



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

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To the Marines of Multi-National Force-Iraq:

In 2004, the situation in al Anbar was dire. US and Iraqi casualties were mounting, and the city of Fallujah, one of the most violent places in the world, was considered lost to the insurgents. Many were predicting that Coalition efforts in western Iraq were doomed to failure. But the naysayers forgot one important fact: Al Anbar province was an area assigned to the United States Marines.

When the members of the Second Continental Congress approved a resolution in 1775 to raise two battalions of Continental Marines, they created an institution to which Americans have turned in times of need again and again over the past 233 years. Without fail, the United States Marine Corps has answered our Nation's call, meeting every challenge placed before it, regardless of the difficulty. The story of the Devil Dogs in Iraq is no different. Facing a seemingly insurmountable task, you refused to give up. You remained focused on the mission, and you fearlessly committed yourselves to protecting the populace and dismantling the extremist networks that sowed terror and instability throughout Iraq's communities.

Today, al Anbar is a success story. Security has improved dramatically, and the province now enjoys one of the lowest levels of violence in Iraq. Marines have earned the trust of the Iraqi people, and responsibility for security has been transferred to the provincial government. Your success, however, has not been limited to al Anbar. Marine Transition Teams have effectively honed the skills of the Iraqi Security Forces, enabling successful operations in Basrah, al Amarah, and Sadr City, and Marines working in numerous capacities throughout Iraq have achieved significant security gains to move ever closer to our goal of a secure, stable, and prosperous Iraq.

There are currently more than 23,000 Marines deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and approximately one-third of all Marine operational forces are deployed to the CENTCOM AOR in the global war on terror. Our Nation continues to call upon the Marine Corps, and you continue to answer that call. History has proven – and recent experience has re-affirmed – that when Marines are given battle space and a mission, you can count on them to complete it. Correspondent Richard Harding Davis's famous dispatch from Panama in 1885 still resonates today, "The Marines have landed, and the situation is well in hand."

Happy 233rd birthday, Marines. Thank you for your service, and Semper Fidelis!

Sincerely,

Raymond T. Odierno
General, United States Army
Commanding