

want nobody nobody sent.” Ab didn’t take no for an answer, because he knew that in America, in our democracy, everybody can be somebody, everybody matters.

That conviction led Ab, a son of immigrants and a World War II veteran, to serve Illinois as a State legislator and serve our Nation in every branch of Government: as a Congressman, Federal judge, and White House Counsel. In every position he held, Ab’s integrity and wisdom consistently put him on the right side of history, from fighting against prejudice and discrimination and for free speech and civil liberties. He reformed Illinois’s criminal code, defended consumers’ rights, and although his decision striking down the ban on gay Americans serving in our military was overturned, history proved him right.

Like so many admirers, I’ve lost a mentor and a friend. But as we mourn his passing, I’m comforted by the thought that countless Americans will continue fighting for progressive causes Ab believed in because he pushed them toward public service, both during his time in Government and through Mikva Challenge, which he established with his wonderful wife Zoe. We’re all better off because we were sent Ab Mikva, and because Ab in turn sent us forward to do big things. Michelle and I send our deepest condolences to Zoe, their three daughters, seven grandchildren, and the generations of young patriots Ab inspired. May his memory be for a blessing.

NOTE: The statement referred to Mary L. Mikva, Laurie I. Mikva, and Rachel Mikva Rosenberg, daughters of Mr. Mikva.

Statement on the Final Report of the Commission on Care *July 5, 2016*

I want to thank the members of the Commission on Care for their comprehensive and thorough review of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and for their considered recommendations. In August 2014, I signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act (VACAA) of 2014, which charged the Commission to examine veterans’ access to VA health care and to recommend how best to organize the VHA, locate health

resources, and deliver health care to veterans during the next 20 years.

The Commission’s report includes a number of specific proposals that I look forward to reviewing closely over the coming weeks. We will continue to work with veterans, Congress, and our partners in the veteran advocacy community to further our ongoing transformation of the veterans’ health care system. Our veterans deserve nothing less for their sacrifices and their service.

Remarks on United States Military Strategy in Afghanistan *July 6, 2016*

Good morning, everybody.

More than 14 years ago, after Al Qaida attacked our Nation on 9/11, the United States went to war in Afghanistan against these terrorists and the Taliban that harbored them. Over the years—and thanks to heroic efforts by our military, our intelligence community, our diplomats, and our development professionals—we pushed Al Qaida out of its camps, helped the Afghan people topple the Taliban and helped them establish a democratic gov-

ernment. We dealt crippling blows to the Al Qaida leadership. We delivered justice to Osama bin Laden. And we trained Afghan forces to take responsibility for their own security.

And given that progress, a year and a half ago, in December 2014, America’s combat mission in Afghanistan came to a responsible end. Compared to the 100,000 troops we once had there, today, fewer than 10,000 remain. And compared to their previous mission—helping to lead the fight—our forces are now

focused on two narrow missions: training and advising Afghan forces and supporting counterterrorist operations against the remnants of Al Qaida as well as other terrorist groups, including ISIL. In short, even as we've maintained a relentless case against those who are threatening us, we are no longer engaged in a major ground war in Afghanistan.

But even these narrow missions continue to be dangerous. Over the past year and a half, 38 Americans—military and civilian—have lost their lives in Afghanistan on behalf of our security. And we honor their sacrifice. We stand with their families in their grief and in their pride. And we resolve to carry on the mission for which they gave their last full measure of devotion.

This is also not America's mission alone. In Afghanistan, we're joined by 41 allies and partners, a coalition that contributes more than 6,000 troops of their own. We have a partner in the Afghan Government and the Afghan people, who support a long-term strategic partnership with the United States. And in fact, Afghans continue to step up. For the second year now, Afghan forces are fully responsible for their own security. Every day, nearly 320,000 Afghan soldiers and police are serving and fighting, and many are giving their lives to defend their country.

To their credit—and in the face of a continued Taliban insurgency and terrorist networks—Afghan forces remain in control of all the major population centers, provincial capitals, major transit routes and most district centers. Afghan forces have beaten back attacks, and they've pushed the Taliban out of some areas. And meanwhile, in another milestone, we recently removed the leader of the Taliban, Akhtar Mohammad Mansur.

Nevertheless, the security situation in Afghanistan remains precarious. Even as they improve, Afghan security forces are still not as strong as they need to be. With our help, they're still working to improve critical capabilities such as intelligence, logistics, aviation, and command and control. At the same time, the Taliban remains a threat. They have gained ground in some cases. They've continued at-

tacks and suicide bombings, including in Kabul. Because the Taliban deliberately target innocent civilians, more Afghan men, women, and children are dying. And often overlooked in the global refugee crisis, millions of Afghans have fled their homes and many have been fleeing their country.

Now, as President and Commander in Chief, I've made it clear that I will not allow Afghanistan to be used as safe haven for terrorists to attack our Nation again. That's why I constantly review our strategy with my national security team, including our commanders in Afghanistan. In all these reviews, we're guided by the facts—what's happening on the ground—to determine what's working and what needs to be changed. And that's why, at times, I've made adjustments, for example, by slowing the drawdown of our forces and, more recently, by giving U.S. forces more flexibility to support Afghan forces on the ground and in the air. And I strongly believe that it is in our national security interest—especially after all the blood and treasure we've invested in Afghanistan over the years—that we give our Afghan partners the very best opportunity to succeed.

Upon taking command of coalition forces this spring, General Nicholson conducted a review of the security situation in Afghanistan and our military posture. It was good to get a fresh set of eyes. And based on the recommendation of General Nicholson, as well as Secretary Carter and Chairman Dunford, and following extensive consultations with my national security team, as well as Congress and the Afghan Government and our international partners, I'm announcing an additional adjustment to our posture.

Instead of going down to 5,500 troops by the end of this year, the United States will maintain approximately 8,400 troops in Afghanistan into next year, through the end of my administration. The narrow missions assigned to our forces will not change. They remain focused on supporting Afghan forces and going after terrorists. But maintaining our forces at this specific level, based on our assessment of the security conditions and the strength of Afghan

forces, will allow us to continue to provide tailored support to help Afghan forces continue to improve. From coalition bases in Jalalabad and Kandahar, we'll be able to continue supporting Afghan forces on the ground and in the air. And we continue supporting critical counterterrorism operations.

Now, in reaffirming the enduring commitment of the United States to Afghanistan and its people, the decision I'm making today can help our allies and partners align their own commitments. As you know, tomorrow I depart for the NATO summit in Warsaw, where I'll meet with our coalition partners and Afghan President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. Many of our allies and partners have already stepped forward with commitments of troops and funding so that we can keep strengthening Afghan forces through the end of this decade. The NATO summit will be an opportunity for more allies and partners to affirm their contributions, and I'm confident they will, because all of us have a vital interest in the security and stability of Afghanistan.

My decision today also sends a message to the Taliban and all those who have opposed Afghanistan's progress. You have now been waging war against the Afghan people for many years. You've been unable to prevail. Afghan security forces continue to grow stronger. And the commitment of the international community, including the United States, to Afghanistan and its people will endure. I will say it again: The only way to end this conflict and to achieve a full drawdown of foreign forces from Afghanistan is through a lasting political settlement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. That's the only way. And that is why the United States will continue to strongly support an Afghan-led reconciliation process and why we call on all countries in the region to end safe havens for militants and terrorists.

Finally, today's decision best positions my successor to make future decisions about our presence in Afghanistan. In January, the next U.S. President will assume the most solemn responsibility of the Commander in Chief: the security of the United States and the safety of the American people. The decision I'm making

today ensures that my successor has a solid foundation for continued progress in Afghanistan as well as the flexibility to address the threat of terrorism as it evolves.

So, in closing, I want to address directly what I know is on the minds of many Americans, especially our troops and their families who have borne a heavy burden for our security. When we first sent our forces into Afghanistan 14 years ago, few Americans imagined we'd be there—in any capacity—this long. As President, I focused our strategy on training and building up Afghan forces. It has been continually my belief that it is up to Afghans to defend their country. Because we have emphasized training their capabilities, we've been able to end our major ground war there and bring 90 percent of our troops back home.

But even as we work for peace, we have to deal with the realities of the world as it is. And we can't forget what's at stake in Afghanistan. This is where Al Qaida is trying to regroup. This is where ISIL continues to try to expand its presence. If these terrorists succeed in regaining areas and camps where they can train and plot, they will attempt more attacks against us. And we cannot allow that to happen. I will not allow that to happen.

This September will mark 15 years since the attacks of 9/11. And once more, we'll pause to remember the lives we lost, Americans and peoples from around the world. We'll stand with their families, who still grieve. We'll stand with survivors, who still bear the scars of that day. We'll thank the first responders who rushed to save others. And perhaps most importantly, we'll salute our men and women in uniform—our 9/11 generation—who have served in Afghanistan and beyond for our security. We'll honor the memory of all those who've made the ultimate sacrifice, including more than 2,200 American patriots who have given their lives in Afghanistan. As we do, let's never forget the progress their service has made possible.

Afghanistan is not a perfect place. It remains one of the poorest countries in the world. It is going to continue to take time for them to build up military capacity that we sometimes

take for granted. And given the enormous challenges they face, the Afghan people will need the partnership of the world, led by the United States, for many years to come. But with our support, Afghanistan is a better place than it once was. Millions of Afghan children—boys and girls—are in school. Dramatic improvements in public health have saved the lives of mothers and children. Afghans have cast their ballots in democratic elections and seen the first democratic transfer of power in their country's history. The current National Unity Government continues to pursue reforms—including record revenues last year—to strengthen their country and, over time, help decrease the need for international support.

That Government is a strong partner with us in combating terrorism. That's the progress we've helped make possible. That's the progress that our troops have helped make possible,

and our diplomats and our development personnel. That's the progress we can help sustain, in partnership with the Afghan people and our coalition partners. And so I firmly believe the decision I'm announcing today is the right thing to do: for Afghanistan, for the United States, and for the world.

May God bless our troops and all who serve to protect us. May God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:27 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. John W. Nicholson, Jr., USA, commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan; and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., USMC. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

Statement on the Observance of Eid al-Fitr

July 6, 2016

Upon the arrival of a new crescent Moon, Michelle and I send our warmest greetings to all those celebrating Eid al-Fitr in the United States and around the globe. For Muslim Americans, Eid is an opportunity to reflect on the 30 days spent fasting and to recommit to values of gratitude, compassion, and generosity. In neighborhoods and homes across the world, this special occasion begins in the early hours of the day when families dress in their finest attire in preparation for prayers and festivities. Homes are decorated with ornaments and lanterns. Gifts are wrapped and envelopes of money are prepared for kids. Above all, Eid is a time to gather and celebrate with loved ones.

Muslim Americans are as diverse as our Nation itself: Black, White, Latino, Asian, and Arab. Eid celebrations around the country remind us of our proud history as a nation built by people of all backgrounds, our history of religious freedom and civil liberties, and our history of innovation and strength. These legacies would not be possible without the contribu-

tions of Muslim Americans that make our country even stronger.

This past month, our country and the world endured challenges and senseless violence that broke our hearts and tried our souls. Our prayers are with the hundreds of innocent lives—many of them Muslim—taken during the month of Ramadan in places like Orlando, Istanbul, Dhaka, Baghdad, and Medina.

Here at home, we've also seen a rise in attacks against Muslim Americans. No one should ever feel afraid or unsafe in their place of worship. Many Americans have shared in the experience of Ramadan by volunteering in community service efforts to assist those in need and even fasting a few days with their fellow Muslim American coworkers. In the face of hate, it's our American values and strength that bring us together to stand in solidarity and protect one another, thereby, making our Nation stronger and safer.

Muslim Americans have been part of our American family since its founding. This Eid, we recommit to protecting Muslim Americans against bigotry and xenophobia, while