



**U.S. Department of Defense**

Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

## News Release

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta Statement on Operation Enduring Freedom**

Today marks ten years since our nation went to war in Afghanistan. In toppling the Taliban regime, we removed a government that had provided safe haven and support to Al Qaeda, and allowed its leaders to plan and launch the worst terrorist attack in our nation's history. Our military has been at war ever since, determined to prevent Al Qaeda from regaining a safe haven and the ability to launch attacks on our homeland. Over these years – and especially this year – we have dealt heavy blows to Al Qaeda's leadership, and terrorists now know that we will pursue them relentlessly in order to defend our country. In Afghanistan, we are reversing the Taliban insurgency's momentum, and our efforts are creating the right conditions for transition to Afghan security lead. Thanks to the progress we have made, we can draw down our forces while building a long-term enduring relationship with the Afghan people. But we must stay committed to this effort to ensure that Afghanistan does not again become a safe haven for terrorists.

Over these ten years, our men and women in uniform and their families have borne a heavy burden to protect our country. Nearly 1,800 U.S. service members have lost their lives in Operation Enduring Freedom, and more than 14,000 have been wounded. On this tenth anniversary, our thoughts turn to those who have paid this heavy price for our freedom and our security. Our country is stronger, and the world is a safer place, because of their sacrifices, and the sacrifices of all who have served. We must honor them by staying committed to this mission of protecting America. This day, and every day, we must continue to fight for the goal of a better and more secure world for our children.