

MNF-I Change of Command Ceremony
Remarks by General David Petraeus
Baghdad, Iraq
16 September 2008

Good morning, *salam alekum, sabah al khair, and shukrun jazeelan*. Thank you for being here for today's ceremony.

I'd like to begin this morning by repeating what I wrote in a letter this week to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen, and Civilians of Multi-National Force-Iraq—that it has been the greatest of privileges to have been their commander for the past 19 months. I can, in fact, imagine no higher honor than soldiering here in Iraq with the men and women of the Coalition—and with the many courageous diplomats and Iraqis with whom we have served—in undertaking this challenging, complex, and critical endeavor.

Mr. Secretary, Admiral Mullen, thank you for your kind words on what our troopers and their Iraqi counterparts have accomplished over the past year-and-a-half. In turn, on behalf of all our men and women in uniform who have sacrificed so much and have served with such courage and skill to achieve the progress you noted, I want to thank each of you—and our bosses at CENTCOM, Admiral Fallon and General Dempsey—for your unwavering support of our men and women serving downrange and for your unyielding efforts to ensure that they have had the equipment, training, and resources needed to confront the enemies of the new Iraq.

In truth, this is a day to say thanks to many here in Iraq--

To our Iraqi partners, some of whom are here with us today—Prime Minister Maliki, Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers, and military leaders: thank you for your courage and your leadership. You have risked everything to help your country make the most of the opportunity that our forces and yours have fought so hard to provide. You have performed countless critical tasks for your country, and it has been an honor to soldier with you again.

To the *Sha'ab Al Iraqi*, the people of Iraq: thank you for your courage in standing with the new Iraq and for standing against extremism. Your willingness to confront Al Qaeda, militia elements, and other extremists has been a significant factor in the progress achieved since the commencement of the surge. You have endured tragic losses and countless hardships. But you have begun the process of repairing the fabric of a society ripped apart by the horrific sectarian violence of 2006 and 2007. Please know that there will always be a place in my heart for the Land of the Two Rivers and the people of Iraq.

To the many Coalition leaders here today—including Air Chief Marshall Sir Jock Stirrup, Chief of the UK Defence Staff, and the ambassadors of many Coalition countries—and

to leadership of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq: thank you for your steadfast support of our mission and of Coalition efforts in Iraq, especially throughout the dark days during the height of the sectarian violence.

To Ambassador Crocker and the members of the US Mission-Iraq team: thank you for being incomparable partners, and thank you for your tremendous work in helping our Iraqi colleagues on the economic, diplomatic, and political fronts. Complex challenges like those found in Iraq require comprehensive solutions. Military action has always been necessary but never sufficient. The additional dimensions you have added have been critical to the progress achieved.

On a personal note, Ambassador Crocker, Ryan, you have been the greatest diplomatic partner with whom any commander could be privileged to serve. It has been an honor to be your wingman and a pleasure to soldier with you as we have grappled with the inevitable daily crises and as we have worked to achieve unity of effort and progress in implementing our joint campaign plan.

To the members of the MNF-I Staff—including three great British DCG's and three terrific Marine Chiefs of Staff, not to mention the incomparable Sadi and the most talented personal staff I've ever seen—thanks for your tireless efforts and for your invaluable, thoughtful, and forthright assessments and leadership. I have relied heavily on each of you, and your skill, commitment, and spirit of teamwork have been truly impressive.

To General Austin and General Odierno before him, to General Helmick and General Dubik before him, to Admiral McRaven and General McCrystal before him, and to all our commanders at every level who have taken big ideas and broad guidance and turned them into reality on the ground: thank you for your exceptional leadership, competence, and energy. You and your Iraqi counterparts have played the central roles in helping to reverse Iraq's downward spiral toward civil war and to wrest the initiative from the enemies of the new Iraq. Your operational acumen, determination during tough times, and sheer force of will have been key ingredients in the progress during the surge and beyond.

To our noncommissioned officer leaders and, above all, to Command Sergeant Major Marvin Hill, my right-hand man for the second time here in Iraq and the best air assault buddy any commander could have: thanks for demonstrating once again what great noncommissioned officers do and thanks for reminding us that the most effective senior non-commissioned officers are those found not in the back seat of their commander's HMMWV but out on their own, expanding their boss's impact and providing energy, example, and direction to the troopers making it happen on the ground.

Finally, and above all, to our troopers: thank you for your courage, determination, commitment, sacrifice, and skill. Our countries and Iraq can never thank you enough for what you have done. When I took command in this rotunda over 19 months ago in

February 2007, I noted that the situation in Iraq was hard but not hopeless. You have proven the latter part of that assessment to be correct.

“Hard” it most certainly has been. There have been many tough days, and many tough losses. You have fought countless difficult battles, many requiring force of arms to clear Al Qaeda and militia sanctuaries and others calling for force of persuasion to spur action on important projects for the Iraqi people. You have prevailed over barbaric, resilient, adaptive enemies, and you have done so in crushing heat and blinding sandstorms throughout seemingly endless days.

But hard has not been hopeless. Indeed, you and our Iraqi partners stemmed the tide of violence and helped this country step back from the brink of civil war. Al Qaeda in Iraq, though still lethal and dangerous as we saw yesterday, is on the run and reduced in capability. And militia activity, though still a threat as well, has also been reduced dramatically. Clearly, innumerable challenges confront the new Iraq and much hard work lies ahead, but the progress you and our Iraqi partners have achieved has been of enormous importance.

Achieving that progress has required you to be consummate counterinsurgents. You have lived with the Iraqi people in order to help secure and serve them. You have partnered with Iraqi Security Forces as they have grown in number and capability. You have pursued non-kinetic initiatives as aggressively and skillfully as you have employed the most lethal of kinetic capabilities.

You have, in short, been builders as well as guardians, statesmen as well as warriors. And your performance has been extraordinary.

As the Secretary and the Chairman have noted, MNF-I’s new Commander is the perfect man for the job. Returning to Iraq only seven months after completing a tremendous tour as the Multi-National Corps-Iraq Commander during the first year of the surge, General Ray Odierno brings to MNF-I the ideal mix of operational skill, experience, understanding, and leadership qualities. Ray, welcome back—and thank you for your willingness to return to Iraq for a third tour so soon after leaving following your second tour. As I move on to Central Command, I pledge to do all that I can to support you, MNF-I, and our Iraqi partners as all engaged in this effort work together to help establish a free, prosperous, and democratic new state in an ancient land.

In closing, I will always be grateful for the opportunity to have served the coalition and Iraq in this important undertaking and to have done so with so many great teammates. And I will always be indebted to those who have served here and have given so much to help bring hope back to Iraq. Thanks again for your professionalism, your dedication, and the sacrifices each of you—and your families—have made. You truly have turned “hard but not hopeless” into “still hard but hopeful.”

Thank you. *Shukrun Jazeelan.*