

pecially those who are serving today in Afghanistan.

For over 65 years, our alliance has been the bedrock of our common security, our freedom, and our prosperity. And though the times may have changed, the fundamental reason for our alliance has not. Our nations are stronger and more prosperous when we stand together. In good times and in bad, our alliance has endured; in fact, it has thrived, because we share an unbreakable commitment to the freedom and security of our citizens.

We've seen this from the cold war to the Balkans, from Afghanistan to Libya. And that's the spirit that we need to sustain here in Chicago, and with an alliance that is focused squarely on the future.

When we last met in Lisbon, we agreed to a bold plan of action to revitalize the alliance and ensure that we have the tools that are required to confront a changing and uncertain strategic landscape. Here, at this session, we can reaffirm our article 5 commitment to our collective defense and to investing in the defense capabilities and new technologies that meet our collective security needs.

In these difficult economic times, we can work together and pull our resources. NATO is a force multiplier, and the initiatives we will endorse today will allow each of our nations to accomplish what none of us could achieve alone. We can all be proud that in Lisbon we committed, and now in Chicago we are delivering.

Over the next 2 days, we'll meet—first as allies and then with President Karzai and our international partners—to chart the next phase of the transition in Afghanistan. Just as we've sacrificed together for our common security, we will stand together, united, in our determination to complete this mission.

And finally, I look forward to our meeting with NATO's neighbors and our partners around the world who have been so critical to NATO operations, as in Afghanistan and Libya. It will be another reminder that NATO is truly a hub of a network of global security partners. There is nothing else like it on Earth.

So again, thank you, Mr. Secretary General, for your outstanding leadership. Thank you to all my fellow leaders and friends who are here. Welcome to Chicago. I'm confident that the next 2 days are going to help to sustain and strengthen the strongest and most successful alliance that the world has ever known.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. at McCormick Place convention center. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Adm. James G. Stavridis, USN, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe; Gen. Stephane Abrial, French Air Force, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation; Gen. John R. Allen, USMC, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan.

Remarks at the International Security Assistance Force Meeting on Afghanistan in Chicago

May 21, 2012

Well, good morning, everyone. And for those who are joining us for the first time, welcome to Chicago. I was just hearing from a few folks who are not NATO members that they had fun on the town last night. Hopefully, no stories in the press. *[Laughter]*

We come together as 50 nations—NATO allies and partners—that make up the International Security Assistance Force in Afghani-

stan. I want to welcome the presence of President Karzai, as well as officials from central Asia and Russia, nations that have an important perspective and that continue to provide critical transit for ISAF supplies.

The presence of so many leaders and nations illustrates once again that this is a truly international mission, and that's because the region and the world have a profound interest

in an Afghanistan that is stable, that is secure, and that is not a source of attacks on other nations. And today, as always, our thoughts are with our brave forces who are serving in this vital mission.

Two years ago, in Lisbon, our nations agreed on a framework for transition in Afghanistan that would allow us to responsibly wind down the war. We agreed that this transition to Afghan lead for security would begin in 2011 and that it would conclude in 2014. At the same time, we said that we would seek a long-term partnership with Afghanistan and the Afghan people.

Over the past 2 years, we've made important progress. Our forces broke the Taliban's momentum, more Afghans are reclaiming their communities, Afghan security forces have grown stronger, and the transition that we agreed to in Lisbon is well underway.

This past week, we saw more progress. We very much welcome President Karzai's announcement of the third group of areas to begin transition. This means that 75 percent of the Afghan people live in areas where Afghan forces will be moving into the lead.

Today we'll decide the next phase of the transition, the next milestone. We'll set a goal for Afghan forces to take the lead for combat

operations across the country in 2013—next year—so that ISAF can move to a supporting role. This will be another step toward Afghans taking full lead for their security as agreed to by 2014, when the ISAF combat mission will end.

Today is also an opportunity to ensure our hard-worn—hard-won progress is preserved. The strategic partnership agreement that President Karzai and I signed in Kabul ensures that as Afghans stand up, they will not stand alone. Today we can agree on NATO's long-term relationship with Afghanistan beyond 2014, including our support of Afghan security forces.

So we have a lot of work to do. Again, I want to thank all of my fellow leaders and our partners for being here. Our nations and the world have a vital interest in the success of this mission. And I am confident, because of the leadership represented here as well as the leadership of our outstanding armed forces, that we can advance that goal today and responsibly bring this war to an end.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:24 a.m. at McCormick Place convention center. In his remarks, he referred to President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan.

The President's News Conference in Chicago May 21, 2012

The President. Good afternoon, everybody. Let me begin by saying thank you to my great friend Rahm Emanuel, the mayor of the city of Chicago, and to all my neighbors and friends, the people of the city of Chicago, for their extraordinary hospitality and for everything that they've done to make this summit such a success. I could not be prouder to welcome people from around the world to my hometown.

This was a big undertaking, some 60 world leaders, not to mention folks who were exercising their freedom of speech and assembly, the very freedoms that our alliance are dedicated to defending. And so it was a lot to carry for the people of Chicago, but this is a city of big shoulders. Rahm, his team, Chicagoans proved

that this world-class city knows how to put on a world-class event.

And partly, this was a perfect city for this summit because it reflected the bonds between so many of our countries. For generations, Chicago has welcomed immigrants from around the world, including an awful lot of our NATO allies. And I'd just add that I have lost track of the number of world leaders and their delegations who came up to me over the last day and a half and remarked on what an extraordinarily beautiful city Chicago is. And I could not agree more.

I am especially pleased that I had a chance to show them Soldier Field. I regret that I was not able to take in one of the Crosstown Clas-