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Vets for Freedom or the VFW or the American Legion and other groups, two of you—Gold Star Mothers, got you, okay, thank you—Blue Star Mothers, Gold Star Mothers, all the mothers, yes. Every day is Mother's Day as far as you're concerned, isn't it? [*Laughter*]

***Audience member.*** Don't forget the dads.

***The President.*** And the dads, yes. I knew this was going to happen. [*Laughter*] Yes, the wives, okay, fine. [*Laughter*] Everybody's supporting our troops. I want to thank you for doing it.

It's important people hear from you. It's important people hear your voice. And I want to thank you for organizing. I want to thank you not only for the grassroots support of our families; I want to thank you for going up to Capitol Hill. And here's the message I hope you deliver: The Commander in Chief wants to succeed, and the Commander in Chief takes seriously the recommendations of our military commanders. General Petraeus came back to the United States to deliver the recommendations he made to me. Inherent in his recommendations is, one, his belief we're succeeding; his belief we will succeed. And I ask the United States Congress to support the troop levels and the strategies I have embraced.

***Audience members.*** U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

***The President.*** Thank you all. When the history books are finally written about this chapter in the war against extremists and radicals, they will recognize certain truths: One, that we recognize that if we were to retreat from the Middle East, the enemy would not be content to remain where they are, but they would follow us here. We recognize that the best way to protect our homeland is to defeat an enemy overseas so we do not have to face them here on the streets of America. And we recognized that liberty is powerful, that liberty will yield the peace that we want for generations to come. They will recognize that this generation of Americans did the hard work now, so that future generations could live in security and peace.

And so on this beautiful morning, we thank you for your steadfast resolve; we appreciate your support of those brave souls who have volunteered in the face of the danger. We ask for God's blessings on the families and our troops in harm's way. And we thank you from the bottom of our collective hearts. God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:07 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

## Remarks Following a Visit to the National Security Agency at Fort Meade, Maryland

*September 19, 2007*

Good morning. I have just received a briefing from Director McConnell and Lieutenant General Alexander as well as other members of my national security team. I first want to thank the men and women who work out here for their dedication and their hard work. The work they're doing here is necessary to protect our country from an enemy who would like to attack us again. The people who work out here understand that the Federal Government has no more urgent responsibility than to protect the American people.

Every day, our intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security professionals confront enemies who are smart, who are ruthless, and who are determined to murder innocent people to achieve their objectives. It is the job of Congress to give the professionals the tools they need to do their work as effectively as possible.

You don't have to worry about the motivation of the people out here; what we do have to worry about is to make sure that they have all the tools they need to do their job. One of the most important tools they use is the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA. The law provides a critical legal foundation that allows our intelligence community to monitor terrorist communications while protecting the freedoms of the American people. Unfortunately, the law is dangerously out of date.

When FISA was passed nearly 30 years ago, the legal protections were based on differences in the way that domestic and overseas communications were transmitted. New technologies have come into being since the

law was written. Technologies like the disposable cell phone or the Internet eliminated many of the differences. So one of the consequences of the way the law was originally drafted is that when technology changed, legal protections meant only for the people in the United States began applying to terrorists on foreign soil. As a result, our intelligence professionals reported that they were missing a significant amount of real-time intelligence needed to protect the American people. So earlier this year, Director McConnell sent Congress legislation to fix the problem.

In August, a bipartisan majority in Congress passed the Protect America Act. This law has helped close a critical intelligence gap, allowing us to collect important foreign intelligence and information about terrorist plots. The problem is, the law expires on February 1st—that's 135 days from today. The threat from Al Qaida is not going to expire in 135 days.

So I call on Congress to make the Protect America Act permanent. The need for action is clear. Director McConnell has warned that unless the FISA reforms in the Act are made permanent, our national security professionals will lose critical tools they need to protect our country. Without these tools, it'll be harder to figure out what our enemies are doing to train, recruit, and infiltrate operatives into America. Without these tools, our country will be much more vulnerable to attack.

Unfortunately, some in Congress now want to restrict the tools. These restrictions would impede the flow of information that helps us protect our people. These restrictions would reopen gaps in our intelligence that we had just closed. As I did in August, in evaluating any FISA bill, I will ask Director McConnell whether the legislation gives him what he needs to protect our Nation. The question I'm going to ask is, do our professionals have the tools necessary to do the job to protect the American people from further attack?

In addition to making the Protection America Act permanent, I urge Congress to take up other critical proposals included in the comprehensive FISA reform my administration submitted last April. It's particularly important for Congress to provide meaningful liability protection to those companies now facing multibillion dollar lawsuits only because they are believed to have assisted in efforts to defend our Nation following the 9/11 attacks. Additionally, without this protection, state secrets could be revealed in connection with those lawsuits and our ability to protect our people would be weakened.

At stake in this debate is more than a piece of legislation. The decisions Congress makes will directly affect our ability to save American lives. I look forward to working with Congress to enact this legislation as quickly as possible, so that our intelligence officials will continue to have the tools they need to keep the American people safe. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Keith B. Alexander, USA, Director, National Security Agency.

## Statement on the Death of Parliament Member Antoine Ghanem of Lebanon

*September 19, 2007*

I strongly condemn today's horrific assassination of Lebanese Member of Parliament Antoine Ghanem. I extend my personal condolences to his family and the families of the innocent persons who were murdered alongside him in Beirut.

Since October 2004, there has been a tragic pattern of political assassinations and attempted assassinations designed to silence those Lebanese who courageously defend their vision of an independent and democratic Lebanon. Today's cowardly attack comes days before the Lebanese Parliament is scheduled to convene to elect a new President. The United States opposes any attempts to intimidate the Lebanese people as they seek to exercise their democratic right to select a President without foreign interference. We will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Lebanese people as they resist attempts by the Syrian and Iranian regimes and their allies to destabilize Lebanon and undermine its sovereignty.

I call on the international community to support the Government of Lebanon in its efforts to bring to justice the perpetrators of