



September 7, 2021

Open Letter to Donors

Our abrupt and disheartening exit from Afghanistan – bringing down a curtain on our 20-year commitment there – has left most of us with a sour taste in our mouths. On Saturday we will commemorate the 20th anniversary of 9/11. Lest we forget, we went into Afghanistan to root out the terrorist cells that orchestrated the attacks on our country. We eventually killed Bin Laden who had organized those attacks. To that extent, our effort was successful.

Unfortunately, there is no celebration. The killing of Bin Laden had morphed into a prolonged campaign to foster democracy in Afghanistan. We took tens of thousands of casualties and invested trillions of dollars to no avail. Now the grim reality is that the terrorists – the Taliban, al-Qaeda, ISIS and other assorted terrorist groups – now have regained a safe haven from which they can continue to wreak death and havoc around the world.

Previous generations of Americans have fought bloody wars, but they tended to be short, at least compared to our commitment in Afghanistan. World War II lasted several years, but from the time our soldiers stormed ashore in Normandy on June 6, 1944, until Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, was less than a year. The war against Japan lasted longer from December 7, 1941 through August 1945. But neither ran on for 20 years without conclusion.

By contrast, the War on Terrorism that launched on September 11, 2001, has gone on for 20 years and counting. To gain perspective on this situation, we must look back to the ancient Roman Empire that lasted a thousand years. Like us, the Romans were required to fight more or less constantly against barbarian tribes that challenged them at every turn. Generation after generation of Romans answered the call to arms. The only alternative they had was to give up everything they had and believed in – which was not a valid alternative.

The hard truth is that our war against religious fanatics is by no means winding down; it is expanding. We are currently fighting terrorists in 80 nations on six continents. This war is not just being waged by the Pentagon which has spent more than \$2 trillion during that time. The State Department likewise has spent billions to train police, military, and border patrol agents in many countries, and to develop antiterrorism education programs. The 80 nations participating in our war against terrorism include 40 military bases, 65 counterterrorism training facilities, 26 U.S. military exercises, 14 with troops actively engaged in combat and 7 where we manage air and drone strikes.

Today our forces – that includes U.S. Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard – but also agents of other federal and state agencies working under cover, identifying threats and

dealing with such threats. They all need and deserve our support. We hope and pray that the casualty lists will disappear, but there is faint hope of that. The wounded may not command as much media exposure today, but they are still coming home with missing limbs and broken spirits. They often must wait weeks or months for the benefits they have earned and depend upon. We remain one of the few organizations available to fill that void in addition to helping wounded veterans cope with post-traumatic stress and acquire useful employment in the private sector. In addition,

In sum, our work is not finished, not by a long shot. We recently launched something new – the Veterans Caregivers Alliance – along with other organizations to provide support to the legions of caregivers who dedicate their lives to our wounded warriors. Most of these caregivers are spouses of wounded warriors many of whom bear extraordinary burdens caring for their husbands who are unable to work, taking care of the kids, paying the bills and otherwise keeping their families together. They need and deserve all the support they can get. Everyone here at the Coalition is devoted to serving those who bear the burden of our freedom, and we will continue to do so for as long as we have your support. Without your support we would have to close our doors.

As for Afghanistan, we spent 20 years fighting the fanatics and striving to teach the Afghans a better way of life. Many thousands of them rallied to our flag. Women have gone to school and acquired educations – a radical development in that backward part of the world. Many are terrified of the resurgence of the Taliban, and they have reason. Already the Taliban thugs are terrorizing women and girls. I do not know what the next phase of our war against the forces of darkness will look like; I only know it will continue.

In the meantime, our troops have done all they could do. Now we must take care of them. Today, as always, we – and the veterans we serve -- depend on your support.

David W. Walker
President and Chief Executive Officer
Coalition to Salute America's Heroes