

## Train, Advise, and Assist Lessons from Resolute Support Mission

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### Background to the Resolute Support Mission

The Resolute Support Mission (RSM) was a NATO-led mission to train, advise, and assist the Afghan security forces and institutions. The mission was launched on 01 January 2015, immediately following the stand-down of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The legal framework for the Resolute Support mission was provided by a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), signed in Kabul on 30 September 2014 and ratified by the Afghan Parliament on 27 November 2014. The SOFA defined the terms and conditions under which NATO forces were deployed, as well as the activities they were authorized to carry out. The mission was also supported by the UN Security Council Resolution 2189, unanimously adopted on 12 December 2014.

At the beginning of 2021, RSM consisted of around 10 000 troops from 36 NATO Allies and partners. The mission operated with one *hub* (Kabul/Bagram) and four *spokes* (Mazar-e-Sharif in the north, Herat in the west, Kandahar in the south, and Laghman in the east).

RSM personnel carried out training, advice, and assistance activities in support of the Afghan government's four-year security roadmap (launched in 2017), which was aimed at increasing the effectiveness and accountability of the Afghan national security forces and institutions.



*Last man standing: Major General Donahue, commander of the US Army's 82nd Airborne Division, was the last to board the final flight (a C-17) out of Kabul Airport on 30 August 2021. Picture via Reuters.*



*For the duration of the mission, RSM forces trained, advised, and assisted Afghan troops develop the capacity to defend Afghanistan and protect its citizens in the long term.*

**“The truth is: this did unfold more quickly that we had anticipated.”**

*Quote: President Biden during his speech on 16 August 2021, commenting on the rapid collapse of the Afghan Government.*



## Background (continued)

The roadmap was focused on leadership development, fighting capabilities (with an emphasis on the Afghan special operations forces and the air force), unity of command, and fighting corruption. The mission also performed supporting functions in several areas: operational planning; budgetary development; force generation process; management and development of personnel; logistical sustainment; and civilian oversight. All of which helped to ensure the Afghan security forces and institutions acted in accordance with the rule of law and good governance.

## Project Overview

On 14 April 2021, recognizing that there was no military solution to the challenges Afghanistan faced, the Allies decided to start the withdrawal of RSM forces by 01 May 2021. In early September 2021, after six years of operation, and 18 years since the beginning of the NATO-led engagement in Afghanistan, RSM was terminated.

Within this context, at the request of SHAPE, the JALLC was tasked to produce an evidence based report identifying the key strategic and operational lessons from NATO's experience in training, advising, and assisting the Afghan security forces and institutions since 2015.

The purpose of the report was to support the NATO strategic and operational level military HQs to learn from NATO's recent military experience in Afghanistan, with the identified RSM lessons benefitting the strategic and operational level military planning, conduct, and assessment of similar missions in the future.

The Project Team identified 12 lessons on topics such as Strategic Communications and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on RSM efforts and activities. The associated recommendations, together with the lessons identified will go on to support, not only future missions, but NATO's ongoing transformation.



*Left: the NATO RSM Mission Map. Right: the JALLC has been contributing to NATO's efforts in Afghanistan since ISAF and into RSM through its analysis reports and Lessons Learned activities. In this picture a JALLC Advisory and Training Team are onsite to provide training*

You can obtain a copy of this report from the JALLC or via the usual NATO Information Portal Channels with the appropriate security credentials.

## Project Team

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