

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks at a Roundtable Discussion With Veterans and Gold Star Mothers on the Multilateral Agreement To Prevent Iran From Developing a Nuclear Weapon

September 10, 2015

Well, I am joined today not only by Secretary John Kerry, but by an incredible group of veterans who have served our Nation proudly in different services, different ranks, from infantrymen to some of our top generals, who served in Iraq, who served in Afghanistan. And we also have two Gold Star mothers here whose sons gave everything, that last full measure of devotion, on behalf of American security. I want to begin by thanking all of them for their extraordinary service and sacrifices.

These veterans have come together in their defense of our national security. They believe in maintaining the strongest military the world has ever known. They are proud of our military capabilities and recognize that there are times when it is necessary that we take military action and go to war. What they also understand is that American power relies as well on strong and principled diplomacy.

And that's why, working together, they have been active and instrumental in promoting the need for us to implement this Iran deal. They do so not because they trust Iran; they do so not because they fail to recognize the real dangers that Iran in the past has posed and continues to pose to regional stability; but they do so because they understand that our ability to solve a massive national security problem and prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons without resort to war is a historic achievement and has to be pursued.

And I just had a chance to thank them for their efforts because I'm absolutely convinced that their willingness and ability to tell their stories to Members of Congress, to describe the losses they've experienced of Army buddies or families members, to be able to describe what they've seen as the costs of war has allowed, I think, a lot of Members who may be feeling political pressure from different directions to remember what a sober and important decision this has been, and it's allowed—created the space for us to be able to make an argument on the merits as to why this deal is right for the American people and our allies and the safety and security of the world.

There are times where, in a debate like this, we hear a lot of loose talk, casual threats of military force, false promises that military actions will be easy or simple or relatively costless. These veterans and their families remind us that that is not the case. They know the consequences when we rush into war. They understand what it means when we act without broad international support and when we fail to consider unintended consequences.

And I want to repeat: None of them are under any illusions. They understand that this is a dangerous world. And it is precisely for that reason that they want to make sure Iran doesn't get a nuclear weapon. And what I indicated to them is that even as this debate winds down, I am hopeful that their voices continue to be heard on a wide range of foreign policy debates. Because we live in a complicated world and we live in a world where terrible things happen, and American leadership is going to be vital in addressing those issues.

But the one principle that I want us to remember every time we make a decision is that American power is not restricted just to our military actions, that we have a lot of tools in the

toolkit, and that we have to try to solve problems without resort to military force, understanding that at the end of the day, there may be times where we have to act militarily, but we don't do so as a first resort, and we certainly don't do so on the basis of political considerations. Because the sacrifices are too significant, and the stakes are too high. And I think these veterans and Gold Star family members, they can remind us of that each and every day.

I will continue over the next 14 months to have to make some tough decisions, in concert with Secretary Kerry and Secretary Carter and the rest of my national security team. I guarantee, the next President is going to continue to be confronted with difficult decisions. And as we lead into this next political season, I just hope that everybody is listening to the veterans around this room and the organizations that they represent, because I think the American people will be well served if they're hearing from the perspective of those who actually fight and the moms who will be visiting Arlington to remember and be with their children. That kind of sobriety in our foreign policy decisionmaking, I think, is necessary and useful.

And so, to all of you, I want to thank you very much for everything you've done. All right?

Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sumpter, OR, resident Michelle DeFord; Mountain View, CA, resident Karen Meredith; and Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter.

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