

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway and an Exchange With Reporters
October 20, 2011

President Obama. Hello, everybody. I am very happy to welcome Prime Minister Stoltenberg to the Oval Office and his delegation to the United States. Michelle and I have incredibly fond memories of our visits to Oslo, and the extraordinary hospitality that the Norwegian people extended to us and our family.

It is fitting that we meet today, given the events that took place in Libya. Obviously, this was a NATO mission that was executed, I think, very effectively. Part of the reason it was so effective was because of NATO partners like Norway. I've said this before, but I want to repeat: Norway punches above its weight. And their participation in the humanitarian mission, protecting civilians, the capacity of Norwegian pilots, their willingness to engage in some very critical missions there, made an enormous difference.

And so I began the meeting by thanking the people of Norway, the Norwegian military, and the Prime Minister for their leadership in helping to give Libya an opportunity to become a democracy.

The people of Norway and the United States share a lot of bonds. Obviously, we have an enormous Norwegian American population here, but we also share a lot of common values. And so in our discussions we covered a wide range of issues. We discussed our partnership in Afghanistan where Norway has been a consistent partner, and discussed how we are going to move the transition forward so that Afghans can take full responsibility for their security by 2014, as we agreed to in Lisbon.

We discussed the world economy, and we shared our intentions to work closely with our European partners to stabilize the euro zone area, but also to make sure that we are all participating in creating a system in which free trade, in which coordinated commercial practices, in which our focus on growing the economy, issues like energy security, all involve close coordination between our two countries. And we very much appreciate the partnership there.

We discussed the heartbreaking situation that occurred in Norway on July 22. And as I've said before, I think everybody in the United States was horrified by the events there. But I complimented the Prime Minister and the people of Norway for the grace with which they handled this extraordinarily difficult situation. It underscored the importance of all of us cooperating in preventing terrorism of all kinds. And the United States and Norway have established a very effective intelligence cooperation system, and that is continually being enhanced and improved. And so we both agreed that we're very pleased with the progress that we've made in making sure that we are working closely together to prevent the kind of senseless violence that we saw in Norway so recently and that we've seen around the world over the last several years.

And we also discussed a range of international issues of great importance. We both share the belief that we need a two-state solution in Middle East, and we want to work very closely with both the Israelis and the Palestinians to arrive at a negotiated settlement.

We discussed the situation in South Sudan, where—and the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. And Norway and the United States have been two very important partners in a process to move towards a more peaceful resolution of the conflicts there.

We discussed how we can work together in the United Nations and other multilateral fora around issues like climate change and maternal health.

And so I think that the state of cooperation and respect between the United States and Norway has never been higher. I personally feel a great affinity for the people of Norway and grateful for the friendship and partnership that they've provided. And I hope that this is not the last visit, but one of many that we'll have together here in the United States. And I hope I have a chance to visit Norway again sometime soon.

So welcome, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Stoltenberg. Thank you so much.

President Obama. Thank you.

Prime Minister Stoltenberg. Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. President, for your kind words. And also thank you so much for the hospitality you have shown me and my delegation. And we are very much impressed about your political agenda and also by your global leadership you have shown, and which we appreciate very much in Norway.

We are also very grateful for the sympathy and the condolences you and the people of America conveyed to the people of Norway after the terrible attacks of the 22d of July. And I know that it was of great comfort for those who lost their loved ones. And as you said, it underlines the importance of cooperation in fighting all kinds of terrorism. We will continue to do so, and we will look how—into how we can expand our cooperation in fighting terrorism.

We've worked together—or we work together on many different issues; we cooperate on many different areas. One of them are within—or is within the NATO, the military alliance. And as you mentioned, we have accomplished what we had as our aim for the military operations in Libya. We protected civilians; we were able to stop Qadhafi of killing his own people. And I think it shows that we are able to implement decisions by the U.N. and by the NATO, and that's important in itself.

We appreciate the cooperation we have in Afghanistan. We are looking forward to focusing even more on the transition. Norway went into Afghanistan together with our allies and are going to leave Afghanistan together with our allies.

I appreciate also very much that we had the opportunity to focus on the high north. The high north is a area where we are seeing new possibilities, new challenges, but also new dangers. And the ice is melting. Actually, in the high north, we see the consequences of global warming. But at the same time, that opens up new possibilities for energy developments, but also for sea routes, and it increases the need for cooperation between the countries bordering the Arctic area, and U.S. and Norway are among them.

I appreciate that we can continue our cooperation when it comes to climate change, because we've worked together on halting deforestation, reducing deforestation. And that's the way we can achieve the biggest, the cheapest, and the fastest reductions in emissions. And we worked together in Indonesia in reducing deforestation.

And I appreciate very much that we work together on child mortality, maternal health, and that's an area where we have achieved a lot together during the last years.

So I appreciate very much this opportunity to meet with you, and you are always welcome to Norway and Oslo. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you very much. Thank you, everybody.

Libya/Death of Former Leader of Libya Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi

Q. Mr. President, does the Libya—the death of Qadhafi vindicate your policy in Libya?

President Obama. There's no doubt that we did exactly what we said we were going to do in Libya. And I think it underscores the capacity of us to work together as an international community. The United States obviously has unique capacities, and we were proud of the leadership we showed in that process. But increasingly, wherever we have the possibility of working with outstanding partners like Norway, then I think that we're going to be even more effective. And the United States will always preserve its right and duty to protect ourselves, our allies, and our interests.

But I think what this shows is that, on a whole range of international issues, there is enormous capacity and we are able to leverage greater resources, more effectiveness, at lower cost when we're able to work together. So I'm very proud of the work that we did on this operation.

Most importantly, I'm proud of what the Libyan people have achieved. And I think they've got an enormous opportunity ahead of them. They've got a lot of challenges as well, but we have now given them the opportunity to determine their own destiny. And that's something that we've seen across North Africa and the Arab world, that there's nothing unique in aspiring to freedom and human rights and democracy. This is something that all people want to enjoy, and I'm very pleased that the Libyan people are going to have the opportunity to do so. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody.

Q. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:16 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

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