

sponsibility to end the current violence and allow immediate humanitarian access to desperate people who have been driven from their homes and are now cut off from outside help.

The situation in Southern Kordofan is dire, with deeply disturbing reports of attacks based on ethnicity. The United States condemns all acts of violence, in particular the Sudanese Armed Forces aerial bombardment of civilians and harassment and intimidation of U.N. peacekeepers. With a cease-fire in Southern Kordofan alongside the agreement to deploy peacekeepers to Abyei, we can get the peace

process back on track. But without these actions, the roadmap for better relations with the Government of Sudan cannot be carried forward, which will only deepen Sudan's isolation in the international community. Without a cease-fire and political negotiations, the people of Southern Kordofan cannot enjoy the right to have their political grievances addressed. The negotiations now under way in Addis Ababa demand the urgent commitment from both sides to peace and to the agreement for immediate help to those civilians caught up in this conflict.

## Address to the Nation on the Drawdown of United States Military Personnel in Afghanistan

*June 22, 2011*

Good evening. Nearly 10 years ago, America suffered the worst attack on our shores since Pearl Harbor. This mass murder was planned by Usama bin Laden and his Al Qaida network in Afghanistan and signaled a new threat to our security, one in which the targets were no longer soldiers on a battlefield, but innocent men, women, and children going about their daily lives.

In the days that followed, our Nation was united as we struck at Al Qaida and routed the Taliban in Afghanistan. Then, our focus shifted. A second war was launched in Iraq, and we spent enormous blood and treasure to support a new government there. By the time I took office, the war in Afghanistan had entered its seventh year. But Al Qaida's leaders had escaped into Pakistan and were plotting new attacks, while the Taliban had regrouped and gone on the offensive. Without a new strategy and decisive action, our military commanders warned that we could face a resurgent Al Qaida and a Taliban taking over large parts of Afghanistan.

For this reason, in one of the most difficult decisions that I've made as President, I ordered an additional 30,000 American troops into Afghanistan. When I announced this surge at West Point, we set clear objectives: to refocus on Al Qaida, to reverse the Taliban's momentum, and train Afghan security forces to

defend their own country. I also made it clear that our commitment would not be open-ended and that we would begin to draw down our forces this July.

Tonight I can tell you that we are fulfilling that commitment. Thanks to our extraordinary men and women in uniform, our civilian personnel, and our many coalition partners, we are meeting our goals. As a result, starting next month, we will be able to remove 10,000 of our troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year, and we will bring home a total of 33,000 troops by next summer, fully recovering the surge I announced at West Point. After this initial reduction, our troops will continue coming home at a steady pace as Afghan security forces move into the lead. Our mission will change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security.

We're starting this drawdown from a position of strength. Al Qaida is under more pressure than at any time since 9/11. Together with the Pakistanis, we have taken out more than half of Al Qaida's leadership. And thanks to our intelligence professionals and special forces, we killed Usama bin Laden, the only leader that Al Qaida had ever known. This was a victory for all who have served since 9/11. One soldier summed it up well. "The message," he

said, “is we don’t forget. You will be held accountable, no matter how long it takes.”

The information that we recovered from bin Laden’s compound shows Al Qaida under enormous strain. Bin Laden expressed concern that Al Qaida had been unable to effectively replace senior terrorists that had been killed and that Al Qaida has failed in its effort to portray America as a nation at war with Islam, thereby draining more widespread support. Al Qaida remains dangerous, and we must be vigilant against attacks. But we have put Al Qaida on a path to defeat, and we will not relent until the job is done.

In Afghanistan, we’ve inflicted serious losses on the Taliban and taken a number of its strongholds. Along with our surge, our allies also increased their commitments, which helped stabilize more of the country. Afghan security forces have grown by over 100,000 troops, and in some Provinces and municipalities, we’ve already begun to transition responsibility for security to the Afghan people. In the face of violence and intimidation, Afghans are fighting and dying for their country, establishing local police forces, opening markets and schools, creating new opportunities for women and girls, and trying to turn the page on decades of war.

Of course, huge challenges remain. This is the beginning—but not the end—of our effort to wind down this war. We’ll have to do the hard work of keeping the gains that we’ve made while we draw down our forces and transition responsibility for security to the Afghan Government. And next May, in Chicago, we will host a summit with our NATO allies and partners to shape the next phase of this transition.

We do know that peace cannot come to a land that has known so much war without a political settlement. So as we strengthen the Afghan Government and security forces, America will join initiatives that reconcile the Afghan people, including the Taliban. Our position on these talks is clear: They must be led by the Afghan Government, and those who want to be a part of a peaceful Afghanistan must break from Al Qaida, abandon violence, and abide by the

Afghan Constitution. But, in part because of our military effort, we have reason to believe that progress can be made.

The goal that we seek is achievable and can be expressed simply: No safe haven from which Al Qaida or its affiliates can launch attacks against our homeland or our allies. We won’t try to make Afghanistan a perfect place. We will not police its streets or patrol its mountains indefinitely. That is the responsibility of the Afghan Government, which must step up its ability to protect its people and move from an economy shaped by war to one that can sustain a lasting peace. What we can do, and will do, is build a partnership with the Afghan people that endures, one that ensures that we will be able to continue targeting terrorists and supporting a sovereign Afghan Government.

Of course, our efforts must also address terrorist safe havens in Pakistan. No country is more endangered by the presence of violent extremists, which is why we will continue to press Pakistan to expand its participation in securing a more peaceful future for this war-torn region. We’ll work with the Pakistani Government to root out the cancer of violent extremism, and we will insist that it keeps its commitments. For there should be no doubt that so long as I am President, the United States will never tolerate a safe haven for those who aim to kill us. They cannot elude us, nor escape the justice they deserve.

My fellow Americans, this has been a difficult decade for our country. We’ve learned anew the profound cost of war, a cost that’s been paid by the nearly 4,500 Americans who have given their lives in Iraq and the over 1,500 who have done so in Afghanistan, men and women who will not live to enjoy the freedom that they defended. Thousands more have been wounded. Some have lost limbs on the battlefield, and others still battle the demons that have followed them home.

Yet tonight we take comfort in knowing that the tide of war is receding. Fewer of our sons and daughters are serving in harm’s way. We’ve ended our combat mission in Iraq, with 100,000 American troops already out of that

country. And even as there will be dark days ahead in Afghanistan, the light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance. These long wars will come to a responsible end.

As they do, we must learn their lessons. Already, this decade of war has caused many to question the nature of America's engagement around the world. Some would have America retreat from our responsibility as an anchor of global security and embrace an isolation that ignores the very real threats that we face. Others would have America overextended, confronting every evil that can be found abroad.

We must chart a more centered course. Like generations before, we must embrace America's singular role in the course of human events. But we must be as pragmatic as we are passionate, as strategic as we are resolute. When threatened, we must respond with force. But when that force can be targeted, we need not deploy large armies overseas. When innocents are being slaughtered and global security endangered, we don't have to choose between standing idly by or acting on our own. Instead, we must rally international action, which we're doing in Libya, where we do not have a single soldier on the ground, but are supporting allies in protecting the Libyan people and giving them the chance to determine their own destiny.

In all that we do, we must remember that what sets America apart is not solely our power, it is the principles upon which our Union was founded. We're a nation that brings our enemies to justice while adhering to the rule of law and respecting the rights of all our citizens. We protect our own freedom and prosperity by extending it to others. We stand not for empire, but for self-determination. That is why we have a stake in the democratic aspirations that are now washing across the Arab world. We will support those revolutions with fidelity to our ideals, with the power of our example, and with an unwavering belief that all human beings deserve to live with freedom and dignity.

Above all, we are a nation whose strength abroad has been anchored in opportunity for our citizens here at home. Over the last decade, we have spent a trillion dollars on war, at

a time of rising debt and hard economic times. Now, we must invest in America's greatest resource: our people. We must unleash innovation that creates new jobs and industries, while living within our means. We must rebuild our infrastructure and find new and clean sources of energy. And most of all, after a decade of passionate debate, we must recapture the common purpose that we shared at the beginning of this time of war. For our Nation draws strength from our differences, and when our Union is strong, no hill is too steep, no horizon is beyond our reach. America, it is time to focus on nation-building here at home.

In this effort, we draw inspiration from our fellow Americans who have sacrificed so much on our behalf. To our troops, our veterans, and their families, I speak for all Americans when I say that we will keep our sacred trust with you and provide you with the care and benefits and opportunity that you deserve.

I met some of these patriotic Americans at Fort Campbell. A while back, I spoke to the 101st Airborne that has fought to turn the tide in Afghanistan and to the team that took out Usama bin Laden. Standing in front of a model of bin Laden's compound, the Navy SEAL who led that effort paid tribute to those who had been lost, brothers and sisters in arms whose names are now written on bases where our troops stand guard overseas and on headstones in quiet corners of our country where their memory will never be forgotten. This officer—like so many others I've met on bases in Baghdad and Bagram and at Walter Reed and Bethesda Naval Hospital—spoke with humility about how his unit worked together as one, depending on each other and trusting one another, as a family might do in a time of peril.

That's a lesson worth remembering, that we are all a part of one American family. Though we have known disagreement and division, we are bound together by the creed that is written into our founding documents and a conviction that the United States of America is a country that can achieve whatever it sets out to accomplish. Now let us finish the work at hand. Let us

responsibly end these wars and reclaim the American Dream that is at the center of our story. With confidence in our cause, with faith in our fellow citizens, and with hope in our hearts, let us go about the work of extending the promise of America for this generation and the next.

## Remarks at Fort Drum, New York *June 23, 2011*

Thank you, everybody. Thank you. I don't want to give a long speech, because I want to spend most of my time just shaking hands and thanking all of you.

Colonel Burleson, thank you so much for your leadership. To Sergeant Major Defreese and Parham, to all of you, there's a reason I wanted to come here today. As the colonel just mentioned, in 2009, after having been in Afghanistan for 7 years, but having, I think, lost a sense of focus in terms of how we were going to accomplish our mission, I made the most difficult decision that I've made as President, and that is to deploy an additional 30,000 troops into Afghanistan so that we could turn back Taliban momentum, so that we could continue to go after Al Qaida aggressively, and so that we could make sure that we were training an Afghan security force that had the capacity to secure their own country.

The only reason I was able to make that decision was because I knew that we had the finest fighting force in the world and that if I gave a command to our troops, they would be able to accomplish that mission. If we were focused and if we were clear in terms of what we were going to try to accomplish, I knew that we could get it done.

And the 10th Mountain Division, this storied—this group that has been there for America day in, day out throughout our history, was the first folks to go in after that order was given. And that's not surprising because you guys were also some of the first folks to go in right after 9/11.

May God bless our troops, and may God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:01 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Throughout my service, first as a Senator and then as a Presidential candidate and then as a President, I've always run into you guys. And for some reason, it's always in some rough spots.

First time I saw 10th Mountain Division, you guys were in southern Iraq. When I went back to visit Afghanistan, you guys were the first ones there. I had the great honor of seeing some of you because a comrade of yours, Jared Monti, was the first person who I was able to award the Medal of Honor to who actually came back and wasn't receiving it posthumously [sic].\*

And so you guys have always been there in the toughest fights. And the fact that you are continuing, even as we speak, that many of your comrades are there right now under some very tough circumstances, is a testimony to your dedication and your patriotism.

Now, last night I gave a speech in which I said that we have turned a corner where we can begin to bring back some of our troops. We're not doing it precipitously. We're going to do it in a steady way to make sure that the gains that all of you helped to bring about are going to be sustained. But because of your outstanding work, what we've been able to do is train an additional hundred thousand Afghan soldiers so that they can start carrying on the fight.

Because of what you've done, areas like Kandahar are more secure than they have been in years. Because of you, we're now taking the fight to the Taliban instead of the Taliban bringing the fight to us. And because of you,

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\* See note below.