

SECRETARY CLINTON MEET AND GREET IN BRUSSELS

December 4, 2012

Meeting With the Staff and Families of the U.S. Missions to the EU and NATO, and U.S. Embassy Brussels



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Remarks

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
Embassy Brussels, Chief of Mission Residence

AMBASSADOR GUTMAN: Good morning. Michelle and I, and actually now that our own son visiting – Collin is visiting, Collin, we'd like to welcome you all to our home, which, as all of the Embassy employees know, is your home as well and is indeed America's home here in Brussels. And today, I don't need to tell you, is truly a special day, a day of thrills. First, it's always a thrill when we get together, when we, the members of the tri-missions all get to be together. It's a greater thrill to see the families, those who give so much so that their loved ones can serve our country. And if you ever want to see the future of a more peaceful and a more secure planet, you just need to look upon the faces of the kids that were on the stairs there just taking the pics with the Secretary. You cannot look at that stair without being encouraged about our future.

And of course, it's a thrill whenever I get together with Ambassadors Kennard and Daalder. I have been very fortunate in the past three years to get to learn so much from them. As I've mentioned previously, administrations are regarded as successful if 50 percent of their political selections are top notch. With Bill Kennard and Ivo Daalder, the Administration is batting 66 percent here in Brussels. (Laughter.)

And though Ambassador Daalder will introduce the Secretary in just a couple of moments, it's an honor and a thrill to welcome Secretary Clinton to the tri-missions, for it is a true thrill for each of us to have the opportunity to say thank you, because for you career government and career State

Department employees and for us, those who have been blessed to serve with you for a few years, and for all of us who work abroad, we know firsthand what a joy and what an honor it is to represent the United States of America under President Obama and Secretary Clinton, what a true source of pride it is for each of us as people come up to us daily and say once again that they love our country. For together, President Obama and Secretary Clinton have given America a new face, a face that shines brightly around the globe, a face that others now line up to greet and look upon with admiration, with respect, and with true affection. And it's not hyperbole, it is the literal truth, to say there is no country in which that face has made a bigger difference in the world than here in Belgium, for as many of you know, of all the countries in the world, Belgium finished first in the world this year, as of May 2012, with the highest increase in its favorability rating for the U.S. and for U.S. leadership.

So the Secretary and all of you have made a powerful team indeed. Through the transparency and honesty of President Obama and Secretary Clinton and through your efforts in transmitting that, Belgians have responded like none other. So we are delighted as surrogates for every tourist who can now proudly wear their Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees t-shirt in the Grand Place, for everyone who now carries their guide books face up and not face down, for every ex-pat who now brags that they have a home back in the States, for every business who sells more today by explaining they're American, we as surrogates thank the Secretary for changing the face of America, for letting us be ever the more proud once again.

And now it's my pleasure to introduce my dear friend, Ambassador Bill Kennard. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR KENNARD: Thank you, Howard. The Secretary's time is very short with us today, so I'm going to be very, very brief. There's only one thing I want to say, and that is thank you, thank you, Secretary Clinton, for making time to be with us here today. And moreover, thank you for the fact that today, and indeed for the rest of our lives, we will all be proud to be able to say that we served under the leadership of Secretary Hillary Clinton. Thank you. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR DAALDER: It's my great pleasure and honor to introduce you, Madam Secretary. This is in some ways a bittersweet moment, a little sad that this is your last visit to Brussels to the NATO ministerial, but very happy because of all of the things that you have accomplished for our country, as Bill and Howard said, but for NATO as well in the last four years.

This is your ninth NATO ministerial. And when I look back to your first ministerial four years ago, I can see what an enormous impact you have had on this alliance. Four years ago, the war in Afghanistan seemed to be going nowhere, Russia and NATO were not speaking, missile defense in Europe seemed an impossible dream, and our European allies seemed to be drifting further and further way from the United States. Today, NATO and the transatlantic partnership has been revitalized and is more active than it has ever been before. We're on a clear timetable to end the war in Afghanistan, NATO countries are able to ship their supplies to and from Afghanistan through Russia, and NATO and Russia are talking – not always the same language, but we're talking. (Laughter.) NATO missile defense is a reality, and within NATO our relationship with our European allies and our non-European partners is closer and more cooperative than it has ever been.

All of these accomplishments bear your personal signature and they are a tribute to your perseverance and hard work and your ability to sleep on airplanes. (Laughter.) I believe you've spent more time in the air than you have on the ground. You've certainly earned more frequent flier miles than all of the air forces of NATO combined. (Laughter.)

And as you said in your recent speech at the Brookings Institution in Washington, the United States hasn't changed direction; it's simply come back to its core values. You've spoken up for people and communities who the United States never spoke up for before. Our foreign policy has become more cooperative, more thoughtful, and more compassionate. You've touched the lives of people around the world, and all that you've done, you've done with a smile, a sense of humor, a kind word, and great, great passion. And no one else will be able to fill your chair at that big round table at NATO as well as you have.

I thank you for all you have accomplished and all you will continue to accomplish after you leave the State Department. Madam Secretary, it's a great honor to have you here today. (Applause.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: (Applause.) Thank you. It is truly both an honor and a great pleasure to be here with all of you in this extraordinary tripartite mission that has done so much and accomplished such a great deal in the last four years. I want to begin, of course, to thank our ambassadors here in Brussels Ivo, Bill, and Howard, or as Howard likes to say, the intelligent one, the dignified one, and the good-looking one. (Laughter.) But I'll leave it to all of you to decide. (Laughter.) But I'm sure you will find agreement because the three of these extraordinary ambassadors have worked so well together. And I also want to thank Elisa, Deborah, and Michelle because they have been terrific partners and representatives of our country as well. So I think we should give a round of applause to our ambassadors and (inaudible). (Applause.)

Now I am pleased to be back in Brussels. I am sad that this will be my last official trip, but I am very gratified by the extraordinary working relationship that all of you have had here in Brussels and that we have had across the Atlantic. Let me start by saying a few words about Embassy Brussels because I think Howard was absolutely right in specifically stating that the work of Embassy Brussels has fortified our relationship, has built greater mutual understanding and respect.

In fact, as Howard was referencing, in 2007, only 8 percent of Belgians surveyed had a favorable view of the United States. Belgian leaders tried to close their ports to U.S. ships and their airspace to U.S. planes. So this Embassy really went to work, Americans and Belgians alike. You targeted critical groups, you made more than one hundred appearances on Belgian TV, and you visited all 589 cities and municipalities – (laughter) – telling the American story over and over again. So today, that number is at 46 percent. We still have some ways to go, but that's a pretty remarkable accomplishment.

Now of course, we're not out to win popularity contests. This shift matters because it produced real results: Belgium agreed to keep its commitment in Afghanistan until 2014, it supported our having a seat on the UN Human Rights Council, it was a leader in the mission in Libya. We needed Belgium as a partner, and that is what's been accomplished by the work that all of you have been doing.

Now meanwhile, our NATO team has been just as busy forging agreement on a new strategic concept for the future of the alliance, creating consensus among allies on some especially divisive issues, leading on the conversation about intervention in Libya. And in the last four years, the number of defense ministerials, foreign ministerials, and summits have really been breathtaking. (Laughter.) And through it all, the NATO mission has just been shining.

I want to take a second to recognize Karen Pennington, a real star of the Foreign Service. As Ivo says, she is the true leader of the mission. So Karen, thank you for your hard work. (Applause.) And of course, the U.S.-EU group, what a tremendous four years you've had. On top of successfully negotiating agreements that strengthen counterterrorism cooperation, building coalitions that confront Iran, promoting peace in the Middle East, expanding trade to our largest economic partner, you have also one of the largest visitor loads in the Foreign Service. Apparently, I'm told you host state officials weekly and top officials from all U.S. agencies nonstop, helping European countries navigate the fiscal crisis. You've really made clear, as President Obama has said, that the United States is here as a partner, as a friend, to listen as much as to talk.

So I'm very proud of this extraordinary group of professionals, Americans and Belgians alike. And I want to recognize the families of those serving in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, along with all of you who have served in unaccompanied posts. I know it's difficult, particularly around the holiday season, but the work you are doing is essential to America's security.

And finally, let me thank our incredibly committed and talented locally employed staff. Will all the Belgians raise your hands? All of our Belgian partners, colleagues. (Applause.) Well, as you know very well, ambassadors come and go, secretaries come and go, but you remain the backbone of this operation, carrying the institutional knowledge that we need to keep up the good work that has been done. So I thank you. I thank you for your teamwork, your accomplishments, the passion and commitment that you bring to each mission here, trying to build a more just, more prosperous, more free world.

I am really proud of all of you. I so remember my first trip to Brussels, going to the EU, going to the Parliament, the Commission. I forget how many other organizations there are – (laughter) – and then to work with Bill on the follow-up. And certainly, the memorable day that I walked into NATO and there was this incredibly positive outpouring of greeting which was really for our country but which made it clear that people were so happy that under President Obama, once again, we would be a partner. And of course, here at the mission, you've helped in so many ways to make it possible for all of us to do our work.

So with that, let me just shake as many hands as I can before I go off again to NATO, but I hope each and every one of you have a wonderful holiday season. You are entitled to a great wheels-up party tomorrow. (Laughter.) This looks like a pretty good row to have it in. (Laughter.) But know that you have my gratitude and my great pride in having served with you. Thank you all very much. (Applause.)