

Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



Monday, December 15, 2008
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WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, December 12, 2008

Remarks at the Saban Forum

December 5, 2008

Thank you. John, thank you very much. I thought for a minute you were going to say I was your favorite rabbi, but—[laughter].

I appreciate you giving me a chance to come. I too want to thank Mr. Saban for his vision and for sponsoring this forum. I am honored to be with you. Madam Secretary, thank you for joining us. Justice Breyer, I am pleased to see you yet again. I thank Ambassador Indyk. Minister Mofaz, it's good to see you, sir, and I appreciate you being here for this forum.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who have joined us, members of the diplomatic corps, and of course, the distinguished guests.

The Saban Forum is one of the world's premier venues for discussion on the Middle East. I thank you for the debates you provoke and the differences you have made. And I'm honored to be with you.

Over the past 8 years, I have had the privilege to see the Middle East up close. I have stood on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and I have hiked the cliffs of Masada. I have enjoyed dinner in the desert of Abu Dhabi and prayed at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. I have looked into the eyes of courageous elected leaders from Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories. I have been convinced that no region is more fundamental to the security of America or the peace in the world than the Middle East.

This evening I will share some thoughts on our policies in the region these past 8 years, and our vision for the future: a Middle East where our friends are strengthened and the extremists are discredited, where economies are open and prosperity is widespread, and where all people enjoy the life of liberty that is the universal gift of an Almighty God.

From our earliest days as a nation, the Middle East has played a central role in

American foreign policy. One of America's first military engagements as an independent nation was with the Barbary pirates. One of our first consulates was in Tangiers. Some of the most fateful choices made by American Presidents have involved the Middle East, including President Truman's decision to recognize Israel 60 years ago this past May.

In the decades that followed that brave choice, American policy in the Middle East was shaped by the realities of the cold war. Together with strong allies in the Middle East, we faced down and defeated the threat of communism to the region. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the primary threat to America and the region became violent religious extremism. Through painful experience, it became clear that the old approach of promoting stability is unsuited to this new danger, and that the pursuit of security at the expense of liberty would leave us with neither one. Across the Middle East, many who sought a voice in the future of their countries found the only places open to dissent were radical mosques. Many turned to terror as a source of empowerment. And as the new century dawned, the violent currents swirling beneath the Middle East began to surface.

In the Holy Land, the dashed expectations resulting from the collapse of the Camp David peace talks had given way to the second intifada. Palestinian suicide bombers struck with horrific frequency and lethality. They murdered innocent Israelis at a pizza parlor or aboard buses or in the middle of a Passover Seder. Israeli Defense Forces responded with large-scale operations. And in 2001, more than 500 Israelis and Palestinians were killed.

Politically, the Palestinian Authority was led by a terrorist who stole from his people and walked away from peace. In Israel, Ariel Sharon was elected to fight terror and pursue a "greater Israel" policy that allowed for no

territorial concessions. Neither side could envision a return to negotiations or the realistic possibility of a two-state solution.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Saddam Hussein had begun his third decade as the dictator of Iraq, a reign that included invading two neighbors, developing and using weapons of mass destruction, attempting to exterminate Marsh Arabs and many Kurds, paying the families of suicide bombers, systematically violating U.N. resolutions, and firing routinely at British and U.S. aircraft patrolling a no-fly zone.

Syria continued its occupation of Lebanon, with some 30,000 troops on Lebanese soil. Libya sponsored terror and pursued weapons of mass destruction. And in Iran, the prospect for—of reform was fading, the regime's sponsorship of terror continued, and its pursuit of nuclear weapons was largely unchecked.

Throughout the region, suffering and stagnation were rampant. The "Arab Human Development Report" revealed a bleak picture of high unemployment, poor education, high mortality rates for mothers, and almost no investment in technology. Above all, the Middle East suffered a deep deficit in freedom. Most people had no choice and no voice in choosing their leaders. Women enjoyed few rights, and there was little conversation about democratic change.

Against this backdrop, the terrorist movement was growing in strength and in ambition. For three decades, violent radicals had landed painful blows against America: the Iranian hostage crisis, the attacks on our Embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut, the destruction of Pan Am Flight 103, the truck bombing of the World Trade Center, the attack on Khobar Towers, the bombing of our Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the strike on the USS *Cole*.

And then came September the 11th, 2001, when 19 men from the Middle East carried out the worst attack on the United States since the strike on Pearl Harbor 67 years ago this weekend. In the space of a single morning, 9/11 etched a sharp dividing line in our history. We realized that we're in a struggle with fanatics pledged to our destruction. We saw that conditions of repression and despair

on the other side of the world could bring suffering and death to our own streets.

With these new realities in mind, America reshaped our approach to the Middle East. We made clear that we will defend our friends, our interests, and our people against any hostile attempt to dominate the Middle East, whether by terror, blackmail, or the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. We have carried out this new strategy by following three overriding principles.

First, we took the offense against the terrorists overseas. We are waging a relentless campaign to break up extremist networks and deny them safe havens. As part of that offensive, we pledged to strengthen our partnership with every nation that joins in the fight against terror. We deepened our security cooperation with allies like Jordan and Egypt, and with our friends in the gulf. Saudi Arabia, long a breeding ground for radicalism, has become a determined partner in the fight against terror, killing or capturing hundreds of Al Qaida operatives in the Kingdom. We dramatically expanded counterterrorism ties with partners in North Africa. And we left no doubt that America would stand by our closest ally in the Middle East, the State of Israel.

Second, we made clear that hostile regimes must end their support for terror and their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, or face the concerted opposition of the world.

This was the approach we took in Iraq. It is true, as I've said many times, that Saddam Hussein was not connected to the 9/11 attacks. But the decision to remove Saddam from power cannot be viewed in isolation from 9/11. In a world where terrorists armed with box cutters had just killed nearly 3,000 of our people, America had to decide whether we could tolerate a sworn enemy that acted belligerently, that supported terror, and that intelligence agencies around the world believed had weapons of mass destruction.

It was clear to me—it was clear to members of both political parties and to many leaders around the world—that after 9/11, that was a risk we could not afford to take. So we went back to the United Nations Security Council, which unanimously passed Resolution 1441 calling on Saddam Hussein to

disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. With this resolution, we offered Saddam Hussein a final chance to comply with the demands of the world. And when he refused to resolve the issue peacefully, we acted with a coalition of nations to protect our people and liberated 25 million Iraqis.

When Saddam regimes fell—when Saddam's regime fell, we refused to take the easy option and install a friendly strongman in his place. Even though it required enormous sacrifice, we stood by the Iraqi people as they elected their own leaders and built a young democracy. When the violence reached its most dire point, pressure to withdraw reached its height. Yet failure in Iraq would have unleashed chaos, widened the violence, and allowed the terrorists to gain a new safe haven, a fundamental contradiction to our vision for the Middle East.

So we adopted a new strategy and deployed more troops to secure the Iraqi people. When the surge met its objective, we began to bring our troops home under the policy of return on success. Yesterday, building on the gains made by the surge, the democratic Government of Iraq approved two agreements with the United States that formalize our diplomatic, economic, and security ties and set a framework for the draw-down of American forces as the fight in Iraq nears its successful end.

After 9/11, we also confronted Libya over its weapons of mass destruction. The leader of Libya made a wise choice. In 2003, Colonel Qadhafi announced that he would abandon his weapons of mass destruction program. He concluded that the interests of his people would be best served by improving relations with America, and Libya turned over its nuclear centrifuges and other deadly equipment to the United States.

The defeat of Saddam also appears to have changed the calculation of Iran. According to our intelligence community, the regime in Tehran had started a nuclear weapons program in the late-1980s, and they halted a key part of that program in 2003. America recognized that the most effective way to pursue—persuade Iran to remove its nuclear weapons—renounce its nuclear weapons ambitions was to have partners at our side, so we supported an international effort led by our

allies in Europe. This diplomacy yielded an encouraging result when Iran agreed to suspend its uranium enrichment.

Sadly, after the election of President Ahmadi-nejad, Iran reversed course and announced it would begin enriching again. Since then, we've imposed tough sanctions through United Nations resolutions. We and our partners have offered Iran diplomatic and economic incentives to suspend enrichment. We have promised to support a peaceful civilian nuclear program. While Iran has not accepted these offers, we have made our bottom line clear: For the safety of our people and the peace of the world, America will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.

Third, America identified the lack of freedom in the Middle East as a principal cause of the threats coming from the region. We concluded that if the region continued on the path it was headed, if another generation grew up with no hope for the future and no outlet to express its views, the Middle East would continue to simmer in resentment and export violence.

To stop this from happening, we've resolved to help the region steer itself toward a better course of freedom and dignity and hope. We're engaged in a battle with the extremists that is broader than a military conflict and broader than a law enforcement operation. We are engaged in an ideological struggle. And to advance our security interests and moral interests, America is working to advance freedom and democracy as the great alternatives to repression and terror.

As part of this effort, we're pressing nations across the region, including our friends, to trust their people with greater freedom of speech and worship and assembly. We're giving strong support to young democracies. We're standing with reformers and dissidents and human rights activists across the region. Through new efforts like the Middle East peace partnership initiative and the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, we're supporting the rise of vibrant civil societies.

We're also advancing a broader vision that includes economic prosperity, quality health care and education, and women's rights. We've negotiated new free trade agreements

in the region, supported Saudi Arabia's accession to the World Trade Organization, and proposed a new Middle East free trade area. We have signed Millennium Challenge agreements with Jordan and Morocco to grant American assistance in return for anti-corruption measures, free market policies, and investments in health and education. We're training Middle Eastern schoolteachers, translating children's school books into Arabic, and helping young people get visas to study here in the United States.

We're encouraging Middle Eastern women to get involved in politics and to start their own businesses and take charge of their health through wise practices like breast cancer screening. Efforts like these extend hope to the corners of despair, and in this work we have had a lot of help, but no finer ambassador of good will than my wife, Laura Bush.

Finally, to advance all the principles that I've outlined—supporting our friends and pressuring our adversaries and extending freedom—America has launched a sustained initiative to help bring peace to the Holy Land. At the heart of this effort is the vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. I was the first American President to call for a Palestinian state and support—and build support for the two-state solution has been a top priority of my administration.

To earn the trust of Israeli leaders, we made it clear that no Palestinian state would be born of terror, we backed Prime Minister Sharon's courageous withdrawal from Gaza, and we supported his decision to build a security fence, not as a political border but to protect the people from terror.

To help the Palestinian people achieve the state they deserve, we insisted on Palestinian leadership that rejects terror and recognizes Israel's right to exist. Now that this leadership has emerged, we're strongly supporting its efforts to build institutions of a vibrant democratic state.

With good advice from leaders like former Prime Minister Tony Blair and Generals Jones, Dayton, Fraser, and Selva, the Palestinians are making progress toward capable security forces, a functioning legal system, Government Ministries that deliver services without corruption, and a market economy.

In all our efforts to promote a two-state solution, we have included Arab leaders from across the region, because we fully understand that their support will be essential for the creation of a state and lasting peace.

Last fall at Annapolis, Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab leaders came together at an historic summit. President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert agreed to launch direct negotiations on a peace agreement. Nations around the globe, including many in the Arab world, pledged to support them. The negotiations since Annapolis have been determined and substantial. Secretary Rice has encouraged both sides by hosting a series of trilateral meetings. And while the Israelis and Palestinians have not yet produced an agreement, they have made important progress. As they stated to the Quartet, they have laid a new foundation of trust for the future.

On this issue, and on our overall approach to the Middle East these past 8 years, America has been ambitious in vision, we have been bold in action, and we have been firm in purpose. Not every decision I've made has been popular, but popularity was never our aim. Our aim was to help a troubled region take the difficult first steps on the long journey to freedom and prosperity and hope. Some have called this idealistic, and no doubt it is. Yet it is the only practical way to help the people of the Middle East realize the dignity and justice they deserve. And it is the only practical way to protect the United States of America in the long term.

As with any large undertaking, these efforts have not always gone according to plan, and in some areas we've fallen short of our hopes. For example, the fight in Iraq has been longer and more costly than expected. The reluctance of entrenched regimes to open their political systems has been disappointing. There have been unfortunate setbacks at key points in the peace process, including the illness suffered by Prime Minister Sharon, the Hamas victory in the Palestinian elections, and the terrorist takeover of Gaza.

Despite these frustrations and disappointments, the Middle East in 2008 is a freer, more hopeful, and more promising place than it was in 2001.

For the first time in nearly three decades, the people of Lebanon are free from Syria's military occupation. Libya's nuclear weapons equipment is locked away in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Places like the UAE and Bahrain are emerging as centers of commerce. The region—the regime in Iran is facing greater pressure from the international community than ever before. Terrorist organizations like Al Qaida have failed decisively in their attempts to take over nations; they're increasingly facing ideological rejection in the Arab world.

Iraq has gone from an enemy of America to a friend of America, from sponsoring terror to fighting terror, and from a brutal dictatorship to a multireligious, multiethnic constitutional democracy. Instead of the Iraq we would see if a Saddam Hussein were in power—an aggressive regime vastly enriched by oil, defying the United Nations, bullying its Arab neighbors, threatening Israel, and pursuing a nuclear arms race with Iran—we see an Iraq emerging peacefully with its neighbors, welcoming Arab ambassadors back to Baghdad, and showing the Middle East a powerful example of a moderate, prosperous, free nation.

The most vexing problem in the region—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—there is now greater international consensus that at any point in modern memory. Israelis, Palestinians, and Arabs recognize the creation of a peaceful, democratic Palestinian state is in their interests. And through the Annapolis process, they started down a path that will end with two states living side by side in peace.

In fits and starts, political and economic reforms are advancing across the Middle East. Women have run for office in several nations and been named to important Government positions in Bahrain and Oman and Qatar, the UAE and Yemen. Trade and foreign investment have expanded. Several nations have opened up private universities, and Internet use has risen sharply. Across the region, conversations about freedom and reform are growing louder. Expectations about government responsiveness are rising, and people are defying the condescending view that the culture of the Middle East is unfit for freedom.

There are still serious challenges facing the Middle East. Iran and Syria continue to sponsor terror. Iran's uranium enrichment remains a major threat to peace. Many in the region still live under oppression. Yet the changes of the past 8 years herald the beginning of something historic and new. At long last, the Middle East is closing a chapter of darkness and fear and opening a new one written in the language of possibility and hope. For the first time in generations, the region represents something more than a set of problems to be solved or the site of energy resources to be developed. A free and peaceful Middle East will represent a source of promise and home of opportunity and a vital contributor to the prosperity of the world.

Those who ask what this future will look like need only look around. We see the new story of the Middle East in Iraqis waving ink-stained fingers, with Lebanese taking to streets in the Cedar Revolution. We see it in women taking their seats in elected Parliaments and bloggers telling the world their dreams. We see it in the skyscrapers rising above Abu Dhabi and living—and thriving Middle Eastern businesses that are now connected to the global economy. We see it in a Saudi king sponsoring an interfaith dialog, Palestinian reformers fighting corruption and terror, and Israelis who love their ancient land, but want to live in peace.

These are striking images, and they do point the way to a brighter future. I believe the day will come when the map of the Middle East shows a peaceful, secure Israel beside a peaceful and democratic Palestine. I believe the day will come when people from Cairo and Riyadh to Baghdad and Beirut to Damascus and Tehran live in free and independent societies, bound together by the ties of diplomacy and tourism and trade. The day will come when Al Qaida and Hizballah and Hamas are marginalized and then wither away, as Muslims across the region realize the emptiness of the terrorists' vision and the injustice of their cause.

Earlier this year, I laid out this vision in my address to the Israeli Knesset, and then in my address to the World Economic Forum in Egypt. It was not a Jewish vision or an

Arab vision or an American vision; it is a universal vision. It unites all who yearn for freedom and peace in the Middle East. And if we lead, and if we persevere, and if we keep faith in our ideals, that vision will become a reality someday.

Thanks for letting me come, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:09 p.m. in the Newseum. In his remarks, he referred to John L. Thornton, chairman of the board of trustees, Brookings Institute, who introduced the President; Haim Saban, chairman and chief executive officer, Saban Capital Group, Inc.; Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin S. Indyk, director, Saban Center for Middle East Policy; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Deputy Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz, and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; former Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom, Quartet Representative in the Middle East; Gen. James L. Jones, USMC (Ret.), Special Envoy for Middle East Security; Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, USA, U.S. Security Coordinator to Israel and the Palestinian Authority; Gen. William M. Fraser III, USAF, Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force; Lt. Gen. Paul J. Selva, USAF, assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; and King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. This item was not received in time for inclusion in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

December 6, 2008

Good morning. This weekend I'm attending the Army-Navy game in Philadelphia, and I'm looking forward to a great day of college football. But more importantly, I'm looking forward to spending time with the brave men and women of the United States military.

Throughout the past 8 years, I've seen the tremendous talent and courage of those who wear the uniform. Their efforts have overthrown tyrants, made our Nation safer, put terrorists on the run, and opened the door to liberty for more than 50 million people. And now, thanks to their work in Iraq and the courage of the Iraqi people, a hopeful new era is dawning for their democracy and ours.

Earlier this week, Iraq's Presidency Council approved two landmark agreements that will solidify Iraq's democratic gains, affirm its sovereignty, and put its relations with the United States on a strong and steady footing.

The first agreement that America and Iraq have signed is called a strategic framework agreement. This pact sets out a common vision for U.S.-Iraqi relations in the years ahead. Under this agreement, we will work together to bring greater stability to Iraq and the region. We'll promote trade and investment between our nations. And we will support Iraq's leaders and their citizens as they strengthen their democratic institutions.

Only a few years ago, such an agreement was unimaginable. Chaos and violence were consuming Iraq. Terrorists were seizing new ground and using violence to divide the Iraqi people along sectarian lines. And the nation was nearing the point of political collapse and civil war.

Today, violence is down dramatically. Our forces have struck powerful blows against Al Qaida. The Iraqi military is growing in capability, taking the lead in the fight against the extremists, and working across sectarian lines. Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish leaders are sitting together at the same table to peacefully resolve their differences and chart their country's future. And there is hope in the eyes of young Iraqis for the first time in many years.

The second agreement that America and Iraq have signed is a security agreement, known as a status of forces agreement. One of the primary purposes of this agreement is to ensure protection for our troops and Defense Department civilians as the Iraqi Government begins to exercise greater sovereignty. Our military commanders have assured me that the agreement's provisions meet this purpose. At the same time, it also respects the authority of the Iraqi Government. And it lays out a framework for the withdrawal of American forces in Iraq, a withdrawal that is possible because of the success of the surge.

This withdrawal will take place in two stages. The first stage will occur next year, when Iraqi forces assume the lead for security operations in all major population centers, while U.S. combat forces move out of

Iraqi cities and move into an overwatch role. After this transition has occurred, the draw-down of American forces will continue to the second stage, with all U.S. forces returning home from Iraq by the end of 2011.

As we enter this new phase in America's relations with Iraq, we have an opportunity to adopt a new perspective here at home. There were legitimate differences of opinion about the initial decision to remove Saddam Hussein and the subsequent conduct of the war. But now the surge and the courage of brave Iraqis have turned the situation around. And Americans should be able to agree that it is in our Nation's strategic and moral interests to support the free and democratic Iraq that is emerging in the heart of the Middle East.

The American people have sacrificed a great deal to reach this moment. The battle in Iraq has required a large amount of time and a large amount of money. Our men and women in uniform have carried out difficult and dangerous missions and endured long separations from friends and family. And thousands of our finest citizens have given their lives to make our country safer and bring us to this new day. The war in Iraq is not yet over. But thanks to these agreements and the courage of our men and women in Iraq, it is decisively on its way to being won.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6:50 a.m. on December 5 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 6. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 5 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at the Union League of Philadelphia's Unveiling of the President's Portrait in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

December 6, 2008

Good morning. Welcome to my hanging. [Laughter] Thank you for coming, and thank you for your warm welcome.

First, I'd like to compliment Mark Carder. He did a really fine job with a challenging subject. [Laughter] I was taken aback by how much gray paint you had to use—[laughter]—which speaks more about my job than yours. [Laughter] But thanks a lot. It's been a joy to work with you, and I'm confident this portrait will stand the test of time.

I want to thank Fred and Frank for welcoming me here. I thank you for the medal. I'm keeping pretty good company, which I will speak about in a minute.

First of all, I do want to thank the board of directors of the Union League for taking time out of your Saturday to be here. And I appreciate all the guests who have come as well.

I particularly want to say thanks to my friend Arlen Specter for joining us, and he—[applause]. It's been a joy working with you—most of the time. [Laughter] He's a pretty independent-minded fellow—[laughter]—who is honest and decent. And like me, he married very well. So Joan, thanks for being here, and I appreciate you supporting this good man during some very difficult times.

I thank the Hoopers for paying for this work. I thank Jim Straw and the Abraham Lincoln Foundation and the foundation members who are here today. I appreciate you preserving the legacy of a good man.

I am—it turns out, this award had been given to folks I have had the honor of serving with: Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, Secretary Tom Ridge—three good men who are dedicated and patriot public servants.

I'm especially proud to be a co-recipient with a guy I call 41, the 1987 Gold Medal Award winner, the guy I call dad; you call him President Bush. We owe our achievements to the same savvy political counselor and firm disciplinarian: Barbara. [Laughter] And they're both doing well, by the way. Mother is coming out of the hospital. I hope they don't put this on TV, but she's a tough old bird—[laughter]—whose spirits are soaring high.

The motto of the Union League is "Love of Country Leads." You obviously love our country, because you continue to lead in ways

that make Philadelphia a more compassionate place, and I want to thank you for that. I appreciate the fact that you have mentoring programs and internships and scholarships, that basically says the dream is for all who live in this country. I thank you for your efforts to preserve historical treasures. One can learn a lot from the past, and the Union League is doing its part to tell the true story of our great Nation.

In short, I thank you for your service to your community and our country.

I also thank you for preserving the legacy of Abraham Lincoln. I'm about to be a member of the ex-President's club, so I'll just call him Abe. *[Laughter]* If he were around I could say, "You call me W." *[Laughter]* He—I don't know if you know this or not, but there's a place in the Oval Office where the President puts the most influential President—portrait of, I guess you'd say, influential President. I'm somewhat conflicted about the influential President, so I say, 41's portrait hangs in my heart; 16 hangs on the wall.

I found it interesting that the League was founded in 1862 to support President Lincoln in a time when his leadership was deeply controversial. *[Laughter]* Look, I know how he felt. *[Laughter]*

But the principles on which he stood have stood the test of time. "All men are created equal under God," he said unflinchingly throughout his Presidency. Liberty is given to every man, woman, and child on the face of the Earth. I believe, like Lincoln, there is an Almighty, and a gift of that Almighty to every man is freedom. He has taught Presidents that you must act on your principles and make tough decisions, regardless of the political consequences.

I have been a—I have drawn strength from his example. I have learned lessons by reading about Abraham Lincoln. And I want to thank you for preserving his legacy.

And most importantly, I thank you for your kind words and your heartfelt prayers during the last 8 years. It has been—somebody said, "What's it's like to be President?" I said, "Some days you're happy; some days not so happy; every day joyous to serve the United States."

God bless you, and God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:38 a.m. in Lincoln Hall at the Union League of Philadelphia. In his remarks, he referred to painter Mark Carder; Frederick C. Haab, Jr., president, Union League of Philadelphia; Frank Giordano, member, and James B. Straw, chairman, board of trustees, Abraham Lincoln Foundation; and Bruce and Eileen Hooper, commissioners of the President's portrait.

Interview With Sam Ryan of CBS Sports in Philadelphia

December 6, 2008

Army-Navy Football Game

Mr. Ryan. Mr. President, we know this is one of the most storied rivalries in all of sports. What does the Army-Navy game mean to you?

The President. Well, it means to me that I have—I got a chance to come and be with people who will be joining the finest military in the history of the world.

Members of the U.S. Armed Forces

Mr. Ryan. When you look at these young players and the seniors, and you know that they enrolled in the academies after 9/11, what does that say about them?

The President. I stand in awe of somebody who would volunteer to serve America in a time of danger. It says that we are blessed to have people of such character in our country.

The Presidency

Mr. Ryan. Mr. President, I know you're probably doing a lot of reflecting here on December 6th. What will you miss the most about being President?

The President. I will miss a lot of things. But one of the things I have treasured the most is to be the Commander in Chief of men and women of courage and character and decency.

Mr. Ryan. Thank you, Mr. President.

NOTE: The interview began at 12:11 p.m. at Lincoln Financial Field. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Nadia Bilbassy Charters of MBC TV

December 5, 2008

The Oval Office

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Mr. President, nice to see you always.

The President. Welcome, welcome.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you very much. Thank you, sir.

The President. We are glad you're here.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you very much.

The President. Come on in to the Oval Office.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. We are grateful for this. Thank you. This is great.

The President. It's an interesting history here, and I kind of think one thing that your viewers might be interested in knowing is that the first decision I ever made as President—but I was actually President-elect—was, what color rug do you want? And one of the important things is to surround yourself with people who you can trust, and delegate. In this case, I delegated the rug design to Laura, my wife.

But I told her, I said, I want the rug to have a message, and that is "optimistic guy goes to work here." And so, as you can see, the rug really lights up the room. And I am optimistic about the future of the Middle East.

Freedom Agenda/Middle East

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Well, that's a great note, sir. You've been here 8 years. A few weeks and you're going to be leaving.

The President. I'm going home.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. You sat on this desk for 8 years, and you took many decisions regarding our region. You launched the greater Middle East initiative that you want to democratize, reform the Middle East. In retrospect, do you think that vision was realized? Would you do anything differently?

The President. Well, I think it began—it's the beginning of a very difficult vision to implement. But I felt it was necessary for a couple of important reasons. One, I believe we're in an ideological struggle against people who want to achieve their ideological vision through the use of violence and murder.

And I believe it is essential that you have an alternative available for people; the one I happen to believe in is based upon liberty. I don't think this is an American vision, see. And I tell people this, that I do believe there is a universal God, and a gift of that Almighty to all of us, whether we be Methodists or Muslims or nothing, is freedom. And so freedom is a great alternative.

But I also believe there's a moral calling. If you believe there's an Almighty God, and a gift of that Almighty to everybody is freedom, then I think you have to—if you can do something about it, that you have to act on that, so that moms can grow up in a society that is hopeful for their children, you know, that their children are—can realize dreams.

And to me the best type of society to do that is freedom. But it's very hard; it's difficult. And so you have to plant a seed, and you have to cultivate the seed, and eventually the crops will bloom. And we're beginning to see the crops beginning to bloom in parts of the Middle East.

War on Terror

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Sir, some people say that the war on terror is a war on Islam.

The President. Yes.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Yet you went to the first mosque after 9/11, and you spoke there. How do you convince people in the Middle East that George Bush is not fighting a war against Islam?

The President. No, I know, and it troubles my soul, because I believe we're all God's children. And I hear people say, "George Bush doesn't like Muslims; he wants to fight Muslims." And, first, I thank you for giving me the chance to, hopefully, set the record straight. But I am objecting to anybody who murders innocent people to achieve their objectives. I don't think people who murder in the name of religion are truly religious people. And secondly, I would hope that people would know that when we try to use some of our influence to help on education programs, for example, or we welcome students, Saudi students, to the United States to study here, that it's a sign of respect and a sign of my desire to reach out to all people regardless of their religion.

Reflections on the President's Time in Office

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Absolutely. I wanted also to ask you about, in the last 8 years, if you look back, would you do things differently? Would you have done things that you probably thought for a second—for the second time, I would have done them a different way?

The President. I'm sure there will be. I mean, there's been some disappointments.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Like what?

The President. Well, like, Abu Ghraib was a terrible disappointment. And admittedly, I wasn't there on the site, but I was the Commander in Chief of a military where these disgraceful acts took place that sent the absolute wrong image about America and our military.

You know, parts of Iraq—it's taken longer than I thought it would. On the other hand, I am pleased to see a multiethnic society begin to emerge. I talked to the leaders of Iraq yesterday and today and congratulated them on doing some hard work. And I love to hear their spirit in their voice.

And so I'm confident history will say, "Oh, Bush could have done it better here," or, "Bush could have done it better there." But I think from the strategic point of view, I'm confident that the idea of moving liberty in the region, a two-state solution to help the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the liberation of Iraq, and the followup with the—to help the Iraqis realize their sovereignty—a strong push-back against Iran—I believe when people objectively analyze this administration, they'll say, "Well, I see now what he was trying to do."

Middle East Peace Process

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. I mean, the Arab peace initiative, it was a framework. Do you think that President-elect Obama should use it in terms of achieving peace in the Middle East?

The President. I definitely think it was a major breakthrough for then Crown Prince, now His Majesty, King Abdallah, to take the initiative and lay out the conditions for peace. And it is, I think, a useful foundation to help solve a longstanding problem. I do believe there will be a Palestinian state. I feel com-

fortable in saying that the decision—my decision to promote a Palestinian state, being the first President to do so, was the right thing for peace—right thing for peace for the Palestinians, right thing for peace for the Israelis. And His Majesty was very useful and very bold in laying out the Arab peace initiative.

The Rose Garden

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. We're going to talk about all this in details so—

The President. Yes, come on, I'll show you the Rose Garden.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. —let's walk and talk as we go down to the Map Room.

The President. You've seen the Rose Garden before.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. I have, many times.

The President. Many times. [Laughter]

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you, sir. It's beautiful.

The President. It is a beautiful day.

The Presidency

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. What are you going to miss most about this place?

The President. Well, you know, I'll miss a lot. I am—I've got such respect for our military, and I admire people in our military so very much. I'll miss being the Commander in Chief. But, you know, the White House is full of incredibly gracious and kind people who work hard to make family life as normal as possible. And so I'll miss a lot of the people we work with here.

Post-Presidency Plans

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. And what's your plans?

The President. Well, I'm going to move back to Texas.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. And what are you going to do there?

The President. And I'm going to, you know, write a book, I think, about what it was like to be President and some of the hard decisions I had to make. I'm going to start a institute that will promote freedom. And this will be an interesting place, particularly in regards to the Middle East, because this will be a place where there will be a forum

for people with different issues to come and discuss.

You know, I would love to have, you know, Palestinians, such as the President or the Prime Minister, to come and describe to the Americans what it was like to be in that part of the world. Or you know, there's just a lot of really interesting opportunities for people to come and lecture and think and talk.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. And in your book, obviously, we're talking about foreign policy. Most of it happened in the Middle East—okay, we're off camera now. I hope the guy is okay.

The President. A lot of—yes. He fell into the Rose Garden.

[At this point, there was a change in location, and the interview resumed as follows.]

Middle East Peace Process/West Bank

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Mr. President, thank you very much for this exclusive interview with us—

The President. Thank you.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. —and thank you very much for granting us, to MEBC, and to me, personally, on behalf of Arab media. I really do appreciate it; I'm very grateful.

The President. Thank you. I've enjoyed working with you. You've been a very fair journalist, and it's been a pleasure to have known you.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you, sir. You are the first American President to call for the establishment of a Palestinian state. You had hoped that you would have this state realized when you leave office. Do you think that you could have done more? Do you think that you have thrown all of the weight of the U.S. behind this vision?

The President. Absolutely, we threw all the muscle and all the weight of the United States behind the vision. I am—you know, I wish there would have been a clearly defined state by the time I left office. However, I do take comfort in a couple of things.

One, the attitude toward a Palestinian state has shifted. I think there's universal recognition in the region that in order for there to be peace, there must be two states living side by side in peace. Secondly, I am pleased that Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas,

after Annapolis, have worked very hard to narrow the differences on a variety of issues. And they have; they've made substantial progress.

Thirdly, I am pleased that there is the Arab peace plan, which is an essential part of creating the conditions for a Palestinian state to evolve. Fourthly, I'm grateful that at the Annapolis conference all Arab nations were represented, which is an important signal, because I learned a lesson in studying previous efforts for peace that there must be regional buy-in. In other words, the nations in the region must stand with the Palestinians, in particular, and say this is—we support you.

And so—and fifthly, by the way, I am pleased with the progress being made to help the development of an infrastructure in the West Bank. Prime Minister Fayyad has asked for help. A lot of nations are helping, including the United States; we're helping with security measures. Generals Dayton and Jones have been very helpful. My friend Prime Minister Blair—former Prime Minister Blair, who was here the other night for dinner—and I talked about the economics that are beginning to take place in the region. In other words, a state can be defined on paper, but it also has to be defined in a civil society and a strong economy. And it's beginning to happen.

Middle East Peace Process/Gaza Strip

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. How do you see the Palestinian issue evolving in the next few years? I mean, Prime Minister Tony Blair said, actually, there's no peace without Gaza, and I guess that means Hamas as well. Do you share that vision?

The President. I share the vision that the only way there's going to be peace is where those who assume that violence is necessary to achieve peace cannot be a part of the process. In other words, people have to renounce violence in order to have peace. It's contradictory to say, I am going to use violence to achieve my objectives, and oh, by the way, I'm for peace.

And so, ultimately, Gaza has got to be—look, Gaza has to be a part of a Palestinian state, and the Palestinian state has to be contiguous territory; it cannot look like Swiss

cheese. And it's got to be a state in which the sovereignty of the Palestinian people is—reigns supreme.

Middle East Peace Process/Palestinian State

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. So you're confident it's going to emerge?

The President. I am. I really am. There will be fits and starts. I mean, if this were a straight line between vision and reality, it would have happened. But there's a lot of complicating factors. Obviously, the terrorists create complicating factors. Secondly, politics creates complicating factors, both within the Palestinians, as well as the Israelis, as we have seen.

But nevertheless, the foundation is there. People—if you give people a choice, ultimately give them a choice between two states side by side in peace or this unresolved dispute, what would they choose? They would choose peace. And this will happen.

Middle East Peace Process

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. What will President-elect Obama pick up from where you left?

The President. Well, I think we've left it in good shape. We've left it with the vision intact. In other words, a lot of people now share the vision of two states. As I say, there's been progress between the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian President toward what a state should look like. I think the Israelis are getting—be more comfortable with the notion that a state won't create less security for them, but more security for them. And the Arab world, because of the Arab initiative as well as the Annapolis conference, are showing more and more willingness to be constructive partners in getting peace.

Saudi Arabia-U.S. Relations

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. The U.S. and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have a close strategic relationship. You, personally, have a very good working relationship with King Abdallah. Yet you don't see eye to eye on many issues. How did you resolve that?

The President. I think we do. I think we got—I think we agree more than we dis-

agree. First of all, I hold His Majesty in high respect. I appreciate, for example, the religious dialog that he instigated, and I was honored to be invited to go to New York. I thought that was a very smart way to help promote understanding, and understanding eventually leads to peace.

He is a man who understands that terrorists can destroy his own society. And so I—I don't know if the world understands this or not, but Saudi Arabia has been very firm in dealing with Al Qaida. And remember, it was Al Qaida that tried to blow up their oil infrastructure; they killed their citizens. And His Majesty knows full well that that kind of terrorism cannot coexist with a peaceful society. When I have my discussions with him, I find there's a lot more common ground than not.

Saudi Arabia/Middle East Peace Process

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. So there's no disagreement with the Palestinian issue with what—

The President. I think His Majesty—look, the Arab peace initiative actually talks about, you know, Israel solving its problems with Lebanon and Syria and the Palestinians, and there will be universal recognition when that happens. And so to me that is a very positive statement. And that the idea of a Palestinian state as part—as far as being part of the solution to the overall problem is something I believe he agrees with. I don't want to put words in his mouth, because he's my dear friend.

Qatar

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. In the recent years, there was an emergence of Qatar as a regional player in many of the countries in the Middle East. Do you see that played on the—kind of at the expense of traditional allies of the U.S., like Saudi Arabia and Egypt?

The President. I think it's going to be very important for the initiatives instigated by Qatar to show results, for example, with Hamas. Now, Hamas—in my judgment, the violent wing of Hamas damages the prospects for a Palestinian state. Or with Hizballah—I believe that Hizballah is a very

destabilizing influence, particularly when they resort to violence.

So what I would look for, and do look for, and would hope the next President would look for is, okay, are these initiatives bearing fruit? We, of course, appreciate, you know, our basing agreement with Qatar, and we thank them very much for that. And we would hope that they would follow through to deliver the results for peace, which is what we all want, I hope.

Iraq

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. We're going to move to Iraq. Recently, the U.S. and the Iraqi Government have signed the status of forces agreement. What do you think of it?

The President. I think that the strategic framework agreement and the status of forces agreement is a sign that the Iraqi democracy is emerging and is healthy. There was a lot of debate on the SFA and SOFA, and there were people that were—you know, a lot of people were saying, well, this will be bad for Iraq, and others say this will be good for Iraq. And after the debate was over, it was ratified by the people's assembly, and I think that's a healthy sign. I also think it's very good to have an agreement in place that recognizes the sovereignty of Iraq and recognizes that the United States will be moving its forces out of cities and then eventually out of the country based upon success.

War on Terror

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. In retrospect, would you think that this war could be averted?

The President. We tried to avert it. I know people say, "Oh, George Bush likes to use the military." That's the hardest thing for a President to do, is to put soldiers in harm's way, because I knew what would happen. And, you know, that's of course manifested when I meet with mothers of fallen soldiers or wives or husbands. And it is incredibly sad, as I'm sure you can imagine, very emotional, to hug and to cry with families. And I've met with a lot of families—a lot—so I knew the consequences. I really did.

And I was hoping that through diplomatic pressure that we would be able to resolve this issue peacefully. And I remember—you

can't take this Iraq out of the post-9/11 context. We'd been attacked, and here's a man who I have said repeatedly, you know, was not directly involved in 9/11, but had used weapons of mass destruction and had supported terror and had paid the families of suicide bombers and was a sworn enemy of the United States and had invaded two countries and had ignored, you know, 17 or however many resolutions in the United Nations. He was a threat.

But I did go to the United Nations, as you remember. Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences, is what 1441 said. And I firmly believe the choice was Saddam Hussein's to make, and he made a fateful choice. Then the interesting point was, after he was removed, with a broad coalition of countries, what do we do? You know, do we pick a strong man and say, here's America's guy and put him in there? Or do we work so that the Iraqi citizens would be able to pick their own form of government and their own people? And that's what we chose to do, and it's been really hard.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Was it worth it?

The President. Absolutely. I believe a Middle East with Saddam Hussein in power today would be different, much different than the one today. I think you'd see a man with a lot of oil wealth willing to use terrorist connections to try to compete, for example, with Hizballah.

There could conceivably be a nuclear arms race taking place, while even though Saddam Hussein did not have nuclear weapons, it is certain, at least to the experts, that he still had the capacity to make nuclear weapons. And there would be nothing more destabilizing for the Middle East than to see Iran trying to develop a nuclear weapon and Iraq trying to develop a nuclear weapon.

So I think the Middle East is a much better place without Saddam Hussein in power, and the sacrifices by both the Iraqi people and the coalition forces to achieve where we are today.

Iran

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. But some say, sir, that the removal of Saddam Hussein has bolstered Iran and made emergent as a regional superpower.

The President. I disagree completely with that. I think the emergence of a democratic and stable Iraq on Iran's border is in the—will help more likely keep the peace vis-a-vis Iran in the Middle East.

Secondly, what has changed with Iran is universal recognition about the dangers of Iran having a—the capacity to make a nuclear weapon. And therefore, one of the objectives of my administration is to create an international coalition all saying the same thing, which is, you have defied the IAEA, therefore, you cannot be trusted to say that you're only enriching for civilian nuclear power; therefore, stop your process, verify they stopped their enrichment process; otherwise, there will continue to be international sanctions.

Iran-U.S. Relations

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. The Iranian—recently your administration has been involved diplomatically with the Iranians. Do you think that actually you can bring them to the international fold by engaging them diplomatically?

The President. We're trying to—we've offered them a way forward; it's verifiably suspend your enrichment. And we will be at the table with other nations.

And so, well, we discussed Iraq with Iran in a regional context. But we have said there is—if you want to have diplomatic relations and discussions with the United States, verifiably suspend your enrichment program. Our objective is to stop their gain of knowledge that would enable them to build a nuclear weapon, because having a nuclear weapon would be incredibly destabilizing to the region.

And so there is a way forward for them to have diplomacy. But it's their choice, and thus far, they have not chosen to do it. And I regret that our relations are with Iran—are this way, because I have great respect for the Iranian people and the Iranian history. And I know that they can have a better future with the rest of the world, if their leadership were to abandon its desire to learn how to build a nuclear weapon.

Syria

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. I have a few questions about just Syria and Lebanon, but my time is over.

The President. Well, thank you for your—you're a beautiful interviewer.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you, sir. So can I go ahead?

The President. Quickly. And then I really do have to go.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Sure, absolutely. I wanted to talk about Syria. Basically, the U.S. attacked Syria. But do you see—

The President. The U.S.—

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. —attacked Syria recently. There was a target inside Syria that was attacked by—

The President. Allegedly, yes.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Allegedly. But do you see this kind of tension will succeed soon, or do you see the U.S. diplomatically engaged in Syria?

The President. First of all, we discussed no operations. Secondly, we have engaged Syria early in my administration with Secretary Colin Powell and others. And our message was, if you'd like to have better relations with us, stop housing Hamas, violent Hamas; stop destabilizing the democracy of Lebanon; stop facilitating the flow of terrorists into Iraq; be a constructive neighbor to countries, and we can have better relations. And they have, thus far, chosen to do that. Again, there is a way forward.

But my worry about just sitting down with people and hoping that they end up behaving differently is that oftentimes it reinforces behavior that is not in our interests. And so I believe in conditional diplomacy. Now, there is a lot of multilateral diplomacy going on out of this administration. But in this case, just like Iran, we will have diplomatic relations if you choose, but there's got to be behavioral change in order to justify it.

Lebanon

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. And can you stabilize Lebanon?

The President. I've been trying to—one of the great successes has been to get 30,000 or so Syrian troops out of Lebanon. I think one of the real keys to peace in the Middle

East is Lebanon. And Lebanon is a democracy. I've met their President recently here in the Oval Office, which—had a very a good discussion. I've been very impressed by Prime Minister Siniora's courage and boldness. We want to help Lebanon have an armed forces that are effective, so that they can protect their people. And we have been working very hard for 7 years to free Lebanon as much as possible from foreign interference, so that its democracy can grow and mature and be a stable contributor to the region.

President's Legacy in the Middle East

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. How would you like the people in the Middle East to remember you?

The President. I would hope they would remember me as George W. Bush, as a man who respects their religion, respects human rights and human dignity, and prays for peace.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you very much. Thank you for your time. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began taping at 1 p.m. in the Oval Office and continued on the Colonnade and in the Map Room at the White House, for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, USA, U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority; Gen. James L. Jones, USMC (Ret.), Special Envoy for Middle East Security; former Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom, Quartet Representative in the Middle East; former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell; and President Michel Sleiman and Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 7. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Memorandum on Suspension of Limitations Under the Jerusalem Embassy Act

December 4, 2008

Presidential Determination No. 2009–8

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Suspension of Limitations Under the Jerusalem Embassy Act

Pursuant to the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, including section 7(a) of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 (Public Law 104–45) (the “Act”), I hereby determine that it is necessary, in order to protect the national security interests of the United States, to suspend for a period of 6 months the limitations set forth in sections 3(b) and 7(b) of the Act.

You are hereby authorized and directed to transmit this determination to the Congress, accompanied by a report in accordance with section 7(a) of the Act, and to publish the determination in the *Federal Register*.

This suspension shall take effect after transmission of this determination and report to the Congress.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., December 16, 2008.]

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 8, and it will be published in the *Federal Register* on December 17.

Remarks at the Children's Holiday Reception

December 8, 2008

The President. Welcome to the White House.

Children. Thank you.

The President. Yes! We're excited you are here. And we're excited you're here for a couple of reasons. One, we love to see the wonder in people's eyes when they get to see the majesty of the White House at this time of year. And I'm looking in your eyes, and I'm seeing wonder.

Secondly, I am glad you're here because I wanted to thank your moms and dads for serving the United States of America. We love being with our military families, because it gives us a chance to express the sincere and deep appreciation of all Americans for the sacrifices that families make. So I want to thank you for standing by your moms and dads and telling them you're proud of them and telling them you love them.

Thirdly, I'm going to ask you to do us a favor, and that is, when you email mom or dad, just tell them you came by the White House—[laughter]—and the President and Laura, the First Lady, sent a special holiday greeting. So you'll be the messenger. So your job is to say, we respect your mom and dad, we admire your mom and dad, and we pray for your mom and dad. So would you do that for us?

Children. Yes.

The President. And fourthly, I'm glad to be here because I get to introduce my wife. [Laughter] It's a pretty neat thing, isn't it?

Children. Yes.

The President. Now, Laura tells me you've already seen Santa—

Children. Yes.

The President. —had a few cookies—

Children. Yes.

The President. Yes? I'm surprised there's not more wiggling going on. [Laughter] At any rate, please welcome my dear wife, First Lady Laura Bush.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:01 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Remarks Following Briefings at the National Counterterrorism Center in McLean, Virginia

December 8, 2008

I have just spent a fascinating morning here at the NCTC. The NCTC is a place where our Government gathers threat assess—or threats and intelligence to better protect the American people.

I want to thank both Mikes for taking a strong lead in doing our most important job,

which is to motivate people to protect this country, and that's what takes place here.

There's a lot of hard-working Americans who—this—by the way, this center is up 24/7. And any time a piece of data comes in that portends any kind of threat, it's analyzed and, if need be, acted upon.

So, most Americans don't know this facility exists. It came to be after the September the 11th attacks, when we all came around and asked the question: How better can we protect the country?

And so I've come by to thank the—all the people who work here, and—because they deserve our thanks. They deserve a Government that understands that the biggest danger we face is from a terrorist attack, and that the best way to defend the country is to stay on the offense and keep the pressure on them constantly and, at the same time, spread freedom as the great alternative to the ideology of those—of the killers.

This is a challenge that's going to face this country for a while. But it's a challenge that can be better met because of facilities like the NCTC and the fact that we've given the professionals the tools, such as listening to the terrorist phone calls, to better protect America.

And so I want to thank you all for your leadership. Appreciate you having me. And again, I thank all the good folks who work here for their dedication.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:23 p.m. at the National Counterterrorism Center. In his remarks, he referred to Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell; and Michael Leiter, Acting Director, National Counterterrorism Center.

Message on the Observance of Eid al-Adha

December 8, 2008

I send greetings to Muslims around the world celebrating Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice.

Eid al-Adha commemorates Abraham's devotion to God, and it reminds us of God's mercy and provision for his people. Abraham's deep faith was tested when God asked

him to sacrifice his son. Although Abraham was set to faithfully obey, God provided an alternate sacrifice that spared his son. During this holiday, Muslims around the world honor Abraham's trust in God and celebrate God's love through acts of charity and joyous feasts with family, friends, and others in their community.

Our Nation is blessed by vibrant Muslim communities. On this holiday, all Americans celebrate our religious liberty, and we remember that religious freedom belongs not to any one nation but to the world.

Laura and I send our best wishes for a blessed holiday.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Proclamation 8328—Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, 2008

December 8, 2008

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The United States was founded on the principle that government must respect people's rights to speak freely, worship as they choose, and pursue their dreams in liberty. As we remember the enduring importance of our Constitution's Bill of Rights, our thoughts turn to those who have yet to secure these precious liberties. During Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, Americans celebrate the rights bestowed upon all by our Creator and reaffirm our deep commitment to helping those whose desire for liberty and justice is still dismissed and denied.

In a free society, every person is treated with dignity and can rise as high as their talents and hard work will take them. Yet in countries like Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Syria, and Zimbabwe, fervent pleas for freedom are silenced by tyranny and oppression. So long as there are people who fight for liberty, the United

States will stand with them and speak out for those who have no other voice.

Freedom is the eternal birthright of all mankind, and during Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, we renew our commitment to lead the cause of human rights and pray for the day when the light of liberty will shine on all of humanity.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim December 10, 2008, as Human Rights Day; December 15, 2008, as Bill of Rights Day; and the week beginning December 10, 2008, as Human Rights Week. I call upon the people of the United States to mark these observances with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this eighth day of December, in the year of our Lord two thousand eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-third.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:15 a.m., December 11, 2008]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 9, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on December 12.

Remarks at the United States Military Academy at West Point in West Point, New York

December 9, 2008

Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you, General, for your warm welcome. Thank you for inviting me here to West Point. I now know why you're so happy I'm here—[laughter]—all classes were canceled.

I had the honor of sitting next to the General and Judy during the game over the weekend. I am disappointed I could not bring the Commander in Chief's Trophy with me. However, you just get the Commander in Chief.

This is my last visit to a military academy as President, so I thought I would exercise

a certain prerogative of office one last time: I hereby absolve all cadets who are on restriction for minor conduct offenses. As always, I always—I leave it to General Hagenbeck to determine what “minor” means. [*Laughter*]

I really am proud to be with you today. I appreciate General Mike Linnington and his wife Brenda for meeting me. It turns out Brenda was a—is a 1981 West Point graduate.

I appreciate being here with General Pat Finnegan and Joan. Today on Air Force One, Congressman John Shimkus, 1980 West Point graduate, and Congressman Geoff Davis, 1981 West Point graduate, flew down with me. It’s my honor to let them fly on the big bird. [*Laughter*]

There are many honors that come with the Presidency, but none higher than serving as Commander in Chief in the greatest Armed Forces on Earth. Every one of you is a volunteer. You came to this academy in a time of war, knowing all the risks that come with military service. I want to thank you for making the noble and selfless decision to serve our country. And I will always be grateful to the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States military.

As West Point cadets, you’re part of a generation that has witnessed extraordinary change in the world. Two decades ago, the cold war was nearing its end, and the Soviet Union was about to collapse. You were just beginning your lives. About the same time, another threat was quietly gathering. In hidden corners of the world, violent religious extremists were plotting ways to advance their radical aims and their grim ideology. We saw the results in a series of horrifying blows: the truck bombing of the World Trade Center, the attack of Khobar Towers, the bombing of our Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the strike on the USS *Cole*.

For many years, America treated these attacks as isolated incidents and responded with limited measures. And then came September the 11th, 2001. In the space of a single morning, we realized that we were facing a worldwide movement of fanatics pledged to our destruction. We saw that conditions of repression and despair on the other side

of the world could bring suffering and death to our own streets.

As a result, America reshaped our approach to national security. Here at home, we hardened our defenses and created the Department of Homeland Security. We gave our national security professionals vital new tools, like the PATRIOT Act, and the ability to monitor terrorist communications. We reorganized our intelligence community to better meet the needs of war against these terrorists, including increasing the number of intelligence officers. We deployed aggressive financial measures to freeze their assets and to cut off their money. We launched diplomatic initiatives to pressure our adversaries and attract new partners to our cause.

We also made dramatic changes to both our military strategy and our—the military itself. We resolved that we would not wait to be attacked again, and so we went on the offense against the terrorists overseas so we never had to face them here at home. We recognized that we needed strong partners at our side, so we helped strengthen the counterterrorism capabilities of our allies. We understood, as I said here at West Point in 2002, “If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long.” So we made clear that hostile regimes sponsoring terror or pursuing weapons of mass destruction would be held to account.

We concluded that we are engaged in an ideological struggle, so we launched an effort to discredit the hateful vision of the extremists and advance the hopeful alternative of freedom. We saw the urgency of staying a step ahead of our enemies, so we transformed our military both to prevail on the battlefields of today and to meet the threats of tomorrow.

These changes will have a direct impact on your military careers. This morning I’m going to give you a report on where we stand in each of these areas and the challenges that lie ahead.

First, within weeks of September the 11th, our Armed Forces began taking the fight to the terrorists around the world, and we have not stopped. From the Horn of Africa to the islands of Southeast Asia to wherever these thugs hide, we and our allies applied the full range of military and intelligence assets to

keep unrelenting pressure on Al Qaida and its affiliates. We have severely weakened the terrorists. We've disrupted plots to attack our homeland. We have captured or killed hundreds of Al Qaida leaders and operatives in more than two dozen countries, including the man who masterminded the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

The terrorists continue to pose serious challenges, as the world saw in the terrible attack in Mumbai last month. Al Qaida's top two leaders remain at large. Yet they are facing pressure so intense that the only way they can stay alive is to stay underground. The day will come, the day will come when they receive the justice they deserve.

Second, we've helped key partners and allies strengthen their capabilities in the fight against the terrorists. We've increased intelligence sharing with friends and allies around the world. We've provided training and support to counterterrorism partners like the Philippines and Indonesia and Jordan and Saudi Arabia. These partners have made enormous contributions in the war on terror. For example, Indonesia has crippled the terrorist group JI. Saudi Arabia has killed or captured hundreds of Al Qaida terrorists. And in Europe, security services have broken up terrorist cells in Germany and Denmark, in Turkey and the United Kingdom.

One of the most important challenges we will face, and you will face, in the years ahead is helping our partners assert control over ungoverned spaces. This problem is most pronounced in Pakistan, where areas along the Afghanistan border are home to Taliban and to Al Qaida fighters. The Pakistani Government and people understand the threat, because they have been victims of terror themselves. They're working to enforce the law and fight terror in the border areas. And our government is providing strong support for these efforts. And at the same time, we have made it clear to Pakistan, and to all our partners, that we will do what is necessary to protect American troops and the American people.

Third, we have made clear that governments that sponsor terror are as guilty as the terrorists and will be held to account. After 9/11, we applied the doctrine to Afghanistan. We removed the Taliban from power. We

shut down training camps where Al Qaida planned the attacks on our country. We liberated more than 25 million Afghans. Now America and our 25 NATO allies and 17 partner nations are standing with the Afghan people as they defend their free society. The enemy is determined, the terrain is harsh, and the battle is difficult. But our coalition will stay in this fight. We will not let the Taliban or Al Qaida return to power. And Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven for terrorists.

We also took a hard look at the danger posed by Iraq, a country that combined support for terror, the development and the use of weapons of mass destruction, violence against its own people, aggression against its neighbors, hostility to the United States, and systemic violation of United Nations resolutions. After seeing the destruction of September the 11th, we concluded that America could not afford to allow a regime with such a threatening and violent record to remain in the heart of the Middle East. So we offered Saddam Hussein a final chance to peacefully resolve the issue. And when he refused, we acted with a coalition of nations to protect our people and liberated 25 million Iraqis.

The battle in Iraq has been longer and more difficult than expected. Foreign terrorists, former regime elements, and Iraqi insurgents—often with outside support—combined to drive up violence and bring the country to the verge of chaos. So we adopted a new strategy, and rather than retreating, sent more troops into Baghdad in Iraq. And when the surge met its objective, we began to bring our troops home under a policy of return on success. Last week, Iraq approved two agreements that formalize diplomatic and economic and security ties with America and set a framework for the drawdown of American forces as the fight in Iraq nears a successful end.

Fourth, America recognized the only way to defeat the terrorists in the long run is to present an alternative to their hateful ideology. So when we overthrew the dictators in Afghanistan and Iraq, we refused to take the easy option and instill friendly strongmen in their place. Instead, we're doing the tough work of helping democratic societies emerge

as examples for people all across the Middle East. We're pressing nations around the world, including our friends, to trust their people with greater freedom of speech and worship and assembly. We're advancing a broader vision of reform that includes economic prosperity and quality health care and education and vibrant civil societies and women's rights.

The results of these efforts are unfolding slowly and unevenly, but there are encouraging signs. From Iraq and Afghanistan to Lebanon and Pakistan, voters defied the terrorists to cast their ballots in free elections. In places like Iraq's Anbar Province, people have seen what life under the Taliban looks like, and they decided they want no part it—actually, it was life under Al Qaida looks like.

You know, mothers don't want to raise their child in a neighborhood where thugs run and where thugs brutalize people. People want to live in peace. People want to live in freedom. Muslims from Jordan and Turkey to India and Indonesia have seen their brothers and sisters massacred and recoil from the terrorists. And even within the jihadist ranks, religious scholars have begun to criticize Al Qaida and its brutal tactics. In these ideological rejections, we see the beginning of Al Qaida's ultimate demise, because in the long run, the ideology of hatred and fear cannot possibly compete with the power of hope and freedom.

Finally, we are transforming our military for a new kind of war that we're fighting now and for wars of tomorrow. This transformation was a top priority for the enterprising leader who served as my first Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. Today, because of his leadership and the leadership of Secretary Bob Gates, we have made our military better trained, better equipped, and better prepared to meet the threats facing America today and tomorrow and long in the future.

As part of our transformation effort, we are arming our troops with intelligence and weapons and training and support they need to face an enemy that wages asymmetric battle. See, this enemy hides among the civilian population, and they use terror tactics like roadside bombs to attack our forces, to demoralize local population, and to try to shake the will of the American people.

To defeat this enemy, we have equipped our troops with real-time battlefield intelligence capabilities that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. In Iraq and Afghanistan, troops in the field have used advanced technologies like global positioning systems to direct air strikes that take out the enemy while sparing innocent life. We've expanded America's arsenal of unmanned aerial vehicles from fewer than 170 when I took office to more than 6,000 today. We're arming Predator drones. We're using them to stay on the hunt against the terrorists who would do us harm.

We've expanded America's special operations forces. With more forces—more of these forces on the battlefield, we can respond more quickly to actionable intelligence on the terrorists who are in hiding. Over the past 8 years, we have more than doubled funding for special operators. We created the first-ever special operations command within the Marines. We have given Special Operations Command the lead role in the global war against the terrorists.

In addition to these upgrades in our counterterrorism capabilities, we have placed a new focus on counterinsurgency. The Army has published a new counterinsurgency manual written by a distinguished graduate of this academy, General David Petraeus. The central objectives of this counterinsurgency strategy are to secure the population and gain support of the people and train local forces to take the responsibility on their own.

One of the reasons we're meeting these objectives in Iraq is the ability to rapidly deploy brigade combat teams. These teams can join the battle on short notice as organized and cohesive units. With these teams in the fight, our Army is better able to carry out its counterinsurgency objectives and better equipped to defeat the enemies we'll face as the 21st century unfolds.

Our counterinsurgency strategy also stresses the importance of following up security gains with real benefits in people's daily lives. To better meet that objective, we created Provincial Reconstruction Teams or PRTs. These teams pair with military personnel civilian experts in areas like economics and agriculture and law enforcement and education. In both Iraq and Afghanistan,

these teams are helping local communities create jobs and deliver basic services and keep the terrorists from coming back. PRTs bring diplomats, aid workers, and other experts from across the government into the fight, and we must expand them in the years to come.

To better institutionalize all the changes we've made in recent years, we have transformed the education and training our troops receive. We're taking the lessons we've learned in Afghanistan and Iraq and teaching them at military academies and training centers across our country. For example, every branch of the military now receives the counterinsurgency training that was once reserved for special operations forces. Here at West Point, you've created a new Combating Terrorism Center that allows you to gain insights from the battles of today and apply them as you lead our military into the future.

In addition to making these changes to help our troops prevail in the war on terror, we've been transforming our military since early 2001 to confront other challenges that may emerge in the decades ahead. For example, we have begun the most sweeping transformation of America's global force posture since the end of World War II. We're shifting troops from cold war garrisons in Europe and Asia so they can surge more rapidly to troubled spots around the world. We've established new military commands to meet challenges unique to Africa and to support our homeland.

We've invested more than a half a trillion dollars in research and development, so we can build even more advanced capabilities to protect America from the dangers of a new century. We're making our forces more joint and interoperable, so they can cooperate seamlessly across different services and with foreign partners. And to confront an emerging threat to our economy, our defense systems, and individual citizens, the Federal Government is cooperating closely with the private sector to improve security in cyberspace.

One of the most serious dangers facing our people is the threat of a rogue regime armed with ballistic missiles. In 2001, I announced withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. I did so because it constrained our ability to develop

the technologies needed to defend ourselves against the threat of blackmail by rogue states. With these constraints removed, we have developed and deployed new defenses capable of protecting American cities from ballistic missile attack.

This system can now defend America against limited missile attacks from North-east Asia. Concluded agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic to establish missile defense sites on their territories to help protect against ballistic missile attacks from the Middle East. Because we acted, America now has an initial capability to protect our people from a ballistic missile attack.

As we built new defenses against a missile attack, we also worked with Russia to make historic reductions in offensive nuclear weapons. When these reductions are complete, the total U.S. nuclear stockpile will be at its lowest level since the Eisenhower administration. These reductions are part of a new approach to strategic deterrence that relies on both nuclear and conventional strike forces, as well as strong defenses. We're investing in new technologies that will ensure the long-term safety and security and reliability and effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent. This approach sends a clear message to the world: We'll reduce our reliance on nuclear weapons while keeping America's strategic deterrent unchallenged.

With all the actions we've taken these past 8 years, we've laid a solid foundation on which future Presidents and future military leaders can build. America's military today is stronger, more agile, and better prepared to confront threats to our people than it was 8 years ago. In the years ahead, our Nation must continue developing the capabilities to take the fight to our enemies across the world. We must stay on the offensive. We must be determined, and we must be relentless to do our duty to protect the American people from harm.

We must stand by the friends and allies who are making tough decisions and taking risks to defeat the terrorists. We must keep up the pressure on regimes that sponsor terror and pursue weapons of mass destruction. We must continue to support dissidents and

reformers who are speaking out against extremism and in favor of liberty. We must continue transforming our Armed Forces so that the next generation inherits a military that is capable of keeping the American people safe and advancing the cause of peace. And above all, we must always ensure that our troops have the funds and resources they need to do their jobs and that their families receive the full support they deserve.

I have great confidence in the future because I have confidence in you all. Ultimately, the security of our Nation depends on the courage of those who wear the uniform. I see that courage in all of you. I thank you for your patriotism. I thank you for your devotion to duty. May God bless you in all your endeavors. May God bless your families, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:25 a.m. in Eisenhower Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Franklin L. Hagenbeck, USA, superintendent, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, who introduced the President, and his wife Judy; Brig. Gen. Michael S. Linnington, USA, commandant, U.S. Military Academy at West Point; Brig. Gen. Patrick Finnegan, USA, dean, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and his wife Joan; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commander, U.S. Central Command. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on the Situation in Zimbabwe

December 9, 2008

As my administration has made clear, it is time for Robert Mugabe to go. Across the continent, African voices are bravely speaking out to say now is the time for him to step down. These leaders share the desire of ordinary Zimbabweans for a return to peace, democracy, and prosperity. We urge others from the region to step up and join the growing chorus of voices calling for an end to Mugabe's tyranny.

The United States will continue to work with our partners around the world to halt the violence and stem the humanitarian disaster that the Mugabe regime is inflicting on its people. We stand ready to help rebuild

Zimbabwe once a legitimate government has been formed that reflects the results of the March elections.

Executive Order 13481—Providing an Order of Succession Within the Department of Justice

December 9, 2008

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998, 5 U.S.C. 3345 *et seq.*, it is hereby ordered that:

Section 1. Subject to the provisions of section 2 of this order, the following officers, in the order listed, shall act as and perform the functions and duties of the office of Attorney General, during any period in which the Attorney General, the Deputy Attorney General, the Associate Attorney General, and the officers designated by the Attorney General pursuant to 28 U.S.C. 508 to act as Attorney General have died, resigned, or otherwise become unable to perform the functions and duties of the office of Attorney General, until such time as at least one of the officers mentioned above is able to perform the functions and duties of that office:

- (a) United States Attorney for the District of Maryland;
- (b) United States Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama; and
- (c) United States Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia.

Sec. 2. Exceptions. (a) No individual who is serving in an office listed in section 1 of this order in an acting capacity, by virtue of so serving, shall act as Attorney General pursuant to this order.

(b) No individual listed in section 1 shall act as Attorney General unless that individual is otherwise eligible to so serve under the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of this order, the President retains discretion, to the extent permitted by law, to depart from this order in designating an acting Attorney General.

Sec. 3. This order supersedes the President's Memorandum for the Attorney General of December 8, 2006 (Designation of Officers of the Department of Justice).

Sec. 4. This order is intended to improve the internal management of the executive branch and is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity, by any party against the United States, its agencies, instrumentalities, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

George W. Bush

The White House,
December 9, 2008.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 2 p.m., December 10, 2008]

NOTE: This Executive order was published in the *Federal Register* on December 11.

Memorandum on Designation of Officers of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation to Act as Director

December 9, 2008

Memorandum for the Director of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation

Subject: Designation of Officers of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation to Act as Director of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998, 5 U.S.C. 3345 *et seq.*, it is hereby ordered that:

Section 1. Order of Succession. Subject to the provisions of section 2 of this memorandum, the following officials of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, in the order

listed, shall act as and perform the functions and duties of the office of the Director of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (Director), during any period in which the Director has died, resigned, or otherwise become unable to perform the functions and duties of the office of Director, until such time as the Director is able to perform the functions and duties of that office:

- (a) Deputy Director for Operations;
- (b) Chief Management Officer;
- (c) Chief Operating Officer; and
- (d) General Counsel.

Sec. 2. Exceptions. (a) No individual who is serving in an office listed in section 1 in an acting capacity, by virtue of so serving, shall act as the Director pursuant to this memorandum.

(b) No individual listed in section 1 shall act as Director unless that individual is otherwise eligible to so serve under the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of this memorandum, the President retains discretion, to the extent permitted by law, to depart from this memorandum in designating an acting Director.

Sec. 3. This memorandum is intended to improve the internal management of the executive branch and is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity, by any party against the United States, its agencies, instrumentalities, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

Sec. 4. You are authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 12 p.m., December 10, 2008]

NOTE: This memorandum was published in the *Federal Register* on December 11.

Memorandum on Designation of Officers of the United States Agency for International Development to Act as Administrator

December 9, 2008

Memorandum for the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development

Subject: Designation of Officers of the United States Agency for International Development to Act as Administrator

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998, 5 U.S.C. 3345 *et seq.*, it is hereby ordered that:

Section 1. Order of Succession. Subject to the provisions of section 2 of this memorandum, the Assistant Administrators for the Bureaus, in the order in which they were appointed as an Assistant Administrator, shall act as and perform the functions and duties of the office of the Administrator (Administrator), during any period in which the Administrator and the Deputy Administrator have died, resigned, or otherwise become unable to perform the functions and duties of the office of Administrator, until such time as the Administrator or Deputy Administrator are able to perform the functions and duties of that office:

- (a) Bureau for Africa;
- (b) Bureau for Asia;
- (c) Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance;
- (d) Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade;
- (e) Bureau for Europe and Eurasia;
- (f) Bureau for Global Health;
- (g) Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean;
- (h) Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs;
- (i) Bureau for Management; and
- (j) Bureau for the Middle East.

Sec. 2. Exceptions. (a) No individual who is serving in an office listed in section 1 in an acting capacity, by virtue of so serving, shall act as the Administrator pursuant to this memorandum.

(b) No individual listed in section 1 shall act as Administrator unless that individual is otherwise eligible to so serve under the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of this memorandum, the President retains discretion, to the extent permitted by law, to depart from this memorandum in designating an acting Administrator.

Sec. 3. This memorandum supersedes the President's memorandum of July 10, 2002, (Designation of Officers of the United States Agency for International Development to Act as Administrator).

Sec. 4. This memorandum is intended to improve the internal management of the executive branch and is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity, by any party against the United States, its agencies, instrumentalities, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

Sec. 5. You are authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., December 11, 2008]

NOTE: This memorandum was published in the *Federal Register* on December 12.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Darfur Human Rights Activist Halima Bashir

December 10, 2008

The President. I have just had the distinct pleasure and honor of visiting with Dr. Halima Bashir, who wrote a book called "Tears of the Desert." This good soul brings firsthand accounts to what life is like in Darfur. She has witnessed violence, deprivation, and she carries a message of a lot of people who want our help.

I assured her that, in spite of the economic difficulties, our aid will continue to flow. We will use our influence to make sure the aid gets to the people of Darfur.

I also made it clear that I am frustrated with the pace of activities; that the United

Nations must expedite sending troops, peacekeepers, to provide security for the people. That's what they want; they want to be able to have a secure life, and that we'll help.

The United States continues to stand at the ready to provide airlift. The pace of action out of the United Nations is too slow. We support the mediation process by the A.U.-U.N. mediator. In other words, we recognize in order for there to be peace in Darfur that parties must come to the table in good faith and solve the problems.

And finally, it's very important for President Bashir of Sudan to know that he cannot escape accountability; that if he so choose, he could change people's lives—the condition of people's lives very quickly.

I've appointed a Special Envoy to Sudan to help put pressure on the Government. The United States must continue to rally the international community to put pressure on the Government as well. The urgency of the situation is never more apparent than when I had the honor of visiting with this brave soul.

And so I welcome you to the Oval Office. And I welcome any comments you want to make.

Halima Bashir. Yes, of course. Thank you very much for the President to invite me to the White House. And I think this is—I'm very happy because now Darfur victims' voices is heard in the White House and to the American people and to the world. And I think the President, the message I send to him is going to do more work in Darfur to handle the situation, and to—[inaudible]—and the ICC ruling and just to stop the genocide and the crisis in Darfur. Because now more than 5 years, and we do not need to wait anymore. We need real action.

And thank you very much.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:27 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Djibril Yipene Bassole, Joint AU-UN Mediator for Darfur; President Umar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir of Sudan; and Ambassador Richard S. Williamson, U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan.

Remarks Following a Discussion on Drug Use Reduction

December 11, 2008

I've just had an extraordinary discussion with a group of our fellow citizens; some are pastors, some are ex-cons, some are baseball players, some are docs, some are community activists, all who have come together to talk about a comprehensive strategy to deal with drug use in America.

And our strategy is threefold: one, reduce demand, interdict supply, and then help people who have become addicts. And we're making progress. No question, there's still work to do in America, but we are making progress. And one way to note the progress is this statistic: Since 2001, teenage drug use has declined by 25 percent; that means 900,000 fewer teens on drugs.

The strategy can be measured. The implementation requires understanding that grassroots activists—for example, like the faith community—can play an integral work in working alongside government to achieve our objectives. The Admiral here has—Admiral Allen, Commandant of the Coast Guard, reported about our interdiction efforts—that we've been making great progress at interdicting, for example, cocaine being trafficked primarily out of South America and Central America into our country.

And finally I am pleased that the Access to Recovery program and programs like that are vibrant and active, which basically says to an addict: If you so choose, you can redeem your health, redeem your money at a place of love in the faith community.

Lives are changing. People's lives are being saved. I say government is justice, government is law and—but government must not fear places of love. And so this has been a positive report and a great meeting, and I want to thank you all for coming. More importantly, I want to thank you for being citizens, and not spectators—people who have decided to do something about your personal lives, as well as the lives of those in your communities. It is the collective effort of thousands of social entrepreneurs that help make America a hopeful place.

There will be more work done after I'm out of here, but we have laid the foundation

for a successful effort against drug use, drug supply, and helping those who have been addicted.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:09 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Commencement Address at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas

December 12, 2008

The President. Thank you all. Howdy!

Audience members. Howdy!

The President. I am thrilled to be back in Aggieland. And it's always an honor to be introduced by the President of the United States, especially when he's your dad. And how about mom? Mom, I've been meaning to say this publicly for a long time: thanks, thanks for the gray hair. [Laughter]

I congratulate the graduates of the Fighting Texas Aggie classes of 2008, class of 2007, the class of 2006—I'd better stop. [Laughter] Let's just say that I hope there's no one left from when I spoke to the commencement in 1998. [Laughter] If so, I hope you're walking out of here with a Ph.D. [Laughter]

I am grateful to the faculty and staff of Texas A&M for their devotion to learning and their example of scholarship. I appreciate your outstanding president, Dr. Elsa Murano. And I am glad to be with—[applause]—there you go. And I am glad to have traveled from Washington today with three fine Aggies representing Texas in the United States Congress, Congressmen Chet Edwards, Joe Barton, and Jeb Hensarling.

I am pleased to see so many of your families and loved ones here today. While you bled maroon, they bled a lot of green. [Laughter] So please join me in thanking all those whose support made it possible for you to reach this proud day. [Applause]

There is one person who wishes he could be here today, and that's your former president and America's Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates. You know, he's got an excused absence. It's not like he's over at the Dixie Chicken. [Laughter] He's traveling to the

Middle East, consulting with our generals, and showing his support for the men and women of the United States Armed Forces.

When I asked Bob to be the Secretary of Defense, it was clear how much he loved Texas A&M. After all, he refused to come to Washington until after he attended the winter commencement. And I was even more impressed when he insisted on standing during the Cabinet meetings—[laughter]—claiming he was the Twelfth Man. [Laughter] One day, he explained it all. He said, "Mr. President, I'm 'red ass.'"

I'll say this for A&M, you've got some mighty fine traditions. Back in my day, I think I would have enjoyed dunking my ring. I would have loved to have taken Laura to Midnight Yell. I especially like the traditions around Reveille. Any time she barks during a class lecture, everyone in the room is dismissed. God, I wish she had been there for some of those press conferences. [Laughter]

This campus is home to solemn rituals that demonstrate the strength of your bonds. In playing of Silver Taps to honor fallen classmates, in the reunion of students and alumni to read the roll call at Muster, and in wearing of your timeless rings, you affirm a powerful truth: Once an Aggie, always an Aggie.

Traditions like these are central to the A&M experience. And so is academic excellence, and all of you will benefit from your rigorous courses of study. I suspect you'll also find that some of your most important learning took place outside the classroom, in the friendships you formed, perspective you gained, and the things you discovered about yourselves. When you leave this campus, you will be well prepared for any endeavor you choose. To those of you who have jobs lined up, I—congratulations. To those not exactly sure what comes next, I know how you feel. [Laughter]

As our days in the White House wind down, we're going through a series of "lasts." I pardoned my last Thanksgiving turkey, Laura decorated for her last Christmas in the White House, and Barney bit his last reporter. [Laughter] Or at least that's what we hope. [Laughter]

This is also my last commencement address as President. And it is fitting that it takes place here in Texas, where I have been

so blessed over the years. I was raised here by wonderful parents, surrounded by brothers and sisters whose love still sustains me. And Texas is where I went to a backyard barbeque and met a beautiful teacher named Laura Welch. Texas is where our girls were born and our lifelong friends live. And next month, when our time in Washington is done, Texas is where we're coming home.

These days, I'm asked a lot about my time as President. Some days have been happy, some days not so happy—every day joyous. It's been a tremendous privilege. I have traveled across our Nation, and to 74 countries around the world. I have slept in Buckingham Palace; I have feasted in the desert of Abu Dhabi; I have watched the sunrise in Jerusalem. I have spoken to campaign rallies in packed stadiums and to hundreds of thousands in Romania's revolutionary—Revolution Square. I've taken Marine One into America's biggest cities and visited many of our smallest towns. Through it all, nothing has inspired me more than the character of the American people, the acts of courage and service that sustain our free society and make this the greatest nation on Earth.

Courage and service are cherished here at A&M, and they are values that I hope will guide you for the years to come. So this morning, I thought I would share a few of the most powerful examples of courage and service that I have witnessed over the past 8 years.

No act of courage or service is more impressive than volunteering for the United States military. Eight years ago, a brave 17-year-old named Christian Bagge made that noble choice when he stepped forward to join the Oregon National Guard. In 2005, Christian's unit was on patrol in Iraq when his Humvee hit a roadside bomb. He lost both his legs, and he thought he would lose his life. But with determination and superb medical care, this good man survived.

I met him at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. He told me he used to be a runner and he planned to run again. I was impressed by his courage, but it was hard to imagine a man with such severe injuries ever being able to run. I said to him offhandedly, "You know, when you're ready

to run, just call me. I'll be glad to run with you," and moved on.

Well, then one day, a phone call came to the Oval Office. It was Christian. He said, "I'm ready to take you up on your offer, Mr. President." Just 5 months after I'd seen him in the hospital, he showed up at the White House with legs made of carbon fiber and a spirit stronger than steel. Together, we took a lap around the South Lawn. I'll admit, he left his Commander in Chief in the dust. [Laughter] And he left me with great admiration for his unshakable determination, his upbeat spirit, and his inspiring example for all Americans.

People like Christian show the true strength of our military, and so do the families who support them. Last year in Reno, Nevada, I met a orthopedic surgeon named Bill Krissoff. His son Nathan, a marine, had given his life in Iraq. Dr. Krissoff told me he wanted to join the Navy Medical Corps in Nathan's honor. I looked at this remarkable man, I said, "How old are you?" He said he was 60 years old. He needed a special waiver to qualify for the Navy. I was thinking, I was 61, so he didn't sound all that old. [Laughter] I asked his wife what she thought of the whole thing, and she said she supported his decision. So I went back to Washington, and surprisingly enough, a few days later the waiver came through.

Since then, Dr. Krissoff has undergone extensive training in battlefield medicine. And soon he will deploy to Iraq, where he'll help save the wounded, uphold the legacy of his fallen son, and inspire the United States of America.

Petty Officer Greg Guillory is also in the Navy. But that is not the only way he serves. Greg lost his mother in a car accident at a young age, and his stepmother suffered from a serious drug addiction. Greg earned a 4-year scholarship to play college football; he was a high school player here in the State of Texas. But he turned down that scholarship so he could stay home to help his family confront its problems. Eventually, he decided to join the Navy, where he found a strong and supportive environment.

While stationed in San Diego, Greg met his wife Shonda, who had also endured a painful childhood. Together, they resolved to

help children trapped in difficult circumstances and made the selfless and compassionate decision to become foster parents. They spent a year caring for a 17-year-old who'd been abused. Then they took in a 14-year-old who had been beaten, then a baby born with drugs in her system, and then a 3-year-old whose mother was in jail. Today, they are caring for two children, a brother and sister, as well as the baby girl Shonda delivered last month.

And all the while, Greg has been carrying out his duties in uniform. He is stationed at Camp David, Maryland, and this generous man who has given so much to others feels so grateful himself. During a moving testimony at the Camp David chapel that I was fortunate enough to witness this past Thanksgiving, he said, "I am thankful that God continues to bless me so I can be a blessing for children in need."

America is blessed to have citizens like Greg and Shonda, whose hearts are big enough to share the greatest gift of all, the gift of love.

Kendrick Kennedy shared that gift too, after Hurricane Katrina struck his hometown of Biloxi, Mississippi. Even though his own house had been damaged, Kendrick put others first, helping family members find shelter and cleaning up debris in neighbors' yards. There's another piece of the story: Kendrick is blind. A few years before the storm, he lost his sight and his job. But he refused to hold—let that hold him back. He enrolled at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. I met him there when I spoke at his commencement. He went on to the University of Southern Mississippi, where he became the first blind student to graduate summa cum laude. Now he's in law school in Ole Miss. And this good man has set a high goal to serve our country as a Justice on the Supreme Court.

Other Americans show courage by summoning the hidden strength to overcome their weaknesses. Four years ago, I met Letitia Chavez-Paulette. She had been addicted to drugs; she served time for her mistakes. While in prison, she joined a faith-based program called Celebrate Recovery, and it helped turn her life around. When she was released, Letitia was determined to sup-

port other women returning to society. So she started a transitional home called A Peaceful Habitation, a name taken from the Book of Isaiah. Here's what Letitia said: "God's grace has kept me going. His love has kept me strong. And my faith is a gift that is helping me help others."

In these stories, we see the courage and service that defined America at its best. And that same spirit has long defined Texas A&M. It's the spirit of General Earl Rudder, who helped lead the D-Day invasion and served more than a decade as A&M's president. It is the spirit of the Corps of Cadet, which includes nearly 1,800 Aggies. It is the spirit of your ROTC program, which routinely commissions more officers than any school outside the service academies. It's the spirit of the 21 Aggies who've given their lives to keep America safe since September the 11th, 2001, a sacrifice that will be honored forever by your Freedom from Terrorism memorial.

That same spirit is visible on this campus in many ways beyond the military. A&M is home to the Big Event, the largest student-run community service project in the Nation. After Hurricane Ike hit the Texas coast, you welcomed more than 1,600 Sea Aggies from A&M's Galveston campus to College Station. And in countless other acts of volunteerism and charity, you have made Texas A&M's name synonymous with service.

On your last day as A&M students, my call to you is to continue this spirit long after you leave the campus. There are so many needs to be met and so many ways you can help, from mentoring a child to becoming a teacher, to volunteering to feed the hungry or heal the sick overseas. If you hear the call to service in the military or government, answer it. If you enter the private sector, be proud of contributing to our prosperity and give back to your communities. Wherever life leads you, pursue the path of service, and you will find fulfillment beyond measure.

As you embark on this journey, let me leave you with a few last pieces of advice. First, listen to your mother. [*Laughter*] As you can see, mom is out of the hospital, and everything is back to normal. After all, she's still telling me what to do. [*Laughter*]

Second, develop a set of principles to live by, convictions and ideals to guide your

course. There will be times when people tell you a different way is more accepted or popular. Remember that popularity is as fleeting as the Texas wind. Character and conscience are as sturdy as the oaks on this campus. If you go home at night, look in the mirror, and be satisfied that you have done what is right, you will pass the only test that matters.

And finally, be on the lookout for role models, people whose conduct you admire and whose path you can follow. With that in mind, I have one last example of courage and service. It's a story of a young man who left comfort behind to answer his Nation's call, became the youngest pilot in the Navy, and nearly gave his life in World War II. When he came back home, he devoted his career to public service and proved that success in politics can be accomplished with decency and grace. He reached the pinnacle in Government, but he defines his life by other roles: a father who gave unconditional love; a grandfather devoted to his grandchildren; and a beloved husband of the sweetheart he married a lifetime ago. Some of you will leave A&M with a degree that carries this good man's name, George Bush. I have been blessed and honored to have carried it for 62 years.

I want to thank you. I want to thank you for the opportunity to share this special day with you. I congratulate you. When I leave office next month, I will depart confident in the future of our country, because I have faith in each of you. I will depart uplifted by the many acts of courage and service that I have witnessed these past 8 years. I will depart grateful for the outpouring of support and prayers that have strengthened Laura and me. And I will depart ready to come home to the people I have missed and the place I love, the State of Texas.

And so, after all this, there is only one thing left to say: Gig'em Aggies! Congratulations, and may God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:36 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to former President George H.W. Bush, who introduced the President; and Christine Krissoff, wife of Lt. Comdr. Bill Krissoff, USN. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Executive Order 13482—Closing of Executive Departments and Agencies of the Federal Government on Friday, December 26, 2008

December 12, 2008

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. All executive branch departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall be closed and their employees excused from duty on Friday, December 26, 2008, the day after Christmas Day, except as provided in section 2 of this order.

Sec. 2. The heads of executive branch departments and agencies may determine that certain offices and installations of their organizations, or parts thereof, must remain open and that certain employees must report for duty on December 26, 2008, for reasons of national security or defense or other public need.

Sec. 3. Friday, December 26, 2008, shall be considered as falling within the scope of Executive Order 11582 of February 11, 1971, and of 5 U.S.C. 5546 and 6103(b) and other similar statutes insofar as they relate to the pay and leave of employees of the United States.

Sec. 4. This order is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity, by any party against the United States, its agencies, instrumentalities, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

George W. Bush

The White House,
December 12, 2008.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:15 a.m., December 15, 2008]

NOTE: This Executive order will be published in the *Federal Register* on December 16.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

December 6

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Philadelphia, PA, where, at the Union League of Philadelphia headquarters, he received the Union League of Philadelphia's Gold Medal Award. He then traveled to Lincoln Financial Field, where he visited the U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Military Academy football teams' locker rooms prior to the Army-Navy football game.

In the afternoon, the President participated in the Army-Navy football game coin toss and then watched the game. Later, he returned to Washington, DC.

December 7

In the afternoon, in the East Room, the President and Mrs. Bush hosted a reception for Kennedy Center honorees.

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush attended the Kennedy Center Honors Gala at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

December 8

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to McLean, VA, where he visited the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the National Counterterrorism Center and participated in briefings.

In the afternoon, the President met and had lunch with National Counterterrorism Center staff. He then returned to Washington, DC. Later, in the Library, he participated in an interview with Cynthia McFadden of ABC News.

The White House announced that the President will welcome President Elias Antonio Saca Gonzalez of El Salvador to the White House on December 16.

December 9

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to West

Point, NY, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Sgt. Jermaine Malone, USA.

In the afternoon, at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the President met with West Point senior cadets. He then participated in an interview with the Pentagon Channel.

Later in the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC, where, upon arrival on the South Lawn, he met with Lance Cpl. Patrick P. Pittman, Jr., USMC, and Lance Cpl. Marc E. Olson, USMC, who were both wounded in a suicide bomb attack in Ramadi, Iraq. He also met with Lance Cpl. Pittman's father, Patrick P. Pittman, Sr., and Lance Cpl. Olson's mother, Janice Kloski.

December 10

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he participated in an interview with Tom Bevan and John McIntyre of RealClearPolitics. He then participated in an interview with Liz Clarke of the Washington Post.

In the afternoon, in the Oval Office, the President participated in a presentation ceremony for recipients of the Presidential Citizens Medal. Later, in the Roosevelt Room, he participated in a video teleconference with democracy advocate bloggers from Belarus, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, and Venezuela.

The President announced his intention to nominate Matthew W. Friedrich to be Assistant Attorney General (Criminal Division).

December 11

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

During the day, the President had a telephone conversation with Secretary of the Treasury Henry M. Paulson, Jr., to discuss bailout legislation for the automobile industry.

In the evening, the President was briefed on Congress's failure to pass bailout legislation for the automobile industry.

The President announced his intention to appoint the following individuals as members of the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation: Richard D. Fairbanks; Arthur G. Linkletter; Sonya E. Medina; Stephen Odland; and Jose R. Ramos.

December 12

In the morning, the President met separately with several White House staff members to discuss failed bailout legislation for the automobile industry. Later, he had an intelligence briefing.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to College Station, TX. While en route aboard Air Force One, he participated in an interview with Kim Strassel of the Wall Street Journal.

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC. Later, at the State Department, he and Mrs. Bush attended a holiday reception for the diplomatic corps.

The President declared a major disaster in South Dakota and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by a severe winter storm and record and near record snow from November 5–7.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

The following list does not include promotions of members of the Uniformed Services, nominations to the Service Academies, or nominations of Foreign Service officers.

Submitted December 8

Brad Cole, of Illinois, to be a member of the Board of Directors of the Corporation for National and Community Service for the remainder of the term expiring October 6, 2012, vice Tom Osborne, resigned.

Cheryl Feldman Halpern, of New Jersey, to be an Alternate Representative of the United States of America to the Sixty-third Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Roszell Dulany Hunter, of Virginia, to be Executive Vice President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, vice John A. Simon, resigned.

Submitted December 11

Matthew W. Friedrich, of Texas, to be an Assistant Attorney General, vice Alice S. Fisher, resigned.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released December 5 *

Fact sheet: Progress in the Middle East: Freedom, Prosperity, and Hope

Released December 7

Fact sheet: The Bush Administration has Provided Unprecedented Support for Our Veterans

Released December 8

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit by President Elias Antonio Saca of El Salvador

Statement by National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley on a Sunday New York Times editorial concerning pre-war intelligence and the war in Iraq

Released December 9

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Fact sheet: Transforming Our Armed Forces to Face the Threats of Today and Tomorrow

Released December 10

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino and Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy Joel Kaplan

Fact sheet: Promoting Human Rights Worldwide

* This item was inadvertently omitted from last week's issue.

Released December 11

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Fact sheet: President Bush Has Improved the Lives of America's Youth

Fact sheet: Leading the Global Response to the Crisis in Darfur

Released December 12

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Statement by the Press Secretary on legislation to help U.S. automakers

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to South Dakota

Fact sheet: Advancing Transatlantic Economic Integration Through the Transatlantic Economic Council

**Acts Approved
by the President**

NOTE: No acts approved by the President were received by the Office of the Federal Register during the period covered by this issue.