

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen of Denmark

March 14, 2011

President Obama. Well, thank you very much, everybody. Michelle and I both have very fond memories of the extraordinary hospitality that was shown to us when we traveled to Denmark in the first 2 years of my Presidency.

It is wonderful to be able to return the favor to my good friend Prime Minister Rasmussen. There are many Rasmussens in Denmark—but Lars Lokke and I have had a chance to work in international forums together on a wide range of issues, and I've got extraordinary respect for his leadership.

We discussed a wide range of issues here today. Of special importance has been our appreciation of the sacrifices that have been made by Danish troops in Afghanistan and the extraordinary leadership that Denmark has shown as part of ISAF.

Denmark is not a large country, but proportional to its population, it's made as significant an effort and made as many sacrifices as anybody in helping to stabilize Afghanistan and now help to effectuate a transition to Afghan leadership. And Danish soldiers are fighting in some of the toughest areas, without caveat. We have discussed how 2011 is going to be a year of transition, and under Prime Minister Rasmussen's leadership, he has been able to build a consensus within Denmark about how that transition would proceed that I think is a model for all our allies and participants in Afghanistan.

So we are very grateful for the excellent work that he has done personally, and obviously, most grateful for the sacrifices of Danish troops in helping to underwrite the security of all of us.

We also discussed the situation in the Middle East. And Prime Minister Rasmussen has been a leader in Europe in making sure that we applied tough sanctions against the Qadhafi regime in Libya. We both share the view that Mr. Qadhafi has lost legitimacy and he needs to leave and that we, as an international community, have to speak firmly against any violence that's directed at civilians; that we have to make sure to provide humanitarian assistance, both inside of Libya as well as along the border regions, where so many people have left; and that it's going to be very important for us to look at a wide range of options that continue to tighten the noose around Mr. Qadhafi and apply additional pressure. And so we will be continuing to coordinate closely, both through NATO, as well as the United Nations, and other international fora, to look at every single option that's available to us in bringing about a better outcome for the Libyan people.

We discussed our close cooperation in counterterrorism efforts, and I appreciate the leadership that Prime Minister Rasmussen has shown on that front. We have worked effectively together on a wide range of issues, and Denmark, again, despite being a small country, is one that obviously has been concerned about terrorist activity within its borders. And so we will continue to strengthen our counterterrorism efforts there.

And we also had a wide-ranging discussion about energy. Denmark is a leader on clean energy and alternative energy. Prime Minister Rasmussen has just put forward a very ambitious and impressive program for complete reliance on clean and alternative energies by 2050, in

part, as he points out, because even if you don't believe in climate change—and we both do—it's still the right thing to do for energy independence and it's still the right thing in terms of producing new jobs and new technologies for the future.

Finally, we discussed the situation in Japan. And obviously I want to reiterate how heartbroken we are by the images of the devastation there. I know Prime Minister Rasmussen agrees that this is an international tragedy. And although Japan is a highly advanced economy and technologically equipped to rebuild at this moment of crisis, it's important that all of us join together in providing any help and assistance that we can in the days and months to come.

And so I'm in close contact with Prime Minister Kan, and our teams are in close cooperation, as is our military in the region. And we expect to continue that cooperation until we have some stabilization of the situation there.

But Prime Minister Rasmussen, once again, thank you for all the help that you've provided to the United States, all the leadership that you've provided internationally. Denmark is a country that, in American terms, punches above its weight and does an outstanding job on a wide range of issues. We're so glad of our strong relationship and friendship between our two countries, and we're very appreciative that you took the time to visit us.

Prime Minister Rasmussen. Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you for your warm welcome, your great hospitality.

As you just said, and I truly believe it's the truth, Denmark and the U.S. are close friends, long-term allies. We share values; we share interests; and the bonds are not only strong between our two Governments, but between our two peoples.

Afghanistan is the key priority, and I was pleased to inform the President about the recent decision taken in Denmark, which proves that we are in this with a long-term perspective. We want the mission done. Two thousand eleven is an important year, where we have to start transition. I just informed the President that I paid a visit to our troops in Afghanistan just 2 weeks ago. I talked to Governor Mangal in Helmand Province, and he emphasized that we have to do more in order to get rid of the negative impact from narcotic in terms of lack of development, lack of governance, lack of security.

I have decided to increase our assistance to alternative crops in Afghanistan, and we're working closely together in that regard in Afghanistan.

We condemn the violent repression to the Libyan people. European leaders gathered last Friday, sent a very strong signal to Qadhafi. He should be history; he has lost his legitimacy, as you just mentioned. And I think, it's important that the international society examine all options to protect the Libyan people.

Fortunately, change is going on in other countries in Middle East and North Africa, as well, and we had an opportunity to discuss, especially, the very positive transition in Egypt and Tunisia.

We agreed that one field for close cooperation should be job creation. What is important now is that the young generation of those countries have always given a hope for a brighter future. And I think there is a huge potential for close cooperation in that field. For instance, in the area of IT, where I think we should establish a close cooperation.

And as you mentioned, we discussed a full range of other issues as well. As I said, we share values. We are working together in counterterrorism, piracy, where we had to increase our

cooperation. So I think our meeting here today reflects the fact that we have a common desire for taking our responsibility in order to create a future with peace and prosperity. So thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Obama. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:34 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, leader of Libya.

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