

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks Following a Meeting With King Felipe VI of Spain
September 15, 2015

The President. Well, it is a wonderful honor and pleasure to welcome His Majesty King Felipe to the Oval Office. We've had occasion to meet before, but this is the first time that he has visited while I've been in office in an official capacity. So welcome, Your Majesty.

His Majesty is here in part to celebrate in St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest Spanish settlement here in the hemisphere, 450 years, which in Europe is a very brief time, but here in the United States, that's a very long time.

So that visit is a reminder of the long history and bonds between our two peoples. At the same time, we want to wish on behalf of the American people, a happy birthday to Her Majesty the Queen. She is currently being hosted by Michelle. And given the Queen's outstanding work on issues like hunger and malnutrition, she and Michelle, I'm sure, have a lot to talk about.

His Majesty and I have had an excellent conversation in which we reaffirmed what both the Spanish people and the American people understand, which is, we have an outstanding, long-lasting friendship and alliance that is important not only to our two countries, but also to the NATO alliance and also to the world.

I emphasized to His Majesty our great appreciation for the security agreements and bilateral ties, the fact that Spain is a host for so many Americans who every single day are working to keep us safe and working together, side by side with Spanish armed servicemembers, to provide the collective security that's so important to us all.

I expressed appreciation for the work we're doing side by side in training Afghan security forces and pushing back against ISIL and other extremists in the Middle East; the counterterrorism efforts that we engage in together, including strong cooperation with our intelligence services; and the peacekeeping efforts that Spain engages in in places like Lebanon that are not only important to our security, but also are important in keeping people safe and providing humanitarian assistance.

We also had the opportunity to discuss the migration crisis that's taking place currently in Europe. And Spain has worked hard to deal with this issue in the past with North African migrants that oftentimes are engaged in very dangerous travels and human trafficking that takes place. Obviously, that's gotten worse over the last several months.

And we agreed that this is going to require cooperation with all the European countries and the United States and the international community in order to ensure that people are safe, that they are treated with shared humanity, and that we ultimately have to deal with the source of the problem, which is the ongoing crisis in Syria. And we discussed how we can continue to strengthen that cooperation. And I discussed the fact that the United States feels it is important for us to also take our share of Syrian refugees as part of this overall humanitarian effort.

We discussed economic cooperation. I congratulated Spain on the progress that it's made in recovering from a brutal recession, but recognized that more work needs to be done on both sides of the Atlantic to improve opportunity and prosperity for our people. And whether it's working together on trade agreements or entrepreneurship that encourage greater formation of

small and medium-sized businesses that can create jobs and opportunity, we are coordinating closely with the Spanish Government to ensure that we continue to deepen the economic cooperation that already exists.

And let me just say in conclusion that in the past, the Spanish people have hosted my family. I hope that I can travel to Spain before the end of my Presidency. There's no country that I enjoy more for a visit. And I think that sentiment is shared by the American people. We feel a great affinity and a great friendship with the Spanish people.

And as a matter of foreign policy, we are deeply committed to maintaining a relationship with a strong and unified Spain. We think that Spain's presence is important not only to Europe, but also to the United States and also to the world. And the leadership that His Majesty has shown during his first year in the throne, I think, has been an outstanding example for all of us.

So we are very grateful for his visit and hope that he has a wonderful trip down to Florida.

King Felipe. Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to say a few words in English and then also in Spanish if that's okay with all of you gentlemen, ladies.

First of all, I would like to thank President Obama for this opportunity to come and visit, to be here at the White House in this first official visit I do as King of Spain, as head of state, to the United States.

There's a long history of our relationships. There's a long history about the links of Spain to this great country. And all of that comes to term in this, is present in this visit.

I follow in the footsteps of my father. He's had a longstanding relationship with many Presidents of the United States. And also, my presence here brings to mind memories of my time in Washington as a student. I spent 2 years here in Georgetown University, my alma mater. And now being here as a head of state and visiting the White House brings a lot of emotion to this opportunity.

And I want to thank the President, as well, for this opportunity to reflect and to mention all those issues that bind us closely together and comes to—brings us together into our commitments to continue the flourishing of our bilateral relations and also our shared efforts in the international community and to address all those global issues that are pressing so strongly.

When we talk about history, of course, this visit is being held at a moment where we're celebrating 450 years, as you mentioned, of the city of St. Augustine, the first European permanent settlement in the U.S. And we will be visiting both Miami and St. Augustine. There's a lot of history that we'll be remembering.

When I went this morning to visit Mount Vernon, I wanted to start off this visit with that emotional touch, honoring and respecting the first U.S. President, George Washington, and also reflecting upon the history that binds us together with the birth of this nation in the—in your strife for independence in which Bernardo de Galvez, as you know, had a very important participation.

He has gained for his own merit the honor of being considered honorary citizens of the United States. Not too many people have accomplished that. And we're happy to see his portrait on the Foreign Relations Senate Committee closely to Friar Junípero Serra's statue, another Spaniard that has taken a very strong role in the history of this country and is soon going to be canonized by Pope Francis in his visit in coming days.

I would like to share what I expressed to the President in terms of admiration and respect to this great nation. We have respect as allies, as friends. We appreciate the ongoing relationships of all our governments. And because we share many values—share values of greater liberty, of unity, of democracy, and obviously, also human rights and respect for diversity—and admiration because of the success throughout history that the American people have come to build this great nation and to perform a role, not a difficult—not an easy role in the world, and always striving to help other nations find their way to democracy and to stability and to peace.

I would like to say a few words in Spanish, if you will.

[*At this point, King Felipe spoke in Spanish, but no transcript was provided. He then continued in English as follows.*]

Mr. President, I would like to stress the fact that we would very much enjoy and appreciate to see you in Spain if it's possible before you finish your term. We would very gladly welcome that opportunity. But anyhow, later on.

President Obama. Well, I'll come a lot, Your Majesty, after I'm President. That's easy. [Laughter]

King Felipe. Well, we'd welcome you with open arms. And thank you again for this opportunity and for your friendship.

President Obama. Thank you, so much. Appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Queen Letizia of Spain. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization. King Felipe referred to King Juan Carlos I of Spain.

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