

France is our oldest ally and continues to be one of our closest allies. And as President Sarkozy indicated, we had an enormous convergence of approaches and views on the challenges that we face around the world. We agreed that the changes that are taking place in the Middle East and North Africa make the pursuit of peace between Israelis and Palestinians more urgent, not less. And we agreed to coordinate closely in encouraging the parties to sit down around the negotiating table and to resolve this issue in a way that creates a Palestinian state that is sovereign and an Israeli state that is secure, the two states living side by side in peace.

We agreed that we have made progress on our Libya campaign, but that meeting the U.N. mandate of civilian protection cannot be accomplished when Qadhafi remains in Libya directing his forces in acts of aggression against the Libyan people. And we are joined in resolve to finish the job.

We discussed the enormous opportunities as well as challenges that are presented by the Arab Spring, and shortly, we'll be discussing in depth how we can fully support countries like Egypt and Tunisia, not only as they transition

to democracy, but also ensuring that that democratic transition is accompanied by economic growth, which can provide more opportunities for all the people, particularly the young people, in the region.

And we also discussed a wide range of issues, from Afghanistan to Iran to the world economy, in which the interests of the United States and the interests of France are closely joined.

So the state of our alliance is strong. I am grateful for the leadership that President Sarkozy has shown. And I very much appreciate the productive way in which he's organized the G-8. I'm confident that as a consequence, we'll be able to continue to make progress in the coming months on the issues that matter most to the French people and to the American people.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:30 a.m. at the Royal Barriere hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, leader of Libya. President Sarkozy spoke in French, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Statement on the Situation in Belarus *May 27, 2011*

I strongly condemn the conviction and sentencing of opposition Presidential candidates Vladimir Neklyayev, Andrei Sannikov, Vital Rymasheuski, Nikolai Statkevich, and Dmitry Uss in Belarus. The United States considers these candidates and the other courageous activists and candidates arrested and charged in conjunction with the crackdown on December 19 as political prisoners. In a major step backward for democracy in Belarus, their trials were clearly politically motivated and failed to meet even the most minimal standards required of a fair and independent judiciary. We welcome the broad international consensus condemning the actions of President Aleksandr Lukashenko and the Government of Belarus in this matter.

Consistent with our values and principles, the U.S. Government will pursue new sanc-

tions against select Belarusian state-owned enterprises, in addition to the sanctions, travel restrictions, and asset freezes announced on January 31. These measures are targeted against those responsible for the repression, particularly President Lukashenko, and are not directed against the people of Belarus. We are coordinating with other concerned governments to ensure that, through the implementation of a flexible international sanctions regime, we hold accountable those Belarusian officials responsible for these repressive actions. We have also increased our assistance in support of democratic reform in Belarus. We join the European Union and our other allies and partners in supporting the aspirations of the people of Belarus for a modern, democratic, and prosperous society within Europe.