



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

20 December 2008

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Civilians of Multi-National Force-Iraq:

As we celebrate the holiday season and the coming of a new year, I encourage all members of the MNF-I family to take a moment to reflect on the extraordinary events of the past year and the significant progress we have made in our campaign for a secure, stable, and prosperous Iraq. It has been a privilege to serve with you this year, and I have been continually amazed and humbled by your gallant devotion and resilient spirit. Standing shoulder to shoulder with your Iraqi partners, you have demonstrated exceptional bravery, boundless ingenuity, and unfailing determination, and you should take great pride in the hard-earned gains you have achieved. You serve so that others may live in peace and harmony, and I want to assure you that our nations' citizens – as well as the people of Iraq – are extremely grateful for your selfless dedication.

The coming year will be a momentous one in Iraq, filled with challenges, but also with tremendous opportunities. With violence at its lowest level in over five years, we have the chance now to build upon our security gains to create the conditions for lasting stability in Iraq. In a sign of the progress we have made, the Iraqi people will head to the polls multiple times next year to exercise the precious right to choose their leaders at the provincial, district and sub-district, and national levels. They do so because of your courage and selflessness, and they understand that freedom is not free. Let us never forget those who died fighting for the ideals of liberty and justice. Some of the finest men and women from the Coalition and the Republic of Iraq have given their lives so others could enjoy freedom, and we honor their sacrifice by continuing to work for the noble cause for which they gave that last full measure of devotion.

The way ahead will of course bring new and complex challenges. But I know that you are up to every task we will face in the coming year, and I know that you will continue the tradition of excellence that has made this command the finest, most versatile force the world has ever known. You serve in a proud and honorable profession, and it takes a special type of person to willingly accept the risks that go with that choice. For that, I salute each and every member of Multi-National Force – Iraq. As we mark this holiday season, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to you and your families for your extraordinary commitment to this mission and the people of Iraq. It is an honor to serve in your ranks. Best wishes for the holiday season, and may you enjoy a blessed new year.

Sincerely,

Raymond T. Odierno
General, US Army
Commanding