

Press Conference by President Obama and President Hollande of France

 obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/11/press-conference-president-obama-and-president-hollande-france

February 11, 2014

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 11, 2014

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT OBAMA
AND PRESIDENT HOLLANDE OF FRANCE
IN JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE

East Room

12:15 P.M. EST

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Good afternoon. Bon après-midi. Again, it's a great honor to welcome my friend and partner, President Hollande, back to the White House for this state visit. It's always a pleasure to host François. At Camp David two years ago, I was trying to make the summit casual, and François -- in true French style -- showed up in a necktie. We tried to get him to take it off.

When I hosted him in Chicago for the NATO summit, I thought he'd try some of our local cuisine -- a Chicago-style hot dog. I'm not sure he had one, but we do know that he has sampled American fast food in the past, because this happens to be the 40th anniversary of François's first trip to America as a student. And I understand he traveled across our country studying the fast food industry. So if back in 1974 you noticed a French guy poking around your local McDonald's, that was him. (Laughter.) Now he's back as the 24th President of France. And Michelle and I look forward to hosting him tonight at a state dinner -- with a different kind of American cuisine.

Alexis de Tocqueville -- that great son of France who chronicled our American democracy -- wrote that even as we marvel at our freedom, there's nothing harder than learning how to use our freedom. It's a lesson that our two countries have learned over more than 200 years. Standing together -- and using our freedom to improve the lives of not only our citizens but people around the world -- is what makes France not only America's oldest ally, but also one of our closest allies.

Our military and intelligence personnel cooperate every day -- keeping our nations secure and dealing with crises and challenges from Africa to the Persian Gulf. Our diplomats work side by side to help resolve conflicts and promote peace, from Syria to Iran. Our

development experts help impoverished villages boost their agriculture and lift themselves out of poverty. And this level of partnership across so many areas would have been unimaginable even a decade ago. But it's a testament to how our two nations have worked to transform our alliance. And I want to salute President Hollande for carrying this work forward.

François, you haven't just spoken eloquently about France's determination to meet its responsibilities as a global leader, you've also acted. From Mali and the Central African Republic to Syria and Iran, you have shown courage and resolve. And I want to thank you for your leadership and for being such a strong partner to the United States.

And in that spirit, I'm grateful for the progress that we've made today in four key areas. First, we're standing shoulder to shoulder on the key challenges to global security. Our unity with our P5-plus-1 partners, backed with strong sanctions, has succeeded in halting and rolling back key parts of the Iranian nuclear program. We agree that next week's talks in Vienna will be an opportunity for Iran to show that it is serious about a comprehensive solution that assures the world that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

President Hollande and I agree on the need to continue enforcing existing sanctions, even as we believe that new sanctions during these negotiations would endanger the possibility of a diplomatic solution. And we remain absolutely united on our ultimate goal, which is preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

Just as our unity on Syria -- and the credible threat of force -- led to a plan for destroying Syria's chemical weapons, we're united on what needs to happen next there. Syria must meet its commitments, and Russia has a responsibility to ensure that Syria complies. And as talks continue in Geneva, we'll continue to strengthen the moderate opposition, and we call on the international community to stem the flow of foreign fighters into Syria.

This week, we're working with our Security Council partners to call for an end to indiscriminate attacks on civilians and to ensure humanitarian aid workers have unimpeded access to Syrians in need. And we'll continue to work with France and others to bolster our partners in the region, including Lebanon.

More broadly, as Israelis and Palestinians move forward with talks, we agree that France and the European Union will have an important role in supporting a final agreement. And we also agreed to continue our cooperation on Mali and the Central African Republic, where leaders and communities need to show the courage to resist further violence and to pursue reconciliation.

Second key area -- as major trading partners, we're working to boost exports and create jobs. I'm pleased to announce that we're launching a new economic dialogue to expand trade, increase the competitiveness of our businesses, spur innovation, and encourage new entrepreneurs. And President Hollande's visit to Silicon Valley this week underscores our commitment to new collaborations in science and technology.

Related to this, we've agreed to continue pursuing an ambitious and comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. I want to thank President Hollande for his commitment to these negotiations. We need to get this done because an agreement could increase exports by tens of billions of dollars, support hundreds of thousands of additional jobs -- both in the United States and the European Union -- and promote growth on both sides of the Atlantic.

Number three, we've agreed to keep expanding the cooperation and clean-energy partnerships that make our countries leaders in the fight against climate change. And even as we take steps at home to reduce carbon emissions, we'll work to help developing countries move to low-carbon growth. And next year's carbon climate conference in France will be an opportunity to forge a strong global agreement that reduces greenhouse gas emissions through concrete actions.

And finally, we're moving forward together on key global development initiatives: food security and nutrition that can lift 50 million Africans out of poverty; our determination to replenish the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB, and malaria -- and I'm pleased that we're joining with partners around the world on a new global health security effort to combat infectious diseases and save lives.

So this is just some of the progress we're making together, using our freedoms, to borrow de Tocqueville's words, to advance security, prosperity, and human dignity around the world. And François, in this work, I could not be more grateful for your partnership and your friendship. I especially want to thank you for honoring our D-Day veterans today. And I'm very pleased to announce that I have accepted François's invitation and will travel to France in June to mark the 70th anniversary of D-Day. I was there for the 65th anniversary and it was an extraordinary experience. I'm looking forward to returning to honor our remarkable veterans and to reaffirm this extraordinary alliance.

President Hollande.

PRESIDENT HOLLANDE: (As interpreted.) Mr. President, dear Barack, you receive me today as you had done the day after my election with the same sincerity, with the same respect, and with the same friendship for France. You didn't know me back then -- I knew you. There was a major difference there between us because your election had been welcomed in France, beyond any political views, for it was a proof that America was moving forward once more. America was able to make something possible, to make progress possible.

When you received me here, it was in Camp David. Let's forget about the tie. As you can see, I'm wearing a tie today. But you welcomed me at a time that was challenging for Europe because what was at stake was the very existence of the Eurozone -- was the Eurozone going to be able to come out of this doubt that prevailed on the Eurozone and on financial markets. And your call for solidarity and for growth was heard, and was heard and was extremely useful back then.

Since then, since this meeting in Camp David, Europe has come out of its financial crisis. It now has the relevant instruments for stability and it has introduced banking union.

I also remember our meeting in Chicago. I remember that in Chicago I had announced that France would withdraw its combatting troops from Afghanistan, but it wasn't an easy decision to make and it wasn't an easy decision to understand. And yet, you accepted. And we remained in Afghanistan, in spite of this, at a lower level to the level we had anticipated in earlier times. But you accepted this movement, all the more so because this was part and parcel of a commitment I had made before the French people, similar to the one you made before the American people when it came to Iraq.

You recalled our historic relations. And I shall not mention again the warm reception of yesterday at Monticello, but I'd like today, here, to pay tribute to the American Unknown Soldier fallen during World War II, to the veterans -- American veterans of the Second World War who enabled France to be liberated, and, indeed, Europe.

We will commemorate the 70th anniversary of D-Day landing. I had invited you to come and join me on the 6th of June, and you have just accepted this invitation, which I welcome. This will be a strong message because we will commemorate the sacrifice made by those soldiers, but we will also celebrate reconciliation and peace.

This brings us back to our responsibilities in terms of security. France and the United States are two countries which, due to their history, their place in history, but also due to their seat as permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, can act on security throughout the world for freedom, democracy, the rule of law.

And this is precisely what France did, with the help of our American friends, in Mali in order to make it possible for Mali to recover its territorial integrity. This operation was successful, and it was only successful because a decision was made by the international community; it was successful because Americans took part and because Europeans helped as well as Americans, who also gave their support. And a President has now been elected in Mali and the Malian state has now found its authority again.

We also intervened in the Central African Republic in a completely different context, admittedly, but the idea was to prevent what could have been a humanitarian disaster. There had been already brutal actions that affected a population that was already suffering a great deal. There are violence every day, there are clashes every day. But France does what it can with the help of other European nations and with the help of Americans.

And this bears witness to an exceptional situation in our history because our countries have always been allies, have always been friends, but now we trust each other in an unprecedented manner. And this is characteristic of our personal relationship but also of our goals -- common goals.

Barack Obama reminded us of our position on Syria. We were prepared to resort to force. But we found another option: negotiation. We made it possible for part of the chemical weapons stockpile to be destructed. But we haven't found a political solution.

Geneva is a possible step in the right direction, but we will have to make headway. We will have to cooperate more, make sure our services cooperate more. We need to support the opposition. We need to make sure that the choice is not between dictatorship on the one hand and chaos on the other -- chaos with its lot of fundamentalists and extremists. And we found this potential solution.

Identically, on the Iranian dossier, we found common ground. It's a challenging issue and finding a final agreement will be challenging. But the Iranian nuclear program has been suspended, and this is precisely the outcome of our collaboration -- collaboration between France and the United States of America.

We also act in the Middle East, and I welcome the American initiative to resume negotiations. A framework of agreement needs to be signed now, and France and Europe will certainly give their support to that two-state solution.

We are also extremely attentive to what happens in Lebanon. Lebanon is a country with which France has historic ties. There again France and the United States stand side by side in order to help this country resist this massive inflow of refugees with this risk of clashes that are ubiquitous and this risk of return to civil war. That is a reality. So we need to support Lebanon and to make sure that it is supported in its unity and in its integrity.

We also help Jordan receive refugees. So on all international issues we have convergent views and we stand united. Not that we never debate or that we never partly disagree -- we might be allies and friends, but we always respect each other's sovereignty. That is a fundamental principle in our relation.

We also act on the economic front. America experiences recovery in its growth due to the policy and the political choices made, due to steps made by the United States -- the United States of America trust in innovation, energy. It also benefits from a low cost of energy and bold decisions. This economic recovery in the United States is an opportunity for Europe, but it also is an example to be followed, a reference that should encourage us to promote competitiveness through the necessary means, but also to promote innovation and new energy. And that is precisely the meaning of my visit to the Silicon Valley tomorrow.

Finally, we agreed with our American friends to sign a partnership agreement between Europe and the United States with the best intentions to open up markets, to remove NTBs -- non-tariff barriers -- to make sure that the same opportunities be offered to all companies so that they can make proposals and tender for markets.

Of course, each country has its own position. We all know what mandate was given to the European Commission. We all know how concerned we were when it came to farming, agriculture or to cultural products. But we really want to reach this agreement because this agreement will contribute to growth. Developing world trade in a balanced manner is a precious contributing factor to growth for companies.

And, now, climate change. How not to mention climate change when France next year will convene and host a conference? It's not just about hosting a conference and having our hotels full. No, it's about defending a global -- reaching a global goal, because there is a danger. We want a serious and comprehensive agreement, one that will enable all countries -- developing countries, developed countries -- to work together towards a number of common goals.

Food security, development, the struggle against AIDS are three other issues on which we work together. But there are so many subjects I could mention. And every single time I would mention one of those issues I would have to bear witness of the quality of our relations and of our trust, including on the most delicate issues and the most challenging ones.

I was referring to history earlier on. It unites us. Tocqueville is suddenly a reference. Always a reference that is current in France: How far can you go when it comes to equality and how far can you go when it comes to freedom? And the revolutionaries who wanted the independence of America, those who wanted a republic in France had this thing in common -- they wanted to be as bold as possible when it comes to freedom and liberty, and they wanted to be as respectful as possible when it comes to equality. This is precisely what the American Dream is made of -- and it is also what the French Dream is made of. Even though many have their own little dream, but the ambition remains exactly the same. We want to be together again.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: We've got a couple of questions each. Let's start with -- where's Mark Landler? There he is. New York Times.

Q Good afternoon. Both of you talked about Syria a good deal in your opening remarks, and I wanted to ask a bit about that. The latest round of the Geneva II talks have proven to be as unproductive as the first round was. The conventional -- the chemical weapons agreement that you both alluded to has removed some weapons, but by all accounts it's a small fraction of the overall stockpile the Assad regime has, and the Syrians have missed a couple of deadlines. And as I don't need to tell you, the Syrian regime is essentially starving thousands of Syrians in Homs and elsewhere. Everybody agrees that more pressure needs to be brought to bear on the Assad regime to change this deadly equation. And so I wonder, beyond the general statements you made, what additional, tangible steps did you discuss in your meetings today to help the moderate opposition to try to change that equation on the ground?

And secondly, for Monsieur le Presidente, (speaks in French), I forget my French, I'm going to ask in English. How is it okay for a trade delegation with 100 French CEOs to travel to Tehran to explore business opportunities when the P5 and the E3-plus-3 have committed to maintaining the strength and integrity of the sanctions regime? Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Why don't I take a stab first at the Syria question? We still have a horrendous situation on the ground in Syria. I don't think anybody disputes that. And what is absolutely clear is that, with each passing day, more people inside of Syria are suffering. The state of Syria itself is crumbling. That is bad for Syria. It is bad for the region. It is bad for global national security, because what we know is, is that there are extremists who have moved into the vacuum in certain portions of Syria in a way that could threaten us over the long term.

So this is one of our highest national security priorities, and I know that François feels the same way, and many of our European partners as well as our partners in the region feel the same way.

The Geneva process recognizes that if we're going to solve this problem, then we have to find a political solution. And the first Geneva conference committed to a transition process that would preserve and protect the state of Syria, would accommodate the various sectarian interests inside of Syria so that no one party was dominant, and would allow us to return to some semblance of normalcy and allow all the people who have been displaced to start moving back in. We are far from achieving that yet.

I would not completely discount the fact that in this latest round of negotiations what you saw was a coherent, cohesive, reasonable opposition in the same room for the first time negotiating directly with the regime.

Now, the regime -- Assad's regime wasn't particularly responsible. And I think even some of their patrons were disturbed by their belligerence. But we are going to continue to commit to not just pressure the Assad regime, but also to get countries like Russia and Iran to recognize that it is in nobody's interest to see the continuing bloodshed and collapse that's taking place inside that country.

Now you ask tangible steps that we can take. Both France and the United States continue to support a moderate opposition. We are continuing to provide enormous amounts of humanitarian aid. One of the problems we have right now is humanitarian access to deliver that aid. And as we speak, today in the U.N. Security Council, we will be debating a resolution that would permit much greater access for humanitarian aid workers to get food, water, shelter, clothing, fuel to people who need it.

Now, there is great unanimity among most of the Security Council on this resolution. Russia is a holdout. And Secretary Kerry and others have delivered a very direct message to the Russians that they cannot say that they are concerned about the well-being of the Syrian people when there are starving civilians, and that it is not just the Syrians that are responsible; the Russians, as well, if they are blocking this kind of resolution. So that is an example of the kinds of diplomatic work that we are engaging in right now.

But, Mark, nobody is going to deny that there's enormous frustration here. And I think the underlying premise to the question may be is there additional direct action or military action that can be taken that would resolve the problem in Syria. I've said throughout my presidency that I always reserve the right to exercise military action on behalf of

America's national security interests. But that has to be deployed wisely. And I think that what we saw with respect to the chemical weapons situation was an example of the judicious, wise use of possible military action.

In partnership with France, we said we would be prepared to act if Syria did not. Syria and Russia came to the conclusion that they needed to for the first time acknowledge the presence of chemical weapons and then agree to a very extensive deal to get those chemical weapons out.

You're right that so far they have missed some deadlines. On the other hand, we've completely chronicled all the chemical weapons inside of Syria. A portion of those chemical weapons have been removed. There's been a reaffirmation by the Syrians and Russia that all of it has to be removed, and concrete steps are being taken to remove it. And we will continue to keep the pressure on. But we now have a U.N. mandate with consequences if there's a failure -- something that we did not have before.

Whether we can duplicate that kind of process when it comes to the larger resolution of the problem, right now we don't think that there is a military solution, per se, to the problem. But the situation is fluid, and we are continuing to explore every possible avenue to solve this problem, because it's not just heartbreaking to see what's happening to the Syrian people, it's very dangerous for the region as a whole, including friends and allies and partners like Lebanon or Jordan that are being adversely impacted by it.

Let me just make one last comment with respect to the Iran sanctions. We have been extraordinarily firm that even during this interim agreement, we will fully enforce all applicable sanctions. In fact, we have taken various steps just over the last six, seven weeks to identify companies that we felt were violating those sanctions and have been very clear to the Iranians that there's not going to be any let-up.

In discussions with President Hollande, he feels the same way, as do all the P5-plus-1 members. And so businesses may be exploring are there some possibilities to get in sooner rather than later if and when there is an actual agreement to be had, but I can tell you that they do so at their own peril right now because we will come down on them like a ton of bricks with respect to the sanctions that we control, and we expect full compliance with respect to the P5-plus-1 during this interim. We don't want new sanctions because the ones we have in place are already squeezing Iran and brought them to the table, but we also want to send a message to the Iranians that if they don't resolve this broader issue of their nuclear program that there will be consequences and that the sanctions regime not only will stay in place but will likely be tightened in the event that these talks fail.

PRESIDENT HOLLANDE: Barack gave you a very comprehensive answer, so I shall now sketch the French approach on the issues that were mentioned only in a few words. First of all, Geneva II -- the only purpose of this conference is to make political transition possible. It's not about discussing humanitarian measures only. It's all about making sure that a political change be possible, which eventually will have to take place in Syria.

We encouraged the democratic opposition to go to Geneva and to demonstrate that they are prepared to commit themselves to this process and to this approach. And if some of them are blocking, there's no prize for guessing who it is -- it is the Syrian regime.

One other observation, a conclusion, as a matter of fact -- we should help along the humanitarian situation, and that is why a resolution will be voted at the NUSC. And we will see again who speaks clearly on the issue of the Syrian question and who is partisan. How you can object to humanitarian corridors? Why would you prevent the vote of a resolution if, in good faith, it is all about saving human lives? So we decided to go all the way and to get these clarifications.

Third question -- the chemical weapons stockpile. Barack Obama and myself, when we were presented with a proof of the use that had been made by the Assad regime of chemical weapons, we decided that resorting to force was an option. And it is precisely because we made this decision that the option of a negotiation was also kept on the agenda. It is precisely for that reason that President Putin made this offer in circumstances you are all familiar with. This led to the destruction of some of the chemical weapons.

But I agree with you, it is a very long-winded process, it's only partial destruction, and it certainly doesn't go nearly far enough. So rules were adopted, particularly within the framework of the Security Council resolution, in case of non-observants. And we shall resort to these measures and enforce them. Chemical weapons have to be destroyed fully, and pressure will be exerted fully.

And then there are choices. We chose to support the democratic position. We chose to make sure that the democratic opposition is an alternative, even though negotiations will have to take place at the Geneva Conference.

You asked me a question about French businessmen in Iran, that trip to Iran. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the French situation, the President of the Republic is not the President of the Employers Union in France -- and he certainly doesn't wish to be. And I don't think anyone wishes for him to be so. So companies just make those decisions when it comes to traveling. But I certainly let them know that sanctions were in force and would remain in force. And if contacts were to be made with a view to a new situation in Iran, a situation where Iran would have renounced the nuclear weapon fully and comprehensively -- well, unless such a new situation would prevail, no commercial agreement could be signed. That's what I told French businessmen and they are very much aware of the situation.

And as far as sanctions are concerned, they will only be lifted if and when there is a definite agreement. And during this period of an interim agreement, they remain in force.

A French question, perhaps now? Le Figaro.

Q You have actually praised France very warmly today and granted our President the first state visit of your second term. Does that mean that France has become the best European ally of the U.S. and has replaced Great Britain in that role?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Oh, goodness. (Laughter.)

Q And if so, why not extend to France the no-spying agreement that you have with England after the big scandal of the NSA's surveillance program?

(As interpreted.) And, Mr. President, you praised the Excellency of the Franco-American cooperation. But on Iran, are there differences in terms of analysis between France and America on the necessity to have an ambitious agreement? Do you fear that Americans will be prepared to make too many concessions? Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: First of all, I have two daughters. (Laughter.) And they are both gorgeous and wonderful, and I would never choose between them. And that's how I feel about my outstanding European partners. All of them are wonderful in their own ways.

Now, to the serious part of the question, what I do believe is, is that the U.S.-French alliance has never been stronger. And the levels of cooperation that we're seeing across a whole range of issues is much deeper than it was I think 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago. And that's good for France, it's good for the United States, it's good for the world, because we share certain values and certain commitments and are willing to act on behalf of those commitments and values.

With respect to the NSA, obviously I expressed my strong commitment to making sure that our rules and how we approach intelligence and surveillance, not just here in the -- not just with respect to any particular country but worldwide, that we do it in a way that takes into account the incredible changes in technology and the new capacities that have evolved over the last several years.

And the first place that we look to in terms of how do we make sure that our rules are compatible with our partnerships and our friendships and our alliances were countries like France that have been long-time allies of ours and some of our closest partners. It's not actually correct to say that we have a "no-spy agreement" with Great Britain. That's not actually what happens. We don't have -- there's no country where we have a no-spy agreement. We have, like every other country, an intelligence capability, and then we have a range of partnerships with all kinds of countries. And we've been in consultations with the French government to deepen those commitments.

At the same time, what I've also said, both publicly and privately -- and I want to reiterate today to the French press -- is that we are committed to making sure that we are protecting and concerned about the privacy rights not just of Americans, not just of our own citizens, but of people around the world as well.

That's a commitment, by the way, that's fairly unprecedented in terms of any country's intelligence operations. And what we've said is, is that we are putting rules in place so that we're not engaging in what some of the speculation has been. When it comes to

ordinary citizens in France, we are respectful of their privacy rights, and we are going to make sure that our rules are abiding by concerns about those privacy rights.

We do remain concerned, as France is and as most of the EU is, with very specific potential terrorist networks that could attack us and kill innocent people. And we're going to have to continue to be robust in pursuit of those specific leads and concerns, but we have to do it in a way that is compatible with the privacy rights that people in France rightly expect just like they do here in the United States.

And the last point -- just because I know you asked it of President Hollande, but I want to go ahead and comment on this -- the reason Iran is at the table is because we have a very high threshold in terms of what we expect out of Iran to prove to us that they're not pursuing nuclear weapons. And we were able to stitch together an international coalition to apply sanctions to make sure that would be the case.

I don't think the concern during the course of these negotiations is whether or not we are going to be making too many concessions. I think the concern is going to be whether or not Iran can recognize the opportunity to prove in a verifiable fashion to the world, in ways that scientists and technical experts can confirm, that any nuclear program they have is for peaceful purposes.

And the facts are what will guide these negotiations. If they meet what technically gives us those assurances then there's a deal to be potentially made; if they don't, there isn't. And it's not subject to a whole lot of interpretation. There are some judgment issues involved, but part of the reason we're where we are right now is because Iran hasn't been able to give those assurances to anybody in the international community that they weren't pursuing a nuclear weapon. That's why there was such unanimity in applying the sanctions and keeping them in place.

PRESIDENT HOLLANDE: In response to your first question -- well, I have four children, so that makes it even more difficult for me to make any choice at all. But we're not trying to be anyone's favorite. There are historic links, we share common values, and I can see that views converge on many issues. But it's not about hierarchy. It's just about being useful to the world, because the friendship between the United States and France is not just about strengthening our ties -- economic ties, cultural or personal ties -- and that already would be a great deal. It's not just about bringing our two societies closer to one another. It's not just about sharing technology -- no. What makes this friendship between the United States and France is the fact that we can hold values at a specific point in time with this American presidency and with this French presidency, if I may say so.

With regards to Iran, your second question, just as the United States, we wanted to work on the basis of the P5 scenario. This was the basis of our action. Nothing prevented us from having bilateral contacts, and I had some bilateral contacts; in New York, during the UNGA, I received President Rouhani during the General Assembly. So it is perfectly legitimate for discussions to take place. However, we had to meet together in order to be strong together and in order to make sure that our toughness brings about this interim agreement -- which it did.

But there is still work to be done. Just because we signed an interim agreement for a few months doesn't mean that there is no longer an Iranian problem. There is an Iranian problem, for we need to make sure that Iran renounces the nuclear weapon in a definite and comprehensive manner.

The NSA now. I was going to say the question wasn't asked to me, but President Obama answered the question, so I'll answer the question too, even though if you choose to ask me a more specific question, I can be more precise. But following the revelations that appeared due to Mr. Snowden, we clarified things, President Obama and myself clarified things. This was in the past. And then we endeavored towards cooperation. We wanted to fight against terrorism. But we also wanted to meet a number of principles. And we are making headway in this cooperation.

Mutual trust has been restored, and that mutual trust must be based on respect for each other's country, but also based on the protection of private life, of personal data; the fact that any individual, in spite of technological progress, can be sure that he is not being spied on. These are principles that unite us.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: National Public Radio.

Q Thank you very much. Mr. President, yesterday your administration again delayed the ACA employer mandate for mid-sized companies. Last week, your economic advisor, Jason Furman, talked about the new choices that people have to find health care outside the workplace. I wonder if you could first explain the delay and then also talk about whether over the long term you see a future where health insurance is less tied to the workplace.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well --

Q And if I may --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Oh, I'm sorry.

Q -- for President Hollande, you both talked about the pursuit of the Transatlantic Trade Agreement. I wonder if you have followed the domestic battle here over fast track authority, and if that raises questions in your mind about whether such a deal could be ratified.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: The announcement yesterday was fairly straightforward. The overwhelming majority of firms in this country already provide health insurance to their employees and are doing the right thing. The small percentage that do not, many of them are very small and are already exempted by law. So you have just this small category of folks who don't provide health insurance, weren't exempted by law. They are supposed to make sure that they meet their responsibilities so that their employees aren't going to the emergency room jacking up everybody else's cost, and the employers end up not having any responsibility for that.

What we did yesterday was simply to make an adjustment in terms of their compliance, because for many of these companies, just the process of complying -- they're mid-sized, between 50 and 100 folks -- it may take them some time, even if they're operating in good faith. And we want to make sure that the purpose of the law is not to punish them, it's simply to make sure that they are either providing health insurance to their employees, or that they're helping to bear the costs of their employees getting health insurance.

And that's consistent, actually, with what we've done in the individual mandate. The vast majority of Americans want health insurance. Many of them couldn't afford it; we provide them tax credits. But even with the tax credits, in some cases they still can't afford it, and we have hardship exemptions, phase-ins, to make sure that nobody is unnecessarily burdened -- that's not the goal. The goal is to make sure that folks are healthy and have decent health care.

And so this was an example of, administratively, us making sure that we're smoothing out this transition, giving people the opportunities to get right with the law, but recognizing that there are going to be circumstances in which people are trying to do the right thing and it may take a little bit of time.

Our goal here is not to punish folks. Our goal is to make sure that we've got people who can count on the financial security that health insurance provides. And where we've got companies that want to do the right thing and are trying to work with us, we want to make sure that we're working with them as well. And that's going to be our attitude about the law generally -- how do we make it work for the American people and for their employers in an optimal sort of way.

What was the second part of that health care question?

Q Long term?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Long term in terms of employer-based. Well, look, we have a unique system compared to many parts of the world, including France, where, partly because of historical accident and some decisions that FDR made during wartime back in World War II, our health care has been much more tied to employers. That's not the case in most other developed countries.

It has worked for a long time, but what is also true is that it has meant for a lot of U.S. companies a greater burden, more costs relative to their international competitors. That's a challenge. It's also meant that folks who were self-employed, for example, or were independent contractors weren't always getting the same deal as somebody who had a job. It meant that folks who worked for small businesses sometimes had more trouble getting decent premiums and decent rates than folks with large companies. So it just created a great amount of unevenness in the system.

I don't think that an employer-based system is going to be, or should be, replaced anytime soon. But what the Affordable Care Act does do is it gives people some flexibility. It says if I'm working at a big company like IBM or Google, and I decide I want to start my own company that I'm not going to be inhibited from starting a new company because I'm

worried about keeping health insurance for myself and my family. I can go make that move. If I'm a woman who is -- and I'd really like to work with him on the farm, but we can't afford health insurance on our own, so I've been working at the county clerk's office for the last 10 years -- now maybe I've got the opportunity to no longer work in a different job and instead work on that farm and increase the likelihood of economic success for my family.

So it's giving people more flexibility and more opportunity to do what makes sense for them. And ultimately I think that's going to be good for our economy.

But we understood from the state that there were going to be some challenges in terms of transition. When you've had one system where a whole lot of people did not have any health insurance whatsoever for a very long period of time, and we finally passed a law to fix that, we knew that there were going to be some bumps and transitions in that process. And that's what we're working with all the stakeholders involved to address.

PRESIDENT HOLLANDE: The question on the TTIP, the trade partnership, you wanted to know when this partnership would be signed. Well, we discussed it with President Obama. I'm aware of the debate that is currently underway in Congress. But as long as principles have been set up, as long as mandates have been decided and the interests of everyone are known, speed is not of the essence. What we need is to find a solution. Of course a speedy agreement would be a good thing because otherwise there will be fears and threats. So if we act in good faith, if we respect each other, and if we want to promote growth, as we said a few moments ago, well, we can go faster.

Q Since last year, foreign investments in France have been crumbling, and we are not benefiting in France from the world recovery. President Obama, do you think that Mr. Hollande doesn't do much to encourage American investors to invest in France?

And, Mr. Hollande, you will meet businessmen. For them, you are a socialist, you think that the world of finance is an enemy, and you tax wealth at 75 percent. So how on earth are you going to convince businessmen here? And what will you tell Pierre Gattaz, the head of the employee's union in France, who said here in Washington that he wanted no compensation for the labor cost cuts?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: It's good to know that reporters have something in common in France and the United States. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT HOLLANDE: These would be? Which one would these be?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I think that all of us were traumatized by the crisis of 2007-2008. And the United States has to take responsibility for its role in that crisis. We made some quick decisions that allowed us to stabilize the financial markets and begin the long process of recovery, but it was painful, it was slow. And it was only because of the incredible resilience of the American people and our businesses, as well as, I believe, some well-timed policies that we were able to begin a growth process that we've now sustained for some time. And we've brought our unemployment rate down.

But Europe has a different set of challenges because of the Eurozone, because of the nature of a shared currency but not completely shared governance and supervisory authorities. That has created some particular difficulties that François and others have had to deal with that we did not have to deal with as a country with a reserve currency that could make some independent choices.

Despite that, I think Europe actually has made enormous strides over the last year. France, in particular, has taken some tough structural reforms that I think are going to help them be more competitive in the future. I think all of us in the developed world are having to balance the need for growth and competitiveness, to be -- what we say in America -- lean and mean, and make sure that we are maximizing efficiency as well as innovation, but also do it in a way that allows for the benefits of growth to be broad-based and so that workers are all benefiting from some sense of security and decent wages and rising incomes and the ability to retire securely.

And so each country is going to have different circumstances. The kinds of reforms we need in this country right now revolve around things like investing in infrastructure, where we have not made the kind of strides that I'd like us to see and would actually boost growth even faster. We're going to have to invest in skills training, which every country is going to have to do, because businesses will locate where they think they've got the most capable, most highly skilled workers. We still have to do more on the innovation front. As innovative as we are, I think we're still underinvesting in research and development.

So America has some inherent strengths but we also have some areas where we've got to make progress. And I think François would be the first to say that France is in the same position. I would certainly encourage American companies to look at opportunities for investment in France. I'd encourage them even more to look at opportunities to invest money back in the United States. And I would welcome any French companies who want to come here to do business.

But one of the great things about our commercial relationship, which is also part of the reason why I think the Transatlantic Trade Partnership could be valuable, is a lot of the growth is in small and medium-size businesses and they are the ones who could stand to benefit greatly from export. They don't have the ability to decide where to be invest; they're going to be in their home countries. If we can open up trade opportunities for them -- because they don't have a lot of lawyers, they don't have a lot of accountants, they can't move locations and open up new plants in different places -- if we expand trade opportunities for them, that can mean jobs and growth in France; it can mean jobs and growth here in the United States. And so I'm hopeful that we can get this deal, which will be a tough negotiation, but I'm confident we can actually get it done.

PRESIDENT HOLLANDE: France is one of the world's countries that receives the largest amount of foreign investments, one of the world countries that is the most open to foreign capital. And I want to strengthen and enhance this attractiveness of France.

If you look at physical investments, real investments -- not just financial investments, not transfers between companies -- if you look at genuine investments, tangible investments in France, factories, job creation -- well, in spite of the crisis, in 2013, we maintained the level of investment in France, which bears witness to the confidence in France, in France's talent, know-how, companies. And this is nothing new. There are more than 2,000 American companies that work in France, employing 500,000 people in my country. And the United States of America is one of the main investors in France. And I hope that this trend will be confirmed and strengthened in the future.

And Barack is perfectly right -- I have nothing to fear from French investments here in the United States. There are many French companies here in the United States, and they create 500,000 jobs -- not all in the Silicon Valley; everywhere in the United States. And when talents come and invest in the U.S., well, this is good for the United States and this is good for France.

I don't have this vision of focusing on protection and blaming anyone who invests abroad, because that won't bring about new technologies and know-how. And it will be useful, especially if they come back. So we need to make efforts when it comes to attractiveness.

And soon I shall invite many foreign companies to take part in an "attractivity council," which we call the Invest in France Council, to see what can be done to improve the situation in France, including when it comes to tax stability, for this what is very often referred to -- or the stability of rules, because companies want visibility, first and foremost.

But American companies that have operations in France ask them why they stay, why they invest in France. Well, it is precisely because they find French society particularly welcoming for them.

You also asked me a question on a statement that was made by Mr. Gattaz, the employers union president, on what I called the "responsibility pact." Well, this sound has nothing to do with the declaration of a statement. What is the responsibility pact? I'm explaining mostly to American journalists because French journalists are familiar with it. This responsibility pact is about mobilizing the entire country to reach one goal.

Barack Obama mentioned the American economy's resilience following the crisis. Well, there comes a point where, after an ordeal, you have to be stronger than you were before the ordeal, before the crisis. You need to be able to mobilize more strength, more energy. You need to be able to make sure that the economy focuses not on what it was before, but on what will be after. This is precisely what is at the very root of this recovery in the American economy.

Companies mobilized their workers to go ahead -- and this is precisely the spirit of this responsibility pact -- we have modernized our labor markets, we have modernized and updated vocational training. There's a whole list of things that we have done and are

doing, but there are other things we can do. We want to strengthen competitiveness, lower labor costs, streamline regulations, create more visibility in terms of tax regime. But everyone has to do its bit.

The state is going to make an effort. There are tax breaks that have already been granted. We also need to look at fiscal policies in order to have sufficient room for maneuver, and commitments will have to be made. But these commitments need to be shared by companies and businesses in order to create jobs, in order to improve vocational training, to fight against the outsourcing of activities, to promote investments. And I hope that discussions will move along quickly between employers unions and employees unions, because this is a prerequisite for confidence. And that it the key word: confidence, trust. It is true of international relations, but it is also true of the economy.

END

1:18 P.M. EST