

brate artists like the ones here tonight. And that's why, in this season of joy and thanksgiving, they have earned our deepest appreciation.

So congratulations again to tonight's honorees. Thank you all very much. And I look forward to a spectacular evening. Thank you.

## Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Boyko Borisov of Bulgaria December 3, 2012

*President Obama.* Well, I want to welcome Prime Minister Borisov to the White House and his delegation from Bulgaria. I have to say at the outset that Bulgaria has proven to be one of our most outstanding NATO allies.

Obviously, there are very strong bonds between our two countries, including many Bulgarian Americans in my hometown of Chicago that reminds us of the strong people-to-people relationship between the United States and Bulgaria.

I've had the opportunity to work and discuss issues with the Prime Minister in the past, and he's always been a very effective leader on the world stage. And I think it's important for everybody to know that he's also a black belt in karate, so you should be very careful crossing him. [*Laughter*]

The—we're going to have a lot to discuss during this meeting. But first and foremost, I want to thank the Prime Minister for the strong partnership in NATO. Bulgaria has been a strong supporter of the efforts in Afghanistan, and we'll have the opportunity to touch briefly on the transition that needs to take place there. But I want to thank him and his fellow countrymen for their service and sacrifice.

We've also had excellent cooperation on criminal investigations, law enforcement, counterterrorism. And most recently, I want to thank the Prime Minister for his very diligent investigation of the tragic terrorist attack that killed Israeli civilians in Bulgaria. The security teams in Bulgaria have worked very hard and cooperatively in bringing the perpetrators to justice.

But of course, the relationship is not just based on security issues. Bulgaria is a modernizing country, and I know that the Prime Min-

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:31 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to musician Prince R. Nelson; actor Robert Redford; and musician Stefani J.A. "Lady Gaga" Germanotta.

ister is interested in a range of reforms to create an open and transparent government, to improve trade and commerce between our two countries, as a leader in the Balkans in moving towards further integration with Europe and the rest of the world economy. We've been very impressed with the progress that's been made in Bulgaria, and I'm looking forward to hearing from the Prime Minister how the United States can further assist in those efforts.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to you. And we look forward to this conversation. The American people send their regards to the people of Bulgaria. And the only thing I have to say is, the weather is not always this good, so you should enjoy some of the sights while you're here as well.

*Prime Minister Borisov.* Mr. President, it is an honor that you invited us all in the White House.

First of all, I would like to extend my congratulations on your winning the trust again of the American people.

Of course, the fact that you pointed out you are from Chicago, I would like to point out that this is one of the biggest Bulgarian cities; over 150,000 Bulgarians make Chicago their home. And everybody in Bulgaria was deeply moved at your telephone call to express your condolences for the Bulgarian citizen as well as the Israeli nationals who perished in the terrorist act.

I'm very glad that you pointed out that in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, places where—that our soldiers, U.S. and Bulgaria, fight for democracy shoulder to shoulder, that we do have additional topics of mutual interest. And I thank you for the opportunity to lay a wreath today at Arlington National Cemetery

at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. As you know, a lot of Bulgarian soldiers perished and were seriously, grievously wounded in our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. And the way that the U.S. people—and you personally—protect the memory of the perished soldiers is unparalleled throughout the world.

It is true that Bulgaria is an island of stability in the Eastern Balkans. Our budget deficit is very low, our sovereign debt is very low, and our financial stability is great. Thank you for the opportunity that—in the energy sphere for Bulgaria to work towards diversification of energy sources. We do have deep reserves in this area for the future.

Especially, I also would like to thank you for the excellent cooperation with the United

States in such areas as social security, national security, counterterrorism, combating organized crime. Our law enforcement services work together very effectively.

Of course, the Bulgarian citizens are expecting your decision on Bulgaria's joining the Visa Waiver Program. We do have visa-free regime—travel regime—with the entire European Union. And thank you once again for the opportunity to discuss these topics.

*President Obama.* Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:05 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Prime Minister Borisov spoke in Bulgarian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

## Remarks at the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Symposium *December 3, 2012*

Thank you so much. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you.

Well, good afternoon everybody. It is wonderful to be back. Secretary Panetta, thank you for the introduction. Last week at the White House, we had our first Cabinet meeting since the election, and it was a chance for me to thank my entire team for their service; for keeping our country safe and strong these past 4 years. And, Leon, few have done more than you in that regard. And that includes taking care of our remarkable men and women in uniform and their families and keeping our military the absolute best in the world, bar none. So thank you, Leon, for being such an outstanding Secretary of Defense. We're very grateful.

Now, I am not here to give a big speech. I wanted to just come by and join you in marking the 20th anniversary of one of the country's smartest and most successful national security programs: Nunn-Lugar. And I want to express my gratitude to all of you: from government, academia, NGOs, and our partners from around the world. People in this room conceived it. You built it. You've sustained it. And of course, I especially want to acknowledge a leader who helped create it and who now helps

guide it as our outstanding Deputy Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter. So thank you, Ash, for your great work.

Of course, no one has done more than the two visionaries on this stage. Now, you have to think about what real visionaries do. They look at the world, and they see what's missing. So they set out to fill the gap, to build something new. And that's what Sam Nunn and Dick Lugar did many years ago. They challenged us to think anew, to imagine, after decades of confrontation, how our nations might engage in cooperation. Early in the cold war, Einstein warned of the danger of our wisdom not keeping pace with our technology. And with Nunn-Lugar, our wisdom began to catch up.

I also wanted to be here because of my own personal debt to these two leaders. When I was in—when I was elected to the Senate, Sam Nunn was one of the first leaders I called. Obviously, he had an extraordinary reputation for his work on a whole range of issues in the Senate. And, Sam, by the way, I should—I always meant to say thanks for taking my call. [*Laughter*] So we do small talk; he congratulates me on being elected. And then he says, I've got two pieces of advice for you. First piece of advice: Get a seat on the Foreign Relations Com-