

# Remarks by President Obama and Chancellor Merkel of Germany in a Joint Press Conference

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CHANCELLOR MERKEL: (As interpreted.) Ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to be able to welcome today for the sixth time the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, to Germany.

In his capacity as President of the United States, let us remind ourselves -- visiting us in his capacity as candidate here in Berlin; we then met in Baden-Baden. We then met in Dresden and Buchenwald. We saw each other when he gave a speech at the Brandenburg Gate. In Elmau, we met again at the G7. Then Hannover Faire comes to mind. And today he is again here in Berlin.

So eight years are coming to a close. This is the last visit of Barack Obama to our country, to Germany. I am very glad that he chose Germany as one of the stopovers on this trip. And thank you very much. Thank you for the friendship you've always demonstrated. Thank you for the reliable friendship and partnership you demonstrated in very difficult hours of our relationship. So let me again pay tribute to what we've been able to achieve, to what we discussed, to what we were able to bring about in difficult hours.

It comes to mind, as I said, of those that had a bearing on the cooperation of our intelligence services, and I'm very grateful that Barack Obama, as President, very much put protection of privacy on the agenda today. Due to the fact of Islamist terrorism all over the world and the threat of IS, we recognize how important the cooperation with

intelligence services, first and foremost, also with the services of the United States is. We need this cooperation. And we say this from a German perspective very clearly and unequivocally.

Our bilateral relations are very good, they're very close. In the areas of business, of the economy, the United States of America last year were our most important trading partner. Both for Germany and the European Union, the European Union and the United States of America on the big, important economic areas for us, which is why I've always come out strongly in favor of concluding a trade agreement with the United States of America.

We have made progress, quite a lot of progress. They cannot be stopped, those negotiations. But we'll keep what we have achieved so far, and I'm absolutely certain that one day we will come back to what we have achieved and build on it.

Because that is my deep conviction. Globalization -- and I think we share this conviction -- is that globalization needs to be shaped politically. It needs to be given a human face. But we cannot allow to fall back into pre-globalization times. So this conclusion of trade agreements that go beyond the scope of mere tariff agreements, customs agreements, are most important, and I'm very pleased that we were able to bring this to fruition between Canada and the EU.

We made great progress, particularly if we look at one of the great global issues -- namely, climate protection. Without the engagement of the current administration under the leadership of Barack Obama, this Paris agreement would never have come about. There has been a change in the attitude in the United States towards that agreement, but there is also better cooperation with China. So last year, we were able to conclude a Paris climate agreement, which will lead the way for the rest of the world, which is ground-breaking. And together with the sustainable development goals of the agenda 2030 for the whole world, this is indeed a sea change, I think, that we see here, and, step-by-step, it will be implemented.

There's another point that I wanted to mention here, particularly, the engagement and commitment to Africa. For us Europeans, Africa as a neighboring continent is of prime importance. The development of African countries is in our very own vested interest. We, as Germans, but also we, as members of the European Union, will have to deal with this. It will be at the very top of our agenda.

There are a lot of areas where we cooperate -- the fight against ISIL, for example. Here, Germany was able to contribute to a certain extent, in certain areas. We'll continue to do so

-- for example, in supporting the Peshmerga, in air policing. But we also have to acknowledge that the United States of America bear most of the burden. They bear the brunt of this responsibility.

So I take your remarks very seriously, Barack, that the European Union as a whole, but also Germany, needs to recognize that this is our alliance, our common alliance, our transatlantic alliance, that we have to step up our engagement. Because, in the long run, we will not be allowed to accept this imbalance as regards the contributions we give to this alliance. And we have understood this message, and we have started to react.

We have worked very closely together, for example, in Afghanistan. We're continuing to do so. I'm very pleased that this military engagement, together with a political road map that we've developed, we were able to continue. We want to bring about a political solution there.

We work very closely together on the issue of annexation of Crimea and Russia's attempt to actually conquer Ukraine. And actually they did so -- conquered part of the territory. We tried to come to a peaceful settlement here on this.

So our interests are very much aligned. Our attempts of cooperation are very much aligned. We continue to build on what we've already achieved in these last months of the administration, and we will continue also with the new administration.

This is the end of an eight-year cooperation that was very close, indeed. From a German point of view, German-American and European-American relations are a pillar of our foreign policy -- a foreign policy that is obviously guided by interests, but that is very much also committed to shared values. So we have a platform -- democracy, freedom, respect of human rights -- that we would like to see respected all over the world, and also a peaceful world order. We have shared those values; we continue to share those values. And obviously we will continue to cooperate with the new administration.

But today, I think a word of gratitude is at hand. Thank you very much for this very close, very intensive cooperation.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, thank you so much. It is wonderful to be back in Berlin. This is my sixth visit to Germany. It will not be my last. I have somehow continued to miss Oktoberfest. (Laughter.) So that's probably something that is better for me to do as a former President rather than as President -- I'll have more fun.

It's also wonderful to be back with my great friend and ally, Chancellor Merkel. As I reflect back over the past eight years, I could not ask for a steadier or a more reliable partner on the world stage, often through some very challenging times.

So I want to thank you for your friendship, for your leadership, and your commitment to our alliance. And I want to thank the German people for the incredible partnership that our countries have been able to establish all these years.

Last week marked the 27th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The United States was proud to stand with the people of Germany as this nation and this continent reunited, and rebuilt, and reached for a better future. And it's a reminder that the commitment of the United States to Europe is enduring and is rooted in the values we share -- values that Angela just mentioned: Our commitment to democracy; our commitment to rule of law; our commitment to the dignity of all people -- in our own countries and around the world.

Our alliance with our NATO partners has been a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy for nearly 70 years -- in good times and in bad, and through Presidents of both parties -- because the United States has a fundamental interest in Europe's stability and security. The commitment that Angela and I share to this guiding principle has formed the basis for our conversations this afternoon.

We discussed our efforts to keep our countries competitive and to create jobs and opportunity on both sides of the Atlantic. The negotiations on agreements like T-TIP have been challenging, and obviously at a moment when there's concerns about globalization and the benefits that accrue to particular people, it is important that those negotiations and channels of communication remain. Because, ultimately, what we have shown over the last several decades is that markets and trade and commerce can create prosperity in all of our countries -- that it's not a win-lose situation, but it can be a win-win situation.

And at a time when the European project is facing challenges, it's especially important to show the benefits of economic integration by continuing to invest in our people and working to reduce inequality, both within and across our countries.

I reiterated our hope that negotiations over the United Kingdom's exit from the EU will be conducted in a smooth and orderly and transparent fashion, and preserve as closely as possible the economic and political and security relationships between the UK and EU. And I continue to believe what I said in Hannover -- that the EU remains one of the world's great political and economic achievements and that those achievements should not be taken for granted, that they need to be nurtured and cultivated and protected and fought for.

Because the achievements that we've seen on this continent, in contrast to a divided Europe of the previous century, are ones that remind us of how important it is that we work together, and that we are willing to uphold principles that have resulted in unprecedented prosperity and security throughout Europe and around the world.

With the threat of climate change only becoming more urgent, Angela and I focused on the need for American and EU leadership to advance global cooperation. Both our nations were proud to join the Paris climate agreement, which the world should work to implement quickly. Continued global leadership on climate, in addition to increasing private investment in clean energy is going to be critical to meeting this growing threat.

Of course, we discussed our commitment to meeting shared security challenges -- from countering cyber threats to ensuring that Iran continues to live up to the terms of the Iran nuclear deal. I commended Angela for her leadership, along with President Hollande, in working to resolve the conflict in Ukraine. We continued to stand with the people of Ukraine and for the basic principle that nations have a right to determine their own destiny. And we discussed the importance of maintaining sanctions until Russia fully complies with the Minsk agreement.

As part of the coalition against ISIL, we are putting that terrorist network under tremendous pressure. Here in Berlin, this week, coalition members are meeting to ensure we remain unified and focused on our mission to destroy ISIL. We are very grateful for the vital contributions Germany has made to this fight -- training local forces in Iraq, sharing intelligence, providing reconnaissance aircraft, including the recent deployment

of additional NATO AWACS. And as Iraqi forces continue the liberation of Mosul, I am pleased that NATO will be meeting the commitment we made in Warsaw to begin training additional forces in Iraq, which started this January.

We also continue to stand united with Germany and our NATO allies in our ongoing efforts to build peace and stability in Afghanistan.

On Syria, it's clear that the indiscriminate attacks on civilians by the Assad regime and Russia will only worsen the humanitarian catastrophe, and that a negotiated end to the conflict is the only way to achieve lasting peace in Syria. Angela and I also agreed on the need for a comprehensive and humane response to the devastating humanitarian crisis in Syria and for the influx of migrants and refugees from around the world.

We need to build on the progress achieved at the U.N. Refugee Summit, which yielded new commitments from some 50 nations and organizations. The United States is doing our part by increasing the number of refugees we resettle. And I want again to commend Angela and, more importantly, the German people for the extraordinary leadership and compassion that you have shown in the face of what I know is a very difficult challenge. You are not alone in trying to deal with this challenge. This is not an issue that any one country should bear but is in need of an international response. And I not only intend to make sure that we have put in place more robust support from the United States, but I'm hoping that that continues beyond my administration.

On this final visit, I am reminded of the visit I made here before I became President. It was eight years ago. I had no gray hair. (Laughter.) But I believe today what I said then: If you want a model for what is possible, if you want to see how to build a peaceful and prosperous and dynamic society, then look at Berlin and look at Germany. Look at Chancellor Merkel. Her personal story helps to tell the story of incredible achievement that the German people have embarked on and I think is something that you should be very proud of.

It is not inevitable that we make progress; it requires hard work. Sometimes it may seem as if progress is stalled. But what the history of postwar Germany shows is that strength and determination and focus and adherence to the values that we care about will result in a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

And on behalf of the American people, I want to thank the German people, I want to thank Chancellor Merkel, for your deep friendship and your steadfast partnership. Vielen dank.

MR. EARNEST: Jeff Mason from Reuters.

Q Thank you very much. Mr. President, you and the President-elect have very different views on Russia. After your meeting with him last week, can you assure Chancellor Merkel that a Trump administration would also support strong sanctions against Moscow? Similarly, what have you told President Putin about Russia's influence on the U.S. election? And how would you advise European countries to deal with the same threat? And lastly, if I may, would you like to see your friend, Chancellor Merkel, run for reelection next year? (Laughter.) (Speaks German.)

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Uh-oh. Pull out your German, showing off. (Laughter.)

Q (As interpreted.) Has the American President calmed you in the sense that on the policy of his successor on climate change and Russia -- he has allayed your fears? And are you concerned that the common European policy towards Russia will collapse? And after the election of Mr. Trump, would you -- as a sign of civility, wouldn't you actually have to declare that you are going to be a candidate again?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, I try to make it a rule not to meddle in other people's politics. All I can say is that Chancellor Merkel has been an outstanding partner. And Chancellor Merkel is perhaps the only leader left among our closest allies that was there when I arrived, so, in some ways, we are now the veterans of many challenges over the last eight years. And although we have not always been in sync on every issue, in terms of our core values, in terms of her integrity, her truthfulness, her thoughtfulness, her doing her homework, knowing her facts, her commitment to looking out for the interests of the German people first, but recognizing that part of good leadership on behalf of the nation requires engaging the world as a whole and participating effectively in multilateral institutions, I think she's been outstanding.

So it's up to her whether she wants to stand again, and then ultimately it will be up to the German people to decide what the future holds. If I were here and I were German, and I had a vote, I might support her. (Laughter.) But I don't know whether that hurts or helps. (Laughter.)

With respect to Russia, my principal approach to Russia has been constant since I first came into office. Russia is an important country. It is a military superpower. It has influence in the region and it has influence around the world. And in order for us to solve many big problems around the world, it is in our interest to work with Russia and obtain their cooperation.

I think we should all hope for a Russia that is successful, where its people are employed and the economy is growing, and they are having good relationships with their neighbors, and participating constructively on big issues like climate change.

So I've sought a constructive relationship with Russia, but what I have also been is realistic in recognizing that there are some significant differences in how Russia views the world and how we view the world.

The values that we talked about -- the values of democracy, and free speech, and international norms, and rule of law, respecting the ability of other countries to determine their own destiny and preserve their sovereignty and territorial integrity -- those things are not something that we can set aside.

And so on issues like Ukraine, on issues like Syria, we've had very significant differences. And my hope is that the President-elect coming in takes a similarly constructive approach, finding areas where we can cooperate with Russia where our values and interests align, but that the President-elect also is willing to stand up to Russia where they are deviating from our values and international norms.

And I don't expect that the President-elect will follow exactly our blueprint or our approach, but my hope is, is that he does not simply take a realpolitik approach and suggest that if we just cut some deals with Russia, even if it hurts people, or even if it violates international norms, or even if it leaves smaller countries vulnerable or creates long-term problems in regions like Syria -- that we just do whatever is convenient at the time. And that will be something that I think we'll learn more about as the President-elect puts his team together.

I am encouraged by the President-elect's insistence that NATO is a commitment that does not change. And his full commitment to NATO as the foundation for our international security I think is very important.



And finally, in terms of my conversations with President Putin, these are conversations that took place before the election. As I indicated, there has been very clear proof that they have engaged in cyberattacks. This isn't new. It's not unique to Russia. There are a number of states where we've seen low-level cyberattacks and industrial espionage and other behavior that we think should be out of bounds. And I delivered a clear and forceful message that, though we recognize Russia's intelligence-gathering will sometimes take place even if we don't like it, there's a difference between that and them either meddling with elections or going after private organizations or commercial entities, and that we're monitoring it carefully and we will respond appropriately if and when we see this happening.

I do think that this whole area of cyber is something that, at an international level, we have to work on and develop frameworks and international norms so that we don't see a cyber arms race. A lot of countries have advanced capabilities, and given the vulnerabilities of our infrastructure and our economies to digital platforms, we have to be careful in making sure that this doesn't become a lawless, low-level battlefield.

And we've started trying to put together some principles that were adopted in the G20, the G7, and at the U.N. levels, but a lot more work remains to be done on that front.

CHANCELLOR MERKEL: (As interpreted.) Well, allow me if I may to underline, first of all, that I'm very much impressed that, in spite of a very tough election campaign, this transition period in the United States of America, because it follows democratic principles, is working smoothly. Because this is all about the American people, it's about the destiny of the American people, the outgoing administration is sharing its knowledge, its expertise with the incoming administration. And this to us is a sign of encouragement to continue the good cooperation that we have built between the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany. And that is in our mutual interest.

So we will continue this. I will continue this with -- I approach this with an open mind, and I'll do it on the basis of a deep conviction with President-elect Donald Trump.

Secondly, on Russia. I can only repeat what the President said previously. This is all about respecting certain principles. And I'm saying this from a European vantage point, from a German vantage point. So the fact that for over 70 years, we have been able to enjoy peace, to live in peace very much depends on territorial integrity and sovereignty of

each and every European country being respected. In view of the European history, the reverse would be the start of a very bitter road down a slippery slope, and we have to nip this in the bud. We have to stand up resolutely against any such attempts.

But we are pinning our hopes on political efforts. This is why we launched the Normandy Process, in close coordination with the United States of America. And particularly from a German perspective, from the European perspective, I can only say again, Russia is our neighbor. Just look at Poland -- the sort of European perspective this has. So we have an interest in seeing this relationship be a good one. We have a lot of historical ties, of course, a history that we share. But this mustn't keep us from, wherever we feel there are very grave differences of opinion, to raise them with them, but, again, with political means and always trying to work for political settlements.

And this what I'm going to continue to work on with all my heart. So on the question whether I will put up a candidacy, I will do this at the appropriate time, and this is not today.

Q Mr. President, your country is divided. You, as first black President, as first African American President, who did so many things so differently, who raised so much hope all over the world -- do you think that you have, perhaps in a way, put too much of a strain, maybe too much of demands on the Americans? And to what extent do you think your successor may well be a threat to the rest of the world, to the security? Because there are, after all, nuclear weapons here in Germany to which he has access now.

Will you want to now, Madam Chancellor, see to it under the your administration try to make Europe and Germany less dependent on the United States? And are you afraid of this wave of populism hitting Germany, hitting Europe, as well?

And a personal question. President Obama paid tribute to you as an outstanding politician. You are somewhat more sober when you describe your partner. How difficult is it for you to take leave today of your partner?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: My guiding principle as President has been to try to do the right thing even when it's not politically convenient; to look at long term trends in our economy, in our society, in the international sphere, and, using my best judgment, shape

policies that will serve the American people, keep them safe, keep our economy growing, put people back to work, and best ensure peace, cooperation, and stability around the world.

And based on current surveys of public opinion in the United States, it turns out that the majority of Americans think I've done a pretty good job, that we haven't, in fact, gone too fast, as you describe it.

But what is certainly true is that the American people -- just like the German people, just like the British, and people around the world -- are seeing extraordinarily rapid change. The world is shrinking. Economies have become much more integrated, and demographics are shifting. Because of the Internet and communications, the clash of cultures is much more direct. People feel, I think, less certain about their identity, less certain about economic security. They're looking for some means of control.

And what that means is, is that the politics in all of our countries is going to require us to manage technology and global integration and all these demographic shifts in a way that makes people feel more control, that gives them more confidence in their future, but does not resort to simplistic answers or divisions of race or tribe, or the crude nationalism, which I think can be contrasted to the pride of patriotism that we all feel about our respective countries.

And I think that our politics everywhere are going to be going through this bumpy phase. But as long as we stay true to our democratic principles, as long as elections have integrity, as long as we respect freedom of speech, freedom of religion, as long as there are checks and balances in our governments so that the people have the ability to not just make judgments about how well government is serving them but also change governments if they're not serving them well -- then I have confidence that over the long term, progress will continue.

And I think it's especially important for those of us who believe in a world where we're interdependent, that believes in mutual interests and mutual respect between nations, it's particularly important that we reach out to everybody in our countries -- those who feel disaffected, those who feel left behind by globalization -- and address their concerns in constructive ways, as opposed to more destructive ways.

And I think that can be done. But it's hard. It requires creativity. It requires effective communications. Part of what's changed in politics is social media and how people are receiving information. It's easier to make negative attacks and simplistic slogans than it is to communicate complex policies. But we'll figure it out.

So, ultimately, I remain optimistic about not just America's future, but the direction that the world is going in. And part of what makes me most optimistic is if you look at the attitudes of young people. Across the board, young people are much more comfortable with respecting differences. They are much more comfortable with diversity. They are much less likely to express attitudes that divide us between "us" and "them." They see themselves as part of a global economy that they can navigate successfully, and are showing enormous creativity and entrepreneurship and working with each other across borders.

So that's where the future is. But we have to create that bridge to the future. And that means making sure we're paying attention to the wages of workers in countries and making sure that we're investing in their education and their skills, that we are growing the economy in smart ways and rebuilding our infrastructure and investing in science and development, and that we stay true to those values that helped get us here. And if we do that, I think we're going to be fine.

CHANCELLOR MERKEL: (As interpreted.) On the issue first of independence of Germany, after the time of national socialism, Germany has been given an enormous amount of help, particularly and also from the United States of America. The fact that we were able to enjoy German unification is due first and foremost to the help of the United States of America. And ever since Germany was able to regain its unity, it is in an even stronger position to give its contribution to upholding this order to which we feel committed, and for which particularly people in the German Democratic Republic stood out there in the streets to keep this up, to maintain this order, particularly also in our country.

Now, we're trying to do more than it used to be 26 years ago. And there are a number of other areas where we have to also make a stronger contribution. We will all have to do more in development cooperation. It's important that these disparities in the living conditions cannot be allowed in this digital period to be too marked. Each and every one must be given an opportunity to participate -- which is why Germany's fate, in many ways, depends on the firmness of its alliance with NATO, with the European Union. We cannot stand alone with 80 million people. In this world of today, you cannot, when you just

stand on your own, achieve much -- even though you may be economically strong. So alliances are part of our destiny as a nation, part of our future as a nation. And this is what guides me in my policy, what guides my government as a whole.

Secondly, this wave of populism that seems to engulf us, well, look at -- and it seems, in your words, to come from the United States. Look at the European Parliament. There are a lot of people who are looking for simplistic solutions, who are sort of preaching policies of -- well, very unfriendly policies. We have them here in Europe, too. We have them here in Germany, too.

And to take up where the President left off, digitization is, in a way, a disruptive force, a disruptive technological force that brings about deep-seated change, transformation of a society. Look at the history of the printing press -- when this was invented, what sort of consequences this had. Or industrialization -- what sort of consequences that had. Very often it led to enormous transformational processes within individual societies, and it took a while until societies learned how to find the right kind of policies to contain this and to manage and steer this. And I think we live in a period of profound transformation, very similar to when we had a transition from agricultural societies to industrial societies.

Now, when we, for example, see shifts of huge production lines from certain areas to other countries, people tend to ask the question, where's my place in this modern world? We have this here, this tendency in our country. We have it in other countries. Trying to keep a society together, trying to keep the older and the younger people together, trying to keep those who live in rural areas together with those who live in cities is one of the most important and most noble tasks of politicians these days -- trying to see to it that each and every one can find his or her place.

But those that belong purportedly to certain groups say, we are the people, and not the others -- that is something that we cannot allow to happen. That is something that I think, at the time when we had this in the GDR, when the people stood in the street and said, we are the people -- that was something that filled me with great joy. But the fact that this people have hijacked it is not something that fills me with great joy. We have to find new ways of addressing people, new ways of getting into contact with people. But I'm optimistic that we'll be able to do so.

Now, taking leave from my partner and friend, well, yes, it is hard. If you've worked together with somebody very well, leave-taking is very difficult. But we are politicians.

We all know that democracy lives off change. So in the United States of America, the Constitution has very clear stipulations on this. It's a tough rule -- eight years and that's it. Out goes the President and a new one comes in. So if it's in the German interest to have good transatlantic relations, well, the task is also to look ahead. But personal -- we have freedom of movement in the whole of Germany, so if we want to see each other, well, I'm game. So we're not completely out of this world, as we would say.

MR. EARNEST: The next question will come from Margaret Brennan at CBS News.

Q Thank you very much, Mr. President. You've spoken a great deal about what you've characterized as kind of a crude form of nationalism perhaps on the rise. I'm wondering if you would advise some of those protestors at home to stop demonstrating against some of the charged rhetoric that has been used by Donald Trump. And I'm wondering, as well, if you've advised your successor to be extra mindful of what you see as some very worrisome trends, particularly when it comes to making his own potentially powerful staff picks.

Lastly, sir, in these final weeks of your presidency, do you believe you have any leverage to stop Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin from continuing to bomb Aleppo?

Chancellor Merkel, I'd like to ask you, Bashar al-Assad has described Donald Trump as a natural ally. Your own Foreign Minister has described Donald Trump as a preacher of hate. I'm wondering, would you tell Americans that they now have a perception problem?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: One of the great things about our democracy is it expresses itself in all sorts of ways, and that includes people protesting. I've been the subject of protests during the course of my eight years, and I suspect that there's not a President in our history that, at some point, hasn't been subject to these protests. So I would not advise people who feel strongly or are concerned about some of the issues that have been raised during the course of the campaign -- I wouldn't advise them to be silent.

What I would advise -- what I advised before the election and what I will continue to advise after the election -- is that elections matter, voting matters, organizing matters, being informed on the issues matter. And what I consistently say to young people -- I say it in the United States, but I'll say it here in Germany and across Europe -- do not take for granted our systems of government and our way of life.

I think there is a tendency -- because we have lived in an era that has been largely stable and peaceful, at least in advanced countries, where living standards have generally gone up -- there is a tendency I think to assume that that's always the case. And it's not. Democracy is hard work.

In the United States, if 43 percent of eligible voters do not vote, then democracy is weakened. If we are not serious about facts and what's true and what's not -- and particularly in an age of social media where so many people are getting their information in soundbites and snippets off their phones -- if we can't discriminate between serious arguments and propaganda, then we have problems. If people, whether they are conservative or liberal, left or right, are unwilling to compromise and engage in the democratic process, and are taking absolutist views and demonizing opponents, then democracy will break down.

And so I think my most important advice is to understand what are the foundations of a healthy democracy, and how we have to engage in citizenship continuously, not just when something upsets us, not just when there's an election, or when an issue pops up for a few weeks.

It's hard work. And the good news is I think there are a lot of young people, certainly, who were involved in my campaigns and I think continue to be involved in work, not just politically but through nonprofits and other organizations, that can carry this hard work of democracy forward.

But I do think sometimes there's complacency. Here in Europe, I think that there are a lot of young people who forget the issues that were at stake during the Cold War, who forget what it meant to have a wall. And I'll be honest, there have been times when I listened to the rhetoric in Europe where and easily equivalence somehow between the United States and Russia, and between how our governments operate versus other governments operate -- where those distinctions aren't made.

I've said many times around the world that, like any government, like any country, like any set of human institutions, we have our flaws, we've operated imperfectly. There are times when we've made mistakes. There are times where I've made mistakes, or our administration hasn't always aligned ourselves with the values that we need to align ourselves with. It's a work of constant improvement.

But I can say to the German people that the United States has been good for Germany, has looked out for Germany, has provided security for Germany, has helped to rebuild Germany and unify Germany. And I can say, across Europe, that many principles that have been taken for granted here around free speech and around civil liberties, and an independent judiciary, and fighting corruption -- those are principles that, not perfectly, but generally, we have tried to apply not just in our own country but also with respect to our foreign policy.

And that should be remembered. Because in an age where there's so much active misinformation -- and it's packaged very well and it looks the same when you see it on a Facebook page or you turn on your television -- where some overzealousness on the part of a U.S. official is equated with constant and severe repression elsewhere -- if everything seems to be the same and no distinctions are made, then we won't know what to protect. We won't know what to fight for. And we can lose so much of what we've gained in terms of the kind of democratic freedoms and market-based economies and prosperity that we've come to take for granted.

That was a long answer, wasn't it? I don't remember if there was a second part to it. I got all caught up in that one.

Q I asked you if you advised the President-elect on things --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Yes, I did. I did. He ran an extraordinarily unconventional campaign, and it resulted in the biggest political upset in perhaps modern political history -- American history. And that means that he now has to transition to governance. And what I said to him was that what may work in generating enthusiasm or passion during elections may be different than what will work in terms of unifying the country and gaining the trust even of those who didn't support him.

And he's indicated his willingness to -- his understanding of that. But you're absolutely right that that has to reflect itself not only in the things he says, but also how he fills out his administration. And my hope is, is that that's something he is thinking about, because not only is the President of the United States somebody that the entire country looks to for direction but sets the agenda internationally in a lot of ways.



Q And Syria?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: With respect to Syria, we are going to continue to work, as we have over the last five, six years, to push towards a political transition and settlement.

It would be naïve of me to suggest that with Russia committed militarily as it is to supporting what, in many cases, are barbarous tactics by the Assad regime to crush the opposition, the sort of indiscriminate bombing that we've been seeing not just in Aleppo but in many parts of the country over the last several years -- it would be naïve of me to suggest that there's going to be a sudden, 180-degree turn in policy by either Assad or Russia or Iran at this point. But we are going to continue to make the argument. We are going to continue to try to find humanitarian steps that can reach the people there. We're going to continue to try to obtain Cessations of Hostilities that lessen the human tragedy and the migration that's taking place.

But, ultimately, the way this is going to be resolved is going to have to be a recognition by Russia, and a willingness to pressure Assad that a lasting, durable peace with a functioning country requires the consent of people. You cannot purchase people's consent through killing them. They haven't made that transition yet, but we're going to keep on trying.

CHANCELLOR MERKEL: (As interpreted.) I think I can speak for the whole of the federal government when I say that we are no longer in election mode in the United States, we're in post-election mode. There is an interest of the Federal Republic of Germany to cooperate well with the United States of America. This goes for each and every President on the basis of shared values, and I believe that these are, indeed, shared values, and should be shared values.

So as to my position on President Assad, Assad as President has actively tried to kill his own people. He has bombed them with barrel bombs in a most terrible way. He has brought untold suffering over his people -- if you look at Aleppo and other places. When you talk to the many Syrian refugees who have fled here to Germany, they will be able to tell you their own personal story, and the majority of them -- the great majority of them -- fled from Assad, and most of them not even fled the IS. So I don't see him as an ally.

Q Thank you very much. Mr. President, you describe your hopes rather more in great historical terms. Let me break this down to months and years. The fact that Stephen Bannon was made as chief strategist, meeting Mr. Farage, and the fact that prominent Republican representatives did not decide to join this transition team -- what makes you confident, against the background of this, that President Trump can be a reliable partner to the world and to Europe and Germany?

Now, Madam Chancellor, if you hear those words of praise of the President with regard to you -- this, what he said, can this not sort of demand too much from you and from Germany? Because too much is demanded, too much is expected from you -- too great are the expectations, you can't meet them?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I'm always optimistic. There were times where I was in the Oval Office and people would come to me with all kinds of political problems and policy problems and international problems, and my team would be getting discouraged and depressed, and I would say to them, I have to be optimistic, because the odds of somebody named Barack Obama being President of the United States were very low, and the fact that, in my lifetime, I have seen such enormous, positive change in the United States and around the world tells me that, although history does not travel in a straight line, it moves in the direction of justice and freedom and a better life for people. But we have to fight for it. We have to work for it.

What makes me cautiously optimistic about my successor and the shift from campaign mode to governance is there's something about the solemn responsibilities of that office, the extraordinary demands that are placed on the United States -- not just by its own people but by people around the world -- that forces you to focus, that demands seriousness. And if you're not serious about the job, then you probably won't be there very long because it will expose problems.

Even when you're doing a job, even when you are attentive, there are so many things that come across your desk that people are going to question you, and you're going to have opponents and you're going to have critics, and you figure that out pretty fast when you're sitting there. And I think the President-elect is going to see fairly quickly that the demands and responsibilities of a U.S. President are not ones that you can treat casually, and that in a big, complex, diverse country, the only way that you can be successful is by listening and reaching out and working with a wide variety of people.

And so it is my hope that that is what will happen. And I'm going to do everything I can over the next two months to help assure that that happens.

It is absolutely true that Chancellor Merkel is going to have significant responsibilities, has had extraordinary burdens that she's had to carry. If she chooses to continue, you're right, she will have big burdens. I wish I could be there to lighten her load somewhat, but she's tough. (Laughter.) And I have -- I know what it means to carry burdens because the fact of the matter is, is that if there are problems around the world, the first question people ask is, why isn't Washington doing something about it?

This is why it's so important not to discount or take for granted the importance of the Transatlantic Alliance. And this is probably the best place for me to end.

In international for a -- in G20s, in G7s, in the United Nations -- the United States and Germany are not always perfectly aligned. America and Europe are not always perfectly aligned. But the voice that speaks out on behalf of some dissident who is jailed halfway around the world, the voice who is expressing concern about some child in an African village who doesn't have clean drinking water or is subject to some terrible disease, the voice that insists on rules and norms governing international affairs, the voice that helps to steer the world away from war wherever possible -- that's our voice more often than not.

And we're not always successful. But if that voice is absent, or if that voice is divided, we will be living in a meaner, harsher, more troubled world. And we have to remember that. And whoever is the U.S. President, and whoever is the Chancellor of Germany, and whoever is the leader of other European nations and other democracies around the world -- they need to recognize that.

There are going to be forces that argue for cynicism, for looking the other way with somebody else's problems, that are not going to champion people who are vulnerable because sometimes that's politically convenient. And if we don't have a strong transatlantic alliance that's standing up for those things, we will be giving to our children a worse world. We will go backwards instead of forwards.

So whoever the U.S. President is, whoever the Chancellor of Germany is, we need to remember that. And our citizenry who decide who our Presidents and Chancellors are need to remember that.

CHANCELLOR MERKEL: (As interpreted.) It is, after all, a very good thing if, after eight years of cooperation, the President of the United States says that this is a cooperation based on friendship, that we cooperated well. I feel that this is a very good, a very positive message, and, indeed, an encouragement for me.

Now, secondly, I, fortunately, know very many people -- and there are many, many more that I don't know, and many politicians -- who stand up for the same values of democracy, of liberal societies, of open societies, of respect for the dignity of man. And I feel that we are in a community of people here who stand up for these values, who try to maintain them, and wherever they are not yet respected, stand up for people's rights to enjoy them, as well.

And this is worth every effort. But I think we're gratified to know that there are many, many people who feel committed to this goal.

Thank you very much.

END

6:38 P.M. CET