

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks on the Release of Sergeant Bowe R. Bergdahl, USA, From Captivity by Taliban Forces in Afghanistan

May 31, 2014

The President. Good afternoon, everybody. This morning I called Bob and Jani Bergdahl and told them that after nearly 5 years in captivity, their son Bowe is coming home.

Sergeant Bergdahl has missed birthdays and holidays and the simple moments with family and friends, which all of us take for granted. But while Bowe was gone, he was never forgotten. His parents thought about him and prayed for him every single day, as did his sister Sky, who prayed for his safe return.

He wasn't forgotten by his community in Idaho or the military, which rallied to support the Bergdahls through thick and thin. And he wasn't forgotten by his country, because the United States of America does not ever leave our men and women in uniform behind.

As Commander in Chief, I am proud of the servicemembers who recovered Sergeant Bergdahl and brought him safely out of harm's way. As usual, they performed with extraordinary courage and professionalism, and they have made their Nation proud.

Right now our top priority is making sure that Bowe gets the care and support that he needs and that he can be reunited with his family as soon as possible.

I'm also grateful for the tireless work of our diplomats and for the cooperation of the government of Qatar in helping to secure Bowe's release. We've worked for several years to achieve this goal, and earlier this week I was able to personally thank the Amir of Qatar for his leadership in helping us get it done. As part of this effort, the United States is transferring five detainees from the prison in Guantanamo Bay to Qatar. The Qatari Government has given us assurances that it will put in place measures to protect our national security.

I also want to express gratitude to the Afghan Government, which has always supported our efforts to secure Bowe's release. Going forward, the United States will continue to support an Afghan-led process of reconciliation, which could help secure a hard-earned peace within a sovereign and unified Afghanistan.

As I said earlier this week, we're committed to winding down the war in Afghanistan, and we are committed to closing Gitmo. But we also made an ironclad commitment to bring our prisoners of war home. That's who we are as Americans. It's a profound obligation within our military, and today, at least in this instance, it's a promise we've been able to keep.

I am mindful, though, that there are many troops who remained missing in the past. That's why we're never going to forget; we're never going to give up our search for servicemembers who remain unaccounted for. We also remain deeply committed to securing the release of American citizens who are unjustly detained abroad and deserve to be reunited with their families, just like the Bergdahls soon will be.

Bob and Jani, today families across America share in the joy that I know you feel. As a parent, I can't imagine the hardship that you guys have gone through. As President, I know that I speak for all Americans when I say we cannot wait for the moment when you are reunited and your son Bowe is back in your arms.

So with that, I'd like Bob to have an opportunity to say something, and Jani, if she'd like, as well. Please.

Jani Bergdahl. I just want to say thank you to everyone who has supported Bowe. He's had a wonderful team everywhere. We will continue to stay strong for Bowe while he recovers. Thank you.

Robert Bergdahl. I'd like to say to Bowe right now, who is having trouble speaking English——

[*At this point, Mr. Bergdahl spoke briefly in Pashto, and no translation was provided. He then continued in English as follows.*]

Mr. Bergdahl. I'm your father, Bowe.

To the people of Afghanistan, the same. Khalifa Al Thani, the complicated nature of this recovery was—will never really be comprehended. To each and every single one who effected this, in this country, in the service branches, at the State Department, throughout the whole of American Government, and around the world—international governments around the world, thank you so much. We just can't communicate the words this morning when we heard from the President.

So we looked forward to continuing the recovery of our son, which is going to be a considerable task for our family. And we hope that the media will understand that that will keep us very preoccupied in the coming days and weeks as he gets back home to the United States.

Thank you all for being here very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:16 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sky Albrecht, sister of Sgt. Bergdahl; Amir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar; and Khirullah Said Wali Khairkhwa, Mohammed Fazi, Norullah Noori, Abdul Haq Wasiq, and Mohammed Nabi Omari, members of the Afghan Taliban released from the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station detention center in Cuba to Qatari custody in Doha in exchange for the release of Sgt. Bergdahl. Mr. Bergdahl referred to Prime Minister Abdallah bin Nasir bin Khalifa Al Thani of Qatar.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Sgt. Bowe R. Bergdahl, USA, release from captivity by Taliban forces in Afghanistan.

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Names: Albrecht, Sky; Bergdahl, Bowe R.; Bergdahl, Jani; Bergdahl, Robert; Fazi, Mohammed; Khairkhwa, Khirullah Said Wali; Noori, Norullah; Omari, Mohammed Nabi; Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani; Wasiq, Abdul Haq.

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