

States. Officials of my Administration and I communicate regularly with the leadership and other Members of Congress with regard to these deployments and we will continue to do so.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Paul D. Ryan, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Orrin G. Hatch, President pro tempore of the Senate.

## Remarks to United States Troops at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida December 6, 2016

*The President.* Hello, MacDill! Thank you so much!

Well, first of all, have you noticed this coincidence? On the scoreboard, it says 44 to 44. That happens to be—oh. [*Laughter*]

*Audience member.* We love you!

*The President.* I love you too. I do.

I—to General Votel, General Thomas, and most importantly, to all of you: I am here for a very simple reason, and that is just to say thank you, on behalf of the American people. We have been so reliant on the outstanding work that has been done by SOCOM and CENTCOM, the extraordinary leadership from the highest general down to the person who's just started. I have been consistently in awe of your performance and the way that you've carried out your mission.

As some of you remember, I was here 2 years ago. I want to thank, in addition to some of the outstanding leadership team, a couple of special folks to mention: Colonel April Vogel, Chief Master Sergeant Melanie Noel, all your senior enlisted leaders. Give them a big round of applause.

I know that, obviously, we've got a lot of Air Force here. We've got Central Command. We've got Special Operations Command. We've got Army, Navy, Marines. We've got our DOD civilians, and we've got spouses, partners, sons, daughters—

*Audience member.* Family!

*The President.* What's that?

*Audience member.* Family.

*The President.* I was just mentioning them. [*Laughter*] You guys, I was getting to that. [*Laughter*] We've got amazing military families here who are sacrificing alongside of you every single day. Give them a big round of applause.

So I just had the chance to meet with General Thomas and some of the extraordinary personnel from across U.S. Special Operations Command. I'm going to go give a big policy speech right after I talk to you. The main thing I want to do is just shake your hands. And I'm going to try to shake as many hands as I can.

I know you're marking an important anniversary. For 75 years—from World War II through Korea, the Cuban missile crisis, Vietnam, the Gulf war, the Afghan and Iraq wars—the men and women of this base have always stepped up when we needed them most. So, on behalf of the entire country, I want to wish you a happy 75th anniversary.

For Michelle and myself, our—the lease is running out on our apartment. [*Laughter*]

*Audience member.* Renew it!

*The President.* No, I can't. [*Laughter*] So I just want to get my security deposit back. [*Laughter*] But it has been the privilege and honor of a lifetime to be your Commander in Chief, the Commander in Chief of the finest fighting force the world has ever known. You are the best, because we have the best people.

You and your families have inspired us. We've been inspired by your patriotism, for stepping forward, for volunteering, for dedicating yourself to a life of service. We've been inspired by your devotion, your willingness to sacrifice for all of us. We've been inspired by your example. At a time when sometimes the country seems so divided, you remind us that, as Americans, we're all part of one team. We take care of each other. And you remind us of what patriotism really means.

So I just want to say thank you to all of you. You are going to continue with your mission, but I will tell you that Michelle and I, having had the experience and the honor of working with you, are going to make it one of our missions as civilians to support you in every way that we can.

God bless you. God bless our troops. God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:34 p.m. in the basketball gym. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Joseph L. Votel III, USA, commander, U.S. Central Command; Gen. Raymond A. Thomas III, USA, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command; and Col. April D. Vogel, USAF, commander, and CMS Melanie K. Noel, USAF, command chief master sergeant, Sixth Air Mobility Wing, MacDill Air Force Base.

## Remarks on United States Counterterrorism Strategy at MacDill Air Force Base December 6, 2016

*The President.* Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. Well, thank you so much. Good afternoon, everybody.

*Audience members.* Good afternoon.

*The President.* I was just told that was going to be the last “Hail to the Chief” on the road, and it got me kind of sentimental. I want to, first and foremost, say thanks to all of you. Just before I came here, I was able to visit with some of the men and women from MacDill Air Force Base, Central Command, our Special Operations Command to thank them for their extraordinary service. And so, to you and your families and to the extended family of American servicemembers, let me say that our Nation owes you an unbelievable debt of gratitude. We are grateful for you, and we will be praying for you over the holidays. So—[*applause*].

As you know all too well, your mission—and the course of history—was changed after the 9/11 attacks. By the time I took office, the United States had been at war for 7 years. For 8 years that I’ve been in office, there has not been a day when a terrorist organization or some radicalized individual was not plotting to kill Americans. And on January 20, I will become the first President of the United States to serve two full terms during a time of war. Now, we did not choose this fight, but once it came to us, the world saw the measure of our resolve.

The most solemn responsibility for any President is keeping the American people safe. In carrying out that duty, I have sent men and women into harm’s way. I’ve visited troops around the globe. I have met our wounded

warriors, and I’ve grieved with Gold Star families. I know better than most that it is because of your service and your sacrifice that we have been able, during these 8 years, to protect our homeland, to strike crippling blows against terrorist networks, and fortify our friends and our allies. So today I’d like to reflect on that work and talk about the foundation that we will leave for the next administration.

I came to this office with a set of core convictions that have guided me as Commander in Chief. I believe that the United States military can achieve any mission; that we are, and must remain, the strongest fighting force the world has ever known. I believe that we must never hesitate to act when necessary, including unilaterally when necessary, against any imminent threats to our people. But I’ve also insisted that it is unwise and unsustainable to ask our military to build nations on the other side of the world or resolve their internal conflicts, particularly in places where our forces become a magnet for terrorists and insurgencies. Instead, it’s been my conviction that even as we focus relentlessly on dismantling terrorist networks like Al Qaida and ISIL, we should ask allies to do their share in the fight, and we should strengthen local partners who can provide lasting security.

And these convictions guided the policies we pursued both in Iraq and Afghanistan. When I took office, the United States was focused overwhelmingly on Iraq, where nearly 150,000 American troops had spent years fighting an insurgency and helping to build a democratic government. Meanwhile, Al Qaida had