

Remarks at the Airport on Arrival in London.

February 24, 1969
Mr. Prime Minister:

I express to you my very deep appreciation for those eloquent remarks and also for the spirit which was exemplified by your statement that the protocol on this occasion was limited so that we could have more opportunity for the discussions to which we both look forward.

I only know from my previous visits to your country that here the welcome, whether it is one which is filled with protocol or one which is primarily devoted to talk, is one that I have always appreciated and--going back over 22 years I have had the opportunity to meet with British statesmen, with you, and in every instance I have profited by those meetings.

The purpose of this visit, as you have so very accurately indicated, is to discuss our common problems, but beyond that, to discuss the problems of the alliance of which we are a part.

I would add one further dimension, to discuss the problems of the world in which we may not have a direct interest in one country or the other, but in which both of us have responsibilities to adopt those policies which will promote a better way to peace in the world.

On that score, Mr. Prime Minister, I noted with interest the great success of a recent meeting you had with the Commonwealth Ministers. In my travels abroad, going back over those 22 years when I first came here as a young Congressman, I have had the opportunity not only to visit this country many times, but to visit every one of the countries of the Commonwealth and to visit other nations no longer in the Commonwealth, but nations which--like the United States of America--share the language, the same great traditions that we in the United States share with the United Kingdom.

I know the contribution, therefore, the contribution in ideals, the contribution in institutions, the contribution that has been made in so many respects by this nation around the world.

That is why I am looking forward to discussions, not only bilaterally and multilaterally, as they affect our common alliance, but on the problems of the whole world, because I know the wisdom that you and your colleagues can provide--wisdom which is essential for all of us as we attempt to find the solutions to those problems. I believe that the purpose of my visit was perhaps explained, in a different context, best by Woodrow Wilson who was the first American President to visit this country. This is what he told the citizens of Manchester in 1918:

"Friendship must have a machinery. If I cannot correspond with you, if I cannot learn your minds, if I cannot cooperate with you, I cannot be your friend, and if the world is to remain a body of friends, it must have the means of friendship, the means of constant friendly intercourse, the means for constant watchfulness over the common interests."

Winston Churchill called ours a special relationship. He was not referring to legal obligations but to human intangibles. He was referring to the means of communication to which Woodrow Wilson had referred to 50 years ago. And no two nations in the world more commonly and more closely share the means of communication than do the United States and the United Kingdom. We share a common language. We share the common law. We share great institutions of the Parliament. We share other institutions.

Because we share those institutions we enjoy a means of communication which gives us a special relationship. It means, too., that we share something else--a common commitment to a peace that transcends national boundaries and because we are partners in the quest for peace we know that

our relationship--that special relationship that we have--is not exclusive because that peace that we seek, the two of us, will be secure only when all nations enjoy the relationship of trust and confidence that unites us.

I believe, as I stand here today, that we can bring about a durable peace in our time. But it cannot come to those who seek it frantically with overnight deals or dramatic gestures. It cannot come to those who pursue it casually, without real help or genuine idealism.

As those in this nation know better than those in our Nation because of your longer experience--peace will come, I believe, step by step, measured and deliberate, continuing to pursue the goal we seek despite setbacks and disappointments. It is that sense of history that you have, that sense of history that all of us in our country respect and that we seek to emulate. It is from that that we can learn. And so we shall strive on this visit and on many others that we will have over the years that I shall be in office; we shall strive for a mutual trust between our two nations and between all nations, the kind of trust that already exists between your nation and mine.

Note: The President spoke at approximately 6 p.m. at Heathrow Airport in response to welcoming remarks by Prime Minister Harold Wilson, which follow:

Mr. President, it is a great pleasure on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, to welcome you to Britain. Equally, my colleagues join with me in welcoming the Secretary of State and your other distinguished colleagues.

You have said, Mr. President, that your purpose in visiting Europe is to work, to observe, and to discuss. For that reason I do not intend, by lengthening my own words of welcome, to defer for more than a few minutes the job that we are to do together while you are our guests.

The weather is cool still, but your welcome from all of those I have the honor to represent is warm. We welcome you personally--a pleasure a number of us have had before. We welcome you as a newly elected President of a great country, our friend and ally. In particular, we welcome your decision, within days after your inauguration, to turn into reality those moving words in your inaugural speech by coming to discuss in this informal way with European heads of government not only the problems of Europe but our mutual hopes and desires for the alliance to which we both belong--not Europe only, not the Atlantic Alliance only, but the problems of the wider world.

There have been those in perhaps both our countries who have been tempted to take these facts of our common purpose and our common alliance too easily for granted because of its success in creating the conditions it set out to create. For those to whom security leads to complacency, the events of last summer represent a call to renewed vigilance, to still stronger solidarity and cohesion.

But equally, Mr. President, on what all of us here in Europe will feel to have been an historic mission, it is right also that our talks should be directed beyond the achieving of security to the most positive ends of the alliance and our common purposes together.

The aim: that from strength on our side we can give on the other side a degree of good will corresponding to that which we are prepared to hold out, moving progressively to a feeling of security, into the path of cooperation and peace.

But, Mr. President, this is not the only lesson that we in Europe drew from the events of last summer. What those events also underlined was a need for still greater unity within Europe, designed not to weaken or disrupt the alliance but to strengthen it: a unity which will enable Europe and each of us as a European country to develop together the great potential of industrial strength and skills which we have, all of us here in Europe; a unity in political and economic terms which will reject narrow, inward-looking attitudes in favor of the wider world concept which you, Mr. President, and we are committed to advance.

For as grows Europe's strength, so grows the strength of the alliance and the thrust of our purposes throughout the world.

Mr. President, you especially asked that with working time so precious, the ceremony and the honors which in other circumstances would be entirely right and fitting for the head of state of your country should be reduced to a minimum. Regard, then, this restricted official welcome as a token only of the welcome which Crown, Parliament, the Estates of the Realm, including industry and labor, and above all, the whole British people, hold out to you---hold out because they feel it in their hearts.

The platform is yours, Mr. President, so that not only those friends but all in whose name we speak can hear from you--and then to work.

Richard Nixon, Remarks at the Airport on Arrival in London. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/240624>