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So much for Brussels, let's play ball! Smiling Obama ignores calls to cut short Cuba trip and even does The Wave at baseball game - before jetting off with his family to Argentina

- <u>President Obama</u> addressed the <u>Belgian terror attacks</u> during a 15-minute ESPN interview at the Estado Latinoamericano in Havana
- Earlier had devoted one minute to the atrocities at the top of his 40-minute speech to the Cuban people
- The attacks killed more than two dozen people in Brussels on their morning commutes
- 'The notion that any political agenda would justify the killing of innocent people like this is ... is beyond the pale'
- · President ordered all federal flags be flown at half mast as a mark of respect for those who caught up in attacks
- All three GOP presidential candidates hit Obama for staying put in Cuba, suggesting he should cut his trip short
- Ted Cruz, who is half-Cuban, said he shouldn't be 'spending his time going to baseball games with the Castros'
- Donald Trump said the president 'sounds so ridiculous' addressing Cuba hours after the European terror attacks
- · Obama appeared to acknowledge the criticism and said that disrupting his schedule is exactly what ISIS want
- · He entered the stadium with his wife Michelle Obama, daughters Sasha and Malia and and Raul Castro
- See Brussels terror attacks news at www.dailymail.co.uk/brusselsattacks

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<u>President Obama</u> was all smiles this afternoon as he watched an exhibition baseball game between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national baseball team - just hours after ISIS terrorists killed at least 34 people in Brussels.

Settling down with wife Michelle, daughters Sasha and Malia and Cuban dictator Raul Castro, Obama appeared carefree as he enjoyed the game - ignoring calls to cut short his historic trip to return to Washington and lead the response.

Indeed, despite criticism that he only devoted one minute of his speech earlier in the day to the Belgian atrocities, Obama took the time to give a somewhat surreal 15-minute interview to ESPN about the threat posed by ISIS - keeping his \$500 shades on throughout the spot.

Scroll down for video



No disruption: The president said that changing our way of lives in response to terror is exactly what ISIS want



Jovial: President Obama was clearly enjoying the historic baseball game which was played between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national team

After observing a moment of silence for the hundreds of victims, a relaxed Obama said, 'This is just one more example of why the entire world needs to unite against these terrorists.'

'The notion that any political agenda would justify the killing of innocent people like this is ... is beyond the pale.'

Obama said, 'We are gonna continue with the over 60 nations that are pounding ISIL, and we're going to go after them. In the meantime, obviously our thoughts and prayers are with those who've been lost and hoping for a speedy recovery or those who've been injured.'

When asked by ESPN why he had not returned to Washington, the president said to do so would show the terrorists they have the power to disrupt.

'It's always a challenge when you have a terrorist attack anywhere in the world, particularly in this age of 24/7 news coverage,' said the president. 'You want to be respectful and understand the gravity of the situation, but the whole premise of terrorism is to try to disrupt people's ordinary lives.'

Recalling what he called one of his proudest memories during his time as president, the reaction of Boston Red Sox' David Ortiz after the Boston bombings in April 2013, Obama said he felt the hitter spoke for the nation when he said, 'This is our f**king city and nobody is going to dictate our freedom.'

'Probably the only time America didn't have a problem with somebody cursing on live TV was when he talked about Boston and how strong it was and wasn't gonna be intimidated,' Obama said.

'That is the kind of resilience and the kind of strength that we have to continually show in the face of these terrorists. They cannot defeat America.'

The president then offered his 'thoughts and prayers' to those affected by the terror attacks.

Just after the game ended and Air Force One took off for Argentina for a two-day stint, the president ordered all federal flags to be flown at half mast as a mark of respect for those who were killed in Tuesday morning's attacks.

Prior to his interview with ESPN, Obama had faced calls from Ted Cruz, Donald Trump and John Kasich to leave Cuba and return to the states.

The president did not heed their advice. He dedicated a brief portion of a planned speech to the attacks and went on about his day.

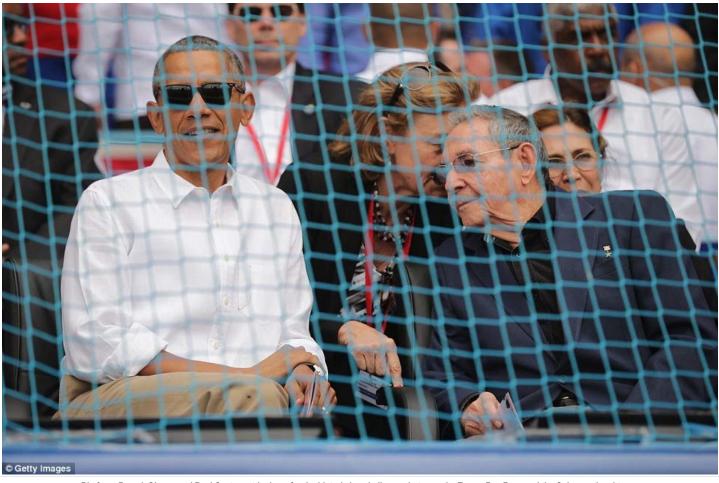
He met Cuban dissidents at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, then made his way to watch the baseball in casual khaki pants, white shirt, no tie, and sunglasses.



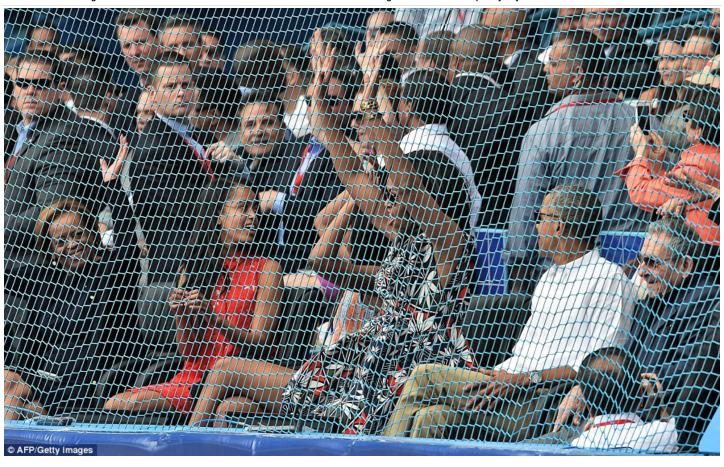
The wave: President Obama, Michelle and Raul Castro all get involved at the baseball in Cuba on Tuesday



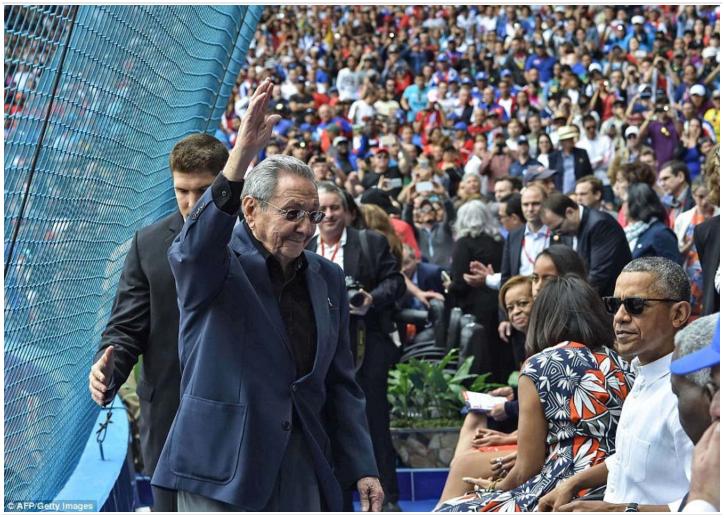
New buddy: Cuban President Raul Castro, (right), and U.S. President Barack Obama share a joke during the baseball match between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national baseball team in Havana, Cuba



Big fans: Barack Obama and Raul Castro settle down for the historic baseball game between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national team



Enthusiastic: US First Lady Michelle Obama gestures as her mother Marian Shields Robinson (L) waves next to US President Barack Obama, daughters Malia (2-L) and Sasha (out of sight) and Cuban President Raul Castro



Famous: Cuban President Raul Castro waves as he returns to his seat after greeting Rachel Robinson, the widow of baseball legend, US Jackie Robinson, the first African-American to play in the Major League



Esteemed guest: President Barack Obama talks with Rachel Robinson, widow of baseball hall-of-famer Jackie Robinson, before taking his seat with Cuban President Raul Castro



Happy days: Capping his remarkable visit to Cuba, President Barack Obama on Tuesday declared an end to the 'last remnant of the Cold War in the Americas' and openly urged the Cuban people to pursue a more democratic future for this communist nation 90 miles from Miami



Let's play ball: Barack and Michelle Obama react to a play during the baseball, while Raul Castro sits impassively



Day out: Obama with the First Family and Cuban President Raul Castro attending the historic baseball game in Havana, Cuba



Malia Obama (left) and Sasha Obama (right), U.S. first lady Michelle Obama and President Barack Obama all keep themselves amused during the baseball game



Famous friends: President Obama talks with former New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter



U.S. Rep Nancy Pelosi, center, attends the exposition game between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national team at the Estado Latinoamericano. To her left is Democratic Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro



No worries: President Obama later reacted to today's ISIS attack in Brussels during an ESPN interview but at the top of the game he was clearly having a good time

The game kicked off with a moment of silence for the Brussels terrorist attack and a choir sang the national anthems of both countries.

Then, it was time for the festivities. Cuban baseball players delivered individually-wrapped white roses to Mrs. Obama and her daughters before they took the field and attendees - including the U.S. president - went through several rounds of the wave.

More than a hundred pigeons were released from behind the warning track in center field during the pre-game show, as well.

The Obamas stayed for the first two innings of the game and left as the third was about to begin in order to drive back to the Havana airport and take their Argentina flight. In a surprise farewell, Castro showed up at the airport to see them off.

Earlier in the day Obama addressed the <u>terrorist attacks</u> that happened this morning in <u>Brussels</u> at the beginning of his remarks on the United States' complicated history with Cuba.



The moment he found out: Obama and his National Security advisor Susan Rice talk on the phone with Homeland Security Advisor Lisa Monaco to receive an update on the terrorist attack in Brussels; He made the call from the residence of the US Chief of Mission in Havana



In his speech, Obama said, 'We will do whatever is necessary to support our friend and ally Belgium in bringing to justice whoever is responsible and this is yet another reminder that the world must unite'



President Obama was all smiles this afternoon as he arrived at an exhibition baseball game between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national baseball team



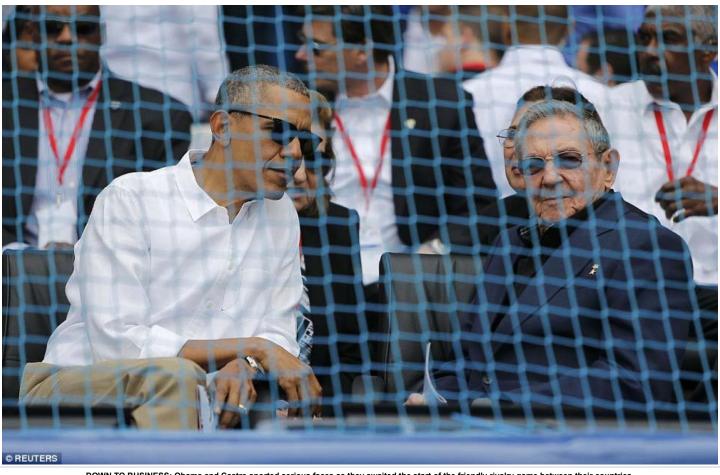
Obama entered the stadium with his wife Michelle Obama, daughters Sasha and Malia and Cuban dictator Raul Castro



TROUBLED TIMES: Obama said the 'thoughts and the prayers of the American people' are with the people of Belgium' today during a speech this morning following the Brussels terrorist attacks that killed at least two dozen people today



Cuban baseball players delivered individually-wrapped white roses to Mrs. Obama and her daughters before they took the field



DOWN TO BUSINESS: Obama and Castro sported serious faces as they awaited the start of the friendly rivalry game between their countries



Spectators cheers during a baseball match between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national team, in Havana, Cuba, on Tuesday



A man holds Cuban and US flags during a Major League baseball exhibition game attended by US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro

Obama said the 'thoughts and the prayers of the American people' are with the people of Belgium' today following the Brussels terrorist attacks that killed at least two dozen people.

'We stand in solidarity with them in condemning these outrageous attacks against innocent people,' Obama said in his Havana speech. 'We will do whatever is necessary to support our friend and ally Belgium in bringing to justice whoever is responsible and this is yet another reminder that the world must unite.'

He added, 'We must be together - regardless of nationality, or race, or faith - in fighting against the scourge of terrorism. We can and we will defeat those who threaten the safety and security of people all around the world.'

Obama was on foreign travel in Cuba and was hit by all three Republican presidential candidates for staying in the country instead of cutting his trip short and returning home.



US President Barack Obama (L) and First Lady Michelle Obama climb the stairs to board their plane at Jose Marti international airport in Havana





US President Barack Obama (bottom left and right with wife, Michelle) and his family board their plane at the Jose Marti international airport in Havana



A man watches on television as U.S. President Barack Obama delivers a speech at the Gran Teatro de la Habana Alicia Alonso in Havana



Obama is on foreign travel in Cuba and delivered the statement on Belgium at the beginning of a televised address from Havana's Gran Teatro de la Habana Alicia Alonso that was attended by the country's dictator Raul Castro, center

Donald Trump was the first of the Republican candidates to comment on the attack Tuesday and spent most of the morning doing phone interviews and sharing his thoughts on the tragedy.

In his first interview, on Fox News, he said the U.S. needs to 'shut the borders,' a statement he repeated later in the morning while appearing on the Today show.

During that appearance he also told host Matt Lauer he is a firm believer in using torture to get information from people behind attacks like the one in Brussels, stating; 'Waterboarding is fine.'

Trump also called into Fox Business Network's Mornings with Maria Bartiromo, saying the U.S. must have surveillance of Muslims in this country, particularly at mosques.

For his final interview of the day he spoke with Good Morning America and said Paris terror suspect Salah Abdeslam probably knew about the attack Tuesday and that had he been tortured it could have been stopped.

Abdeslam was arrested last week in Belgium.

'President Obama is spending his time going to baseball games with the Castros,' said Senator Ted Cruz later said, according to ABC News.

Ohio Governor John Kasich also criticized Obama for sticking to schedule and said, 'The president must return home immediately and get to work with our allies to respond with strength against the enemies of the west.'

'I'm a little surprised that the president is going to a baseball game when I believe – if I would have been president I would have cut short my visit, I would have flown home, I would have conducted calls jointly with heads of state and gone to assemble teams of people, intelligence experts, who can take a look at the serious breaches that we have in intelligence,' Kasich said on CNN.

On Twitter Trump said, 'President Obama looks and sounds so ridiculous making his speech in Cuba, especially in the shadows of Brussels. He is being treated badly!'



Texas Sen. Ted Cruz whacked President Obama this morning for staying put in Cuba instead of coming home to deal with the terrorist situation in Brussels or heading to the country





The president must return home immediately and get to work with our allies to respond with strength against the enemies of the west.

John Kasich followed suit and suggested that President Obama return home 'immediately' instead of staying in Cuba through the rest of the day







President Obama looks and sounds so ridiculous making his speech in Cuba, especially in the shadows of Brussels. He is being treated badly!

Donald Trump came out against President Obama after his two Republican rivals, suggesting that the speech to the Cuban people looked 'ridiculous' in light of today's news

Before the speech Obama called Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel 'to offer his condolences on behalf of the American people following today's horrific terrorist attacks in Brussels,' the White House said.

'The President reaffirmed the steadfast support of the United States for Belgium, and offered any assistance necessary in investigating these attacks and bringing those responsible to justice,' a statement read.

Obama further told Michel the U.S. 'stands together with the people of Belgium' and the European Union 'and once again pledged the full cooperation and support of the United States in our shared commitment to defeat the scourge of terrorism.'

The White House said this morning that U.S. officials have been in close contact with their Belgian counterparts on the explosions at the Brussels Airport and a subway station near the EU headquarters that began just before 8 am local time.

The city of Brussels says 15 people died in the Maelbeek metro explosion and 55 were injured. Another 11 were killed in two blasts at the airport. News reports indicate a total of 130 people were wounded in the attacks.

One of the attacks has been attributed to a suicide bomber. Belgium has shuttered its transportation systems and put the nation on high alert for terror in response.

The country will observe three days of national mourning, and flags will be flown at half-mast.



Obama's speech was to be the crescendo of of his 48-hour trip to Havana. A visit 18 months in the making, the U.S. president, with less than a year left in his term, his remarks focused on the renewed bonds between Cuba and the United States following more than 50 years of estrangement

The only suspect from last year's Paris attacks that left 130 dead still believed to be alive, Salah Abdeslam, was arrested in Belgium last week. The Belgian government was unable to say in the wake of today's bombings if the events were related.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security says it is 'closely monitoring' the situation in Brussels and said via Twitter it 'will not hesitate to adjust our security posture, as appropriate, to protect the American people.'

It also also the public to report any suspicious activity to local law enforcement but did not sent out a bulletin through the National Terror Advisory System.

Attorney General Loretta Lynch was also briefed on the attacks, the Justice Department told the Associated Press.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who is also on travel in Cuba, sent his condolences to the Belgian people over Twitter.

'We stand w/Belgium & Europe in the face of this tragedy. Attacks like these only deepen shared resolve to defeat terrorism around the world,' he said.

'The United States stands with people of Belgium. We are ready to support the investigation as appropriate,' said State.

The U.S. Embassy in Brussels posted an advisory recommending 'sheltering in place' and advised against taking public transportation.

It warned Americans in the country to 'take the appropriate steps to bolster your personal security.'



Castro entered before Obama to thunderous applause. The Cuban dictator waved and spread out his arms to the people above and below him for several minutes before Obama entered the theater



As Obama was due to begin speaking, famed Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso, the namesake of the 94-year-old theater, joined the box reserved for Cuban dignitaries

TAMPA COMES TO CUBA

The Tampa Bay Rays brought 34 players on their trip to Havana.

The Major League Baseball team arrive on Sunday and became the first team to come to Cuba since 1999.

That year the Baltimore Orioles played the Cuban National Team and won 3-2 after 11 innings.

One player who did not take the field today was born in Havana. Dayrom Varona played for the Cuban National baseball team for seven seasons before signing with the rays in May of 2015.

The estimated crowd at today's historic game between two teams: 55,000

In Havana, Obama addressed the Belgium terrorist attack then proceeded with his prepared remarks on reconciliation and rights.

'I have come here to bury the last remnant of the Cold War in the Americas,' Obama said fro mthe Gran Teatro de la Habana Alicia Alonso as he addressed the country's dictator, Raul Castro, and its citizens. 'I have come here to extend a hand of friendship to the Cuban people.'

Obama said, 'I believe in the Cuban people. This is not just a policy of normalizing relations with the Cuban government, the United States is normalizing relations with the Cuban people.'

The American president said it is time to lift a decades-old, congressionally-mandated U.S. embargo on travel and trade to Cuba.

'But even if we lifted the embargo tomorrow,' he said, 'Cubans would not realize their potential without change here in Cuba.'

And Obama declared, 'It should be easier to open a business here in Cuba.' And the internet should be available all across the island nation, he said.

'There's no limitation from the United States on the ability of Cuba to take these steps. It's up to you.'

Obama's speech was to be the crescendo of of his 48-hour trip to Havana.

A visit 18 months in the making, the U.S. president who has less than a year left in his term focused on the renewed bonds between Cuba and the United States following more than 50 years of estrangement.

He respectfully disagreed with Castro on human rights and called for the free exchange of ideas.

Speaking 'as a friend,' Obama said that healthcare, education and environmental protection are important aspects of government but so are fundamental freedoms that the United States government believes are universal.

Obama told the authoritarian government officials present that 'over time the youth will lose hope' if the government continues to restrict their activities.

'I know these issues are sensitive, especially coming from a United States president,' Obama said, carefully, as he acknowledged his country's past exploitation of Cuba. 'I know the history, but I refuse to be trapped by it.'



After his speech Obama this morning Obama met with Cuban dissidents in Havana, rounding out his time in the country. Yesterday he held talks with Castro



'All of the individuals around this table have shown extraordinary courage. They have spoken out on behalf of the issues that they care deeply about,' Obama said

Obama promised that the United States would not impose its political system on Cuba.

But having removed the shadow of history from our relationship, I must speak honestly about what I believe, about what we as Americans think, he said.

'So let me tell you what I believe. I can't force you to agree, but you should know what I think,' he told them.

Obama said every person should be 'equal under the law,' and have healthcare, education and a roof over their head - ideas that the Castro regime also backs - and it earned him a smattering of applause.

Yet he also said citizens should be free to speak their minds without fear, to organize and to criticize their government and to protest peacefully and hold free elections.

'Not everybody agrees with me on this. Not everybody agrees with the American people on this. But I believe those human rights are universal,' he said.

And while the president wasn't in a position to react to Republicans' comments directly, he did give a nod to Cruz during the speech.

He used Cruz's run for the White House, along with Florida Senator Marco Rubio's, another Republican politician of Cuban descent who has since dropped out of the White House race, as examples of America's democratic progress.

'You have two Cuban-Americans in the Republican Party running against the legacy of a black man who is president while arguing that they're the best person to beat the Democratic nominee who will either be a woman or a democratic socialist,' Obama said to laughter from the audience.

In a major concession to the United States, Obama's communist host country agreed to broadcast his speech locally so the Cuban people could hear from the first American president to visit their homeland in nearly 90 years.



Displaced travelers wait to be moved to safety after Brussels airport was evacuated following two explosions this morning



The city of Brussels says 15 people died in the Maelbeek metro explosion and 55 were injured. Another 11 were killed in two blasts at the airport. News reports indicate a total of 130 people were wounded in the attacks.

Obama has been in Cuba since Sunday with his family. They took a walking tour of Old Havana in a downpour on Sunday evening and the president and first lady attended a state dinner at the Palace of the Revolution.

Castro also hosted Obama at the Palace in the afternoon for talks. The Cuban president accused the United States of having a 'double standard' on human rights as it doesn't guarantee its citizens free higher education and healthcare like his country does.

Obama said he does not 'disagree' that the government has a responsibility to provide those services to its citizens while arguing that doesn't take away from the fact that Cuba needs to extend essential freedoms to its people.

This afternoon, after his speech, Obama met with political opponents of the government before his stop at the baseball game.

'All of the individuals around this table have shown extraordinary courage. They have spoken out on behalf of the issues that they care deeply about,' Obama told the group.

'There are people here who have been detained. Some in the past, some very recently. And as I have said consistently, part of our policy with respect to engagement with Cuba is not simply me meeting with President Castro or government-to-government relations. Much of this is a matter of us being able to hear directly from the Cuban people and making sure that they have a voice and making sure that their concerns and their ideas are helping to shape U.S. policy.'

Obama thanked them for attending the meeting and said, 'It requires oftentimes great courage to be active in civic life here in Cuba. This is an area where we continue to have deep differences with the Cuban government. My hope is that by listening and hearing from them that we can continue to refine our policy in such a way that ultimately the Cuban people are able to live freely and prosperously.'

Alongside Obama on the trip to Cuba were more than 40 Members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats.

They piled in to the lower level of the historic theater in Havana's Capitolio district this morning to hear Obama's historic speech. Senators Jeff Flake and Dick Durbin and Representatives Mark Sanford, Reid Ribble, Steve Cohen and Sheila Jackson Lee were among those who showed up for the president's remarks.

On the ground floor, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsak, White House Communications Director Jen Psaki and White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest sat in an elevated section to the left of the stage.

Cuban Vice President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who is being groomed to succeed Cuban President Raul Castro when he steps down in 2018, and other high ranking Cuban officials took their seats in the center of the first level balcony, as did Castro.

The Cuban leader entered before Obama to thunderous applause. Castro waved and spread out his arms to the people above and below him for several minutes in a large display. He made a similar show out of his exit afterward.

As Obama was due to begin speaking, famed Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso, the namesake of the 94-year-old theater, joined the box reserved for Cuban dignitaries and was likewise feted.





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