

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON AFGHANISTAN

In 2001, Allies invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty for the only time in NATO's history and went to Afghanistan together with clear objectives: to confront al-Qaeda and those who attacked the United States on September 11, and to prevent terrorists from using Afghanistan as a safe haven to attack us. In the ensuing decades through the investment of blood and treasure, and in partnership with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and its security forces, we have worked together to achieve these goals.

In light of this and recognising that there is no military solution to the challenges Afghanistan faces, Allies have determined that we will start the withdrawal of Resolute Support Mission forces by May 1. This drawdown will be orderly, coordinated, and deliberate. We plan to have the withdrawal of all US and Resolute Support Mission forces completed within a few months. Any Taliban attacks on Allied troops during this withdrawal will be met with a forceful response.

The conclusion of NATO's Resolute Support Mission takes place against the backdrop of renewed regional and international support for political progress toward peace. We will continue to support the ongoing Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. We welcome the Istanbul Conference as an opportunity to move the peace process forward and to reinforce the progress made in Doha. We call on the Afghan government and the Taliban to adhere to their commitments to the peace process initiated by the US-Taliban agreement and the US-Afghanistan Joint Declaration.

NATO Allies and partners will continue to stand with Afghanistan, its people, and its institutions in promoting security and upholding the gains of the last 20 years. Withdrawing our troops does not mean ending our relationship with Afghanistan. Rather, this will be the start of a new chapter. A sustainable peace in Afghanistan will have at its foundation an enduring, comprehensive, and inclusive peace agreement that puts an end to violence, safeguards the human rights of all Afghans, particularly women, children, and minorities, upholds the rule of law, and ensures that Afghanistan never again serves as a safe haven for terrorists.

NATO assembled one of the largest coalitions in history to serve in Afghanistan. Our troops went into Afghanistan together, we have adjusted together, and now we are leaving together. We are grateful to all who served in and supported this mission, including Afghanistan's security forces. We honour the sacrifices of those who paid the ultimate price in service to it.