

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2020

**Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of Greece
and an Exchange With Reporters**

January 7, 2020

President Trump. Well, thank you very much. On behalf of the First Lady and myself, it's an honor to have the Prime Minister of Greece and First Lady of Greece with us. We really appreciate it. We have many things to discuss.

The relationship is really extraordinary, I would say. Right? It's as good as it can get. We're doing a lot of things together—military. We're also doing big trade. A lot of trade. And Greece has made a tremendous comeback. We've worked with them very closely. And really, the Prime Minister will have some interesting things to say. I say you have to tell that one statistic, because it's a great statistic. We're very proud of Greece and the comeback that they're making. And we will continue it forward. There's no doubt about it. Thank you very much for being here.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. Well, thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. It's a real privilege to be here at a very important time. You're right to point out that this relationship is the best it ever was. But it can become even better.

Both on the geopolitical side, we're looking for your constant support, strengthening the strategic relationship. On the defense side, we've made lots of progress in terms of making sure that you have a reliable and predictable ally in a complicated part of the world. But I also want to stress the economic aspect of our relationship. The Greek economy has done extremely well over the past months. We lowered taxes. We are deregulating. We're following a recipe that has also worked here in the——

President Trump. [Laughter] Yes. That's right.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. ——in the United States. And the economy is reacting very positively. So we'll also be looking to your support to convince American companies to invest more in Greece and help us grow the economy at a pace where people are really going to feel the difference.

So it's a privilege to be here. You can always count on—the United States can always count on Greece as a reliable and predictable ally in our part of the world.

President Trump. Well, we appreciate it. And again, congratulations. Really, one of the—percentage-wise, one of the biggest increases in the world. And that's a big statement. And that's a tremendous comeback. And you've done a fantastic job. You've really united the country.

So again, congratulations.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Q. Mr. President?

President Trump. Okay. Yes.

*Death of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Major General and Quds Force
Commander Qasem Soleimani of Iran*

Q. A lot of questions are being asked in Washington and across America about what evidence you had that Qasem Soleimani was planning attacks against American targets. What can you tell us about what you knew prior to ordering the attack?

President Trump. Sure. Well, number one, I knew the past. His past was horrible. He was a terrorist. He was a—so designated by President Obama, as you know. And he wasn't even supposed to be outside of his own country; he was. So right there.

But that's, in a way, the least of it. We had an attack very recently that he was in charge of, where we had people horribly wounded, one dead. In fact, the number now, as of this morning, I believe is two dead. And that was his. He was traveling with the head of Hezbollah. They weren't there to discuss a vacation. They weren't there to go to a nice resort someplace in Baghdad. They were there to discuss bad business.

And we saved a lot of lives by terminating his life. A lot of lives were saved. They were planning something, and you're going to be hearing about it, or at least various people in Congress are going to be hearing about it tomorrow.

Our Secretary of State covered it very well a little while ago. I saw him. I saw his new conference—Mike. And if you want to mention a couple of things in addition to what I've just said. But we had tremendous information. We've been following him for a long time. And we followed his path for those 3 days. And they were not good stops. We didn't like where he was stopping. They were not good stops. We saved a lot of lives.

Mike.

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo. Well, Mr. President, I'd only add we had deep intelligence indicating there was active plotting to put American lives at risk. And I'm confident, and I think the President is confident too, that the actions that the President took saved American lives, saved lives of Iraqi Muslims as well. It was the right thing to do. And our Department of Defense did an excellent job executing the mission.

Q. And, Mr. President, can——

President Trump. And, as you know, he killed at least 608 Americans, but the number is much higher than that. He's also very much—roadside bombs and all of the horrible explosives that you see, he was a big believer and sent them everywhere. He was somebody that—we did ourselves and we did a lot of countries a big favor. And I've been hearing from countries. They were extremely happy with what we did. And if you look inside Iran itself, there were plenty of those leaders that were happy, because they feared him and didn't like him, in many cases.

Potential U.S. Military Action Against Iranian Cultural Sites

Q. But could you also clear up, Mr. President, whether Iranian cultural sites would be on any future target list?

President Trump. Well, as I said yesterday, it was very interesting, they're allowed to kill our people, they're allowed to maim our people, they're allowed to blow up everything that we have, and there's nothing that stops them. And we are—according to various laws—supposed to be very careful with their cultural heritage. And you know what? If that's what the law is, I will—I like to obey the law.

But think of it: They kill our people, they blow up our people, and then we have to be very gentle with their cultural institutions. But I'm okay with it. It's okay with me.

I will say this: If Iran does anything that they shouldn't be doing, they're going to be suffering the consequences and very strongly.

All right. Steve [Steve A. Holland, Reuters]?

Death of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Major General and Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani of Iran

Q. Are there any signs of imminent retaliation from the Iranians? Any indications of imminent——

President Trump. Well, don't forget: In our case, it was retaliation, because they were there first. They killed—and look, I don't have to talk about him. For 18 to 20 years, he was a monster. But just in the very short period of time, two people dead, people badly injured, and then, before that, there were other attacks. And look at what he was planning.

So that will be discussed tomorrow morning. Right now it's classified. And that will be discussed tomorrow with Mike Pompeo and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

U.S. Military Readiness

Q. And is the U.S. prepared for an Iranian attack?

President Trump. We're prepared. We're totally prepared. And likewise, we're prepared to attack if we have to, as retribution.

Death of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Major General and Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani of Iran

Q. Mr. President, Iran's leaders say that any response to the Soleimani killing would be, quote, "proportionate." What would the United States do in the event of any Iranian attack, proportionate or not?

President Trump. So, again, John [John Roberts, Fox News], if you look at what's going on, ours was an attack based on what they did. We weren't the first one out. He killed an American. Now two people are dead from the same attack and some people very badly wounded. And that was one of his smaller endeavors.

If you look over his past, his past—he's been called a "monster," and he was a monster. And he's no longer a monster; he's dead. And that's a good thing for a lot of countries. And he was planning a very big attack and a very bad attack for us and other people. And we stopped him.

And I don't think anybody can complain about it. I don't hear too many people, other than politicians who are trying to win the Presidency. Those are the ones that are complaining. But I don't hear anybody else complaining.

Go ahead.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey

Q. Mr. President, you called him a "monster," but your friend Erdogan called him a "martyr." What is your reaction?

President Trump. Well, that's—everybody—to each his own. I mean, I disagree a hundred percent, and I'm sure he does too. But he has a public to take care of, and I guess that's for his own reason. But I'm actually surprised to hear that, but that's okay.

Greece-U.S. Relations/U.S. Military Sales to Greece

Q. Are you willing to make a deal with Greece regarding F-35s, sir?

President Trump. Say it?

Q. Are you willing to make a deal with Greece regarding F-35?

President Trump. So Greece and I, and my people and—we have a whole group of people. And as you see, they brought a lot of great representatives from Greece that we've been dealing with. We have a tremendous Greek population, over 3 million people, as I understand it. That's

fantastic. I think I know—I really feel I know most of them. I think I know all of them, come to think of it. But it's a great population in the United States.

We're going to be meeting, we're going to be talking, we're going to be negotiating, and we're going to be making a lot of deals.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. Yes. Let me add something—yes.

President Trump. We have a really great relationship with Greece.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. Let me add something to that: Greece is interested, Mr. President, in participating in the F-35 program. As you know, we are already upgrading our F-16s.

President Trump. Yes.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. And that program will be completed in 2023, 2024. So we're very much interested in participating in the F-35 program after that. And I'm sure that the U.S. will take into consideration the fact that this country is coming out of an economic crisis, in terms of structuring the program in the best possible way for my country.

President Trump. That's true. And you know, they just signed a very big renovation of existing aircraft. They have great aircraft, but it's gotten a little bit tired. And they've done a renovation that's going to bring it up to brandnew, and we look forward to doing that. A couple of our great companies are doing it. Okay?

Iraq/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Terrorist Organization/Repatriation of Captured Terrorist Suspects

Q. Sir, in Iraq—in Iraq, how do you feel about the idea of the supposed withdrawal from Iraq being a possibility? Isn't that something Soleimani actually wanted all these years?

President Trump. Well, it's something that I want too. I mean, eventually, they have to be able to defend themselves and take care of themselves. And it's something, ultimately, that I want to see. We don't want to be there forever; we want to be able to get out.

I didn't want to be there in first place, to be honest, and everybody knows that. That was when I was a civilian, I said it. But we were there, and they made a decision, and I disagreed with that decision very strongly. But we're there now.

We've done a great job. We've gotten rid of the caliphate. A hundred percent of the caliphate is gone, and—which is ISIS. We have thousands of ISIS prisoners that we're keeping right now under lock and key. And we want Europe to take many of these prisoners, because they came from Germany, France, and other places, probably a few from Greece, in all fairness. We'll have to talk to you about that.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. Well, none. None from Greece——

President Trump. Good.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. ——so far. [Laughter] Yes, yes.

President Trump. You're lucky. You're lucky.

But we have a lot of people right now in prison—ISIS fighters that are tough fighters—and they are where they should be.

So I think we've done a fantastic job, but eventually, we want to be able to let Iraq run its own affairs. And that's very important. So, at some point, we want to get out. But this isn't the right point.

The other thing is, if we do get out, you know, we've spent a tremendous amount of money on building airports and building—it's one of the largest Embassies we have in the world, Mike, and we want to be reimbursed for the various costs that we have had. And they're very significant. But we'll work something out.

And I talk sanctions, but I'm only talking sanctions if we're not treated with respect. We have to be treated with respect.

Q. Mr. President——

President Trump. We deserve—I'll tell you what. I'll tell you, with what we did——

Q. [Inaudible]—companies——

The President. Excuse me. Wait, wait, wait. One sec. With what we did with ISIS—and this was done during by my administration, because it was a mess before we got here—with what we did with ISIS, we've done the Middle East and we've done a lot of other countries a tremendous favor.

Yes, go ahead.

Q. Mr. President——

Turkey/Libya

Q. Do you agree with—do you agree with Turkey's provocations in Libya, in eastern Mediterranean, against Greece? And are you willing to talk to your friend Erdogan to stop——

President Trump. We are talking to him, and we're talking to——

Q. ——to stop these provocations?

President Trump. Yeah. We're talking to—when you're talking about Libya, we're discussing with President Erdogan, we're discussing many other countries. I just spoke with the Chancellor of Germany, with Angela, and we talked about that subject specifically, Libya and what's going on. We'll be talking to Russia; they're involved. A lot of countries are involved with respect to Libya. And it's right now a mess.

But there are a lot of countries, and they all want to know where we stand, and they do know where we stand. We have a very distinctive stand. And we have meetings set up, and we're going to see if we can work out some kind of a plan for peace.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. [Inaudible]

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. I think it's important—just one—Mr. President, can I just make one point?

President Trump. Yes, please. Go ahead.

Q. [Inaudible]

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. One point. One second. One point on this issue. I think it is important to point out that the agreement signed between Turkey and Libya infringe upon Greece's sovereign rights and essentially cause great concern and instability in a region which is already highly problematic.

President Trump. Yes.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. So we'll be very much looking to your support to make sure that these types of provocative agreements are not being put into place. And I think we should refrain,

in general, in the eastern Mediterranean, for any sort of activity that inflames passions and that doesn't, you know, promote regional peace and security. So we'll be very much looking forward to your support on this issue because it is a very important issue for my country.

U.S. Military Presence in Iraq/Iraq-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, the Iraqi Government says it expects U.S. forces to leave the country after the letter that it received, General Mark Milley said, by mistake yesterday. What do you say to the Iraqi Government about the possibility of U.S. forces leaving based on that letter?

President Trump. Well, I don't know anything about that letter. That letter was sent, and I understand it was an unsigned letter. So I could maybe let Mike speak to it. I don't know if that letter was a hoax or was it unsigned, or what?

Secretary Pompeo. That letter itself was a mistake. I think the Department of Defense has spoken earlier that it was a mistake; it wasn't intended.

Q. But the Iraqi Government is saying they're taking you at your word and expect U.S. forces to leave.

Secretary Pompeo. Yes.

President Trump. Well, I think it's the worst thing that could happen to Iraq. If we leave, that would mean that Iran would have a much bigger foothold, and the people of Iraq do not want to see Iran running the company—the country, that I can tell you.

So we'll see how it all works out. I know it's going to work out well for us because, at some point, we want to be able to get out. We want to bring our soldiers back home.

I will say that we have had tremendous support from the people of Iraq appreciating what we've done. And they don't want to see Iran go into Iraq. But they're neighbors, and over a period of years, something will happen; we'll see what that is.

But the—what was said yesterday, I didn't know about. I really don't know about it. What is that, Mike? What exactly was that?

Secretary Pompeo. I just know that there was a draft letter that was sent out by mistake.

President Trump. A draft, unsigned.

Secretary Pompeo. Unsigned letter that—

President Trump. The media knew that, so you know—but they don't like to say that. Yes.

Secretary Pompeo. They knew it. And the Iraqi people understand that we're there to help them stand up their sovereignty.

President Trump. The Iraqi people were not happy when the suggestion was made yesterday that we were thinking about leaving at some point. They were not happy. But, at some point, we will want to leave.

Q. Quick different topic—

Q. Mr. President, you didn't answer the question.

Q. Mr. President—

President Trump. No.

Steve, go ahead. Steve.

Impeachment/2016 Presidential Election/U.S. Economy

Q. Are you ready for the Senate impeachment trial?

President Trump. What?

Q. Are you ready for the Senate trial?

President Trump. Yes, whatever it is. It's a hoax. The impeachment is a big hoax. It's a—it's become a laughing stock all over the world. There was nothing done wrong. The two articles that were sent are not even serious. And by the way, they're not a crime.

The Republicans voted approximately 196 to nothing. This was not supposed to be partisan. It was never meant that way by, as they would say, the Founders. So it was—it's turned out to be a totally partisan hoax, witch hunt. And frankly, it's been going on from before I came down the escalator with our great First Lady. I mean, it—this has gone on for 3 years and probably longer than that.

And it will be very interesting when the final tabulation is set and when the facts are released, because a lot of people are working on those facts right now. It's a big deal. It's, in many ways, the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on our country. It's one of the great hoaxes ever. It started with a—with an illegal document that turned out to be false. The fake document that you know so well, the dossier, as they call it. And it went on from there. It was set up by a bunch of dirty cops and others, working with the DNC, working with the Democrats.

And from the day I ran—from the day I was elected, and probably before that, substantially—not probably. If you look at the insurance policy, the insurance policy was long before that. So that means before I ever got elected, they were working on something that's so illegal. So I assume that will be announced at some point into the future and, hopefully, not too far into the future.

And the impeachment story is—it's just a continuation of the same—shame—it really is a shame that we can't focus on all of the things. You know, we talked today about Iran. We talk about Iraq. We talk about economic development. We have the greatest stock market we've ever had in the history of our country. We have the greatest economy that we've ever had in the history of our country. We're setting records. Unemployment records. Employment records also; we're going to have almost 160 million people working.

And that we have to work on this partisan scam is really a shame. That we have to take time is a shame.

All right, that's about it, I think.

Q. Mr. President, one more on a different topic?

President Trump. Yes, go ahead.

Impeachment/Former National Security Adviser John R. Bolton/The President's Telephone Conversations With President Volodymyr Zelenskiy of Ukraine/U.S. Assistance to Ukraine

Q. Will you be okay if John Bolton testifies? He indicated yesterday that he would if he is subpoenaed.

President Trump. Well, that's going to be up to the lawyers. It will be up the Senate. And we'll see how they feel. He would know nothing about what we're talking about, because if you know, the Ukrainian Government came out with a very strong statement—no pressure, no anything. And that's from the boss. That's from the President of Ukraine. The Foreign Minister came out with a statement that was equally as strong.

And frankly, if you look at it and you look at everything, all they have to do is read the transcripts. You take a look not just at one; you take a look at two transcripts. They were absolutely perfect. There was absolutely nothing done wrong. There was no false statement. And it's crazy that it's gotten to a point where you—look, Ukraine—the President of Ukraine said there was no pressure whatsoever. There was no pressure on his country whatsoever.

And by the way, in terms of the money, it got there 2 or 3 weeks ahead of schedule—long before it was supposed to be there. There was absolutely nothing done wrong.

The one thing I look at is corruption, and the other thing I look at is, why isn't France and why isn't Germany and maybe, I could say, why isn't Greece—but why aren't all of these countries—why aren't they paying? Why is it always the United States that has to pay?

And I said that very strongly. In fact, it's in the transcript, but the press doesn't cover it. Why is it that the United States pays? And it affects Europe far more than it affects the United States. So why isn't it that France, Germany, and all of those countries in Europe that are so strongly affected, why aren't they paying? Why is it always us? That's one question.

And the other question is always about corruption. We're sending all of this money. Where is it going? Where is it going?

And the President, by the way, got elected on anticorruption, and I think he's going to do a great job. But I appreciated his statement; he's made it many times: no pressure whatsoever.

Thank you all very much. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, the DOJ has recommended jail time for Michael Flynn.

President Trump. Thank you very much.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis. Greece is actually paying more than 2 percent in NATO.

President Trump. Good. That's true.

Former National Security Adviser Michael T. Flynn

Q. Do you agree with the DOJ recommending jail time for Michael Flynn?

President Trump. I don't know. I don't know. I didn't look at it. I—you're just telling me for the first time. I don't know. I'll take a look at it.

Q. Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mareva Grabowski-Mitsotakis, wife of Prime Minister Mitsotakis; Nawres Waleed Hamid, a contract translator with Valiant Integrated Services, who was killed in the rocket attack at a military base near Kirkuk, Iraq, on December 27; Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, leader of the Ketaeb Hezbollah militia and insurgent organization; and Minister of Foreign Affairs Vadym Volodymyrovych Prystaiko of Ukraine. A reporter referred to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley, USA.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Greece, Prime Minister Mitsotakis.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Bolton, John R.; Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Grabowski-Mitsotakis, Mareva; Hamid, Nawres Waleed; Merkel, Angela; Mitsotakis, Kyriakos; Muhandis, Abu Madhi al-; Obama,

Barack; Pompeo, Michael R.; Prystaiko, Vadym Volodymyrovych; Soleimani, Qasem; Trump, Melania; Zelenskiy, Volodymr.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; Congress : House of Representatives :: Articles of Impeachment; Economy, national : Improvement; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Germany : Chancellor; Greece : Defense relationship with U.S.; Greece : Economic growth and development; Greece : Prime Minister; Greece : Relations with U.S.; Greece : Trade with U.S.; Iran : Quds Force Commander, death in U.S. airstrike in Baghdad, Iraq; Iran : Regional involvement; Iran : Terrorism, sponsorship; Iraq : Baghdad :: Iranian Quds Force Commander, death in U.S. airstrike; Iraq : Ketaeb Hezbollah insurgent organization; Iraq : Security cooperation with U.S.; Libya : Political unrest and violence; State, Department of : Secretary; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Global threat; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Terrorism : Terrorists :: Repatriation of captured terrorist suspects; Turkey : President; Ukraine : Government officials, corruption issues; Ukraine : Minister of Foreign Affairs; Ukraine : President; Ukraine : U.S. assistance.

DCPD Number: DCPD202000007.