

**Major General David M. Rodriguez, Outgoing Commander Remarks – as prepared
Combined Joint Task Force – 82 Transfer of Authority to CJTF-101
Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan
10 April 2008**

Our distinguished guests –

The Ambassadors to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – good to see you this morning. Distinguished Afghan ministers, directors, and provincial governors from across Regional Command-East – many of you made quite a long journey here today in difficult weather – thank you;

General officers and sergeants major from the Afghan National Army, the Pakistani Army, and the Afghan National Police – good to see you;

Fellow general and flag officers from across the coalition;

Leadership and representatives from the International & Interagency communities who bring so much to this effort;

Other friends, guests, and partners – good morning,

Soo-bah-ki

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General McNeill – thank you for those kind remarks, and thank you, as well, for your example and your leadership of the International Security Assistance Force: a multilateral, joint, interagency effort – about 50,000 troops, 40 nations, from around the globe, united with a single purpose: operate as trusted partners with the Afghan people, institutions – help them bring stability to their people and nation.

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First, to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Civilians of Combined Joint Task Force – 82, it has been an honor to serve alongside you. You all should be proud of your immeasurable achievements over these 15 months. You have done more than we could have ever asked or imagined, and for that you have our eternal gratitude.

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General Schloesser and Command Sergeant Major Comacho – the Screaming Eagles were here at the beginning of the fight in 2001, and now you are back, growing the size of the Combined Joint Task Force by an entire aviation battalion. And we know that you and your Air Assault troopers will continue to add to your Division's rich heritage and proud legacy. God bless you and your Soldiers and all their families. Thank you for your sacrifice and service.

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It is, indeed, an honor to be with you all this morning. The purpose of the ceremony today is not about words, but about the monumental deeds of many courageous, determined, and committed men and women from across the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It is about better opportunities for the future of the Afghan people. And it is about the coalition's enduring commitment to this nation.

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This is a historic group gathered here at the hangar: some of the most senior civil servants from the Afghan government, and representatives from some 14 of its provinces; distinguished warriors and heroes from the Afghan National Security Forces and National Directorate of Security, all of whom have made it their life's duty to serve, fight for, defend, and bring security to the Afghan people.

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Few choose such a great responsibility, but they all do so freely because they know that what they fight for is worth it: what they fight for is to give the Afghan people the chance to chart a new future of hope and opportunity, a better life for their children.

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And too often, they pay the supreme sacrifice on behalf of their nation to give its sons and daughters opportunities that, perhaps, they did not have or could not enjoy in the shadow of more than three decades of war. It is a new destiny they earn for Afghans through their sacrifice and service.

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For all those Afghan leaders serving their people – thank you for all that you do. In the final analysis, you will win this struggle. You are the core of leadership around which this nation grows. And the progress you have made since 2001, even in the past fifteen months, is truly amazing.

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The national and sub-national governments are increasing capacity, building a team of world class leadership characterized by their integrity, sense of accountability and responsibility, and their devotion to the people of their provinces and this country. Your leadership is about peace, stability, promise, trust, and confidence in the future.

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And we see great progress in the growth and development of institutions that bring hope to the good people. Since the Taliban era, there are 8,000 more schools and 140,000 more teachers. Now, about 70% of the girls and 97% of the boys in Regional Command-East have access to a state sponsored education. Today, access to basic healthcare has increased to nearly 80%, in part resulting in a 25% reduction in infant mortality – that's some 90,000 young lives. All of that is a large investment in a prosperous future for Afghanistan.

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We have seen significant improvement in the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces. During the past 15 months, Afghan National Army ranks have grown from 25,000 to 37,000 soldiers. The 201st and 203rd Corps have begun to lead operations with coalition support. And we have seen the establishment of the Commando Kandaks, a great success in their own right who are setting a high example for others to follow.

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The Afghan National Police is continuing to build the trusted institution Afghan people seek and deserve for the security of their communities, villages and families. The Focused District Development training is accelerating this process, improving performance, increasing capabilities, and strengthening leadership.

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So everything ISAF is doing with its Afghan and Coalition partners is helping to build a stable, economically sustainable Afghanistan, an Afghanistan with a representative government that leads its people and secures its own territory.

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We know Afghanistan won't get there overnight, but together, we are moving forward, and as the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) takes command of the Combined Joint Task Force this morning, you can rest assured that you will continue to see steady progress towards a stable Afghanistan.

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It was more than 60 years ago when the first commander of the 101st Airborne Division – Major General William Lee – told his new Troopers, “You have no history, but you have a rendezvous with destiny.”

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Now, Combined Joint Task Force - 101 led by the 101st Airborne – Air Assault – Division and its Afghan partners, together, will have their own rendezvous with destiny.

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**Good luck. We remain with you in spirit, with you in our thoughts, and in our prayers.
*Tashakoor, Manana, Airborne. Air Assault. All the Way!***