

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT TRUMP AT PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER NATO SUMMIT

12 July 2018

THE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very much, everybody. Appreciate it. We've had a very amazing two-day period in Brussels. And we really accomplished a lot, with respect to NATO. For years, Presidents have been coming to these meetings and talked about the expense — the tremendous expense for the United States. And tremendous progress has been made; everyone has agreed to substantially up their commitment. They're going to up it at levels that they've never thought of before.

Prior to last year, where I attended my first meeting, it was going down — the amount of money being spent by countries was going down and down very substantially. And now, it's going up very substantially. And commitments were made. Only 5 of 29 countries were making their commitment. And that's now changed. The commitment was at 2 percent. Ultimately, that'll be going up quite a bit higher than that.

So we are — we made a tremendous amount of progress today. It's been about, at a minimum, they estimate — and they're going to be giving you exact numbers — but since last year, they've raise an additional \$33 billion that's been put up by the various countries, not including the United States.

And the United States' commitment to NATO is very strong, remains very strong, but primarily because everyone — the spirit they have, the amount of money they're willing to spend, the additional money that they will be putting up has been really, really amazing to see it. To see the level of spirit in that room is incredible.

And I hope that we're going to be able to get along with Russia. I think that we probably will be able to. The people in the room think so, but they nevertheless — they really stepped up their commitment, and stepped it up like they never have before.

So took in an addition \$33 [billion]. The number could actually be higher than \$40 [billion] when they give you the final number. The Secretary General, Stoltenberg, will be giving those numbers sometime today, probably in his concluding press statement. But we are doing numbers like they've never done before or ever seen before. And you'll be seeing that, and I guess you'll be hearing that a little bit later.

Okay. We have our Secretary of State, as you know, and we have — John is here. So if you have any questions for the three of us. Mike Pompeo just got back from a third trip, as you know, to North Korea. He's become a true expert on the trips to North Korea — the best way

to get there, the best way to get out. And he gets along very well. And he's doing a great job over there.

Yes, ma'am.

Q I have a question.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Mr. President, I'm Tara McKelvey with the BBC. Can you tell us whether or not you warned people that the U.S. would pull out of NATO if they weren't meeting their spending goals?

THE PRESIDENT: I told people that I'd be very unhappy if they didn't up their commitments very substantially, because the United States has been paying a tremendous amount, probably 90 percent of the cost of NATO. And now, people are going to start and countries are going to start upping their commitments. So I let them know yesterday, actually. I was surprised that you didn't pick it up; it took until today. But yesterday, I let them know that I was extremely unhappy with what was happening, and they have substantially upped their commitment, yeah. And now we're very happy and have a very, very powerful, very, very strong NATO, much stronger than it was two days ago.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Hi, President Trump.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, hi. How are you?

Q I'm the White House Correspondent for PBS —

THE PRESIDENT: I know. You're very famous on television.

Q I have a question, again, about — did you ever, at any point, say that the U.S., though, might stop engaging with NATO? And do you think that your rhetoric helps NATO cohesion, or are you worried that people might think that U.S. might not be as committed to NATO? There are a lot of people who say they were worried and stressed by what you did yesterday.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, they were probably worried because the United States was not being treated fairly, but now we are, because the commitment has been upped so much. So now they are. And I was very firm yesterday.

You have to understand, I know a lot of the people in the room. I was here last year. I let them know last year — in a less firm manner, but pretty firm — and they raised an additional \$33

billion, I think going to \$40 billion. But it's \$33 billion as of today. And then today and yesterday, I was probably a little bit more firm.

But I believe in NATO. I think NATO is a very important — probably the greatest ever done. But the United States was paying for anywhere from 70 to 90 percent of it, depending on the way you calculate. That's not fair to the United States.

In addition to that, as you know, we're in negotiations with the EU, and we're going to be meeting with them next week. We've been treated very unfairly on trade. Our farmers have been shut out of the European Union. Now, you could say they're different, but basically, to a large extent, they're the same countries.

So I think we're going to be ultimately treated fairly on trade. We'll see what happens, but I can tell you that NATO now is really a fine-tuned machine. People are paying money that they never paid before. They're happy to do it. And the United States is being treated much more fairly.

Yes, sir.

Q President Trump, Ryan Chilcote, PBS NewsHour. Did you win concessions in your meetings and discussions with the German Chancellor when it comes to German defense spending and also with this issue of purchasing energy from Russia? And secondly, what would you say to your critics that say by creating this scene here at NATO you're only enabling President Putin and Russia to further disturb things in Ukraine and Georgia?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, if you consider putting up tremendously — you know, the additional funds at a level that nobody has ever seen before, I don't think that's helping Russia. I think that NATO is much stronger now than it was two days ago. I think that NATO was not doing what they were supposed to be doing — a lot of the countries. And we were doing much more than we should have been doing.

Frankly, we were carrying too much of a burden. That's why we call it "burden-sharing." I was using the term a lot today. "Burden-sharing." We had a fantastic meeting at the end — 29 countries. And they are putting up a lot. Germany has increased very substantially their time period, and Germany is coming along. And we still have to figure out what's going on with the pipeline, because the pipeline is coming in from Russia.

So we're going to have to figure that out. I brought it up; nobody brought it up but me, and we all are talking about it now. And actually, I think the world is talking about it now maybe more than anything else. But we're going to figure that out.

But — and, frankly, maybe everybody is going to have a good relationship with Russia so there will be a lot less problem with the pipeline. But, to me, that was a very major point of contention. We discussed it at length today. Germany has agreed to do a lot better than they

were doing, and we're very happy with that. We had a very good relationship with Angela Merkel.

Yes.

Q Mr. President —

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, go ahead.

Q Hi. Thank you. Margaret Talev from Bloomberg.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. After all these years, I know, Margaret. Go ahead.

Q Thank you. Maybe I'm being dense here, but could you just clarify: Are you still threatening to potentially pull the United States out of NATO for any reason? And do you believe you can do that without Congress's explicit support and approval?

THE PRESIDENT: I think I probably can, but that's unnecessary. And the people have stepped up today like they've never stepped up before. And remember the word — \$33 billion more, they're paying. And you'll hear that from the Secretary General in a little while. He thanked me actually. He actually thanked me. And everybody in the room thanked me. There's a great collegial spirit in that room that I don't think they've had in many years. They're very strong. So, yeah, very unified, very strong. No problem. Right?

Yes, go ahead.

Q We're in NATO. No — no —

THE PRESIDENT: No problem. Go ahead.

Q Mr. President, Jonathan Lemire with the Associated Press. You have said previously you wanted the countries to step up their spending to 2 percent. Yesterday there was a suggestion it might be 4 percent, or perhaps 2 percent at a much quicker timetable. Can you clarify, what did they commit to doing? Is that satisfactory to you?

THE PRESIDENT: So what they're doing is spending at a much faster clip. They're going up to the 2 percent level. Now, you have to understand, some of them have parliaments, they have their own congresses, they have a lot of things they have to go through. So, you know, they're here as prime minister or a as a president, and they can't necessarily go in and say, this is what we're going to do. But they're going back for approvals.

Some are at 2 percent; others have agreed definitely to go to 2 percent. And some are going back to get the approval, and which they will get, to go to 2 percent. After the 2 percent, we'll

start talking about going higher. But I said, ultimately we should be, in years — in advance — we should be at 4 percent. I think 4 percent, it's the right number.

Now, the United States — depending on the way you calculate it — was at 4.2 percent. And I said, that's unfair. And we have the largest GDP by far, especially since we've increased it by so much since a thing called the election. Our GDP has gone way up. And so the fact that our GDP went way up, that means we're paying for even more, which is very unfair. So I explained that.

We will go to much higher than 2 percent into the future, but right now we're getting people up to 2 percent, and that will take place over a fairly short period of time — a short number of years. Okay?

Yeah, go ahead.

Q Hi, Tomas LeCrass (ph) from (inaudible) journalist Croatia Daily Newspaper. We understand your message —

THE PRESIDENT: Congratulations, by the way.

Q Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: On soccer.

Q Thank you. We understand your message, but some people ask themselves, will you be tweeting differently once you board the Air Force One? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: No, that's other people that do that. I don't. I'm very consistent. I'm a very stable genius. (Laughter.)

Go ahead. Yeah, go ahead.

Q Thank you, sir. Jeremy Diamond with CNN. How are you?

THE PRESIDENT: Hi, Jeremy.

Q Quick question with regards to Germany and the comments that you made yesterday. Do you feel like given the threats that you made about potentially leaving NATO, about insulting Germany's sovereignty, it appears, by suggesting that they're totally controlled by Russia — do you feel like that's an effective way to conduct diplomacy? And secondly, would you be able to be a little bit more specific about the commitments that you secured today with regards to increasing the financial commitment? Is there an updated timeline? Are there specific countries you could cite? Because a majority of them were already planning to meet that 2 percent threshold by 2024.

THE PRESIDENT: No, many of them — in fact, Germany was going to be in the year 2028 or '30. Yeah, I think it's a very effective way to deal, but I didn't deal exactly the way you said. I have great respect for Germany. My father is from Germany. Both of my parents are from the EU, despite the fact they don't treat us well on trade.

But I think that will change also, and I think we'll see that — because on the 25th of July, they're coming in to start negotiations with me. We'll see. And if they don't negotiate in good faith, we'll do something having to do with all of the millions of cars that are coming into our country and being taxed at a virtually zero level, at a very low level.

But, Jeremy, I think it's been a very effective way of negotiating. But I'm not negotiating; I just want fairness for the United States. We're paying for far too much of NATO. NATO is very important. But NATO is helping Europe more than it's helping us. At the same time, it's very good for us.

So we have now got it to a point where people are paying a lot more money, and that's starting — really, last year. It really had — you were there last year. And last year we had a big impact. Again, we took in \$33 billion more. And if you ask Secretary General Stoltenberg, he gives us total credit — meaning me, I guess, in this case, total credit — because I said it was unfair.

Now, what has happened is, presidents over many years, from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama, they came in, they said, "Okay, hey, do the best you can," and they left. Nobody did anything about it. And it got to a point where the United States was paying for 90 percent of NATO. And that's not fair. So it's changed. We had a really good meeting today. We had a great meeting in terms of getting along. I know most of the people in the room because of last year, because of the year and a half that we've been in office — year and a half-plus. But we have a great relationship. Everybody in that room, by the time we left, got along. And they agreed to pay more, and they agreed to pay it more quickly.

Yeah, go ahead, Phil.

Q Thanks, Mr. President. Philip Rucker from the Washington Post. You tweeted yesterday, "What good is NATO?" And you've talked about NATO as an alliance that benefits Europe, that defends and protects Europe. Do you see any value of NATO to the United States vis-à-vis Russia? Does it help protect the United States from Russia, in your view?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it's another very strong ally, as together it's much stronger than, obviously, individual countries. I think it's — the way we have it now, I think it's a much — I think NATO got — you know what was happening with spending prior to my getting into office. The numbers were going down. Now the numbers have gone up like a rocket ship. The numbers have gone up a lot, and they've gone up rapidly. And they're now going up further.

So I think NATO is going to be very, very effective. I'm very impressed with — and really know, and he's a friend mine — but Secretary General Stoltenberg has done a fantastic job and putting it all together. And we were the ones that really — we gave him an extension of his contract, as you know. I think he's done a really good job.

I think that when I was saying that I am very concerned with the pipeline, I don't like the pipeline. And when I talk about NATO, I say, how do you have NATO? And then you have somebody paying the people that you're protecting against. But maybe we'll get along with the group that we're protecting against. I think that's a real possibility.

As you know, I'm meeting with President Putin on Monday. And I think we go into that meeting not looking for so much. We want to find out about Syria. We will, of course, ask your favorite question about meddling. I will be asking that question again. But we'll also be talking about other things. We'll be talking about Ukraine. Ukraine was here today, by the way. And, you know, it was very interesting to hear what they had to say?

Q (Inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: Excuse me?

Q What if he denies it?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, he may. I mean, look, he may. You know, what am I going to do? He may deny it. I mean, it's one of those things. All I can do is say, "Did you" and "Don't do it again." But he may deny it. You'll be the first to know. Okay?

Yes, go ahead.

Q Mr. President, Robert Wall with the Wall Street Journal.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Hi, Robert.

Q If the Germans and the Canadians and others don't come up to 2 percent, what is your fallback position? How will you up the pressure to make them actually?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, they will. They will. I have no doubt about it. They all made commitments. And they will be up to 2 percent. It will be over a period — a relatively short period of years. Okay?

Q Please. Thank you so much.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, go ahead.

Q Georgian TV (inaudible). Mr. President, what do you think today, it needs — (inaudible) Georgia more support from NATO? And I wanted to ask about —

THE PRESIDENT: Georgia? They were here today, representing.

Q Yes. And will you talk about Georgia in a meeting with President Putin?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, they were here. They made a very favorable impression. And we listened to their plight. It's a tough situation with Georgia. But they made a very fair verbal impression in the room. Okay?

Yeah, go ahead. Go. Go. Go ahead.

Q She's already had one.

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah, you really did. Come on. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Q Well, I had a question, as well. But nonetheless, I'll ask, sir. Will you recognize —

THE PRESIDENT: Go ahead.

Q Will you recognize Russia's annex — will you recognize Crimea as part of Russia when you meet President —

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, that's an interesting question — because long before I got here, President Obama allowed that to happen. That was on his watch, not on my watch. You know, people like to say, "Oh, Crimea." But the fact is, they built bridges to Crimea. They just opened a big bridge that was started years ago. They built, I think, a submarine port; substantially added billions of dollars. So that was on Barack Obama's watch. That was not on Trump's watch. Would I have allowed it to happen? No, I would not have allowed it to happen. But he did allow it to happen, so that was his determination.

What will happen with Crimea from this point on? That I can't tell you. But I'm not happy about Crimea. But again, that was on Barack Obama's watch, not Trump's watch.

Yeah, go ahead. Sure.

Q It's Jeff Mason from Reuters, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Sure. I know, Jeff.

Q Regarding your summit with President Putin, will you be raising arms control issues?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Would you like to extend New START? And will you raise concerns about violations of the INF Treaty?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q And as a follow-up to the NATO meeting today, will you suggest to him, or would you consider stopping military exercises in the Baltic States, if that's something that he requests?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, perhaps we'll talk about that. But I will say that we are going to be talking about those three issues and many more. We'll be talking about it, Jeff.

Go ahead. Go ahead.

Q (Inaudible.) We are in the NATO, the quarters — the cost (inaudible) the double (inaudible) before. I would like to know if you are planning to guarantee the taxpayers that the new money that is flowing into NATO will be spent in the best possible way, especially the money coming from country that have several problem with the public finances.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the money will be spent properly. And one of the things that we have — we have many wealthy countries with us today, but we have some that aren't so wealthy. And they did ask if they could buy the military equipment and could I help them out. And we will help them out a little bit. We're not going to finance it for them, but we'll make sure that they're able to get payments and various other things so they can buy.

Because the United States makes, by far, the best military equipment in the world. The best jets, the best missiles, the best guns. The best everything — we make, by far. I mean, that's one thing — I guess I assumed it prior to taking office, but I really learned, since being President, our equipment is so much better than anybody else's equipment when you look at our companies — Lockheed and Boeing and Grumman. The material — the equipment that we make is so far superior, everybody wants to buy our equipment. In fact, it's the question, can they make it? Because they are doing very well. Can they make it for so many people?

So we are helping some of those countries get on line and buy the best equipment.

Yeah, go ahead.

Q Hi, I'm Kristin Brown with Fox News. On your upcoming summit with President Putin, did any of your allies here express any specific concerns or talk to you about any messages that they'd like you to take with you when you go to the summit?

THE PRESIDENT: Yeah. Just the opposite of concern. They actually — and they'll probably come out with a little bit of an edict — but they actually thanked me for meeting with President

Putin. I look forward to the meeting. They thanked me. They thought it was a great thing that I was doing it. And they gave us our best wishes, or their best wishes.

Now, with that being said, we'll see what happens. Just a loose meeting. It's not going to be big schedule. I don't think it should take a very long period of time. And we'll see where it leads. But it could lead to productive — something very productive. And maybe it's not.

But I think meeting with people is great. We had a great meeting with Chairman Kim. And I'll tell you, Mike Pompeo did a fantastic job. I might ask you to say a few words, Mike, while you're here.

Just one second. Mike, go ahead.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Mr. President. So, I did. I returned — I actually came straight from North Korea with a couple of stops here to Brussels. We had a productive conversation. There remains a great deal of work to do, but I think, most importantly, my counterpart, Kim Yong Chol, made a commitment consistent with what President Trump was able to achieve with Chairman Kim, which was: They intend to denuclearize. They're going to accomplish it. And now the task is to get it implemented.

THE PRESIDENT: I think, just to finish on that, you know, it's so important. That was an amazing — really, an amazing meeting, I thought. And I really think that we established a very good relationship. We'll see where it all ends. But there have been no missile tests. There have been no research. Where there has been — they have blown up a site; I hear they're blowing up another site, missile site. They've taken down all of the propaganda. In fact, somebody said there's no more music playing at the border line. You know, the music was going on for many years. They said recently that, "Wow, there's no more of the heavy music and the propaganda." They've done a lot of things. And we got back our three hostages.

So it's a good process. But the main thing is there have been no rocket launches. There have been no missile tests. There's been no nuclear tests, no explosions, no nothing, for almost nine months.

Okay. Yeah, please.

Q Ewen MacAskill from The Guardian. Your trip to the UK, there are lots of protests planned in London and elsewhere. How do you feel about that?

THE PRESIDENT: I think it's fine. I mean, I think they like me a lot in the UK. I think they agree with me on immigration. I'm very strong on immigration. I made a point today — I said, you've got to stop. You're ruining your — you're going to have a lot of problems. You see what's going on throughout the world with immigration. I probably, at least partially, won an election because of immigration.

If you look at Italy — Giuseppe, who I got to know quite well over the last month and a half, he won his election because of strong immigration policies on Italy. I think that a lot of the people in the UK — I think that's why Brexit happened. Now, I don't know what's going on with the negotiation. Who knows. But — and I guess that's become a very interesting point of contention. I said I'm going to a few hotspots. We have NATO, then we have the UK, and then we have Putin. And I said, Putin may be the easiest of them all. You never know. But I'm going to a pretty hotspot right now, right, with a lot of resignations.

But I will say that immigration is a very important thing, and I told them today, the EU — the European Union — better be very careful, because immigration is taking over Europe, and they better be very, very careful. And I said that loud and clear.

Yes, go ahead.

Q President Trump, (inaudible) Romania. What will you tell President Putin about this summit and about NATO?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think he's going to see about this summit — this has turned out to be a very successful summit. This is — I think, really, that NATO is more put together right now, is more coordinated. And I think there's a better spirit for NATO right now than perhaps they've ever had. It's richer than it ever was. The commitments are made at a higher level than they've ever been made. And the money, it will be paid out faster — far faster.

You know, the 2 percent was a range, a goal. It wasn't something that they were committed to. Now it's a commitment. There's a big difference — the 2 percent number. And that's why so many people weren't reaching it or hitting it. It was just sort of like this amorphous number out there. Now it's a commitment, a real commitment.

I think he's going to see that there's great unity, great spirit, great esprit de corps. And I think we're going to have a good meeting. Regardless of that, I think we're going to have a good meeting.

But this was a fantastic two days. This was a really fantastic — it all came together at the end. And, yes, it was a little tough for a little while, but ultimately — you can ask anybody at that meeting — they're really liking what happened over the last two days. There's a great, great spirit leaving that room.

Yes, sir. Go ahead. Please.

Q Yeah. Jonathan Beale from BBC. I just wonder — you think you're going to get along with President Putin at that meeting. Could you just tell us, why do you think that? Is there something you admire about him?

And the second question, because you're just about to go to the UK, sir —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, he's a competitor. He's been very nice to me the times I've met him. I've been nice to him. He's a competitor. You know, somebody was saying, "Is he an enemy?" No, he's not my enemy. "Is he a friend?" No, I don't know him well enough. But the couple of times that I've gotten to meet him, we got along very well. You saw that.

I hope we get along well. I think we get along well. But ultimately, he's a competitor. He's representing Russia. I'm representing the United States. So in a sense, we're competitors. Not a question of friend or enemy. He's not my enemy. And hopefully, someday, maybe he'll be a friend. It could happen. But I — I just don't know him very well. I've met him a couple of times. And when I did meet him, most of you people were there.

Yes.

Q And Brexit — sorry, sir, because you are going to the UK. What will be your message on Brexit?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Brexit is a — you know, I've been reading a lot about Brexit over the last couple of days, and it seems to be turning a little bit differently where they're getting at least partially involved back with the European Union.

I have no message. It's not for me to say. I own a lot of property there. I'm going to Scotland while I wait for the meeting. I have Turnberry in Scotland, which is a magical place — one of my favorite places. I'm going there for two days while I wait for the Monday meeting.

But it's not for me to say what they should be doing in the UK. I have great friendships. My mother was born in Scotland. I have great friendships over there. We have a wonderful ambassador — Woody Johnson. And he's doing — by the way, Woody is doing a great job.

But it's not for me to say. I'd like to see him be able to work it so it could go quickly, whatever they work out.

Q Hard Brexit?

THE PRESIDENT: Is it heartbreak?

Q Hard Brexit.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, hard Brexit. I see. (Laughter.) I thought you said it was heartbreaking. I said, that might be going a little bit too far, right? (Laughter.) Heartbreak. Is it heartbreaking? A lot of things are heartbreaking.

No, I would say that Brexit is Brexit. It's not like — I guess we'll use the term "hard Brexit." I assume that's what you mean. The people voted to break it up, so I would imagine that's what

they'll do. But maybe they're taking a little bit of a different route. So I don't know if that's what they voted for. I just want the people to be happy. They're great people. And I do think I have — I'm sure there will be protests, because there are always protests. But I think — there were protests the night of the election, both ways. But in the end, we got 206 electoral — 306 electoral votes. And one state said — you know, it was interesting, one of the states we won, Wisconsin — I didn't even realize this until fairly recently — that was the one state Ronald Reagan didn't win when he ran the board his second time. He didn't win Wisconsin, and we won Wisconsin. So, you know, we had a great night.

Protests? There might be protests. But I believe that the people in the UK — Scotland, Ireland. As you know, I have property in Ireland; I have property all over. I think that those people, they like me a lot, and they agree with me on immigration. And I think that's why you have Brexit in the first place, because of immigration.

Yes, ma'am. Yeah, go ahead.

Q (Inaudible) from Finland. What would be the best deal with Putin when you come to Helsinki? And don't you think that your hard diplomacy — that you are playing to the same goal that Putin, with your hard diplomacy towards EU and NATO?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I can't tell you what would be the ultimate. What would be the ultimate? Well, let's see: No more nuclear weapons anywhere in the world would be the ultimate, okay? No more wars, no more problems, no more conflict. Let's find a cure to every disease known to mankind, or womankind. That would be my ultimate, okay? And we'll start from there.

Okay. Yeah, go ahead.

Q (Inaudible) from Afghan Service and BBC World Service. So I would like to ask you, Mr. President, that Afghan President is going to be here —

THE PRESIDENT: He's here right now. He's here right now.

Q No, is here. And are you going to meet him?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q And what have you got to say to him?

THE PRESIDENT: Ghani.

Q And when the war is going to end in Afghanistan? Because people are fed up now and they want to know.

THE PRESIDENT: I agree with that. I very much agree. It's been going on for a long time. We've made a lot of progress, but it's been going on for a long time. We've made a lot of progress in Afghanistan, I will say. Yes, your President is here right now. In fact, he's in the room. When I'm finished with this, I'm going right back into that room.

Q One question, please. Please. Georgia Public Broadcasting. Mr. President, can you tell us what do you think about future membership of Georgia in NATO, please?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, at a certain point they'll have a chance. Not right now. They just left the room. But at a certain point, they'll have a chance.

Yes, sir. Go ahead.

Q (Inaudible) reporter for Kurdistan 24. Are you going to continue to support the Kurdish forces, Peshmerga, in Iraq? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: I think the Kurds are great people. They're incredible fighters. They're wonderful, warm, intelligent — allies, in many cases. As you know, it's different groups of people. But they're great people. I really do — I believe they're great people.

Yes, go ahead, please.

Q Mr. President, (inaudible) working with ARD German TV. You said Putin isn't an enemy, isn't a friend; he's just a competitor.

THE PRESIDENT: He's a competitor.

Q Do you consider him as a security threat for Europe or to the U.S.? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Hey, I don't want him to be. And that's, I guess, why we have NATO, and that's why we have a United States that just had the largest military budget ever — \$700 billion approved; \$716 billion next year.

No, I hope that we'll be able to get along. I've said from day one, whether it's China or Russia — you know, we're working on trade with China right now, and I don't say that's an easy situation, because that's been years of abuse of the United States by presidents, frankly, that allowed that to happen. So I've taken over a lot of bad hands, and I'm fixing each one of them and I'm fixing them well.

But China is going to be, I think, very successfully, ultimately, taken care of. I have a great respect for their President, as you know — President Xi. I spent two days there. It was among the most magical two days I've ever lived. And I think we're going to end up doing something very good with China. Right now, we're in a pretty nasty trade battle, but I think ultimately that will work out. I really think we have a big advantage.

You know, we've picked up \$8 trillion in value, in worth, since I became President. And we're close to two times the size of China. A lot of people don't know that. And, you know, we're going to negotiate a fair deal, if that's possible.

Okay. And Russia — I think getting along with Russia also would be a very good thing.

Yes, go ahead.

Q Jamal Mousavi from BCC Persian TV. We have seen escalation of tension between you and the Iranians. What is your exit plan, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: I would say there might be an escalation between us and the Iranians. I agree with that.

Q But they are threatening to —

THE PRESIDENT: By the way, they're treating us with much more respect right now than they did in the past. And I think — I know they're having a lot of problems and their economy is collapsing. But I will tell you this: At a certain point, they're going to call me and they're going to say, "Let's make a deal," and we'll make a deal. But they are — they're feeling a lot of pain right now.

Yes. Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Q Mr. President, do we expect the rise of the Russian influence in Macedonia following the starting of the negotiation process, like we've seen in Montenegro with alleged coup? And what will NATO and United States do to counter that Russian influence in the Western Balkans? Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: We never talk about our future plans.

Yes, go ahead, ma'am. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Q Thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you very much. My name is Alla Shali from Rudaw TV from Kurdistan Iraq. My question is about the government of Iraq. You know, after two months election, the government in Iraq has not been formed. What's the role from USA? And you want to talk about Syria with President Putin. Can I have any information about Quds in Syria? Thank you very much.

THE PRESIDENT: So I hope we get along well with Iraq. We've certainly spent a great fortune in Iraq. And many, many lives — thousands and hundreds of thousands of lives, if you think on both sides, which I always think about both sides, not just our side. And they had an election, and I hope we're going to be able to get along, and we'll see how that goes. We've

already been talking to the people that won the election. I was not in favor of that war. I was very much against that war. I never thought it was a good thing. But that's another deck of cards that I inherited, and we'll do the best we can with it.

I think the election was pretty conclusive. And again, we've spoken to them. We'll see what happens.

Yes, sir. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Q I'm Asea Atrouz (ph) from Assabah Newspaper in Tunisia. I come from a very far country, a small country in Northern Africa, Tunisia. My question, Mr. President — we really admire what you are doing in North Africa and we really wish and hope that something again will be done in the Middle East to avoid (inaudible) more wars and more blood and more killings in the Middle East, with a just peace process that gives everyone its (inaudible).

THE PRESIDENT: We're looking for peace. And Africa, as you know, is on our very strong list. But we're looking for peace. We want peace all over. We want to solve problems. We're looking for peace. Africa, right now, has got problems like few people would even understand. They have things going on there that nobody could believe in this room. If you saw some of the things that I see through intelligence, what's going on in Africa, it is so sad and so vicious and violent. And we want peace. We want peace for Africa. We want peace all over the world. That's my number-one goal: peace all over the world.

And we're building up a tremendous military, because I really believe, through strength, you get peace. But we're going to have a military like we've never had before. We've given out orders for the best fighter jets in the world, the best ships, the best everything.

But hopefully we'll never have to use them. That would be a dream. To buy the best stuff, to have the best stuff, to have the best equipment in the world, and to never have to use it would be a really great part of my dream.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. I'm going to be going — leaving in about a half an hour. Thank you.

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