



**HEADQUARTERS**  
MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE - IRAQ  
BAGHDAD, IRAQ  
APO AE 09342-1400

13 December 2008.

To the men and women of the National Guard in Multi-National Force-Iraq:

As the National Guard celebrates its 372<sup>nd</sup> birthday, I want to extend to each of the more than 20,000 courageous citizen-soldiers serving in Iraq my heartfelt gratitude for your resolute determination and selfless dedication to our Nation, this mission, and the people of Iraq. As the oldest component of our Armed Forces, the National Guard has stood in defense of freedom throughout our history, both at home and abroad. Your valiant predecessors held their ground at Lexington and Concord, firing “the shot heard ‘round the world.” They stormed the beaches of Normandy, battled in the frigid mountains of Korea, and patrolled the jungles of Southeast Asia. Today, the men and women of the National Guard are deployed around the world, still defending freedom, still resisting the forces of tyranny and oppression. In Iraq, you have distinguished yourselves by your bravery, compassion, and boundless ingenuity. And through your tireless efforts, we have made significant progress in our campaign for a secure, stable, and prosperous future for the Iraqi people.

Yours is a unique vocation, and your acts of gallantry and heroism are committed not only on battlefields in foreign lands, but also in towns and cities across the United States. The National Guard is our country’s first responder, and in times of emergency the American people have had no better friend. In the wake of devastation, you have been there, time and again, to save lives, restore order, provide comfort, and renew hope.

Civilians in peace, Soldiers in war – the men and women of the National Guard represent the finest that our Nation has to offer. You have been – and continue to be – “Always Ready, Always There,” and I want to thank you for everything that you do for our country. It truly is the greatest of privileges to soldier with each and every one of you. Happy 372<sup>nd</sup> Birthday!

Sincerely,

Raymond T. Odierno  
General, US Army  
Commanding