

Remarks on the Nomination of Senator John F. Kerry To Be Secretary of State

December 21, 2012

Good afternoon, everyone. When I took office, our Nation was engaged in two wars and Al Qaida was entrenched in their safe havens. Many of our alliances were frayed, and America's standing in the world had suffered.

Over the past 4 years, we've begun a new era of American leadership. We ended the war in Iraq, put the Al Qaida core on the path to defeat, and we're winding down the war in Afghanistan. We've strengthened our alliances, including in Asia; forged new coalitions to meet global challenges; and stood up for human dignity from North Africa to the Middle East, to Burma. We still, of course, face great challenges. But today, I can say with pride that the United States is safer, stronger, and more respected in the world.

In this work, I've been grateful for an extraordinary national security team. Tom Donilon has been a part of that, and I'm grateful to him. Of course, one of the most important people in this whole transformation has been our outstanding Secretary of State, my friend, Secretary Hillary Clinton. Hillary wanted very much to be here today, but she continues to recuperate. I had a chance to talk to her earlier today, and she is in good spirits and could not be more excited about the announcement that I'm making.

Over the last 4 years, Hillary has been everywhere, both in terms of her travels, which have seen her represent America in more countries than any previous Secretary of State, and through her tireless work to restore our global leadership. And she's looking forward to getting back to work, and I am looking forward to paying tribute to her extraordinary service in the days to come.

Today, though, I'm looking ahead to my second term. And I am very proud to announce my choice for America's next Secretary of State: John Kerry.

In a sense, John's entire life has prepared him for this role. As the son of a Foreign Service officer, he has a deep respect for the men and women of the State Department, the role they play in advancing our interests and values, the risks that they undertake, and the sacrifices that they make along with their families.

Having served with valor in Vietnam, he understands that we have a responsibility to use American power wisely, especially our military power. And he knows from personal experience that when we send our troops into harm's way, we must give them the sound strategy, a clear mission, and the resources that they need to get the job done. In an extraordinarily distinguished Senate career, and as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, John has played a central role in every major foreign policy debate for nearly 30 years.

As we turn the page on a decade of war, he understands that we've got to harness all elements of American power and ensure that they're working together: diplomatic and development, economic and political, military and intelligence, as well as the power of our values, which inspire so many people around the world.

As John has said, we are an exceptional nation "not because we say we are, but because we do exceptional things." And I'd say that one of the more exceptional things we've seen in recent

decades was when John helped lead the way, along with folks like John McCain and others, to restore our diplomatic ties with Vietnam. And when he returned to the country where he and so many others had fought so long ago, it sent a powerful message of progress and of healing.

Over these many years, John has earned the respect and confidence of leaders around the world. He is not going to need a lot of on-the-job training. He has earned the respect and trust of his Senate colleagues, Democrats and Republicans. I think it's fair to say that few individuals know as many Presidents and Prime Ministers or grasp our foreign policies as firmly as John Kerry. And this makes him a perfect choice to guide American diplomacy in the years ahead.

On a personal level, John has been a great friend. I've appreciated John's partnership in helping to advance so many of my foreign policy priorities, including the ratification of the new START Treaty. I've called on his talents and diplomatic skills on several occasions, on complex challenges from Sudan and South Sudan to the situation in Afghanistan. And each time, he has been exemplary.

Of course, I also have to say thanks because John invited a young Illinois State senator to address the Democratic Convention in Boston. I was proud to serve with him on the Foreign Relations Committee under the tutelage of Joe Biden—*[laughter]*—and where we all became friends. But of course, nothing brings two people closer together than weeks of debate prep. John, I'm looking forward to working with you instead of debating you. *[Laughter]*

Finally, I want to thank Teresa. As someone who came to this country as an immigrant, she understands the shining values that America represents to the world. As a former interpreter at the United Nations, she appreciates how our interests can be advanced in partnership with others. Teresa, thank you so much for being John's partner in this next endeavor.

I have to say, I think I speak for John and Joe and myself. We just left Danny Inouye's funeral, a man who exemplified the very best of the U.S. Senate tradition. And so I know that, John, it won't be easy to live the Senate—leave the Senate that you love. And I think it's fair to say that there are going to be some great challenges ahead. An uncertain world will continue to test our Nation.

But even with all the challenges that we face, I have never been more confident, more optimistic, that if we act with wisdom and with purpose, and if we're guided by our values and we remind what binds us together as Americans, the United States will continue to lead in this world for our lifetimes.

So, John, I am very grateful that you've agreed to take on this new assignment. I'm confident that the Senate will confirm you quickly. I guess you won't be able to actually appear and preside at the same time—*[laughter]*—so we'll have to figure out how that works. But I know that you are going to be an outstanding Secretary of State.

Thank you so much. Congratulations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Teresa Heinz Kerry, wife of Sen. John F. Kerry.

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