

## **Obama in Afghanistan**

To the United States Corps of Cadets, to the men and women of our armed services, and to my fellow Americans, I to speak to you tonight from this outpost more than seven thousand miles from home, but which, for over a decade has been close to our hearts because here, in Afghanistan, more than half a million of our sons and daughters have laid down their lives to protect our country.

Today, I signed an historic agreement between the United States and Afghanistan that defines a new kind of relationship between our countries – a future in which Afghans are responsible for the security of their nation, building an equal partnership between two sovereign states.

But before I talk about this transition, first, let us remember why we came here. It was here, in Afghanistan, where Osama bin Laden established a safe-haven for his terrorist organization. It was here, in Afghanistan, where al Qaeda brought new recruits and plotted acts of terror. It was here, from within these borders, that al Qaeda launched the attacks that killed nearly 3,000 innocent men, women and children.

And so, the United States and our allies went to war to make sure that al Qaeda could never again use this country to launch attacks against us. Despite initial success, for a number of reasons, this war has taken longer than most anticipated. In 2002, bin Laden and his lieutenants escaped across the border and established safe-havens in Pakistan.

But over the last three years, the tide has turned. We broke the Taliban's momentum. We've built strong Afghan Security Forces. We devastated al Qaeda's leadership, taking out over 20 of their top 30 leaders.

Still, there will be difficult days ahead. The enormous sacrifices of our men and women are not over. Tonight, I'd like to tell you how we will complete our mission and end the war in Afghanistan.

First, we have begun a transition to Afghan responsibility for security. Already, nearly half the Afghan people live in places where Afghan Security Forces are moving into the lead. This month, at a NATO Summit in Chicago, our coalition will set a goal for Afghan forces to be in the lead for combat operations across the country next year. International troops will continue to train, advise and assist the Afghans, and fight alongside them when needed. But we will shift into a support role as Afghans step forward.

As we do, our troops will be coming home. Last year, we removed 10,000 U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Another 23,000 will leave by the end of the summer. After that, reductions will continue at a steady pace, with more of our troops coming home. And as our coalition agreed, by the end of 2014 the Afghans will be fully responsible for the security of their country.

Second, we are training Afghan Security Forces to get the job done. Those forces have surged, and will peak at 352,000 this year. The Afghans will sustain that level for three years, and then reduce the size of their military. And in Chicago, we will endorse a proposal to support a strong and sustainable long-term Afghan force.

Third, we are building an enduring partnership. The agreement we signed today sends a clear message to the Afghan people: as you stand up, you will not stand alone. It establishes the basis of our cooperation over the next decade, including shared commitments to combat terrorism and strengthen democratic institutions. It includes Afghan commitments to transparency and accountability, and to protect the human rights of all Afghans.

Many Americans are tired of war. As President, nothing is more wrenching than signing a letter to a family of the fallen, or looking in the eyes of a child who will grow up without a mother or father. I will not keep Americans in harm's way a single day longer than is absolutely required for our national security. But we must finish the job we started in Afghanistan, and end this war responsibly.

My fellow Americans, we have traveled through more than a decade under the dark cloud of war. Yet here, in the pre-dawn darkness of Afghanistan, we can see the light of a new day on the horizon. The Iraq War is over. We have a clear path to fulfill our mission in Afghanistan, while delivering justice to al Qaeda.

This future is only within reach because of our men and women in uniform. Time and again, they have answered the call to serve in distant and dangerous places. In an age when so many institutions have come up short, these Americans stood tall. They met their responsibilities to one another, and the flag they serve under. In their faces, we see what is best in ourselves and our country.

Here, in Afghanistan, Americans answered the call to defend their fellow citizens and uphold human dignity. Today, we recall the fallen, and those who suffer wounds seen and unseen. But through dark days we have drawn strength from their example, and the ideals that have guided our nation and lit the world: a belief that all people are created equal, and deserve the freedom to determine their destiny.

That is the light that guides us still. This time of war began in Afghanistan, and this is where it will end. With faith in each other and our eyes fixed on the future, let us finish the work at hand, and forge a just and lasting peace. May God bless our troops. And may God bless the United States of America.