

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his

remarks, he referred to Erskine B. Bowles and Alan K. Simpson, Cochairs, National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

Statement on the Retirement of General John R. Allen *February 19, 2013*

Today I met with General John Allen and accepted his request to retire from the military so that he can address health issues within his family. I told General Allen that he has my deep, personal appreciation for his extraordinary service over the last 19 months in Afghanistan, as well as his decades of service in the United States Marine Corps. General Allen presided over the significant growth in the size and capability of Afghan National Security Forces, the further degradation of Al Qaida and their extremist allies, and the ongoing transition to Afghan security responsibility across the country. He worked tirelessly to

strengthen our coalition through his leadership of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and to improve our relations with the Afghan Government. Above all, he cares deeply for the men and women in uniform who serve our Nation, as well as their families, and I am grateful for the sacrifices made by his family in supporting him during his service. John Allen is one of America's finest military leaders, a true patriot, and a man I have come to respect greatly. I wish him and his family the very best as they begin this new chapter, and we will carry forward the extraordinary work that General Allen led in Afghanistan.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and an Exchange With Reporters *February 22, 2013*

President Obama. Well, I want to extend a warm welcome to Prime Minister Abe and congratulate him on his victory and his leadership of Japan.

Obviously, Japan is one of our closest allies, and the U.S.-Japan alliance is the central foundation for our regional security and so much of what we do in the Pacific region. And that friendship extends not just between our governments, but also between our peoples.

Prime Minister Abe himself is no stranger to the United States. I think he and I studied in California around the same time, and this is not his first visit to the Oval Office. So we're looking forward to building a very strong working relationship on a whole range of issues.

We had close consultations on a wide range of security issues, in particular our concerns about the provocative actions that have been taken in North Korea and our determination to take strong actions in response.

We also discussed a wide range of multilateral issues, and I expressed my appreciation for the support Japan has provided to our efforts in Afghanistan, our efforts to resolve the nuclear issue in Iran, and we expressed mutual condolences around the loss of life at the BP plant in Algeria and pledged that this would spur greater counterterrorism cooperation.

After this brief session with the press, we'll have an opportunity to extend these discussions over lunch, and we'll have a chance to talk about the close economic cooperation between our two countries.

And I know that Prime Minister Abe and I both agree that our number-one priority has to be making sure that we are increasing growth and making sure that people have the opportunity to prosper if they're willing to work hard in both our countries. And so we'll be talking about a host of issues that—and steps that we can take in our respective countries to encourage the kind of trade, expanded commerce,

and robust growth that will lead to greater opportunity for both the United States and Japan.

Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. And please extend our warmest wishes to the people of Japan, and you can rest assured that you will have a strong partner in the United States throughout your tenure as Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Abe. Yes, Mr. President, you already gave a very detailed briefing of the content of our briefing, so there's nothing for me to add, but I would like to make some additional remarks.

First of all, I would like to thank President Obama for creating this opportunity to have a summit meeting between Japan and the United States at a very busy time, when his second term is beginning.

I think today's one big theme in our meeting today was for us to discuss in which direction we would be strengthening the alliance between Japan and the United States. And we touched upon many issues that we have to deal with in that regard.

And as a result of our discussion, we were able to share our understanding on not just concrete policy, but on the direction to which our alliance is headed. I think I can declare with confidence that the trust and the bond in our alliance is back.

And when we look at the security environment in the Asia-Pacific, it's becoming more and more difficult. And we need to create an order in this region based on cooperation between our two countries to secure the freedom of the seas and to secure a region which is governed based on laws, not on force.

And we just cannot tolerate the actions of North Korea, such as launching missiles and conducting nuclear tests. So we agreed that we would cooperate with each other in dealing resolutely with North Korea. And I also explained to Mr. President the abduction issue by North Korea, and the President understood my explanation and expressed his support.

So we intend to continue to strengthen our alliance and, by doing so, secure our national interest and make this world a better place.

President Obama. Go ahead.

U.S. Federal Budget Negotiations/Government Spending Reductions

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. We're one week from the sequester deadline. I'm wondering, at this point, if you think those cuts going into effect are inevitable, and what you're telling the Prime Minister and other world leaders about the impact that that would have on the global economy.

President Obama. Well, I never think that anything is inevitable. We always have the opportunity to make the right decisions. And I've been very clear that these kinds of arbitrary, automatic cuts would have an adverse impact on families, on teachers, on parents who are reliant on Head Start programs, on our military readiness, on mental health services, on medical research. This is not a smart way for us to reduce the deficit.

I've also been very clear that there's an alternative, which is for us to take the kind of balanced approach that I've presented, where we have more strategic cuts on programs we don't need and we close some tax loopholes that are taken advantage of only by the well connected and the well off. By the way, that's what the majority of the American people prefer.

So I will continue to have conversations with Members of Congress, both while they're gone and when they get back next week. My hope is, is that we can see a different course taken by Congress. This should be a no-brainer. And let me just point out that the overall impact of the economy will be to slow down the recovery. And not only may there end up being direct job loss, but because the economy is softer, it also means that we're not going to be driving down unemployment as quickly as we should.

So, with respect to world leaders, I think that unlike issues like the debt ceiling, the sequester going into effect will not threaten the world financial system. It's not like the equivalent of the U.S. defaulting on its obligations. What it does mean, though, is that if the U.S. is growing slower, then other countries grow slower, because we continue to be a central engine in world economic growth. So I don't think anybody would like to see this outcome.

And particularly, when we're poised to grow rapidly as housing comes back and we're starting to see real signs of the recovery taking root, it's the wrong prescription. But ultimately, I don't need to persuade world leaders of that. They know that. I've got to persuade Members of Congress, and that can be harder sometimes.

Q. Even if you think a deal—or even if you think averting the cuts is not inevitable, do you see any realistic sign of being able to reach a deal over the next week?

President Obama. Hope springs eternal. And I will just keep on making my case not only to Congress, but more importantly, the American people to take a smart approach to deficit reduction and do it in a way that doesn't endanger our economy and endanger jobs.

I just realized I didn't have a translation of that. It was sort of a domestic question. My suggestion would be, why don't we just go ahead and direct the next question to Prime Minister Abe. That one will be translated.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, I would like to ask what you discussed with President Obama about actions by North Korea, such as the launching of missiles and a nuclear test. And also, the provocative actions that China is taking vis-a-vis the Senkaku Islands. And also, on what actions and measures you have discussed to strengthen the alliance between Japan and the United States at a time when the security environment in the region is deteriorating. What kind of concrete measures did you discuss with the President to strengthen our alliance?

Prime Minister Abe. On North Korea, the important thing we discussed, we agreed that it

was important for Japan and the United States to not provide rewards to North Korea for their actions such as launching missiles and conducting nuclear tests. That's number one.

And number two, we agreed that we would cooperate so that a resolution, including sanctions, would be adopted in the U.N. We also discussed additional sanctions, for example, financial sanctions, and we agreed to continue cooperating in that regard as well.

And then, we also talked about the importance of cooperating with other countries, especially Japan, the U.S., and Korea, in dealing with the issue of North Korea.

Concerning the South China Sea and the Senkaku Islands, we agree that the very existence of the Japan-U.S. alliance is a stabilizing factor, which contributes to the peace and stability of the region. We agreed that we would stay in close coordination with each other in dealing with such issues and other issues and a wide range of issues that we are faced with in this region. So we will continue to coordinate in dealing with such issues based on the Japan-U.S. alliance.

And I also explained that we have always been dealing with this issue, the Senkaku issue, in a calm manner. We will continue to do so and we have always done so.

President Obama. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Prime Minister Abe and a reporter spoke in Japanese, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan February 22, 2013

The two Governments confirm that should Japan participate in the TPP negotiations, all goods would be subject to negotiation, and Japan would join others in achieving a comprehensive, high-standard agreement, as described in the Outlines of the TPP Agreement announced by TPP Leaders on November 12, 2011.

Recognizing that both countries have bilateral trade sensitivities, such as certain agricultural products for Japan and certain manufactured products for the United States, the two Governments confirm that, as the final outcome will be determined during the negotiations, it is not required to make a prior com-