

Remarks by the President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron in Joint Press Conference

 obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/22/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-cameron-joint-press

April 22, 2016

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

April 22, 2016

10 Downing Street
London, England

5:00 P.M. BST

PRIME MINISTER CAMERON: Good afternoon, and welcome. It's great to welcome President Obama again, on his fifth visit to the United Kingdom.

Barack has been President for more than seven years; I've been Prime Minister for nearly six years. And our two countries have been working together through some of the most difficult and troubled global times. We faced the aftermath of the banking crisis, the need to revive growth and create jobs in our economies, new threats to our security from Russia in the east to the rise of Islamist terrorists in the south, and, of course, huge global challenges like Ebola and climate change. And through it all, the strong and essential partnership between our nations has never been more important.

When, 70 years ago last month, Winston Churchill first described the special relationship, it was not merely an enduring expression of friendship, it was a way of working together. It was about two nations, kindred spirits who share the same values and, so often, the same approaches to the many issues that we face.

And just as for our predecessors, that has been true for Barack and me, whether we're working to deliver economic security, national security, or new, emerging challenges. And today, we've been discussing all three.

On economic security, we've succeeded in getting our economies growing and creating jobs for our people. The global economy still faces serious challenges, but last year, Britain and the United States were the two fastest-growing major economies in the world.

And we both know just how important trade deals are in driving global growth. So Barack and I remain among the most determined to achieve our vision of a U.S.-EU trade deal. And we're working hard to push this forward because it would add billions to our economies and set the standards for the rest of the world to follow.

On national security, together with our partners in the EU, we've used our economic muscle to avoid the calamity of an Iranian nuclear weapon. We've delivered sanctions against Russia in response to its aggression against Ukraine. We've secured the first-ever global and legally binding deal on climate change, being formally signed today by over 150 governments at the United Nations.

And we've transformed the way that we use our aid, our diplomacy and our military together to make progress on some of the most difficult issues of our time. For example, in East Africa, we've helped to turn around the prospects for Somalia. For instance, thanks to an EU operation, led by Britain, supported by America, its waters are no longer a safe haven for pirates. And in West Africa, British leadership in Europe secured a billion euros to support our efforts in helping the people of the region to defeat the outbreak of Ebola, with Britain taking the lead in Sierra Leone, the United States in Liberia, France in Guinea.

But just as we've made important progress in all these areas, so there are many more that need a lot more work. There's no doubt that the situation in Libya is immensely challenging, but we now finally have a Government of National Accord with whom we can work. While in Syria and Iraq, we are continuing coalition efforts to defeat and degrade Daesh.

More than 25,000 Daesh fighters have now been killed, over 600 in the last month alone. With the total number of Daesh fighters, they're estimated to be at its lowest for about two years. The Iraqi security forces are steadily pushing Daesh out of its territory, this week almost entirely clearing them out of the town of Hit. And in Syria, our partners have liberated the last Kurdish areas in the northeast and cut off the main route between Raqqa and Mosul.

We also discussed efforts to deal with the migration crisis. This doesn't directly affect the United States, and in the UK, we've maintained our borders and we will continue to do so. But we both know the challenge this poses to our friends and our allies, and to the continent of Europe. This is the sort of challenge that can only be tackled effectively through international cooperation. NATO is helping to reduce the number of migrants in the Eastern Mediterranean. And Barack and I have discussed how NATO might now contribute to the EU's efforts in the Central Mediterranean, too.

We also need to do more to break the business model of the people smugglers, so, together with our EU partners and the Libyan government, we'll look at whether there's more we can do to strength the Libyan Coast Guard. Barack and I will be discussing this further when we meet with the leaders of France, Germany and Italy in Hannover on Monday. And this will be another opportunity to show how, working together, collectively, we can better protect ourselves from the threats that we face.

We also covered a number of new and emerging challenges where it will be more important than ever that we work together with our international partners to identify problems and deal with them rapidly. Just as we've done with Ebola, we now need the

same international cooperation on dealing with the Zika virus, on the challenge of antimicrobial resistance, on cybersecurity and on tackling corruption.

Britain is holding a big anticorruption summit here in London next month, which Secretary Kerry will attend. And Barack and I have talked today about some of the things we wanted to achieve. One of the biggest problems is that if you're a country that wants to take action against corruption you have to go all around the globe to lobby for help. So we'd like to see an international anticorruption coordination center to help law enforcement agencies and investigators work together right across different jurisdictions. And if we get international agreement on this next month, both Britain and America will help contribute to set it up.

All this work we have done together, and at the same time, I think we've got to know each other very well. I'm honored to have Barack as a friend. He's taught me the rules of basketball. He's beaten me at table tennis. I remember very fondly the barbecue we had in Number 10 Downing Street, serving servicemen and women who serve our countries together here in the United Kingdom. I've always found Barack someone who gives sage advice. He's a man with a very good heart, and been a very good friend, and always will be a good friend, I know, to the United Kingdom.

Let me finish by saying this. In all the areas we discussed today our collective power and reach is amplified by Britain's membership of the European Union. Let me be clear.

When it comes to the special relationship between our two countries, there's no greater enthusiast than me. I'm very proud to have the opportunity to be Prime Minister and to stand outside the White House, listening to this man, my friend, Barack, say that the special relationship between our countries has never been stronger. But I've never felt constrained in any way in strengthening this relationship by the fact that we're in the European Union.

In fact, quite the reverse. We deliver for our people through all the international groups that we're part of. We enhance our security through the membership of NATO. We further our prosperity through the G7 and the G20. And like those organizations, Britain's membership of the EU gives us a powerful tool to deliver on the prosperity and security that our people need, and to stand up for the values that our countries share.

And now I think is a time to stay true to those values and to stick together with our friends and allies in Europe and around the world.

Thank you very much.

Barack.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you, David. And as always, it is wonderful to be here in London, and to meet with my good friend, David Cameron. I confess I've also come back to wish Her Majesty the Queen a very happy 90th birthday. Earlier today, Michelle and I had the honor to join Her Majesty and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh as their guests at Windsor Castle, where we conveyed the good wishes of the American people.

I have to say I have never been driven by a Duke of Edinburgh before. (Laughter.) And I can report that it was very smooth riding. As for Her Majesty, the Queen has been a source of inspiration for me, like so many people around the world. She is truly one of my favorite people. And should we be fortunate enough to reach 90, may we be as vibrant as she is. She's an astonishing person, and a real jewel to the world and not just to the United Kingdom.

The alliance between the United States and the United Kingdom is one of the oldest and one of the strongest that the world has ever known. When the U.S. and the UK stand together, we make our countries more secure, we make our people more prosperous, and we make the world safer and better.

That's one of the reasons why my first overseas visit as President more than seven years ago was here to London, at a time of global crisis. And the one thing I knew, as green as I was as a new President, was that it was absolutely vital that the United States and the United Kingdom, working together in an international forum, tackle the challenges that lie ahead. Our success depended on our ability to coordinate and to be able to leverage our relationship to have an impact on other countries.

I met with David on that visit. He wasn't yet Prime Minister. But just as our nations share a special relationship, David and I have shared an extraordinary partnership. He has proven to be a great friend, and is one of my closest and most trusted partners. Over the six years or so that our terms have overlapped, we have met or spoken more times than I can count. We've shared our countries' beers with each other -- he vouches for his, I vouch for mine -- (laughter) -- taken in a basketball game in America.

David I think you should recall, we were actually partners in that ping-pong game. (Laughter.) And we lost to some school children. (Laughter.) I can't remember whether they were eight or 10, but they were decidedly shorter than we were, and they whooped us. (Laughter.)

Samantha and Michelle, our better halves, have become good friends as well. And it's the depth and the breadth of that special relationship that has helped us tackle some of the most daunting challenges of our time.

Around the world, our joint efforts, as David mentioned, have stopped the outbreak of Ebola, kept Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, forged a climate agreement in Paris that hopefully will help to protect our planet for future generations.

And today, on Earth Day, our governments, along with about 170 others, are in New York to sign that agreement. The U.S. is committed to formally joining it this year, which should help it take effect years earlier than anybody expected.

We also discussed the full array of challenges to our shared security. We remain resolute in our efforts to prevent terrorist attacks against our people, and to continue the progress that we've made in rolling back and ultimately defeating ISIL. Our forces, as David mentioned, are systematically degrading ISIL's finances and safe havens, and removing

its top leaders from the battlefield. We've got to keep working to improve security and information-sharing across Europe, and to stem the flow of foreign fighters into and out of Syria.

We discussed our efforts to resolve political conflicts in the Middle East, from Yemen to Syria to Libya, in order to increase the prospects for stability. In Libya, going forward, we have an opportunity to support a new government and help Libyans root out extremist elements. In Syria, as challenging as it is, we still need to see more progress towards an enduring ceasefire, and we continue to push for greater humanitarian access to the people who need it most.

We have to continue to invest in NATO so that we can meet our overseas commitments, from Afghanistan to the Aegean. We have to resolve the conflict in the Ukraine and reassure allies who are rightly concerned about Russian aggression. All NATO allies should aim for the NATO target of spending 2 percent of their GDP on defense -- something that David has made sure happens here in the UK to meet that standard.

We discussed new actions we can take to address the refugee crisis, including with our NATO allies. And because a strong defense relies on more than just military spending but on helping to unleash the potential of others to live freer and more prosperous lives, I want to thank the people of the United Kingdom for their extraordinary generosity as one of the world's foremost donors of humanitarian aid.

We talked about promoting jobs and stronger growth through increased transatlantic trade and investment so that our young people can achieve greater opportunity and prosperity. And, yes, the Prime Minister and I discussed the upcoming referendum here on whether or not the UK should remain part of the European Union.

Let me be clear. Ultimately, this is something that the British voters have to decide for themselves. But as part of our special relationship, part of being friends is to be honest and to let you know what I think. And speaking honestly, the outcome of that decision is a matter of deep interest to the United States because it affects our prospects as well. The United States wants a strong United Kingdom as a partner. And the United Kingdom is at its best when it's helping to lead a strong Europe. It leverages UK power to be part of the European Union.

As I wrote in the op-ed here today, I don't believe the EU moderates British influence in the world -- it magnifies it. The EU has helped to spread British values and practices across the continent. The single market brings extraordinary economic benefits to the United Kingdom. And that ends up being good for America, because we're more prosperous when one of our best friends and closest allies has a strong, stable, growing economy.

Americans want Britain's influence to grow, including within Europe.

The fact is, in today's world no nation is immune to the challenges that David and I just discussed. And in today's world, solving them requires collective action. All of us cherish our sovereignty -- my country is pretty vocal about that -- but the U.S. also recognizes that

we strengthen our security through our membership in NATO. We strengthen our prosperity through organizations like the G7 and the G20. And I believe the UK strengthens both our collective security and prosperity through the EU.

In the 21st century, the nations that make their presence felt on the world stage aren't the nations that go it alone but the nations that team up to aggregate their power and multiply their influence. And precisely because Britain's values and institutions are so strong and so sound, we want to make sure that that influence is heard, that it's felt, that it influences how other countries think about critical issues. We have confidence that when the UK is involved in a problem that they're going to help solve it in the right way. That's why the United States cares about this.

For centuries, Europe was marked by war and by violence. The architecture that our two countries helped build with the EU has provided the foundation for decades of relative peace and prosperity on that continent. What a remarkable legacy -- a legacy born in part out of what took place in this building.

Before we walked out, I happened to see Enigma on display. And that was a reminder of the incredible innovation and collaboration of the allies in World War II and the fact that neither of us could have won that alone. And in the same way, after World War II, we built out the international institutions that, yes, occasionally constrained us, but we willingly allowed those constraints because we understood that by doing so, we were able to institutionalize and internationalize the basic values of rule of law, and freedom, and democracy, that would benefit our citizens as well as people around the world.

I think there's a British poet who once said, "No man is an island" -- even an island as beautiful as this. We're stronger together. And if we continue to tackle our challenges together, then future generations will look back on ours, just as we look back on the previous generation of English and American citizens who worked so hard to make this world safer and more secure and more prosperous, and they'll say that we did our part, too. And that's important. That's important not just here; that's important in the United States, as well.

Thanks.

PRIME MINISTER CAMERON: Thank you very much.

All right, we've got some questions. We're going to start with a question from the British press. We'll have Chris Ship from ITV.

Q Thank you very much, Prime Minister. Chris Ship from ITV News.

Mr. President, you, yourself, acknowledge the controversial timing of your comments on the EU referendum and the spirited debate that we're having here. And I think you're right. In the weeks before your arrival here, Leave campaigners have said that you're acting hypocritically. America would not accept the loss of sovereignty that we have to accept as part of the EU. America would not accept the levels of immigration from Mexico that we have to accept from the EU. And therefore, in various degrees of politeness, they

have said to you that you should really keep your views to yourself. With that in mind, Mr. President, do you still think it was the right decision to intervene in this debate? And can I ask you this -- truthfully, what happens if the UK does decide in June to leave the European Union?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, firsts of all, let me repeat, this is a decision for the people of the United Kingdom to make. I'm not coming here to fix any votes. I'm not casting a vote myself. I'm offering my opinion. And in democracies, everybody should want more information, not less. And you shouldn't be afraid to hear an argument being made. That's not a threat. That should enhance the debate.

Particularly because my understanding is that some of the folks on the other side have been ascribing to the United States certain actions we'll take if the UK does leave the EU. So they say, for example, that, well, we'll just cut our own trade deals with the United States. So they're voicing an opinion about what the United States is going to do. I figured you might want to hear it from the President of the United States what I think the United States is going to do. (Laughter.)

And on that matter, for example, I think it's fair to say that maybe some point down the line, there might be a UK-U.S. trade agreement, but it's not going to happen anytime soon, because our focus is in negotiating with a big bloc, the European Union, to get a trade agreement done, and the UK is going to be in the back of the queue -- not because we don't have a special relationship, but because, given the heavy lift on any trade agreement, us having access to a big market with a lot of countries -- rather than trying to do piecemeal trade agreements is hugely inefficient.

Now, to the subject at hand, obviously the United States is in a different hemisphere, different circumstances, has different sets of relationships with its neighbors than the UK does. But I can tell you this. If, right now, I've got access to a massive market where I sell 44 percent of my exports, and now I'm thinking about leaving the organization that gives me access to that market and that is responsible for millions of jobs in my country and responsible for an enormous amount of commerce and upon which a lot of businesses depend, that's not something I'd probably do.

And what I'm trying to describe is a broader principle, which is, in our own ways -- I mean, we don't have a common market in the Americas -- but in all sorts of ways, the United States constrains itself in order to bind everyone under a common set of norms and rules that makes everybody more prosperous.

That's what we built after World War II. The United States and the UK designed a set of institutions -- whether it was the United Nations, or the Bretton Woods structure, IMF, World Bank, NATO, across the board. Now, that, to some degree, constrained our freedom to operate. It meant that occasionally we had to deal with some bureaucracy. It meant that on occasion we have to persuade other countries, and we don't get 100 percent of what we want in each case. But we knew that by doing so, everybody was going to be better off -- partly because the norms and rules that were put in place were reflective of what we believe. If there were more free markets around the world, and an orderly

financial system, we knew we could operate in that environment. If we had collective defense treaties through NATO, we understood that we could formalize an architecture that would deter aggression, rather than us having, piecemeal, to put together alliances to defeat aggression after it already started. And that principle is what's at stake here.

And the last point I'll make on this -- until I get the next question, I suspect -- (laughter) -- is that, as David said, this magnifies the power of the UK. It doesn't diminish it. On just about every issue, what happens in Europe is going to have an impact here. And what happens in Europe is going to have an impact in the United States.

We just discussed, for example, the refugee and the migration crisis. And I've told my team -- which is sitting right here, so they'll vouch for me -- that we consider it a major national security issue that you have uncontrolled migration into Europe -- not because these folks are coming to the United States, but because if it destabilizes Europe, our largest trading bloc -- trading partner -- it's going to be bad for our economy. If you start seeing divisions in Europe, that weakens NATO. That will have an impact on our collective security.

Now, if, in fact, I want somebody who's smart and common sense, and tough, and is thinking, as I do, in the conversations about how migration is going to be handled, somebody who also has a sense of compassion, and recognizes that immigration can enhance, when done properly, the assets of a country, and not just diminish them, I want David Cameron in the conversation. Just as I want him in the conversation when we're having discussions about information-sharing and counterterrorism activity. Precisely because I have confidence in the UK, and I know that if we're not working effectively with Paris or Brussels, then those attacks are going to migrate to the United States and to London, I want one of my strongest partners in that conversation. So it enhances the special relationship. It doesn't diminish it.

PRIME MINISTER CAMERON: Let me just make, Chris, one point in response to that. This is our choice; nobody else's -- the sovereign choice of the British people. But as we make that choice, it surely makes sense to listen to what our friends think, to listen to their opinion, to listen to their views. And that's what Barack has been talking about today.

But it's also worth remembering as we make this choice, it's a British choice about the British membership of the European Union. We're not being asked to make a choice about whether we support the German style of membership, or the Italian style of membership. Britain has a special status in the European Union. We're in the single market; we're not part of the single currency. We're able to travel and live and work in other European countries, but we've maintained our borders, because we're not in the Schengen no-border zone.

And on this vital issue of trade, where Barack has made such a clear statement, we should remember why we are currently negotiating this biggest trade deal in the whole world, and in the whole world's history, between the European Union and the United States -- is because Britain played an absolutely leading part in pushing for those talks to get going.

Indeed, we announced them at the G8 in Northern Ireland, when Britain was in the chair of that organization. We set the agenda for what could be an absolutely game-changing trade deal for jobs, for investment, because we were part of this organization.

So I just want to add those important points.

I think we have a U.S. question now.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Justin Sink.

Q Thanks, Mr. President. Following on that, do you think that between Brexit and the migration issue, European unity is at a crisis point? What do you hope leaders gathering in Germany can concretely do about it? And do you expect those nations to militarily support, including the possibility of ground troops, the new government in Libya to keep that situation from further straining Europe? While we're talking about future summits, I'm also wondering if maybe you could talk about whether you plan to go to Hiroshima when you visit Japan, and --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Oh, come on, man. You're really stretching it. (Laughter.)

Q This one is for Prime Minister Cameron, and it's short. I promise.

Prime Minister Cameron, the President has come here to tell the UK that, as a friend, and speaking honestly, they should stay in the EU. As a friend and speaking honestly, what would you advise American voters to do about Donald Trump? Thanks. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT OBAMA: That was so predictable.

PRIME MINISTER CAMERON: I'll let you take the first six --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Yes, exactly.

PRIME MINISTER CAMERON: -- and then I'll pick up that last one. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I wouldn't describe European unity as in a crisis, but I would say it is under strain. And some of that just has to do with the aftermath of the financial crisis and the strains that we're all aware of with respect to the Eurozone. I think it is important to emphasize, as David points out, that the UK is not part of the Eurozone, and so the blowback to the British economy has been different than it is on the continent. But we've seen some divisions and difficulties between the southern and the northern parts of Europe. That's created some strains.

I think the migration crisis amplifies a debate that's taking place not just in Europe, but in the United States as well. At a time of globalization, at a time when a lot of the challenges that we face are transnational, as opposed to just focused on one country, there is a temptation to want to just pull up the drawbridge, either literally or figuratively. We see that played out in some of the debates that are taking place in the U.S. presidential race.

And that debate I think is accelerated in Europe. But I'm confident that the ties that bind Europe together are ultimately much stronger than the forces that are trying to pull them apart.

Europe has undergone an extraordinary stretch of prosperity -- maybe unmatched in the history of the world. If you think about the 20th century and you think about the 21st century, 21st century Europe looks an awful lot better. And I think the majority of Europeans recognize that. They see that unity and peace have delivered sustained economic growth, reduced conflict, reduced violence, enhanced the quality of life for people. And I'm confident that can continue.

But I do believe that it's important to watch out for some of these fault lines that are developing. And in that sense, I do think that the Brexit vote -- which, if I'm a citizen of UK, I'm thinking about it solely in terms of how is this helping me, how is this helping the UK economy, how is it helping create jobs here in the UK -- that's the right way to think about it. But I do also think that this vote will send a signal that is relevant about whether the kind of prosperity that we've built together is going to continue, or whether the forces of division end up being more prominent. And that's why it's -- that's part of the reason why it's relevant to the United States, and why I have had the temerity to weigh in on it.

What were your four other questions? (Laughter.) I've got to figure I've knocked out two through that answer.

Q Libya --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: With respect to Libya, both David and I discussed our commitment to try to assist this nascent government. And it's a challenge, but there are people in this Government of National Accord that are genuinely committed to building back up a state. That's something we desperately want, because both the United States and United Kingdom, but also a number of our other allies, are more than prepared to invest in helping create border security in Libya, and helping to drive out terrorists inside of Libya, and trying to make sure that what could be a thriving society -- a relatively small population, a lot of resources -- this is not an issue where we should have to subsidize Libya. They're actually much better-positioned than some other countries that we've been helping, if they can just get their act together. And we want to help provide that technical assistance to get that done.

There is no plans for ground troops in Libya. I don't think that's necessary. I don't think it would be welcomed by this new government. It would send the wrong signal. This is a matter of can Libyans come together. What we can do is to provide them our expertise. What we can do is provide them training. What we can do is provide them a road map for how they can get basic services to their citizens and build up legitimacy.

But I do think that the one area where both David and I are heavily committed is, as this progresses, we can't wait if ISIL is starting to get a foothold there. And so we are working not just with the Libyan government but a lot of our international partners to make sure

that we're getting the intelligence that we need and, in some cases, taking actions to prevent ISIL from having another stronghold from which to launch attacks against Europe or against the United States.

And I think you have to wait until I get to Asia to start asking me Asia questions.
(Laughter.)

PRIME MINISTER CAMERON: The question you asked me -- this is not a general election. This is a referendum. And as Barack has explained, it's a referendum that affects, of course, the people of the United Kingdom very deeply, but it also does affect others in the European Union; it affects partners like America, or Canada, or Australia, or New Zealand. And as I look around the world, it is hard to find -- so far, I haven't found one -- a country that wishes Britain well that thinks we ought to leave the European Union.

And I think that's -- again, it's our choice. We'll make the decision. We'll listen to all the arguments. People want the facts. They want the arguments. They want to know the consequences. And I'll try to lay those out as Prime Minister as clearly as I can. But listening to our friends, listening to countries that wish us well, is part of the process and is a good thing to do.

As for the American elections, I've made some comments in recent weeks and months. I don't think now is a moment to add to add to them or subtract from them. (Laughter.) But I think, just as a Prime Minister who's been through two general elections leading my party, you always look on at the U.S. elections in awe of the scale of the process and the length of the process, and I marvel at anyone who is left standing at the end of it.
(Laughter.)

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Fortunately, we're term-limited. (Laughter.) So I, too, can look in awe at the process. (Laughter.)

PRIME MINISTER CAMERON: We have another British question from Laura Kuenssberg from the BBC.

Q Thank you. Mr. President, you've made your views very plain on the fact that British voters should choose to stay in the EU. But in the interest of good friends always being honest, are you also saying that our decades-old special relationship that's been through so much would be fundamentally damaged and changed by our exit? If so, how? And are you also -- do you have any sympathy with people who think this is none of your business?

And, Prime Minister, to you, if I may, some of your colleagues believe it's utterly wrong that you have dragged our closest ally into the EU referendum campaign. What do you say to them? And is it appropriate for the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, to have brought up President Obama's Kenyan ancestry in the context of this debate?

PRIME MINISTER CAMERON: Well, let me -- this is a British question - let me go first. I mean, first of all, questions for Boris are questions for Boris. They're questions for Boris, they're not questions for me.

I don't have some special power over the President of the United States. Barack feels strongly about this and has said what he's said. And, as I said, it's our decision as a sovereign people, the choice we make about Europe, but I think it's right to listen to and consider the advice of your friends.

And just to amplify one of the points that Barack made, we have a shared interest of making sure Europe takes a robust approach to Russian aggression. And if you take those issues of the sanctions that we put in place through the European Union, I think I can put my hand on my heart and say that Britain played a really important role, and continues to play an important role, in making sure those sanctions were put in place and kept in place. I'm not sure it would have happened if we weren't there.

Now, if it's in our interest -- and it is in our interest -- for Europe to be strong against aggression, how can it be an interest not to be at that table and potentially to see those sanctions not take place? And I think it's been that working between Britain and the United States over this issue that has helped to make a big difference.

I would just say about the special relationship, to me -- and I'm passionate about this, and I believe it very, very deeply, for all the reasons of the history and the language and the culture, but also about the future of our country -- and the truth is this: The stronger Britain is, and the stronger America is, the stronger that relationship will be. And I want Britain to be as strong as possible. And we draw our strength from all sorts of things that we have as a country -- the fifth largest economy in the world; amazing armed forces; brilliant security and intelligence forces -- that we were discussing about how well they work together; incredibly talented people; brilliant universities; the fact that we're members of NATO, the G7, the G20, the Commonwealth. But we also draw strength, and project strength, and project power, and project our values, and protect our people, and make our country wealthier, our people wealthier by being in the European Union.

So I want Britain to be as strong as possible. And the stronger Britain is, the stronger that special relationship is, and the more that we can get done together to make sure that we have a world that promotes democracy and peace and human rights and the development that we want to see across the world.

So, to me, it's simple: Stronger Britain, stronger special relationship -- that's in our interest, and that's in the interest of the United States of America, as well.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Let me start with Winston Churchill. (Laughter.) You know, I don't know if people are aware of this, but in the Residence, on the second floor, my office, my private office is called the Treaty Room. And right outside the door of the Treaty Room, so that I see it every day, including on weekends, when I'm going into that

office to watch a basketball game -- (laughter) -- the primary image I see is a bust of Winston Churchill. It's there voluntarily, because I can do anything on the second floor. (Laughter.) I love Winston Churchill. I love the guy.

Now, when I was elected as President of the United States, my predecessor had kept a Churchill bust in the Oval Office. There are only so many tables where you can put busts - - otherwise it starts looking a little cluttered. (Laughter.) And I thought it was appropriate, and I suspect most people here in the United Kingdom might agree, that as the first African American President, it might be appropriate to have a bust of Dr. Martin Luther King in my office to remind me of all the hard work of a lot of people who would somehow allow me to have the privilege of holding this office.

That's just on Winston Churchill. I think people should know that, know my thinking there.

With respect to the special relationship, I have a staff member, who will not be named -- because it might embarrass her a little bit -- who, generally, on foreign trips, does not leave the hotel or the staff room because she's constantly doing work making this happen. She has had one request the entire time that I have been President, and that is, could she accompany me to Windsor on the off-chance that she might get a peek at Her Majesty the Queen. And, gracious as she is, Her Majesty actually had this person, along with a couple of others, lined up so that as we emerged from lunch, they could say hello. And this staff person, who is as tough as they come, almost fainted -- (laughter) -- which was -- I'm glad she didn't because it would have caused an incident. (Laughter.) That's the special relationship.

We are so bound together that nothing is going to impact the emotional and cultural and intellectual affinities between our two countries. So I don't come here, suggesting in any way that that is impacted by a decision that the people of the United Kingdom may make around whether or not they're members of the European Union. That is there. That's solid. And that will continue, hopefully, eternally. And the cooperation in all sorts of ways -- through NATO, through G7, G20 -- all those things will continue.

But, as David said, if one of our best friends is in an organization that enhances their influence and enhances their power and enhances their economy, then I want them to stay in it. Or at least I want to be able to tell them, you know, I think this makes you guys bigger players. I think this helps your economy. I think this helps to create jobs.

And so, ultimately, it's your decision. But precisely because we're bound at the hip, I want you to know that before you make your decision.

Margaret Brennan.

Q Thank you very much, sir. Mr. President, Vladimir Putin hasn't stopped Assad, as he led you to believe he would, and the ceasefire in Syria appears to be falling apart. Will you continue to bet on what looks to be a losing strategy?

Mr. Prime Minister, the UK today warned its citizens traveling to North Carolina and Mississippi about laws there that affect transgender individuals. As a friend, what do you think of those laws?

Mr. President, would you like to weigh in on that? And, sir, if you'd indulge us --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Indulge -- what do you mean?

Q Well, indulge all of us back in the U.S., sir, Prince passed away. You were a fan. You had invited him to perform at the White House. Can you tell us what made you a fan?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I'm trying to figure out which order to do this. (Laughter.) Maybe I'll start with North Carolina and Mississippi. I want everybody here in the United Kingdom to know that the people of North Carolina and Mississippi are wonderful people. They are hospitable people. They are beautiful states, and you are welcome and you should come and enjoy yourselves. And I think you'll be treated with extraordinary hospitality.

I also think that the laws that have been passed there are wrong and should be overturned. And they're in response to politics, in part; in part, some strong emotions that are generated by people -- some of whom are good people but I just disagree with when it comes to respecting the equal rights of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, whether they're transgender or gay or lesbian. And although I respect their different viewpoints, I think it's very important for us not to send signals that anybody is treated differently.

And I think it's fair to say that we're not unique among countries where -- particularly under a federal system in which power is dispersed, that there are going to be some localities or local officials that put forward laws that aren't necessarily reflective of a national consensus. But if you guys come to North Carolina or Mississippi, everybody will be treated well.

The second question with respect to Syria. I am deeply concerned about the cessation of hostilities fraying and whether it's sustainable. Now, keep in mind that I have always been skeptical about Mr. Putin's actions and motives inside of Syria. He is -- along with Iran -- the preeminent backer of a murderous regime that I do not believe can regain legitimacy within his country because he's murdered a lot of people.

Having said that, what I also believe is, is that we cannot end the crisis in Syria without political negotiations and without getting all the parties around the table to craft a transition plan. And that, by necessity, means that there are going to be some people on one side of the table who I deeply disagree with and whose actions I deeply abhor. That's how oftentimes you resolve conflicts like this that are taking an enormous toll on the Syrian people.

The cessation of hostilities actually held longer than I expected. And for seven weeks we've seen a significant reduction in violence inside that country. And that gave some relief to people.

I talked to Putin on Monday precisely to reinforce to him the importance of us trying to maintain the cessation of hostilities, asking him to put more pressure on Assad, indicating to him that we would continue to try to get the moderate opposition to stay at the negotiating table in Geneva.

But this has always been hard. And it's going to keep being hard. And what David and I discussed in our meeting was that we will continue to prosecute the war against Daesh, against ISIL. We are going to continue to support those who are prepared to fight ISIL. And we're going to continue to target them. We're going to continue to make progress. But we're not going to solve the overall problem unless we can get this political track moving.

I assure you that we have looked at all options. None of them are great. And so we are going to play this option out. If, in fact, the cessation falls apart, we'll try to put it back together again even as we continue to go after ISIL. And it's my belief that ultimately Russia will recognize that, just as this can't be solved by a military victory on the part of those we support, Russia may be able to keep the lid on, alongside Iran, for a while, but if you don't have a legitimate government there, they will be bled, as well. And that is not -- that's not speculation on my part. I think the evidence all points in that direction.

And finally with respect to Prince, I loved Prince because he put out great music and he was a great performer. I didn't know him well. He came to perform at the White House last year and was extraordinary, and creative and original and full of energy. And so it's a remarkable loss.

And I'm staying at Winfield House, the U.S. Ambassador's residence. It so happens our Ambassador has a turntable, and so this morning we played "Purple Rain" and "Delirious" just to get warmed up before we left the house for important bilateral meetings like this. (Laughter.)

PRIME MINISTER CAMERSON: As a fan of great music, the Ambassador has brought a lot of brilliant talent.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Absolutely.

PRIME MINISTER: Let me just answer, I've been to North Carolina many years ago and enjoyed it. I have not yet made it to Mississippi, but one day I hope to. The guidance that we put out, the Foreign Office, gives advice on travel, and it obviously deals with laws in situations as they are, and it tries to give that advice dispassionately, impartially. But it's very important that it does so. It's something that a lot of attention is given to.

Our view on any of these things is that we believe that we should be trying to use law to end discrimination rather than to embed it or enhance it. And that's something we're comfortable saying to countries and friends anywhere in the world. But obviously, the laws people pass is a matter of their own legislatures. But we make clear our own views about the importance of trying to end discrimination, and we've made some important steps forward in our own country on that front, which we're proud of.

With that, thank you very much.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.)

END

5:55 P.M. BST