

# Remarks by President Obama in Press Conference after GCC Summit

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PRESIDENT OBAMA: Good evening. Before I get to what we discussed here today with our Gulf partners, I want to, again, express my deepest condolences to the families of those who died in Tuesday's terrible train derailment outside of Philadelphia. And I want to express my gratitude for the first responders who raced to save lives, and for the many passengers who, despite their own injuries, made heroic efforts to get fellow passengers to safety.

For a lot of people on that train, it was a routine journey -- a commute, a business trip. For the Amtrak employees who were badly hurt, it was their office, place of doing business. And that somehow makes it all the more tragic.

Until we know for certain what caused this tragedy, I just want reiterate what I have already said -- that we are a growing country, with a growing economy. We need to invest in the infrastructure that keeps us that way -- and not just when something bad happens, like a bridge collapse or a train derailment, but all the time. That's what great nations do.

So I offer my prayers for those who grieve, a speedy recovery for the many who were injured as they work to recover. And we will cooperate, obviously, at every level of government to make sure that we get answers in terms of precisely what happened.

Now, to the work that brought us to Camp David. For the past 70 years, the United States has maintained a core national security interest in the security and the stability of the Middle East generally, and the Gulf region specifically. This is a fundamental tenet of American foreign policy, upheld by generations of American servicemembers and reaffirmed by every U.S. President -- including me.

Since I took office, we've intensified our security cooperation with our Gulf Cooperation Council partners -- Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain. At a time of extraordinary challenges across the Middle East -- including conflicts that have caused untold human suffering -- the United States and our GCC partners cooperate extensively, countering terrorist groups like al Qaeda, and now ISIL; opposing the Assad regime's war against the Syrian people; supporting the legitimate government of Yemen; and opposing Iran's destabilizing actions across the Middle East.

I invited our GCC partners here today to deepen our cooperation and to work together to resolve conflicts across the region. I want to thank each of the leaders and delegations who attended.

We approached our discussions in a spirit of mutual respect. We agree that the security relationship between the United States and our GCC partners will remain a cornerstone of regional stability and our relationship is a two-way street -- we all have responsibilities. And here at Camp David, we decided to expand our partnership in several important and concrete ways.

First, I am reaffirming our ironclad commitment to the security of our Gulf partners. As we've declared in our joint statement, the United States is prepared to work jointly with GCC member states to deter and confront an external threat to any GCC state's territorial integrity that is inconsistent with the U.N. Charter. In the event of such aggression, or the threat of such aggression, the United States stands ready to work with our GCC partners to urgently determine what actions may be appropriate, using the means at our collective disposal, including the potential use of military force, for the defense of our GCC partners. And let me underscore -- the United States keeps our commitments.

Second -- and to back up our words with deeds -- we will increase our already extensive security cooperation. We'll expand our military exercises and assistance to meet the full range of threats -- in particular, terrorism. This means more training and cooperation between our special operations forces, sharing more information and stronger border security to prevent the flow of foreign fighters, and increased enforcement to prevent

terrorist financing. We'll step up our efforts to counter violent extremism, including online. And more broadly, we'll expand our cooperation on maritime security and work to harden our partners' critical infrastructure.

Third, we'll help our Gulf partners improve their own capacity to defend themselves. The United States will streamline and expedite the transfer of critical defense capabilities to our GCC partners. We will work together to develop an integrated GCC defense capability against ballistic missiles, including an early warning system. And we will work toward the development of rapid response capabilities to undertake missions such as counterterrorism and peacekeeping.

Fourth, we pledged to work together to try to resolve armed conflicts in the region, and we have articulated core principles to guide our efforts: Respect for state sovereignty; recognition that these conflicts can only be resolved politically; and acknowledgment of the importance of inclusive governance and the need to respect minorities and protect human rights.

Therefore, with respect to Syria, we committed to continuing to strengthen the moderate opposition, to oppose all violent extremist groups, and to intensify our efforts to achieve a negotiated political transition toward an inclusive government --without Bashar Assad -- that serves all Syrians.

We will continue to support the Iraqi government in its efforts against ISIL, and in reforms to ensure that the rights and opportunities of all Iraqis are fully respected.

We welcomed the humanitarian truce in Yemen, so urgently needed aid can reach civilians, and we call on all parties in Yemen to return to political talks facilitated by the United Nations.

We will step up our collective efforts to help form a national unity government in Libya, and counter the growing terrorist presence there.

And we reiterate the urgent need for a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

Fifth, we spent considerable time discussing Iran. I updated our Gulf partners on the negotiations towards a comprehensive deal to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And I'm pleased that here at Camp David we agree that a comprehensive, verifiable solution that fully addresses the regional and international concerns about Iran's nuclear program is in the security interests of the international community -- including our GCC partners.

Of course, whether we reach a nuclear deal or not with Iran, we're still going to face a range of threats across the region, including its destabilizing activities, as well as the threat from terrorist groups. So we're going to work together to address these threats. And much of the enhanced security cooperation that I've outlined will allow us to do precisely that.

But I want to be very clear. The purpose of security cooperation is not to perpetuate any long-term confrontation with Iran or even to marginalize Iran. None of our nations have an interest in an open-ended conflict with Iran. We welcome an Iran that plays a responsible role in the region -- one that takes concrete, practical steps to build trust and resolve its differences with its neighbors by peaceful means, and abides by international rules and norms.

As I've said before, ending the tensions in the region and resolving its devastating conflicts will require a broader dialogue -- one that includes Iran and its GCC neighbors. And so a key purpose of bolstering the capacity of our GCC partners is to ensure that our partners can deal with Iran politically, diplomatically, from a position of confidence and strength.

And finally, while this summit was focused on security cooperation, events in the Middle East since the beginning of the Arab Spring are a reminder that true and lasting security includes governance that serves all citizens and respects universal human rights. So, in the Middle East, as we do around the world, the United States will continue to speak out on behalf of inclusive governance, representative institutions, strong civil societies and human rights, and we will work to expand the educational and economic opportunities that allow people -- especially young people -- to fulfill their potential.

So, again, I want to thank all of our GCC partners for making this summit a success. I believe that the Camp David commitments I've described today can mark the beginning of a new era of cooperation between our countries -- a closer, stronger partnership that advances our mutual security for decades to come.

So, with that, I'm going to take some questions. And I will start with Julie Pace because I promised her in the Oval Office that I'd call on her.

Q Thank you very much. You mentioned in your statement the broad support from the GCC for stopping Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. Did you get any specific commitments from the Gulf leaders for the framework that you reached a few months ago, and at least a commitment to not publicly oppose a deal if you're able to reach that? And on the Gulf's main concern, Iran's destabilizing activity in the region, how can you really assure them that Iran would not continue that activity if they had an influx of money from sanctions relief when they're already accused of doing so now with a weaker economy?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: We didn't have a document that we presented to them to sign on the bottom line, will you approve of this nuclear framework deal, because the deal is not completed. And in the same way that I wouldn't ask the United States Senate, or the American people to sign off on something before they've actually seen the details of it, and given that I'm not going to sign off on any deal until I've seen the details of it, I wouldn't expect them to either.

What I did hear from our GCC partners was their agreement that if we can get a comprehensive, verifiable deal that cuts off the pathways to a nuclear weapon, that that would be in their interests and the interests of the region, as well as the world's community.

And so the question is then going to be, is Iran prepared to do what's required for the international community to feel confidence that, in fact, it's not developing a nuclear weapon, and have we set up the kinds of inspection regimes that allow such confidence to be maintained, not just next year or five years from now, but out into the future?

So what we did was we had Secretary Kerry, Secretary Ernie Moniz -- who obviously was involved in the negotiations, as well -- to walk through why it was that we were confident that if the framework agreement we've arrived at were to be solidified, that, in fact, we could verify that they did not have a nuclear weapon. And that was important to them and I think gave them additional confidence.

There was a concern -- a concern that I share -- that even if we deal effectively with the nuclear issue that we will still have a problem with some of Iran's destabilizing activities. And a number of them did express the concern that with additional resources through the reduction in sanctions, that was it possible that Iran would siphon off a lot of these resources into more destabilizing activity.

Secretary Jack Lew was there to explain that, first of all, there would be no sanctions relief until we could confirm that Iran had actually carried out its obligations under any nuclear deal. Secondly, we gave them our best analysis of the enormous needs that Iran has internally and the commitment that Iran has made to its people in terms of shoring up its economy and improving economic growth.

And as I pointed out, most of the destabilizing activity that Iran engages in is low-tech, low-cost activity. And so part of my emphasis to them was that if we are focusing more effectively on the things we need to do -- to shore up defenses, improve intelligence, improve the capacity for maritime monitoring of what's taking place in the Gulf -- if we are working in concert to address the terrorist activity and countering terrorist messages that are coming not just from state sponsors like Iran, but, more broadly, from organizations like ISIL, then we're going to be able to fortify ourselves and deal with many of these challenges much more effectively, and we can do so from a position of strength and confidence.

So it's not to deny the concerns that were there about what happens when sanctions are reduced, but it was to emphasize that what matters more is the things that we can do now to ensure that some of this destabilizing activity is no longer taking place.

And, of course, when you look at a place like Yemen, the issue there is that the state itself was crumbling, and that if we can do a better job in places like Syria, Yemen, Libya, in building up functioning political structures, then it's less likely that anybody, including Iran, can exploit some of the divisions that exist there.

Michael Viqueira.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. On Syria, one of the reasons we're here is because many of the nations in the region were upset that more than two years ago when Bashar al-Assad deployed chemical weapons, there was no military response as you appeared to promise, no retaliation on the part of the U.S. Now there's a possibility that Assad has once again used chemical weapons. What did you tell these leaders here who were disappointed last time? And will you use a military response if it's confirmed that he used chemical weapons again, once again deployed them?

And if I could ask you a domestic question, as well, sir. And this one is about the environment and the drilling that's recently been approved in the Arctic. This nation, the United States, is now a net exporter for the first time in years of fossil fuels, partly due to fracking, something that environmentalists have objected to, something that you regard as an "all of the above" energy strategy. The oil company, Shell, has had a very mixed record of drilling in that region. Many environmentalists look at this and say, is it really worth the risk to drill in such a delicate ecosystem. Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: First of all, Michael, I don't know why you're here, but the reason I'm here is not because of what happened in Syria a couple of years ago. The reason I'm here is because we've got extraordinary challenges throughout the region -- not just in Syria, but in Iraq and Yemen and Libya, and obviously, the development of ISIL; and our interest in making sure that we don't have a nuclear weapon in Iran.

With respect to Syria, my commitment was to make sure that Syria was not using chemical weapons, and mobilizing the international community to assure that that would not happen. And, in fact, we positioned ourselves to be willing to take military action. The reason we did not was because Assad gave up his chemical weapons. That's not speculation on our part. That, in fact, has been confirmed by the organization internationally that is charged with eliminating chemical weapons.

And I don't think that there are a lot of folks in the region who are disappointed that Assad is no longer in possession of one of the biggest stockpiles of chemical weapons of any country on Earth. Those have been eliminated.

It is true that we've seen reports about the use of chlorine in bombs that have the effect of chemical weapons. Chlorine itself, historically, has not been listed as a chemical weapon, but when it is used in this fashion can be considered a prohibited use of that particular chemical. And so we're working with the international community to investigate that. And, in fact, if we have the kinds of confirmation that we need, we will, once again, work with the international community and the organization charged with monitoring compliance by the Syrian government, and we will reach out to patrons of Assad like Russia to put a stop to it.

With respect to the situation in the Arctic, I think it's fair to say that I know a little something about the risks of offshore drilling given what happened in the Gulf very early in my presidency. And so nobody is more mindful of the risks involved and the dangers. That's why, despite the fact that Shell had put in an application for exploration in this region several years ago, we delayed it for a very lengthy period of time until they could provide us with the kinds of assurances that we have not seen before, taking account of the extraordinary challenges if, in fact, there was a leak that far north and in that kind of an environment, which would be much more difficult to deal with than in the Gulf. Based

on those very high standards, Shell had to go back to the drawing board, revamp its approach, and the experts at this point have concluded that they have met those standards.

But keep in mind that my approach when it comes to fracking, drilling, U.S. energy production of oil or natural gas has remained consistent throughout: I believe that we are going to have to transition off of fossil fuels as a planet in order to prevent climate change. I am working internationally to reduce our carbon emissions and to replace over time fossil fuels with clean energies.

Obviously, we start at home with all the work that we've done to, for example, double the use of clean energy. But I think that it is important also to recognize that that is going to be a transition process. In the meantime, we are going to continue to be using fossil fuels. And when it can be done safely and appropriately, U.S. production of oil and natural gas is important.

I would rather us -- with all the safeguards and standards that we have -- be producing our oil and gas, rather than importing it, which is bad for our people, but is also potentially purchased from places that have much lower environmental standards than we do.

Toluse.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to ask you about trade.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Yes.

Q The Senate moved forward on a bill today to approve your trade legislation. And it also moved forward with a proposal to punish countries like China for what they do in terms of manipulating their currency. Could you potentially see yourself accepting Senator Schumer's language on currency manipulation? Or would you have to veto that? And, secondly, could you also talk about your relationship with Senator Warren? Do you regret the fact that things have become so personal with the back-and-forth on trade? And then, secondly, if I could ask --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Wait, that was the second question, wasn't it? So now, thirdly, is what you're saying.

Q Yes.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Okay. (Laughter.)

Q Just really quickly, you mentioned the issue of a two-state solution with Israel. I was wondering if you would give your reaction to what the Pope is moving forward with in terms of recognizing the Palestinian state. Do you think that's a good idea? Do you think it's a mistake? And do you think it might help or hinder the two-state solution that you mentioned earlier?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Okay. Well, first of all, I want to congratulate the Senate on moving forward on providing me the authority to not only strike a smart, progressive, growth-promoting trade deal with some of the countries in the Asia Pacific region and potentially in Europe, as well, but also to give me the tools to enforce those agreements, which haven't always happened in the past.

So I want to thank all the senators who voted to provide that authority -- or at least to begin the debate on moving that process forward. Those who didn't vote for it, I want to keep on trying to make the case and provide them the information they need to feel confident that despite the fact that there have been very genuine problems with some trade deals in the past, the approach that we're taking here I think is the right one -- not just for big U.S. businesses, but also for small U.S. businesses and medium-sized U.S. businesses, and most importantly, ultimately, American workers.

I would not be promoting any agreement that I didn't think at the end of the day was going to be creating jobs in the United States and giving us more of an opportunity to create ladders of success, higher incomes and higher wages for the American people, because that's my primary focus. It has been since I came into office.

The issue with respect to myself and Elizabeth has never been personal. I think it's fun for the press to see if we can poke around at it when you see two close allies who have a disagreement on a policy issue. But there are a whole bunch of -- some of my best friends in the Senate, as well as in the House, some of my earliest supporters who disagree with me on this. And I understand. Because, like me, they came up through the ranks watching plants close, jobs being shipped overseas. Like me, they have concerns about whether labor agreements or environmental agreements with other countries are properly enforced. Like me, they have concerns about whether, in fact, trade ends up being fair and not just free.

And, like me, they have a deep concern about some of the global trends that we've seen and trends that we've seen in our own country in terms of increased inequality and what appears to be the effects of automation and globalization in allowing folks at the very top to do really, really well, but creating stagnation in terms of incomes and wages for middle-class families and folks working to get their way into the middle class.



So these are folks whose values are completely aligned with mine. I notice that there was sort of a progressive statement of principles about what it means to be a progressive by some of these friends of mine, and I noted that it was basically my agenda -- except for trade. (Laughter.) That was the one area where there was a significant difference. And this just comes down to a policy difference and analysis in terms of what we think is best for our people, our constituents.

It is my firm belief that, despite the problems of previous trade deals, that we are better off writing high-standard rules with strong, enforceable provisions on things like child labor, or deforestation, or environmental degradation, or wildlife trafficking, or intellectual property -- we are better off writing those rules for what is going to be the largest, fastest-growing market in the world. And if we don't, China will, and other countries will. And our businesses will be disadvantaged and our workers will ultimately suffer.

And in terms of some of the fears of outsourcing of jobs, it is my belief, based on the analysis, that at this point, if there was a company in the United States that was looking for low-cost labor, they have no problem outsourcing it under the current regime. And so what we do have the opportunity to do is to attract back companies to manufacture here in the United States.

And we're seeing some of that happen. That's why I went out to Nike. I understand that Nike has been manufacturing shoes with low-cost labor in many of these areas in the Asia Pacific region and that hurt the American footwear industry in terms of jobs here in the United States. But that happened over the course of the last 30 years. And now, for Nike to announce that because of new technologies, they're potentially bringing 10,000 jobs back here because we've gone up the value chain, we're manufacturing in different ways -- that's an opportunity. But we've still got to be able to sell over there to take full advantage of those opportunities.

Which is why my argument with my progressive friends is what we really need to be focusing on to meet the same objectives -- the shared objectives -- is the kinds of other issues that we all agree on: strong minimum wage; strong job training programs; infrastructure investments that put people back to work; stronger laws to protect collective bargaining and the capability of workers to have a voice; strong enforcement of rules around things like overtime pay; making sure that we have paid sick leave; making sure that we have a honest conversation about our budgets and that we're not slashing investments in the future simply to make sure that we're preserving loopholes for corporations that don't provide any economic benefit.

Those are the things that are going to help us address the very problems that they're concerned about. Blocking a trade deal will not -- particularly since they're the first ones to acknowledge that the existing trade rules are a bad deal for U.S. workers. If they're not working for us now, how does hanging on to what's going on now help American workers? It doesn't make sense.

I'm all for enforcement and the provisions that were signed. I have expressed concerns about how the currency language that is in the bill is drafted. But I have to talk to Senator Schumer and Sherrod Brown and others about how we can work on language that does not end up having a blowback effect on our ability to maintain our own monetary policy.

I don't even remember what your other question was. (Laughter.)

Q The Vatican --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Oh. Well, rather than speak for others, I'll just reiterate what I've said previously. I continue to believe that a two-state solution is absolutely vital for not only peace between Israelis and Palestinians, but for the long-term security of Israel as a democratic and Jewish state.

And I know that a government has been formed that contains some folks who don't necessarily believe in that premise. But that continues to be my premise. And since we're up here at Camp David, I think it's important to remind ourselves of the degree to which a very hard peace deal that required incredible vision and courage and tough choices resulted in what's now been a lasting peace between countries that used to be sworn enemies. And Israel is better off for it. I think the same would be true if we get a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians.

That prospect seems distant now. But I think it's always important for us to keep in mind what's right and what's possible.

Okay. Last question -- Scott Horsley.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned at the outset our need for a world-class infrastructure. We're coming up on a deadline for the Highway Trust Fund. With gas prices where they are, why isn't this a good time to consider a hike in the federal gas tax, which might also serve some of the carbon goals you talked about?

And since you mentioned the overtime rules, I know it's been about 14 months since you asked the Labor Department to put those together. They went over to OMB last week. How soon might we see those?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Soon.

And with respect to transportation, you're absolutely right that now is the time for us to get something done. I'm practical, and in order for us to get a transportation bill done I've got to get cooperation from a Republican-controlled Congress. And so I'm in discussions with the majority and minority leaders in both chambers, as well as the relevant committee chairpersons. We want to hear their ideas. We want to find out what's possible. I think that that's going to be something that we need to explore.

But this is not an area where either side should be looking for political points. This did not used to be a partisan issue. Building roads, building bridges, building airports, sewer lines, dams, ports -- this is how we grow. This is how America became an economic superpower, was investing in our people, investing in infrastructure, doing it better and faster and bigger than anybody else did. We should be doing the same thing now.

The first Republican President, a proud native of my home state, named Mr. Lincoln, even in the midst of Civil War was looking at how we join the country together through our railways and our canals. We shouldn't be thinking smaller today. We need to be thinking bigger in this global economy.

So my hope is, is that we have a chance to have a serious discussion and look at all potential revenue sources. What is absolutely true is, is that the Highway Trust Fund has consistently gotten smaller and smaller and smaller, and inadequate for the needs. What's also true is patchwork approaches of three months or six months at a time don't make any sense. We need some sort of long-term solution.

Nobody foresaw that we could actually get a doc fix done and actually solve the long-term problem there in terms of how we were managing Medicare payments for doctors. Who knows? Maybe we might see some intelligent bipartisan outbreaks over the next few months -- because I think everybody recognizes this is important.

Thank you very much, everybody.

END

6:27 P.M. EDT