

Commander's Foreword

Ceremony for the Return of HQ NATO Rapid Deployable Corps – Italy From deployment as HQ ISAF, Afghanistan Milan, 13 May 06 Commander's Address

The Right Honourable Minister of Defence, The Mayor of Milan, The Italian Chief of Defence Staff, Respected Civil and Military Dignitaries, Esteemed Guests, The Officers and Soldiers of HQ NRDC-IT and representatives of Italian and other Armed Forces.

It is a moment of real pride for all of us to have present so many persons of great import; a presence which confers a particular gravity upon this ceremony; the return of this HQ after 9 months in Afghanistan and command of the NATO mission in that country.

A mission, which has seen the Corps deployed to a distant land, in an austere but at the same time fascinating country, and which put to the test the professional and human capabilities of its personnel.

The operation in Afghanistan, which is deemed the Alliance's priority mission, was given to NATO Rapid Deployable Corps, Italy and was carried out by the personnel from its 13 different constituent nations, the flags of which you see paraded before you, and from the military of other nations, 10 of which come from outside the NATO membership countries.

A demonstration, in the form of the uniformed men and women from 36 nations, of the will and cohesion of the international community, rallying behind the United Nations mandate of the mission to advance the democratic process of that country.

At the end of this experience, in such an impressive setting as the Duomo Square in Milan, it is appropriate to sum up the main achievements.



Commander NRDC-Italy, Lt Gen Mauro Del Vecchio



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Gabriele ALBERTINI - Mayor of Milan

The city of Milan is proud to host the official return from Afghanistan of the contingent deployed in command of the ISAF VIII peace support operation. Thanks to their marvelous supporting efforts and their contribution to security and protection, on 18 September 2005 Afghanistan held free and regulated democratic elections which gave life to a new national parliament in December 2005, the first in 23 years.



The nine months during which the Deployable Corps was deployed in Afghanistan have been characterised by the following important events:

- The expansion of the area of responsibility of NATO to more than half the country's area;
- The preparation of the final expansion phase which will see NATO operate throughout the whole of Afghanistan by the end of this year;
- The support to the Afghan security forces for the maintenance of a framework of security and stability which has allowed the continuing physical reconstruction of the country and the growth of its democratic institutions;

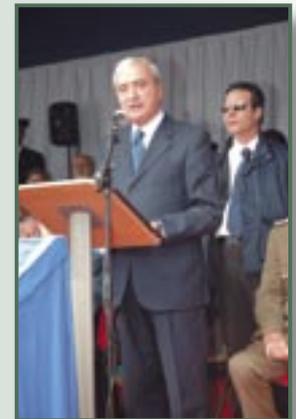
It is worth particularly underlining two events which happened during the nine months of

this Headquarters' watch; the national assembly and provincial council elections and the inauguration of the new parliament.

The importance of these events will maybe not strike those who are not current with the situation in Afghanistan.

Antonio MARTINO - Minister of Defense

The reasons for our presence in Afghanistan are noteworthy. We are defending the civil powers of a country devastated by decades of violence and which had become a sanctuary of international terrorism. , By such methods we also defend, both our national security and that of the international community, from the emergence of new threats, preventing terrorists from establishing bases and obtaining support.



In reality, these have been incredibly important steps for the country, which is trying to raise itself from a legacy of 25 years of war and which can now boast its first freely elected parliament in 30 years.

Intimately involved in this process were the men and women of the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps, Italy and those of the other countries participating in the mission, who faced numerous challenges during 9 intense and difficult months.

They operated, respecting the culture and traditions of an ancient land, rich in history, and developed strong links with the country's institutions and people.

They can be proud and fully satisfied with their achievements.



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But the Corps' mission in Afghanistan was also characterised by important gestures of solidarity which, through the military framework, the international community was able to extend to the Afghan people.

Within this area must be noted the work of the city of Milan and the institutions of the Lombardy Region which, standing shoulder to shoulder with we military in the humanitarian effort to help the Afghan people, provided an important contribution to the improvement of their quality of life.

To the Mayor of Milan I say "Thank you - for what your city, our city, has done".

Thank you to the people of Lombardy for roundly demonstrating to the Afghan people, the solid commitment of the international community and of Italy.

Thank you, finally, for the continuous expressions of support for those who were operating in Afghanistan.

A support exemplified by the Milanese flags, entrusted to our Corps before our departure for that country and now returned, brought back with us and placed here, in the symbolic heart of this city.



Admiral Giampaolo DI PAOLA Chief of Italian Defense Staff

In these nine months you have made a crucial contribution, essential to the process of stability. Thanks to your endeavor and your mission we have taken many positive steps; your professionalism was particularly noted by our allies.

But, Honourable Minister, Sirs, valued guests, the officers and soldiers of the Corps paraded in front of you, are not able to close the chapter in their lives of their mission to Afghanistan, without pausing for a reverent and moving thought for the soldiers of so many countries, who lost their lives during the operation in that far country, or other operational theatres.



Their thoughts go out to those who they lost in the last nine months, who were close to them in Afghanistan and with whom, day after day, they shared their anxieties, their difficulties, the happy moments and the sad.

They shared a common bond in that country - those soldiers from Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Britain and Sweden, who are no

longer with us - the conviction of those who know they are contributing to the growth of a democratic process, and the hope of those who want to help a people in suffering.

For such an expression of solidarity, they paid with their own lives.

Their names, which will be read one after the other, during a deferential silence from all who aspire to a democratic and secure World, will never be forgotten.

General Filiberto CECCHI Chief of the Italian General Staff

This is not only the end of your delicate and tough operational deployment, but also of a longer process, started at the end of 2001 in order to meet NATO's request to set up deployable and high-readiness headquarters so as to face the new threats worldwide.

After just four years, NRDC-IT has been able to meet these requirements and effectively cope with its first demanding challenge.

