

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy Brey of Spain and an Exchange With Reporters in Madrid, Spain

July 10, 2016

Prime Minister Rajoy. Good morning, everybody. As you know, we've just had a meeting where we've addressed a number of issues, which I will be describing. First of all, I would like to welcome once again President—the President of the United States to the Palace of the Moncloa, President Barack Obama. I've thanked him, and I would like to thank him once again for coming before the end of his term. No U.S. President had visited Spain for 15 years last time—the last visit we had was 15 years ago.

So I would like to thank him particularly. I did it earlier, and I'd like to do it formally. On behalf of all Spaniards, I would like to thank him for maintaining his visit after the serious events that have taken place in his country. And I've expressed our sympathy and our affection for—to all the American people.

I've also explained the—this country's situation at this time, especially from an economic standpoint. The President of the United States knows how the situation has evolved in our economy. He showed interest for our country's economy. When the crisis started in 2007, 2008, and when I was already President of the Government in 2012, we went through very difficult times, and now we see that those times have been overcome in spite of some pending issues.

Spain is no longer in a recession. Spain is growing; it's the economy which is growing fastest in the EU. And jobs are no longer destroyed; jobs are being created. In 2015, we had very positive figures, as you know. And 2016 is also positive for the time being, and we hope things will continue like that.

We've overcome imbalances. We're more competitive. And the Spanish economy has bright prospects if it continues—we continue to have an economic policy to keep public accounts under control and if we continue to undertake structural reforms.

We've also spoken about the elections in Spain, the process that has concluded with the 26 June elections. And I told President Obama that I will do everything possible to form a Government as soon as possible. I think that having had to rerun the elections for the first time in the history of Spain was bad news, but having to have a third election would be very negative, and it would affect the economy and also our credibility in Spain and outside.

We've also discussed issues on the European Union. We've talked about Brexit. Spain's position in the negotiations with the U.K. will be constructive. I think that's what is reasonable and what makes sense. We've also talked about the refugee crisis and the immigration problems and immigration for economic reasons. Obviously, we have a position, and our position is that problems need to be resolved at the point of origin, and we think that they should be resolved soon—the issue of Libya, the issue of Syria—because that will help us greatly.

And I've also told President Obama about what I'm doing at the EU so the EU gets involved in resolving problems at the point of origin. A young person who has no prospects in his or her country—who has no prospects to live in his country, who can't have a dignified life—will do anything he can to leave his or her country and find something elsewhere. So

problems need to be resolved at the point of origin, and countries need to be helped. And we have to do it together with the European Union.

We've also talked about NATO relations. They're very good. We've talked about Rota, Morón. And I think things have been done properly with the consensus of most of Spanish society. And that's very good for Spain, and it's also very good for the United States and for all of us who defend democracy, freedom, human rights, and security for people.

Bilateral relations at this time are wonderful from all perspectives. The United States is the top investor in Spain—foreign investor. And the United States is the top country where Spanish companies invest as well.

Lastly, we've also addressed the situation in Cuba. We're optimistic for the future. We hope the outcome will be positive. And in Colombia, we wish lots of luck to President Santos because he's deploying great efforts. And we've also talked about Venezuela and the need to normalize the situation.

So we've addressed issues which are very important for Spain and for the United States. And I would like to conclude by saying, anyone who wants to hear me, that President Obama is a good friend of Spain's and a good friend of Spaniards. He's a committed person. He's honest and a person that we have cooperated with very pleasantly. We would be very pleased if he came back to Spain. He was already here lots of years ago, and he can come back whenever he wishes, because he will always be well remembered and welcome here.

President Obama. Well, let me begin by thanking Prime Minister Rajoy and his team and the Spanish people for welcoming us. It has been an extraordinarily gracious and warm welcome, particularly given the tough situation that we've had at home and my need to rearrange my schedule.

I was hoping for a longer stay, but I thought that it was important to make sure that, while I was still President, I visited such an important friend and ally. Because the relationship between us is a bond of friendship; it is an alliance relationship. We have shared economic and security interests. And we have shared values and ideals as two democracies. And the United States, given the size of its Spanish-speaking population or persons with Hispanic heritage, I think, feel a special connection to Spain.

We—I thought the Prime Minister summarized our conversations well. We meet here at a difficult, challenging time for Europe and for the world. We have a world that is integrating rapidly and presents enormous opportunities. But if our institutional arrangements don't ensure inclusion, if we do not coordinate effectively on economic and security issues, then it can present great dangers, both in terms of our own people feeling as if they're left—being left behind, as well as people from other countries fleeing bad situations, wanting to come here, or engaging in conflicts that create safe havens for terrorism and present future challenges to us.

The good news is, is that the relationship between the United States and Spain is extremely strong and we have been able to work together on a whole range of these issues. I'm confident that taking the approach that Spain has suggested on the Brexit negotiations, that that can be managed in a way that does not have an adverse impact on economic growth and opportunity for all of Europe, including the U.K., and will not have an adverse effect on the global economy.

I want to congratulate the Prime Minister and the Spanish people for the economic progress that's been made over the last several years. It has been a difficult journey, but many

of the changes that were taken are starting to bear fruit. And we still have more work to do, all of us, in improving the prospects for young people who are unemployed and creating more innovation and productivity and growth in our economies and making sure that those economies are broad based. So we discussed how we can do that on both sides of the Atlantic.

We just both came from the NATO meeting in Warsaw, and I want to thank the people of Spain and Spanish Armed Forces for the outstanding leadership that they provide on a whole spectrum of NATO initiatives, whether it's heading up one of NATO's new joint task forces, the incredible contribution that's provided by the Rota and Morón facilities and the hospitality shown to our forces, the work that the EU and NATO together are doing in the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea. On all these issues, Spain has been a critical contributor. And Spain's men and women in uniform do an outstanding job.

As Prime Minister mentioned, we also are working together in some very difficult places, like the Middle East. And the contributions that Spain is making to training Iraqi military and police so that they can consolidate the gains that we're making against ISIL have been critically important, and we appreciate that very much as well.

Outside of Europe and the Middle East, we also discussed Latin America, where we have a shared interest, given Spain's roots and strong relationships throughout the Spanish-speaking world and given the fact that what happens in the southern half of our hemisphere has a huge impact on us. We agree that Cuba offers the potential of new prosperity and new freedom if managed correctly, the process of normalization between the United States and Cuba. Our hope is, is that although it will not happen overnight, that it provides new opportunity for the people of Cuba.

Peace in Colombia has been elusive for decades. And the fact that President Santos has been able to initiate these changes and forge a tentative, but very important peace deal, I think, promises greater prosperity and security for all the Colombian people.

We are jointly concerned about the situation in Venezuela. And our hope is, is that we can find a way in which all sides can come together, stabilize the Government, and stabilize the economy. And we want to be helpful, although, obviously, we cannot dictate the outcomes in Venezuela.

Let me just conclude by saying that I definitely will come back as an ex-President, because Spain is beautiful. The food, the culture, the people, the weather—it's hard to resist. But—and I want to thank the extraordinary hospitality that's been shown to Michelle and my daughters when they've traveled here. They love it as well. So I think, as your children get older, they don't always want to spend time with you. But if you tell them, we'll take you to Spain—*[laughter]*—then it's a good way to bribe them and force them to spend time with you.

But as President of the United States, in my formal role, I want to express the warmth, the gratitude, the friendship that the American people feel towards the Spanish people. We share values. We share ideals. We believe in democracy. We believe in rule of law. We believe in the dignity of all people. And our work together across the international stage is hugely important.

So I hope that I'm setting a precedent so that it will not be another 15 years before the next U.S. President comes here.

Thank you very much.

Prime Minister Rajoy. Thank you.

President Obama. Are we starting with the American journalist or——

State Department's Handling of Classified Information/Cybersecurity/Criminal Justice Reform/Black Lives Matter Movement

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask you about the continued demonstrations we saw overnight in response to some of the police-involved shootings. But at the risk of suffering the same fate as one of my colleagues yesterday, I also wanted to return to the issue of Secretary Clinton's e-mails because some of the comments that you have made in the past yourself about this. You said in April that you continue to believe that she has not jeopardized America's national security. But this week, FBI Director Comey said that their assessment was that it was possible hostile actors gained access to her e-mails and that there's evidence that they were extremely careless in their handling of very sensitive, highly classified information.

Do you accept that conclusion? And when you referred yesterday to the issue of overclassification, did you mean to suggest that some of the issues that were identified as classified might have been examples of that overclassification?

On to the other issue, you've commented in the past on some of the tactics of the Black Lives Matter's movement that you suggested have been counterproductive. We've seen continued protests, as I mentioned, overnight in many American cities over the Dallas tragedy. And as you prepare yourself to travel to Dallas, how would you advise the Black Lives Matter activists to approach this very sensitive issue—situation?

And, Prime Minister Rajoy, the President said in an interview with El Pais that he hopes and expects this next Spanish Government will remain committed to a strong relationship with the U.S. and to Europe. Are you in a position to make that kind of guarantee? And despite some of the concerns you raised about a possible third election, are you in a position to rule out the possibility? Thank you.

President Obama. Well, Mike [Michael A. Memoli, Los Angeles Times], on the first question, this has been a criminal investigation. The FBI Director took the extraordinary step of explaining in methodical fashion how they arrived at their conclusion. The Attorney General accepted the recommendation of the investigators. And as a consequence, I think it's inappropriate for me to second-guess or comment extensively on the conclusion that they arrived on.

When I talked about the fact that there are legitimate concerns around how information travels in the State Department, it's across the spectrum. It has to do with the volumes of information that are now being transmitted, who has access to them, concerns about cyber attacks and cybersecurity, concerns about making sure that we're transmitting information in real time so that we can make good decisions, but that it's not being mishandled in the process or making us more vulnerable.

And without commenting on what Director Comey said, I can tell you that Secretary Kerry is and has been concerned about this generally and has stood up initiatives to try to improve those information flows and that I'm concerned about this throughout the Government, generally. It just has a particular salience when you're talking about diplomatic cables and issues involving national security.

And I don't think we have it perfectly solved. I think we're going to have to do better and learn from mistakes. And some of that will have to do with intentional—or some of that will have to do with changing systems. Some of it will have to do with how we train personnel from

the very top: how I use my smartphone or BlackBerry, all the way down to the lowest-level staffer.

But we've seen problems on this. WikiLeaks was a big piece of business. And it wasn't intentional, but what it exposed was that there were a lot of vulnerabilities there. We know we've had hacking in the White House. And how people handle information, the precautionary steps that are taken, all those things are being examined thoroughly. And I think it will be a work in progress over time.

With respect to your second question, one of the great things about America is that individual citizens and groups of citizens can petition their government, can protest, can speak truth to power. And that is sometimes messy and controversial. But because of that ability to protest and engage in free speech, America, over time, has gotten better. We've all benefited from that.

The abolition movement was contentious. The effort for women to get the right to vote was contentious and messy. There were times when activists might have engaged in rhetoric that was overheated and occasionally counterproductive. But the point was to raise issues so that we, as a society, could grapple with it. The same was true with the civil rights movement and the union movement and the environmental movement, the antiwar movement during Vietnam. And I think what you're seeing now is part of that longstanding tradition.

What I would say is this: that whenever those of us who are concerned about fairness in the criminal justice system attack police officers, you are doing a disservice to the cause. First of all, any violence directed at police officers is a reprehensible crime, and it needs to be prosecuted. But even rhetorically, if we paint police in broad brush, without recognizing that the vast majority of police officers are doing a really good job and are trying to protect people and do so fairly and without racial bias, if our rhetoric does not recognize that, then we're going to lose allies in the reform cause.

Now, in a movement like Black Lives Matter, there's always going to be some folks who say things that are stupid or imprudent or overgeneralize or are harsh. And I don't think that you can hold well-meaning activists who are doing the right thing and peacefully protesting responsible for everything that is uttered at a protest site. But I would just say to everybody who's concerned about the issue of police shootings or racial bias in the criminal justice system that maintaining a truthful and serious and respectful tone is going to help mobilize American society to bring about real change. And that is our ultimate objective.

Now, this week, people felt hurt and angry, and so some of this is just venting. But I think that the overwhelming majority of people who are involved in the Black Lives Matter movement, what they really want to see is a better relationship between the police and the community so that they can feel that it's serving them. And the best way to do that is to bring allies aboard. That means—that includes, by the way, police departments that are doing the right thing, like Dallas, which has implemented the very reforms that Black Lives Matter is seeking. That's part of why it's so tragic that those officers were targeted in Dallas, a place that is—because of its transparency and training and openness and engagement with the community—has drastically brought down the number of police shootings and complaints about misconduct.

The flip side of that—and this is the last point I'll make—is just as my hope would be that everybody who is involved in the Black Lives Matter's movement or other civil rights organizations or who are protesting, just as I want all of them to maintain a respectful,

thoughtful tone, because as a practical matter, that's what's going to get change done, I would hope that police organizations are also respectful of the frustrations that people in these communities feel and not just dismiss these protests and these complaints as political correctness or as politics or attacks on police. There are legitimate issues that have been raised, and there's data and evidence to back up the concerns that are being expressed by these protesters.

And if police organizations and departments acknowledge that there's a problem and there's an issue, then that, too, is going to contribute to real solutions. And as I said yesterday, that is what's going to ultimately help make the job of being a cop a lot safer. It is in the interest of police officers that their communities trust them and that the kind of rancor and suspicion that exists right now is alleviated.

So I'd like all sides to listen to each other. And that's what we'll hopefully be able to accomplish over the course of the next week and over the course of the remaining months that I'm President.

Prime Minister Rajoy. Whatever happens when we try to form a new Government in Spain, well, that's something we'll see in the coming days how it proceeds. But I'm certain that everyone is going to act responsibly and that, therefore, Spain will soon have a Government.

In Spain, foreign policy and defense policy are generally the subject of an agreement among the largest political parties. We are in NATO at this time. We have reached agreements with the U.S. Government in Rota. Our troops are present in many countries around the world. They're in Turkey. They're in Iraq. They've been the Baltic. They're in Lebanon. And all the missions of the Spanish Army or of the civil guard or other police go through Parliament and they're voted on by members of Parliament. And there is an agreement on defense policy in Spain among the large traditional parties, and I'm sure that that's going to continue to be the case in the future.

The same applies to foreign policy. The major decisions in the area of foreign policy are also the subject of an agreement between the government of a nation and the party supporting it and at least the second largest political force, which has always been in power in Spain for many years. So foreign policy and defense policy and the relations with the United States, with whom we're a trustworthy and serious ally and we share the same principles and values, all of that will continue in the future, regardless of the outcome of the elections. I have no doubt about that. It's always been that way. At some specific points in time in our history, there have been disagreements, but most of the decisions on defense policy, foreign policy, and U.S.-Spain relations are always the subject of an agreement supported by the Spanish people.

Spain-U.S. Relations/U.S. Presidential Election/Economic Globalization

Q. I'd like to ask President Obama if he's concerned about how long it's taking to form a Government in Spain and whether that can affect the U.S.-Spain relations and also whether you think in both countries populists could come to power.

And I'd like to ask President Rajoy the following. You said that you had told Mr. Obama that you would like to have a Government in Spain soon. I don't know whether you've gone into the details as to the agreements to form a Government. And regarding the next elections in the United States, do you think that if Trump wins, that would be worrying for the United States and for the U.S.-EU and U.S.-Spain relations? Thank you.

President Obama. Well, I think Prime Minister Rajoy is absolutely right that although it matters a great deal to us that we have a stable, well-functioning Spanish Government, the nature of the relationship, the bond between the United States and Spain is not dependent on which party is in power, in the same way that my expectation would be that, although there might be differences in foreign policy if I had a successor that was Republican rather than Democrat, there would still be a core interest as fellow NATO members who are concerned about terrorism and are concerned about a wide range of international and security and economic issues.

So I wish the Prime Minister luck. He did not go into the details, by the way. It's not my job to figure out what all the ins and outs of negotiations may be in forming a Spanish Government. But I'm very confident that whatever Government emerges, we'll be able to work with them effectively on a whole range of issues.

As you point out, I've got my own politics to worry about back home. [*Laughter*] And I won't comment on the U.S. election, because I think that's for the American people ultimately to decide. I am—what I would say is, is that I have great confidence in the American people, their goodness, their values, their decency, their common sense. And although our political process is messy and dominated by too much money, and it lasts too long, and there's a lot of rhetoric that is all over the place, at the end of the day, I think people recognize the importance of the office of the President and that the United States occupies a unique role in the world and will take that decision about who sits in the Oval Office very seriously.

There are some connections between populist impulses and voices in the United States and what's happening here in Europe, whether what we've seen in Brexit or other parties that have arisen in other European countries. And I would just go back to what I've said before, that if global integration does not work for everybody, if it simply helps elites and you see growing inequality and people feel left behind, then you will get a crude populism that often is divisive. And that's not good for anybody. But those kinds of politics will grow.

If, like me, you believe that the exchange of trade and communications and culture and ideas and greater global understanding and integration can be a good thing, then that has to be accompanied with policies that address inequality, that make sure workers are getting fair wages and that the social compact and the social welfare system is strengthened for the 21st century and we're attentive to environmental concerns and other concerns that have been raised by progressive organizations.

If we ignore those things, then that—those fears and anxieties will be challenged—or be channeled in an unproductive way. If we address them squarely, then I think politics on both sides of the Atlantic will be just fine.

Prime Minister Rajoy. There were two questions, whether I've explained to the U.S. President what I'm going to do to get an agreement so that there can be a Government and so new elections can be avoided. Well, I haven't gone into those details because, naturally, we don't go into that kind of detail.

But what I will say is that Spain has urgent matters ahead of it. First, we have to approve a budget, an expenditure cap, and get the situation back to normalcy and to continue growing and creating jobs.

Secondly, I'm going to ask for a broad consensus on European policy where we'll see very important matters coming up in the coming months, starting with Brexit, refugee problems, the European integration process, and so on.

And then, my concerns for the future are mostly four or five: first, employment; two, keeping our welfare state; three, combatting terrorism; four, defending the unity of Spain; and five, having a foreign and defense policy like the one we have had in the past 4 years in our country.

So, on that basis, I think we can build, and I think we should build, because as I've said, we've had an acting Government for a long time. For the time being, this hasn't affected our economy. Jobs are being created. I think this year is going to be good as far as job creation goes. But we shouldn't play with fire. I think that too much time has gone by, and Spain needs a Government as soon as possible.

Regarding the Government of the United States and the candidate on which you asked your question, allow me to say something obvious. The President of the United States will be whoever the American people decides. And the rest of us have nothing to say about that and much less when you're President of a Government of a country that's a friend.

And based on that, our relations, I'm sure, will be good. They will continue to be like they've been. Because peoples and countries are above individuals, and there are a lot of things that bring us together. There's a lot of joint work, and there's a lot of plans for the future. Individuals are also important, but it's mainly the shared history and the willingness to work together for the future that matter.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:55 a.m. in the Official Chamber at the Palacio de la Moncloa. In his remarks, he referred to the United Kingdom's June 23 referendum vote to leave the European Union; and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization. Prime Minister Rajoy referred to Donald J. Trump, chairman and president, Trump Organization, in his capacity as a U.S. Republican Presidential candidate. A reporter referred to former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Prime Minister Rajoy spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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Texas : Dallas :: Shootings of law enforcement officers; Venezuela : Political unrest and violence.

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