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General John R Allen
Strategic Communication as ISAF's Primary Maneuver Force

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Thank you for that kind introduction. It's a privilege and an honor to be here this afternoon. I am particularly pleased to speak to this audience about Strategic Communications and to meet with professionals from so many of our alliance nations, who for so many years to come will rely on strategic communication. Today, I'd like to speak with you about Strategic Communications in the context of ISAF and the Campaign in Afghanistan.

Before I begin, I'd like to formally thank SHAPE's Chief of Strategic Communications, Mark Laity, and his team for bringing this conference together and this august group of speakers at this terrific event, and in particular, Dr. Steve Corman, a real expert in the field of narrative. Thank you for traveling such a long way.

And thank you all for being here to advance the evolution of NATO Strategic Communications in support of operations and missions.

Let me tell you why I thought it was important enough to leave the combat zone to speak with you today. This is a critical moment in the campaign. This is a vital moment for NATO to succeed. Our strategic communication must reach multiple audiences — audiences in Afghanistan, throughout the region, and in capitals in our alliance and around the world.

Your work is of great importance to our success in Afghanistan. It's an area that affects the campaign on a daily basis. As I say at ISAF Headquarters, I view Strategic Communication as my most responsive maneuver element. Information must be

treated in the same vein as a component of combined arms, indeed as a weapon. To think of it otherwise sells short the capability and the potential impact. It requires aggressiveness, speed, and agility to put information in the hands of the people and to effectively counteract, in our case in Afghanistan, the virulent and nearly pervasive and demoralizing propaganda of the enemy.

Informing audiences with accuracy, precision, and speed is an important part of our campaign and our mission in Afghanistan. As we move forward, as our numbers diminish, Strategic Communication and other non-kinetic fires are going to take on an even greater role.

We are entering a Strategic Moment in our campaign, and the Afghan people are living in a pivotal year of their history. Going into the Chicago NATO Summit last month, many were looking toward a 2014 horizon when the UN mandate for ISAF ends and the Afghan National Security Forces will be fully in the lead for security. The Summit in Chicago adjusted all of our sights from 2014 out to 2024. At that Summit, fifty nations sent three unmistakable messages to the world:

- To the Afghan people: we are committed to your future,
- To the Region: the International Community will not abandon Afghanistan as we did in the post-Soviet era; and
- To the Taliban: you cannot wait us out.

That message combined with the growing capability of the Afghan National Security Forces is sending a powerful signal to the insurgency. Throughout history, insurgencies have seldom been defeated by foreign forces. Indeed, they have been beaten ultimately by indigenous national forces. In the long run, in this campaign, our goals will

