

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway and an Exchange With Reporters in Oslo, Norway
December 10, 2009

Prime Minister Stoltenberg. Mr. President, it is a great pleasure and honor to welcome you here in Oslo. And once again, I would like to congratulate you on being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2009. You have really created a new climate of international cooperation through your very strong emphasis on the need for dialog. And I, personally, very much appreciate this opportunity to continue our dialog from the NATO summit in Strasbourg and from the U.N. this fall.

Norway and the United States are close allies. We are partners in NATO, and we enjoy close, longstanding relationships. We cooperate in the high north, and we work closely on a number of different global issues. Today we have discussed the most pressing challenge of our time, climate change. We need a strong political agreement in Copenhagen, and I briefed the President on the Norwegian-Mexican initiative on financing, which is a key issue in Copenhagen.

Developed countries must provide more funding for climate action in the developing world. We need money both for the short term and the long term, and we need funding both from the public and from the private sector. The cap and trade system championed by your administration, Mr. President, is truly in keeping with our approach here in Norway. By capping emissions, we reduce emissions and we put a price on carbon, which is very, very important. This will bring strong incentives to develop new and cleaner technologies.

We have agreed that Norway and the U.S. will work together to ensure that efforts to reduce emissions from tropical forests will be an important element in a deal in Copenhagen. U.S. leadership is crucial if you are to succeed in combating climate change. Mr. President, you are providing that leadership.

We discussed Afghanistan. I welcome the stronger and broader U.S. involvement aimed at ensuring development and stability. Norway is committed to continuing our military and civilian efforts in Afghanistan. And I am pleased to announce that Norway will increase its financial contribution to the Afghan National Army and police to a total of 110 million U.S. dollars for the period 2010 to 2014. We must enable Afghans to take responsibility for their own security.

We touched upon the situation in the Middle East. As chair of the international donors group, I expressed my support for the U.S. efforts to bring the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians back on track.

And we have agreed to work together for U.N. Millennium Development summit in New York next autumn.

We recognize our collective effort on global health issues, including maternal and child health and strengthening of health systems. We need to scale up efforts to ensure the health and safety of every woman and child in connection with childbirth.

We are ready to work together with you, Mr. President, to meet these and other challenges. Mr. President, we are delighted to have you in Oslo. The floor is yours.

President Obama. Thank you so much. Well, it is a great honor to be here in Norway. I appreciate the extraordinary hospitality of the Norwegian people, and I thank Prime Minister Stoltenberg for his friendship and his extraordinary leadership here in his country. I only wish that my family could stay longer in this wonderful country, but I still have a lot of work to do back in Washington, DC, before the year is done.

Norway is a close friend and an ally, and the relationship between the American and the Norwegian people has always been extraordinarily strong. It's been noted that there are probably more Norwegians, or at least persons of Norwegian descent, in the United States than there are here in Norway. Norwegians were among the earliest settlers on our shores, and many Norwegian Americans rank as distinguished American citizens. I should also note that, as I was driving through—this being my first visit to Norway—I understood why they all moved to Wisconsin and Minnesota, some of our northern States, because they look identical to Norway.

Today, our relationship thrives on the basis of our common values and our shared aspirations for a better world. To that end, our cooperation spans a broad range of issues, as the Prime Minister indicated, including building stability and security in Afghanistan and the Balkans, confronting nuclear proliferation and climate change, advancing human rights, and global health.

Something that, obviously, is pressing right now is the issue of climate change, and the Prime Minister and I discussed the ongoing meeting in Copenhagen, in which we're both strongly committed to a positive outcome. The United States has done a lot of work this year to transform the way we think about energy and our use back home and to help to move international climate negotiations forward in an effective way. And I look forward to coming back this way next week during the leaders' summit that ends the conference.

Prime Minister Stoltenberg and I also discussed how we can work together and with other countries to protect forests, something that he has personally championed. And I'm very impressed with the model that has been built between Norway and Brazil that allows for effective monitoring and ensures that we are making progress in avoiding deforestation of the Amazon. And we all understand that it's probably the most cost-effective way for us to address the issue of climate change, having an effective set of mechanisms in place to avoid further deforestation and, hopefully, to plant new trees.

The Prime Minister and I also reaffirmed our mutual commitment to improving global health. We committed to work together to deal with maternal child and newborn health, to promote research and innovation and strengthen health systems.

I discussed our strategy in Afghanistan, and I want to add that we are grateful to the people of Norway and the sacrifices that they've made on behalf of this effort. Norway has consistently stood alongside the United States and, as is true in so many other areas of international relations, I indicated to the Prime Minister an expression that we use in America—it's a boxing term—Norway punches above its weight. It is a very effective actor internationally, and it has been here on the issue of Afghanistan. And I appreciate the Prime Minister's announcement of the total of \$110 million for the Afghan security force trust fund. It will be absolutely critical for us to build capacity, and that's something that is at the core of the effort that we're embarking in over the next several years.

Finally, I want to thank His Majesty King Harald V and the Royal Family for the extraordinary hospitality that they are showing Michelle and myself. We look forward to the

extraordinary honor of the events associated with the Nobel Peace Prize. I want to thank the people of Norway.

And with that, perhaps we can take some questions.

Nobel Peace Prize/The Presidency

Q. Good morning.

President Obama. Hi, how are you?

Q. Giving the peace prize to you, Mr. President, has been described as premature. How can you use the prize, do you think, to make some of your good intentions materialize and then counter that criticism?

President Obama. Well, you know, first of all, as I said upon receiving the news of the prize, it was a great surprise to me. I have no doubt that there are others who may be more deserving. My task here is to continue on the path that, I believe, is not only important for America, but important for lasting peace and security in the world. That means pursuing a world free of nuclear weapons over time and strengthening our mechanisms to avoid nuclear proliferation. That means addressing climate change in an effective way. It means stabilizing countries like Afghanistan and mobilizing an international effort to deal with terrorism that is consistent with our values and our ideals. It means addressing issues of development, because we understand the connection between economic justice and peace.

So on a whole host of initiatives that I've put forward this year, some of which are beginning to bear fruit, the goal is not to win a popularity contest or to get an award, even one as esteemed as the Nobel Peace Prize. The goal has been to advance America's interests, to strengthen our economy at home, and to make ourselves a continuing force for good in the world, something that we've been for decades now.

And if I'm successful in those tasks, then hopefully, some of the criticism will subside, but that's not really my concern. And if I'm not successful, then all the praise and the awards in the world won't disguise that fact.

Okay, I think we've only got time for two, and I've got to make sure that one of our poor Americans who traveled here and are very exhausted at this point because they didn't get enough sleep—is Ben [Ben Feller, Associated Press] around? There you are, Ben. I guess you're not the only one tired. [*Laughter*] I missed you.

Arrest of U.S. Citizens in Pakistan/Muslim Americans/Military Operations in Afghanistan

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I'd like to ask you about national security. There's been a lot of debate about the July 2011 deadline; that date in your Afghanistan speech. Can you assure the American public that that is when American forces will begin to come home, or is it possible that that date could slip? And also, I'd like to get your reaction to the arrests of five American—young American Muslims in Pakistan on charges of terrorism?

And to the Prime Minister, if I could, I'd like to get your reaction to my colleague's question about the debate over the President's Nobel Peace Prize. What is your reaction to this concern that it may be premature?

President Obama. First of all, with respect to the five young men who were arrested in Pakistan, I think the details are still forthcoming. There will undoubtedly be a series of investigations surrounding these events, so I'd prefer not to comment on them at this point.

I think what has been remarkable over the course of the last 8, 9 years since 9/11 is the degree to which America has reaffirmed the extraordinary contributions of the Muslim American community and how they have been woven into the fabric of our Nation in a seamless fashion. On the other hand, the degree to which the fierce loyalty towards America, the fierce patriotism and integration of Muslim Americans into America life have helped to avoid some of the problems that we've seen in other countries on this issue.

Now, the Muslim American community is vast, so we have to constantly be mindful that some of these twisted ideologies are available over the Internet and can affect our young people. But I think we've got a good story to tell here and one that we need to build on.

With respect to Afghanistan, I think General McChrystal said it as well as it could have been said in his testimony. We believe we've got the right strategy. We believe we can execute the strategy, that we can build Afghan capacity, protect population centers, and blunt and degrade the Taliban capacity so that beginning on July of 2011, we are beginning to transfer responsibility to the Afghan people and Afghan security forces.

I've been unambiguous about this, so there should not be a debate. Starting in July 2011, we will begin that transition, that transfer of responsibility. The pace at which that takes place, the slope of a drawdown, how it occurs tactically, those are all going to be conditions based. And so, just as in Iraq, there was a constant monitoring of the situation and continues to be, and there's discussion on an ongoing basis between myself and General Odierno and our national security team, so will those kind of conversations be taking place in Afghanistan.

And as I indicated to the Prime Minister, I think it's very important to understand that we're not going to see some sharp cliff, some precipitous drawdown. Our whole concept here is to train and partner with Afghan forces and to transfer to them even as our troops are fighting alongside each other. It's also important to understand that several years after U.S. combat troops have been drastically reduced in the region, and ISAF troops have been reduced in the region, the Afghan Government is still going to need support for those security forces. We are still going to have an interest in partnering with Afghans and Pakistanis and others in dealing with the remnants of terrorist activity there.

So that's not going to go away. Our commitment to Afghan development, to their civilians, to increasing their agricultural production, all those things are going to continue. But July 2011 will signal a shift in our mission.

Prime Minister Stoltenberg. Let me just say some words about your question. First of all, I would like say that, in my opinion, the Nobel Peace Prize to President Barack Obama is a very well-deserved and important award, because the whole idea with the Nobel Peace Prize, as it is expressed in the last will of Alfred Nobel, is that it shall contribute to peace based on an assessment on what a person has done the last year. And I cannot think about anybody else who has done more for peace during the last year than Barack Obama, because he has become President and he has taken initiatives when it comes to disarmament, when it comes to nonproliferation, when it comes to a world without nuclear weapons, and also when it comes to important issues regarding preventing conflicts. For instance, fighting global warming, taking leadership as he has done when it comes to trying to reach an agreement in Copenhagen, is an

important part of creating a world with less conflicts, more peace, and less ground for war and conflicts.

And the whole new agenda the President has created when it comes to the importance of international cooperation, dialog, and the importance that we are solving common problems together, is a strong and bold initiative which is promoting peace.

So it is a well-deserved peace prize, and hopefully, it is really in the best spirit of Alfred Nobel, because it can contribute in itself to strengthening the efforts of the President to work for peace. So I support the Nobel Committee. It is an independent committee, but I support the decision; I think it's a very bold and an important decision.

President Obama. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. in the Office of the Prime Minister. In his remarks, the he referred to Ahmad Abdulminni, Umar Farooq, Waqir Hussain Khan, Aman Hasan Yamer, and Ramys Zamzam, who were arrested on December 7 in Sargodha, Pakistan, for suspected terrorist activity; Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; and Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

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