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Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and an Exchange With Reporters in Shima City, Japan

May 25, 2016

Prime Minister Abe. At the very outset of our small-group discussion, I firmly lodged a protest against President Obama as the Japanese Prime Minister with regard to the most recent case in Okinawa. The entire time for the small group discussion was spent on this specific case in Okinawa. And I feel profound resentment against this self-centered and absolutely despicable crime.

This case has shocked not only Okinawa, but also deeply shocked the entire Japan. I conveyed to the President that such feelings of Japanese people should be sincerely taken to heart. I also urged the United States to make sure to take effective and thorough means to prevent a recurrence and vigorously and strictly address the situation.

In proceeding with the realignment of the U.S. forces without truly staying together with the feelings of the people in Okinawa, we will not be able to make progress. And there is a tough and challenging road ahead of us as we seek to regain confidence, which was lost due to the most recent case. However, we both agreed to do our utmost in areas such as impact mitigation in Okinawa through Japan-U.S. cooperation.

At the plenary meeting, for myself, I conveyed to the President that I wholeheartedly welcome the decision by President Obama to visit Hiroshima, a place which suffered an atomic bomb. And he is going to visit the Hiroshima as the first-ever U.S. President.

I am convinced that when the leader of a nation that is the only nation to have used a nuclear weapon and the leader of the nation that is the nation—only nation to have suffered atomic bombings in the war express the feelings of sincere sorrow and pray for the repose of the souls of those citizens who sacrificed their life will create a significant and strong momentum toward the world free of nuclear weapons.

Japan and the United States, together, working hand in hand and continuously doing utmost for global peace and prosperity, I would like to send such a powerful message from Hiroshima together with President Obama.

So tomorrow, finally, the G–7 Ise-Shima summit is starting. We could compare notes how we, the G–7, can lead the world in addressing various challenges of the international community, including the global economy, which has become increasingly uncertain, and also the challenges against the international order.

In particular, the global economy is going to be the biggest theme for the G–7 Ise-Shima summit. And both President Obama and I could share the recognition that G–7 should lead the global sustainable and powerful growth. My determination is to demonstrate in a thorough manner a way forward toward resolving various challenges of the international community, through the close cooperation between Japan and the United States.

Japan and the United States, working hand in hand for regional and global peace and prosperity, based on our enduring bond and also under our alliance of hope, that is the determination that I could renew, together with President Obama today.

[*At this point, the moderator spoke in English as follows.*]

Moderator. Now, let me invite the President of the United States.

President Obama. Well, I want to thank Prime Minister Abe and the people of Japan for welcoming us. Prime Minister Abe and his team have done an outstanding job preparing for the G–7 summit. And we discussed, as Shinzo indicated, the need for us to continue to boost global growth and to move ahead with the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The alliance between the United States and Japan is a critical foundation for the security of both of our countries. That alliance has also helped to fortify peace and security throughout the region.

As Prime Minister Abe indicated, we did discuss the tragedy that took place in Okinawa, and I extended my sincerest condolences and deepest regrets. And the United States will continue to cooperate fully with the investigation to ensure that justice is done under the Japanese legal system.

We also discussed a range of regional issues, and given the threat from North Korea, we agreed to continue reinforcing deterrence and strengthening our defense capabilities. On maritime issues, we are united in upholding freedom of navigation and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

We also discussed a range of global issues, including the need for additional resources to help migrants and refugees and to support Iraq. And we discussed the role our countries should play in achieving the early entry into force of the Paris climate change agreement.

Finally, I'm looking forward to the opportunity to visit with some of our American and Japanese military personnel to thank them for their service. And our visit to Hiroshima will honor all those who were lost in World War II and reaffirm our shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons, as well as highlight the extraordinary alliance that we have been able to forge over these many decades.

[*The moderator spoke in English as follows.*]

Moderator. Thank you. Thank you, the President. Now, let us have the questions from the floor. I would have two questions, one from Japanese side, the other one from the United—you Americans' side. The—let me appoint the questioner, and then let me defer to my American counterpart to appoint the U.S. question. And when the—we appointed, please make sure that you are—the names and media outlet. And—[*inaudible*]—question.

[*He then spoke in Japanese, but no translation was provided.*]

Q. This is—[*inaudible*]—from NHK. I would like to ask a question to Prime Minister Abe with regard to the most recent, very tragic case in Okinawa. I understand that more than 20 years have already passed since the rape incident, which involved U.S. Marine Corps officers back in 1995. But even so, we do not see the decreasing number of crimes involving the U.S. people. And it is quite regrettable a trend. And whenever Japan faces each of the case or accident, I understand that the Japanese Government has been requesting the U.S. side to take measures to prevent the recurrence of the—such measures. And also, you have been dealing with the situation through the improvement of the implementation of the SOFA instead of having amendment to the SOFA itself. And I am aware of the fact that your judicial systems are quite different of—between Japan and the United States.

So my question to the Prime Minister is that whether or not you have requested to the President that we should have the revision or amendment to the SOFA. And also, in order for

you to see the progress in the base-related issues, I understand that the key is to regain the confidence among the people in Okinawa, as well as ensuring safety and security among those of the people in Okinawa. So what specific measures are you planning to implement as you move forward?

Prime Minister Abe. I too feel profound resentment. When thinking of fear and real disappointment of this victim, I am just speechless. We will investigate in a vigorous manner under the Japanese jurisdiction, in mind with the Japanese laws, this offender who committed this self-centered and absolutely despicable crime.

With regard to the Japanese investigation process, during our discussion, President Obama assured me that the U.S. side will offer full support as we move forward. The entire Japan was deeply shocked due to this most recent case. And as I said earlier, for myself, I conveyed to the President that such feelings of the Japanese people should be taken to heart sincerely. I also requested that the United States vigorously and strictly address the situation, including making sure to take effective and thorough measures to prevent recurrence.

On the status of forces agreement, when facing issues, we will steadily realize the visible improvement in concrete terms as for each and every issue that we face. And by doing so, we will achieve results, one after another, in a steady manner, in parallel with such steady efforts. My view is that we both make efforts and persistently pursue the most appropriate form of the regime, based on the status of forces agreement and related arrangements.

As a result of the case in Okinawa, people in Okinawa feel strong sense of uneasiness in light of their security situation. My intention is to thoroughly implement measures to prevent crimes and ensure safety and peace of mind among the people in Okinawa. So I already gave the instruction to my Chief Cabinet Secretary to consider such measures in a timely manner.

Securing lives and property of the Japanese people is my responsibility as Prime Minister. I am determined to take every possible means so that such tragic case is never to be repeated.

White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary Eric H. Schultz. Christi Parsons with the Chicago Tribune.

Alleged Rape and Murder Committed by Former U.S. Servicemember in Okinawa, Japan/U.S. Diplomacy/Use of Military Force/China-U.S. Relations/South China Sea Maritime Disputes

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister. Mr. President, on this trip you are confronting old war zones and the use of American military might in them. This week, you also crossed into sovereign Pakistani territory, where you did not have permission to operate, in order to kill the leader of the Taliban. After expanding the use of the drone program as you have, are you worried at all about handing it over to the next President? Could I also ask what your response is to the Chinese warnings this week that the U.S. and its partners in this region may be creating a tinderbox that would lead to regional conflict?

Mr. Prime Minister, if you would also reflect on that, I would appreciate it. Could you also tell us a little bit about what you think the President's visit to Hiroshima means to the Japanese people? And will you also consider a trip to Pearl Harbor, sir? Thank you.

President Obama. Before I answer your questions, Christi, let me just touch on the points that were made earlier about the Okinawa case, because this has shaken up, I think, people in Okinawa as well as people throughout Japan.

I want to emphasize that the United States is appalled by any violent crime that may have occurred or been carried out by any U.S. personnel or U.S. contractors. We consider it inexcusable. And we are committed to doing everything that we can to prevent any crimes from taking place of this sort. And that involves reviewing procedures and making sure that everything that can be done to prevent such occurrences from happening again are put into place.

I think it's important to point out that the SOFA—the status of forces agreement—does not in any way prevent the full prosecution and the need for justice under the Japanese legal system. And we will be fully cooperating with the Japanese legal system in prosecuting this individual and making sure that justice is served. And we want to see a crime like this prosecuted here the same way that we would feel horrified and want to provide a sense of justice to a victim's family back in the United States.

So I think the Japanese people should know how deeply moved we are by what has happened and our intention to make sure that we're working with the Japanese Government to not only prosecute this crime, but to prevent crimes like this from happening again. Go ahead.

[*The interpreter translated President Obama's remarks into Japanese. He continued his remarks as follows.*]

Christi, with respect to your broader question, I wasn't entirely clear on the parallel you were trying to draw. As Commander in Chief and President of the United States, my job is to protect the American people. I wish that never involves us having to take military actions. That's not the world we live in.

Obviously, there are very few parallels between the deployment of 500,000 troops to Vietnam and us taking strikes against terrorists who are trying to kill our troops who are stationed in Afghanistan or potentially carry out actions in the homeland.

But I think that what might be a useful lesson to draw from the trip that I just took to Afghanistan—or to Vietnam, rather, is the extraordinary opportunities that have presented themselves through the diplomacy that we've been engaged in over the last 7 years, and the fact that former adversaries are now working in partnership to provide economic opportunities to both of our peoples, to expand trade and commerce, to educate those remarkable young people that were in the town halls that we met today. And I am investing enormous amounts of time and energy and resources into those kinds of diplomatic initiatives because, to the extent that they're successful, that shrinks areas of conflict, reduces the necessity of engaging in military action.

But at the end of the day, it is still going to be a dangerous world, and there are going to still be times where our U.S. fighting forces have to be deployed or have to take actions. And we have to do so in a way that is prudent, that is proportional, and that is mindful of the fact that any kinetic action, no matter how targeted and how justified, also can create tragedy. And one of the things that I hope to reflect on when I'm at Hiroshima—and certainly, something I reflected on when I was in Vietnam—is just a reminder that war involves suffering, and we should always do what we can to prevent it.

But, as I said early on in my Presidency when I was in Oslo for the Nobel Peace Prize, I am the President of a nation that at times is threatened by very real risks, not imaginary risks, and it's important for us to act on occasion in order to make sure that the American people are protected.

[*President Obama paused while his remarks were translated into Japanese. He continued his remarks as follows.*]

My answer sounds so much longer in translation. [*Laughter*] So the—just very briefly, on China. Our growing partnership with Vietnam is happening entirely independent from China and is based on mutual interests to expand trade, to expand cooperation across a whole range of areas, and is 30 years in the making now. So the fact that China would perceive that as some sort of provocation to them, I think, says more about Chinese attitudes than it says anything about our attitudes.

The tensions between China and Vietnam or China and the Philippines or China and other claimants in the South China Sea are not of our making. And we would very much like to see a peaceful resolution of those disputes. What's preventing that from happening is not anything we're doing. We would welcome China and Vietnam having a conversation and being able to resolve those disputes. We're not taking a position on those claims. So it's entirely within China's power to resolve those disputes. And our goal with respect to our own interests in the South China Sea is simply to maintain freedom of navigation, freedom of overflight, and the maintenance of international rules and norms because we think that benefits everybody, including China.

Prime Minister Abe. With regard to China, we certainly welcome the peaceful rise of China. And what we have been advocating for vis-à-vis the situation in this region is as follows, namely, three-pronged principles. First, if you are to make a claim you have to make a claim based on international law. And also, second, you should never intimidate others through the use of force or coercion, or you should not unilaterally change the status quo. And third, you should settle the disputes in a peaceful manner in accordance with international law.

With regard to President Obama's visit to Hiroshima, I'd like to touch on this. Seventy-one years ago, back in 1945, two atomic bombs were dropped. And in Hiroshima, numerous number—numerous citizens sacrificed their lives, and even now there are those of us suffering because of the atomic bombing. And what those Japanese people's suffering from the atomic bomb desiring is never to repeat such tragedy in the world. And I understand that the upcoming visit by President Obama to Hiroshima will no doubt create further powerful momentum toward realizing a world free of nuclear weapons.

At this moment, I don't have any specific plan to visit Hawaii. However, last year, when we marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, I made an official visit to the United States. During my visit to the United States last year, I had an opportunity to deliver a speech to the joint Houses of the U.S. Congress. And on that occasion, I sincerely reflected on the past and expressed my sincere sense, and also, I highlighted the facts that former adversaries are now transforming into the relationship of allies, as the United States and Japan—as we stand at this moment. And also, during my visit to the United States, I had a chance to visit the Second World War Memorial, where I laid a wreath to pray for the souls of the—all the war dead.

So as we move forward, I am determined to work closely with the United States in addressing various challenges of the international community based on our robust alliance, namely the alliance of hope between Japan and the United States. Thank you.

Moderator. Now, let us wrap up the joint conference. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:50 p.m. in the Fujii Room at the Shima Kanko Hotel, The Classic. In his remarks, he referred to Kadena Air Base employee Kenneth Franklin Shinzato, a former U.S. Marine who was arrested on May 19 on suspicion of illegally disposing of the body of Rina Shimabukuro in Okinawa, Japan, on April 28. Prime Minister Abe referred to Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga of Japan. Reporters referred to former Pfc. Rodrico Harp, USMC, and former SN Marcus D. Gill, USN, who were convicted in the rape of a minor in Okinawa, Japan, on September 4, 1995; and Akhtar Mohammad Mansur, leader of the Taliban insurgent organization in Afghanistan, who was killed in a U.S. airstrike in Baluchistan Province, Pakistan, on May 22. Prime Minister Abe and a reporter spoke in Japanese, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: Shima City, Japan; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Japan, Prime Minister Abe.

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