

Forces to make sure more Americans are stepping up to support and honor those extraordinary families.

We're going to stay strong by taking care of our wounded warriors and our veterans. Because helping our wounded warriors and veterans heal isn't just a promise, it's a sacred obligation. And as you come home, some of you will return to civilian life, and we want to make sure you can enjoy the American Dream that you helped to defend. So with the transition assistance to help you begin the next chapter of your life, that's going to keep America strong. The credentials and licenses to help you find a job worthy of your incredible skills, that will keep America strong. Making sure the post-9/11 GI bill is in place and delivering for you the kind of education that you have earned, that will keep America strong.

And I keep on saying to every company back home, "If you want somebody who knows how to get the job done, hire a vet."

*Audience members.* Hooah!

*The President.* Hire a vet. [Applause] Hire a vet. Because like generations before you, we need you to help us write the next great chapter in the American story, and I know you'll do that because I've seen the character of your service, and I know the strength of our country.

Going back to New York and thinking about that tragedy 12 years ago, in those awful moments after the Twin Towers fell, as the wreckage was still burning, those at the scene were desperately looking for survivors, one of those searching was a detective at the NYPD. And as he climbed through the debris, he spotted something in the rubble. It was a flag. It was torn up. Parts of it were burned, but it was still intact.

## Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia May 26, 2014

Thank you so much. Please be seated. Thank you, Secretary Hagel, for your introduction and for your lifetime of service, from a young Army sergeant in Vietnam to our Nation's 24th Secretary of Defense.

And today, that flag is at the 9/11 Museum. It's dusty and it's torn and you can see the burn marks from the fires. That flag has been through a lot. But the thing you notice is, its broad stripes and bright stars still shine. Its red, white, and blue still inspire. After all it's been through, after all America has been through, our flag is still there.

And our flag is still there because when our Nation was attacked, a generation—this generation, the 9/11 generation—stepped up and said, "Send me." Our flag is still there because you've served with honor in dusty villages and city streets and in rugged bases and remote outposts, in Helmand and Kandahar and Khost and Kunar and Paktika and Nuristan. Our flag is still there because through this long war, you never wavered in your belief that people deserve to live free from fear, over here and back home. Our flag will always be there, because the freedom and liberty it represents to the world will always be defended by patriots like you.

So I'm here to say thank you. I'm here to say I'm proud of you. The American people are proud of you. God bless you. God bless the United States Armed Forces. And God Bless our United States of America.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:14 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., USMC, commander, international Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; musician Brad D. Paisley, his wife Kimberly Williams-Paisley, and their sons Huck and Jasper; Leslie Genier, wife of U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan James B. Cunningham; Purple Heart recipient Sgt. Jeffery C. Baker, USA; and Fawzia Koofi, Vice President, National Assembly of Afghanistan.

Vice President Biden, Jill, Chairman Dempsey, Major General Buchanan, Patrick Hallinan, Chaplain Brainerd; to our men and women in uniform here and around the world; to our outstanding veterans; and most of all, to

the Gold Star families here to remember the loved ones you've lost: Michelle and I are humbled and honored to commemorate this Memorial Day with you.

Every year, this ceremony marks another page in the life of our Nation, this year in particular, as we recognize the 150th anniversary of this holy space, Arlington National Cemetery. One hundred and fifty years ago, war raged on hillsides and farmlands not far from where we gather today. A nation ill-prepared for war found itself overwhelmed with the task of burying so many of its sons. So we declared upon this hill a final resting place for those willing to lay down their lives for the country that we love. And on a spring day in 1864, Private William Christman of Pennsylvania was the first American to find eternal rest on these grounds.

Over that century and a half, in times of war, in times of peace, Americans have come here, to pay tribute not only to the loved ones who meant the world to them, but to all our heroes, known and unknown. Here, in perfect military order, lie the patriots who won our freedom and saved the Union. Here, side by side, lie the privates and the generals who defeated fascism and laid the foundation for an American century. Here lie the Americans who fought through Vietnam and those who won a long twilight struggle against communism. And here, in Section 60, lie men and women who gave their lives to keep our homeland safe over more than a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Early this morning I returned from Afghanistan, and yesterday I visited with some of our men and women serving there, 7,000 miles from home. For more than 12 years, men and women like those I met with have borne the burden of our Nation's security. Now, because of their profound sacrifice, because of the progress they have made, we're at a pivotal moment. Our troops are coming home. By the end of this year, our war in Afghanistan will finally come to an end. And yesterday at Bagram, and here today at Arlington, we pay tribute to the nearly 2,200 American patriots who've made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan. We will honor them always.

Today, in small towns across America, in cemeteries throughout our country and around the world, and here on these solemn hillsides, the families of our fallen share stories of the lives they led. Our hearts ache in their absence. But our hearts are also full, full in knowing that their legacy shines bright in the people that they loved the most. Through almost unimaginable loss, these families of the fallen have tapped a courage and resolve that many of us will never know. And we draw comfort and strength from their example.

We draw strength from the promise of their children. Today Michelle and Jill are with 200 brave boys and girls whose parents gave everything they had in service to their country.

They were mothers and fathers like Staff Sergeant Michael Cardenaz, who gave his life in Afghanistan 4 years ago. The years since have been hard for Michael's family. And yet, with the love of their mother, Macarena, his three youngest daughters have displayed a strength beyond their years.

Mariella, the oldest of the three, has become a mentor to other children who've lost their parents. Mariliz, the middle girl, was used to her dad carrying her everywhere when she was little; now 7, she shepherds her little sister, Marianna. And Marianna, who was just a baby when her dad was deployed, is starting to understand what it means that her daddy served his country. Mariella, Mariliz, and Marianna are here today. And we say to you and to all these courageous children: Your parents' bravery lives on in you. You will never walk alone. Your country will be there to help you grow up into the young men and women your parents always knew you would be. And that's our pledge to you.

We draw strength as well from the love of the spouses of the fallen. Sergeant First Class Joseph Gantt was a young man, but already a veteran of World War II, when he met Clara Edwards on a train headed to California. He spent 2 years courting Clara before she finally agreed to marry him. Then, when Joseph deployed to Korea, he told his young wife to remarry if he didn't come back. She told him no. He had a hard enough time getting her to say

yes in the first place, she said. [Laughter] He had waited 2 years for her; she'd wait as long as it took for him to come home.

When Joseph went missing in action, Clara waited. She waited 63 years. Meanwhile, our country continued to work to bring home the missing from all our wars. And then, last December—last December—his remains finally identified, Joseph returned home to be laid to rest. Clara never remarried during those 63 years. And now 96 years old, she was there to welcome him home. And we are honored to have Clara Gantt here with us today. Clara. [Applause]

We also draw strength from the parents who have given their sons and daughters to America.

Earlier this year, in my State of the Union Address, I spoke of the remarkable story and grueling recovery of Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg, who was severely injured by a massive roadside bomb in Afghanistan. And when he stood, there in the balcony, it reminded our entire Nation that we are blessed to be protected by patriots like him. But that was only part of the story. Today I want to close with the story of Cory's brother-in-arms, Sergeant Roberto Sanchez, who was killed by that same explosion.

Rob wasn't a big guy, but his mother Wendy remembers that he was "larger than life," always surrounded by friends and melting hearts with a devastating smile. Rob admired the Army from a young age, dressed up as a soldier the first time he went out for Halloween and for many Halloweens after that. He meticulously arranged and rearranged G.I. Joes on his bedroom floor. And when he watched the Twin Towers fall that awful September day, Rob found his calling to serve his country. A proud Army Ranger who took care of his fellow soldiers just as he did his own family, he'd tell Wendy, "Mom . . . I'm your Superman."

In October 2009, Rob was on his fifth deployment, and Rob and Cory were finishing a mission with their fellow Rangers in Kandahar. And that's when the bomb went off. And that's when this American family made a sacrifice the depths of which few of us will ever truly comprehend.

And in the years since, Wendy has dug deep to find the strength to live without Rob. She keeps in touch with Cory, who she finally had a chance to meet and spend some time with this past week, sharing their memories of Rob. She runs half-marathons. She and her husband pour their hearts into raising their youngest son Logan, who she says wants to be just like Rob, which she knows means she'll probably send another son into military service.

Today Wendy is watching this ceremony from home near Indianapolis, on a Memorial Day in America that has been made safe by her son's sacrifice. And every day, when she looks at the old photo of her and Rob that sits on her dresser, she's reminded that although he is gone, he will always inspire her and will always be her Superman.

For the parents who have lost a child, for the husbands and wives who have lost a partner, for the children who have lost a parent, this day and this place are solemn reminders of the extraordinary sacrifice they have made in our name. But today reminds us as well that for these family and for their comrades-in-arms, their service to our Nation endures. There are few who truly understand what it means to send a child into war or to watch a battle buddy give his life to save others. On this Memorial Day, and every day, these are the families and veterans we're sworn to look after.

And so here, on these hallowed grounds, we rededicate ourselves to our sacred obligations to all who wear America's uniform and to the families who stand by them always: that our troops will have the resources they need to do their job; that our Nation will never stop searching for those who've gone missing, who are held as prisoners of war; that, as we've been reminded in recent days, we must do more to keep faith with our veterans and their families and ensure they get the care and benefits and opportunities that they've earned and that they deserve. These Americans have done their duty. They ask nothing more than that our country does ours, now and for decades to come.

The fallen patriots we memorialize today gave their last full measure of devotion. Not so we might mourn them, though we do. Not so

that our Nation might honor their sacrifice, although it does. They gave their lives so that we might live ours: so that a daughter might grow up to pursue her dreams; so that a wife might be able to live a long life, free and secure; so that a mother might raise her family in a land of peace and freedom. Everything that we hold precious in this country was made possible by Americans who gave their all. And because of them, our Nation is stronger, safer, and will always remain a shining beacon of freedom for the rest of the world.

May God bless the fallen and all those who serve. May God watch over their families. And may God continue to bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:38 a.m. in the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington Na-

tional Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Jeffrey S. Buchanan, commanding general, and Col. Michael E. Brainerd, USA, Joint Force headquarters command chaplain, National Capital Region and Military District of Washington; Patrick K. Hallinan, executive director, Army National Military Cemeteries; Macarena E. Cardenaz, wife, and Mariella, Mariliz, and Marianna Cardenaz, daughters, of S. Sgt. Michael David P. Cardenaz, USA, who was killed in action in Afghanistan on February 20, 2010; Clara Gantt, wife of Sfc. Joseph E. Gantt, USA, who went missing in action during the Korean war; and Wendy Holland, mother of Sgt. Robert D. Sanchez, USA, who was killed in action in Afghanistan on October 1, 2009, her husband Will Holland, and their son Logan.

## Remarks on the Drawdown of United States Military Personnel in Afghanistan *May 27, 2014*

Good afternoon, everybody. As you know, this weekend, I traveled to Afghanistan to thank our men and women in uniform and our deployed civilians, on behalf of a grateful nation, for the extraordinary sacrifices they make on behalf of our security. I was also able to meet with our commanding general and Ambassador to review the progress that we've made. And today I'd like to update the American people on the way forward in Afghanistan and how, this year, we will bring America's longest war to a responsible end.

The United States did not seek this fight. We went into Afghanistan out of necessity, after our Nation was attacked by Al Qaida on September 11, 2001. We went to war against Al Qaida and its extremist allies with the strong support of the American people and their representatives in Congress, with the international community and our NATO allies, and with the Afghan people, who welcomed the opportunity of a life free from the dark tyranny of extremism.

We have now been in Afghanistan longer than many Americans expected. But make no

mistake: Thanks to the skill and sacrifice of our troops, diplomats, and intelligence professionals, we have struck significant blows against Al Qaida's leadership, we have eliminated Usama bin Laden, and we have prevented Afghanistan from being used to launch attacks against our homeland. We've also supported the Afghan people as they continue the hard work of building a democracy. We've extended more opportunities to their people, including women and girls. And we've helped train and equip their own security forces.

Now we're finishing the job we started. Over the last several years, we've worked to transition security responsibilities to the Afghans. One year ago, Afghan forces assumed the lead for combat operations. Since then, they've continued to grow in size and in strength, while making huge sacrifices for their country. This transition has allowed us to steadily draw down our own forces, from a peak of 100,000 U.S. troops to roughly 32,000 today.

Two thousand fourteen, therefore, is a pivotal year. Together with our allies and the