

The Long Good-Bye: Obama to Give Farewell Address Next Tuesday

President Barack Obama officially vacates the office of president of the United States at 11:59 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 20. But, he has announced he will make his farewell address to the nation next Tuesday from his hometown of Chicago.

The president said:

In 1796, as George Washington set the precedent for a peaceful, democratic transfer of power, he also set a precedent by penning a farewell address to the American people. And over the 220 years since, many American presidents have followed his lead.

On Tuesday, Jan. 10, I'll go home to Chicago to say my grateful farewell to you, even if you can't be there in person.

I'm just beginning to write my remarks. But I'm thinking about them as a chance to say thank you for this amazing journey, to celebrate the ways you've changed this country for the better these past eight years, and to offer some thoughts on where we all go from here.

Since 2009, we've faced our fair share of challenges and come through them stronger. That's because we have never let go of a belief that has guided us ever since our founding – our conviction that, together, we can change this country for the better.

So I hope you'll join me one last time.

Because, for me, it's always been about you.

Obama's "long good-bye" began last week with his final planned press conference at the White House. Wednesday afternoon, he said farewell to the U.S. military with a full honors review at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Fort Myer, Virginia, with Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Marine Corps Gen. Joe Dunford on hand.

The event included a 21-gun salute by the U.S. Army's Presidential Salute Battery stationed at Arlington National Cemetery and a review of the joint military representatives of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. It also included a medal ceremony that is likely to anger more than a few of the nation's military veterans.

Obama himself was presented with the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service, an award created in 1947 to recognize "exceptionally distinguished service of significance to a Department of Defense component or function, or the Department of Defense as a whole." While the president isn't the first to receive the medal—both presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton also received it—it is the medal's citation that is likely to draw the most anger.

It reads:

President Barack Obama distinguished himself as Commander-in-Chief of the greatest fighting force the world has ever known. From Jan. 20, 2009, to Jan. 20, 2017, President Obama kept our nation safe, led a strategic transition in our defense strategy, strengthened our alliances and pursued new partnerships, and laid the foundation for a force of the future that will continue to win our nation's wars.

President Obama countered decisively the most imminent threat to our national security: terrorism. He directed the operation to kill Osama bin Laden, decimated al Qaeda's terrorist network, put [ISIS] on a path to a lasting defeat,

and developed counter-terrorism platforms from South Asia to North Africa. He did so relentlessly, effectively, with increased transparency and in strict accordance with our values.

Simultaneously, President Obama achieved verifiable nuclear disarmament of Iran, the gravest threat to security in the Middle East. And, while encountering proliferation abroad, he directed recapitalization of our vitally important deterrent here at home.

As he neutralized immediate threats to our national security, President Obama also directed a transition in our defense strategy. He implemented a rigorous intellectual policy and legal framework to guide the most solid of decision that a Commander-in-Chief makes: to deploy and employ our men and women in uniform.

He supported strategic investments to perpetuate our military edge in the air, at sea, with missile defenses, and in space and cyber domains, including by establishing the United States Cyber Command. In so doing, he led the transformation of the United States military from over a decade of counter-insurgency into a full-spectrum fighting force. And critically, he directed the United States, rebalanced to the Asia-Pacific, the most consequential region for America's future.

President Obama also recognized that security in the world cannot be America's responsibility alone. He strengthened our alliances and pursued new partnerships. In Europe, he led the adaptation of NATO to continue its commitment to a stable Afghanistan and to actively counter threats to Europe's east and south.

In particular, President Obama directed the bolstering of our allied military presence in Europe and re-establishing a deterrence against Russian aggression. In Asia, he

modernized our alliances with Japan and Korea, strengthening the cornerstone of security in East Asia and deterring threats from North Korea. In the Middle East, he strengthened Israel's qualitative military edge, including with an unprecedented package of foreign military funding.

But in an ever-changing world, President Obama recognized that America's relationships must also change. He directed the advancement of new strategic partnerships, including the unprecedented deepening of the strategically consequential United States-India partnership.

In all of this, President Obama recognized that the source of America's greatest strength, including its military strength, is its people. To ensure the United States military stays the best, he understood that we must continue to attract, recruit, retain, develop and transition the best talent that our nation has to offer. His repealing of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy and his support for opening all military occupations and positions to women will help ensure that. He also championed advanced research and an innovative program to care for our nation's wounded warriors and their families and led efforts to help veterans make the transition to civilian life.

These and many other distinctive accomplishments of President Obama reflect great credit upon himself, the Department of Defense and the United States of America.

Following the award ceremony, Obama spoke to the military, thanking them for their service to their country at a time when few Americans truly understand their sacrifice. In part, he said:

The list of accomplishments that Joe and Ash so generously mentioned, they're because of you. It's what I tell my staff—I'm the front man, but you're the ones doing the work. Because of you, our alliances are stronger, from Europe to

the Asia Pacific. Because of you, we surged in Afghanistan, trained Afghan forces to defend their country, while bringing most of our troops home. Today our forces serve there on a more limited mission—because we must never again allow Afghanistan to be used for a safe haven in attacks against our nation.

It's because of you—particularly our remarkable Special Forces—that the core al Qaeda leadership that attacked us on 9/11 has been decimated. Countless terrorist leaders, including Osama bin Laden, are gone. From South Asia to Africa, we have forged partnerships to go after terrorists that threaten us. Because of you, we are leading a global coalition against ISIL. These terrorists have lost about half of their territory. They are losing their leaders. Towns and cities are being liberated. And I have no doubt this barbaric terrorist group will be destroyed—because of you.

You've shown that when it comes to fighting terrorism, we can be strong and we can be smart. Not by letting our forces get dragged into sectarian conflicts and civil wars, but with smart, sustainable, principled partnerships. That's how we've brought most of our troops home—nearly 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan down to 15,000 today. That's how, even as we've suffered terrible attacks here at home, from Boston to Orlando, no foreign terrorist organization has successfully planned and executed an attack on our homeland these past eight years.

Because of you, the world has seen the awesome reach of American Armed Forces. In some of the first few weeks of my job, when Somali pirates took Captain Phillips, later on, when they kidnapped Jessica Buchanan, it was you that went in and you that risked everything, and you that brought these Americans home to their families.

The world has seen your compassion—the help you deliver in

times of crisis, from an earthquake in Haiti to the tsunami in Japan. Think of Ebola and the countless lives this Armed Forces saved in West Africa. It was you that set up the architecture and set the example for the world's response. One woman in West Africa said, "We thanked God first and then we thanked America second for caring about us." That's the difference you make—you continue to make—in the lives of people around the world.

As you know well, with service comes great sacrifice. And after 15 years of war, our wounded warriors bear the scars—both seen and unseen. In my visits to their bedsides and rehab centers, I have been in awe, watching a wounded warrior grab his walker and pull himself up and, and through excruciating pain, take a step, and then another. Or hearing troops describe how they grappled with post-traumatic stress but summoned the strength to ask for help. As a military and as a nation, we have to keep supporting our resilient and incredibly strong wounded warriors as they learn to walk and run and heal. As they find new ways to keep serving our nation, they need to know that we still need your incredible talents. You've given so much to America, and I know you have more to give.

And then you have not seen the depths of true love and true patriotism until you've been to Dover, when our troops receive our fallen heroes on their final journey home; until you have grieved with our Gold Star families who've given a piece of their heart to our nation—a son or a daughter, a father or mother, a husband or wife, a brother or a sister. Every one a patriot. Every single one of these American families deserves the everlasting gratitude and support of our entire nation.

Today, after two major ground wars, our Armed Forces have drawn down, and that is natural and it is necessary. And after reckless budget cuts of sequester, we need to keep

improving the readiness, and the training and modernizing our forces. So let me take this opportunity, while I still have it, to appeal to our friends from Congress who are here: We cannot go back to sequestration. There is a responsible way forward—investing in America's strengths, our national security and our economic security. Investing in the reform and the equipment and support that our troops need, including the pay and the benefits, and the quality of life, and the education and the jobs that our troops and our veterans and all of your families deserve.

But make no mistake, even with the challenges of recent years—and there have been challenges—our allies and adversaries alike understand America's military remains, by far, the most capable fighting force on the face of the Earth. Our Army, tested by years of combat, is the best-trained and best-equipped land force on the planet. Our Navy is the largest and most lethal in the world—on track to surpass 300 ships. Our Air Force, with its precision and reach, is unmatched. Our Marine Corps is the world's only truly expeditionary force. Our Coast Guard is the finest in the world.

And we're also the best because this military has come to welcome the talents of more of our fellow Americans. Service members can now serve the country they love without hiding who they are or who they love. All combat positions in our military are now open to women. And Joe Biden and I know that women are at least as strong as men. We're stronger for it. It's one of the reasons that our military stands apart as the most respected institution in our nation by a mile. (Applause.) The American people look up to you and your devotion to duty, and your integrity, and your sense of honor, and your commitment to each other.

One of my proudest achievements is that I have been able to, I think, communicate through the constant partisan haze,

along with so many others, how special this institution is, and the esteem in which our military is held has held steady and constant and high throughout my presidency. And I'm very grateful for that. Because you remind us that we are united as one team. At times of division, you've shown what it means to pull together.

So my days as your Commander-in-Chief are coming to an end, and as I reflect on the challenges we have faced together and on those to come, I believe that one of the greatest tasks before our Armed Forces is to retain the high confidence that the American people rightly place in you. This is a responsibility not simply for those of you in uniform, but for those who lead you. It's the responsibility of our entire nation.

And so we are called to remember core principles: That we must never hesitate to act when necessary to defend our nation, but we must also never rush into war—because sending you into harm's way should be a last and not first resort. It should be compelled by the needs of our security and not our politics. We need to remember that we must not give in to the false illusion of isolationism, because in this dangerous time, oceans alone will not protect us, and the world still seeks and needs our leadership as the one indispensable nation.

We have to remember that our military has to be prepared for the full spectrum of threats, conventional and unconventional, from 20th century-style aggression to 21st century-style cyber threats. And when we do go to war, we have to hold ourselves to high standards and do everything in our power to prevent the loss of innocent life, because that's what we stand for. That's what we should stand for. We have to remember that as we meet the threats of our time, we cannot sacrifice our values or our way of life—the rule of law and openness and tolerance that defines us as Americans, that is our greatest strength and makes us a

beacon to the world. We cannot sacrifice the very freedoms that we're fighting for.

And finally, in our democracy, the continued strength of our all-volunteer force also rests on something else—a strong bond of respect and trust between those in uniform and the citizens that you protect and defend. At a time when too few Americans truly understand the realities or sacrifices of military service, at a time when many political leaders have not served, if some in the military begin to feel as though somehow they are apart from the larger society they serve those bonds can fray.

As every generation learns anew, freedom is not free. And so while less than 1 percent of Americans may be fighting our wars, 100 percent of Americans can do their parts—at the very least—to support you and your families. Everybody can do something—every business, every profession, every school, every community, every state—to reach out and to give back, and to let you know that we care, to help make the lives of our troops and your families just a little bit easier. Everybody can do something.

And that's why Michelle and Jill Biden have mobilized more Americans to honor and support you and your families through Joining Forces. And that's why, even after we leave the White House, Michelle and I intend to keep on looking for ways to help rally more of our fellow citizens to be there for you, just like you've always been there for us.

So we can't say it enough, and we can't show it enough. Thank you for your patriotism. Thank you for your professionalism. Thank you for your character in representing the very best of the American spirit. Our nation endures—we live free under the red, white and blue—because of patriots like you.

It has been a privilege of a lifetime to serve with you. I

have learned much from you. I'm a better man having worked with you. I'm confident that the United States and our Armed Forces will remain the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known. {eoa}