

# Remarks on Departure From Britain.

February 26, 1969  
Mr. Prime Minister:

This has indeed been a very eventful and rewarding visit for me. Our time together was short, but, in Kipling's words, we filled "the unforgiving minute with 60 seconds' worth of distance run."

We received the typically warm and generous welcome of the British people; we were received by your gracious Queen and Prince Philip; and in the most frank and open manner we were given the opportunity to exchange views with your leaders of government.

I shall always remember the events of yesterday. At Westminster Abbey I was reminded of the splendor of your traditions, the greatness of your history, and I shared the gratitude which General Pershing must have felt when he presented the Congressional Medal of Honor to Britain's unknown soldier.

Yesterday, for the first time in history, a man occupying the Office of President of the United States visited a session of the House of Commons. It was an inspiring and compelling experience, one for which I am deeply grateful. And it was an experience in which I came away with a deep appreciation and respect for the ability of the British parliamentarian to stand up during the question period and answer so effectively.

I believe that your question period is much more of an ordeal than our press conference.

It was a moment which no man who has served in the Congress of the United States can forget, for it was here that representative government was born and it was here that men such as Pitt, Disraeli, Gladstone, and Churchill turned their genius and eloquence to the challenges of social reform and the defense of freedom.

Yesterday, too, an American President in office was given the opportunity of exchanging views with a representative cross-section of citizens in the nongovernmental sector. This, too, was a very rewarding experience for me and one that I hope may establish a new precedent in visits of this type, that will be made by heads of government and heads of state.

Then, too, as you remarked, the opportunity--an historic opportunity--to meet with members of the British Cabinet not only on points of mutual interest that were bilateral, but more on those subjects that draw together from the beginning time of our own history and of yours where we have been, where we are, where we are going.

This discussion is one that will stay in our memories for all of our lives, because it is centered on how we can best pursue our common purposes--the cause of peace, prosperity, a better life for our young people and for all mankind.

I have never been more certain--and that certainly has been buttressed by my visit here--that the strength of our ideals and purposes, and the collective force that Europe and America have built to safeguard them, are the necessary cornerstones of the lasting peace we both seek.

Let us, Great Britain and America, remember that "United" is our common first name--the United Kingdom, the United States. We know the real meaning of unity--not the unity of the monolith, but the unity that gains strength by encouraging the diversity which is the hallmark of freedom--a diversity that I saw in action around your Cabinet table and that I see in action around mine.

That is the kind of unity we seek within the Western Alliance--a unity creative in its contrasts, flexible in its forms, but above all, powerful in its purpose.

*Note: The President spoke at 8:40 a.m. at Heathrow Airport in response to farewell remarks by Prime Minister Harold Wilson. An advance text of the President's remarks was also released. Prime Minister Wilson's remarks follow:*

*Mr. President, as we take our leave of you after this visit, my first thought is to wish you Godspeed as you continue on this mission which you conceived and to which I have said to you on your arrival here, future commentators may well ascribe the phrase "historic."*

*I told you when you arrived here about 36 hours ago how much we welcomed your decision within days of your inauguration to visit our European Continent.*

*Allowing for the minimum of sleep which nature requires, I would not have believed that so much constructive discussion could have been crowded into so few hours. The problems of our alliance, the problems of unity in Europe, the problems of a wider world--all these we have discussed against the background of our common purpose--the common purpose of our own society.*

*These views we have discussed and otherwise examined, not with the idea of reaching firm decisions but with the idea of assuring that they shall be continuously examined in depth, that they shall be examined together.*

*Together we have given the necessary instructions to insure that what your visit has done will continue. We have established a close relationship and above all, we have established a process of consultation on world affairs.*

*But as you said on your arrival here, neither of us regards this as an exclusive process, for what views we have discussed must become part of the currency of consultations with all our partners, and this process will continue as you carry forward your discussions with our friends in Germany, in Italy, and in France, and subsequently with our other European partners.*

*Equally I have in mind--and I doubt if you will forget--that unprecedented, uninhibited exchange of views when last night you sat down with the British Cabinet around the Cabinet table, when we discussed the internal social problems of a modern society, yours, ours, the societies of other countries you will be visiting, problems of urban explosion, problems of race and color, problems of regional participation, and above all, the problems of youth--youth, not only of the articulate, even demonstrative, minority of a nation's youth but the problems of the hard-working and no less sincere sort of our young people seeking to express themselves, seeking the cause, seeking above all, an ideal.*

*I am glad that we have been able together to give instructions that there will be established fuller consultation between governments and that we have been able to agree that there shall be established equally, insofar as it is in our power to do so, full consultation between Parliament and Congress, indeed between our two societies, on all of these problems.*

*What we have begun here in London I know you will want to extend in all the other centers you will be visiting--and I believe, instill more widely.*

*Mr. President, here at Heathrow less than 2 days ago, we both proclaimed our conceptions of the objectives of this visit. Our talks have widened those conceptions and given reality to them.*

*This is a start and, we both realize, only a start. Both of us look forward to building on what we have begun.*

*Mr. President, from the British Government and the British people, I wish you Godspeed on your mission of hope.*

*Richard Nixon, Remarks on Departure From Britain. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/240655>*