

Statement on the End of United States Combat Operations in Afghanistan *December 28, 2014*

Today's ceremony in Kabul marks a milestone for our country. For more than 13 years, ever since nearly 3,000 innocent lives were taken from us on 9/11, our Nation has been at war in Afghanistan. Now, thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, our combat mission in Afghanistan is ending, and the longest war in American history is coming to a responsible conclusion.

On this day we give thanks to our troops and intelligence personnel who have been relentless against the terrorists responsible for 9/11, devastating the core Al Qaida leadership, delivering justice to Usama bin Laden, disrupting terrorist plots, and saving countless American lives. We are safer and our Nation is more secure because of their service. At the same time, our courageous military and diplomatic personnel in Afghanistan—along with our NATO allies and coalition partners—have helped the Afghan people reclaim their communities, take the lead for their own security, hold historic elections, and complete the first democratic transfer of power in their country's history.

We honor the profound sacrifices that have made this progress possible. We salute every American—military and civilian, including our dedicated diplomats and development workers—who have served in Afghanistan, many on multiple tours, just as their families have sacrificed at home. We pledge to give our many wounded warriors, with wounds seen and unseen, the world-class care and treatment they have earned. Most of all, we remember the

more than 2,200 American patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan, and we pledge to stand with their Gold Star families who need the everlasting love and support of a grateful nation.

Afghanistan remains a dangerous place, and the Afghan people and their security forces continue to make tremendous sacrifices in defense of their country. At the invitation of the Afghan Government, and to preserve the gains we have made together, the United States—along with our allies and partners—will maintain a limited military presence in Afghanistan to train, advise, and assist Afghan forces and to conduct counterterrorism operations against the remnants of Al Qaida. Our personnel will continue to face risks, but this reflects the enduring commitment of the United States to the Afghan people and to a united, secure, and sovereign Afghanistan that is never again used as a source of attacks against our Nation.

These past 13 years have tested our Nation and our military. But compared to the nearly 180,000 American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan when I took office, we now have fewer than 15,000 in those countries. Some 90 percent of our troops are home. Our military remains the finest in the world, and we will remain vigilant against terrorist attacks and in defense of the freedoms and values we hold dear. And with growing prosperity here at home, we enter a new year with new confidence, indebted to our fellow Americans in uniform who keep us safe and free.