Today, we remember those nearly THREE THOUSAND men, women and children lost in the attacks of September ELEVENTH, and we honor more than SIX THOUSAND service members who have given their lives in Afghanistan and in Iraq, as well as tens of thousands of our wounded warriors, and the Gold Star families of our fallen heroes.

How we remember that day is a mark of our resilient American spirit. We honor and remember those lost, but we also recognize that on that day, a date that once held no special meaning to us, our country and a generation of Americans were changed in an instant.
September ELEVENTH was once a day that held no special meaning for America, but on that morning in TWO THOUSAND ONE, a tempest of change blew forth. That day was punctuated by profound fear and loss, and it is now a day that is etched in our memories. The storm that rained down terror on our shores was designed to replace freedom with fear, but it bolstered our resolve and became a defining moment in what would become the next great generation.
I recently heard a radio interview featuring veterans of World War II as they recalled their experiences of the D-Day landing at Normandy. These members of America’s “Greatest Generation” when asked whether there would ever be another great generation, replied forcefully and without hesitation: “Yes, the next great generation is serving today. Their sacrifices and their extraordinary dedication and courage are remarkable.”

Just as Pearl Harbor and World War TWO defined a generation destined for greatness, so have the events of NINE ELEVEN and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The NINE ELEVEN generation includes more than FIVE million Americans who have served in uniform, Active, Guard and Reserve, over the past decade.
The NINE ELEVEN generation includes those on duty on September ELEVENTH, TWO THOUSAND ONE who quickly transitioned to war and the nearly THREE million Americans who have joined the military since. Many of the young people serving today were sitting in classrooms on that fateful day. Still PAUSE knowing they would be sent in harm’s way, PAUSE they raised their hands to serve the country.

In contrast to earlier conflicts, the NINE ELEVEN generation are all volunteers. Everyone in today’s military has chosen to serve in a time of war. Afghanistan and Iraq mark the first time since the Revolutionary War that our nation has engaged in sustained conflicts fought entirely by volunteers. Never before has America asked so much of our all volunteer force.
Moreover, the NINE ELEVEN generation continues to step forward, with re-enlistment rates of troops in the war zones among the highest in the military and with every military service continuing to meet its recruiting and retention goals.

This all volunteer Army provides depth and versatility to the Joint Force. It is an Army that is more efficient in its deployment, providing greater flexibility for national security decision makers, defending our interests at home and abroad.
In the last TEN years, this all volunteer Army has transformed itself into an expeditionary force while meeting the demands of two wars. The leaders of the NINE ELEVEN generation at every level have displayed unparalleled ingenuity, flexibility and adaptability, and our Soldiers have displayed mental and physical toughness and courage under fire. They have transformed the Army into the most versatile, agile, rapidly deployable and sustainable strategic force in the world today.
The NINE ELEVEN generation has earned its place among the greatest of generations in U.S. history. Over the past decade, more than two million of our troops have served in the war zones, deploying more than TWO AND ONE HALF million times. Hundreds of thousands of troops have deployed multiple times. Our National Guardsmen and Reservists have completed an unprecedented number of deployments.
The accomplishments of the NINE ELEVEN generation have been extraordinary—making great strides in our fight against the Taliban, pushing Al Qaeda from its Afghan safe havens, training Afghan forces, delivering justice to Osama bin Laden and putting al Qaeda on the path to defeat, all of which has helped to prevent terrorist attacks and save American lives at home. Meanwhile, our troops in Iraq battled a brutal insurgency, have trained Iraqi forces and given the Iraqi people an opportunity to forge a better future.
The NINE ELEVEN generation has upheld the virtues of service, sacrifice and selflessness that have always been the source of America’s strength. Coming from every corner of our country and reflecting all backgrounds and faiths, our military men and women—including many immigrants who have become American citizens while wearing the uniform—represent the unity and diversity we need as our nation confronts urgent challenges at home and abroad.
This past decade of conflict has proven that our current generation of servicemembers is different from those of our past. This generation of servicemembers is the most diverse our nation has seen. Women have played a critical role in this next great generation and will continue to do so as our country moves forward.

The examples of women who have made and continue to make an impact for our nation’s defense are countless --- from our young Silver Star winners to our strategic leaders such as General Ann Dunwoody, the Army’s first FOUR Star General.
More than TWO HUNDRED FIFTY FIVE THOUSAND uniformed women have proudly served in Iraq and Afghanistan and many women have sacrificed their lives. In the past decade of combat women have commanded units in combat, piloted aircraft, served as role models in training members of foreign militaries, and have been intimately involved in all of our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For the first time since World War TWO, the nation’s third highest decoration for valor in the face of the enemy was awarded to women. Military Policewoman Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester and Combat Medic Monica Brown exhibited conspicuous gallantry in Iraq and Afghanistan earning them each the Silver Star.
It is amazing when you think about how much has changed in America and around the world since our nation’s founding, even in the last TEN years. We’ve overcome many challenges to become the most diverse and powerful nation in the world. Today we continue to face significant strategic challenges abroad, made more so by a globally interconnected world moving “at the speed of Twitter.”

The key to this growth has always been the creative, unrelenting spirit of America. Faced with formidable adversaries, our resilient troops have proven themselves as a generation of innovators. They adopted new tactics, mastered new languages and harnessed new technologies. Junior officers have taken on responsibilities once reserved for more senior commanders.
Our troops have not only had to defeat their enemies on the battlefield, they’ve excelled in political, economic and development tasks for which they often had little or no training, but which have been critical to their success.

Over the past decade, we have achieved some tremendous equipment modernization successes – the fielding of unmanned systems provides unprecedented real-time intelligence to our tactical commanders; precision weapons provide accurate fires while mitigating collateral damage; and the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles provide a level of protection to our Soldiers unheard of in past generations.
We have seen monumental changes in medical innovations in the care for our veterans and wounded warriors, living up to the Warrior Ethos – “I will never leave a comrade behind.” As those who have served this country with honor, we have a sacred duty to care for all who sacrifice for our defense. With an historic increase in the Veterans Affairs budget, we have dramatically increased treatment for mental health and the signature wounds of the NINE ELEVEN generation—traumatic brain injury and Post Traumatic Stress. We have given new support to caregivers of our wounded warriors, and we are helping hundreds of thousands of veterans and their families pursue a college education under the post-NINE ELEVEN GI Bill.
As we look back on the last TEN years and how the new “Great Generation” has brought the Army into the TWENTY FIRST century, we need to look toward the future and wonder where this “Great Generation” will take us next. This is a time like no other in history. It is a time of uncertainty and historic change. As operations shift from Iraq and Afghanistan, the future will dictate what our country will need the Army to do.

Just as earlier generations of Americans overcame great tests and turmoil, the NINE ELEVEN generation has risen to the challenges of our time, ensuring that America will emerge even stronger. They will be the ones to bring the Army through this period of uncertainty to be as good in TWENTY TWENTY ONE as it is today.
Our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen and their families have served with honor, kept us safe, and earned the eternal gratitude of all Americans. As a nation, we will move forward with the same strength, unity and resilience that our troops and their families display every day.

Despite the enormous strains of TEN years of continuous operations, our military remains the strongest it’s ever been. Thanks to the commitment and character of the NINE ELEVEN generation, we have the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped fighting force in history. We are going to maintain our military superiority so that our troops can meet any mission and so we can keep America safe.
The NINE ELEVEN Generation is the embodiment of a quote from Winston Churchill, “Kites rise highest against the wind, not with it.”

PAUSE (repeat quote slowly) “Kites rise highest against the wind, not with it.” Many of us in TWO THOUSAND ONE could not have imagined that in TEN years, we would have a completely transformed Army, filled with men and women who have spent the bulk of their careers fighting two wars. As our country again faces the winds of change, I am confident that today’s Army, one made up of the men and women of the NINE ELEVEN generation will rise to new heights over the next TEN years.