

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at Osan Air Base, South Korea

November 19, 2009

The President. Hello, Osan! It is good to be here! Thank you so much.

First of all, please give Staff Sergeant Randy Gray a big round of applause for the outstanding introduction. I want to thank Randy for his service as one of the best warriors in the United States Army. Randy is a reminder that our noncommissioned officers are the strength of America's military. So thanks to Randy and to all the NCOs.

Thank you, Lieutenant Colonel Glover, for the invocation. And please give a big round of applause to Katherine Dennison for singing our national anthem. To the 8th Army Band—where you guys at?

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. There they are, up there. You look fantastic. To all the airmen and soldiers behind me—you guys make a pretty good photo op. [*Laughter*] We are grateful for your service.

I want to thank your local leaders at Osan for welcoming me here today, including Brigadier General Michael Keltz and Colonel Tom "Big" Deale. Your great senior enlisted leaders, including Command Sergeant Major Robert Winzenried and Chief Master Sergeant Michael Williams.

We are joined by America's outstanding representatives here in the Republic of Korea. I want you guys to give it up for Ambassador Kathleen Stephens and General "Skip" Sharp. Give them a big round of applause. There is a wonderful story that I just heard—that the day Skip Sharp was born in West Virginia, his dad was here—serving in the Korean war. And that just says something about the extraordinary tradition of your family and service to our country, and we salute you for that. We are grateful to you. Thank you so much.

Listen, it is great to be here at Osan Air Base. We've got the 51st Fighter Wing. We've got the 7th Air Force and Air Forces Korea. But I know we have folks from all across U.S. Forces Korea. We've got the 8th Army and Army Forces Korea. We've got the Naval Forces Korea. We've got Marine Forces Korea—Special Operations Command. And we've got a whole lot of DOD civilians too.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back.

Now, Joanne Sharp and Michelle Remington were there to greet me, and I see that we've got a whole lot of spouses and family here. To you and all the spouses back home, I just want to remind you that you serve and sacrifice too, and America honors you as well.

And we are joined by our great allies: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Lee and Mrs. Hwang. We are so nice—so grateful that you are here. Thank you. Members of the Republic of Korea Armed Forces, and to all our KATUSA partners—your English is better than my Korean—[*laughter*]—but let me say: *katchi kapshida*. For those of you guys who have not been doing your homework while you're in Korea, that means: We go together.

And to your neighbors, the people of Osan and this country, for more than a half a century, your steadfast resolve has earned you the respect of the world. And your hospitality to Americans serving far from home has earned you the gratitude of the United States. On behalf of us all, thank you to the people of the Republic of Korea.

Now, today I'm finishing my first visit to Asia as President. In Tokyo, we renewed and deepened the U.S.-Japan alliance. In Singapore, we worked with leaders from across the Asia Pacific to strengthen the global economic recovery. And in China, we worked to advance the partnership between our two countries on global issues, because cooperation between the United States and China will mean a safer, more prosperous world for all of us, including right here on the Korean Peninsula.

In Seoul, President Lee and I reaffirmed the enduring alliance between our countries, an alliance rooted in shared sacrifice, common values, mutual interest, and mutual respect. And as we look to the future with a shared vision of our alliance for the 21st century, I made it clear: America's commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea will never waver, and our alliance has never been stronger.

And I want to deliver, actually, just a quick story, go a little off script. President Lee talked to me about what it was like when he was a young child here in Korea, this country having been torn by war and the poverty that still existed in the country. And he said: "I hope the American people understand how grateful we are for what you've done, because we would not be the extraordinarily strong, prosperous nation that we are, had it not been for the sacrifices of your armed services and the continued contributions that you've made."

And I thought, when the President of a country that's become so successful says that America, and America's armed services in particular, had something to do with the extraordinary success of their country—he said, "That's something you should take great pride in." And I want all of you to know that, because you are carrying that tradition on right here at Osan.

I couldn't come to the Republic of Korea without coming to see you to deliver a simple message, a message of thanks to you and your families. Because of all the privileges of serving as President, I have no greater honor than serving as Commander in Chief of the finest military that the world has ever known.

At every step of my journey, one truth is clear: The security that allows families to live in peace in Asia and America, the prosperity that allows people to pursue their dreams, the freedoms and liberties that we cherish, they're not accidents of history, they are the direct result of the work that you do, the strong alliances that we have. That's the legacy that you are carrying forward. It is no exaggeration to say that the progress we've seen not just in Korea but in this part of the world would not have been possible without the security and stability provided by generations of American men and women in uniform. It has transformed the lives of millions of people.

Many people have to wait a lifetime to see the difference they've made. But you see the legacy of your service, and you only have to look around. Like generations before you, you've helped keep the peace on this peninsula, working with the wonderful people of the Republic of Korea as they forged a vibrant democracy, and an example that the world admires, of progress and tradition going hand in hand.

Backed by our alliance, this is one of the world's most dynamic economies—and one of America's largest trading partners—bringing prosperity and opportunity to both our people. That's the legacy of our armed services.

Backed by our alliance, the Republic of Korea has taken on a leadership role, promoting security and stability around the world—in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in the waters off the Horn of Africa, and here in Asia—helping to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. That makes us all more secure. That too is part of your legacy.

But the story of your service goes beyond this peninsula, for you are members of a generation that has earned your place among the greatest in American history. You volunteered in a time of war, knowing that you could be sent into harm's way. Many of you served in Iraq. You've given people a chance of self-government there. Others among you served in Afghanistan. And you've denied a safe haven to those who attacked us eight Septembers ago, and would do so again if given the opportunity. Others among you will deploy yet again.

So you and your families have served tour after tour, year after year. And while you've made sacrifices that few Americans will ever truly understand, I want to assure you, every American appreciates what you do. I say today on behalf of the American people: We thank you for your service; we honor you for your sacrifices. And just as you've fulfilled your responsibilities to your Nation, your Nation will fulfill its responsibilities to you.

So as Commander in Chief, here's the commitment I make. We'll make sure you can meet the missions we ask you to go on. That's why we're increasing the defense budget, to keep you the best trained, best led, best equipped military in the world.

We've increased the size of the Army and Marines Corps ahead of schedule. We've approved a temporary increase in the Army. And we've halted reductions in the Navy and the Air Force, which will give you more time home between deployments. And it will help us to put an end, once and for all, for stop-loss for those who've done their duty.

We'll spend our defense dollars wisely. So we're cutting tens of billions of dollars in waste and unnecessary projects that even the Pentagon says it doesn't need, so that we can spend that money on building the 21st century military that we do need so we can maintain our military superiority.

And I promise you this: I will not hesitate to use force to protect the American people or our vital interests, but I will also not risk your lives unless it is absolutely necessary. And if it is—[*applause*]—and when it is necessary, America will back you up to the hilt. We'll give you the strategy, the clear mission, the equipment, and the support you need to get the job done. That's the promise I make to you.

As you fulfill your duties, we're going to take care of your families. That's why we're increasing pay. That's what's called an applause line in the business. [*Laughter*] That's why we're increasing child care. That's why we're increasing support to help spouses and families deal with the stress and separation of war. And I want to commend General Sharp for working to normalize your tours, so more of your families can join you here in Korea. And everywhere I go, from what I've heard, there's an extraordinary quality of life here for our troops. The fact that we can extend these tours a little bit longer just provides more stability and security for your families.

Finally, we pledge to be there when you come home. I mean, it's nice here, but we want you coming home. We're improving care for our wounded warriors, especially those with

posttraumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. We're funding the post-9/11 GI bill to give you and your families the chance to pursue your dreams. We've made the biggest commitment to our veterans through the largest percentage increase requested for the VA's budget in more than 30 years.

So these are the commitments I make to you, because you've always taken care of America, and America needs to take care of you. For you are the latest chapter in a long story of proud service, a story told in quiet places of reflection and tribute, including a memorial on the National Mall in Washington, not far from the White House.

There, between the monument to Washington and the memorial to Lincoln, you can find it. Nineteen statues, a squad on patrol as they might have appeared on this peninsula six decades ago, their packs on their backs, clad in their helmets and ponchos, carrying their rifles and radios—every service: Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines; every race: white, black, brown—standing together, serving together, moving on, pushing ahead. And etched into the black granite wall beside them, thousands of faces: the nurses, the mechanics, the support personnel who served alongside them.

There, at the Korean War Veterans Memorial, beside the tranquil waters and—that help us remember, are the statistics of their sacrifice: the wounded, the captured, the missing, the dead from that war. And under a bright American flag, etched in stone, are timeless words we know to be true: That freedom is not free.

Freedom is not free. And it is paid in the service and the sacrifice of all who wear America's uniform. It was paid by their generation, from the Pusan Perimeter to the landings at Inchon, from the skies of MiG Alley to the heroism of Heartbreak Ridge. It's been paid by every generation since. And it's being paid by you, in service that inspires us all. And for this, your country—and generations yet unborn—will be forever grateful.

So God bless you all. God bless the armed services, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to S. Sgt. Randy Gray, Jr., USA, signal intelligence analyst, A Co., 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, South Korea, who was one of the 8th U.S. Army's 2009 Best Warrior Competition winners; Col. Bruce Glover, USAF, chaplain, Col. Thomas H. Deale, USAF, commander, and CMSgt. Michael M. Williams, USAF, command chief master sergeant, 51st Fighter Wing; Brig. Gen. Michael A. Keltz, USAF, vice commander, 7th Air Force, Air Forces Korea, and chief of staff, Air Component Command, Osan Air Base; CSM Robert A. Winzenried, USA, command sergeant major, U.S. Forces Korea, Combined Forces Command, and 8th U.S. Army; Gen. Walter L. "Skip" Sharp, USA, commander, United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea, and his wife Joanne; Gen. Lee Sang-eui, chairman, Republic of Korea Joint Chiefs of Staff; and President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 20.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Osan Air Base, South Korea.

Locations: Osan Air Base, South Korea.

Names: Deale, Thomas H. ; Dennison, Katherine; Glover, Bruce; Gray, Randy, Jr.; Keltz, Michael A.; Lee Myung-bak; Lee Sang-eui; Remington, Michelle; Sharp, Joanne; Sharp, Walter L. "Skip"; Stephens, Kathleen; Williams, Michael M.; Winzenried, Robert A.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Expansion; Armed Forces, U.S. : GI bill legislation; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military family benefits, expansion of; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Pay increase; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), treatment efforts; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Service and dedication; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Traumatic brain injury, treatment efforts; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Arms and munitions : Weapons of mass destruction; China : President Obama's visit; China : Relations with U.S.; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Stabilization efforts; Defense, Department of : Defense contracts :: Contracting policies, reform; Defense, Department of : Defense contracts :: Weapon systems development, delays and inefficiencies; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Japan : President Obama's visit; Japan : Relations with U.S.; Singapore : President Obama's visit; South Korea : Afghanistan, role in; South Korea : Defense relationship with U.S.; South Korea : Iraq, role in; South Korea : Osan Air Base; South Korea : President; South Korea : President Obama's visit; South Korea : Relations with U.S.; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Veterans : Health care.

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