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General Lloyd J. Austin III

Address on Assuming Command of U.S. Forces-Iraq



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Today marks the beginning of Operation New Dawn and our renewed commitment to an enduring, strategic relationship with the Iraqi peoples.

Success will require a comprehensive and coherent approach by all U.S. government entities, international organizations, and the Iraqi government. The result of that teamwork will be a stable, secure, and self-reliant Iraq that benefits the entire region.

Well, good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Vice President, Ambassador Jeffrey, Secretary Gates, distinguished guests. Thank you all for being here today.

And General Odierno, at the outset let me thank you for your invaluable service and your leadership. What a great job -- Hooah.

It is my sincere honor to return to this great country to serve once more with my Iraqi friends. And to all the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen, and civilians serving under United States Forces-Iraq, it is indeed my honor and a distinct privilege to serve with you as we undertake the next phase of our effort in Iraq.



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The past few years in Iraq have been marked by steady progress. And in that time we have witnessed an improvement in the lives of the Iraqis, as this country has become more stable, more secure, and more self-reliant. The development of the Iraqi security forces has indeed been significant, and I commend the Iraqi security forces for taking the lead in providing for Iraq's security.

I also commend our American servicemembers, our civilians, and the Department of State and other agencies for their contributions to this wonderful progress. And because of your service, the Iraqis have had the freedom to participate in two, free and fair national elections. The incidents of violent attacks have steadily declined, and Iraq has begun constructive new relationships with its regional allies, which will offer stability and prosperity for the entire region.

This is tremendous progress in a relatively short period of time, and it would not have been possible without a strong partnership between our two nations. And although challenges remain, we will face these challenges together.

Iraq still faces a hostile enemy who is determined to hinder progress. Iraq's enemies will continue to seek opportunities to pursue their objectives, but make no mistake: Our military forces here, and those of the Iraqi nation, remain committed to ensuring that our friends in Iraq succeed.

And we will demonstrate our commitment through a continued partnership with the Iraqis.

And we will help the Iraqis develop their capability to provide for their own national defense by advising, assisting, training, and equipping their security forces.

And we will support Iraqi troops in targeted counterterrorism operations.

And we will continue to work with the State Department provincial reconstruction teams to assist local and provincial governments as they continue to improve services for the Iraqi people.

And we will work with the Iraqi government to strengthen Iraqi institutions, and the rule of law.

And we fully recognize that United States Forces-Iraq is but one component of a whole of government effort. And as we press forward together, the U.S. mission will continue to transition to an increasing focus on civilian-led efforts, but our national commitment to Iraq will not change.



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And I look forward to working very closely with Ambassador Jeffrey, whom I hold in very high regard. And we will work together to ensure that this transition is carried out in a thorough and responsible manner. As you know, Ambassador Jeffrey has a distinguished career of service to our nation, and I cannot think of a better partner in this endeavor.

And I know that we would not be where we are today without the distinguished service and the commitment and the sacrifice of so many Americans, and so many Iraqis -- distinguished warriors like former Iraqi Captain Furat and American Captain [Brian] Ducote.

Now Captain Furat served in the Iraqi special forces under Saddam Hussein. He later fought side-by-side with American soldiers against insurgents, where he became a close friend of an American officer, Captain Ducote.

In 2005, Furat was paralyzed in a terrorist ambush when he was hit by small-arms fire some 12 times. And terribly wounded, Furat's survival was far from certain. And Captain Ducote helped Furat get medical care in the United States, and he refused to leave his comrade until he was cared for. The bond that they shared was formed through the hardship that they experienced together, and it could not be broken. And that is the type of bond, ladies and gentlemen, that we hope to have with Iraq for many, many years to come -- one based on trust, confidence, and mutual respect.

Ultimately, we want what all Iraqis want: a stable, secure, and unified Iraq -- an Iraq whose people feel a sense of dignity and hope, an Iraq whose governmental institutions provide for its people and foster a sense of inclusion in the political process; and an Iraq with a strong, professional, and capable security force that can protect the population and defend the nation.

Operation New Dawn marks the next phase of an enduring relationship between Iraq and the United States of America. And I look forward to continuing to work with our counterparts at the State Department, and with our Iraqi partners, to help Iraq become a stable, secure, and self-reliant nation.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

Shukran jazilan.¹

Note: General Austin is the first black General to lead an entire war effort in a major operation.

¹ Arabic for "Thanks a lot" or "Thanks, very much."