



The International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan

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At present there are approximately 55,100 military personnel from 41 contributing nations deployed as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

This note is intended to be a brief guide to the mandate upon which those forces are deployed; the command and control of forces in the country and the integration of ISAF with the US-led Operation *Enduring Freedom*; current troop contributions and future force rotation plans and commitments.

It does not examine wider political and economic developments in Afghanistan or the counter narcotics strategy. A list of relevant of Library papers covering these topics is set out in section 4.

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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 deployed under the guise of the UN and until August 2003 when NATO assumed command of the operation, it had been conducted as a 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 1833 (2008) currently authorises the deployment of ISAF until 13 October 2009.¹

1.1 Area of Operations

UNSCR 1510 (2003) expanded the ISAF operation to cover the whole of Afghanistan. Between October 2003 and the end of 2005 ISAF operations were subsequently expanded into the north and west of the country. Deployment of ISAF forces into the southern provinces was endorsed by NATO Leaders in December 2005 and achieved on 31 July 2006; while command of the final 14 eastern provinces of Afghanistan was assumed on 5 October 2006.

NATO-led ISAF forces do not operate in Pakistan, although forces do operate near the Afghan-Pakistani border.

¹ A copy of UNSCR 1833 is available online at:
http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/mandate/unscr/resolution_1833.pdf

1.2 Mission

In addition to the overall task of assisting the Afghan government in extending its authority and creating a secure environment, the ISAF operation has the following objectives:

- Conducting stability and security operation in coordination with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF);
- assisting in the development of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and structures, including training the new Afghan National Army and National Police (ANP);
- identify reconstruction needs, such as the rehabilitation of schools and medical facilities, restoring water supplies and providing support for other civil-military projects;
- support the Afghan government to Disarm Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG);
- provide 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 Forces conducting counter-narcotics operations. ISAF, however, is not directly involved in the poppy eradication or destruction of processing facilities, or in taking military action against narcotic producers; and
- support humanitarian assistance operations.²

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, albeit on a temporary basis, until the Afghan National Army is in a position to undertake this role. In a press statement NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated:

Based on the request of the Afghan government, consistent with the appropriate United Nations Security Council resolutions, under the existing operational plan, ISAF can act in concert with the Afghans against facilities and facilitators supporting the insurgency, in the context of counternarcotics, subject to authorization of respective nations.³

2 Command and Control

Since 2003 Allied Joint Force Command (JFC) Headquarters Brunssum has served as the NATO operational HQ for the ISAF operation.

Headquarters ISAF is located in Kabul and serves as NATO's theatre level command for the operation. It also works 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 has been configured as a composite HQ with staff 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 (a list of those rotations is available in Appendix One). Forty countries now contribute more than 1,700 soldiers to the HQ.

² <http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/mandate/index.html>

Under HQ ISAF are five Regional Commands (RC), which incorporate 26 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. 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** – C2 HQ and FSB located at Mazar-e-Sharif and led by Germany. There are five PRT under RC (N) command.
- **Regional Command Capital** – located in Kabul and since 5 August 2008 has been led by France.⁴ 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 for the C2HQ from Spain. Spain has, however, retained operational responsibility for the FSB. There are four PRT under RC (W) command.
- **Regional Command South** – Located in Kandahar. Currently the lead nation is the Netherlands, although command responsibility is rotated between Canada, the Netherlands and the UK. The UK is expected to assume command in November 2009. There are four PRT under RC (S) command.
- **Regional Command East** – located at Bagram and led by the US. There are 13 PRT under RC (E) command.

In early 2008 consideration was reportedly given to changing the rotating command structure for RC (S) by establishing single nation command responsibility, under the US, amid fears that the system was boosting the Taliban insurgency in the southern provinces. That suggestion was, however, rejected by the Pentagon in May 2008 despite reported support for the proposal from US Commanders on the ground. An article in *Voice of America News* reported at the time:

Just a few hours before [the Pentagon] announced the agreement [...] American General Dan McNeil told reporters in a video teleconference that he believes one nation should be put in permanent command in the region, as has been done in other parts of the country [...]

A similar view has been expressed by General McNeil's boss, another American four-star general, John Craddock, the NATO Supreme commander.⁵

As a compromise, and in order to ensure greater continuity, command tenures were extended from nine to 12 months in November 2008. It has been speculated that the US will participate in the rotational command structure as of November 2010 following the surge of US forces into the southern provinces over the course of 2009. Yet, it has also been noted that the US will not be in command of a key area of Afghanistan [the south] now until at least two years into the tenure of the new Head of US Central Command, General David Petraeus. Many analysts had expressed the hope that General Petraeus would be given more authority

³ <http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2008/10-october/e1010b.html>

⁴ Italian Brigadier General Federico Bonato commanded RC-Capital between December 2007 and August 2008

⁵ "US will not take NATO command in southern Afghanistan", *Voice of America News*, 21 May 2008

in Afghanistan in order to apply the counterinsurgency experience he recently gained as Multinational Force Commander in Iraq.⁶

In response to concerns that the deployment of additional US in southern Afghanistan from mid-2009 onwards (See section 3.3) would result in the US sidelining the existing command structure in RC (S), in a letter to *The Sunday Times* on 18 January 2009 US ISAF Commander, General David McKiernan, stated:

We have no intention of sidelining the British general due to take command of International Security Assistance Force operations in southern Afghanistan in November.

British forces have acquitted themselves exceptionally well in this theatre of operations; I have no plans for by-passing one of our most trusted partners in the mission.

The chain of command will remain as it is now. I will give my orders to the British general in command and he will give his orders to deputies, one of whom will be Brigadier-General John Nicholson.

There will be no parallel command structures [...] It will be the responsibility of the British general to oversee the integration of any extra forces into southern Afghanistan, as endorsed by the incoming US administration and NATO.⁷

2.1 Integration with Operation *Enduring Freedom*

Command and control in Afghanistan is complicated by the fact that, in addition to the deployment of the ISAF force, American and other forces have continued to operate independently in the country under Operation *Enduring Freedom*.⁸

Given the focus of OEF in the southern and eastern provinces of the country, the NATO operational plan for expansion into the south in 2006 subsequently set out arrangements for greater command integration between the ISAF and OEF operations.

According to a NATO statement:

ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the ongoing US-led military operation in Afghanistan, will continue to have separate mandates and missions. ISAF will continue to focus on its stabilisation and security mission whilst OEF will continue to carry out its counter-terrorism mission.

Clear command arrangements will coordinate, and where necessary, deconflict efforts within the two missions as agreed under the auspices of the operational plan.⁹

Under these arrangements a Deputy Commander was to be responsible for counter-terrorism operations and be 'dual-hatted', answering to both the ISAF Commander and US Central Command. The Deputy Commander also had responsibility for coordination and 'deconfliction' between ISAF and OEF.¹⁰ Despite this continued separation of mandates, it was acknowledged that ISAF rules of engagement would have to be reviewed in order to

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ "British Afghan Command", *The Times*, 18 January 2009

⁸ Operation Enduring Freedom was established in 2001 as the military response to the events of 9/11.

⁹ NATO statement on 21 December 2005. This is available online at:

http://www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan_stage3/index.html

¹⁰ "NATO approves Afghan operations plan", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 14 December 2005

accommodate the operational challenges that operating in the south of the country could present. As part of that expansion plan US forces operating in the south were earmarked to come under the overall command responsibility of ISAF. This has not, however, been the case for the majority of US OEF forces in the eastern provinces. Although 12,000 US and other forces were transferred to ISAF command when NATO assumed command responsibility in the east in October 2006, approximately 20,000 US forces continued to operate in the region under the OEF banner.

Retention of two distinct operations in Afghanistan has attracted some criticism, in particular over the inconsistency in rules of engagement, the number of civilian casualties sustained and a lack of integration between the two operations.¹¹ The recent incursion of US forces over the Afghan/Pakistani border prompted ISAF, for example, to issue a press release at the beginning of September 2008 clarifying the nature of ISAF's Area of Operations.¹² Questions have also been raised in the US over the feasibility of maintaining two combatant commands in one country. In May 2008 the US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, was reported to have called for US command and control in Afghanistan to be examined.¹³ On 6 October 2008 the Pentagon subsequently stood up US Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A), a functioning command control HQ for all US forces operating in Afghanistan. USFOR-A will be commanded by General David McKiernan, who will also continue to serve as the Commander of ISAF. In announcing the activation of USFOR-A, the Pentagon stated:

The stand up of USFOR-A headquarters is intended to enable the most efficient command and control of US forces in Afghanistan and ensure effective integration and coordination between US and coalition forces operating under NATO/ISAF [...]

Under this new arrangement, the approximately 20,000 US forces, operating as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, will come under the operational control of USFOR-A. The ISAF and OEF chains of command will remain separate and distinct, and US Central Command will continue to oversee US counterterrorism and detainee operations.¹⁴

However, while the integration of US forces has been welcome by some commentators,¹⁵ the decision to integrate US forces into a single command has not been met with approval from all quarters. Robert Fox, commenting in *The Guardian* on 6 October 2008 argued:

There are now signs of a serious difference in approach between Britain and America. Increasingly the international effort in Afghanistan is becoming an all-American run show. The American commander General David McKiernan commands the international support and assistance force to the Karzai government (ISAF) as well as commanding the US operation enduring freedom against al-Qaida and its allies in George W. Bush's global "war on terror". He is running a split command and different missions.

"Increasingly the allies, even the ones doing the fighting like the Canadians, Dutch, Danes and Brits are becoming bit players – a sideshow", a British commander told me recently. "This is now an American mission".¹⁶

¹¹ See "Debate flares anew about German military mission", *Spiegel Online*, 28 May 2007 and "Italy calls on US to wind down enduring freedom", *Defense News*, 25 July 2007

¹² A copy of that press release is available at: <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/mediaadvisory/2008/09-september/ma080904-053.html>

¹³ See "Gates pushes for single command in Afghanistan", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 20 August 2008

¹⁴ US Department of Defense Press Release, 6 October 2008

¹⁵ Defence Editor of *The Times*, Michael Evans commented that "sensibly, one US general will take command of both [operations]" ("Can King David bring order to the mountains of Afghanistan", *The Times*, 6 October 2008

As an article in the *New York Times* on 8 August 2008 also pointed out:

The command reorganization implies that an American officer will be in charge of the NATO and American missions for the foreseeable future.¹⁷

3 Troop Contributions

As of 12 January 2009 there are approximately 55,100 military personnel deployed as part of ISAF from 41 contributing nations. Those military personnel are divided among the five ISAF Regional Commands and thus have security responsibility for specific geographical areas:

- **Regional Command Capital** – Approximately 5,650 personnel, largely from France and Hungary
- **Regional Command North** – Approximately 4,470 personnel largely from Germany, Sweden, Hungary and Norway
- **Regional Command West** – Approximately 3,050 personnel largely from Italy, Spain, Lithuania and the United States
- **Regional Command South** – Approximately 22,360 military personnel largely from Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, Estonia, Australia, Romania and the United States.
- **Regional Command East** – Approximately 19,570 ISAF personnel largely from the United States, Czech Republic, New Zealand, and Turkey.

Those force locations, according to PRT, are as follows:



Source: International Security Assistance Force, 12 January 2009

¹⁶ Robert Fox, “A reality check for Britain’s defence strategy”, *The Guardian*, 6 October 2008

¹⁷ “Gates pushing plan for Afghan army”, *The New York Times*, 8 August 2008

The full list of force contributions to ISAF is also as follows:

	Albania	140		Finland	110		Lithuania	200		Spain	780
	Australia	1090		France	2890		Luxemburg	9		Sweden	290
	Austria	1		Georgia	1		Netherlands	1770		The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ²	140
	Azerbaijan	45		Germany	3405		New Zealand	150		Turkey	800
	Belgium	410		Greece	140		Norway	490		Ukraine	10
	Bulgaria	465		Hungary	240		Poland	1590		United Arab Emirates	0
	Canada	2830		Iceland	8		Portugal	40		United Kingdom	8910
	Croatia	280		Ireland	7		Romania	770		United States	23220
	Czech Republic	415		Italy	2350		Singapore	20			
	Denmark	700		Jordan	0		Slovakia	120			
	Estonia	130		Latvia	70		Slovenia	70			
										Total (rounded)	55100

Source: International Security Assistance Force, 12 January 2009

The UK figure in this chart is slightly higher than figures provided by the MOD due to the rotation of forces and that fact that these figures reflect the number of personnel on the ground at a specific point in time.

3.1 British Forces in ISAF

On 8 October 2008 3 Commando Brigade formally assumed command of the British operation in Helmand province. This is the second deployment of 3 Commando brigade to Afghanistan in the last two years and it is expected to last until April 2009. During this roulement of forces, the size of the overall British contingent increased from 7,800 to 8,030 personnel.¹⁸ In a Statement to the House on 15 December 2008 the Prime Minister also announced that additional theatre reserve battalion forces would be deployed until August 2009 to cover the period in the run up to the Afghan Presidential election. These additional forces will come from the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. During this period approximately 8,300 British personnel will therefore be deployed in southern Afghanistan.¹⁹

In April 2009, 19 (Light) Brigade is expected to assume command of the British operation in southern Afghanistan until the end of October 2009. On current plans that brigade will then be replaced by 11 (Light) Brigade.²⁰ Reports that the UK will increase the number of its forces in Afghanistan after April 2009 by as many as 3,000 personnel, in order to match the planned US "surge" into the country, have thus far been denied by the Secretary of State. However, the MOD has continued to reiterate that force posture will be kept under review and many analysts have considered the deployment of additional forces likely given the continued reluctance of some NATO allies to commit further personnel and assets (this is examined in greater detail in section 3.3 below).²¹

The British contingent in Afghanistan currently comprises the following Army, RAF, Royal Navy and Royal Marines units:

¹⁸ HC Deb 16 June 2008, 677

¹⁹ HC Deb 15 December 2008, c816

²⁰ An outline of the forces to be deployed in the next force rotation was set out in a written statement to the House on 16 December 2008, c105-7WS

²¹ See "UK will not send substantial extra troops to Afghanistan, Browne says", *The Guardian*, 19 September 2008 and "Britain faces US pressure for a troop surge in Afghanistan", *The Times*, 19 September 2008

- 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters, Royal Marines
- 42 Commando Royal Marines
- 45 Commando Royal Marines
- United Kingdom Landing Force Command and Support Group
- Commando Logistic Regiment Royal Marines
- 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards
- 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery
- 24 Commando Engineer Regiment
- 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles
- 1st Battalion The Rifles
- 3 Close Support Battalion, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
- 114th Provost Company, Royal Military Police
- Elements of
 - The Queen's Royal Lancers
 - 5th, 16th, 26th, 32nd, 47th and 39th Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery
 - 32 and 35 Engineer Regiments
 - 33 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal)
 - 170 (Infrastructure Support) Engineer Group
 - 10th and 22nd Signal Regiments
 - 21st Signal Regiment (Air Support)
 - 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment
 - 7 Transport Regiment, The Royal Logistics Corps
 - 4 Regiment, Army Air Corps
 - 9 Supply Regiment, The Royal Logistics Corp
 - 11 Explosive Ordnance Regiment, The Royal Logistics Corp
 - 13 Air Assault Support Regiment, The Royal Logistics Corp
 - 17 Port and Maritime Regiment, The Royal Logistics Corp
 - 24 and 29 Postal Courier and Movement Regiment, The Royal Logistics Corp
 - 101 Force support Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

- 103 Military Working Dog Support Unit
- 1 Military Intelligence Brigade
- 4th Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment (King's, Lancashire and Border)
- 6th Battalion The Rifles
- Headquarters, 104 Logistic Brigade
- 4 Force Protection Wing Headquarters, Royal Air Force
- 1 Regiment Field Squadron, Royal Air Force
- Elements of:
 - Naval Strike Wing
 - 845, 846 and 847 Naval Air Squadrons
 - 4, 18, 27, 30, 39 and 70 Squadrons, Royal Air Force
 - 1 Air Movements Wing, Royal Air Force
 - 85 (Expeditionary Logistic) Wing Headquarters, Royal Air Force
 - 1 Air Control Centre, Royal Air Force
 - 90 Signals Unit, Royal Air Force
 - 2 Motor Transport Squadron, Royal Air Force
 - 5001 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 - Mobile Catering Support Unit
 - Tactical Medical Wing
 - Tactical Armament Squadron
 - Tactical Imagery Intelligence Wing
 - Joint Medical Command
- Elements to man 904 Expeditionary Air Wing, Royal Air Force; the Tactical Supply Wing and the Joint Helicopter Support Unit

3.2 Force Generation and Caveat Issues

Since the beginning of 2006 NATO Commanders and the leaders of several NATO nations have consistently called upon Member States to meet the force generation requirements of the ISAF operation. Despite considerable pressure, progress in securing additional troop commitments has, however, been minimal leading to allegations of unequal burden sharing within the Alliance and concern over the potential for a “two tier Alliance”²² to emerge.

²² See “Gates warns of two-tier NATO”, *The Financial Times*, 7 February 2008

Speaking at RUSI on 19 September 2006, for example, the then Secretary of State for Defence, Des Browne, expressed the view that:

I know that some of our partners feel, with some justice, that they have done their bit, and many are now focused on other tasks elsewhere in the world. Some have doubts that the mission will succeed. Others, candidly, have more direct concerns about the level of risk they are prepared to expose their soldiers to. These are understandable concerns.

But those of us who are already fully committed in the south – ourselves, the Canadians, the Dutch, the Danes, the Estonians and the ever present Americans – must remind our partners that it was their agreement and support that brought us to this point., and that the mission is as vital as it always has been [...]

The fundamental point is that NATO is an alliance. When it decides to use military force, all partners should be prepared to face equal risk.²³

Following the NATO Summit in Seville in February 2007 US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, also commented:

NATO is not a paper membership or a social club or a talk shop. It is a military alliance, one with very serious real-world obligations [...] NATO members are divided into two groups: those who do all they can to fulfil collective commitments, and those who do not [...] Going forward, it is vitally important that the success Afghanistan has achieved not be allowed to slip away through neglect or lack of political will or resolve. The overall success of the Alliance, and in particular, the success of the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan is dependent upon alliance members honouring their commitments.²⁴

Indeed an independent panel of experts appointed in October 2007 by the Canadian government to examine the options for the deployment of Canadian forces in Afghanistan beyond 2009, concluded that unless additional force contributions could be secured from other participating ISAF nations then Canada should relinquish security responsibility in the southern province of Kandahar.

These early developments are examined in greater detail in [Library Standard Note SN/IA/4143](#).

Military commanders on the ground have also criticised the imposition of national caveats on the deployment of military forces, arguing that restrictions on the rules of engagement of certain countries' forces have undermined the overall effectiveness of the ISAF operation. At the NATO Summit in Riga in November 2006 NATO leaders did agree to remove a number (although not all) of the caveats on the operational use of personnel, including securing the commitment of all allies to come to the aid of forces that require assistance in an emergency situation. However, concerns remained over this compromise, in particular over what may constitute the definition of "an emergency". As an article in *The Times* highlighted at the time:

Following the summit deal on national caveats, British troops under attack by the Taleban in Helmand province might in the future be able to rely on reinforcements from

²³ Speech by the Secretary of State for Defence to the Royal United Services Institute on 19 September 2006. A copy of his full speech is available online at: <http://www.rusi.org/events/ref:E4507D412CAD4A/info:public/infoID:E450FB4C61AE34/>. In an interview with *The Guardian* on 4 September the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt had already suggested that Britain "was doing more than its share of what is required in Afghanistan" ("Britain's top new soldier", *The Guardian*, 4 September 2006).

²⁴ Department of Defense Press Release, 11 February 2007

other parts of Afghanistan if they appeal for help, although neither political leaders nor officials were able to define what type of emergency would merit a call for assistance from troops in other more benign provinces.²⁵

An article in *The Financial Times* also highlighted the disparity of opinion between Member States on this issue:

Mr de Hoop Scheffer added that he had received commitments from the leaders of all 26 Nato countries that such restrictions would be waived in the case of emergency. "An emergency is defined by one man and only one man and that is the commander [of Nato's force]," he said.

But seconds later both Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, Spain's prime minister, and Romano Prodi, his Italian counterpart, insisted that their countries retained the right to decide when troops should be deployed.

"In emergency situations it is the Spanish command that decides," Mr Zapatero said. He added that Spain would not lift any of its restrictions on the use of its forces, since no such step was required by the troops' United Nations mandate.

Mr Prodi said the position of Italy, France, Germany and Spain, none of which station or intend to deploy troops in the turbulent south of Afghanistan was the same. At a separate press conference, President Jacques Chirac said France could consider sending its troops outside Kabul case by case.²⁶

The NATO Summit in Bucharest – April 2008

It was hoped that the summit in Bucharest in April 2008 would resolve the ongoing concerns over force generation and national caveats, particularly given the declaration by countries such as Canada to draw down their forces if additional assistance did not prove forthcoming.

Prior to the summit France and Poland indicated that they would be willing to deploy more forces or capabilities in Afghanistan, although several options were under consideration.²⁷ The US also tempered some of the previous criticism levelled at a number of its European allies, suggesting that those countries unable to commit combat troops due to domestic difficulties could provide equipment instead.²⁸

Despite expectations for the summit, events in Bucharest were somewhat overshadowed by the debate over the expansion of the Alliance and the ongoing row with Russia over missile defence.²⁹ As such addressing concerns over Afghanistan and the future credibility of the ISAF mission was considered by many to have been afforded less attention than it deserved. Of the 10,000 additional forces understood to have been requested by General McNeil, approximately only one tenth of those forces were identified by Member States. France committed to deploying a further 750-800 personnel in Regional Command East, thereby freeing up US troops to re-deploy and fight in the south alongside the Canadians in Kandahar. Romania, Slovakia and Portugal also agreed to provide additional capabilities. The US also indicated that it would be willing to deploy further forces in 2009, although details on numbers and location were expected to depend upon the security situation on the

²⁵ "Congratulations for NATO despite small boost to troops", *The Times*, 29 November 2006

²⁶ "NATO discord mars Afghan headway", *The Financial Times*, 30 November 2006

²⁷ See "Poland changes focus from Iraq to Afghanistan", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 16 January 2008.

²⁸ "Gates raises other options to Afghanistan troop deployment", *Defense News*, 8 February 2008

²⁹ Further information on the outcome of the NATO summit is available in Library Standard Note, SN/IA/4694, *NATO's Bucharest Summit 2008*, 10 April 2008.

ground at the time. It was also suggested that the level of additional commitment would depend upon the support offered by other NATO allies over the course of 2008.

To offset the concerns of some countries regarding the provision of additional forces to the ISAF mission, agreement was also reached on the concept of establishing a trust-fund scheme whereby countries would be able to offer equipment or financial contributions instead of sending forces. The UK was reported to have offered to contribute £5m to that fund.³⁰ Whether this initiative will be sufficient to overcome the concerns over burden sharing that have rocked the Alliance still remains to be seen. A general commitment to provide maximum flexibility to the ISAF force by restricting the use of national caveats was also agreed at the Bucharest summit, although no country-specific caveats were reportedly lifted.

Further attempts to persuade some NATO countries to relax the caveats on operational deployment have since achieved minimal success with concerns continuing to be expressed that 'undeclared' national caveats on the use of forces continue to hinder ISAF operations.³¹ In September 2008 the French Defence Minister, Hervé Morin, again called on European allies to relax restrictions on troop deployment and operations in Afghanistan. In a visit to Australia Mr Morin commented:

We [France and Australia] share the view that the effectiveness of the forces in place in Afghanistan depends very heavily on the conditions that are applied for their use. Caveats prevent the best possible application of the forces.³²

In a speech to the Royal United Services Institute on 20 October 2008 NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General John Craddock, also urged allies to address what he called a "wavering political will" in Afghanistan:

Not all of our challenges are of the external variety. We continue to face internal challenges – challenges over which we in NATO have much control. Many of the internal challenges NATO faces in conducting its operations revolve around the issue of our level of ambition and how it relates to political will.

A brief look at the will of our alliance in the mission in Afghanistan demonstrates some real shortcomings. In view of the more than seventy national operational restrictions – or 'caveats' – and our continual inability to fill our agreed upon statement of requirements in theatre – we are demonstrating a political will that is – somewhat wavering.

And it is this wavering political will that impedes operational progress and brings into question the relevancy of the alliance here in the twenty first century.³³

More recently the British Defence Secretary, John Hutton, has publicly called on European NATO allies to "step up to the plate" and deploy more forces to Afghanistan. He argued that "freeloading on the back of US military security is not an option if we wish to be equal partners in this transatlantic alliance. Anyone who wants to benefit from collective security must be prepared to share the ultimate price".³⁴ The Prime Minister, Gordon Brown also

³⁰ See "Many pledges but few new troops for Afghanistan", *The Guardian*, 4 April 2008

³¹ See "US general sees undeclared caveats in Afghanistan", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 30 May 2007

³² "France wants Europe to lift Afghan troop restrictions", *Reuters*, 17 September 2008

³³ A copy of that speech is available online at:

<http://www.rusi.org/events/ref:E48EDD9A572226/info:public/infoID:E48FC6E8B5C05C>

³⁴ "Hutton tells NATO allies to 'step up to plate' over Afghanistan", *The Guardian*, 16 January 2009

indicated that this issue would be on the agenda for the NATO 60th Anniversary Summit in April 2009.³⁵

3.3 Future Force Contributions and Rotation Plans

In the southern provinces the deployment of Canadian and Dutch ISAF forces has been secured until at least 2010-2011. The Canadian House of Commons voted by 198-177 on 13 March 2008 to support the extension of the Canadian deployment for a further two and a half years. In the longer term Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, has however pledged to withdraw most of Canada's contingent in the country when their current mandate ends in 2011. In December 2007 the Dutch Parliament also approved the extension of its mandate until August 2010, with a view to complete withdrawal by the end of that year. Throughout this period the composition of the Dutch contingent is expected to remain largely the same as at present, with the majority of forces deployed in Uruzgan province.³⁶ As outlined above, on current plans British forces in southern Afghanistan have been earmarked for deployment until at least April 2010.

In mid-September 2008 the then US President George W. Bush also announced that in tandem with a drawdown of forces in Iraq,³⁷ additional US military personnel would be deployed to Afghanistan in what was labelled a "quiet surge". Although exact numbers were to be confirmed a marine battalion which had been earmarked for deployment to Iraq was to be deployed in November 2008 along with an Army combat brigade team in January 2009. A further three combat brigades were identified as likely to be available for deployment in spring-summer 2009.³⁸ The proposal for a surge of forces into Afghanistan has been supported by the new US administration under President Barack Obama which ordered a strategic review of US policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, under the chairmanship of General Petraeus. As part of that review President Obama is expected to approve a surge of approximately 25-30,000 additional forces into Afghanistan in 2009-2010, with at least 10,000 of those forces deployed into Helmand province in mid-2009 where UK forces are currently based. The remaining personnel will be deployed elsewhere in southern and south western Afghanistan. At present there is no coalition presence whatsoever in Nimroz province in the far south western corner of Afghanistan.

As part of that surge of forces European allies in NATO are expected to come under pressure from the new administration to also commit additional forces. Those discussions are considered likely to dominate much of the agenda for the forthcoming NATO 60th anniversary summit in April 2009. However, many analysts do not expect that request for further forces to be met with enthusiasm by the majority of European governments, thereby placing more pressure on the UK. In response to reports in the media that the US was pressuring the UK to contribute additional 'surge' forces to Afghanistan, the MOD stated at the end of 2008:

The fact is that the US are planning to send more troops to Southern Afghanistan and the US Defence Secretary has stated that three additional brigades should become available by the Spring and Summer of 2009. The UK is the second largest contributor of forces to Afghanistan. Our troop contribution to ISAF is kept under regular review by the Chiefs of Staff and their advice to Ministers has always been followed. UK military

³⁵ HC Deb 15 December 2008, c816

³⁶ See "The Netherlands extends mission in Afghanistan", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 5 December 2007

³⁷ This is examined in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4845, [Coalition forces in Iraq: towards a drawdown?](#), 22 September 2008

³⁸ "Three combat brigades available for Afghanistan by summer, Gates says", *American Forces Press Service*, 23 September 2008

commanders have not requested additional troops but we have been consistently clear that a greater commitment is needed from other NATO countries.³⁹

Following suggestions that British forces could be transferred from Iraq to Afghanistan after the drawdown of the British contingent in Basra at the end of May 2009, the UK Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, stated in December 2008 that there is no question of British forces transferring from Iraq to Afghanistan on a “one to one basis”. He went on to comment:

I have said for a very long time that the British Armed Forces are stretched. We’re doing more than we are structurally resourced to do in the long-term. We can do it for a short period, but we can’t continue doing it ad infinitum, so we also have to get ourselves back into balance. It’s crucial that we reduce the operational tempo for our Armed Forces. So it cannot be, even if the situation demanded it, it cannot be just a one for one transfer from Iraq to Afghanistan. We have to reduce that tempo.⁴⁰

In the longer term, the British Ambassador to Kabul suggested in an interview with the Today programme in June 2007, that Britain’s commitment to Afghanistan was “likely to last for decades”;⁴¹ while in August 2007 Brigadier John Lorimer, then Commander of UK forces in Helmand province, was reported as suggesting that British forces could remain on the ground for over 30 years:

If you look at the insurgency then it could take maybe 10 years. Counter-narcotics, it’s 30 years. If you’re looking at governance and so on, it looks a little longer. If you look at other counter-insurgency operations over the last 100 years then it has taken time.⁴²

In September 2008 the then outgoing British Commander of forces in Afghanistan, Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, suggested that the Taliban-led insurgency “is a generational problem” that “will take 10 to 15 years to change, and we will need to be here”.⁴³ On another occasion he is reported to have commented that a military victory over the Taliban was “neither feasible nor supportable” and that “what we need is sufficient troops to contain the insurgency to a level where it is not a strategic threat to the longevity of the elected Government”.⁴⁴ In response to those comments the MOD stated:

Several media outlets today have reported that US Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said that Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith was being “defeatist” by thinking that the war cannot be won against the Taliban. Brigadier Carlton-Smith was not being defeatist, far from it. He has been upbeat about the progress that has been made militarily against the Taliban over the last year. The point he was making was that success in Afghanistan will not be won by military means alone. Reconstruction, development and political solutions at a national and provincial level to the needs of the people are crucial to building long term security and stability. This is something which we and the US are in complete agreement.⁴⁵

³⁹ http://www.blogs.mod.uk/defence_news/2008/week39/index.html

⁴⁰ Interview on the Andrew Marr show, 9 November 2008

⁴¹ “We’ll be in Afghanistan for decades”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 June 2007

⁴² “Afghan victory could take 38 years”, *The Observer*, 5 August 2007

⁴³ “Afghanistan troops must double”, *Sky News*, 24 September 2008

⁴⁴ “We can’t defeat Taleban says Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith”, *The Times*, 6 October 2008. These views have also recently been reported as being shared by the British Ambassador to Kabul, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles. See “British envoy says mission in Afghanistan is doomed, according to leaked memo”, *The Times*, 1 October 2008

⁴⁵ MOD Press Statement, 8 October 2008

Elsewhere further commitments to strengthening ISAF forces have been made. On 22 September 2008 the French Parliament voted to not only maintain its contingent in Afghanistan but also increase the number of forces deployed there by 100 personnel.

On 7 October 2008 the German cabinet also approved the extension of Germany's military contribution to ISAF until the end of 2009; while increasing the ceiling for the number of forces deployed in Afghanistan to approximately 4,500 personnel. That proposal was approved by the Bundestag on 16 October despite domestic opposition to the mission and calls from some political parties for a firm withdrawal date to be set. However, those additional forces will be deployed in the north of the country.

The Czech government has also announced its intention to raise the number of its forces in the country by a further 200 personnel in early 2009.⁴⁶

More recently the US government has called upon Japan and any NATO allies who have been reluctant to deploy forces to the ISAF operation in a combat capacity to contribute to the estimated \$17bn that is required to build up the Afghan army. Pentagon Press Secretary, Geoff Morrell, stated:

This may be one of those cases where countries that have had a reluctance to contribute forces, in particular combat forces, may be able to take part in this mission through a financial contribution to the development of the Afghan National Army.⁴⁷

On this proposal *Reuters* observed:

The new Pentagon push to share costs more widely reflects a realization among US officials that some allies simply will not put troops into the war despite heavy pressure from Washington – something Europe has been telling the United States for more than a year.

But it also threatens to create just the type of two-tiered NATO alliance that US Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned against...⁴⁸

Although no formal plans were endorsed at the meeting of NATO Defence Ministers on 9-10 October 2008 a Pentagon summary of the outcome of that meeting suggested that:

there was no "push-back" on either the expansion of the Afghan National Army or the creation of a NATO trust fund to help pay for it. "I think there is a broad understanding that ultimately the expansion of the Afghan security forces is everybody's ticket out of there," [US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates] said.⁴⁹

This issue is considered likely to now be discussed at the NATO summit in April 2009.

4 Related Library Papers

- Library Standard Note, SN/SG/3139, [The cost of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan](#), 24 September 2008
- Library Standard Note, SN/IA/4788, [Afghanistan](#), 8 July 2008

⁴⁶ "Czechs announce troop level boost for Afghanistan", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 13 August 2008

⁴⁷ "US to allies: fight in Afghanistan or write check", *Reuters*, 6 October 2008

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ Department of Defense press release, 10 October 2008

- Library Standard Note, SN/IA/4143, [*International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan: Recent Developments*](#), 2 May 2008
- Library Standard Note, SN/IA/2601, [*International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan*](#), 11 July 2006

Appendix One – Chronology of ISAF Commands

ISAF I (December 2001 – July 2002): Led by the United Kingdom under Lt. Gen. John McColl.

ISAF II (July 2002 – January 2003): Led by Turkey under Maj. Gen. Hilmi Akin Zorlu.

ISAF III (January – August 2003): Led by Germany, the Netherlands and Canada under Lt. Gen. Norbert Van Heyst, Germany

ISAF IV (August 2003 – February 2004): The first command to be led by NATO under Lt. Gen. Götz Gliemeroth, Germany

ISAF V (February – August 2004): NATO-led, under the command of Lt. Gen. Rick Hillier, Canada

ISAF VI (August 2004 – February 2005): NATO-led, under the command of Lt. Gen. Jean-Louis Py, France, EUROCORPS

ISAF VII (February – August 2005): NATO-led, under the command of Lt. Gen. Ethem Erdagi, Turkey, NRDC-T

ISAF VIII (August 2005 – May 2006): NATO-led, under the command of Lt. Gen. Mauro Del Vecchio, Italy, NRDC-IT. Command rotations changed to nine months.

ISAF IX (May 2006 – February 2007): NATO-led, under the command of Gen. David Richards, United Kingdom, Headquarters Allied Rapid Reaction Corps

ISAF X (February 2007 – February 2008): Composite command established. NATO-led, under the command of General Dan McNeill, United States

ISAF XI (February 2008 – Present): NATO-led under the command of General Dan McNeill, United States (February-June 2008) and General David McKiernan, United States (June 2008 -)