

were able to execute a plan in a relatively short timeframe that resulted in a good outcome.

But each country is different. As David just mentioned with respect to Syria, it is a extremely complicated situation. The best thing that we can do right now is to make sure that the international community continues to unify around the fact that what the Syrian regime is doing is unacceptable. It is contrary to every international norm that we believe in.

And for us to provide strong support to Kofi Annan, to continue to talk to the Russians, the Chinese, and others about why it is that they need to stand up on behalf of people who are being shelled mercilessly, and to describe to them why it is in their interest to join us in a unified international coalition, that's the most important work that we can do right now.

There may be some immediate steps that we've discussed just to make sure that humanitarian aid is being provided in a robust way and to make sure that a opposition unifies along principles that ultimately would provide a clear platform for the Syrian people to be able to transition to a better form of government.

But when we see what's happening on television, our natural instinct is to act. One of the things that I think both of us have learned in

every one of these crises—including in Libya—is that it's very important for us to make sure that we have thought through all of our actions before we take those steps. And that's not just important for us, it's also important for the Syrian people. Because ultimately, the way the international community mobilizes itself, the signals we send, the degree to which we can facilitate a more peaceful transition or a soft landing, rather than a hard landing that results in civil war and, potentially, even more deaths—the people who are going to ultimately be most affected by those decisions are the people in Syria itself. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody. Enjoy the day. See some of you tonight.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:27 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to former Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan of the United Nations, in his capacity as Joint U.N.-Arab League Special Envoy for Syria. Prime Minister Cameron referred to Sunday Times photographer Paul Conroy, who was wounded in an attack by Government forces in Homs, Syria, on February 22, and later rescued by Syrian anti-Government activists.

## Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom

*March 14, 2012*

*President Obama.* Good evening, everyone. Please have a seat. Welcome to the White House. I was just telling the Prime Minister that, so far, the evening has been successful because I have not stepped on Michelle's train—[laughter]—my main goal this evening. Michelle and I could not be more honored that you could join us as we host our great friends the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, and his remarkable wife Samantha. You can give them a round of applause. Why not?

As I said this morning, this visit also gives us an opportunity to return the gracious hospitality that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth as well as

David and Samantha and all the British people showed us during our visit to London last year. And I know Michelle looks forward to returning, because, as she announced yesterday, she will be leading the U.S. delegation to the opening ceremonies of the Summer Olympics in London. I am jealous. [Laughter]

Now, I'm so grateful for all the time that David and I have had together. But as we've learned, you can never tell how things will get reported as a consequence of our interactions. When we met 2 years ago, we exchanged beers from our hometowns. One newsstory said: "David Cameron and Barack Obama cemented

their special relationship by hitting the bottle.” [Laughter]

When we had a barbecue at Downing Street for some of our servicemembers, David and I rolled up our sleeves, threw away the aprons, decided to flip the burgers ourselves. One reporter called it a “brave and foolish move.” [Laughter] Another expressed amazement at our “surprising competence.” [Laughter] Michelle and Samantha often remark the same way. [Laughter]

And finally, when David and I got beat pretty badly in table tennis by some local London kids, one newspaper asked the head coach of the British Olympic women’s team to critique our performance. Obama, the coach said, “talked a lot.” [Laughter] David “overhits the ball.” [Laughter] Both of them—I’m quoting here—“looked a little confused.” [Laughter]

But in moments like that and in all of our interactions, including today, I’ve learned something about David. In good times and in bad, he’s just the kind of partner that you want at your side. I trust him. He says what he does, and he does what he says. And I’ve seen his character. And I’ve seen his commitment to human dignity during Libya. I’ve seen his resolve, his determination to get the job done, whether it’s righting our economies or succeeding in Afghanistan.

And I will say something else, David: All of us have seen how you, as a parent, along with Samantha, have shown a measure of strength that few of us will ever know. Tonight I thank you for bringing that same strength and solidarity to our partnership, even if you do overhit the ball. [Laughter]

We are by no means the first President and Prime Minister to celebrate the deep and abiding bonds between our people. There has been no shortage of words uttered about our special relationship. And as—and I was humbled to offer my own last year when I had the opportunity to address Parliament in Westminster Hall.

So, rather than words, I’d like to leave you tonight with two simple images. They’re from different times and places, decades apart. But they’re moments, I think, that reveal the spirit

of our alliance and the character of our countries.

The first is from the Blitz, when, month after month, the British people braved the onslaught from the sky. And one of those most enduring images from those days is of the London skyline, covered in smoke, with one thing shining through: the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral, tall and proud and strong. The other image we know from our own lives, from that awful September day, that unforgettable picture of the Manhattan skyline, covered in smoke and dust, with one thing shining through: our Statue of Liberty, tall and proud and strong.

In those two moments, I think you see all you need to know about who we are and what brings us together tonight. In war and in peace, in times of plenty and times of hardship, we stand tall and proud and strong together. And as free peoples committed to the dignity of all human beings, we will never apologize for our way of life, nor waver in its defense.

It’s why David’s grandfather fought alongside us Yanks after D-day, why my grandfather marched across Europe in Patton’s army. It’s why tonight, at dusty bases in Afghanistan, both American and British soldiers are getting ready to go on patrol, like generations before them, shoulder to shoulder. It’s why our diplomats and development workers are side by side, standing with the activists who dare to demand their rights, save a child from drought or famine.

It’s why leaders of our two countries can embrace the same shared heritage and the promise of our alliance, even if we come from different political traditions, even if the Prime Minister is younger than nearly 200 years of his predecessors, even if the President looks a little different than his predecessors. And, David, it’s why tonight our young children, and children across our countries, can sleep well, knowing that we’re doing everything in our power to build a future that is worthy of their dreams.

So, in closing, let me just say that I intended to make history tonight. I thought that I could be the first American President to make it through an entire visit of our British friends

without quoting Winston Churchill. [Laughter] But then I saw this great quote, and I thought, "Come on, this is Churchill!" [Laughter] So I couldn't resist.

It was December 1941, and the attack on Pearl Harbor had finally thrust America into war, alongside our British friends. And these were the words Sir Winston spoke to his new American partners: "I will say that he must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below, of which we have the honor to be the faithful servants."

And so I'd like to propose a toast: To Her Majesty the Queen, on her Diamond Jubilee, to our dear friends David and Samantha, and to the great purpose and design of our alliance. May we remain, now and always, its faithful servants. Cheers, everyone.

[At this point, President Obama offered a toast.]

David.

Prime Minister Cameron. President Obama, First Lady, ladies and gentlemen: It is a tremendous honor to be here this evening. And I want to thank you for putting on such a great dinner and for making our visit so special over the last 2 days. And thank you also for those strong and beautiful words that you've just spoken.

Now, Michelle, I'm sure that, like Sam, you often wonder what happens when your husband goes for a night out with the guys. [Laughter] So maybe I should come clean about last night. [Laughter] We went to basketball, and we had a real man-to-man chat. Barack tried to confuse me by talking about bracketology—[laughter]—but I got my own back by running him gently through the rules of cricket. [Laughter]

The truth is, we have to have a guys' night out because so often we find we are completely overshadowed by our beautiful wives.

As I rolled into bed last night, I said, "Samantha, do you want to hear about what I got up to on this great guys' night out?" And she—she's not too impressed by these things. She said: "Well, everything you did was on television. You were surrounded by the Presidential

bodyguard, so presumably, you didn't get up to anything." [Laughter]

Now, both Barack and I have said a lot today about the importance of the relationship between our two countries and our peoples. Like my predecessors, I'm proud of our essential relationship and of Britain's strong national bond with the United States of America. I feel it in my bones.

Now, there is, of course, a great history of close relationships between U.S. Presidents and British Prime Ministers. Importantly, these have been regardless of the political parties they happen to represent. Her Majesty the Queen is a great authority on the matter. She has seen—and she likes to tell me this—no fewer than 12 British Prime Ministers and 11 American Presidents during her time on the throne. And I'm sure everyone here would want to pay tribute to her incredible service and selfless duty in this, her special Diamond Jubilee year.

Now, Her Majesty's first Prime Minister was, of course, Winston Churchill, a regular guest here at the White House. I'm not going to quote from Churchill, I'm going to quote about Churchill, because it seems his visits were not always the easiest experience for his American hosts.

As Roosevelt's secretary wrote after one visit: "Churchill is a trying guest. He drinks like a fish. He smokes like a chimney. He has irregular routines, works nights, sleeps days, and turns the clocks upside down." And for those of you who wonder why the British Prime Minister now stays at Blair House rather than the White House—[laughter]—I simply observe this. We all know the story of Winston Churchill famously found naked in his bath by President Roosevelt. This happened while he stayed at the White House in December 1941, and the Federal Government bought Blair House in 1942. [Laughter]

Now, for every genuine Presidential-Prime Ministerial friendship, there have been some—I think we could call them—total disconnects. Edward Heath and Richard Nixon took personal awkwardness with each other to new and excruciating levels. [Laughter] And

yet, despite this, Richard Nixon arranged for someone to pay for the swimming pool at the Prime Minister's country residence of Chequers. Incidentally, this swimming pool now has a serious and possibly terminal leak. [Laughter] So I hope you won't find it amiss as I say here in the White House, for the first time in 40 years, these words: It is time to call in the plumbers. [Laughter]

Now, turning to Obama-Cameron, as fellow parents, Barack and Michelle have both been personally very kind to Sam and me. And as fellow leaders, we've struck up, I believe, a really good partnership. It is frank and honest. We talk through issues very rationally. We don't need to remind each other of the basic threats that we face; we know them. But there are three things about Barack that really stand out for me: strength, moral authority, and wisdom.

Strength, because Barack has been strong when required to defend his national interests. Under President Obama's leadership, America got bin Laden. And together with British and coalition forces, America has fundamentally weakened Al Qaida. The President says what he will do, and he sticks to it. I'll never forget that phone call on Libya, when he told me exactly what role America would play in Libya, and he delivered his side of the bargain to the letter. We delivered our side of the bargain too. And let us all agree that the world is better off without bin Laden, but the world is better off without Qaddafi too.

Moral authority, because Barack understands that the means matter every bit as much as the ends. Yes, America must do the right thing, but to provide moral leadership, America must do it in the right way too. The first President I studied at school was Theodore Roosevelt. He talked of speaking softly and carrying a big stick. That is Barack's approach. And in following it, he has pressed the reset button on the moral authority of the entire free world.

Wisdom, because Barack has not rushed in to picking fights, but has stewarded America's resources of hard and soft power. He's taken time to make considered decisions, drawing down troops from Iraq and surging in Afghani-

stan. He's found a new voice for America with the Arab people. And at home, he's recognized that in America, as in Britain, the future depends on making the best of every citizen. Both our nations have historically been held back by inequality. But now there's a determined effort in both our countries—most notably through education reform—to ensure that opportunity is truly available for all.

Half a century ago, the amazing courage of Rosa Parks, the visionary leadership of Martin Luther King, and the inspirational actions of the civil rights movement led politicians to write equality into the law and make real the promise of America for all her citizens. But in the fight for justice and the struggle for freedom, there is no end, because there is so much more to do to ensure that every human being can fulfill their potential.

That is why our generation faces a new civil rights struggle, to seek the prize of a future that is open to every child as never before. Barack has made this one of the goals of his Presidency, a goal he's pursuing with enormous courage. And it is fitting that a man whose own personal journey defines the promise and potential of this unique nation should be working to fulfill the hopes of his country in this way.

Barack, it is an honor to call you an ally, a partner, and a friend. You don't get to choose the circumstances you have to deal with as a President or a Prime Minister. And you don't get to choose the leaders that you have to work with. But all I can say is that it is a pleasure to work with someone with moral strength, with clear reason, and with fundamental decency in this task of renewing our great national alliance for today and for the generations to follow.

And with that, I propose a toast: To the President, to the First Lady, and to the people of the United States of America. Cheers.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:01 p.m. on the South Grounds at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Alan Cooke, head coach, United Kingdom's women's Olympic table tennis team.