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General John F. Campbell

ISAF-Resolute Support Transition Ceremony Address

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Good afternoon everyone; especially to our Afghan friends, As-salamu alaykum. Thank you for all attending. Mr. [Mohammad Hanif] Atmar, thank you for your remarks. Thanks for coming today. You honor us with your presence. Thank you for your selfless and courageous service to your country. It's a privilege to serve alongside you and all of our Afghan leaders from the police and from the army as we strive together to strengthen the new National Unity Government and protect the Afghan people and the international community from extremism.

To all of our distinguished guests, ambassadors, ministers, Coalition partners, General Dumröse (Happy Birthday), commanders, sergeants majors, ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for joining us as we formally end the ISAF mission; and more importantly, we transition to our new mission, Resolute Support.

Another special recognition, I'd like to say a thank you to Ambassador [Maurits] Jochems, as the Senior Civilian Representative of NATO [SCR] that will end his duties here in a couple of days; and Ambassador [Ismail] Aramaz, incoming SCR. So thank you both, gentlemen. Maurits, thank you for your service for the past several years. You've meant a great deal to ISAF and to the Coalition partners. Let's give [Mauritz and hand].

To all those who planned and organized this ceremony, I thank you for your hard work. An event like this requires a great deal of organization, preparation, and rehearsal. Thanks very much.



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Today marks an end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Today, NATO completes its combat mission, a 13-year endeavor filled with significant achievements and branded by tremendous sacrifice, especially by the thousands of Coalition and Afghan Army & Police wounded and fallen who gave so much to build a brighter future for this war-torn land; and, I must add, thousands and thousands of Afghan civilians, as well, who gave their lives in defense of this country.

Today, as we case the ISAF colors and unfurl the Resolute Support colors, we also remember and honor all those Coalition and Afghan heroes whom we've lost and the loved ones that they left behind. Their sacrifices drive us to persevere. They drive us to finish this noble mission well. And they drive us to win.

As we close out the ISAF mission, it's also appropriate to pause and reflect upon what we've collectively accomplished. Our progress has been considerable. In the wake of the Taliban's defeat in 2001 -- and we have many Afghans who were with us from the very beginning -- Afghanistan possessed no standing, professional security forces. Over the course of a decade, our Afghan partners and we have built a highly capable Afghan Army and Police Force of over 350,000 personnel. For the last two fighting seasons, the Afghan National Security Forces [ANSF] have been in the lead, and they've prevailed over a determined enemy. Today, the ANSF have rightfully earned their position as the most respected institutions in the country.

We should take great pride in our contributions to the ANSF's success. Together, we have created the security conditions which have allowed Afghan society to rise up after decades of relentless war. Together, we have lifted the Afghan people out of the darkness of despair and given them hope for the future. Some examples: In 2001, the life expectancy here in Afghanistan was 43 years old. Today it's 62. That's 21 years in this last decade plus. You times that by about 35 million Afghans represented here in the country, that gives you 741 million years of life that the Afghan Security Forces and Coalition have provided hope for the future.

Take a look at the roads, the number of people on the internet, the number of cell phones, number of females in schools -- number of people in school -- the women in the labor force -- on and on. These things could not have happened without the Afghan Security Forces and the Coalition standing together.

The momentous events of 2014 reinforce our optimism. The first peaceful, democratic transition in Afghan history occurred. The international community confirmed its financial commitments. The Afghan Parliament ratified long-term security agreements with NATO and the United States. The ANSF demonstrated extraordinary courage and increasing capabilities and our Coalition's resolve remained firm.



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There are many challenges that remain, yet all of these positive developments bode well for an eventual, successful resolution of this conflict. We now enjoy considerable momentum as we enter 2015. There is no turning back to the dark days of the past. The insurgents are losing, they're desperate. The inauguration of the National Unity Government and the ratification of the BSA [Bilateral Security Agreement] & SOFA [(NATO) Status of Forces Agreement] represent devastating political blows to the enemy's cause and narrative.

The Afghan people have spoken. They've chosen progress over backwardness, education over ignorance, and transparency over criminality. They've roundly rejected the insurgents' senseless destruction and murdering. This year the Afghan people reasserted their sovereignty and they've asked for and need our sustained support. And we will give it to them. We're not walking away.

Yet in spite of all of this, the insurgents continue to kill their fellow Muslims in their misguided cause. It's time for the enemy to heed President [Mohammad Ashraf] Ghani's call: lay down their arms, come to the peace table, and help rebuild the Afghan nation.

As we look to the future, we can see that Afghanistan and our Coalition are at a critical turning point. We are presented with an unprecedented strategic opportunity to break the cycle of misery and lay the foundations for an enduring peace. Our new Resolute Support Mission reflects NATO's continued investment in Afghanistan's future. Our commitment to Afghanistan endures.

The ANSF have already proven that they can win the tactical fight. The ANSF -- when they work together, completes the Army -- overmatch the enemy wherever and whenever challenged. Our Afghan partners can and will take the fight from here.

Because of the ANSF's success on the battlefield, we're transitioning to the Resolute Support mission. We'll continue to train, advise, and assist the ANSF and Afghan Security Institutions at the operational and strategic levels so that they can sustain their hard-fought gains and win the war.

President Ghani recently marked -- remarked at the NATO Foreign Ministers' Conference, and I quote: "Compelled by tragedy, and cemented by mutual sacrifice, the partnership between Afghanistan and NATO is entering a new phase," end quote.

Resolute Support will serve as the bedrock of our Enduring Partnership with Afghanistan in which our joint interests and cooperation will ensure our shared security. Working together, we cannot fail. Working *together*, we will prevail.

Let me close by first thanking the men and women for our historic Coalition. We've endured many challenges since 2001, yet we've remained cohesive and effective.



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The Coalition has played a central role in the largest, most resilient, and effective Coalition in modern history. NATO and its partners, representing 51 nations -- over a quarter of the countries of the world -- have stood firmly with Afghanistan for 13-plus years and counting. The men and women of our Coalition have earned the Afghans' and International Community's respect, admiration, and lasting gratitude.

And so, to all that have served under the ISAF colors and to all those who will serve under the Resolute Support banner, I hope you take great pride in the positive impact you've made and will continue to make upon the Afghan people and their future. You've made Afghanistan stronger and our countries safer. Because of your vigilance, courage, and extraordinary efforts, Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven for international terrorists.

I also want to express my gratitude to your families at home. I know firsthand the sacrifices they make every day to support us while we're deployed. In many ways, these separations are harder on them than on us. Please convey to them how important your mission remains here; and how vital their support is to our success.

Finally, I'd like to say thank you to our Afghan partners. Today, and throughout the month of January, as Mr. Atmar mentioned, we join President Ghani, CEO Abdullah, and all the Afghan people as you rightfully celebrate the ANSF's development, success, and sovereignty. We too salute the Afghan Security Forces heroism. We too honor your brave soldiers and policemen who are rightfully the pride of your nation.

We stand in awe of their selfless courage. I only need to cite the actions of two Afghan National Policemen. One, Officer Murad Khan, last year embraced a deranged suicide attacker and smothered the effects of his explosion and saved scores of women and children in Khost Province; and another, Officer Mir Afghan, who just 10 days ago valiantly stood his ground and gave his life and prevented another homicidal madman from driving his explosive-laden vehicle into the middle of Kabul.

For the last 13 years, we have fought and bled alongside the ANSF. As we commence the Resolute Support mission, we will continue to stand by them and you, today and in the future.

We're all very proud of our relationship, a relationship built on trust, friendship, and shared interests. That trust and a common vision for a stable, secure, and unified Afghanistan fill me with confidence that we'll continue to be successful. The road before us remains challenging, but we will triumph.

Once again, thank you all for coming.

Tashakur.