

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks in a Meeting With Republican Members of Congress and an Exchange With Reporters

July 17, 2018

The President. Thank you, everybody. Yesterday I returned from a trip from Europe where I met with leaders from across the region to seek a more peaceful future for the United States. We're working very hard with our allies, and all over the world, we're working. We're going to have peace. That's what we want; that's what we're going to have. I say peace through strength.

I have helped the NATO alliance greatly by increasing defense contributions from our NATO allies by over \$44 billion. And Secretary Stoltenberg was fantastic. As you know, he reported that they've never had an increase like this in their history, and NATO was actually going down, as opposed to going up. And I increased it by my meeting last year—\$44 billion. And this year will be over—it will be hundreds of billions of dollars over the coming years.

And I think there's great unity with NATO. There's a lot of very positive things happening. There's a great spirit that we didn't have before, and there's a lot of money that they're putting up. They weren't paying their bills on time, and now they're doing that. And I want to just say thank you very much to Secretary Stoltenberg. He really has been terrific. So we had a tremendous success.

I also had meetings with Prime Minister May on the range of issues that—concerning our special relationship, and that's between the United Kingdom and ourselves. We met with the Queen, who is absolutely a terrific person, where she reviewed her honor guard for the first time in 70 years, they tell me. We walked in front of the honor guard, and that was very inspiring to see and be with her. And I think the relationship, I can truly say, is a good one. But she was very, very inspiring indeed.

Most recently, I returned from Helsinki, Finland, and I was going to give a news conference over the next couple of days about the tremendous success. Because as successful as NATO was, I think this was our most successful visit. And that had to do, as you know, with Russia.

I met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in an attempt to tackle some of the most pressing issues facing humanity. We have never been in a worse relationship with Russia than we are as of a few days ago, and I think that's gotten substantially better. And I think it has the possibility of getting much better. And I used to talk about this during the campaign. Getting along with Russia would be a good thing. Getting along with China would be a good thing. Not a bad thing; a good thing. In fact, a very good thing.

We're nuclear powers, great nuclear powers. Russia and us have 90 percent of the nuclear weapons. So I've always felt getting along is a positive thing, and not just for that reason.

I entered the meeting with the firm conviction that diplomacy and engagement is better than hostility and conflict. And I feel that with everybody. We have 29 members in NATO, as an example, and I have great relationships—or at least very good relationships—with everybody.

The press covered it quite inaccurately. They said I insulted people. Well, if asking for people to pay up money that they are supposed to pay is insulting, maybe I did. But I can tell you, when I left, everybody was thrilled. And that's the way this was too.

My meeting with President Putin was really interesting in so many different ways, because we haven't had relationships with Russia for a long time, and we started. Let me begin by saying that, once again, the full faith and support for America's intelligence agencies—I have a full faith in our intelligence agencies.

[At this point, the lights went out for several seconds.]

The President. Whoops, they just turned off the light. That must be the intelligence agencies. *[Laughter]*

[The lights came back on.]

The President. There it goes. Okay. You guys okay? Good. *[Laughter]* That was strange. But that's okay. *[Laughter]*

So I'll begin by stating that I have full faith and support for America's great intelligence agencies. Always have. And I have felt very strongly that, while Russia's actions had no impact at all on the outcome of the election, let me be totally clear in saying that—and I've said this many times—I accept our intelligence community's conclusion that Russia's meddling in the 2016 election took place. Could be other people also; there's a lot of people out there.

There was no collusion at all. And people have seen that, and they've seen that strongly. The House has already come out very strongly on that. A lot of people have come out strongly on that.

I thought that I made myself very clear by having just reviewed the transcript. Now, I have to say, I came back, and I said: "What is going on? What's the big deal?" So I got a transcript. I reviewed it. I actually went out and reviewed a clip of an answer that I gave, and I realized that there is need for some clarification.

It should have been obvious—I thought it would be obvious—but I would like to clarify, just in case it wasn't. In a key sentence in my remarks, I said the word "would" instead of "wouldn't." The sentence should have been: I don't see any reason why I wouldn't—or why it wouldn't be Russia. So just to repeat it, I said the word "would" instead of "wouldn't." And the sentence should have been—and I thought it would be maybe a little bit unclear on the transcript or unclear on the actual video—the sentence should have been: "I don't see any reason why it wouldn't be Russia." Sort of a double negative.

So you can put that in, and I think that probably clarifies things pretty good by itself.

I have, on numerous occasions, noted our intelligence findings that Russians attempted to interfere in our elections. Unlike previous administrations, my administration has and will continue to move aggressively to repeal any efforts—and repel—we will stop it; we will repel it—any efforts to interfere in our elections. We're doing everything in our power to prevent Russian interference in 2018.

And we have a lot of power. As you know, President Obama was given information just prior to the election—last election, 2016—and they decided not to do anything about it. The reason they decided that was pretty obvious to all: They thought Hillary Clinton was going to win the election, and they didn't think it was a big deal.

When I won the election, they thought it was a very big deal. And all of the sudden, they went into action, but it was a little bit late. So he was given that in sharp contrast to the way it should be. And President Obama, along with Brennan and Clapper and the whole group that you see on television now—probably getting paid a lot of money by your networks—they knew about Russia's attempt to interfere in the election in September, and they totally buried it. And as I said, they buried it because they thought that Hillary Clinton was going to win. It turned out, it didn't happen that way.

By contrast, my administration has taken a very firm stance—it's a very firm stance—on a strong action. We're going to take strong action to secure our election systems and the process. Furthermore, as has been stated—and we've stated it previously and on many occasions: No collusion.

Yesterday we made significant progress toward addressing some of the worst conflicts on Earth. So when I met with President Putin for about 2½ hours, we talked about numerous things. And among those things are the problems that you see in the Middle East, where they're much involved; we're very much involved. I entered the negotiations with President Putin from a position of tremendous strength. Our economy is booming. And our military is being funded \$700 billion this year—\$716 billion next year.

It will be more powerful as a military than we've ever had before. President Putin and I addressed the range of issues, starting with the civil war in Syria and need for humanitarian aid and help for people in Syria.

We also spoke of Iran and the need to halt the nuclear ambitions and the destabilizing activities taking place in Iran. As most of you know, we ended the Iran deal, which was one of the worst deals anyone could imagine. And that's had a major impact on Iran. And it's substantially weakened Iran. And we hope that, at some point, Iran will call us, and we'll maybe make a new deal, or we maybe won't.

But Iran is not the same country that it was 5 months ago, that I can tell you. They're no longer looking so much to the Mediterranean and the entire Middle East. They've got some big problems that they can solve, probably much easier, if they deal with us. So we'll see what happens. But we did discuss Iran.

We discussed Israel and the security of Israel. And President Putin is very much involved now with us in a discussion with Bibi Netanyahu on working something out with surrounding Syria and—Syria and specifically with regards to the security and long-term security of Israel.

A major topic of discussion was North Korea and the need for it to remove its nuclear weapons. Russia has assured us of its support. President Putin said he agrees with me a hundred percent, and they'll do whatever they have to do to try and make it happen.

Discussions are ongoing, and they're going very, very well. We have no rush for speed. The sanctions are remaining. The hostages are back. There have been no tests. There have been no rockets going up for a period of 9 months. And I think the relationships are very good. So we'll see how that goes.

We have no time limit. We have no speed limit. We have—we're just going through the process. But the relationships are very good. President Putin is going to be involved in the sense that he is with us. He would like to see that happen.

Perhaps the most important issue we discussed at our meeting prior to the press conference was the reduction of nuclear weapons throughout the world. The United States and

Russia have 90 percent, as I said, and we could have a big impact. But nuclear weapons is, I think, the greatest threat of our world today.

And they're a great nuclear power. We're a great nuclear power. We have to do something about nuclear. And so that was a matter that we discussed actually in great detail, and President Putin agrees with me.

The matters we discussed are profound in their importance and have the potential to save millions of lives. I understand the many disagreements between our countries, but I also understand that dialogue and the—when you think about it, dialogue with Russia or dialogue with other countries. But dialogue with Russia, in this case, where we've had such poor relationships for so many years—dialogue is a very important thing, and it's a very good thing.

So if we get along with them, great. If we don't get along with them, then, well, we won't get along with them. But I think we have a very good chance of having some very positive things. I thought that the meeting that I had with President Putin was really strong. I think that they were willing to do things that, frankly, I wasn't sure whether or not they would be willing to do. And we'll be having future meetings, and we'll see whether or not that comes to fruition. But we had a very, very good meeting.

So I just wanted to clear up, I have the strongest respect for our intelligence agencies headed by my people. We have great people, whether it's Gina or Dan Coats or any of them. I mean, we have tremendous people, tremendous talent within the agencies. I think they're being guided properly. And we all want the same thing; we want success for our country.

So with that, we're going to start a meeting now on tax reductions. We're going to be putting in a bill. Kevin Brady is with us, and I might ask Kevin just to say a couple of words about that, and then we'll get back on to a private meeting. But, Kevin, could you maybe give just a brief discussion about what we'll be talking about?

Representative Kevin P. Brady of Texas. Yes, sir. Mr. President, thank you for having members of the Ways and Means Committee here today. You know, peace through strength is foreign policy that works. And it works best when America has a strong economy and a strong military. Under your leadership, House and Senate Republicans are delivering on both of them.

Today is about how we can strengthen America's economy even more. And we think the best place to start is with America's middle class families and our small businesses. So today we're here to talk to you about making permanent this tax relief: one, so they can continue to grow; two, so we can add a million and a half new jobs; and three, we can protect them against a future Washington trying to steal back those hard-earned dollars that you and Republicans in Congress has given them.

So thank you very much—

The President. Good.

Rep. Brady. —for having us here today.

The President. And the time of submittal, what would you think that would be, Kevin?

Rep. Brady. So we anticipate to the House voting on this in September and the Senate setting a timetable as well.

The President. That's good. Good. Well, that's great.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

U.S. Sanctions Against Russia

Q. Did you talk about reducing sanctions with Mr. Putin? Did you talk about—did you talk about rolling back sanctions?

The President. We're not lifting sanctions. What?

Q. The Russians sanctions will remain. Is that what you meant?

The President. Yes, everything is remaining. We're not lifting sanctions.

Q. Are you going to increase sanctions on Russia, sir?

The President. Not lifting sanctions. No.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:22 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to 2016 Democratic Presidential nominee Hillary Rodham Clinton; John O. Brennan, former Director, and Gina C. Haspel, Director, Central Intelligence Agency; James R. Clapper, Jr., former Director, and Daniel R. Coats, Director, Office of the Director of National Intelligence; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; and Kim Hak-song, Tony Kim, and Kim Dong-chul, U.S. citizens formerly detained by North Korean officials who returned to the U.S. on May 10. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Republican Members of Congress, meeting with President; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Brady, Kevin P.; Brennan, John O.; Clapper, James R., Jr.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Coats, Daniel R.; Elizabeth II, Queen; Haspel, Gina C.; Kim Dong-chul; Kim Hak-song; Kim, Tony; May, Theresa; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Obama, Barack; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Stoltenberg, Jens.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile, reduction; Central Intelligence Agency; China : Relations with U.S.; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; Congress : Members, meetings with President; Economy, national : Improvement; Elections : Security, improvement efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Foreign policy, U.S. : Peace efforts, expansion; Intelligence, Office of the Director of National; Iran : Nuclear program, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Iran : Regional involvement; Israel : Prime Minister; Israel : Relations with Russia; Israel : Security cooperation with U.S.; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; North Korea : Ballistic missiles, testing and development; North Korea : International and U.S. sanctions; North Korea : International diplomatic efforts; North Korea : Nuclear weapons development; Russia : 2016 U.S. elections, interference; Russia : International and U.S. sanctions; Russia : Nuclear weapons stockpile, reduction; Russia : President; Russia : Relations with U.S.; Syria : Civil war and sectarian conflict; Syria : Refugees, humanitarian situation; Taxation : Tax relief; United Kingdom : Prime Minister; United Kingdom : Queen; United Kingdom : Relations with U.S.

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