

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Sauli Niinistö of Finland, Prime Minister Erna Solberg of Norway, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven of Sweden, Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen of Denmark, and Prime Minister Sigurður Ingi Jóhannsson of Iceland
May 13, 2016

President Obama. Well, once again, I want to welcome our Nordic partners. The last time that we met together was 3 years ago in Sweden, and we had a very productive meeting again here today.

As I said this morning, the United States is grateful for the partnership that we have with all the countries represented around this table. They are, individually, not large countries in terms of population, but in terms of effectiveness, contributions, ideas, energy, they are enormously important players on the international stage. And the fact that our values and our interests align make them one of our most important partners. So we very much want to thank their presence.

Given the threats of terrorism, our Nordic partners are making significant contributions in the fight against ISIL, including more special operations forces and aircrafts and trainers, more assistance to stabilize areas that have been liberated from ISIL and more humanitarian assistance to Syrians and Iraqis.

We discussed our counterterrorism cooperation, and that includes the need to share more information. And I want to thank Denmark for new commitments to the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

Beyond our military campaign, we agreed that we need to work together in support of a political settlement to end the Syrian civil war. And our countries will continue to work together to counter violent extremism and to prevent people from being radicalized in the first place.

I want to commend the contributions that these countries have made in absorbing refugees. And we had a significant discussion around the issue of migrants and refugees. I think it's useful for the American press to understand that, although some of the absolute numbers that are going into these respective countries may not seem that large, when you look at it on a per-capita basis, they are making an enormously generous effort to help people in great need. But it's important for the world to carry this burden alongside them and not allow any individual country to carry those burdens alone, which is part of the reason why I'm glad we'll get strong cooperation and participation in the summit on refugees that I intend to host in September in the margins of the U.N. General Assembly.

With regard to European security, as we head into the NATO summit in Warsaw, I'm pleased that Denmark and Norway will be joining the United States in contributing to an enhanced, allied, forward presence to bolster our collective defense in Europe. And all of our nations agreed to increase cooperation between NATO and the EU.

We agreed on the need to continue to support Ukraine and maintain sanctions against Russia until we can get a resolution, as was outlined in the Minsk agreements, and that those need to be fully implemented.

We're united in our concern about Russia's growing aggressive military presence and posture in the Baltic-Nordic region. We will be maintaining ongoing dialogue and seek cooperation with Russia, but we also want to make sure that we are prepared and strong, and we want to encourage Russia to keep its military activities in full compliance with international obligations.

As members of the EU, Denmark, Finland, Sweden are strong supporters of T-TIP. I reaffirmed my intention to try to get this done before the end of the year. And we discussed the importance of Europe's energy security, including diversification of suppliers and sources and routes.

Our six nations remain strong partners in climate change, including the implementation of the Paris Agreement and transitioning to a low-carbon economy. And as Arctic nations, we committed to conservation and sustainable development that prioritize our efforts to combat climate change. And we look forward to hosting the first-ever White House Arctic Science Ministerial this fall to ensure that we're working together on that issue.

And finally, all the leaders here are key partners in global development. The Nordic countries are some of the few countries—and by the way, the United States doesn't fall into this category of meeting the goals that had been set with respect to foreign aid and humanitarian assistance. And I'd like us to do even more. They're doing a great job. And the coordination in terms of global health security, in terms of encouraging women's education and inclusion in economies, developing sustainable development in poor countries, and eradicating extreme poverty, as was outlined in the 2030 agenda—all these countries have been outstanding leaders in this process. And one of the things we discussed is how we can coordinate better so that we get more effect from the common contributions that we're making in that regard.

So I thought this was a very useful and important conversation—although there was probably too much agreement—[laughter]—to make for as exciting a multilateral meeting as I sometimes participate in.

With that, what I'd like to do is to turn it over to Prime Minister Löfven, who is going to be sharing, I think, for the group their perspective on how the meeting went.

Stefan.

Prime Minister Löfven. Thank you, Mr. President. And thank you once again for inviting us Nordic leaders to this summit. We appreciate it very much.

We know that the United States and the Nordic countries, we share a great history. More than 11 million Americans have Scandinavian heritage. So we share that, but we also share many values. And that was clear today. Let me just give two examples.

First, we agree on the need of global response to common challenges. And the transatlantic link is more important than ever. It is actually key to preserving European and global security. And in times when basic rules and norms of international standards are contested, we stand side by side to defend them. We will not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea or accept Russian aggression in Ukraine. We are convinced that a negotiated two-state solution in—is urgently needed for peace and security for both Israel and Palestine and will require actions and responsibility.

We welcome the military progress made by the coalition against Daesh, while seeking to complement these efforts with strong political and civilian support. We have also agreed to

work together to tackle the root causes of forced migration. I believe that we need a globally shared responsibility in handling the flows of migration, and we welcome the U.S.-led leaders' summit on refugees in September, to which Sweden will seek to actively contribute. And I will personally attend that summit. I think it's very, very important to have a global perspective on the migration issue.

The same goes for climate change. And I applaud President Obama's instrumental role in pushing for the climate agenda and a clean energy revolution in U.S. and globally. And our Nordic countries will gladly both cooperate and compete in the race to reduce emission. And I can also say that Sweden aims to be the first fossil-free welfare nation in the world.

Secondly, the U.S. and the Nordic countries share the belief that the best foundation for individual freedom are jobs, growth, and social investments. To create jobs, we need free trade, sustainable investment that embraces innovation and new technology. That is why I'm a staunch supporter of bringing the U.S. and EU closer together through a strong Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

But with freedom comes also responsibility. We strive for trade that is both free and fair, enables social development, creates better working conditions, and protects our environment. We share the belief that women's empowerment and participation in the workforce are necessary to achieve real, sustainable development. Gender equality is both financially smart and a fundamental matter of human rights.

Our five countries have developed what has been known as the Nordic welfare model to enable more people to work, to increase gender equality, and to create socially inclusive societies. And we are proud to see that those ideas are also discussed and developed here in the United States, with President Obama's strong efforts for affordable health care, socially—social safety nets, and higher education system for all.

I believe that seeing U.S. advance on these issues will create new ripples of hope for all of us who believe in social justice and individual freedom. And as we have read in the Atlantic, President Obama likes to say, if only everyone could be like the Scandinavians, this would all be easy. [*Laughter*] We don't know about that. But let me just add that we Scandinavians truly enjoy cooperation with the United States to make life not only easier, but better and freer for all.

Thank you very much.

President Obama. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:15 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization, also known as "Daesh."

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