

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom July 20, 2010

President Obama. Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat. It is my great pleasure to welcome Prime Minister Cameron on his first visit to the White House as Prime Minister.

We have just concluded some excellent discussions, including whether the beers from our hometowns that we exchanged are best served warm or cold. My understanding is, is that the Prime Minister enjoyed our 312 beer, and we may send him some more. I thought the beer we got was excellent, but I did drink it cold. [Laughter]

Mr. Prime Minister, we can never say it enough: The United States and the United Kingdom enjoy a truly special relationship. We celebrate a common heritage. We cherish common values. And we speak a common language, most of the time. We honor the sacrifices of our brave men and women in uniform who have served together, bled together, and even lay at rest together.

Above all, our alliance thrives because it advances our common interests. Whether it's preventing the spread of nuclear weapons or securing vulnerable nuclear materials, thwarting terrorist attacks or confronting climate change or promoting global economic growth and development, when the United States and the United Kingdom stand together, our people, and people around the world, are more secure and they are more prosperous.

In short, the United States has no closer ally and no stronger partner than Great Britain. And I appreciate the opportunity to renew our relationship with my partner, Prime Minister Cameron.

In his campaign, David was known for his extensive town hall discussions with voters: "Cameron Direct." And that's the same spirit that we had here today. I appreciate David's steady leadership and his pragmatic approach. And just as he's off to an energetic start at home, I think we've had a brilliant start as partners who see eye to eye on virtually every challenge before us.

Great Britain is one of our largest trading partners, and we're committed to long-term, sustainable growth that keeps the global economy growing and puts our people to work. I told David that my administration's working hard with the Senate to move forward as soon as possible with our defense trade treaty with the U.K., which will be good for our workers and our troops in both our countries.

We reaffirmed our commitment to fiscal responsibility and reform. David's government is making some courageous decisions, and I've set a goal of cutting our deficit in half by 2013. Tomorrow I'll sign into law the toughest financial reforms since the aftermath of the Great Depression. And I commend David for his leadership in Europe to rebuild confidence in the financial sector. Together, we're determined to make sure the financial catastrophe that we are emerging from never happens again.

We discussed the Middle East, where both our governments are working to encourage Israelis and Palestinians to move to direct talks as soon as possible.

We discussed the continuing threat posed by Iran's nuclear program. On this we are united: The Iranian Government must fulfill its international obligations. The new sanctions imposed by the U.N. Security Council, the United States, and other countries are putting unprecedented pressure on the Iranian Government. And I thanked David for Great Britain's efforts to ensure strong European Union sanctions in the coming days.

Along with our P-5-plus-1 partners, we remain committed to a diplomatic solution. But the Iranian Government must understand that the path of defiance will only bring more pressure and more isolation.

Finally, much of our discussion focused on Afghanistan. After the United States, Great Britain is the largest contributor of combat forces in Afghanistan, and British troops and civilians have served and sacrificed in some of the most dangerous parts of the country.

This is not an easy fight, but it is a necessary one. Terrorists trained in Afghanistan and the tribal regions along the Pakistani border have killed innocent civilians in both of our countries. And an even wider insurgency in Afghanistan would mean an even larger safe haven for Al Qaida and its terrorist affiliates to plan their next attack. And we are not going to let that happen.

We have the right strategy. We're going to break the Taliban's momentum. We're going to build Afghan capacity so Afghans can take responsibility for their future. And we're going to deepen regional cooperation, including with Pakistan.

Now, today's historic Kabul conference is another major step forward. The Afghan Government presented, and its international partners unanimously endorsed, concrete plans to implement President Karzai's commitments to improve security, economic growth, governance, and the delivery of basic services. The Afghan Government presented its peace and reconciliation plan, which the United States firmly supports. Agreement was reached on a plan in which responsibility for security in Afghan Provinces will transition to Afghan security forces. In addition, Afghanistan and Pakistan reached a historic agreement to increase economic opportunity for people on both sides of the border.

So these are all important achievements, and they go a long way toward helping create the conditions needed for Afghans to assume greater responsibility for their country. Indeed, over the coming year, Afghans will begin to take the lead in security, and in July of next year will begin to transfer—we will begin to transfer some of our forces out of Afghanistan. And the Kabul conference shows that the Afghan—that Afghanistan has the support of the international community, including the United States, which will remain a long-term partner for the security and progress of the Afghan people.

As we go forward, we want to honor our fallen warriors with the respect and gratitude that they deserve, whether it's here at Dover or in the small British town of Wootton Bassett, where people line the streets in a solemn trib-

ute that represents the best of the British character. With pride in their service and determination to carry on their work for a safer world, I am confident that we can be worthy of their sacrifice.

And I am confident that with my partner and friend, David Cameron, the special relationship between our countries will only grow stronger in the years to come.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Cameron. Well, first of all, can I thank you, Mr. President, for welcoming me so warmly to the White House today? Thank you for the meeting, for the lunch that we had, and also for the tour of part of your home. I have to say, I was most impressed by how tidy your children's bedrooms were. [Laughter] And I think if the President of the United States can get his children to tidy their bedrooms, then the British Prime Minister, it's about time—

President Obama. You can do it.

Prime Minister Cameron. —he did exactly the same thing. [Laughter]

President Obama. You have to give them some notice, that's the only thing. [Laughter]

Prime Minister Cameron. Right. Well, they've got notice.

President Obama. Tell them the Prime Minister is coming. [Laughter]

Prime Minister Cameron. They should be in bed by now, but if they're not, they have notice. [Laughter]

I think we did have a very valuable opportunity today to discuss in real depth a strong and a shared agenda on Afghanistan, on global economic recovery, and on the Middle East. And this relationship isn't just, as you put it, an extraordinary special relationship. To me, it is also an absolutely essential relationship if we are going to deliver the security and the prosperity that our people need. And I thought again today in our discussions just how closely aligned our interests are on all of the issues that we discussed.

First, on Afghanistan, there is no clearer, no more tangible illustration of Britain and America standing shoulder to shoulder in our national interest than this mission that we are engaged in together. We have British troops working to an

American commander in Helmand, and we have American troops working to a British commander in Kandahar.

Today President Obama and I took stock of progress in this vital year. We reaffirmed our commitment to the overall strategy. A key part of that is training the Afghan National Army and police so they can provide security for their country and our troops can come home.

We also agreed on the need to reinvigorate the political strategy for Afghanistan. Insurgencies tend not to be defeated by military means alone. There must also be political settlement. And to those people currently fighting, if they give up violence, if they cut themselves off from Al Qaida, if they accept the basic tenets of the Afghan Constitution, they can have a future in a peaceful Afghanistan.

There is real progress. Last weekend, the first Afghan-led military operation took place successfully in Helmand, Afghans defending themselves. And today, as Barack has just said, for the first time in decades, the Government of Afghanistan has hosted an international conference on its own soil. Over 40 foreign ministers and 80 delegations assembled in Kabul to monitor progress and drive forward the international strategy. That is a real achievement, and we should congratulate President Karzai on it.

President Obama and I also discussed the economy. We're both taking action that our countries need. Our destination is a strong and stable growth, a sustained economic recovery, and a reformed financial system that will never again be open to the abuses of the past. We are confident that the right steps were taken at the Toronto G-20 summit to help achieve that.

The Middle East was the third area that we focused on today. We both want a secure, peaceful, and stable Middle East. And that means two things. First, as Barack has just said, Iran must give up its pursuit of a nuclear weapon. We urge the Iranian regime to resume negotiations with the international community without delay. It's not too late for it to do so. America and Britain, with our partners, stand ready to negotiate, and to do so in good faith. But in the absence of a willing partner, we will implement with vigor the sanctions package

agreed by the United Nations Security Council, and in Europe, we will be taking further steps as well.

Second, we desperately need a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians that provides security, justice, and hope. As we were discussing over lunch, it is time for direct talks, not least because it is time for each, Israel and Palestine, to test the seriousness of the other.

On BP, which we discussed at some length, I completely understand the anger that exists right across America. The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is a catastrophe for the environment, for the fishing industry, for tourism. I've been absolutely clear about that. And like President Obama, I've also been clear that it is BP's role to cap the leak, to clean up the mess, and to pay appropriate compensation. I'm in regular touch with senior management at BP, and the President is too, to make sure that happens. And the progress that's been made to cap the leak is a step in the right direction.

Equally, of course, BP is an important company to both the British and the American economies. Thousands of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic depend on it. So it's in the interest of both our countries, as we agreed, that it remains a strong and stable company for the future. And that's something we discussed today.

And let us not confuse the oil spill with the Libyan bomber. I've been absolutely clear about this right from the start, and in our meeting, we had what we call a violent agreement, which is that releasing the Lockerbie bomber, a mass murderer of 270 people, the largest act of terrorism ever committed in the United Kingdom, was completely wrong.

He showed his victims no compassion. They were not allowed to die in their beds at home, surrounded by their families. So in my view, neither should that callous killer have been given that luxury. That wasn't a decision taken by BP; it was a decision taken by the Scottish Government. We have to accept that under the laws of my country, where power on certain issues is devolved to Scotland, this was a decision for the Scottish Executive, a decision that they took.

I know that Senator Kerry's committee is looking into these issues. My Government will

engage constructively with those hearings. And, indeed, my Foreign Secretary has already set out the Government's position.

So let me thank you again, Barack, for hosting me today. While at the World Cup, our teams could only manage a score draw. I believe our relationship can be a win-win. And, yes, I did enjoy drinking the 312 beer—cold—during the World Cup. [Laughter] I enjoyed it so much that when I watched Germany beat Argentina, I actually cheered for Germany. That's something that's a big admission for a British person to make, so the beer is obviously very effective. [Laughter]

But what you said, Barack, though, about British and American soldiers fighting together, sometimes dying together, serving together, is absolutely right. And we should never forget that, whether it's on the beaches of Normandy, whether it's in Korea, whether in Iraq, or whether now in Afghanistan.

Our relationship is one that has an incredibly rich history. It is based on ties of culture and history and, yes, emotion too. But for all those things, I think it has also an incredibly strong future that is based on results—results of a positive partnership of working together, agreeing where we agree; when we have disagreements, working through them and coming to a fair conclusion. It's a partnership that I profoundly want to make work as well as it possibly can in the years that I'm Prime Minister of Britain and with you as President of the United States.

So thank you again for welcoming me here today.

President Obama. Thank you, David.

With that, we're going to take a few questions. And I'm going to start with Mimi Hall of USA Today.

Release of Convicted Terrorist Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed Al-Megrahi/United Kingdom-U.S. Relations

Q. Thank you, Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about BP. You mentioned, Mr. Prime Minister, your decision to cooperate, et cetera, but you said we shouldn't confuse the two. Have you flatly ruled out opening a Government investi-

gation into the events around the release of the bomber?

And, President Obama, how do you feel about a congressional investigation into this? Would you like to see that happen, or do you think that confuses the two events?

President Obama. Well, why don't I start off, and I'll throw it over to David. I think all of us here in the United States were surprised, disappointed, and angry about the release of the Lockerbie bomber. And my administration expressed very clearly our objections prior to the decision being made and subsequent to the decision being made. So we welcome any additional information that will give us insights and a better understanding of why the decision was made.

But I think that the key thing to understand here is that we've got a British Prime Minister who shares our anger over the decision, who also objects to how it played out. And so I'm fully supportive of Prime Minister Cameron's efforts to gain a better understanding of it, to clarify it. But the bottom line is, is that we all disagreed with it. It was a bad decision. And going forward, that has to inform how we approach our relationship with respect to counterterrorism generally.

Now, one of the things that I want to emphasize that I think may get lost in this current debate is the extraordinarily strong ties between our two countries when it comes to fighting terrorism. We probably have the best coordination and cooperation of any two countries in the world. And those relationships are vital, and they keep people safe on both sides of the Atlantic.

And I want to make sure that even as we may express concern about what happened with respect to the release of this particular individual, that we stay focused on the cooperation that currently exists and build on that cooperation to make sure that there is no diminution of our joint efforts to make sure that the kinds of attacks that happened over Lockerbie do not happen again.

Prime Minister Cameron. Well, I agree with actually what's been said about the importance of the security cooperation, something we dis-

cussed today. On Megrahi, look, I'm not standing here today and saying it was a bad decision to release Megrahi because I'm here. I said this a year ago, at the time, that it was a bad decision. It shouldn't have been made. The British Government, as well, should have been clear that it was a bad decision, rather than going along with it. I took that very clear view. This was the biggest mass murderer in British history, and there was no business in letting him out of prison.

In terms of an inquiry, there has been an inquiry by the Scottish Parliament into the way the decision was made. The British Government—the last British Government released a whole heap of information about this decision. But I've asked the Cabinet Secretary today to go back through all of the paperwork and see if more needs to be published about the background to this decision.

But in terms of an inquiry, I'm not currently minded that we need to have a U.K.-based inquiry on this, partly for this reason: I don't need an inquiry to tell me what was a bad decision. It was a bad decision. And if you like, the big fact that's changed over the year that makes it an even worse decision is the fact that, of course, Megrahi is still free, at liberty, in Libya, rather than serving the prison sentence in Scotland, as he should be doing.

So that's what we're going to do, is go back over this information, see if more needs to be published, and of course, in terms of the congressional hearing, make sure that proper cooperation is extended to it.

President Obama. Somebody you want to call?

Prime Minister Cameron. Right. I think James Landale [BBC News].

U.S. Inquiry Into the Release of Convicted Terrorist Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed Al-Megrahi

Q. Just to stay on that subject, if we may. Mr. Prime Minister, first of all, would you be prepared to talk to your predecessors, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, to get their agreements to release any documents if they are relevant to the paper search that the Cabinet Secretary will undergo?

And, Mr. President, can I ask you—the Prime Minister says he opposes an inquiry. Hillary Clinton has demanded an inquiry. Where do you stand?

President Obama. Well, go ahead, David.

Prime Minister Cameron. Well, first of all, on the documents, the proper process here is that the Cabinet Secretary should look back over this decision and the circumstances surrounding it, should identify those documents that should be published. It should be right that Ministers in the previous Government should be consulted about the publication of those documents. And of course we will consult with them over that.

But in my view, there is absolutely no harm to be done in giving the fullest possible explanation of the circumstances surrounding this decision. I think the key thing, though, to remember is that in the end, it was a decision by the Scottish Executive.

On the issue of an inquiry, as I said, I'm not currently minded to hold an inquiry because I think publishing this information, combined with the inquiry that has already been, will give people the certainty that they need about the circumstances surrounding this decision. But the key thing is to get the information out there so people can see. But I don't think there's any great mystery here. There was a decision taken by the Scottish Executive, in my view, a wholly wrong and misguided decision, a bad decision, but the decision nonetheless. That's what happened. And I don't think we need an extra inquiry to tell us that that's what happened. But the information, as I said, will be gone over and published, as appropriate. And of course I'll be consulting with previous Ministers and Prime Ministers, as you should do in the normal way.

President Obama. I think the simple answer is, we should have all the facts; they should be laid out there. And I have confidence that Prime Minister Cameron's government will be cooperative in making sure that the facts are there. That will not negate the fact that, as the Prime Minister indicated, it was a very poor decision and one that not only ran contrary to, I think, how we should be treating terrorists, but also didn't reflect the incredible pain that the

families who were affected still suffer to this day. And my administration is in regular contact with these families, and this was a heartbreaking decision for them that reopened a whole host of new wounds.

So my expectation is, is that the facts will be out there, and, as David indicated, with all the facts out, I think we're going to be back to where we are right now, which it was—it's—it was a decision that should not have been made and one that we should learn from going forward.

Laura Meckler [Wall Street Journal].

Global Economy/Release of Convicted Terrorist Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed Al-Megrahi/Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico

Q. Thank you. Mr. President, in your opening statement, you referred to the fact that the British Government has been taking some very tough steps towards—to get their budget in order, and you said you had committed to cut the deficit in half. Could you talk about whether you think that those decisions are going to be—the decisions that they're making there are going to be needed to be made here on a similar level beyond pledges?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, specifically, could you address the matter of what role BP had in lobbying for the release of this man, and whether an inquiry or the review that you're planning is going to look at that specific question? Thank you.

President Obama. When I came into office in January of 2009, I was very clear at the time—even before we knew the severity of the recession that we would experience—that we have a structural deficit that is unsustainable, and that for our long-term growth and prosperity, we are going to have to get a handle on that. I talked about that during my campaign. I talked about it in the days after I was elected. I talked about it after I had been sworn in.

We had an emergency situation on our hands, and so the entire world, working through the G-20, coordinated in making sure that we filled this huge dropoff in demand. We got the economy growing again. And we had to take a number of steps, some of which were unpopu-

lar and that, yes, added to the short-term deficit.

What I also said at the time was we are then going to make sure, number one, that we pay down whatever additional deficit had been added as a consequence of the Recovery Act and other steps that we had to take last year, but then we're still going to have to go back and deal with these long-term structural deficits.

And, in fact, in the first G-20 visit that I made, in April to England, I was very clear to the rest of the world that what they cannot rely on is an economic model in which the United States borrows—consumers in the United States borrow, we take out home equity loans, we run up credit cards to purchase goods from all around the world. We cannot alone be the economic engine for the rest of the world's growth. So that rebalancing ended up being a central part of our long-term strategy working with the G-20.

Now, what we've done is we've initiated a freeze on our domestic discretionary budget. We are on the path to cutting our deficits in half. We have put forward a fiscal commission that is then going to examine how do we deal with these broader structural deficits. So this isn't just an empty promise. We've already started taking steps to deal with it, and we're going to be very aggressive in how we deal with it.

Now, our two countries are in slightly different situations. Their financial situation is slightly different; their levels of debt relative to GDP are somewhat higher. And as David and I discussed when we saw each other in Toronto, the goal here is the same, and we're all moving in the same direction. But there's going to be differentiation based on the different circumstances of different countries in terms of how they approach it tactically and at what pace.

But I can assure you this: that my administration is squarely committed not just to dealing with the short-term deficit and debt, which in some ways is the least troubling aspect of this problem, what we're going to have to tackle are some big structural reforms that are going to be tough. And they're going to be that much tougher because we're coming out of a recession as we do it. But I think that as we continue

to see economic growth, as we continue to see the economy heal from last year, that the American people are going to want to approach this problem in a serious, realistic way. We owe it for the next generation.

And my hope is, is that we're going to end up getting a bipartisan solution to this thing that is realistic. And one concern that I have obviously is the politics of deficits and debt. When I announced that I was in favor of this fiscal commission, at the time, I had a number of Republicans who were cosponsors of the legislation who suddenly reversed themselves because, I suppose, I supported it.

And fortunately, what I've seen so far, all the reports from the fiscal commission, is that people are serious about this. Both Republicans and Democrats on the commission are taking their task seriously. I think it's going to be a good report, but is still going to require some tough choices, and we're committing to pursuing those tough choices after we get that report.

David.

Prime Minister Cameron. Thank you. You asked about the role of BP. I mean, the role of BP and any lobbying they might have done is an issue for BP and an issue that they should explain themselves. I mean, the decision to release Megrahi, though, was a decision made by the Scottish Government, and I haven't seen anything to suggest that the Scottish Government were in any way swayed by BP. They were swayed by their considerations about the need to release him on compassionate grounds, grounds that I think were completely wrong. I don't think it's right to show compassion to a mass murderer like that. I think it was wrong.

But it's a matter for BP to answer what activities they undertook. But the Scottish Government made its decision and has explained its decision on many occasions, and I'm sure will explain it again.

I'm very keen that we are clear here that BP should, rightly, be blamed for what has happened in the Gulf, and have real responsibilities to cap the well, to clean up the spill, to pay compensation—all of which they are getting on with, including putting aside the £20 billion in the escrow account. I think—\$20 billion, sorry.

I think they've made good progress on that, and further progress needs to be made.

I think it's important to separate that from the decision to release Al-Megrahi, which, as I say, was a decision made by the Scottish Government and, as so far has been shown in investigations by the Scottish Parliament, was a decision which I wholly disagree with but, nonetheless, was taken in an appropriate way.

I think we have a question from Tom Bradby.

Cybersecurity/Extradition of Gary McKinnon to the U.S.

Q. Mr. President, Tom Bradby, ITV News. Quite a lot of people in the U.K. feel that your determination as a country to continue to push for the extradition of computer hacker and Asperger's sufferer Gary McKinnon is disproportionate and somewhat harsh. Do you think it is time now to consider some leniency in this case?

And, Prime Minister, you've expressed very strong views on this matter, suggesting that Mr. McKinnon shouldn't be extradited. Your Deputy Prime Minister has expressed even stronger views. Did you discuss that with the President today? And if not, would now be a good moment to share your views with us once again?

Prime Minister Cameron. Shall I go?

President Obama. Please, go ahead.

Prime Minister Cameron. It is something that we discussed in our meeting. I mean, clearly there's a discussion going on between the British and the Americans about this, and I don't want to prejudice those discussions. We completely understand that Gary McKinnon stands accused of a very important and significant crime in terms of hacking into vital databases. And nobody denies that that is an important crime that has to be considered. But I have had conversations with the U.S. Ambassador, as well as raising it today with the President, about this issue, and I hope a way through can be found.

President Obama. Well, one of the things that David and I discussed was the increasing challenge that we're going to face as a consequence of the Internet and the need for us to cooperate extensively on issues of cybersecurity.

We had a brief discussion about the fact that although there may still be efforts to send in spies and try to obtain state secrets through traditional cold war methods, the truth of the matter is, these days, where we're going to see enormous amounts of vulnerability when it comes to information is going to be through these kind of breaches in our information systems. So we take this very seriously. And I know that the British Government does as well.

Beyond that, one of the traditions we have is the President doesn't get involved in decisions around prosecutions, extradition matters. So what I expect is that my team will follow the law, but they will also coordinate closely with what we've just stated is an ally that is unparalleled in terms of our cooperative relationship. And I trust that this will get resolved in a way that underscores the seriousness of the issue, but also underscores the fact that we work together and we can find an appropriate solution.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

Statement on Equal Pay Legislation July 20, 2010

In America today, women make up half of the workforce and two-thirds of American families with children rely on a woman's wages as a significant portion of their families' income.

Yet, even in 2010, women make only 77 cents for every dollar that men earn. The gap is even more significant for working women of color, and it affects women across all education levels. As Vice President Biden and the Middle Class Task Force will discuss today, this is not just a question of fairness for hard-working women. Paycheck discrimination hurts families who lose out on badly needed income. And with so many families depending on women's wages, it hurts the American economy as a whole. In difficult economic times like these, we simply cannot afford this discriminatory burden.

My administration has already begun to address this problem. In my first week in office, I signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which

Prime Minister Cameron. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:58 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan. Prime Minister Cameron referred to his daughter Nancy and son Arthur; Maj. Gen. Richard P. Mills, USMC, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan, Regional Commander Southwest; Maj. Gen. Nick P. Carter, British Army, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan, Regional Commander South; Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs William J. Hague and Cabinet Secretary Gus O'Donnell of the United Kingdom; and U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom Louis B. Susman. A reporter referred to Deputy Prime Minister Nicholas Clegg of the United Kingdom.

helps women who face wage discrimination recover their lost wages, and in my State of the Union Address, I promised to crack down on violations of equal pay laws. Today the Equal Pay Enforcement Task Force will present its recommendations, which include ways to better coordinate among enforcement agencies and inform employees about their rights. These steps support women, and they also support businesses that are doing the right thing and paying their employees what they deserve.

We cannot do this work alone. So today I thank the House for its work on this issue and encourage the Senate to pass the "Paycheck Fairness Act," a commonsense bill that will help ensure that men and women who do equal work receive the equal pay that they and their families deserve. Passing this bill is one of the Task Force's key recommendations, and I hope Congress will act swiftly so that I can sign it into law.