



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 7, 2012

Obama Spokesman Suggests the End of the War on Terror

A writer at the *Washington Post* took a snippet out of a speech by President Obama's Defense Department general counsel and concluded that he saw an end to the War on Terror. He was wrong.

[Washington Post](#) writer Fareed Zakaria [characterized the speech by Jeh Johnson \(shown on left\)](#) as "thoughtful," and Zakaria was inordinately hopeful that it signaled the beginning of the end of Washington's 12-year-old War on Terror. He wrote:



For the first time since Sept. 11, 2001, an administration official has sketched a possible endpoint....

Phasing out or modifying these emergency powers [given to the president by Congress to prosecute the war against al-Qaeda] should be something that would appeal to both left and right.

Zakaria agreed with ending the war — to a point — and he invoked the warning James Madison gave about the dangers of unending eternal warfare:

Of all the enemies to public liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes....

No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.

Zakaria reviewed some of the impact that the war has had on America: bloated military budgets, new unconstitutional agencies (especially the Department of Homeland Security, which now employs a *quarter of a million people*), the building of 33 new intelligence facilities in the Washington, D.C. area alone ([equivalent to three Pentagons](#)), an Afghan war that has cost trillions of dollars, and [nearly 60,000 American casualties](#).

Zakaria was hopeful that Johnson's speech was a turning point, signaling the end of the War on Terror, and that life in the United States can soon return to normal:

It is a good idea that the United States find a way to conduct its anti-terrorism campaigns within a more normal legal framework, rather than rely on blanket wartime authority granted in a panic after Sept. 11.

In fact, the "[blanket wartime authority](#)," which was granted to the president seven days after the [September 11 attacks](#), should never have been passed, as it unconstitutionally allowed the president to declare war — instead of Congress having that power — and then gave the president virtually unlimited power to prosecute the war. From that joint resolution:

Whereas, on September 11, 2001, acts of treacherous violence were committed against the United States and its citizens, and...

Whereas, the President has authority under the Constitution to take action to deter and prevent acts of international terrorism against the United States: Now, therefore, be it Resolved by the



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Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled...

That the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.

The section of Johnson's [speech](#), which [he](#) gave at the Oxford Union, Oxford University on November 30, that Zakaria found favor with was this snippet:

But, now that efforts by the U.S. military against al Qaeda are in their 12th year, we must also ask ourselves: how will this conflict end?...

I do believe that on the present course, there will come a tipping point — a tipping point at which so many of the leaders and operatives of al Qaeda and its affiliates have been killed or captured, and the group is no longer able to attempt or launch a strategic attack against the United States, such that al Qaeda as we know it, the organization that our Congress authorized the military to pursue in 2001, has been effectively destroyed.

At that point, we must be able to say to ourselves that our efforts should no longer be considered an “armed conflict” against al Qaeda and its associated forces.

And from that Zakaria concluded that this was “the possible endpoint” of the war on terror.

Unfortunately he didn't read the rest of Johnson's remarks. The essence of those remarks was that the War on Terror was going to continue indefinitely, but under a different name. This name change is merely in keeping with Obama's rhetoric on the war. Less than two months after his first inauguration, President Obama ordered the Defense Department to refrain from using the phrase “War on Terror” and instead start calling it the “[Overseas Contingency Operation](#)” (OCO).

Johnson's credibility should have come into question within minutes of his opening remarks. After he noted that he favored a quote from [the pro-war Brookings Institution](#) that he said motivates his public service: “The Founding Fathers believed *in a democracy*” (they didn't), he celebrated the success the military has had in putting into effect that unconstitutional “blanket wartime authority”:

We ended the combat mission in Iraq.

We increased the number of combat forces in Afghanistan and have reversed much of the Taliban's momentum in the country....

We banned “enhanced interrogation techniques,” consistent with the calls of many in our country, including our own military, that great nations simply do not treat other human beings that way....

And, finally, we have, in a manner consistent with our laws and values, taken the fight directly to the terrorist organization al Qaeda, the result of which is that the core of al Qaeda is today degraded, disorganized and on the run. Osama bin Laden is dead. Many other leaders and terrorist operatives of al Qaeda are dead or captured; those left in al Qaeda's core struggle to communicate, issue orders, and recruit.

At this point in his speech, Johnson might have suggested that it was time to pack up and go home: Job One is done.

Not a chance.



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There is still danger and there is still much to do. Al Qaeda's core has been degraded, leaving al Qaeda more decentralized, and most terrorist activity now conducted by local franchises...

So, therefore, in places like Yemen, and in partnership with that government, we are taking the fight directly to [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula], and continually disrupting its plans to conduct terrorist attacks against U.S. and Yemeni interests.

We have made clear that we are not at war with an idea, a religion, or a tactic. We are at war with an organized, armed group — a group determined to kill innocent civilians.

The War on Terror, or the Overseas Contingency Operation, or whatever Johnson now calls it, will continue:

Al Qaeda's radical and absurd goals have included global domination through a violent Islamic caliphate, terrorizing the United States and other western nations from retreating from the world stage, and the destruction of Israel. There is no compromise or political bargain that can be struck with those who pursue such aims.

In the current conflict with al Qaeda, I can offer no prediction about when this conflict will end.

It's too bad that the writer from the *Washington Post* didn't read the rest of Johnson's speech. It was hardly a signal that the war on terror was ending. It was, instead, a confirmation that it will continue indefinitely into the future.

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