

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his

remarks, he referred to Erskine B. Bowles and Alan K. Simpson, Coauthors, National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

## Statement on the Retirement of General John R. Allen *February 19, 2013*

Today I met with General John Allen and accepted his request to retire from the military so that he can address health issues within his family. I told General Allen that he has my deep, personal appreciation for his extraordinary service over the last 19 months in Afghanistan, as well as his decades of service in the United States Marine Corps. General Allen presided over the significant growth in the size and capability of Afghan National Security Forces, the further degradation of Al Qaida and their extremist allies, and the ongoing transition to Afghan security responsibility across the country. He worked tirelessly to

strengthen our coalition through his leadership of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and to improve our relations with the Afghan Government. Above all, he cares deeply for the men and women in uniform who serve our Nation, as well as their families, and I am grateful for the sacrifices made by his family in supporting him during his service. John Allen is one of America's finest military leaders, a true patriot, and a man I have come to respect greatly. I wish him and his family the very best as they begin this new chapter, and we will carry forward the extraordinary work that General Allen led in Afghanistan.

## Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and an Exchange With Reporters *February 22, 2013*

*President Obama.* Well, I want to extend a warm welcome to Prime Minister Abe and congratulate him on his victory and his leadership of Japan.

Obviously, Japan is one of our closest allies, and the U.S.-Japan alliance is the central foundation for our regional security and so much of what we do in the Pacific region. And that friendship extends not just between our governments, but also between our peoples.

Prime Minister Abe himself is no stranger to the United States. I think he and I studied in California around the same time, and this is not his first visit to the Oval Office. So we're looking forward to building a very strong working relationship on a whole range of issues.

We had close consultations on a wide range of security issues, in particular our concerns about the provocative actions that have been taken in North Korea and our determination to take strong actions in response.

We also discussed a wide range of multilateral issues, and I expressed my appreciation for the support Japan has provided to our efforts in Afghanistan, our efforts to resolve the nuclear issue in Iran, and we expressed mutual condolences around the loss of life at the BP plant in Algeria and pledged that this would spur greater counterterrorism cooperation.

After this brief session with the press, we'll have an opportunity to extend these discussions over lunch, and we'll have a chance to talk about the close economic cooperation between our two countries.

And I know that Prime Minister Abe and I both agree that our number-one priority has to be making sure that we are increasing growth and making sure that people have the opportunity to prosper if they're willing to work hard in both our countries. And so we'll be talking about a host of issues that—and steps that we can take in our respective countries to encourage the kind of trade, expanded commerce,