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The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni of Italy

April 20, 2017

President Trump. Thank you very much. Prime Minister Gentiloni, welcome. Great honor. Thank you.

It's wonderful to have you in our wonderful people's house, known as the White House. And so many great Italian friends are with us today. And we renew, always, the deep ties of history and friendship that link together the American and the Italian peoples. That history traces its roots to the timeless contributions of Italy to civilization and human progress—so true. Stretching all the way back to ancient Rome, through the ages, your country has been a beacon of artistic and scientific achievement—and that continues today—from Venice to Florence, from Verdi to Pavarotti, a friend of mine. Great friend of mine. These bonds of history and culture have only grown stronger as our two nations have become close partners, dear friends, and very vital allies.

Mr. Prime Minister, I'm thrilled that you are here today to discuss how we can make this great relationship even more productive in the years to come. On the economy, Italy is one of America's largest trading partners. A lot of people don't know that. We both seek a trading relationship that is balanced, reciprocal—I love the word "reciprocal," because we don't have too many reciprocal trading partnerships, I will tell you that, but we will very soon—and fair, benefiting both of our countries. And we can work together to achieve that outcome, and that will happen.

Italy is also a key partner in the fight against terrorism. Italy is now the second largest contributor of troops to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. I would also like to thank you, Prime Minister, for your leadership on seeking stabilization in Libya and for your crucial efforts to deny ISIS a foothold in the Mediterranean. You fought hard. We're grateful for your role in the anti-ISIS campaign. All nations must condemn this barbaric enemy and support the effort to achieve its total and complete destruction.

Also, as you know, Mr. Prime Minister, we have more than 30,000 American servicemembers, families, and personnel who are stationed across your country. As we reaffirm our support for historic institutions, we must also reaffirm the requirement that everyone must pay their full and fair share for the cost of defense.

Together, we can address many pressing challenges, including two that greatly affect both of our countries, those of large-scale migration and international smuggling. Maintaining strong borders is a vital component of any security policy, and a responsible approach to refugees is one that seeks the eventual return of refugees to their home countries so that they can help to rebuild their own nations.

Finally, I want to say how much I look forward to visiting Sicily for the G–7, as we seek to foster cooperation not only on matters of security, but also science, commerce, health, and technology. Our two countries have shared interests and shared values, and we can each make great contributions to the other.

Mr. Prime Minister, I again want to thank you for being with us and being our true friend. Italy is a spectacular place; I know it well. I love the people of Italy. We have 18 million Italians

living in the United States, people originally from Italy. And it's a great honor to have many of them as my friends. Thank you for being here.

Prime Minister Gentiloni. Thank you very much. Thank you for hosting us here. It's an honor to be here at the White House today. And I'll now switch to Italian.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Gentiloni spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Prime Minister Gentiloni. We had a very fruitful meeting, which reflects an ancient friendship, as the President reminded us with his words. This friendship is also a sign of the 18 million Italian Americans who have such an important role in our country—in this country. And this friendship is witnessed also by the fact that Italy is the second choice for American students who study abroad, and we're very proud of this. And this confirms the importance that the United States gives to the cultural dimension of our country, as the President, himself, just said.

This friendship is based on a common commitment against terrorism. This commitment, see, is a commitment in which we are both very active—our country is very active in Iraq and in Afghanistan, and I think that the stabilization work will be decisive, the civilization work of Iraq, after the military defeat that we expect for Daesh.

We know that this action against terrorism must take place within our individual countries. In Europe, with the social and cultural commitment against radicalization, by cooperating with Islamic communities, Italy contributes to peace and to stability in the Mediterranean. In Syria, where I believe the U.S. choice to react to the use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Asad, and where a negotiated solution is more necessary than ever. In Libya—and we discussed this in our meeting—where we need to work against the division of the country in order to stabilize it.

This is a very decisive task if we want to manage the migratory flows without giving up on our values and our humanitarian principles. And we need to contrast the horrible traffic of people and clandestine refugees.

Italy is convinced of its strategic commitment in favor of the transatlantic relationship. We have also spoken about common commitments in NATO and the goals that were identified in 2014 and the commitments on military expenses and the contribution that each country must make towards collective security. We are proud of our contribution.

And finally, Italy is a country of dialogue. We are proud because we succeeded in keeping open the doors in difficult crises. Dialogue can be useful, even vis-à-vis Russia, without obviously giving up our unity and our principles and without giving up our strength and our values.

I also told President Trump that we have confidence—even though this is a difficult moment, and we all know it's difficult right now—I have—we have confidence in the future of the European Union and certainly in the importance of the relationship between the U.S. and Italy. These are the two pillars that the transatlantic relationship is based on and a great part of peace and freedom in the world. We are going through a difficult time, but I have confidence that the European Union will continue to be a positive response to this.

And finally, we are expecting and I look forward to the President's visit to the summit in Taormina, and I trust that this will be the opportunity to show him the unity of our leaders and of the principal free economies of the planet. Because right now we really do need this unity.

Once again, thank you, Mr. President.

President Trump. Thank you very much, sir. Thank you. Appreciate it.

I'll take a few questions. John Roberts of Fox, please.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization/Shooting in Paris, France/North Korea/China/Iran

Q. Mr. President, thanks so much. I hope you'll forgive me for asking you three-part questions; it's been a while. In just the last few minutes—I believe it was while you were meeting with the Prime Minister—there was a shooting in downtown Paris.

President Trump. I see that.

Q. It's being described as a potential terrorist attack. I wonder if you have something on that.

And further to that, to the big trouble spots that you're dealing with right now, North Korea and Iran. Do you believe that the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Un, is mentally unstable? Is that one of the reasons why you're so concerned about these latest developments? Is he a man who can be reasoned with? And on Iran, do you have reason to suspect that they are cheating on the JCPOA?

And to Mr. Prime Minister, you talked just a moment ago about your commitment to NATO. President Trump would like to see all NATO members contribute 2 percent of their GDP to NATO. Your contribution is slightly less than 1 percent. Will you commit to committing 2 percent of your GDP to the alliance going forward? Thank you.

President Trump. Well, first of all, I love the question you asked the Prime Minister. I look forward to his answer—[*laughter*]—because I'm going to be asking him that same question very soon.

Well, first of all, our condolences from our country to the people of France. Again, it's happening, it seems. I just saw it as I was walking in, so that's a terrible thing, and it's a very, very terrible thing that's going on in the world today. But it looks like another terrorist attack. And what can you say? It just never ends. We have to be strong, and we have to be vigilant. And I've been saying it for a long time.

As far as North Korea is concerned, we are in very good shape. And we're building our military rapidly. A lot of things have happened over the last short period of time. I've been here for approximately 91 days; we're doing a lot of work. We're in very good position. We're going to see what happens.

I can't ask your—answer your question on stability. I hope the answer is a positive one, not a negative one. But hopefully, that will be something that gets taken care of. I have great respect for the President of China. As you know, we had a great summit in Florida, and Palm Beach, and got to know each other and, I think, like each other. I can say from my standpoint I liked him very much. I respect him very much. And I think he's working very hard.

I can say that all of the pundits out there are saying they never have seen China work like they're working right now. Many coal ships have sent back. Many other things have happened. Some very unusual moves have been made over the last 2 or 3 hours. And I really have confidence that the President will try very hard. We don't know whether or not they're able to do that, but I have absolute confidence that he will be trying very, very hard.

And one of the reasons that we're talking about trade deals and we're talking about all of the different things—but we're slowing up a little bit. I actually told him, I said, you'll make a much better deal on trade if you get rid of this menace or do something about the menace of North Korea. Because that's what it is, it's a menace right now.

So we'll see what happens. As far as Iran is concerned, I think they are doing a tremendous disservice to an agreement that was signed. It was a terrible agreement. It shouldn't have been signed. It shouldn't have been negotiated the way it was negotiated. I'm all for agreements, but that was a bad one, as bad as I've ever seen negotiated.

They are not living up to the spirit of the agreement, I can tell you that. And we're analyzing it very, very carefully, and we'll have something to say about it in the not-too-distant future. But Iran has not lived up to the spirit of the agreement. And they have to do that. They have to do that. So we will see what happens.

Thank you very much, John.

Prime Minister Gentiloni. Thank you, Mr. President.

[*Prime Minister Gentiloni continued in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Prime Minister Gentiloni. First of all, allow me to join President Trump's words for what happened in Paris, these words of condolences and closeness to the French people. And this is a very delicate period for them, just 3 days before the election.

As far as the question is concerned, the commitment has been made. It was made during a NATO summit. And we are used to respecting our commitments. We know that this will be a gradual process; it has already begun. And we know that Italy has certain limitations when it comes to its budget, but despite these limitations, our commitment for common defense is very clear.

And as I said earlier, I'm very proud not only of the progress made by—in our financial commitment, but also proud of the contribution that we give to the security of the alliance in so many areas of the world. We talked about Iraq and Afghanistan, but we could also talk about the Baltic Sea or the Balkans. And in all of these areas, you will see the presence of Italian forces within the alliance, and we are proud of that.

Sky News.

[*A reporter spoke in Italian, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

European Union/Pope Francis

Q. Giovanna Pancheri, Sky Italia. First, for you, President [Prime Minister]* Gentiloni, I wanted to ask you: We saw from this new administration a new type of policy on the international scene, very different from what we had in the past. And one of the last important operations, which was carried out by President Trump, was in Syria with a bombing following the use of chemical weapons by the Asad regime. I wanted to ask you, does Italy think or conceive a possibility to take action in—more action in Syria?

[*The reporter continued in English as follows.*]

* White House correction.

Q. ——since my colleague from Fox News did, so I'm going to take as well the possibility to ask you two questions. First of all, about European Union, you have said in the past the Brexit was a great thing, and that you think that other country will follow. So you know that Italy is an important player and supporter of European integration. Do you believe that actually a strong Europe is important from—for the United States, also looking forward at the French election?

And on the second question, is that you said that you're looking forward to come to Italy for the G–7, and I wanted to know if you're also looking forward, if it's going to be possible, to meet Pope Francis during your Italian trip. Thank you.

[*Prime Minister Gentiloni spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Prime Minister Gentiloni. Syria: We immediately assessed the operation that was ordered by President Trump and decided that this was a motivated response to the use of chemical weapons. We added that it's up to everyone to consider negotiation as the road through which we, hopefully, can put an end to this infinite dramatic war and come to peace. Italy is not directly involved in the operations, in military operations in Syria other than marginal aspects, but it's not our plan to change this attitude.

President Trump. Yes, a strong Europe is very, very important to me as President of the United States. And it's also, in my opinion, in my very strong opinion, important for the United States. We want to see it. We will help it be strong, and it's very much to everybody's advantage. And I look very much forward to meeting the Pope.

Fabian of the Hill [Jordan Fabian, The Hill]. Fabian. Yes.

Health Care Reform Legislation

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Some people on Capitol Hill believe you can get one of two things next week: a vote on health care or a vote on a Government funding bill. So my question is, which one is more important to you have: a vote on health care or a vote on a bill to keep the Government open?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, I want to get your thoughts on a referendum in Turkey that occurred last week. You spoke about democratic values in the European continent, so are you concerned with the result of the Turkish referendum? And is that something that you discussed with President Trump?

President Trump. Okay, I want to get both. [*Laughter*] Are you shocked to hear that? And we're doing very well on health care. We'll see what happens. But this is a great bill. There's a great plan. And this will be great health care. It's evolving. You know, there was never a give-up. The press sort of reported there was, like, a give-up. There's no give-up. We started. Remember, it took Obamacare 17 months. I've really been negotiating this for 2 months, maybe even less than that, because we had a 30-day period where we did lots of other things the first 30 days.

But this has really been 2 months. And this is a continuation. And the plan gets better and better and better. And it's gotten really, really good. And a lot of people are liking it a lot. We have a good chance of getting it soon. I'd like to say next week, but it will be—I believe we will get it. And whether it's next week or shortly thereafter. As far as keeping the Government open, I think we want to keep the Government open. Don't you agree? So, yes, I think we'll get both. Thank you.

[*Prime Minister Gentiloni spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Prime Minister Gentiloni. The Turkish referendum is a fact that we must take note of, leaving aside any debates that can take place about how the vote took place. But I believe that the European leadership have taken note of the vote. The consequences will depend a great deal on how the Turkish Government and President Erdogan, especially, will take into account almost half of the population's expression of a different opinion. Will there be an inclusive approach, or will there be a confrontation in this part of Turkey? This will be very important for us and the European Union.

The other thing that's going to be very important is to—is the respect of the certain fundamental principles. We are members of the Atlantic alliance—Italy and Turkey—and Italy contributes to Turkey's defense with its own military assets. We believe that, among our countries, there should be a cooperation, and hopefully—and we trust—that this cooperation will have, among its consequences, the solution of the case concerning the journalist—blogger who's been detained over the last few days in Turkey.

[*Inaudible*]—Italian Radio.

[*A reporter spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Libya/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Terrorist Organization

Q. Ruffalo—[*inaudible*]. President Gentiloni, you have focused a lot on the leadership—Italian leadership and American leadership—in order to stabilize Libya. What do you expect exactly from Washington? And especially, I am asking you, what is necessary in this process, in this relationship of cooperation with Russia?

[*The reporter continued in English as follows.*]

Q. President Trump, do you see a role for your administration in helping stabilizing Libya? And do you agree that stabilizing Libya means combating terrorism and ISIS?

[*Prime Minister Gentiloni spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Prime Minister Gentiloni. America has played a very key role, first of all, to prevent the consolidation of an important basis for terrorism while Daesh was undergoing defeats in Iraq and Syria. There were operations that were sustained by the U.S. against Daesh in the city of Sirte, which were successful. Now the commitment must be political. And therefore, in the cooperation between U.S. and Italy and other key partners in the region, the goal is to broaden the basis of the consensus for the Tripoli Government, which is recognized by the international community, but which must be able to count on a broader consensus.

I believe that one clear goal should be this: We need the region, and we need countries like Egypt and Tunisia that are close to Libya. We need a stable and unified Libya. A divided country and in conflict would be—would make stability worse. The U.S. job is—the U.S. role, sorry, in this is very critical.

President Trump. I do not see a role in Libya. I think the United States has right now enough roles. We're in a role everywhere. So I do not see that. I do see a role in getting rid of ISIS. We're being very effective in that regard. We are doing a job, with respect to ISIS, that has not been done anywhere near the numbers that we're producing right now. It's a very effective force we have. We have no choice. It's a horrible thing to say, but we have no choice.

And we are effectively ridding the world of ISIS. I see that as a primary role, and that's what we're going to do, whether it's in Iraq or in Libya or anywhere else. And that role will come to an end at a certain point, and we'll be able to go back home and rebuild our country, which is what I want to do.

Thank you all very much. I appreciate it. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:56 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Xi Jinping of China. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization, also known as "Daesh." Prime Minister Gentiloni referred to President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; and Gabriele Del Grande, an Italian blogger and human rights reporter who was arrested in Hatay, a region in southern Turkey near the Syrian border, on April 9. A reporter referred to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a multilateral agreement reached to ensure that Iran's nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful.

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