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General Raymond Odierno

*U.S. Forces-Iraq Change of Command Address*



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**AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio and edited for continuity**

Distinguished guests, Mr. Vice President, Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, General Mattis, General Austin, Command Sgt. Major Wilson, Command Sgt. Major Coleman:

To my Iraqi friends: Deputy Prime Minister Issawi, Prime Minister Barham Salih, Minister of Defense, the Minister of the Interior, General Babaker, and all the wonderful general officers of the Iraqi army and air force:

Thank you so much for coming today, you are the future of Iraq and we think the future of Iraq is very bright.

I'd also like to take a minute just to thank all of those who spent so much time and effort in putting this ceremony together to make it special for both me and General Austin. I truly appreciate that. I appreciate the band, the color guard, but all the people behind the scenes that I know we don't ever properly recognize for what you do to make this a very special event. So thank you very much

Usually, when you're at a change of command you take some time to thank those who have supported you and you know, you like to name a lot of people. But I have been here 40 out of the last 47 months as the Secretary pointed out and I've been here through 3 Corps Headquarters, 24 different U.S. Multinational Divisions, 211 Brigades, over 1,000 Battalions, over 140 Flag Officers, a hundred and hundreds of thousands of soldiers so if I try to thank all



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of them, we'd be here for a very, very long time. So to save you all, I've decided not to do that today

I will start out by saying it's important to take a step back to put into perspective where we are today. I believe it's absolutely remarkable how much the United States and our Coalition partners at the time, but most importantly the Iraqi people what they've accomplished. This period in Iraq's history will probably be remembered for sacrifice, resiliency, and change; however, I remember it as a time in which the Iraqi people stood up against tyranny, terrorism, and extremism and decided to determine their own destiny as a people and as a democratic state.

In my time here in Iraq, I participated in many inspiring milestones:

- The toppling of this Saddam's tyrannical regime.
- The capture of Saddam Hussein.
- The planning and execution of the Surge and Operation Fardh al Qanoon.
- The recognition of Iraqi sovereignty through the ratification and implementation of the bilateral agreements.
- The Iraqi Security Forces taking the lead of security within the cities on the first of July of 2009.
- The transition and consolidation of Multi National Force-Iraq into a single unified command.
- The National Parliamentary Elections on 7 March in which 11.5 million Iraqis from all ethnic and religious groups, both young and old, from North to South, East to West, freely exercised the most basic right of democracy.

I've witnessed the continued improvement of the Iraqi security forces and their capability, which resulted in the draw down of our forces, which featured the withdrawal of just under 100,000 personnel, over 40,000 wheeled and tracked vehicles, and nearly 2 million pieces of equipment all without incident. That defines a certain level of security.

And now today marks the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the beginning of Operation New Dawn, continued steps in achieving a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq.

In every case that I just mentioned above, there were many who doubted the ability that we'd ever accomplish what we set out to do. However, no matter the circumstances, I never for a moment lost faith in the adaptability, courage, and mental toughness of our service members and civilians to get the job done.



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If there is one lesson I have taken from our involvement here, it is the sheer magnitude of what we are capable of when we trust in ourselves, remain focused on our commitment, and work side-by-side, arm-in-arm with our Iraqi partners and our civil-military team. Even today there are those who doubt that the Iraqi Security Forces are ready to take full responsibility for security. I stand before you today and say they are ready to do that task.

To each and every trooper of U.S. Forces-Iraq, previously Multi National Force-Iraq past and present, you made these momentous accomplishments possible through your tireless efforts, extraordinary sacrifice in partnership with the Iraqi Security Forces, our Coalition partners, and the interagency.

We stood together through difficult times. We fought together, we laughed together and sometimes cried together. We stood side-by-side and shed blood together. But it was for the shared ideals of freedom, liberty, and justice. A degree of normalcy that was previously hijacked by a dictator, by al-Qaeda, and by other extremist groups has been reclaimed and returned to its rightful owners, the Iraqi people. Because of your tremendous efforts, justice has replaced chaos, accord has replaced strife, and hope has replaced despair.

Today is a new dawn in our relationship with the Government of Iraq. We can no longer dwell on our past accomplishments, but must remain focused on the tremendous opportunity at hand. Iraq has always played a vital role in this uncertain part of the globe. A strong democratic Iraq that is an enduring and equal partner of the United States can become an engine for peace and stability in the Middle East.

Through the end of our military mission, United States Forces-Iraq must maintain strategic patience and continue to do all we can to develop Iraq's capacity and build meaningful relationships. Today marks the transition to Operation New Dawn and the end of combat operations in Iraq for American forces, but it in no way signals an end of our commitment to the people of Iraq. It is a continued recognition of Iraq's sovereignty and marks the beginning of our transition to a U.S. civilian-led effort, one aimed at building an enduring strategic partnership which will bring American technology, education, and commercial expertise to bear, so that the Iraqi people can unleash the country's great potential. We will maintain our military presence through the end of 2011 to continue maturing the Iraqi Security Forces and to provide the physical and psychological support necessary for the Government of Iraq to move forward to enduring, stability and prosperity.

We stand at a pivotal point today in Iraq, as Iraqis establish the foundations of the representative government in accordance with their Constitution and continue to build economic, diplomatic and security depth. A peaceful transition of power following Iraq's credible and legitimate elections is the strongest possible response to al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations.



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By voting for peace, stability, and prosperity, the Iraqi people have sent a clear message to their leadership, and I urge all the political blocs to respond by forming a government that is representative of their will. It is time for Iraq to move forward. Through decades of abuse, oppression and uncertainty, the Iraqi people have continued to demonstrate tremendous resiliency. I know they are determined to make Iraq something very different from what it once was, something their children and grandchildren can be proud of and something their forefathers, the inheritors of Hammourabi and Harun al-Rashid could recognize as matching the greatness of Iraq's glorious past.

When I return to the United States, I know that many will ask, "Was it worth it? What was it all for?" To which I will respond with the words of General George C. Marshall, "We must present democracy as a force holding within itself the seeds of unlimited progress by the human race. By our actions we should make it clear that such a democracy is a means to a better way of life, together with building a better understanding among nations."

We have sacrificed our nation's most precious resource, our sons and daughters, to give the Iraqi people the opportunity for a better future. All of you who have served here, civilians and military, should be proud of your contribution to that noble goal. We will never forget the 4,163 Americans and the tens of thousands of Iraqis who have died for their country, or the thousands wounded whose lives have been changed forever, but will always continue to inspire us. We will complete our mission with honor and success as a tribute to their selfless service.

As USF-I changes its missions today, I remain supremely confident that General Lloyd Austin will carry on our legacy of positive change for the Iraqi people. General Austin is a proven combat leader of the highest order. He has worked closely with the Iraqi Security Forces and senior U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi leadership. His incredible reputation of professionalism and dedication precedes him and U.S. Forces-Iraq is in great hands at this important juncture. There is simply no one more qualified, and Lloyd I wish you nothing but the best of luck.

To my Iraqi partners: I have been proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with you and I am honored to have served the Iraqi people. Together we have shouldered the burden of war, that builds a bond that cannot be broken. You have demonstrated exceptional bravery, boundless ingenuity, and unfailing determination. You serve so that others may live in peace and harmony. You all have earned my utmost respect.

To Ambassador Jeffrey and all the brave and dedicated Foreign Service Officers of the U.S. Embassy and the many other U.S. governmental agencies committed to our mission in Iraq: Thank you for your professionalism, sacrifice and partnership.

To the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Civilians of U.S. Forces-Iraq: You are the finest fighting force in the world today. Your commitment to success never wavered. When we asked you to sacrifice, you were selfless. When the conditions became difficult, you gave more. When a change was required, you embraced it.



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You represent the best of what America has to offer and you inspire me every single day. It has been an honor to serve with you and humbling to lead you.

To my family, my wife Linda, Michael, Katie, my son-in-law Nick, Tony, my daughter-in-law Daniela: Your selflessness, sacrifice, and support have kept me going over the last many years. I will never be able to repay you for your sacrifices and thank you for your unconditional love and support.

To all our families: You are true American heroes who have selflessly sacrificed for your country. We are all deeply indebted to you.

And finally, to my Iraqi Friends: I am honored to have known you. I am proud to call you my friends. I will miss you and I will miss Iraq. Iraq will always be a part of me, but for now my journey is home.

May God bless all of you.

May God Bless America.

And may God Bless the new Iraq.

Lion 6 out.

Thank you very much.