



**COM JFC BRUNSSUM, GENERAL WOLF LANGHELD
ADDRESS AT
ISAF CHANGE OF COMMAND CEREMONY – 18 July 2011**

President Karzai, Ambassadors, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen:
On behalf of the NATO Secretary General, and as the ISAF, Out-of-Theatre Operational Commander, it is my privilege to be here today.

General Petraeus, General Allen, I will address each of you, separately, later in my remarks. First, I would like to take the opportunity to make some personal observations, as I fast approach a year in post.

Above all else, ISAF is here to help shape a future that provides a safe environment for the people of this country; a future of optimism and opportunity; a future of hope. The Afghan people deserve it and we will deliver it.

We need to continue to deliver improvements the Afghan people can smell, can touch, and see. But, critically, we need to ensure the Afghan people associate improving living standards with the emerging capacity of their own government. This is vital.

The Taliban, and other radical groups, find them-selves increasingly marginalized through the excellent work of the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, ISAF and, most importantly, the Afghan people themselves.

Today, it is clear that any Taliban momentum has been arrested across much of the country, and reversed in a number of important areas. However, while security progress is significant, it remains fragile and reversible.

Nevertheless, hard-fought achievements in 2010 and 2011 enabled the Joint Afghan-NATO Transition Board to recommend the start of transition. And, as you know, that process is about to start.

This is a decisive period for our mission in Afghanistan. We will get one shot at transition and we have to get it right. As transition unfolds we must ensure the actions we take are **irreversible**.

On the subject of transition let me emphasize one point. The intention to return to pre-‘surge’ troop levels over the next 15 months, is not the signal for ISAF forces to leave Afghanistan; rather, it’s the point at which the role of ISAF begins to evolve from combat to support, as a natural consequence of real progress on the ground.

But, be in no doubt, NATO’s long-term commitment to Afghanistan extends into the future, in the form of an Enduring Partnership, well beyond 2014.

We must build upon our considerable successes, and not lose the momentum that has been generated, if we are to succeed. However, although much remains to be done, I am certain we are on the right path.

The greatest, and most significant, share of the credit for the progress achieved over the past year, goes to General David Petraeus.

General, it has been a pleasure to work together with you. In many ways this mission is unique and demands unique solutions. I, for one, have been immensely impressed by your willingness to 'think outside the box'; your ability to implement novel solutions to new challenges; and your willingness to tackle, head-on, the difficulties presented by the practical application of a comprehensive military / civilian approach.

On behalf of a grateful Alliance, thank-you for your dedication, your exceptional leadership, your personal example, and your openness to new ideas. Thank-you for leading the ISAF mission to this point.

Military students of the future will, I am sure, analyze every step of this campaign and scrutinize every decision. Their findings will be blunt, factual, critical, and arrived at with the benefit of hindsight. But, of one thing I am certain – they will underscore the broad extent of your personal contribution – a personal contribution I sense most of us do not fully appreciate.

General, I hope you are able to enjoy a well deserved break before assuming your next demanding position in Washington, as Director CIA. Good luck, and God be with you.

General John Allen now shoulders the weighty responsibility of leading the largest mission in the history of the Alliance. Coming from CENTCOM, where he was the Deputy Commander, General Allen is well acquainted with ISAF and, to my mind, is the ideal choice for this demanding position.

General, it is helpful that we know each other already. I look forward to working ever more closely with you over the months ahead, as we pursue our shared goals.

A very warm welcome to Kabul. As you assume your responsibilities, of one thing you can be certain -- I personally, and my entire Brunssum staff, are at your service -- you should never, day or night, think twice about contacting me, or any of my people, if you need our assistance. The very best of luck for the challenge ahead.

To those of you who have just arrived – I am sure that you appreciate the magnitude of your challenge. There can be no doubt that the coming months, will include the most critical phase yet in our campaign; the individual efforts of every one of you will count.

Take the time to understand this great country, its culture, its history, and its people. The greater your understanding, the greater will be your contribution, and the greater your satisfaction.

During my trips to this country one thing never ceases to inspire me – that is the way in which the troops from 48 NATO and non-NATO nations, from a broad spectrum of different cultures and religions, seamlessly blend together under the ISAF flag.

Working relationships born in this mission often lead to life-long friendships based on trust, camaraderie, and a willingness to put your life on the line for your fellow soldier – regardless of colour, gender or faith. Perhaps that is a lesson to us all.

Make this mission a success for the Afghan people, for those who have served before us, and the thousands who have died in the cause: the cause of a stable Afghanistan and a safer world.