

They're spending some extra time on the phone with their loved ones back home. Or they're setting up video chats so they can watch as the presents are opened. So today we want all our troops to know that you're in our thoughts and prayers this holiday season.

And here's the good news: For many of our troops and newest veterans, this might be the first time in years that they've been with their families on Christmas. In fact, with the Iraq war over and the transition in Afghanistan, fewer of our men and women in uniform are deployed in harm's way than at any time in the last decade.

The First Lady. And that's something that we all can be thankful for. And with more and more of our troops back here at home, now it's our turn to serve. It's our turn to step up and show our gratitude for the military families who have given us so much.

And that's why Jill Biden and I started our Joining Forces initiative, to rally all Americans to support our military families in ways large and small. And again and again, we have been overwhelmed by the response we've gotten, as folks from across the country have found new ways to give back to these families through their schools, businesses, and houses of worship.

The President. That's the same spirit of giving that connects all of us during the holidays. So many people all across the country are helping out at soup kitchens, buying gifts for children in need, or organizing food or clothing

drives for their neighbors. For families like ours, that service is a chance to celebrate the birth of Christ and live out what He taught us: to love our neighbors as we would ourselves, to feed the hungry and look after the sick, to be our brother's keeper and our sister's keeper. And for all of us as Americans, regardless of our faith, those are values that can drive us to be better parents and friends, better neighbors, and better citizens.

The First Lady. So as we look to the new year, let's pledge ourselves to living out those values by reaching out and lifting up those in our communities who could use a hand up.

The President. So merry Christmas, everyone. And from the two of us, as well as Malia, Sasha, Grandma, Bo——

The First Lady. And Sunny, the newest Obama.

The President. ——we wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season.

The First Lady. Happy holidays everybody, and God bless.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:30 p.m. on December 19 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on December 25. In the address, the President referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson. The First Lady referred to Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 24, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on December 25.

Statement on Signing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014

December 26, 2013

Today I have signed into law H.R. 3304, the "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014." I have signed this annual defense authorization legislation because it will provide pay and bonuses for our service members, enhance counterterrorism initiatives abroad, build the security capacity of key partners, and expand efforts to prevent sexual assault and strengthen protections for victims.

Since taking office, I have repeatedly called upon the Congress to work with my Administration to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The continued operation of the facility weakens our national security by draining resources, damaging our relationships with key allies and partners, and emboldening violent extremists.

For the past several years, the Congress has enacted unwarranted and burdensome restric-

tions that have impeded my ability to transfer detainees from Guantanamo. Earlier this year I again called upon the Congress to lift these restrictions and, in this bill, the Congress has taken a positive step in that direction. Section 1035 of this Act gives the Administration additional flexibility to transfer detainees abroad by easing rigid restrictions that have hindered negotiations with foreign countries and interfered with executive branch determinations about how and where to transfer detainees. Section 1035 does not, however, eliminate all of the unwarranted limitations on foreign transfers and, in certain circumstances, would violate constitutional separation of powers principles. The executive branch must have the flexibility, among other things, to act swiftly in conducting negotiations with foreign countries regarding the circumstances of detainee transfers. Of course, even in the absence of any statutory restrictions, my Administration would transfer a detainee only if the threat the detainee may pose can be sufficiently mitigated and only when consistent with our humane treatment policy. Section 1035 nevertheless represents an improvement over current law and is a welcome step toward closing the facility.

In contrast, sections 1033 and 1034 continue unwise funding restrictions that curtail options available to the executive branch. Section 1033 renews the bar against using appropriated funds to construct or modify any facility in the United States, its territories, or possessions to house any Guantanamo detainee in the custody or under the control of the Department of Defense unless authorized by the Congress. Section 1034 renews the bar against using appropriated funds to transfer Guantanamo detainees into the United States for any purpose.

I oppose these provisions, as I have in years past, and will continue to work with the Congress to remove these restrictions. The executive branch must have the authority to determine when and where to prosecute Guantanamo detainees, based on the facts and circumstances of each case and our national security interests. For decades, Republican and Democratic administrations have successfully prosecuted hundreds of terrorists in Federal court. Those prosecutions are a legitimate, effective, and powerful tool in our efforts to protect the Nation. Removing that tool from the executive branch does not serve our national security interests. Moreover, section 1034 would, under certain circumstances, violate constitutional separation of powers principles.

The detention facility at Guantanamo continues to impose significant costs on the American people. I am encouraged that this Act provides the Executive greater flexibility to transfer Guantanamo detainees abroad, and look forward to working with the Congress to take the additional steps needed to close the facility. In the event that the restrictions on the transfer of Guantanamo detainees in sections 1034 and 1035 operate in a manner that violates constitutional separation of powers principles, my Administration will implement them in a manner that avoids the constitutional conflict.

BARACK OBAMA

The White House,
December 26, 2013.

NOTE: H.R. 3304, approved December 26, was assigned Public Law No. 113–66.

Statement on the Observance of Kwanzaa *December 26, 2013*

Michelle and I extend our best wishes to all those celebrating Kwanzaa this holiday season. Today marks the beginning of the week-long celebration of African American culture through family activities and community festivities that bring attention to Kwanzaa's seven

principles of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Though each principle represents the essence of this holiday, they also represent the shared values that bind us as Americans.