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The New York Times

Commander Nominated to Lead War in Afghanistan

By Elisabeth Bumiller

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WASHINGTON — President Obama on Wednesday nominated Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps and a combat veteran who led a regiment in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, as the top American and NATO commander in Afghanistan.

If confirmed by the Senate, General Dunford will preside over the withdrawal of most of the 68,000 American troops in Afghanistan expected by the end of 2014.

General Dunford is to replace Gen. John R. Allen. General Allen was in turn nominated by Mr. Obama on Wednesday to replace Adm. James G. Stavridis as the supreme allied commander of NATO, whose duties include leading the American military's European Command. Admiral Stavridis is to retire this spring.

General Dunford would take over the 11-year-old Afghan conflict, America's longest war, at a difficult time. Although American forces have pushed back insurgents in critical areas, particularly in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar, eastern Afghanistan remains volatile, and over all the Taliban have proved potent. In recent months more than 50 American and coalition troops have died in a wave of insider attacks at the hands of their partners, the Afghan security forces, which have been infiltrated by the Taliban.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, speaking at a NATO meeting in Brussels on Wednesday, praised General Dunford as "an exceptionally gifted strategic leader." He will be the fifth

American commander in Afghanistan since October 2001, when President George W. Bush began the war as a response to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Last month the United States withdrew the last of the 33,000 “surge” forces from Afghanistan that Mr. Obama ordered to try to bring the war under control. With the reduction over the next two years of the remaining 68,000 American troops, General Dunford would lead a force that is to operate from fewer bases and will train Afghan forces to take the lead in combat.

Mr. Obama said Wednesday in a statement that General Dunford “will lead our forces through key milestones in our effort that will allow us to bring the war to a close responsibly as Afghanistan takes full responsibility for its security.”