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Salaam Aleikum. Good morning to you all.

Ministers Wardak, Khan, Spanta, other Ministers, Ambassadors, General Ramms, General Karimi, and our other Afghan Partners, distinguished guests, members of the International Security Assistance Force and US Forces-Afghanistan, thank you all for being with us.

And General Ramms, thank you for presiding at today's ceremony and for your great support of this mission throughout your tenure over the past several years as Commander of Nato's Joint Forces Command-Brunssum. And special thanks to the great 101st Airborne Division and Afghan bands and the superb color guard here this morning.

Up front, I also want to recognise the enormous contributions of my predecessor, General Stan McChrystal.

We have all worked hard together over the past year-and-a-half to get the inputs right in Afghanistan - to build the organisations needed to carry out a comprehensive, civil-military counterinsurgency campaign; to get the best individuals possible in charge of those organisations; to ensure that we have our plans and concepts right; and to garner and deploy the forces and other resources needed to implement those plans and concepts.

No-one did more in helping to get the inputs right than General McChrystal. And the progress made in recent months, in the face of a determined enemy, is in many respects the result of the vision, energy, and leadership he provided during his time as ComIsaf [Commander, International Security Assistance Force].

This morning, as I look at the representatives of the organisations engaged here in Afghanistan, I feel privileged to be joining this critical effort at such a pivotal time. As each of you knows well, we are engaged in a tough fight.

After years of war, we have arrived at a critical moment. We must demonstrate to the Afghan people, and to the world, that al-Qaeda and its network of extremist allies will not be allowed to once again establish sanctuaries in Afghanistan from which they can launch attacks on the Afghan people and on freedom-loving nations around the world.

And with the surge in Isaf forces and the growth of our Afghan partners, we have a new opportunity to do just that.

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we will do all that we can to help you build a country free of the fear of the Taliban and al-Qaeda

Gen David Petraeus

We are engaged in a contest of wills. Our enemies are doing all that they can to undermine the confidence of the Afghan people. In so doing, they are killing and maiming innocent Afghan civilians on a daily basis.

No tactic is beneath the insurgents; indeed, they use unwitting children to carry out attacks, they repeatedly kill innocent civilians, and they frequently seek to create situations that will result in injury to Afghan citizens.

In answer, we must demonstrate to the people and to the Taliban that Afghan and Isaf forces are here to safeguard the Afghan people, and that we are in this to [win](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/south_asia/10501541.stm). That is our clear objective.

As President Obama and Nato Secretary General [Anders-Fogh] Rasmussen have noted, my assumption of command represents a change in personnel, not a change in policy or strategy. To be sure, I will, as any [new commander](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/south_asia/10501541.stm) should, together with Isaf, Afghan, and diplomatic partners, examine our civil-military effort to determine where refinements might be needed. But our military objectives will remain the same.

Together with our Afghan partners, we must secure and serve the people of Afghanistan. We must help Afghan leaders develop their security forces and governance capacity so that they can, over time, take on the tasks of securing their country and see to the needs of their people. And, in performing these tasks, we clearly must pursue the insurgents relentlessly.

To the soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and civilians of Isaf and USFor-A: I pledge to do all that I can to provide the best leadership, direction, and example that I can muster. Your accomplishments this year have been impressive. You have helped achieve progress in several important areas. Predictably, as we have sought to reverse the Taliban's momentum and take away insurgent safe havens, the enemy has fought back. Recent months in Afghanistan have seen hard fighting and tough casualties.

As we press on in our vital mission, we must continue our efforts to reduce the loss of innocent civilians to an absolute minimum.

But as those on the ground strive to achieve that intent, we will not hesitate to bring all assets to bear to protect you and the Afghan forces with which you are fighting shoulder-to-shoulder, SHONA-BA-SHONA.

Beyond that, I want to thank each of you - and each of your families - for the sacrifices you are making as you serve in this critical endeavor. Thanks, as well, for the skill, courage, determination, and sheer force of will that you have demonstrated - and on which we will rely heavily in the months to come.

To our diplomatic and international civilian partners here today: We are all - civilian and military, Afghan and international - part of one team with one mission. Indeed, we all recognise the grave threat that the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the associated "syndicate" of extremists pose to this country, to this region, and to the world.

We cannot accomplish our mission without working together. Each of your organisations brings tremendous commitment and unique skills and attributes to the team of teams at work in Afghanistan - and I look forward to what our organisations will accomplish together as we reinforce a culture here that recognises that co-operation is not optional.

To our Afghan partners: we will do all that we can to help you build a country free of the fear of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, a country in which all citizens can live in peace with one another and provide for themselves and their families. I salute each of you for your courage and for your dedication to Afghanistan and to the Afghan people.

I told President [Hamid] Karzai yesterday that I applaud his commitment to inclusivity, transparency, integrity, and accountability. I look forward to working with each of you in making his watchwords reality as we work together to achieve our common goals. Nothing has been easy in Afghanistan; however, we can all take heart from the progress that has been made on the security front and beyond.

Indeed, seven million Afghan children are now in school, as opposed to less than one million a decade ago. Immunisation rates for children are now in the 70 to 90% range nationwide. Cell phones are ubiquitous in a country that had virtually none during the Taliban days, though the Taliban seeks to deny their use. Kabul is a bustling, busy city, as are Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Jalalabad. Roads and bridges and other infrastructure have been built.

And the future holds even greater promise, if we can resist those who want to turn the clocks back in Afghanistan rather allow the march of progress to continue.

To the many Afghan partners in uniform who have joined us this morning: Thanks for your tremendous courage and commitment. You and your comrades have made great strides, and you should be proud of what you have accomplished. Indeed, Afghan forces are now in the lead in Kabul and in a number of other areas.

In such cases, Afghan units are the "supported" forces, operating with assistance from Isaf to be sure, but already shouldering the responsibilities of leadership. Isaf forces will continue to partner with you as your ranks grow and as you take on increasing responsibility for securing the Afghan people. It is a privilege to serve with you.

Finally, to the people of Afghanistan: it is a great honor to be in your country and to lead Isaf.

I want to emphasise what a number of our country's leaders recently affirmed - that our commitment to Afghanistan is an enduring one and that we are committed to a sustained effort to help the people of this country over the long-term.

Neither you nor the insurgents nor our partners in the region should doubt that. Certainly the character of our commitment will change over time. Indeed, Afghans and the citizens of Isaf countries look forward to the day when conditions will permit the transition of further tasks to Afghan forces.

In the meantime, all of us at Isaf pledge our full commitment to help you protect your nation from militants who allowed al-Qaeda sanctuary when they ruled the country. Moreover, we see it as our solemn duty to protect the innocent people of Afghanistan from all violence, whether intended by the enemy or unintended by those of us pursuing that enemy.

And we stand with you as we all work to defeat the enemies of the new Afghanistan and to help create a better future for you and your families.

Working together, we can prevail in this endeavour.

It is an honour to serve with each of you and those you represent. Thank you for your commitment to Afghanistan and your courage in meeting the challenges we face.

Manana, tashakor, thank you very much.