

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 at-

tack, 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 J. Michael McConnell; and Michael E. 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.

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