

**General John R. Allen**  
**Change of Command**  
**10 February 2013, 1000-1100**

---

Excellencies, distinguished members of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, members of our diplomatic community from Kabul, and special guests,

A-salaam aleikum, sobh ba khayr.      Good morning to you.

I'd like to begin by thanking the 1<sup>st</sup> Division Band who has brought a lot of dignity to this performance today. Thank you very much, you are a valued member of these many ceremonies in which we are participating frequently. Thank you very much.

There are so many who are here today who are dear to all of us. And unfortunately we can't recognize everyone; so many friends, commanders, senior enlisted leaders, ambassadors. We're so grateful that you could attend this morning, and please forgive me if I don't have the opportunity to recognize each of you by name, but please know how much I treasure your friendship and how much I have treasured your support.

I'd specifically like to thank the leaders, though, and the staff of my NATO chain of command, in particular General Hans-Lothar Domröse, Commander of Joint Forces Command Brunssum, but also the Chairman of the Military Committee of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, General Knud Bartels. We're very grateful that you're with us here today. I'd also like to recognize and thank General Marty Dempsey, who's the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States, and Gen. Jim Mattis, who's the Commander of the US Central Command, my US Chain of Command. And of course, my Commandant, the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, General Jim Amos. Thank you all for being here. Thank you for the tremendous support you have given to ISAF. We've been well-resourced, ***we have never wanted for anything***, because of your leadership and because of your support.

And while they're not here today I'd also like to recognize several other individuals who've been central to the success of this campaign. The NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen; the US Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta; and the Supreme Allied Commander - Europe, my Annapolis classmate and friend Admiral Jim Stavridis. As well, I'd like to recognize the sage advice and friendship of the NATO Senior Civilian Representatives, Ambassador Maurits Jochems and Ambassador Simon Gass.

And though he's not here this morning, I could not offer these remarks without recognizing the role of a dear friend: the premier diplomat of American modern history, Ryan Crocker, who did so much for this relationship on two occasions. After we re-opened the US Embassy here in 2002 – very early – and then returned, and we had the opportunity to serve together here throughout much of my tour. And he has been succeeded by another great American diplomat, Jim Cunningham, who carries on Ryan's important work.

Excellencies, ministers, eminent representatives of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, President Mujadeddi, Dr. Spanta, Min. Mohammadi, Min. Patang, Gen. Karimi, and so many other true Afghan patriots who are here today, who have participated in this historic birth of democracy: Thank you for honoring us all with your presence. And to Dr. Ashraf Ghani, a dear friend, who plays such an important role in this business of Transition, but whose wisdom, advice, and friendship have been so important to me during my time of command, thank you for being with us this morning.

For all of you I am grateful – for your strong partnership – our friendship -- as we have faced and as we have overcome many challenges together. And in the process, in a very real sense, we have become brothers. Indeed, the people of Afghanistan have become my family – have become a part of me – and normally on an occasion like this, my family would be with me. My wife and my daughters would attend a ceremony such as this, but they're not able to be here today so I asked two young students from a high school nearby with whom we have a strong relationship – Somaya Fedayi and Mustafa Ibrahimi – to join me today, because they are very much my family. They will always be very much my family. Thank you, tashakoor.

And in their bright faces, we see the future of this great country. Today they are my precious family, and they have served to form the memories that I will take from Afghanistan.

Now it's difficult to imagine that in less than two hours I'm going to be on an airplane home to the US. I'll stop briefly in Ramstein to spend some time at the military hospital in Landstuhl to spend time with our wounded, but also to spend time with the staff of that hospital for the magnificent care they have given year after year to the troops of this Coalition. But it's been quite a journey since that early July day in 2011. And I will miss you all. And I will miss those that are with me here today. And I will miss this mission beyond words.

I don't want to say good-bye today. Instead I'd like to reflect, and to thank, and to pay tribute to you and to those who have gone before you, before the change of command on the 18th of July in 2011, and those we have lost in this noble and honorable endeavor.

Frankly, looking back on that day in July 2011, nineteen months ago, I did not have the sense of optimism that I have now as I stand before you here today – the optimism and the very real sense of knowing that we will be victorious in this calling. This didn't happen overnight, nor did it occur solely on my watch. It came from the worthy work of predecessors, the work of our many nations, and the success that we have enjoyed. And we should pay tribute to those who have paid this sacrifice. Today's success has been borne on the backs of many brave, young, precious soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and our civilians, more than 2,000 of whom have paid the ultimate price in this cause.

We have stood beside our Afghan brothers in this fight, as they, too, have paid a great price and will continue to pay with their lives to make a better future for Afghanistan. Truly the future of Afghanistan is nourished by the blood of your martyrs.

In a relatively short time within the context of the campaign as a whole, I am struck by how this chapter of history has unfolded, how much has changed from the time that I arrived here in July 2011. I assumed command just one day after the first Transition implementation ceremony for Tranche 1. This was the first glimmer of where Lisbon Transition and its roadmap would take us.

At that time, we were only beginning to see the glimmer of the potent force that the Afghan National Security Forces would become. ISAF at the time I arrived was in the lead. This is no longer the case. Afghanistan will soon be fully and formally responsible for its security across this great and beautiful land. But this has not been easy.

Let me put this in operational terms. The soldiers of the Coalition have conducted a battle handover from a main force unit from 50 nations to Afghanistan's forces that were still being built during the drawdown of 33,000 troops, all the while pivoting to a strategy of security force assistance and closing nearly 600 bases -- all of this in contact with the enemy, an enemy that would stop at nothing to break the enduring bonds that our Coalition and our Afghan counterparts share.

I don't think any of our nations have ever done this in history. This is historic, it is an epic achievement. This remarkable success will be looked upon as a defining moment in the Campaign and likely in Afghanistan's modern history. And here I must acknowledge the role of certain key commanders. And there are so many, I risk even mentioning one or mentioning several. And we wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for the work of Dave Rodriguez, our first commander of IJC. And followed so ably by Mike Scaparrotti. And today succeeded by Lt. Gen. James Terry, who is as fine a soldier as I've ever seen. Their labors, their planning, their sacrifice, their leadership have delivered us to where we are.

These achievements, your achievements have taken place upon the ground of a nation that for 1,000 years has been the place between empires. Imperial ambition and dynamics have played out across this country for generation after generation. Usually and often at the expense of the Afghan people and of this great country. And with the passage of empires playing out still until this day. Followed by the civil war and the dark days of the Taliban. We are delivered into this current struggle. But Afghanistan is no longer the place between empires. This is no longer the case.

At Chicago, I sat beside the President of the United States, and I heard 50 nations pledge their support -- 50 nations pledge their support -- to the security of Afghanistan. At Tokyo, we saw 100 nations and international organizations pledge 16 billion dollars of support to Afghanistan in the Decade of Transformation. There is no other country on the planet that has ever had this level of commitment and tangible support from so many in the international community.

And Afghanistan itself, it is rich in natural resources. Trillions of dollars of resources beneath our very feet. But importantly, there is another richness of this country. And it is the people of Afghanistan and it will be the people of Afghanistan that guarantee the greatness of this country. And in the burgeoning schools across this country, in which more than 8 million children now attend school -- almost half of them girls -- we are witnessing the birth of a generation of Afghans who will grow to lead this country to take its rightful place as a leader within Central and South Asia.

I see a bright future when I look into the faces of young Somaya and Mustafa, and when I see the young officers, as was the one who told us this morning of the Afghan casualties of last week – who is often Capt. Karker. And the new officers coming out of the military academy and schools of Afghanistan. I see in these faces the promise – the promise of Afghanistan’s bright future.

So, I believe that in 10 years Afghanistan will never again be the place between empires, caught in the grindstone of international politics. And I believe that Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven to terrorists that will oppress the precious people of this country and be the scourge and the plague of the world. This nation is the center, it is the heart of Asia, and as it continues on its present trajectory through the Decade of Transformation, it can be the future of Asia.

I believe it can be. I believe it will be.

To get us to this place has not been easy, nor has it been free. Every Sunday – today – we gather in front of my headquarters to name the names of the fallen. I’ll never forget that in the course of my command over 560 sons and daughters have given their lives, and over 5,500 were wounded. This weighs very heavily on me, and I will live with this reality, and I will pray for their souls every day and every night.

In this struggle all of us have given something. Many of us have given much, and some have given everything. We have all paid a price to get here, and many of us still see the faces of the youngsters that we’ve loved so much, our troops; these troops who have become a son or a daughter, and we acknowledge that there is a chair at a table at home, a chair that is empty and will always be.

And we can never forget them, and they are in our prayers always. So I remember the price they’ve paid, not just them, but the price paid by their families. And I remember the wounded, some of whom will never be whole again, and the families who must now support them. And we have to remember them.

And then every Sunday when we’ve read the names of our Coalition dead, the Afghan National Army steps up to recognize the sons of Afghanistan, also who have sacrificed in this conflict. And every week there are 25 or 35 or 45 killed in action and 50 or 60 or 70 wounded. There can be no doubt that Afghanistan is investing in its own future. The cost is paid in the blood of their finest young warriors.

Our nations together with the co-mingled blood of our troops and the expenditure of treasure have done so in a noble cause, and it will not be in vain. We stand with the people of Afghanistan today, now, and over the next 23 months, and in the Decade of Transformation.

Now this is not the first time I’ve relinquished command to Gen. Joe Dunford – one of my oldest and dearest friends in the United States Marine Corps. I pass the ISAF battle color to Joe as I did once before in 1996 when I handed the battle color of the famous 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment to then Lt. Col. Joe Dunford. I couldn’t have chosen a better replacement today. Just as I knew then that the 2<sup>nd</sup>

Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines would flourish under the leadership of Joe Dunford, I know that ISAF will as well. It is in good hands. And I know that he will stand with the people of Afghanistan in this worthy cause.

And I thought long and hard about the advice that I would leave with Joe Dunford as I depart. What words I could possibly impart that capture the entirety of this mission, of this calling. The advice that I gave him is to do all he can to understand this complexity of this ancient society of Afghanistan. To recognize that in its all its complexity, the principles of democracy come naturally to the Afghans – perhaps even easier than it came to us.

It's also important to understand that the relationship he'll have to have with the Afghan people will be a personal relationship. To understand the importance of these relationships, as he assumes the responsibilities as the commander of ISAF.

And lastly, I told him our victory here may never be marked by a parade or a point in time on a calendar when victory is declared. This insurgency will be defeated over time by the legitimate and well-trained Afghan forces that are emerging today, who are taking the field in full force this spring. Afghan forces defending Afghan people and enabling the government of this country to serve its citizens. This is victory. This is what winning looks like, and we should not shrink from using these words.

This campaign is, and always has been, about the Afghan people and about winning. And in that we must remember the cost. And in that we must keep faith with the sacrifices, because victory and winning can be the only outcome.

And then through all of this, the ultimate blessing that I have received is the blessing of my family – my beloved family. My wife Kathy, and my two daughters Betty and Bobbie. Their steadfast love and their support and their sacrifice during my 38-year career and countless deployments and innumerable moves cannot be measured. I owe them everything, and now I must recognize all of that sacrifice. Kathy, I wish you were here with me today, but you're not. And in your absence I thank you for all that you have done and all that you have sacrificed, and I want to tell you how much I love you.

In a few minutes I will board an airplane and return to the United States, but I will not leave Afghanistan. That is not possible. I will remain steadfast to the people of Afghanistan and the men and women of this Coalition, present and past, who have given their lives for what has become the call of our generation. They will always be with me, always be in my heart, in my memories, and my soul.

Thank you, tashakoor.