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Barack Obama

*Speech to Troops at Fort Campbell*



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Hello, Fort Campbell! 101st Airborne Division -- Air Assault, hello!

General Colt, thank you for that great introduction -- it was great because it was brief. More importantly, thank you for the extraordinary leadership that you've shown here at one of the largest Army bases in America.

And let me just say, I make a lot of decisions; one of the earliest and best decisions I made was choosing one of the finest Vice Presidents in our history -- Joe Biden, right here.

Chaplain Miller, thank you for the beautiful invocation.

I want to thank General Colt for welcoming me here today, along with your great Command Sergeant Major, Wayne St. Louis. The Quartet and 101st Division Band. All these troopers behind me -- you look great. You noticed they kind of hesitated.

We got a lot of folks in the house. We've got military police and medical personnel. We've got the Green Berets of the 5th Special Forces Group. I think we've got a few Air Force here. Oh -- Well, we thought we did. There they go -- okay. Come on. And, of course, the legendary Screaming Eagles. And although they're not in the audience, I want to acknowledge the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment -- the Night Stalkers -- for their extraordinary service.

Now, I've got to say, some of you are starting to look a little familiar -- because last December, when we were at Bagram, I was out there to thank you for your service, especially during the holidays. And we had a great rally, a big crowd -- it seemed like everybody was there from the 101st.



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And since then, I know we've had quite a few homecomings. The Rakkasans. Destiny. Strike. Bastogne. And some of the Division Headquarters -- the Gladiators. On behalf of a grateful nation -- welcome home.

Of course, our thoughts and prayers are with General Campbell, Command Sergeant Major Schroeder, and all of the Screaming Eagles and troops that are still risking their lives in theater. And I'm so pleased that Ann Campbell and Marla Schroeder, and some of the inspiring military spouses are here. Where are they at? Right over there. We are grateful to you. God bless you. There they are. Thank you so much. This happens to be Military Spouse Appreciation Day. And we honor your service as well.

Now, I didn't come here to make a really long speech. I know you're hearing that. It's like, yeah, it's hot! What I really wanted to do was come down and shake some hands. I came here for a simple reason -- to say thank you on behalf of America. This has been an historic week in the life of our nation. Thanks to the incredible skill and courage of countless individuals -- intelligence, military -- over many years, the terrorist leader who struck our nation on 9/11 will never threaten America again.

Yesterday, I traveled to New York City, and, along with some of our 9/11 families, laid a wreath at Ground Zero in memory of their loved ones. I met with the first responders -- the firefighters, the police officers, the Port Authority officers -- who lost so many of their own when they rushed into those burning towers. I promised that our nation will never forget those we lost that dark September day.

And today, here at Fort Campbell, I had the privilege of meeting the extraordinary Special Ops folks who honored that promise. It was a chance for me to say -- on behalf of all Americans and people around the world -- "Job well done." Job well done.

They're America's "quiet professionals" -- because success demands secrecy. But I will say this. Like all of you, they could have chosen a life of ease. But like you, they volunteered. They chose to serve in a time of war, knowing they could be sent into harm's way. They trained for years. They're battle-hardened. They practiced tirelessly for this mission. And when I gave the order, they were ready.

Now, in recent days, the whole world has learned just how ready they were. These Americans deserve credit for one of the greatest intelligence military operations in our nation's history. But so does every person who wears America's uniform, the finest military the world has ever known. And that includes all of you men and women of 101st.

You have been on the frontlines of this fight for nearly 10 years. You were there in those early days, driving the Taliban from power, pushing al Qaeda out of its safe havens. Over time, as the insurgency grew, you went back for, in some cases, a second time, a third time, a fourth time.



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When the decision was made to go into Iraq, you were there, too, making the longest air assault in history, defeating a vicious insurgency, ultimately giving Iraqis the chance to secure their democracy. And you've been at the forefront of our new strategy in Afghanistan.

Sending you -- more of you -- into harm's way is the toughest decision that I've made as Commander-in-Chief. I don't make it lightly. Every time I visit Walter Reed, every time I visit Bethesda, I'm reminded of the wages of war. But I made that decision because I know that this mission was vital to the security of the nation that we all love.

And I know it hasn't been easy for you and it hasn't, certainly, been easy for your families. Since 9/11, no base has deployed more often, and few bases have sacrificed more than you. We see it in our heroic wounded warriors, fighting every day to recover, and who deserve the absolute best care in the world. We see it in the mental and emotional toll that's been taken -- in some cases, some good people, good soldiers who've taken their own lives. So we're going to keep saying to anybody who is hurting out there, don't give up. You're not alone. Your country needs you. We're here for you to keep you strong.

And most of all, we see the price of this war in the 125 soldiers from Fort Campbell who've made the ultimate sacrifice during this deployment to Afghanistan. And every memorial ceremony -- every "Eagle Remembrance" -- is a solemn reminder of the heavy burdens of war, but also the values of loyalty and duty and honor that have defined your lives.

So here's what each of you must know. Because of your service, because of your sacrifices, we're making progress in Afghanistan. In some of the toughest parts of the country, General Campbell and the 101st are taking insurgents and their leaders off the battlefield and helping Afghans reclaim their communities.

Across Afghanistan, we've broken the Taliban's momentum. In key regions, we've seized the momentum, pushing them out of their strongholds. We're building the capacity of Afghans, partnering with communities and police and security forces, which are growing stronger.

And most of all, we're making progress in our major goal, our central goal in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and that is disrupting and dismantling -- and we are going to ultimately defeat al Qaeda. We have cut off their head and we will ultimately defeat them.

Even before this week's operation, we've put al Qaeda's leadership under more pressure than at any time since 9/11, on both sides of the border. So the bottom line is this: Our strategy is working, and there's no greater evidence of that than justice finally being delivered to Osama bin Laden.



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But I don't want to fool you. This continues to be a very tough fight. You know that. But because of this progress, we're moving into a new phase. In the coming months, we'll start transferring responsibility for security to Afghan forces. Starting this summer, we'll begin reducing American forces. As we transition, we'll build a long-term partnership with the Afghan people, so that al Qaeda can never again threaten America from that country.

And, as your Commander-in-Chief, I'm confident that we're going to succeed in this mission. The reason I'm confident is because in you I see the strength of America's military -- and because in recent days we've all seen the resilience of the American spirit.

Now, this week I received a letter from a girl in New Jersey named Payton Wall. She wrote to me on Monday after the news that bin Laden had been killed, and she explained how she still remembers that September morning almost 10 years ago. She was only four years old. Her father, Glen, was trapped inside the World Trade Center. And so, in those final, frantic moments, knowing he might not make it, he called home. And Payton remembers watching her mom sobbing as she spoke to her husband and then passed the phone to Payton. And in words that were hard to hear but which she's never forgotten, he said to her, "I love you Payton, and I will always be watching over you."

So yesterday, Payton, her mom, and her sister, Avery, joined me at Ground Zero. And now Payton is 14. These past 10 years have been tough for her. In her letter, she said, "Ever since my father died, I lost a part of me that can never be replaced." And she describes her childhood as a "little girl struggling to shine through all the darkness in her life."

But every year, more and more, Payton is shining through. She's playing a lot of sports, including lacrosse and track, just like her dad. She's doing well in school. She's mentoring younger students. She's looking ahead to high school in the fall. And so, yesterday she was with us -- a strong, confident young woman -- honoring her father's memory, even as she set her sights on the future.

And for her and for all of us, this week has been a reminder of what we're about as a people. It's easy to forget sometimes, especially in times of hardship, times of uncertainty. We're coming out of the worst recession since the Great Depression; haven't fully recovered from that. We've made enormous sacrifices in two wars. But the essence of America -- the values that have defined us for more than 200 years -- they don't just endure; they are stronger than ever.

We're still the America that does the hard things, that does the great things. We're the nation that always dared to dream. We're the nation that's willing to take risks -- revolutionaries breaking free from an empire; pioneers heading West to settle new frontiers; innovators building railways and laying the highways and putting a man on the surface of the moon.



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We are the nation -- and you're the Division -- that parachuted behind enemy lines on D-Day, freeing a continent, liberating concentration camps. We're the nation that, all those years ago, sent your Division to a high school in Arkansas so that nine black students could get an education. That was you. Because we believed that all men are created equal; that everyone deserves a chance to realize their God-given potential.

We're the nation that has faced tough times before -- tougher times than these. But when our Union frayed, when the Depression came, when our harbor was bombed, when our country was attacked on that September day, when disaster strikes like that tornado that just ripped through this region, we do not falter. We don't turn back. We pick ourselves up and we get on with the hard task of keeping our country strong and safe.

See, there's nothing we can't do together, 101st, when we remember who we are, at that is the United States of America. When we remember that, no problem is too hard and no challenge is too great.

And that is why I am so confident that, with your brave service, America's greatest days are still to come.

God bless you.