

Al Qaida can never again use Afghanistan to launch attacks against America.

The 33,000 additional forces that I ordered to Afghanistan served with honor. They completed their mission and, as promised, returned home last fall. This week, we agreed that this spring, Afghan forces will take the lead for security across the entire country and our troops will shift to a support role. In the coming months, I'll announce the next phase of our drawdown. And by the end of next year, America's war in Afghanistan will be over.

This progress has only been possible because of the heroic sacrifices of our troops and diplomats, alongside forces from many other nations. More than a half million Americans—military and civilian—have served in Afghanistan. Thousands have been wounded. More than 2,000 have given their lives.

This remains a very difficult mission. The work ahead will not be easy. Our forces are still in harm's way. But make no mistake: Our path is clear, and we are moving forward. Because after more than a decade of war, the nation we need to rebuild is our own.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on U.S. Military Support for a French Rescue Operation in Somalia *January 13, 2013*

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

On January 11, 2013, French forces conducted an operation in Somalia in which they attempted to rescue a French citizen being held hostage by al-Shabaab. United States forces provided limited technical support to the French forces in that operation, but took no direct part in the assault on the compound where it was believed the French citizen was being held hostage. United States combat aircraft briefly entered Somali airspace to support the rescue operation, if needed. These aircraft did not employ weapons during the operation. The U.S. forces that supported this operation left Somalia by approximately 8:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on January 11, 2013.

As we do, we have to care of our troops and veterans who fought in our name. We have to grow our economy and shrink our deficits, create new jobs and boost family incomes. We have to fix our infrastructure and our immigration system. We have to protect our planet from the destructive effects of climate change and protect our children from the horrors of gun violence.

These, too, will be difficult missions for America, but they must be met. And if we can just summon a fraction of the determination of our men and women in uniform, I know we can meet them. And I intend to work as hard as I know how to make sure we do.

Thank you.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:05 p.m. on January 11 in the State Dining Room at the White House for broadcast on January 12. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 11, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on January 12.

I directed U.S. forces to support this rescue operation in furtherance of U.S. national security interests, and pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with the War Powers Resolution (Public Law 93-148). I appreciate the support of the Congress in this action.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to John A. Boehner, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Patrick J. Leahy, President pro tem-

pore of the Senate. The letter referred to Denis Alex, a French intelligence operative who

was kidnapped in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 2009.

The President's News Conference January 14, 2013

The President. Please have a seat, everybody. Good morning. I thought it might make sense to take some questions this week, as my first term comes to an end.

It's been a busy and productive 4 years. And I expect the same for the next 4 years. I intend to carry out the agenda that I campaigned on: an agenda for new jobs, new opportunity, and new security for the middle class.

Now, right now our economy is growing, and our businesses are creating new jobs, so we are poised for a good year if we make smart decisions and sound investments and as long as Washington politics don't get in the way of America's progress.

As I said on the campaign, one component to growing our economy and broadening opportunity for the middle class is shrinking our deficits in a balanced and responsible way. And for nearly 2 years now, I've been fighting for such a plan, one that would reduce our deficits by \$4 trillion over the next decade, which would stabilize our debt and our deficit in a sustainable way for the next decade. That would be enough not only to stop the growth of our debt relative to the size of our economy, but it would make it manageable so it doesn't crowd out the investments we need to make in people and education and job training and science and medical research—all the things that help us grow.

Now, step by step, we've made progress towards that goal. Over the past 2 years, I've signed into law about \$1.4 trillion in spending cuts. Two weeks ago, I signed into law more than \$600 billion in new revenue by making sure the wealthiest Americans begin to pay their fair share. When you add the money that we'll save in interest payments on the debt, all together that adds up to a total of about \$2.5 trillion in deficit reduction over the past 2 years, not counting the \$400 billion already

saved from winding down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So we've made progress. We are moving towards our ultimate goal of getting to a \$4 trillion reduction. And there will be more deficit reduction when Congress decides what to do about the \$1.2 trillion in automatic spending cuts that have been pushed off until next month.

The fact is, though, we can't finish the job of deficit reduction through spending cuts alone. The cuts we've already made to priorities other than Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and defense mean that we spend on everything from education to public safety less as a share of our economy than it has—than has been true for a generation. And that's not a recipe for growth.

So we've got to do more both to stabilize our finances over the medium and long term, but also spur more growth in the short term. Now, I've said I've—I'm open to making modest adjustments to programs like Medicare to protect them for future generations. I've also said that we need more revenue through tax reform by closing loopholes in our Tax Code for the wealthiest Americans. If we combine a balanced package of savings from spending on health care and revenues from closing loopholes, we can solve the deficit issue without sacrificing our investments in things like education that are going to help us grow.

It turns out, the American people agree with me. They listened to an entire year's debate over this issue, and they made a clear decision about the approach they prefer. They don't think it's fair, for example, to ask a senior to pay more for his or her health care or a scientist to shut down lifesaving research so that a multimillionaire investor can pay less in tax rates than a secretary. They don't think it's smart to protect endless corporate loopholes and tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans