

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan

May 2, 2012

The President. How's everybody doing tonight?

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Hooah!

It is good to be back here with all of you. I've got a few acknowledgments I've got to make before I say what I've got to say. First of all, somebody who has served our country with the kind of distinction that doesn't happen a lot, somebody who has been a leader for you and a leader for our country for a very long time—give your commander, General John Allen, a big, big round of applause.

We also have somebody who is John's partner on the civilian side and has made extraordinary sacrifices, first in Iraq, now in Afghanistan—Ambassador Ryan Crocker is here. Please give him a big round of applause.

All right, now, let me just see if I've got this right. We've got the 1st Infantry Division in the house. We've got the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing. We've got the Task Force Muleskinner. We've got the 101st Army Field Sustainment Brigade. We've got Task Force Paladin in the house. And we've got Task Force Defender in the house. And we've got me in the house.

Audience members. Eighty-second!

The President. Eighty-second. Eighty-second in the house—82d in the house. You know, somebody is going to be in trouble that they didn't have 82d on here. Anybody else I'm missing?

Audience members. [Inaudible]

The President. There you go. All right. I love all of you.

Now listen, I'm not going to give a long speech. I'm going to have the opportunity to address the Nation from Bagram just in a little bit, and it's going to be broadcast back home during primetime. So all I want to do is just say thank you.

The sacrifices all of you have made, the sacrifices your families make every single day are what make America free and what make America secure. And I know that sometimes, out here, when you're in theater, it's not clear whether folks back home fully appreciate what's going on. And let's face it, a lot of times it's easier to get bad news on the news than good news.

But here's the good news, and here's part of the reason that I'm here. I just finished signing a strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan that signals the transition in which we are going to be turning over responsibility for Afghan security to the Afghans. We're not going to do it overnight. We're not going to do it irresponsibly. We're going to make sure that the gains, the hard-fought gains that have been made are preserved. But the reason we're able to do that is because of you. The reason that the Afghans have an opportunity for a new tomorrow is because of you. And the reason America is safe is because of you.

We did not choose this war. This war came to us on 9/11. And there are a whole bunch of folks here, I'll bet, who signed up after 9/11.

We don't go looking for a fight. But when we see our homeland violated, when we see our fellow citizens killed, then we understand what we have to do. And because of the sacrifices now of a decade, and a new greatest generation, not only were we able to blunt the Taliban momentum, not only were we able to drive Al Qaida out of Afghanistan, but slowly and systematically we have been able to decimate the ranks of Al Qaida. And a year ago, we were able to finally bring Usama bin Laden to justice.

That could have only happened because each and every one of you, in your own way, were doing your jobs. Each and every one of you—without a lot of fanfare, without a lot of fuss—you did your jobs. No matter how small or how big, you were faithful to the oath that you took to protect this Nation. And your families did their job supporting you and loving you and remembering you and being there for you.

And so, together, you guys represent what is best in America. And you're part of a long line of those who have worn this uniform to make sure that we are free and secure, to make sure that those of us at home have the capacity to live our lives. And when you're missing a birthday or you're missing a soccer game or when you're missing an anniversary, and those of us back home are able to enjoy it, it's because of you.

And I'm here to tell you, everybody in America knows that. And everybody in America appreciates it. And everybody in America honors it. And when the final chapter of this war is written, historians will look back and say, not only was this the greatest fighting force in the history of the world, but all of you also represented the values of America in an exemplary way.

I could not be prouder of you. And I want you to understand, I know it's still tough. I know the battle is not yet over. Some of your buddies are going to get injured, and some of your buddies may get killed. And there's going to be heartbreak and pain and difficulty ahead. But there's a light on the horizon because of the sacrifices you've made. And that's the reason why for Michelle and me nothing is more important than looking after your families while you're here. And I want everybody here to know that when you get home, we are going to be there for you when you're in uniform, and we will stay there for you when you're out of uniform. Because you've earned it; you've earned a special place in our hearts. And I could not be prouder to be your Commander in Chief.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. Now I want to shake some hands.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:21 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. John R. Allen, USMC, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan C. Crocker.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan.

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