

EXPLORING THE HIDDEN AGENDA OF BARACK OBAMA IN HIS FAREWELL SPEECH: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study analyzes Barack Obama's Farewell Speech to the United States Armed Forces using Sketch Engine, revealing a speech rich in rhetorical strategies and thematic complexity. The analysis highlights Obama's use of personal address, emotional appeal, and thematic repetition to convey gratitude, reflect on the responsibilities of leadership, and emphasize the lasting connection between the military and the American people. Serving both as a tribute to the military's achievements and a call to continue upholding the values of service, sacrifice, and leadership, the speech is a key contribution to the tradition of presidential farewell addresses. The corpus analysis provides valuable insights into the speech's linguistic and rhetorical features, offering a deeper understanding of its impact and significance in reinforcing the unique relationship between the Commander-in-Chief and the armed forces.

Keywords: presidential farewell addresses, corpus analysis, responsibilities of leadership, linguistic and rhetorical features

Introduction

Barack Obama's Farewell Address to the United States Armed Forces, delivered on January 4, 2017, marks the culmination of his tenure as Commander-in-Chief. The speech is a comprehensive reflection on the responsibilities of leadership, the values of service and sacrifice, and the enduring relationship between the military and the American people. This assignment employs corpus linguistic tools, specifically Sketch Engine, to conduct an in-depth analysis of the speech, exploring its linguistic features, thematic content, and rhetorical strategies.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this assignment are:

1. To identify and analyze the key themes and messages in Barack Obama's Farewell Address using corpus analysis techniques.
2. To explore the rhetorical strategies employed by Obama, particularly his use of language, tone, and repetition, through detailed keyword, collocation, and concordance analysis.
3. To assess the implications of the speech for civil-military relations, using linguistic evidence to understand the impact of Obama's discourse.
4. To place the speech within the broader context of presidential rhetoric, comparing it with similar speeches and assessing its significance for military policy.

Literature Review

The study of presidential speeches, particularly farewell addresses, is an established field in rhetoric and discourse analysis. Researchers like Campbell and Jamieson (2008) emphasize the importance of these speeches as moments of reflection and legacy-building. Farewell addresses often serve as a final opportunity for presidents to influence national discourse, shape their legacy, and communicate core values.

In the context of Obama's speech, the concept of civil-military relations is crucial. Feaver and Kohn (2001) discuss the delicate balance of power and mutual respect between civilian leaders

and the military, a theme that is central to Obama's address. Additionally, studies on Obama's rhetorical style, such as those by Lim (2002), highlight his use of inclusive language, moral appeals, and the blending of personal narratives with national themes. These characteristics are evident in his Farewell Address, where Obama connects personal reflection with broader discussions on military and national security.

Other scholars have explored the broader implications of presidential rhetoric. Hart (1984) analyzes the persuasive power of presidential communication, identifying strategies that presidents use to resonate with their audience. Tulis (1987) further investigates how modern presidents have evolved their rhetorical strategies to address a broader and more diverse electorate.

In terms of civil-military relations, Janowitz (1977) offers a foundational perspective on the professional soldier and the evolving dynamics between the military and civilian sectors. The significance of these relations in shaping national security policy is further explored by Owens (2011), who examines the historical context and contemporary challenges in this domain.

The rhetorical significance of farewell addresses has also been explored in the context of legacy and leadership. Zarefsky (2004) discusses how presidents use these speeches to frame their legacies, often reflecting on their achievements while providing guidance for the future. Murphy (2011) provides a comparative analysis of presidential farewell addresses, highlighting the rhetorical devices employed to address different audiences and contexts.

Finally, in analyzing Obama's rhetorical style specifically, Rowland and Jones (2011) included his use of narrative and symbolism to craft a compelling and unifying message, elements that are evident in his farewell address to the armed forces.

Methodology

Using Sketch Engine, the following corpus linguistic methodologies were employed:

Keyword Analysis: Identifying words that are unusually frequent in the speech compared to a reference corpus, providing insight into the speech's key themes.

Collocation Analysis: Investigating words that frequently appear together with key terms in the speech, revealing the contextual usage of important concepts.

Concordance Analysis: Examining how specific words or phrases are used in different parts of the speech, which helps identify patterns and rhetorical strategies.

Word Sketch and N-gram Analysis: Analyzing frequent word combinations and common phrases to understand the structure and flow of the speech.

Contextual Comparison: Comparing the speech with other presidential farewell addresses to place it within a broader rhetorical tradition.

Corpus Analysis

1. Keyword and Frequency Analysis:

Keywords: Words like "service," "sacrifice," "military," and "responsibility" were identified as key terms in the speech. The high frequency of these words highlights Obama's focus on the values and duties associated with military service.

Frequency: The word "you" appeared frequently, reflecting Obama's direct address to the audience, personalizing the speech and creating a connection with the military personnel.

2. Collocation Analysis:

Service and Sacrifice: The terms "service" and "sacrifice" frequently collocate with words like "honor," "commitment," and "family," emphasizing the noble and selfless nature of military duty.

Leadership and Responsibility: Collocations with "leadership" include "strategic," "counsel," and "integrity," underscoring the importance of thoughtful and ethical decision-making in military leadership.

Civil-Military Relations: The term "trust" collocates with "respect" and "confidence," reflecting the emphasis on maintaining strong relationships between the military and civilian sectors.

3. Concordance Analysis:

Personal Address: The repeated use of "you" and "we" throughout the speech is significant. These pronouns create a sense of unity and collective identity, as Obama positions himself as part of the same team as the military personnel.

Emotional Appeal: Phrases like "patriotism," "pride," and "sacrifice" appear in contexts that evoke strong emotional responses, aiming to reinforce the audience's sense of duty and honor.

4. N-grams and Word Sketches:

Repetition of Themes: Phrases such as "Because of you" and "service and sacrifice" are repeated, reinforcing the central themes of the speech. This repetition serves to underscore the contributions of the military and to solidify the message.

Structural Patterns: The speech uses a consistent pattern of acknowledging past achievements, followed by a call to maintain these values in the future, providing a balanced structure that reflects on both past and future.

5. Contextual Comparison:

Comparison with Other Farewell Addresses: Compared to other presidential farewell addresses, Obama's speech is notable for its emphasis on personal connection with the military and the explicit discussion of civil-military relations. This focus sets it apart as a reflection not only on his presidency but also on the broader role of the military in American society.

Conclusion

The analysis of Barack Obama's Farewell Address to the United States Armed Forces using Sketch Engine reveals a speech rich in rhetorical strategies and thematic depth. Through the use of personal address, emotional appeal, and thematic repetition, Obama effectively communicates his gratitude, reflects on the responsibilities of leadership, and underscores the enduring bond between the military and the American people.

The speech serves as both a tribute to the military's accomplishments and a call to continue upholding the values of service, sacrifice, and leadership. It is a significant contribution to the tradition of presidential farewell addresses, offering insights into the unique relationship between the Commander-in-Chief and the armed forces. The detailed corpus analysis highlights the speech's linguistic and rhetorical features, providing a deeper understanding of its impact and significance.

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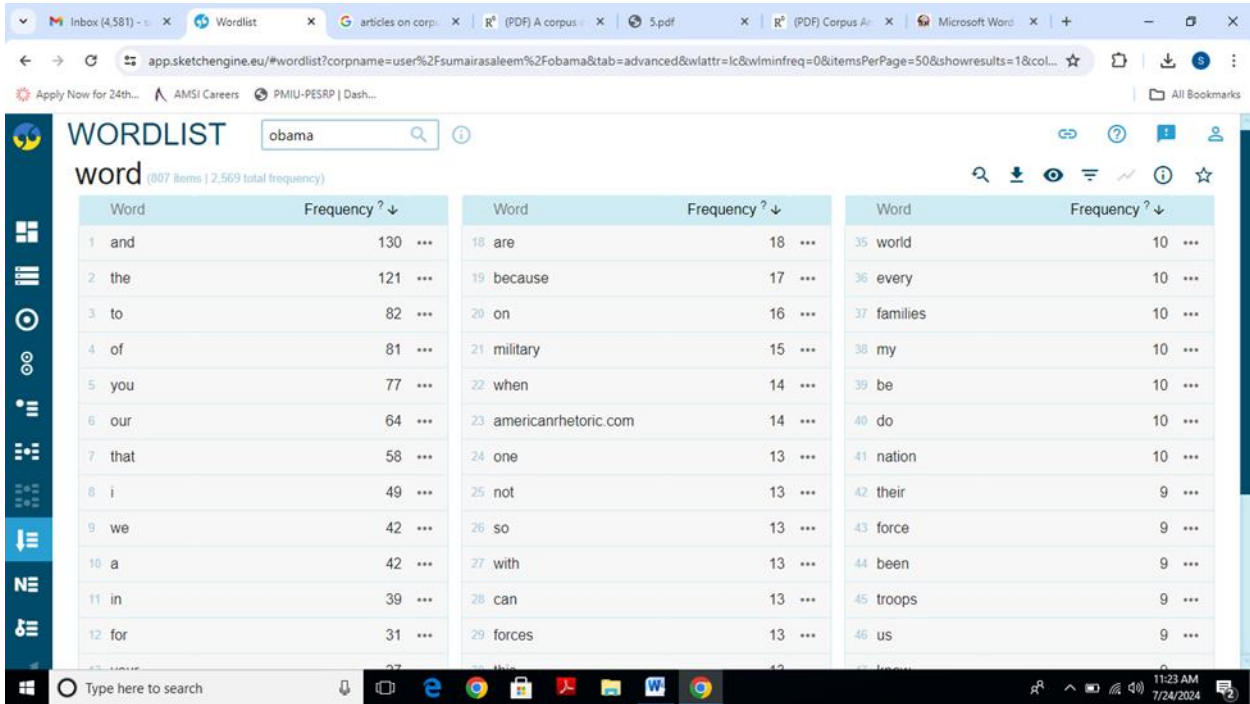
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Words Frequency List:



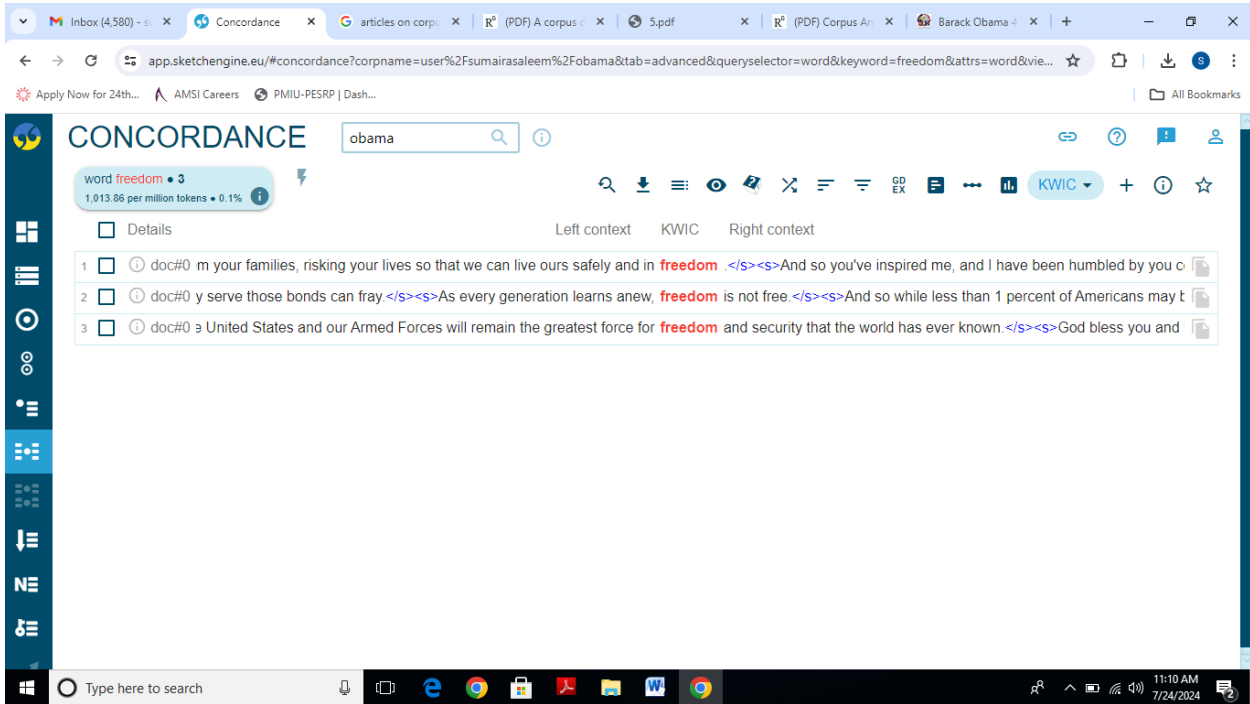
WORDLIST

word (807 items | 2,569 total frequency)

Word	Frequency ? ↓	Word	Frequency ? ↓	Word	Frequency ? ↓
1 and	130 ...	18 are	18 ...	35 world	10 ...
2 the	121 ...	19 because	17 ...	36 every	10 ...
3 to	82 ...	20 on	16 ...	37 families	10 ...
4 of	81 ...	21 military	15 ...	38 my	10 ...
5 you	77 ...	22 when	14 ...	39 be	10 ...
6 our	64 ...	23 americanrhetoric.com	14 ...	40 do	10 ...
7 that	58 ...	24 one	13 ...	41 nation	10 ...
8 i	49 ...	25 not	13 ...	42 their	9 ...
9 we	42 ...	26 so	13 ...	43 force	9 ...
10 a	42 ...	27 with	13 ...	44 been	9 ...
11 in	39 ...	28 can	13 ...	45 troops	9 ...
12 for	31 ...	29 forces	13 ...	46 us	9 ...

Concordances lists:

1:



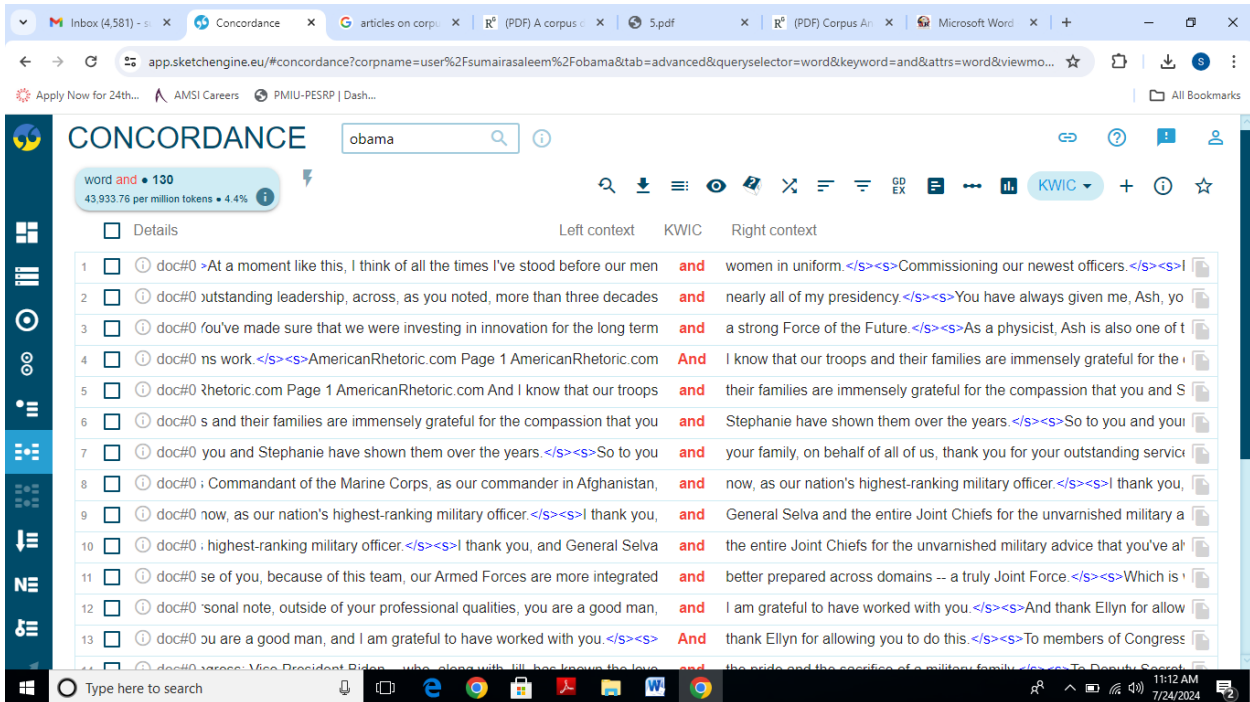
CONCORDANCE obama

word **freedom** • 3
 1,013.86 per million tokens • 0.1%

Left context KWIC Right context

- 1 doc#0 m your families, risking your lives so that we can live ours safely and in **freedom** .</s><s>And so you've inspired me, and I have been humbled by you c
- 2 doc#0 y serve those bonds can fray.</s><s>As every generation learns anew, **freedom** is not free.</s><s>And so while less than 1 percent of Americans may t
- 3 doc#0 ə United States and our Armed Forces will remain the greatest force for **freedom** and security that the world has ever known.</s><s>God bless you and

2:



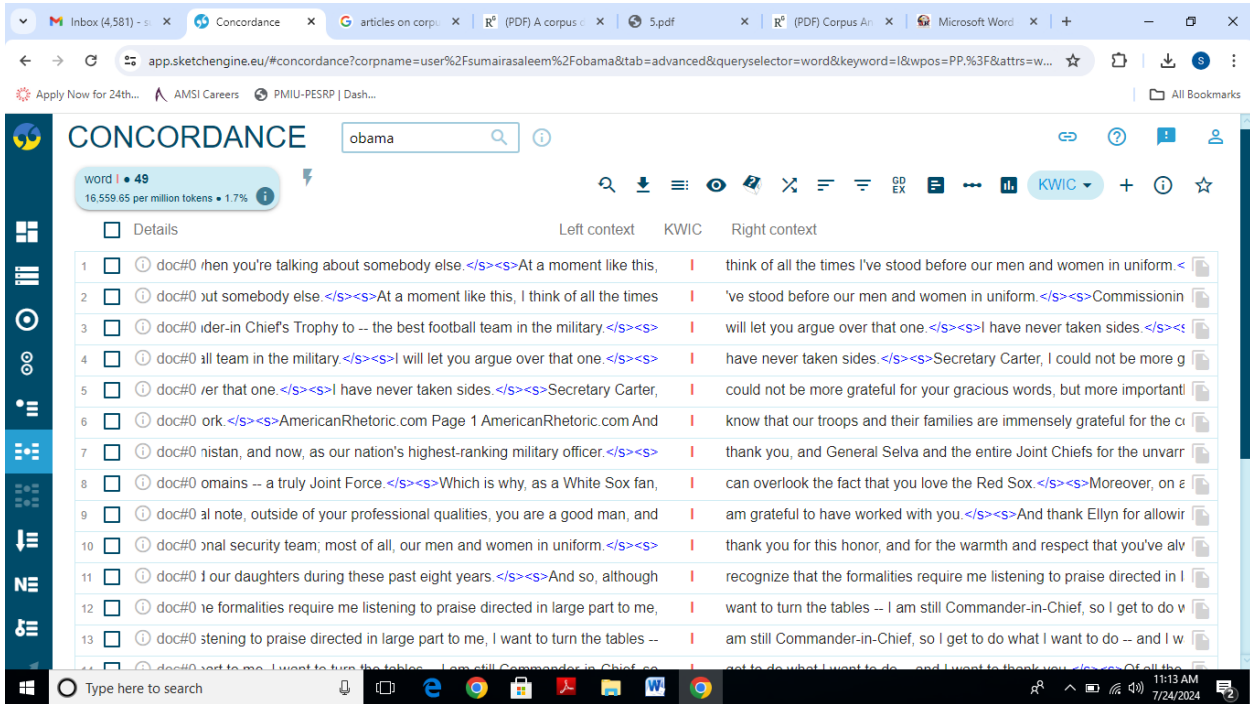
CONCORDANCE obama

word **and** • 130
 43,933.76 per million tokens • 4.4%

Left context KWIC Right context

- 1 doc#0 >At a moment like this, I think of all the times I've stood before our men **and** women in uniform.</s><s>Commissioning our newest officers.</s><s>I
- 2 doc#0 outstanding leadership, across, as you noted, more than three decades **and** nearly all of my presidency.</s><s>You have always given me, Ash, yo
- 3 doc#0 you've made sure that we were investing in innovation for the long term **and** a strong Force of the Future.</s><s>As a physicist, Ash is also one of t
- 4 doc#0 ns work.</s><s>AmericanRhetoric.com Page 1 AmericanRhetoric.com **And** I know that our troops and their families are immensely grateful for the
- 5 doc#0 rhetoric.com Page 1 AmericanRhetoric.com And I know that our troops **and** their families are immensely grateful for the compassion that you and S
- 6 doc#0 s and their families are immensely grateful for the compassion that you **and** Stephanie have shown them over the years.</s><s>So to you and you
- 7 doc#0 you and Stephanie have shown them over the years.</s><s>So to you **and** your family, on behalf of all of us, thank you for your outstanding servic
- 8 doc#0 : Commandant of the Marine Corps, as our commander in Afghanistan, **and** now, as our nation's highest-ranking military officer.</s><s>I thank you,
- 9 doc#0 now, as our nation's highest-ranking military officer.</s><s>I thank you, **and** General Selva and the entire Joint Chiefs for the unvarnished military a
- 10 doc#0 : highest-ranking military officer.</s><s>I thank you, **and** the entire Joint Chiefs for the unvarnished military advice that you've al
- 11 doc#0 se of you, because of this team, our Armed Forces are more integrated **and** better prepared across domains -- a truly Joint Force.</s><s>Which is
- 12 doc#0 'sonal note, outside of your professional qualities, you are a good man, **and** I am grateful to have worked with you.</s><s>And thank Ellyn for allow
- 13 doc#0 ou are a good man, and I am grateful to have worked with you.</s><s> **And** thank Ellyn for allowing you to do this.</s><s>To members of Congress

3:

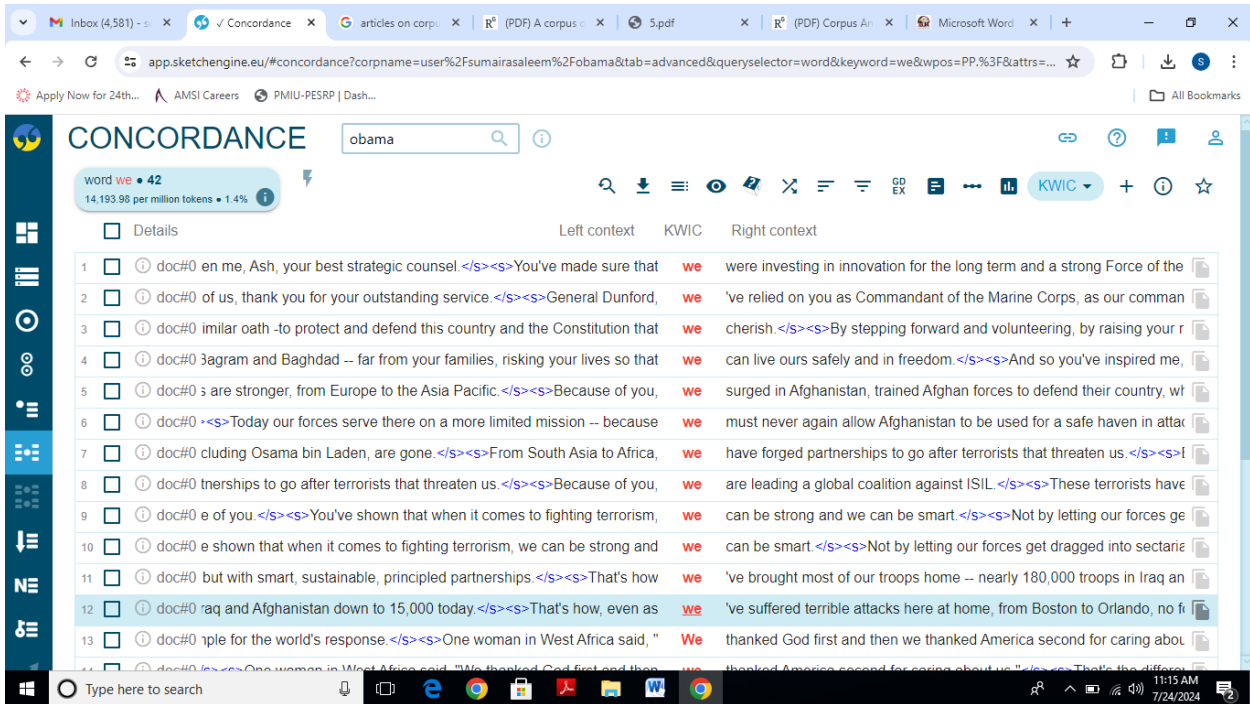


CONCORDANCE obama

word **obama** • 49
 16,559.65 per million tokens • 1.7%

	Left context	KWIC	Right context
1	doc#0 then you're talking about somebody else.	</s><s>At a moment like this,	I think of all the times I've stood before our men and women in uniform.
2	doc#0 ut somebody else.	</s><s>At a moment like this, I think of all the times	I've stood before our men and women in uniform.</s><s>Commissionin
3	doc#0 nder-in Chief's Trophy to -- the best football team in the military.	</s><s>	I will let you argue over that one.</s><s>I have never taken sides.</s><s>
4	doc#0 ill team in the military	</s><s>I will let you argue over that one.</s><s>	I have never taken sides.</s><s>Secretary Carter, I could not be more g
5	doc#0 er that one.	</s><s>I have never taken sides.</s><s>Secretary Carter,	I could not be more grateful for your gracious words, but more importantl
6	doc#0 ork	</s><s>AmericanRhetoric.com Page 1 AmericanRhetoric.com And	I know that our troops and their families are immensely grateful for the cr
7	doc#0 nistan, and now, as our nation's highest-ranking military officer.	</s><s>	I thank you, and General Selva and the entire Joint Chiefs for the unvarr
8	doc#0 omains -- a truly Joint Force	</s><s>Which is why, as a White Sox fan,	I can overlook the fact that you love the Red Sox.</s><s>Moreover, on e
9	doc#0 al note, outside of your professional qualities, you are a good man, and		I am grateful to have worked with you.</s><s>And thank Elyn for allowir
10	doc#0 nal security team; most of all, our men and women in uniform.	</s><s>	I thank you for this honor, and for the warmth and respect that you've alv
11	doc#0 I our daughters during these past eight years.	</s><s>And so, although	I recognize that the formalities require me listening to praise directed in I
12	doc#0 e formalities require me listening to praise directed in large part to me,		I want to turn the tables -- I am still Commander-in-Chief, so I get to do v
13	doc#0 stening to praise directed in large part to me, I want to turn the tables --		I am still Commander-in-Chief, so I get to do what I want to do -- and I w

4:



CONCORDANCE obama

word **we** • 42
 14,193.98 per million tokens • 1.4%

	Left context	KWIC	Right context
1	doc#0 en me, Ash, your best strategic counsel.	</s><s>You've made sure that	we were investing in innovation for the long term and a strong Force of the
2	doc#0 of us, thank you for your outstanding service.	</s><s>General Dunford,	we 've relied on you as Commandant of the Marine Corps, as our comman
3	doc#0 imilar oath -to protect and defend this country and the Constitution that		we cherish.</s><s>By stepping forward and volunteering, by raising your r
4	doc#0 agram and Baghdad -- far from your families, risking your lives so that		we can live ours safely and in freedom.</s><s>And so you've inspired me,
5	doc#0 s are stronger, from Europe to the Asia Pacific.	</s><s>Because of you,	we surged in Afghanistan, trained Afghan forces to defend their country, wf
6	doc#0 e <s>Today our forces serve there on a more limited mission -- because		we must never again allow Afghanistan to be used for a safe haven in attac
7	doc#0 cluding Osama bin Laden, are gone.	</s><s>From South Asia to Africa,	we have forged partnerships to go after terrorists that threaten us.</s><s>I
8	doc#0 nerships to go after terrorists that threaten us.	</s><s>Because of you,	we are leading a global coalition against ISIL.</s><s>These terrorists have
9	doc#0 e of you	</s><s>You've shown that when it comes to fighting terrorism,	we can be strong and we can be smart.</s><s>Not by letting our forces ge
10	doc#0 e shown that when it comes to fighting terrorism, we can be strong and		we can be smart.</s><s>Not by letting our forces get dragged into sectaria
11	doc#0 but with smart, sustainable, principled partnerships.	</s><s>That's how	we 've brought most of our troops home -- nearly 180,000 troops in Iraq an
12	doc#0 raq and Afghanistan down to 15,000 today.	</s><s>That's how, even as	we 've suffered terrible attacks here at home, from Boston to Orlando, no fi
13	doc#0 pple for the world's response.	</s><s>One woman in West Africa said, "	We thanked God first and then we thanked America second for caring abou

5:

The screenshot displays the Concordance application interface. At the top, the search term 'obama' is entered in the search bar. Below the search bar, the word 'because' is highlighted, with statistics showing 17 occurrences and a frequency of 5,745.18 per million tokens (0.57%). The interface includes navigation options for 'Details', 'Left context', 'KWIC', and 'Right context'. The main area shows a list of 13 numbered search results, each with a checkbox, a document icon, and a snippet of text containing the word 'because'. The text snippets are: 1. '... for your dedication, for your professionalism, for you integrity. </s><s> Because of you, because of this team, our Armed Forces are more integrated ar'; 2. '... tion, for your professionalism, for you integrity. </s><s>Because of you, because of this team, our Armed Forces are more integrated and better prepare'; 3. '... quipment and the support that you needed to get the job done. </s><s> Because that's what you rightfully expect and that is what you rightfully deserve.'; 4. '... if accomplishments that Joe and Ash so generously mentioned, they're because of you. </s><s>It's what I tell my staff -- I'm the front man, but you're the'; 5. '... y staff -- I'm the front man, but you're the ones doing the work. </s><s> Because of you, our alliances are stronger, from Europe to the Asia Pacific. </s>>'; 6. '... ou, our alliances are stronger, from Europe to the Asia Pacific. </s><s> Because of you, we surged in Afghanistan, trained Afghan forces to defend their'; 7. '... ome. </s><s>Today our forces serve there on a more limited mission -- because we must never again allow Afghanistan to be used for a safe haven in'; 8. '... n to be used for a safe haven in attacks against our nation. </s><s>It's because of you -- particularly our remarkable Special Forces -- that the core al C'; 9. '... have forged partnerships to go after terrorists that threaten us. </s><s> Because of you, we are leading a global coalition against ISIL. </s><s>These ter'; 10. '... s>And I have no doubt this barbaric terrorist group will be destroyed -- because of you. </s><s>You've shown that when it comes to fighting terrorism, w'; 11. '... t years. </s><s>AmericanRhetoric.com Page 3 AmericanRhetoric.com Because of you, the world has seen the awesome reach of American Armed For'; 12. '... Coast Guard is the finest in the world. </s><s>And we're also the best because this military has come to welcome the talents of more of our fellow Ame'; 13. '... oughout my presidency. </s><s>And I'm very grateful for that. </s><s> Because you remind us that we are united as one team. </s><s>At times of divis';

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Barack Obama

Farewell Address to the United States Armed Forces

delivered 4 January 2017, Joint Base Myer-Henderson, Fort Myer, Virginia



AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio

Well, good afternoon. It turns out these are easier when you're talking about somebody else. At a moment like this, I think of all the times I've stood before our men and women in uniform. Commissioning our newest officers. Presiding over promotions. Presenting the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy to -- the best football team in the military. I will let you argue over that one. I have never taken sides.

Secretary Carter, I could not be more grateful for your gracious words, but more importantly, for your outstanding leadership, across, as you noted, more than three decades and nearly all of my presidency. You have always given me, Ash, your best strategic counsel. You've made sure that we were investing in innovation for the long term and a strong Force of the Future. As a physicist, Ash is also one of the few people who actually understands how our defense systems work.

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And I know that our troops and their families are immensely grateful for the compassion that you and Stephanie have shown them over the years. So to you and your family, on behalf of all of us, thank you for your outstanding service.

General Dunford, we've relied on you as Commandant of the Marine Corps, as our commander in Afghanistan, and now, as our nation's highest-ranking military officer. I thank you, and General Selva and the entire Joint Chiefs for the unvarnished military advice that you've always provided to me, for your dedication, for your professionalism, for your integrity.

Because of you, because of this team, our Armed Forces are more integrated and better prepared across domains -- a truly Joint Force. Which is why, as a White Sox fan, I can overlook the fact that you love the Red Sox. Moreover, on a personal note, outside of your professional qualities, you are a good man, and I am grateful to have worked with you. And thank Ellyn for allowing you to do this.

To members of Congress; Vice President Biden -- who, along with Jill, has known the love and the pride and the sacrifice of a military family. To Deputy Secretary Work; service secretaries; distinguished guests; dedicated civilians from across the Defense Department; my national security team; most of all, our men and women in uniform. I thank you for this honor, and for the warmth and respect that you've always shown me, the support that you've shown Michelle and our daughters during these past eight years.

And so, although I recognize that the formalities require me listening to praise directed in large part to me, I want to turn the tables -- I am still Commander-in-Chief, so I get to do what I want to do -- and I want to thank you. Of all the privileges of this office -- and there are many -- I will miss Air Force One; I will miss Marine One; but I can stand before you today and say that there has been no greater privilege, and no greater honor, than serving as the Commander-in-Chief of the greatest military in the history of the world.

When I took office, I noted that Presidents and those of you in uniform swear a similar oath -- to protect and defend this country and the Constitution that we cherish. By stepping forward and volunteering, by raising your right hand and taking that oath, each of you made a solemn pledge. You committed yourself to a life of service and of sacrifice. And I, in turn, made a promise to you, which, to the best of my abilities, I've tried to uphold every single day since, that I would only send you into harm's way when it is absolutely necessary, with the strategy,

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the well-defined goals, with the equipment and the support that you needed to get the job done. Because that's what you rightfully expect and that is what you rightfully deserve.

I made that pledge at a time when less than one percent of Americans wear the uniform. Fewer Americans know someone who serves. And as a result, a lot of Americans don't see the sacrifices you make on our behalf. But as Commander-in-Chief, I do. I've seen it when I looked into the eyes of young cadets, knowing that my decisions could very well send them into harm's way. I've seen it when I've visited the field -- at Bagram and Baghdad -- far from your families, risking your lives so that we can live ours safely and in freedom. And so you've inspired me, and I have been humbled by you consistently. And I want every American to know what I know -- through year after year after year of continuous military operations -- you have earned your place among the greatest generations.

The list of accomplishments that Joe and Ash so generously mentioned, they're because of you. It's what I tell my staff -- I'm the front man, but you're the ones doing the work. Because of you, our alliances are stronger, from Europe to the Asia Pacific. Because of you, we surged in Afghanistan, trained Afghan forces to defend their country, while bringing most of our troops home. Today our forces serve there on a more limited mission -- because we must never again allow Afghanistan to be used for a safe haven in attacks against our nation.

It's because of you -- particularly our remarkable Special Forces -- that the core al Qaeda leadership that attacked us on 9/11 has been decimated. Countless terrorist leaders, including Osama bin Laden, are gone. From South Asia to Africa, we have forged partnerships to go after terrorists that threaten us. Because of you, we are leading a global coalition against ISIL. These terrorists have lost about half of their territory. They are losing their leaders. Towns and cities are being liberated. And I have no doubt this barbaric terrorist group will be destroyed -- because of you.

You've shown that when it comes to fighting terrorism, we can be strong and we can be smart. Not by letting our forces get dragged into sectarian conflicts and civil wars, but with smart, sustainable, principled partnerships. That's how we've brought most of our troops home -- nearly 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan down to 15,000 today. That's how, even as

we've suffered terrible attacks here at home, from Boston to Orlando, no foreign terrorist organization has successfully planned and executed an attack on our homeland these past eight years.

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Because of you, the world has seen the awesome reach of American Armed Forces. In some of the first few weeks of my job, when Somali pirates took Captain Phillips, later on, when they kidnapped Jessica Buchanan, it was you that went in and you that risked everything, and you that brought these Americans home to their families.

The world has seen your compassion -- the help you deliver in times of crisis, from an earthquake in Haiti to the tsunami in Japan. Think of Ebola and the countless lives this Armed Forces saved in West Africa. It was you that set up the architecture and set the example for the world's response. One woman in West Africa said, "We thanked God first and then we thanked America second for caring about us." That's the difference you make -- you continue to make -- in the lives of people around the world.

As you know well, with service comes great sacrifice. And after 15 years of war, our wounded warriors bear the scars -- both seen and unseen. In my visits to their bedsides and rehab centers, I have been in awe, watching a wounded warrior grab his walker and pull himself up and, and through excruciating pain, take a step, and then another. Or hearing troops describe how they grappled with post-traumatic stress but summoned the strength to ask for help. As a military and as a nation, we have to keep supporting our resilient and incredibly strong wounded warriors as they learn to walk and run and heal. As they find new ways to keep serving our nation, they need to know that we still need your incredible talents. You've given so much to America, and I know you have more to give.

And then you have not seen the depths of true love and true patriotism until you've been to Dover, when our troops receive our fallen heroes on their final journey home; until you have grieved with our Gold Star families who've given a piece of their heart to our nation -- a son or a daughter, a father or mother, a husband or wife, a brother or a sister. Every one a patriot. Every single one of these American families deserves the everlasting gratitude and support of our entire nation.

Today, after two major ground wars, our Armed Forces have drawn down, and that is natural and it is necessary. And after reckless budget cuts of sequester, we need to keep improving the readiness, and the training, and modernizing our forces. So let me take this opportunity, while I still have it, to appeal to our friends from Congress who are here: We cannot go back to sequestration.

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There is a responsible way forward -- investing in America's strengths, our national security and our economic security. Investing in the reform and the equipment and support that our troops need, including the pay and the benefits, and the quality of life, and the education and the jobs that our troops and our veterans and all of your families deserve.

But make no mistake, even with the challenges of recent years -- and there have been challenges -- our allies and adversaries alike understand America's military remains, by far, the most capable fighting force on the face of the Earth. Our Army, tested by years of combat, is the best-trained and best-equipped land force on the planet. Our Navy is the largest and most lethal in the world

-- on track to surpass 300 ships. Our Air Force, with its precision and reach, is unmatched. Our Marine Corps is the world's only truly expeditionary force. Our Coast Guard is the finest in the world.

And we're also the best because this military has come to welcome the talents of more of our fellow Americans. Service members can now serve the country they love without hiding who they are or who they love. All combat positions in our military are now open to women. And Joe Biden and I know that women are at least as strong as men. We're stronger for it. It's one of the reasons that our military stands apart as the most respected institution in our nation by a mile. The American people look up to you and your devotion to duty, and your integrity, and your sense of honor, and your commitment to each other.

One of my proudest achievements is that I have been able to, I think, communicate through the constant partisan haze, along with so many others, how special this institution is, and the esteem in which our military is held has held steady and constant and high throughout my presidency. And I'm very grateful for that. Because you remind us that we are united as one team. At times of division, you've shown what it means to pull together.

So my days as your Commander-in-Chief are coming to an end, and as I reflect on the challenges we have faced together and on those to come, I believe that one of the greatest tasks before our Armed Forces is to retain the high confidence that the American people rightly place in you. This is a responsibility not simply for those of you in uniform, but for those who lead you. It's the responsibility of our entire nation.

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And so we are called to remember core principles: That we must never hesitate to act when necessary to defend our nation, but we must also never rush into war -- because sending you into harm's way should be a last and not first resort. It should be compelled by the needs of our security and not our politics. We need to remember that we must not give in to the false illusion of isolationism, because in this dangerous time, oceans alone will not protect us, and the world still seeks and needs our leadership as the one indispensable nation.

We have to remember that our military has to be prepared for the full spectrum of threats, conventional and unconventional, from 20th century-style aggression to 21st century-style cyber threats. And when we do go to war, we have to hold ourselves to high standards and do everything in our power to prevent the loss of innocent life, because that's what we stand for. That's what we should stand for. We have to remember that as we meet the threats of our time, we cannot sacrifice our values or our way of life -- the rule of law and openness and tolerance that defines us as Americans, that is our greatest strength and makes us a beacon to the world. We cannot sacrifice the very freedoms that we're fighting for.

And finally, in our democracy, the continued strength of our all-volunteer force also rests on something else -- a strong bond of respect and trust between those in uniform and the citizens that you protect and defend. At a time when too few Americans truly understand the realities or sacrifices of military service, at a time when many political leaders have not served, if some in the military begin to feel as though somehow they are apart from the larger society they serve those bonds can fray.

As every generation learns anew, freedom is not free. And so while less than 1 percent of Americans may be fighting our wars, 100 percent of Americans can do their parts -- at the very least -- to support you and your families. Everybody can do something -- every business, every profession, every school, every community, every state -- to reach out and to give back, and to let you know that we care, to help make the lives of our troops and your families just a little bit easier. Everybody can do something.

And that's why Michelle and Jill Biden have mobilized more Americans to honor and support you and your families through Joining Forces. And that's why, even after we leave the White House, Michelle and I intend to keep on looking for ways to help rally more of our fellow citizens to be there for you, just like you've always been there for us.

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So we can't say it enough and we can't show it enough. Thank you for your patriotism. Thank you for your professionalism. Thank you for your character in representing the very best of the American spirit. Our nation endures -- we live free under the red, white and blue -
- because of patriots like you.

It has been a privilege of a lifetime to serve with you. I have learned much from you. I'm a better man having worked with you. I'm confident that the United States and our Armed Forces will remain the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known. God bless you and your families. And God bless the United States of America.