

## John Nicholson

Commander of American & NATO Forces in Afghanistan 2016-2018

General John Nicholson is a United States Army four-star general (retired) widely admired as a uniquely-skilled “warrior-diplomat”. He completed his term as Commander of U.S. Forces–Afghanistan and NATO’s Resolute Support mission in September 2018, as the longest-serving commander in the Afghan theatre of war. His leadership, deep experience and close relationships with Afghan leaders were key to brokering the first nationwide ceasefire in the 17-year war and helped launch the peace initiative now underway. In reporting on the Afghan war, NPR said of Nicholson, “Maybe no American soldier knows this battleground better than Army General John Nicholson.”

During nearly two and a half years as commander of the 41-nation force in Afghanistan, Nicholson built on his previous three tours to work with his U.S., Afghan and Coalition colleagues to formulate new policy and reform the Afghan Security forces to include doubling the size of the Afghan special forces and nearly tripling their air force. He oversaw a budget of \$17 billion, led 22,000 international troops, and closely advised over 330,00 Afghan security forces.

Nicholson’s commitment as a soldier and to Afghanistan is in his blood. A statue of his ancestor British Brigadier General John Nicholson, who served in the British East India Company in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, stands in Peshawar, Pakistan, and his grave is in the Nicholson Cemetery in New Delhi, India. He is the son of a Vietnam-era U.S. Army general, started his service in Afghanistan as a colonel in the eastern mountains in 2006, and served two additional tours before becoming the overall commander in 2016.

Nicholson commanded the storied 82d Airborne Division and helped restore the readiness of the Nation’s Global Response Force. As the Commander of NATO Allied Land Command, headquartered in Turkey, he was responsible for commanding multiple NATO Corps in the event of large-scale war in Europe. He was involved in the training and readiness of the nine NATO Corps as well as drafting defensive plans for NATO in the face of emergent threats.

Today, drawing on decades of leadership experience leading large military units and allied coalitions in times of complexity and risk, Nicholson’s speeches provide enduring lessons that are highly relevant to improving strategic thinking, strengthening results through collaboration and developing resilient colleagues who will thrive in today’s fast-paced global operating environment. His insights are not just for military historians. They are for anyone who wants to meet the challenges of leadership in these complex times.

“The knowledge and insights gained in my military career are about far more than war, terrorism and striving for peace,” says Nicholson. “Learning how to unite people to achieve common goals under the most adverse circumstances or how to identify leaders at every level and instill in them a shared vision of a better future is key to many endeavors, civilian as well as military.”

With looks from the command bunker in Afghanistan to the corridors of the Pentagon and the Alliance headquarters in Brussels, Nicholson opens a window into a unique moment of political-military leadership dynamics. With over 36 years of active duty under seven Presidents, Gen. Nicholson commanded at every level of the U.S. Army and is one of our nation’s most combat-seasoned leaders. Taking audiences on the journey of a lifetime, Nicholson explores what a career that started as a paratrooper at the tip of the spear and culminated with Presidential appointments has taught him about leading massive organizations and building team cohesion and shared vision.

Throughout his speeches, Nicholson travels from his former office in the Pentagon—destroyed by a hijacked airliner on 9/11—to the U.S. outposts in the treacherous mountain regions of Afghanistan, and back again. Packed with heart-pounding stories and lessons that leave a lasting impact, Gen. Nicholson’s speeches rouse individual and groups to be and do better for their teams and their organizations. He is exclusively represented by [Leading Authorities speakers bureau](#).

Gen. Nicholson’s six years in Afghanistan also include service as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, in Kandahar as the Deputy Commander of ISAF’s Regional Command South and in Jalalabad and Khowst as the Commander of Task Force Spartan, responsible for Eastern Afghanistan. Gen. Nicholson spent much of his service in the joint, multinational, and interagency arena, working closely with colleagues in the State Department, the Intelligence Agencies, the Development community, Law

Enforcement, the National Security Staff, and numerous non-governmental organizations. His other assignments include Deputy Director of Joint IED Defeat Organization, Director of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Coordination Cell and Deputy Director for Operations, J3 on the Joint Staff, work on personal staffs of the Secretary of the Army, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and the Commander of U.S. Army Europe as well as the George C. Marshall Center for European Security under U.S. European Command.

He has testified before various Congressional Committees: The House Committee on Oversight and Government, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the Senate Armed Services Committee. He has hosted and briefed numerous Congressional Delegations to Afghanistan and participated in numerous NATO North Atlantic Council sessions with Ambassadors, Chiefs of Defense, Defense Ministers, Foreign Ministers, and Heads of Government.

He has been interviewed and covered by many major US and international media outlets including 60 Minutes, CNN, FOX, MSNBC, New York Times, Washington Post, Al Jazeera, Der Spiegel, BBC to name but a few.

He is a Ranger, Master Parachutist, Pathfinder and the recipient of two awards of the Combat Infantryman's Badge as well as the Expert Infantryman's Badge. His decorations also include two awards of the prestigious Defense Distinguished Service Medal, two awards of the Army Distinguished Service Medal, five awards of the Defense Superior Service Medal, three awards of the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star medal, and the Bronze Star medal with V device for Valor. Among multiple international awards he has received France's Legion D'Honneur, and Germany's Gold Cross of Honor. He has been presented Afghanistan's highest award given to non-Afghans, the Amir Amanullah Khan Award.

A West Point graduate who was the highest-ranking cadet or First Captain of the class of 1982, Gen. Nicholson also has a BA in History from Georgetown University, an MA in Operational Art from the School for Advanced Military Studies, and an MA in National Security Studies from the National War College. He currently serves in the U.S. National Defense University Capstone Program as a mentor to rising general officers/flag officers of the US Military and as Adjunct Faculty at Harvard University's JFK Kennedy School of Government Belfer Center Executive Education Program.