

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Nicolas Sarkozy of France in New York City

September 21, 2011

President Obama. Well, I want to welcome President Sarkozy to New York City and to the United States. On the anniversary of September 11th, President Sarkozy gave a speech at our Embassy in Paris, and he reminded the people of France, but also the world, of the extraordinary friendship that had developed, in part, because of the great sacrifices that our men and women in uniform have made over the decades to preserve freedom and democracy. And so not only am I grateful for the expression of deep friendship that President Sarkozy expressed, but I want to affirm the mutuality of feeling that we have towards the French people.

Do we have an interpreter?

[At this point, an interpreter translated President Obama's previous remarks into French and began a running translation.]

That partnership's been evidenced by the extraordinary work that we've done together in Libya. And I want to thank President Sarkozy for his leadership, as a coalition helped the Libyan people achieve the kind of freedom and opportunity that they're looking for. That partnership is evidenced in the work we did together in Cote d'Ivoire to ensure that the rightfully elected leader of that country was put in place. And our partnership and our mutual leadership will be required to deal with a range of international issues that have been discussed here at the United Nations and are going to be critical in the months and years to come, including trying to find a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also trying to find a coordinated world strategy, global strategy, to deal with a economy that is still far too fragile.

And of course, we still have the joint project to bring stability and transition to Afghan governance. And we are extraordinarily grateful for the sacrifices that the men and women in uniform from France have made in that effort.

On a personal note, I consider Nicolas a friend as well as a colleague. Thank you for your leadership. Welcome. And I look forward to a very productive discussion.

[President Sarkozy spoke in French, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.]

President Sarkozy. I should like to say just how delighted we are to be here in the United States, in New York, alongside Barack Obama.

Now, for we, the people of France, I must say, it's actually easy to work with Barack Obama. Whatever the crises we've had to face together, whatever the initiatives we have taken jointly, on every single occasion we have found a listening, open-minded attitude on the part of our friend, Barack Obama. In particular, when tackling the crisis, which is still upon us today, the leadership that President Obama has shown, and showed at the time, have been of a special value to us all.

There is still much to do, in particular in paving the way to the G-20 summit in Cannes. This is our priority; our number-one priority—let me make this very clear—is to find the path to growth worldwide.

Lastly, I wish to say to what extent I am sensitive to the boldness, the courage, the intelligence, and the sensitivity of President Obama, my friend. I liked him before his election, I liked him once he was elected, and I especially appreciate him now, when the tough times are upon us.

And there's one thing I want to say, perhaps on a more personal note, and that I really mean from the bottom of my heart. When things are as tough as they are right now, when the going gets as tough as it is right now, it is especially precious and important to be able to speak to what is the world's number-one power, but to someone who listens, someone who is sensitive to others, someone who is respectful and aware of other people's red lines and prepared to take them into account, especially at a time when, as I said, we are facing fresh difficulties, and we really need, together, to go forward.

[Following the translation of his remarks, President Sarkozy spoke in English.]

President Sarkozy. She speaks like me. *[Laughter]*

President Obama. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:53 p.m. at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : France, President Sarkozy.

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