponsored logistic supply chain. I mean, what you will get is people who have fought in Iraq and the sort of jihadist network which has been established, you will get them gravitating from conflict theatre to conflict theatre, and they will bring their expertise and their kit with them. But you are still, I don't think, talking about a logistical chain which requires specific state sponsorship. Non-state actors can still provide the logistics chain, even to reach quite a high level of IED production.

URRY: Evidence of this co-operation has been seen by others. Chris Hunter, the bomb disposal operator, worked for the Defence Intelligence Service during the last two years of his career in the Army. He's noted a surge in expertise and capabilities because of information sharing.

HUNTER: We saw basically crude timed Improvised Explosive Devices in the early stages of the Northern Ireland conflict evolving right up into command-initiated devices, so basically hardwired command wire links, if you like, evolving right the way through to radio controlled Improvised Explosive Devices. It's worth noting that the level of technical sophistication achieved by the IRA in thirty years of conflict was superseded in just twelve months in Iraq and eighteen months in Afghanistan because of the crossover of technologies, tactics, techniques and procedures by the other terror groups.

URRY: How did that crossover happen?

HUNTER: I think in the same way that any industry has conferences where they share ideas and best practice. The terror groups almost do the same sort of thing, terrorist insurgent groups. They go to training camps, they use the internet, they physically pass each other CD Roms, DVDs and the like, and any means necessary, but certainly the internet now is a big way in the terror training camps.

URRY: And now, the Taliban are trying to exploit the world of international trade to gather more sophisticated bomb making technologies. During the Bush administration, Mario Mancuso was a leading figure in the US Department of Defence for special operations to combat terrorism. Then he became the most senior official working to unite national security, trade and investment departments within the US Government to focus on the fight against global terror. He stepped down last year. He's told File on 4 insurgents are attempting to extend their reach.

MANCUSO: We have publicly disclosed that the Taliban, it's a low tech IED, there could be any number of places where that equipment comes from, to the extent that other devices have been used. We have reason to believe that the Taliban is at least working with operatives in other countries to plug into global supply networks.

URRY: That's a disturbing development, isn't it?

MANCUSO: We, particularly at the Department of Defence, which is where I started, never doubted the Taliban's intelligence or resourcefulness, and I don't think we should doubt it today.

URRY: A court case in the United States has highlighted the dangers, uncovering an illicit international procurement network gathering components for improvised bombs. US legal papers allege items like these have been employed in IEDs and used against Coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was known as the Mayrow enterprise, after the company at the centre of the conspiracy, and it was a top priority for Mario Mancuso during his time as a senior US Government official.

MANCUSO: It was a huge network, both in terms of the numbers of participants, in terms of the numbers of companies involved, in terms of its ambitions, and it would materially impact our ground operations.

URRY: So what was this network up to? How did it operate?

MANCUSO: Much of that is still classified. It operated in a global fashion. It used front companies in various locations, including in the Gulf. They would procure devices that could be used to armour and fire IEDs. We do know that certain components went into Iran, and we also know that those components found themselves on the battlefield in Iraq. In fact, recently there have been a handful of occasions where the United States Government has publicly said that they have found Iranian manufactured or traceable equipment inside of Afghanistan, used in IEDs and other similar devices.

ACTUALITY IN GOLDERS GREEN

URRY: A company which supplied that network was based in Golders Green, North West London. A house in a quiet residential area was the registered business address of a man called Farshid Gilliardian, an Iranian by birth but a naturalised British citizen. He imported high tech components called inclinometers from an American supplier, but said they were to be used in the UK. Instead he shipped them to a business contact in Iran, These sorts of inclinometers have benign commercial applications in such everyday products as gaming consoles and smartphones, but they can also be part of a trigger mechanism for explosives.

America has strict trade embargoes with Iran, so Gillardian lied about the final destination for the inclinometers when buying them from a US supplier. He said they were to be sold to the University of Manchester, but when File on 4 checked with the University, they said they'd never heard of him or ordered any inclinometers from him. Farshid Gillardian wouldn't be interviewed by File on 4. We asked for a statement from his lawyer, but we didn't get one. In August last year, Gillardian appeared before a Judge in Florida and pleaded guilty to US export violations. He was given a year's probation and flew home to the UK. But in Britain, he'd committed no offence.

SPRAGUE: In this case, where this equipment could have been used for IEDs, because the goods themselves are not controlled in an arms export control sense, they don't need export licences, there's absolutely nothing in law to stop that trade happening again tomorrow.

URRY: There's a gap in British regulations that doesn't cover items which have commercial applications but which can also have military use. And that's a concern to the human rights group, Amnesty, which has campaigned for tighter restrictions. Amnesty argues they should be controlled because, as well as troop casualties, large numbers of civilians are killed and maimed by IEDs. Oliver Sprague, who speaks for the organisation on arms control issues, says he's given evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee, calling for a change in the law.

SPRAGUE: In the same way that we now have pretty strong controls on things like Weapons of Mass Destruction, nuclear, chemical, biological, I mean you can't even sell a bucket to somebody if you have reason to believe that that's going to be used to produce biological toxins. So we have been saying for a long time, why not have a similar control on equipment, especially equipment like this that can be used to facilitate terrorist acts. So we think the UK does need to introduce a clause in its export law that says that if an exporter has reason to believe that his equipment might be being used to facilitate those kinds of acts, that there should be a control to stop that happening.

URRY: What's been the response?

SPRAGUE: Well, the response has been that it's an issue that they're looking at. We've just been going through an ongoing review of our current arms export control legislation. It started in 2007. To give the Government some credit here, they are on public record as saying they are intending to work on proposals. The problem is ...

URRY: Intending to work on proposals?

SPRAGUE: This is the problem. The intending to work on proposals is coming to the stage where it looks like this is an issue that's been kicked into the long grass. As your programme has shown, this is an area where the long grass needs to be shortened very very quickly.

URRY: Britain prides itself on having some of the most comprehensive export regulations of any nation. The government department with lead responsibility is Business Innovation and Skills. But it's also a matter for the Ministry of Defence. So we were surprised when Armed Forces Minister Bill Rammell flatly denied any loopholes.

RAMMELL: I don't believe that's the case. We've got probably the strongest export controls anywhere in the world. If any item of equipment we judge would be used for internal repression or external aggression, it is not permitted. Firstly, with regard to Iran, there is an arms embargo in place and we have been at the forefront of the international community ...

URRY: These aren't arms, these are components. These are components which, when put together, can be made into bombs, but the problem that's been identified on the British end is that we haven't got the laws in place to deal with the specific components that were sent from here.

RAMMELL: No, no, no. With respect, and I do think you need to check your facts, and I know you're going to be talking to the Department of Business Innovation and Skills. I do not believe any licences have been granted in respect of that company.

URRY: They don't need a licence, didn't need a licence.

RAMMELL: Right, right, and there is a question about illicit smuggling, and any information you have or anybody else has we will look at and we will tackle.

URRY: In the light of the minister's comments we double-checked with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. They confirmed there was no law covering the sort of items sent to Iran by Farshid Gillardian and that there's no prospect of any immediate change.

READER IN STUDIO: The Government is working to negotiate enhancements to the Military End Use Control in the EU. Any control would need to be implemented by all our EU partners in order to be truly effective and prevent exporters simply exporting from another EU Member State. Such enhanced controls would however only cover non-controlled items for end use by the military, paramilitary, police or security forces of embargoed destinations. Support for terrorists and insurgents is most effectively addressed by anti-terrorism legislation.

URRY: So, three years after the Government was first asked to consider the matter, there's still no word on when, or if at all, any new controls will come into effect. Stopping the Taliban getting their hands on hi tech components is only one facet of the strategy to protect British troops. The Government's putting in more resources and making Counter-IED its number one priority. But, as we've heard in this programme, the Taliban has a lot of advantages. The terrain suits their type of insurgency, their funding sources remain largely obscured and their supply routes are difficult to police. There are those who argue that, up to now, Britain has been trying to hold too much ground with too few soldiers. And concern about lack of proper equipment rumbles on. For Dr Tim Bird, who's helped write the new military stabilisation doctrine, there's a bigger battle to be fought in Afghanistan.

BIRD: IEDs, I think, are a symptom of the problem, they're not the problem. Whilst we are struggling to provide sufficient security in key areas of Afghanistan, while we're struggle to provide effective governance, while the security sector reform of the Afghans themselves is a work in progress, then you will see further IED attacks, you know, this will go on. The plan is that Afghanistan becomes stabilised, that effective governance appears at local regional levels, the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police develop, and as you see that then the symptom of the crisis, which is the IED, you would expect to decrease. We are not going to engineer our way or have a technological breakthrough which ends the IED threat. The IED is a symptom of a conflict, and as the conflict begins to be won, then the IED threat will diminish, but probably not before.

SIGNATURE TUNE