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**BACKGROUND**

**Phase 4: Transition to Afghan ownership and leadership in security**

**What does the Ministers' decision mean?**

The NATO Defence Ministers, in Bratislava on 23 October 2009, formally approved a Strategic Concept for ISAF Phase 4 (Transition) which will provide the basis for subsequent detailed military planning to prepare for the eventual transition to an Afghan lead and an ISAF support role. The Ministerial decision does not constitute a formal move to Phase 4 but sets the conditions and the planning criteria that would have to be met before allowing ISAF to transition to the next Phase. Each step in the transition process will require a decision by the North Atlantic Council.

Gradual transition of the lead security from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is the next phase of NATO's Operational Plan.

Significant progress has already been made to that end. Afghan Security Forces have assumed the lead for planning and execution of security operations in Kabul, as part of a Transfer of Lead Security Responsibility (TLSR) process. TLSR will be expanded in the future to other districts and, eventually, entire provinces, as the ANSF develops the necessary capacity and capability.

**What is phase 4**

The ISAF mission is currently in the stabilisation phase (Phase 3) of its operational plan. During this phase, ISAF will continue to provide security and build Afghan capacity. The adoption of Phase 4 (Transition) of ISAF's operational plan will be the next phase of an overall process of transferring responsibility to the Afghans. This is not associated with any force withdrawal or pre-determined decrease in force level requirements. It will entail a change in the nature of the security assistance provided to the Afghans and the balance of responsibility. In Phase 4, ISAF will gradually transition to a supporting and advisory role, as the Afghans assume the lead in the decision making, planning and conduct of security operations. Clear conditions for the launch of Phase 4 in districts and provinces will be set by the Alliance and Afghan Government. The Phases overlap, hence Phase 3 activities will continue in parts of the country, even after Phase 4 is initiated where conditions allow.