

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018*

**Remarks to United States Troops at Al Asad Air Base in Al Anbar Province, Iraq**  
*December 26, 2018*

*The President.* Well, first of all, at ease. At ease. Let's have a good time. Let's have a good time. And we had an incredible meeting that lasted for about an hour, and you have no idea what we've come up with. You're going to be so happy. You're going to be so happy.

I want to just first say thank you for everything. And, on behalf of Melania and myself, we had a great flight in. So I want to thank you, honey. Come say hello, honey. Just say hello.

*The First Lady.* I'm very honored to be here tonight. Thank you for your service, for your sacrifice, and keeping us safe and free. I'm very proud of you. And, on behalf of our Nation, I'm wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year. Thank you again, and to your families. Okay.

*The President.* [Laughter] Let's let her make this speech, right? No, she's great. A very popular First Lady and a great person.

And I want to thank General LaCamera for the incredible job he's done. And I was just saying, we had a meeting with him and some of your great representatives, and we have some ideas, that are more than ideas, that are going to be just—we like to win. Do we like to win? We're going to win.

I want to thank everyone at Al Asad Air Base. Special people. We came in, we were—we felt very safe coming in. It was a pretty difficult journey in certain ways, but we felt very, very good, very safe. And also we knew exactly where we were going, and we're going to say hello to you and wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Very important. Thank you very much. Great job.

So Melania and I are thrilled to be here with the extraordinary men and women of the American Armed Forces—the greatest military—and especially as we get all of this billions and billions of dollars of new equipment that I approved over the last 2 years. You're getting such new equipment, your eyes are popping, right? Your eyes are popping. You're getting the best equipment in the world.

As you know, it was being very rapidly depleted, and it wasn't good. And we weren't going to let that happen to you or to our country.

And I just want you to relax. Let's have a good time for a few minutes, and then I'll be heading to another location, and then I'll be heading back. But I have you totally in mind—totally in mind.

We came to Al Asad to share our eternal gratitude for everything you do to keep America safe, strong, and free. Though you are thousands of miles away from your home and your loved ones, I hope you all had a merry Christmas. I also know that, speaking for your families, they are missing you, and they love you. And you know they're every bit a part of your success; they make it possible. So they're very special to us, all of the families.

It's because of your sacrifice that America's families can celebrate in safety and in peace. And we're doing great back at home.

There are many incredible patriots to recognize here, right now. And I'd like to start by saying a few words for Colonel Michael Maddox. Colonel, thank you very much. Thank you,

Colonel. Great job. Thank you, Colonel. No games. I can see—I know people. No games for the Colonel. No games with your general, right? Not a lot of games. It's called, "They want to win."

I want to thank the 201st Regional Support Group. One that everybody knows of, even back in the States: Task Force Thunder and their Lieutenant Colonel Kent Park. There's a reason for that name, "Thunder," isn't there? The 443d Air Expeditionary Squadron and their great commander, Major Dicie Hritz. Where is Dicie? Thank you. Great, fellas. Great.

The 1st Expeditionary Rescue Group and their commander, Colonel Michael Guischart. Where is Michael? Thank you. Thank you, fellas. The 3d Cavalry Regiment and their commander, Colonel Jonathan Byrom. Brigadier General Austin Renforth. Where is Austin? Austin. Thank you, Austin. Thanks, Austin.

Everyone at the Special Operations Joint Task Force. Thank you. Where the hell are they? *[Laughter]* And all personnel who reside at Camp Havoc. You know what that means, Camp Havoc.

Also joining us this evening is the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Douglas Silliman. Douglas, thank you very much. Great job, Douglas. Great job.

The courageous men and women at Al Asad Air Base are on the leading edge of our fight to vanquish America's terrorist enemies. You know that. The other reason I'm here today is to personally thank you and every servicemember throughout this region for the near-elimination of the ISIS territorial caliphate in Iraq and in Syria.

Two years ago, when I became President, they were a very dominant group. They were very dominant. Today, they're not so dominant anymore. Great job. I looked at a map, and 2 years ago, it was a lot of red all over that map. But now you have a couple little spots. And that's happening very quickly. That's happening very quickly. You'll be seeing that.

I want to just say great job. And we'll be watching ISIS very closely. We'll be watching them very, very closely, the remnants of ISIS.

No enemy on Earth can match the awesome strength of American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. Nobody is even close. And nobody is even close, in terms of our equipment. We make the greatest equipment in the world. Whether it's missiles or ships or anything you want to name, we have the greatest in the world—the jet fighters, the new F-35, the Super F-18s—we have the greatest fighter jets in the world. We make the greatest equipment in the world.

But you strike fear into the hearts of our enemies and bring comfort to all of our allies and those who cherish peace. And we want peace. And the best way to have peace is strength. When we're strong, we're going to have peace. If we're not strong, you know what happens. So we're stronger than ever. And very soon, when it all comes in, when that equipment keeps flowing—it's being made, much of it now—there will be nobody ever in history that's even close.

American and coalition forces have had one military victory after another over the last 2 years against ISIS, including the retaking of both Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria. We've liberated more than 20,000 square miles of territory. Think of what that is—20,000. Twenty thousand acres is a lot; think of what twenty thousand square miles is. It's a lot. This was all formerly held by ISIS—and liberated more than 3 million civilians from ISIS's bloodthirsty control.

The men and women stationed at Al Asad have played a vital role in the military defeat of ISIS in Iraq and in Syria. Because of these gains, our servicemembers in Syria can now return home to their families. Some will come here for a stay, but a lot of them are going to be going back home, where they want to be, with their families. They've done a fantastic job.

Originally, years ago, they came here. And it was supposed to be for 3 to 4 months, and that was a long time ago. That was many years ago. But what a job you have done. What a job they have done. I made it clear from the beginning that our mission in Syria was to strip ISIS of its military strongholds; we're not nation-building. Rebuilding Syria will require a political solution. And it's a solution that should be paid for by its very rich neighboring countries, not the United States. Let them pay for it. And they will. They will.

In fact, Saudi Arabia yesterday—you probably read—stepped up to the plate and has already made a commitment of substantial funds for development. And President Erdogan of Turkey has also agreed to take out any remnants of ISIS, and we'll be working with them. We're going to be working with them.

Our presence in Syria was not open-ended, and it was never intended to be permanent. Eight years ago, we went there for 3 months, and we never left. But now we're doing it right, and we're going to finish it off.

One year ago, I gave our generals 6 more months in Syria. I said: "Go ahead. Get them." And it turns out, it was really a year and a half ago. I said, "Go get them." "We need 6 months." "Go get them." Then, they said, "Give us another 6 months." I said, "Go get them." Then, they said, "Go—can we have one more, like, period of 6 months?" I said, "Nope, nope." I said, "I gave you a lot of 6 months." And now we're doing it a different way. And we're doing it. And you're doing it, folks. You're doing it. Just the remnants.

The men and women who serve are entitled to clear objectives and the confidence that when those objectives are met they can come home and be with their families. Our objective in Syria was always to retake the territory controlled by ISIS. Some people said we've already retaken 99 percent. That's a number that comes up a lot. And if you look at the map, before and after, it looks like 99 percent.

Now that we have done so, the nations of the region must step up and take more responsibility for their future. And also, they have to confront those remnants of ISIS and take them out very easily if, after we're totally finished, they're even left at all.

There will be a strong, deliberate, and orderly withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria—very deliberate, very orderly—while maintaining the U.S. presence in Iraq to prevent an ISIS resurgence and to protect U.S. interests and also to always watch very closely over any potential reformation of ISIS and also to watch over Iran. We'll be watching.

While American might can defeat terrorist armies on the battlefield, each nation of the world must decide for itself what kind of future it wants to build for its people and what kind of sacrifices they are willing to make for their children. America shouldn't be doing the fighting for every nation on Earth, not being reimbursed, in many cases, at all.

If they want us to do the fighting, they also have to pay a price—and sometimes, that's also a monetary price—so we're not the suckers of the world. We're no longer the suckers, folks. And people aren't looking at us as suckers. And I love you folks, because most of you are nodding your head this way. We're respected again as a nation. We're respected again.

America is safer, and peace is more possible because of the incredible courage and devotion of every patriot here tonight. Some people say, "Well, maybe somebody comes from the area, and they hit us on our homeland." If that happens, they will suffer consequences over here like nobody has ever suffered before. Okay? Let me just tell you. And I hope they hear that loud and clear. And that's not a threat; that's going to be a fact. If anything should happen at all, nobody will ever have suffered the consequences that they will suffer. Just remember I said it.

*Audience member. [Inaudible]*

*The President.* We will honor—you're welcome. You're welcome. [Laughter] We will honor your service by doing everything in our power to defend our homeland and to stop terrorists from entering America's shores. And that includes the strengthening of our borders.

I don't know if you folks are aware of what's happening. We want to have strong borders in the United States. The Democrats don't want to let us have strong borders—only for one reason. You know why? Because I want it. [Laughter] If I said—you know, I think, just standing here looking at all these brilliant, young faces—these warriors. You're warriors. You know, you're modern-day warriors. That's what you are.

But you gave me an idea, just looking at this warrior group. I think I'll say, "I don't want the wall." And then, they're going to give it to me. [Laughter] I've figured out the solution, First Lady. [Laughter] Tell Nancy Pelosi, "I don't want the wall." "Oh, we want the wall." And then, we get the wall. [Laughter] That's another way of doing it. That's another way of doing it.

No, we have to have it. And you know, not only human trafficking; drugs; illegals; a lot of criminals—bad records. We've seen murderers come in through the—you saw what happened with the caravan, as we call it. A caravan of thousands of people.

And by the way, our Border Patrol did an incredible job, and our military did an incredible job. And local law enforcement on the various parts of the border did an incredible job. And those caravans are slowly breaking up, and they're going back where they came from, and they have to come into our country legally. Legally.

And that's what you're fighting for. You know, when you think about it, you're fighting for borders in other countries, and they don't want to fight—the Democrats—for the border of our country. It doesn't make a lot of sense.

At this sacred time of the year, our thoughts turn to the American heroes who gave their last breath in defense of our country, including the seven brave souls who perished last March on the Jolly 51 rescue helicopter. You know exactly who we're talking about. Some of you were great friends of theirs.

Through their incredible sacrifice, our fallen heroes have achieved immortality. That's what it is; it's immortality. Immortality. They will live forever in the hearts of their countrymen, in your hearts, and in the history of the United States of America. They will live forever.

The dignity and glory of the American warrior is recorded on the fields of battle and in acts of valor that will live for all of time. You're going to be remembered for all of time. And under my administration, we're winning now. We're not playing to lose slowly, like they've been doing for 19 years. We're fighting in areas where we shouldn't be fighting and spending hundreds of billions of dollars doing it.

No. You have the right thought process now going, for the first time in a long time. [Laughter] Thank you. We want to fight where it's meaningful, which is basically what you're just saying. And you understand that better than anybody. The people in this room understand that better. Your general understands it. I just met with them. Your general understands it. We want to fight for the meaningful things.

No force in history has done more for the cause of justice and peace. I want each and every one of you to know that we will always protect those who protect us. You protect us. We are always going to protect you. And you just saw that, because you just got one of the biggest pay raises you've ever received—unless you don't want it. [Laughter] Does anybody here—is anybody here willing to give up the big pay raise you just got? Raise your hands, please. Oh, I don't see too many hands. Okay, don't give it up.

It's great. You know what? Nobody deserves it more. You haven't gotten one in more than 10 years—more than 10 years. And we got you a big one. I got you a big one. I got you a big one.

They had plenty of people that came up. They said: "You know, we could make it smaller. We could make it 3 percent. We could make it 2 percent. We could make it 4 percent." I said: "No. Make it 10 percent. Make it more than 10 percent." Because it's been a long time. It's been more than 10 years. It's been more than 10 years. That's a long time. And you know, you really put yourselves out there, and you put your lives out there. So congratulations.

We're fighting every day to ensure you have also the tools, the equipment, the training, and resources that you need to fight and to win. We don't play "prevent defense" anymore. We're not doing that. That's why, when you see me doing things, I always have things in mind. I always have lots of things in mind—things that you have in mind too, but a lot of other people don't. A lot of the media doesn't want to report it correctly, but we have a lot of things in mind.

But do you ever see at—like, in football, where a team is holding the other team scoreless—they can't throw; they can't pass; they can't do anything. Now it's three and a half quarters; they've got to just hold them. And they say, "Let's change to prevent defense." And that's what happens.

And you know what it does? It prevents them from winning. How many times have you seen that? We don't like prevent defense. We want real offense, and we want real defense. And that's what we're doing.

We have secured a record increase to our military budget, and we are purchasing all of this great equipment—\$700 billion last year; \$716 billion—with a "b," with a "b." And we were fought very hard by the Democrats and others. But I said, "We have to take care of our military."

I mean, I want to see costs come down too. But not when it comes to our military. You have to have the finest equipment anywhere in the world, and you have that—\$716 billion. And this year, again, we're going to be—don't tell anybody because nobody else knows—even a little bit higher.

But we have no choice. We can't play cheap with our warriors or military. We can't play cheap with victory. And we're not going to.

We understand the best way to preserve the peace is to be prepared for combat and the surest way to prevent conflict is to be totally unyielding and totally ready for conflict if that should happen. America is a peace-loving Nation. But rest assured, if we are forced to fight, we will engage the enemy with overwhelming force like never before—like nobody has ever seen before.

There is no military more capable and, now, more lethal, more fearless, and more skilled than the United States Armed Forces. Nobody is even close. Our faith and confidence in you is absolute and total. You are the sentinels who watch over our Nation. You are the warriors who defend our freedom. You are the patriots who ensure the flame of liberty burns forever bright. That's who you are. That's who you are.

To everyone at Al Asad Air Base and every American serving overseas, may God bless you, may God protect you, and may God always keep you safe. We love you. We support you. We salute you. We cherish you. And together, we pray for justice, goodness, and peace on Earth.

We are putting America first, for the first time in a long time, longer than anyone can remember. At the same time, we're here to help others. And for all of you that have those red caps—and I saw them before; I signed a lot of them—it says, "Make America Great Again." And you know what? That's exactly what we're doing.

So we flew all night on Christmas evening, the First Lady, myself, John Bolton, and a lot of other great people on that plane. Thank you, John. And it was worth every minute of it. And I just

want to thank you. You are outstanding, outstanding people. And we will never let you down. Just remember that.

God bless America. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:38 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Paul J. LaCamera, USA, commanding general, Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve; Col. Michael B. Maddox, USA, base commander, Al Asad Air Base; Lt. Col. Kent W. Park, USA, "Thunder" squadron commander, 3d U.S. Cavalry Regiment; Brig. Gen. Austin E. Renforth, USMC, commanding officer, Combined Joint Operations Center—Baghdad, Iraq; House Speaker-Designate Nancy Pelosi; and National Security Adviser John R. Bolton. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Al Asad Air Base in Al Anbar Province, Iraq.

*Locations:* Al Anbar Province, Iraq.

*Names:* Bolton, John R.; Byrom, Jonathan; Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Guisnard, Michael; Hritz, Dicie; LaCamera, Paul J.; Maddox, Michael B.; Park, Kent W.; Pelosi, Nancy; Renforth, Austin E.; Silliman, Douglas A.; Trump, Melania.

*Subjects:* Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker-designate; Defense and national security : Border security; Drug abuse and trafficking : Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Holidays and special observances : Christmas; Homeland Security, Department of : Customs and Border Protection, U.S.; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Iraq : Al Asad Air Base in Al Anbar Province; Iraq : Crash of U.S. military helicopter near Syrian border; Iraq : President Trump's visit; Iraq : Security cooperation with U.S.; Iraq : U.S. Ambassador; Law enforcement and crime : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Syria : U.S. military forces, withdrawal; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Turkey : President; Turkey : Security cooperation with U.S.; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: National Security Adviser.

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