THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
May 23, 2013
The Future of our Fight against Terrorism
Remarks of President Barack Obama ² As Prepared for Delivery
National Defense University
May 23, 2013
As Prepared for Delivery --
,W·VDQKRQRUWRUHWXUQWRWKHNational Defense University. Here, at Fort McNair,

basic values ² by using torture to interrogate our enemies, and detaining individuals in
a way that ran counter to the rule of law.
After I took office, we stepped up the war against al Qaeda, but also sought to change
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and brought nearly 150,000 troops home. We pursued a new strategy in Afghanistan,
and increased our training of Afghan forces. We unequivocally banned torture,
affirmed our commitment to civilian courts, worked to align our policies with the rule
of law, and expanded our consultations with Congress.
Today, Osama bin Laden is dead, and so are most of his top lieutenants. There have
been no large-scale attacks on the United States, and our homeland is more secure.
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to come home. Our alliances are strong, and so is our standing in the world. In sum, we
are safer because of our efforts.
Now make no mistake: our nation is still threatened by terrorists. From Benghazi to
Boston, we have been tragically reminded of that truth. We must recognize, however,
that the threat has shifted and evolved from the one that came to our shores on 9/11.
With a decade of experience to draw from, now is the time to ask ourselves hard
questions ² DERXWWKHQDWXUHRIWRGD\·VWKUHDWVDQGKRZZHVKRXOGFRQIURQWWKHm.
These questions matter to every American. For over the last decade, our nation has
spent well over a trillion dollars on war, exploding our deficits and constraining our
ability to nation build here at home. Our service-members and their families have
sacrificed far more on our behalf. Nearly 7,000 Americans have made the ultimate
sacrifice. Many more have left a part of themselves on the battlefield, or brought the
shadows of battle back home. From our use of drones to the detention of terrorist
suspects, the decisions we are making will define the type of nation ² and world ² that
we leave to our children.
So America is at a crossroads. We must define the nature and scope of this struggle, or
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Islam; and this ideology is rejecte

surrounding tribal communities that pose no threat to us, or when putting U.S. boots on
the ground may trigger a major international crisis.
To put it another way, our operation in Pakistan against Osama bin Laden cannot be the

In the Afghan war theater, we must support our troops until the tran

was involved in planning to blow up an airliner in 2009. When Farouk Abdulmutallab ²
the Christmas Day bomber ² went to Yemen in 2009, Awlaki hosted him, approved his
suicide operation, and helped him tape a martyrdom video to be shown after the attack.
His last instructions were to blow up the airplane when it was over American soil. I
would have detained and prosecuted Awlaki if we captured him before he carried out a
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not authorized the strike that took out Awlaki.
Of course, the targeting of any Americans raises constitutional issues that are not
present in other strikes ² which is why my Administration submitted information about
Awlaki to the Department of Justice months before Awlaki was killed, and briefed the
Congress before this strike as well. But the high threshold that we have set for taking
lethal action applies to all potential terrorist targets, regardless of whether or not they
are American citizens. This threshold respects the inherent dignity of every human life.
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decision to use force against individuals or groups ² even against a sworn enemy of the
United States ² is the hardest thing I do as President. But these decisions must be made,
given my responsibility to protect the American people.
Going forward, I have asked my Administration to review proposals to extend
oversight of lethal actions outside of warzones that go beyond our reporting to
Congress. Each option has virtues in theory, but poses difficulties in practice. For
example, the establishment of a special court to evaluate and authorize lethal action has
the benefit of bringing a third branch of government into the process, but raises serious
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suggested ² the establishment of an independent oversight board in the executive
branch ² avoids those problems, but may introduce a layer of bureaucracy into national-security decision-making, without inspiring additional public confidence in the process.
Despite these challenges, I look forward to actively engaging Congress to explore these
² and other ² options for increased oversight.
I believe, however, that the use of force must be seen as part of a larger discussion about
a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy. Because for all the focus on the use of
force, force alone cannot make us safe. We cannot use force everywhere that a radical
ideology takes root; and in the absence of a strategy that reduces the well-spring of
extremism, a perpetual war ² through drones or Special Forces or troop deployments ²
will prove self-defeating, and alter our country in troubling ways.
So the next element of our strategy involves addressing the underlying grievances and
conflicts that feed extremism, from North Africa tR6RXWK$VLD$VZH·YHOHDUQHGWKLV
past decade, this is a vast and complex undertaking. We must be humble in our
expectation that we can quickly resolve deep rooted problems like poverty and
sectarian hatred. Moreover, no two countries are alike, and some will undergo chaotic

change before things get better. But our security and values demand that we make the
effort.
This means patiently supporting transitions to democracy in places like Egypt, Tunisia
and Libya ² because the peaceful realization of individual aspirations will serve as a
rebuke to violent extremists. We must strengthen the opposition in Syria, while
isolating extremist elements ² because the end of a tyrant must not give way to the
tyranny of terrorism. We are working to promote peace between Israelis and
Palestinians ²

themselves to a violent agenda, and learn how to kill without leaving their home. To
address this threat, two years ago my Administration did a comprehensive review, and
engaged with law enforcement. The best way to prevent violent extremism is to work
with the Muslim American community ² which has consistently rejected terrorism ² to
identify signs of radicalization, and partner with law enforcement when an individual
is drifting towards violence. And these partnerships can only work when we recognize
that Muslims are a fundamental part of the American family. Indeed, the success of
American Muslims, and our determination to guard against any encroachments on their
civil liberties, is the ultimate rebuke to those who say we are at war with Islam.
Indeed, thwarting homegrown plots presents particular challenges in part because of

The AUMF is now nearly twelve years old. The Afghan War is coming to an end. Core
al Qaeda is a shell of its former self. Groups like AQAP must be dealt with, but in the
years to come, not every collection of thugs that labels themselves al Qaeda will pose a
credible threat to the United States. Unless we discipline our thinking and our actions,

Today, I once again call on Congress to lift the restrictions on detainee transfers from
GTMO. I have asked the Department of Defense to designate a site in the United States
where we can hold military commissions. I am appointing a new, senior envoy at the
State Department and Defense Department whose sole responsibility will be to achieve
the transfer of detainees to third countries. I am lifting the moratorium on detainee
transfers to Yemen, so we can review them on a case by case basis. To the greatest
extent possible, we will transfer detainees who have been cleared to go to other
countries. Where appropriate, we will bring terrorists to justice in our courts and
military justice system. And we will insist that judicial review be available for every
detainee.
Even after we take these steps, one issue will remain: how

I think of Lauren Manning, the 9/11 survivor who had severe burns over 80 percent of
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I think of the New Yorkers who filled Times Square the day after an attempted car
bomb as if nothing had happened.
I think of the proud Pakistani parents who, after their daughter was invited to the
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and never give up EHFDXVHLWGRHVSD\RIIµ

I think of the wounded warriors rebuilding their lives, and helping other vets to find
jobs.

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you are going to have more people than ever. Determination is not something to be
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Now, we need a strategy ² and a politics ²that reflects this resilient spirit. Our victory
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statue being pulled to the ground. Victory will be measured in parents taking their kids
to school; immigrants coming to our shores; fans taking in a ballgame; a veteran starting
a business; a bustling city street. The quiet determination; that strength of character and
bond of fellowship; that refutation of fear ² that is both our sword and our shield. And
long after the current messengers of hate have faded from the world·VPHPRU\
alongside the brutal despots, deranged madmen, and ruthless demagogues who litter
history ² the flag of the United States will still wave from small-town cemeteries, to
national monuments, to distant outposts abroad. And that flag will still stand for
freedom.
Thank you. God Bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.

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