Afghanistan: The Timetable for Security Transition

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Over the course of 2010 plans have been put in place to strengthen the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces, with a view to transitioning security responsibility so that Coalition military forces can begin to draw down from mid-2011 onwards.

As part of that new counterinsurgency strategy, a surge of 30,000 US and 10,000 additional Coalition forces were deployed to the country in the first half of 2010, which brought the total ISAF force in Afghanistan to approximately 132,000 personnel by year end.

The timetable for drawing down ISAF forces was endorsed at the NATO Heads of State and Government Summit in Lisbon in November 2010.

This note examines the timetable for transferring security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces; the current commitment of contributing nations, and any plans for withdrawal.

Developments in the military campaign in Afghanistan over the course of 2010 are examined in Library briefing SN/IA/5678, Afghanistan: Towards a Handover of Security Responsibility.
1 Background

1.1 ISAF Mandate

UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1386 of December 2001 laid down the initial mandate for a 5,000-strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to deploy to the region in, and immediately around, Kabul, in order to provide security and to assist in the reconstruction of the country under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

While UN mandated, the ISAF force is not, however, deployed under the guise of the UN. In November 2001 the then UN Secretary General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, recommended, as part of his wider proposals that led to the Bonn Agreement, that a new security force for Afghanistan be established. He also suggested, however, that a UN peacekeeping force could not be recommended, partly because of the time it would take to form and partly because:

UN peacekeepers have proven most successful when deployed to implement an existing political settlement among willing parties - not to serve as a substitute for one. Any security force established in the absence of a credible cease-fire agreement or political settlement, whether constituted by Afghans, international personnel, or both, could quickly find itself in the role of combatant. This is not a role for ‘Blue Helmets.’

Until August 2003 when NATO assumed command, the ISAF operation was subsequently conducted as a UN-mandated coalition of the willing.

Since UNSCR 1386, the UN Security Council has adopted several resolutions extending the deployment of ISAF, including UNSCR 1510 in October 2003 which expanded the ISAF mandate to cover the whole of Afghanistan and thereby lay the groundwork for ISAF commanders to expand operations beyond Kabul.

UN Security Council Resolution 1943 (2010) currently authorises the presence of ISAF until 13 October 2011.\(^2\)

A detailed Military Technical Agreement agreed between the ISAF Commander and the Afghan Transitional Authority in January 2002 provides additional guidance for ISAF operations.

### 1.2 Mission

NATO’s main role in Afghanistan is to assist the Afghan Government in exercising and extending its authority across the country and creating a secure environment with a view to paving the way for reconstruction and effective governance. ISAF is a key component in achieving those aims and has the following mission objectives:

- Conducting stability and security operations throughout the country in coordination with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), an increasing number of which are being led by the ANSF.

- Through the NATO Training Mission (NTM-A), ISAF forces are mentoring, training and equipping the ANSF, to enable the international community to gradually hand over security responsibility to the Afghans. This is being done in partnership with the United States, which runs its training and equipping activities through the Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan (CSTC-A). ISAF also works in coordination in the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL).\(^3\)

ISAF troop contributing nations have deployed a number of Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) and Police OMLTs (POMLTs) which are embedded in ANA and ANP units to support training and deploy on operations in an advisory role. Equipping the ANSF is co-ordinated by the NATO Equipment Donation Programme and supported by the ANA Trust Fund which covers the transportation and installation costs of equipment donations, the purchase of equipment, the purchase of services for engineering and construction projects, and training, both inside and outside Afghanistan.

- Supporting the Afghan government in Disarming Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG).

- Facilitating the management of ANA ammunition depots. NATO administers a trust fund project, agreed between the Afghan government, ISAF nations and the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency, aimed at enhancing the physical security of ANA ammunition depots and at supporting the development of the ANA’s ammunition stockpile management capabilities.

- Providing humanitarian assistance through the Post-Operations Humanitarian Relief Fund which has been established since 2006. The fund provides rapid assistance in

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the immediate aftermath of significant ISAF military operations. Assistance includes the provision of food, shelter and medicines as well as the repair of buildings or key infrastructure. Such assistance is provided on a short-term basis and responsibility is handed over to the civil sector as soon as circumstances permit. The fund consists entirely of voluntary donations from ISAF troop contributing nations.

- Identifying reconstruction needs, such as the rehabilitation of schools and medical facilities, restoring water supplies and providing support for other civil-military projects. Through its 28 Provincial Reconstruction Teams, ISAF is supporting reconstruction and development and securing areas in which reconstruction work is being undertaken by other national and international actors. PRTs consist of both civilian and military personnel. While a PRT’s civilian components lead on political, economic, humanitarian and social aspects of the PRT’s work in support of the Afghan Government’s development priorities, the military components of the PRT focus on increasing security and stability in the area, building security sector capacity and directing military assistance to the civilian elements, in particular in relation to transport, medical assistance and engineering.

- Assisting in humanitarian relief operations upon request by the Afghan government. ISAF troops have launched several relief missions distributing medication, food and winter supplies to help villagers cope with severe weather conditions in different parts of the country.

- Providing support to the Afghan government and internationally-sanctioned counter-narcotics efforts through intelligence-sharing and the conduct of an efficient public information campaign, as well as support to the Afghan National Army conducting counter-narcotics operations. ISAF also assists the training of the ANSF in counter-narcotics related activities and provides logistic support, when requested, for the delivery of alternative livelihood programmes.

Following calls from the US to tackle the drugs trade in Afghanistan more proactively in order to undermine the financial base of the Taliban insurgency, at an informal meeting on 9-10 October 2008 NATO Defence Ministers agreed to expand the counter narcotics role of the ISAF mission. This enhanced support by ISAF includes the destruction of processing facilities and action against narcotic producers if there is a clearly established link with the insurgency. Such action can only be undertaken by ISAF forces upon the request of the Afghan Government and with the consent of the national authorities of the forces involved.

1.3 Command and Control

Since 2003 overall command of the NATO operation has rested with Allied Command Operations at SHAPE in Belgium; while Allied Joint Force Command (JFC) Headquarters Brunssum has served as the NATO operational HQ for ISAF. Headquarters ISAF, located in Kabul has served as NATO’s theatre level command for the operation, working with the Government of Afghanistan, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, international organisations and non-governmental organisations in implementing their mutual goals in the country. Since February 2007 HQ ISAF had been configured as a composite HQ with staff

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4 Narcotics facilities/facilitators are defined by NATO as all facilities associated with the narcotics industry and those individuals involved in the processing, storing and transporting of illegal narcotics or precursor chemicals that directly support the insurgency (NATO Fact Sheet, June 2009)

5 http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_8189.htm
drawn from existing NATO Standing HQ and contributing ISAF nations, in contrast to the previous situation which saw the rotation of command between existing Corps HQ.  

In August 2009 NATO Member States agreed, however, to adjust the ISAF upper command structure to reflect the evolution in ISAF’s scope and scale of responsibilities in those last few years, and the increasing need for greater co-operation with the Afghan authorities and other international partners. The decision was subsequently taken to separate the strategic and the day-to-day operational functions of ISAF with the establishment of a second intermediary HQ.

The new ISAF command structure now comprises a higher operational headquarters, ISAF HQ, commanded by a four-star General (COM ISAF – currently General David Petraeus); and a subordinate three-star headquarters, ISAF Joint Command (IJC) HQ, both located in Kabul:

- **HQ ISAF** – under this new command structure COMISAF focuses on the strategic political-military aspects of the ISAF mission, co-ordinating those ISAF operations with the work of the Afghan government and other international organisations in the country.

  COMISAF is dual-hatted as the Commander of ISAF and of US Forces in Afghanistan (COMUSFOR-A) thus ensuring the continued co-ordination of ISAF operations and Operation **Enduring Freedom**. COMISAF has command responsibility over the IJC Commander, the Commander of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan and Special Operations Forces.

- **ISAF Joint Command HQ** – COMIJC is responsible for executing the full spectrum of tactical operations throughout the country, on a day-to-day basis, and has command of the six Regional Commands, the 28 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) and other theatre enablers. In addition COMIJC ensures the co-ordination of ISAF and ANSF operations.

  The US acts as framework nation for the first manning of the ICJ HQ which achieved full operational capability in November 2009.

There will be a balanced representation of US and NATO personnel at both HQ.

In March 2010 the Pentagon announced its intention to integrate nearly all of the remaining 20,000 US troops operating in Afghanistan under Operation **Enduring Freedom** into ISAF, following calls by then USFOR-A/ISAF Commander General McChrystal to further simplify

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6 A list of those rotations is available in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4854, *The International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan*, 9 February 2009
7 General Petraeus replaced General Stanley McChrystal as ISAF Commander and head of US forces in Afghanistan in June 2010 (formally assuming command on 4 July 2010). General McChrystal resigned in June following an article in *Rolling Stone* magazine in which he criticised the Obama administration.
8 In October 2009 NATO announced that it would establish a new NATO headquarters to oversee higher level training and mentoring for the ANSF in order to achieve a more co-ordinated and effective approach to training. Under the new organisational structure, the US-led training and mentoring programme of Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) was integrated with ISAF efforts into a common HQ: NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A). The key elements of NTM-A will include the provision of training and mentoring teams to the ANA and the ANP, the institutional training of the ANA and ANP reform at the district level and below. CSTC-A will continue to mentor the Afghan Ministries of Defence and Interior and will be responsible for developing the Afghan National Air Corps, the logistics command and the Afghan national military hospital.
the military command structure in the country. Only small detachments of US Special Forces and a detention unit remain outside of the NATO command structure.9

Regional Commands

At the end of May 2010 the North Atlantic Council gave formal approval for the reorganisation of ISAF’s Regional Command South into two regional commands: RC South West and RC South in order to allow commanders to focus on geographically smaller areas, ensure greater partnering between ISAF and the Afghan National Security Forces and deliver the objective of increased governance, development and security in those regions.

Under IJC HQ there are now six Regional Commands (RC) which incorporate 28 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) and several Forward Support Bases (FSB). The RC command all ISAF units in their area of responsibility and coordinate all regional civil-military activities conducted by the military elements of the PRT. Command of each RC is assumed by a lead nation and is composed of a Command and Control (C2) HQ and a Forward Support Base (FSB) which provides a supply, medical and transport hub in each region.

The RC are located, and led, as follows:

- **Regional Command North** – HQ RC (N) and the FSB are located at Mazar-e-Sharif and led by Germany. There are six PRT under RC (N) command led by Sweden, Germany, Hungary, Norway and Turkey.

- **Regional Command Capital** – located in Kabul and is currently led by Turkey. RC Capital is a distinct entity from HQ ISAF.

- **Regional Command West** – located at Herat. Since July 2008 Italy has been the lead nation, assuming command responsibility from Spain. Spain has, however, retained operational responsibility for the FSB. There are four PRT under RC (W) command led by Italy, Spain, the US and Lithuania.

- **Regional Command South** – Located in Kandahar. The UK initially retained command responsibility of RC South after the division of RC south into two commands. The transfer of command responsibility to the United States subsequently took place on 2 November 2010, ending a five-year practice of rotating the command among Britain, Canada and the Netherlands. RC South now has three PRT led by the US and US/Australia, and control of an ISAF force of approximately 35,000 personnel in Kandahar, Daykundi, Uruzgan and Zabul provinces. The UK handed over command of Kandahar airfield to the US in November 2010. Kandahar continues to be the base of 904 Expeditionary Wing, including the UK’s Tornado and Hercules contingents; while security for the base remains the responsibility of the RAF Regiment.

- **Regional Command South West** – Established in June 2010 and has responsibility for Helmand and Nimroz provinces. The US has assumed command of RC South West in the first instance, which in the longer term will operate as a rotational command between the US and UK.10 The UK-led PRT at Lashkar Gah, and therefore the majority of British forces in Afghanistan, now fall within this command. In total RC South West has approximately 32,000 troops.

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9 “Most US enduring freedom troops to join NATO’s Afghan wing”, *Agence France Presse*, 16 March 2010
10 HC Deb 26 May 2010, c4WS
Regional Command East – located at Bagram and led by the US. There are 14 PRT under RC (E) command led by the US, the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Turkey and South Korea.

On the division of RC South and the subsequent changes in command and control, Major General Gordon Messenger, Strategic Communications Officer to the British Chief of the Defence Staff, commented:

This command and control change makes complete sense and is welcome. The span and complexity of the command challenge in southern Afghanistan has increased enormously in recent months and these changes provide the best command support to the troops on the ground.

The change will also align the ISAF military structure in the south with the structure of the Afghan National Army, enabling a greater partnering capacity between ISAF and Afghan forces.

The UK has been closely involved in the preparations for this change and entirely agrees with its rationale. We are well accustomed to operating within a multinational coalition command structure and we are entirely content that the best interests of the UK force will be maintained under the new arrangements.\(^{11}\)

2 NATO's Lisbon Summit – November 2010

At a meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers at the end of April 2010 agreement on a common roadmap for progressive security transition to the Afghan authorities, beginning in late 2010, was reached. However, in reaching a draft agreement the NATO Secretary General cautioned:

We need to be clear about what transition means and doesn’t mean. Transition means that Afghan authorities take the lead, and we move into a supportive role. But it doesn’t mean a rush for the exit.\(^{12}\)

Few details of that draft plan were released with the expectation that a roadmap would be developed in conjunction with the Afghan government for endorsement at the security conference in Kabul on 20 July 2010. Indeed, the Communiqué agreed at the Kabul Conference reiterated the support of the international community to the objective “that the Afghan National Security Forces should lead and conduct military operations in all provinces by the end of 2014”. The plan for transition agreed at that July conference set out the following principles:

- Transition would be a conditions-based process and any recommendations would be based on conditions on the ground.
- Transition would not signify a withdrawal of ISAF forces but a gradual shift to a supporting role as the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces developed. As circumstances dictate, the international community’s civilian and military representatives would gradually shift toward a supporting, then mentoring, then enabling and finally a sustaining role across all three pillars of security, governance and development.

\(^{11}\) MOD Press Release, 21 May 2010

\(^{12}\) NATO press release, 23 April 2010
Transition would involve key Afghan institutions and functions as well as geographic areas, and would include the evolution of the ISAF Provincial Reconstructions Teams (PRTs) towards a mainstream developmental model. ISAF Headquarters would remain even as forces drawdown.

The criteria for transition were defined thus:

Successful transition of security responsibility requires that Afghan National Security Forces, under effective Afghan civilian control, will be capable of tackling existing and new security challenges, with continued support from ISAF. Transition assessments will also consider the ability and authority of the Afghan government to provide the rule of law and manage public administration at sub-national and local levels; and the capacity of an area to sustain socio-economic development. Transition must be irreversible.\textsuperscript{13}

Assessment of each province’s readiness for transition was to be undertaken by the Joint Afghan-NATO Inteqal Board, with its recommendations to be submitted to the Afghan Cabinet for approval. Any provinces identified as falling short of transition criteria would be the focus of an Action Plan specifically geared towards addressing those shortfalls.

The Kabul Communiqué went on to conclude that “the Government of Afghanistan and NATO/ISAF are to assess jointly the provinces with the aim of announcing by the end of 2010 that the process of transition is underway”.\textsuperscript{14} At the time the intention was to launch that process in time for the Lisbon summit.

However, General Petraeus, less than two months into his new role as Commander of ISAF, suggested in an interview with the \textit{New York Times} in August 2010 that he would resist any large scale or rapid withdrawal of US forces in mid-2011 and that should the conditions of the ground warrant it, he would not discount the possibility of recommending a delay in drawing down forces.\textsuperscript{15}

2.1 Transition of Security Responsibilities

The Lisbon Summit Declaration subsequently identified the ISAF mission in Afghanistan as “the Alliance’s key priority” and confirmed that a new phase in the Afghan mission would now begin, with the process of transition to Afghan security responsibility starting in early 2011 in certain districts and provinces “following a joint Afghan and NATO/ISAF assessment and decision”. Transition would be conditions-based, “not calendar-driven” and “will not equate to withdrawal of ISAF troops” which will remain in a supporting role, but would result in Afghan forces gradually assuming full responsibility for security across the whole of Afghanistan by the end of 2014. The declaration did not, however, pinpoint which districts and provinces would be the first to transition.

More specifically, the Declaration by the nations contributing to ISAF set out the following:

- The agreed process of transition will be jointly carried out.
- Assistance with Afghan national priority programmes will be better aligned.

\textsuperscript{13} NATO Factsheet, \textit{NATO’s role in Afghanistan}
\textsuperscript{14} Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan Communiqué, 20 July 2010
\textsuperscript{15} “Petraeus opposes a rapid pullout in Afghanistan”, \textit{the New York Times}, 15 August 2010
As transition proceeds, ISAF’s profile and reconfiguration will be adjusted, with military assets reinvested, as necessary and appropriate, to meet critical security, training and mentoring requirements.

Afghan security capabilities will be further strengthened as ISAF gradually moves away from combat to an increasingly supporting role.

The international civilian effort, including the work conducted through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams will continue to evolve and enable greater Afghan capacity and leadership, while also preparing for longer-term development assistance.

That document also reiterated the importance of the Afghan security forces training mission to the process of transition, and emphasised the challenge of meeting the requirements for “trainers, mentors and critical enablers for 2011 and beyond”. It went on to welcome measures for reconciliation and reintegration, recognising them as “a key part of achieving lasting stability in Afghanistan” and expressed continued support for Afghan-led efforts through the Peace Jirga, the High Peace Council and the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program. The declaration did, however, state that “corruption remains a central challenge to be addressed” and called on the Afghan government to fully implement the Kabul commitments on improving governance, strengthening the rule of law and ensuring sustainable economic growth. Co-operation with regional partners was also welcomed.

2.2 Declaration on Enduring Partnership

NATO leaders and the Afghan government also agreed a Declaration on an Enduring Partnership which seeks to establish long term partnership arrangements between NATO and the Afghan government beyond the scope of the current ISAF mission, and in line with broader UN-led international efforts. Centred round the Comprehensive Approach, that declaration commits to developing effective measures of co-operation that will provide sustained practical support to Afghan security institutions in the longer term. Specifically, those measures could include:

- Mechanisms for political and military dialogue.
- Continuing use of NATO trust funds in support of capacity building of Afghan government security institutions.
- A continuing NATO liaison in Afghanistan to assist in the implementation of the declaration with a common understanding that NATO has no ambition to establish a permanent military presence in Afghanistan or to use its presence in Afghanistan against other nations.
- Continuation of the NATO Afghan training mission, reconfigured as necessary, and with the approval of NATO leaders, to meet the Afghan government’s evolving security needs.
- An individual programme of additional co-operation activities derived from, and incorporating, the existing Afghan Co-operation Programme along with other initiatives. Such activities could include assistance with the development and reform of security ministries and other national institutions; helping build professionalism and capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces in areas such as counter terrorism and counter narcotics; and providing tailored access to NATO courses, institutions and military and civilian expertise.
NATO and the Afghan government are now expected to consult over the scope of such a partnership agreement with any resulting co-operation programme approved by NATO and the Afghan government on a regular basis through a jointly-owned process. The declaration specifically commits all parties to review the declaration and the programme of co-operation resulting from it, at a senior political level and at intervals of no more than three years. It also confirms that discussions between the Afghan government and NATO on a Status of Forces Agreement will be initiated within the next three years. In the meantime, the application of the current Military Technical Agreement will continue to be monitored and reviewed by the Joint Coordinating Body. With the joint approval of NATO and the Afghan government, third parties may contribute to the activities resulting from this declaration, although any bilateral assistance between the Afghan government and such nations will remain outside of its purview.

3  First Phase of Security Transition

On 22 March 2011 Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced the first phase of transition of security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces.

That first phase will involve the gradual handover of seven districts and provinces:

- Bamyan province
- Kabul province, with the exception of Surobi district
- Panjshir province
- Herat City (capital of Herat province)
- Lashkar Gah (capital of Helmand province)
- Mazar-e-Sharif (capital of Balkh province)
- Mehtar Lam (capital of Laghman province).

See section 4 for a map of the provinces.

Security handover will begin in May and will follow a four-stage process in all areas of security, governance, development and the rule of law. It has been made clear that progress through those four stages will be dictated by conditions on the ground and that it could take up to 18 months for the process to be fully complete in any given area.

ISAF operations are now expected to move towards a more supporting and advisory role in each of these areas, with Afghan National Security Forces assuming the lead in decision making, planning and conduct of security operations.

The Joint Afghan-NATO Inteqal Board is expected to consider additional districts and provinces to begin the transition process in the second half of 2011. The objective remains that by the end of 2014 the Afghan National Security Forces will lead and conduct security operations across the whole of Afghanistan.

Discussing the process of transition in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2011, General Petraeus commented:
The shifting of responsibility from ISAF to Afghan forces will be conducted at a pace determined by conditions on the ground, with assessments provided from the bottom up so that those at operational command level in Afghanistan can plan the resulting battlefield geometry adjustments with our Afghan partners.

According to the NATO principles, transition will see our forces thinning out, not just handing off, with reinvestment of some of the forces freed up by transition in contiguous areas, or in training missions where more work is needed. Similar processes are also taking place as we commence transition of certain training and institutional functions from ISAF trainers to their Afghan counterparts.

As we embark on the process of transition, we should keep in mind the imperative of ensuring that the transition actions we take will be irreversible. As the ambassadors of several ISAF countries emphasized at one recent NATO meeting, we’ll get one shot at transition, and we need to get it right.¹⁶

The NATO Secretary General has also sought to reiterate that “transition does not mean a rush for the exit. On the contrary – our forces will stay to support, to mentor the Afghans, and to train more new recruits”.¹⁷

Responding to the announcement on transition, the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, and Secretary of State for Defence, Liam Fox, stated:

We welcome President Karzai’s announcement today that the first phase of security transition in Afghanistan has started. This begins the process of a gradual transition which will be completed across the country by the end of 2014. This will ensure that UK forces will no longer be in a combat role in Afghanistan by 2015 […]

Transition is a process which will over time achieve our shared goal of the Afghans leading on security. We will not abandon Afghanistan.

We welcome the assessment that Lashkar Gah district, in Helmand, is ready to begin this first phase. This is a measure of Afghan military governance and capability in this area. It demonstrates that efforts to support the Afghan National Security Forces through continued training, partnering and mentoring are working.¹⁸

The announcement that Mazar-e-Sharif would be among the first districts to transition was overshadowed, however, by an attack on the UN compound in the city on 1 April 2011 which killed seven UN workers.

4 Multinational Forces in ISAF

As of 4 March 2011 there were approximately 132,203 military personnel deployed as part of ISAF, from 48 contributing nations. Those military personnel are divided among the six ISAF Regional Commands and thus have security responsibility for specific geographical areas.¹⁹ Those force locations, according to PRT, are as follows:

¹⁶ Senate Armed Services Committee, *Hearing to receive testimony on the situation in Afghanistan*, 15 March 2011
¹⁷ NATO press release, 11 March 2011
¹⁸ “UK welcomes start of transition in Afghanistan”, MOD press release, 22 March 2011
¹⁹ Information on ISAF troop contributions since January 2007 is available from the ISAF website.
The broad contribution of each nation is currently as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>257</td>
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<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1550</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
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<td>Azerbaijan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>528</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
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<td>Hungary</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Former Yugoslav Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>165</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>132,203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISAF Headquarters, 4 March 2011

At present over half of the countries contributing to ISAF operate with national caveats that restrict or prohibit certain actions (such as counter narcotics operations for example) or operations in specific geographical locations, without national consent. Nearly 40% of caveats are in the latter category, which are regarded as presenting a “significant challenge for COMISAF as they limit his agility”. The Pentagon’s November 2010 report also suggests that “The effect of geographical caveats on transition may present further challenges, as thinned-out ISAF Forces may be more difficult to redeploy in unstable, insecure areas where handoff of security responsibilities to ANSF may require ad-hoc ISAF engagement”. Currently 20 troop contributing nations are “caveat free”.

4.1 British Forces

Since November 2009 the UK contingent in Afghanistan has consistently totalled approximately 10,000 personnel: 9,500 of which are deployed as part of ISAF and the remainder are UK Special Forces. The UK is the second largest contributor, accounting for 7.2% of total ISAF forces deployed.

Since 2006 British forces have been predominantly deployed in the southern province of Helmand and at Kandahar airfield where the UK’s air assets are based. Following the surge of US forces into the southern provinces during the end of 2009/first half of 2010, and the reorganisation of Regional Command South (see above), British forces have handed over a number of key areas of territory and the command and control of RC South, to US forces, in order to allow British forces to consolidate their presence in central and southern Helmand. In April 2010 US forces assumed responsibility for the town of Musa Qala. In June 2010 British forces handed over responsibility for Kajaki; while responsibility for Sangin was transferred to the US in September. Responding to suggestions that the US marines were “bailing out” British forces in Sangin the Deputy Commander of US forces in Afghanistan, Lieutenant-General David Rodriguez, argued that the redeployment was a tactical move that would “concentrate British forces where we need them most – in the central areas of the

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20 Department of Defense, Report on Progress toward Stability and Security in Afghanistan, November 2010
21 ibid
22 HC Deb 30 November 2009, c836
23 Details of the timeframe for the reorganisation of forces in RC South West, including the handover of Sangin, were set out by the MOD on 7 July 2010.
province”. In September 2010 Major General Gordon Messenger, Chief of the Defence Staff’s Strategic Communications Officer, commented:

The transfer of responsibility for Sangin to the USMC is the latest in a series of practical and sensible reconfigurations that have occurred as a result of the significant uplift in ISAF troops in Helmand over the last year.

It allows British forces, with their Danish and Estonian allies, to focus their efforts in the critical central Helmand area, building on the strong momentum that has already been achieved there.

Despite speculation that British forces could re-deploy out of Helmand province as a result of both the US surge and the withdrawal of other Coalition forces from Kandahar province, at the end of May 2010 the MOD stated that “UK forces are committed to their enduring deployment to central Helmand and there are no plans to deploy UK forces from Helmand to anywhere else”. Secretary of State for Defence, Liam Fox, reiterated this position on several occasions suggesting that the move of British forces from Helmand to Kandahar was “very unlikely”. In December 2010 the MOD did confirm, however, that a company from 2nd Battalion The Royal Welsh would extend its activity into Kandahar Province as part of measures to secure freedom of movement along Highway One between central Helmand and Kandahar, for a period of up to six months.

3 Commando Brigade assumed command responsibility for British troops in Afghanistan (Operation Herrick 14) on 9 April 2011. The deployment of 300 additional personnel from the UK Theatre Reserve Battalion, announced in July 2010, and the deployment of an additional two Tornado GR4 aircraft to Kandahar, announced in August 2010, came to an end in October and the beginning of November 2010 respectively.

The British contingent in Afghanistan therefore currently comprises the following Army, RAF, Royal Navy and Royal Marines units which will be deployed until October/November 2011. This is the fourth deployment of 3 Commando Brigade to Afghanistan since operations began in 2001:

- 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters
- Elements of 30 Commando Information Exploitation Group
- Elements of the Royal Navy forming Headquarters Joint Force Support (Afghanistan), including members of the Maritime Reserve
- Headquarters 104 Logistic Brigade
- Elements of 7 Armoured Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (207)
- 42 and 45 Commando Royal Marines, including members of the Maritime Reserve

24 “US general denies his marines are bailing out British forces”, The Times, 8 July 2010
25 MOD Press Release, 20 September 2010
26 Ibid
27 “MOD denies Britain had eyes shut over Helmand”, BBC News Online, 9 June 2010
29 That deployment temporarily took the overall British contingent in the country to 10,300 personnel.
• Commando Logistic Regiment
• 29 Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery
• 24 Commando Engineer Regiment
• 4th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland
• 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment
• 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles
• 1st Battalion The Rifles
• 2 Close Support Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

• Elements of:
  o Royal Navy forming the in-theatre medical regiment and field hospital
  o 3rd Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery
  o The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers and Greys)
  o 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales’s)
  o 5th, 12th, 16th, 26th, 32nd, 39th, and 47th Regiments, Royal Artillery
  o 12 (Air Support) Engineer Regiment
  o 22, 28, 32, 36 Engineer Regiments
  o 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic)
  o 170 (Infrastructure Support) Engineer Group
  o 3rd Division HQ and Signal Regiment
  o 10th and 22nd Signal Regiments
  o 14th Signal Regiment (Electronic Warfare)
  o 21st Signal Regiment (Air Support)
  o 1 and 3 Regiments, Army Air Corps
  o 2 Logistic Support Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps
  o 9 and 27 Regiments, Royal Logistic Corps
  o 11 Explosive Ordnance Regiment, Royal Logistics Corp
  o 17 Port and Maritime Regiment, Royal Logistics Corp
  o 23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps
  o 7 Air Assault Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
101 and 104 Force Support Battalions, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
5th Regiment, Royal Military Police
111 and 114 Provost Company, Royal Military Police
24 and 29 Postal Courier and Movement Regiment, Royal Logistics Corp
Special Investigations Branch United Kingdom
Military Provost Staff and Military Provost Staff (Volunteers)
1 Military Working Dogs Regiment
1 Military Intelligence Brigade
Military Stabilisation Support Group
101 (City of London) Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal)
6th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland (Volunteers)
4th Battalion, The Mercian Regiment (Volunteers)
6th Battalion, The Rifles (Volunteers)
151 (London) Transport Regiment (Volunteers), Royal Logistic Corps
158 (Royal Anglian) Transport Regiment (Volunteers), Royal Logistics Corps
88 Postal and Courier Regiment (Volunteers), Royal Logistic Corps
162 Movement Control Regiment (Volunteers), Royal Logistic Corps
166 Supply Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps (Volunteers)
148 Expeditionary Force Institute Squadron (Volunteers), The Royal Logistics Corp
383 Commando Petroleum Troop (Volunteers), Royal Logistics Corps
395 Air Despatch Troop (Volunteers), Royal Logistic Corps
102 Battalion (Volunteers), Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

- 6 Force Protection Wing Headquarters, Royal Air Force
- 58 Squadron, Royal Air Force Regiment
- 31 and 617 Squadrons, Royal Air Force

Elements of:
- 845, 846, 847, 854 and 857 Naval Air Squadrons
- Royal Naval Regulators
- Royal Auxiliary Air Force
Following the transfer of security responsibility for Kajaki, Musa Qaleh and Sangin to the US in the summer of 2010, the UK subsequently announced in October that the number of British personnel dedicated to training the ANSF would be increased by more than 320, with more than 60 UK troops redeployed to the Helmand Police Training Centre in Lashkar Gah.\(^\text{30}\) This rebalancing of forces has not increased the UK’s overall force level in Afghanistan from 9,500.

**Timetable for Withdrawal**

In his first Statement to the House on Afghanistan on 14 June 2010, the new Prime Minister, David Cameron, highlighted the Government’s commitment to the objectives of the Afghanistan campaign and sought to reiterate its importance to the UK. He stated:

> Let me address the first question that people are asking. Why are we in Afghanistan? I can answer in two words: national security. Our forces are in Afghanistan to prevent Afghan territory from again being used by al-Qaeda as a base from which to plan attacks on the UK or on our allies.

> Of course, the al-Qaeda training camps and the Taliban regime that protected them were removed from Afghanistan in the months after 9/11, and the presence of NATO

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\(^{30}\) MOD Press Release, 14 October 2010
forces prevents them from returning, but Afghanistan is not yet strong enough to look after its own security. That is why we are there [...] 

Today I am advised that the threat from al-Qaeda from Afghanistan and Pakistan has reduced, but I am also advised that if it were not for the current presence of UK and international coalition forces, al-Qaeda would return to Afghanistan and the threat to the UK would rise.31

He went on to comment:

The next question is how long we must stay. The Afghan people do not want foreign forces on their soil any longer than necessary, and the British people are rightly impatient for progress. Our forces will not remain in Afghanistan a day longer than is necessary, and I want to bring them home the moment it is safe to do so [...] 

That is why we back the strategy developed by General McChrystal, commander of the international security assistance forces, and endorsed by President Obama and NATO. That strategy involves protecting the civilian population from the insurgents, supporting more effective government at every level, and building up the Afghan national security forces as rapidly as is feasible. We want to transfer security responsibility for districts and provinces to Afghan control as soon as they are ready, but that must be done on the basis of facts on the ground, not a pre-announced timetable.32

Reports of a rift between Cabinet colleagues over the timetable for withdrawal of British troops in Afghanistan surfaced, however, after Foreign Secretary William Hague stated at the beginning of July 2010 that he would be “very surprised” if Afghan security forces did not have responsibility for their own security by 2014 and that he did not expect UK combat forces to be there in 2015.33 Separately Prime Minister David Cameron had called for troops to be out by 2015; while Defence Secretary Liam Fox suggested that British forces would be the last to leave Afghanistan and that strategic patience was required.34

Speaking at the end of the NATO Summit in November 2010, the Prime Minister stated that the withdrawal of British combat troops from Afghanistan by 2015 was a firm deadline that would be met:

The commitment we have entered into today to transfer the lead responsibility for security to the Afghan Government by the end of 2014 will pave the way for British combat troops to be out of Afghanistan by 2015. This is a firm deadline that we will meet.35

He went on to stress, however, that the NATO summit had also agreed to provide long-term support to Afghanistan on training, diplomacy and development and that “we will stand by Afghanistan for many years to come”.36

In late November 2010, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Richards, was reported as suggesting that there was “increasing scope for redistribution of manpower, certainly scope for reduction” of the number of British forces deployed in Afghanistan by 2012. However, he has sought to reiterate that any drawdown will be subject to conditions on the ground.37

31 HC Deb 14 June 2010, c603 
32 HC Deb 14 June 2010, c604 
34 “UK set to be among last out of Afghanistan says Fox”, BBC News Online, 30 June 2010 
35 MOD Press Release, 22 November 2010 
36 ibid 
37 “Afghan withdrawal will start in just over a year, says top general”, The Daily Telegraph, 29 November 2010
progress made in the transition of Lashkar Gah to the Afghan National Security Forces over the next 18 months, as part of the first phase of security transition, is considered likely to play a key role in determining the possibility for drawing down British forces in the near term.

4.2 Coalition Forces

The agreement reached at the NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010 has provided a provisional timetable for withdrawal which the contributing nations of ISAF have expressed their support for. However, a number of individual coalition countries have also set down more specific timetables for the drawdown of forces, within that framework for transition:

- **United States** – The December 2010 review of strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan stated:

  As a result of our integrated efforts in 2010, we are setting the conditions to begin transition to Afghan security lead in early 2011 and to begin a responsible, conditions-based U.S. troop reduction in July 2011.\(^{38}\)

  That position was reiterated by General Petraeus during evidence to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2011. However, he also noted that “while the security progress achieved over the past year is significant, it is also fragile and reversible”.\(^{39}\) Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, has also previously suggested that while the US is “very committed to beginning the drawdown then” it will be based on conditions and the recommendations of commanders on the ground, and that as a result “there will continue to be a large number of US and allied troops on the ground in Afghanistan after July 2011”.\(^{40}\)

  A number of commentators have suggested that differences of opinion have arisen between military commanders and the White House on the potential scale of any reduction in July. Military planners are reported to favour keeping combat troop withdrawals to a minimum; while the Administration is understood to favour a “meaningful drawdown” before US Presidential elections in November 2012.\(^{41}\) Recent media coverage suggests that a plan to reduce the US presence in Afghanistan by 70,000 personnel over the next three years is currently under discussion by the US administration. Under that plan 10,000 troops would be withdrawn by the end of 2011 (with an initial tranche of 5,000 withdrawing in July) with a greater focus given to Special Forces operations.\(^{42}\)

- **Canada** – Since 2009 the Canadian Government has repeatedly made clear its intention to withdraw Canadian forces from Afghanistan once the current parliamentary mandate for the combat operation ended in 2011. However, domestic political support for retaining a Canadian non-combat presence in Afghanistan beyond 2011 had been steadily increasing after a Canadian Senate report warned at the end of June 2010 that Canada’s standing among its allies could suffer if it was to withdraw the entirety of its forces in 2011.

\(^{38}\) White House, *Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review*, 16 December 2010

\(^{39}\) Senate Armed Services Committee, *Hearing to receive testimony on the situation in Afghanistan*, 15 March 2011

\(^{40}\) US Department of Defense Press Release, 28 November 2010

\(^{41}\) “Obama and military battling over troop withdrawal”, *The Times*, 1 April 2011

\(^{42}\) “US to withdraw 70,000 troops from Afghanistan in next three years in favour of special forces”, *The daily Telegraph*, 10 May 2011
In November 2010 the Canadian Government subsequently announced that its contingent of combat forces would withdraw once its parliamentary mandate expires at the end of July 2011. However, it also stressed its continuing commitment to Afghanistan and therefore outlined the intention to deploy a non-combat force of approximately 950 personnel to the country until March 2014 as part of the NATO Training Mission. Those forces will focus on training the ANSF as part of Canada’s wider engagement agenda which will concentrate on four key areas: the education and health of young people; advancing security, the rule of law and human rights; regional diplomacy and humanitarian assistance. The decision to deploy a non-combat force for a further three years has been taken without parliamentary approval, a move that has been criticised by some members of the Canadian House of Commons. The government has argued that a vote on the deployment is unnecessary as it only involves non-combat troops. Indeed, in January 2010 Canadian military personnel were deployed to Haiti in a non-combat role without a parliamentary vote.

**Australia** – In October 2009 the Australian Defence Minister, John Faulkner, stated that the government was examining how best to complete Australia’s mission in Uruzgan province in “the shortest timeframe possible” and that discussion about possible exit strategies had been underway since early 2009. Although 2012 had been touted as a possible date for handing over control of the province to Afghan National Security Forces, the Commander of Australian forces in the Middle East, General Hindmarsh, suggested, however that this date may be too ambitious. The new Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, confirmed at the end of June 2010 that “my approach to Afghanistan will continue the approach taken to date by the Australian government”.

**New Zealand** – On 1 February 2011 the New Zealand government announced that while it would extend the deployment of Special Forces troops to Afghanistan for a further year from April 2011, the size of that contingent would be reduced from 70 to 35 personnel. The Prime Minister also suggested that this deployment of Special Forces personnel was likely to be the last. On 19 April 2011 the government announced that they would maintain their 140-strong PRT in Bamyan province until 2014.

**Netherlands** - The Dutch contingent formally ended its mission in Uruzgan province in southern Afghanistan on 1 August 2010, in line with the end of its Parliamentary mandate which was initially agreed in December 2007. The command of Task Force Uruzgan (which had comprised 1,600 Dutch forces) was subsequently handed over to US and Australian forces. On 29 January 2011, however, the Dutch parliament approved a cabinet proposal to deploy a new training mission to Afghanistan that would comprise 545 non-combat personnel, including police trainers. Those personnel will be based in the northern province of Kunduz alongside German troops and will deploy from May 2011 until 2014. However, in order to gain parliamentary approval various concessions were made to Dutch opposition parties. Significantly the Dutch Government agreed to seek a written agreement from the Afghan

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44 “Australia seeks early pull out from Afghanistan”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 2009

45 “Aim to withdraw diggers from Afghanistan by 2012”, *The Age*, 12 January 2009

46 “Australia: troops to stay in Afghanistan”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 25 June 2010
government that police trained by Dutch troops will not be used in any military action and that any use of four Dutch fighter jets accompanying the mission will be determined by the Netherlands and not the US.47

- **Denmark** – At the beginning of March 2011 the Danish Government and opposition parties agreed on a two-year plan for Denmark’s military contingent in Afghanistan. The ‘Helmand Plan 2011’ envisages handing over control of forward operating bases to the Afghan National Army in mid-2011 and reducing its troop levels in the country from 750 to 650 personnel by 2012 (an initial 30 personnel will be withdrawn in August 2011). While elements of the current Danish Battle Group are expected to be maintained until the end of 2014, the remaining Danish contingent is expected to have an increased focus on training and education. The plan also sets out a commitment to a continued presence of trainers and enablers after 2014.48

- **Germany** – In November 2009 German Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle, acknowledged that the government was seeking a framework for the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan “to become visible” within the lifetime of the current Bundestag which is due to end in 2013.49 On 28 January 2011 the Bundestag voted to approve the extension of the current mandate for Afghanistan for a further year, although for the first time that extension included a measure for German troops to begin withdrawing from Afghanistan by the end of 2011, subject to conditions on the ground, and to be completed in 2014. The vote passed by 420 votes to 116, with 43 abstentions.

- **Italy** – In October 2010 the Italian Government suggested that a gradual drawdown of its troops in Afghanistan would begin in summer 2011, with a view to a complete withdrawal by 2014.50

- **France** – In October 2010 the French Defence Minister, Hervé Morin, stated that French troops would be aiming to hand over the Surobi district, east of Kabul, to Afghan forces in 2011, which could lead to the first withdrawal of forces. The statement attracted criticism from NATO which, at that point, had refused to be drawn on which districts and regions could transition first in order to prevent these areas becoming targets for insurgents. Indeed, the first phase of transition announced in March 2011 specifically excluded the handover of control of Surobi district, despite the remainder of Kabul province being highlighted as one of the first areas to transition (see section 3 above).

- **Poland** – President Bronislaw Komorowski announced in November 2010 that Poland would end its patrol and combat operations in Afghanistan in 2012, after which point troops will take on a purely training mission until 2014.51

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47 See “First victory for Dutch minority government as MPs approve new Afghan mission”, *IHS Global Insight Daily Analysis*, January 2011
49 “Germany eyes Afghan exit road map by 2013”, *Reuters News*, 18 November 2009
50 “Italy to withdraw troops from Afghanistan”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 2010
51 “Germany joins allies in planning to quit Afghanistan”, *International Herald Tribune*, 17 December 2010