

Remarks to the Press by the Vice President and French President Hollande

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PRESIDENT HOLLANDE: (In progress as translated) -- this President here.

France will continue its mission allowing Mali to regain its territorial integrity, and then leave the African troops to deal with it. And tomorrow, it will be an operation for -- a peacekeeping operation.

We also talked about Syria. I noted that we shared the same views. We are noting that the situation is worsening day after day with a number of civilian casualties. And what should be the settlement of that crisis is in a deadlock. We consider that Bashar al-Assad should go, and we are doing our utmost for a transition conditional solution to be found. So this is the reason why we have been supporting the Syrian National Coalition, like the United States.

We also talked about Iran. And here again, we regret to note that, notwithstanding all of the efforts, Iran is still rejecting transparency and compliance with its international obligations. There is yet another appointment that's been taken very soon for negotiations to resume. So until the end, we will exert pressure for the negotiations to succeed.

We also share the same willingness to revive the peace process in the Middle East. Now that the elections in Israel are behind us, the Palestinian authorities are willing to commit themselves, we shall make sure that both the United States and Europe can support the revival of negotiations that can lead to a two-state solution.

Then we also discussed the economy. Both the American administration and the French presidency have the same approach. We want our public accounts to be improved, rebalanced. We all inherited debts from the previous majorities. But beyond sorting out the debt and reducing the deficit, we both want to support growth. And I do not forget

that the first international meeting I attended was the G8, and on that occasion, Barack Obama was hosting the foreign leaders, and he kept telling us that growth should be at the heart of our decisions. Fiscal seriousness and growth are not incompatible, and both the United States and France can prove it.

The last topic we discussed at a great length is climate. The duty that we have to bring to the next generations a planet that shall not be facing major disasters. So we have to make sure that in the context of the climate conference, we have to reach some tangible results.

This is what I can say about our meeting today. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs will soon be traveling to the U.S. in order to meet his counterpart, Mr. John Kerry. And there will be elsewhere -- many exchanges between myself and President Obama to discuss the many topics I just mentioned.

But the visit today of Mr. Joe Biden, Vice President of the United States, yet again an opportunity for us to say how strong the friendship between our two countries is.

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Mr. President, it is always a great pleasure -- and I mean that literally, a pleasure -- to visit France. And it was particularly nice to get a chance to have such a leisurely but informative lunch with you. Your hospitality is unmatched in the world, and I want to thank you for that.

And without saying -- it went without saying today that our agenda, our mutual agenda is global. It is not confined to any single issue or any single part of the world. It spans the globe.

And as the President indicated, we discussed an array of issues starting and including Mali and North Africa more broadly. And let me say again on behalf of the President, the people of the United States, we applaud your decisiveness and I might add the incredible competence and capability of your French military forces.

I often tell the story -- I've been in and out of Afghanistan and Iraq an awful lot, several dozen times; and I remember the first time I was in a forward operating base up in the hills above the Kunar Valley, the mountains. And I asked early on in the campaign, before I was Vice President -- I asked my -- the six Americans who I was standing with who they enjoyed standing most together with. And one young man said, "the Tricolors, the French." And "they know how to shoot straight" was his expression. You have a brave and competent -- and I say to the Minister of Defense -- competent military. And your decisive action is not only in the interest of France, but quite frankly the United States and everyone.

The President shared his insights of his recent trip to Bamako and to Timbuktu, and we agreed on the need to as quickly as reasonably possible establish -- the establishment of an African-led international mission to Mali, and to as quickly as is prudent transition that mission to the United Nations.

We also support the political process that France is leading to restore a democratic government in Mali. The President indicated as well that we discussed the importance of working with our regional partners to counter terrorism across North Africa and beyond. We spent no little time discussing how terrorist organizations metastasized and why additional strategies will be necessary going into the future to deal with this new threat.

I emphasized the importance of working with the new government of Libya and building an -- effective security institutions, as well as I commended France once again on its leading role.

On Syria, as the President mentioned, we discussed what more can be done to address the situation and also briefly discussed the humanitarian crisis affecting Syria and its neighbors. We both fully support the Syrian opposition coalition, the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. And I recounted my meetings on Saturday in Germany with President al-Khatib, as well as a long meeting I had with the U.N.-Arab League Joint Special Representative Mr. Brahimi. And I filled the President in on the detail of those discussions.

Our conversation also ventured into Afghanistan where we have stood together in a stalwart way. We reviewed our strategic vision, how to secure and stabilize Afghanistan.

President Hollande and I also reminded one another of the firm commitments of all NATO leaders in Chicago to both sustain NATO's mission in Afghan post-2014 and to remain in incredibly close contact as to how to proceed.

And finally, we did discuss -- we also discussed Iran. I complimented the President and his predecessor on the strong stand that France has taken to make it clear to Iran that we mean business. These are the most consequential sanctions in no small part because of France's leadership that have been imposed in the, oh, 40 years that I've been involved in international affairs. And they are -- and this next phase which kicks in now, this month is -- must be followed through.

We are prepared, the President asked me about the statement made in Munich, and I just pointed out, I reiterated what has been our position: When and if the Supreme Leader and the Iranians are prepared to discuss the essence of what is at the core of this -- of these embargos, we're prepared to discuss. We never -- and we're prepared to meet with them individually after consultation with our partners the P5-plus-1, or as we say in Europe, the E3-plus-3. And we did discuss that. But we also share the view that there has been no real evidence of any movement thus far by the Iranians.

But as I said, we discussed economic issues as well, and I think the President summed it up very clearly. The President -- President Obama believes there is nothing inconsistent with dealing with putting our long-term debt in perspective and bringing it under control and generating economic growth. They should not be inconsistent. We know they're not inconsistent objectives. And we're hopeful that Europe and the entire EU will be more inclined to share your view, Mr. President.

And we also pointed out that too many families -- too many families in France, the United States, Europe as a whole, are still suffering from underemployment as well as unemployment. And again, we must speak to that.

I was impressed in the discussion we had relative to climate change -- and I mean this sincerely, Mr. President -- I could have been sitting in a private meeting with President Obama. He would have not said it in French, he'd say it in English, but you said the same thing. The President pointed out that there is an obligation here that extends way beyond these administrations. There is a need -- there is a need to set out a vision for the young people in both our countries that we understand -- we understand. It's a rallying cry that can be a call for a united effort and support in both our countries to deal with global warming.

The President is committed to do that. And as I pointed out to the Foreign Minister, he is going to have an interlocutor in John Kerry. There is no one in my country who has been, over the period of time he's been in the Senate, more concerned with or knowledgeable about the issues relating to global warming. And so the President is -- President Obama is committed as well.

With regard to the -- back to the economy for just a moment. As I said in Europe -- I mean, excuse me, in Munich, Europe is our largest economic partner. Over \$600 billion in annual trade and \$5 trillion -- \$5 trillion in overall commercial relationships, creating literally millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. So the United States has a profound interest -- a profound interest in Europe's success, in Europe securing the foundations of its monetary union. It's overwhelmingly in our naked self-interest.

As you can see, we had a very full discussion of a number of issues. And I fear that both of our delegations were probably thankful that the dessert had come, because I'm afraid we could have gone on much longer. But I found it extremely helpful.

And, again, let me conclude, Mr. President, by saying on behalf of President Obama how much he looks forward -- how much he looks forward to working with you and France, because there's not a single issue that affects us on the international -- in the international arena that does not -- where our interests do not intersect. And we look forward to a very, very close relationship between our administrations.

And, again, thank you for the hospitality. I appreciate it very, very much. Thank you.

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3:12 P.M. (Local)