

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with British Prime Minister Blair (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister Blair

Notetakers: Doug Bayler, Bonnie Glick, Roger Merletti, James Smith and K. C. Brown

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: May 4, 1999, 1:29 - 1:48 p.m. EDT
Oval Office

The President: Hello, Tony. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Hi, Bill. How are you? (U)

The President: How did you do on your trip? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: It was good. It was extraordinary, really. They've got a lot of problems in the refugee camps, and I am trying to help them set up another in Macedonia. Things are pretty difficult there, because the refugees keep coming in. But no, it was good. And the thing with the Romanian parliament went well. It was good. We have also got good contacts with the Kosovar people now. I met some leading people there, and they've got quite a formidable network there, so we tapped into all that. How are you doing? How are you getting on? ~~187~~

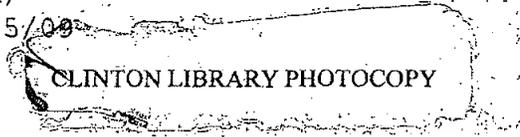
The President: Fine. I met yesterday with Chernomyrdin for a long time, then he met for an even longer time with Al Gore last night, and Sandy, and then they met again this morning. I think that Chernomyrdin's involvement is a chance to move Belgrade toward our position, but we need to get Moscow moving in that direction.

[redacted] I explained to him what was necessary for this to be a success. [redacted]

[redacted] I told him we need a timetable on withdrawal, as well as a commitment to an international security

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E.O. 13526, section 1.4(d)



E.O. 13526, section 1.4(d)

force. [redacted]

[redacted] We said he has to commit to get all his forces out, then we can talk about a presence symbolic of Serbian sovereignty. (S)

We had a long talk about the rationale for an international security force with NATO at its core and the rapid deployment capability, to keep the Serbs and Albanians from clashing. I do think he understands that if we are not in there, the peaceful Albanians won't go back and the guerrillas will, and we'll all be back where we are in six to eight months. I think he understands. [redacted]

The only other thing is, the G8 political directors yesterday was pretty good, except they talked about an international presence authorized by the UN. [redacted]

[redacted] But Madeleine is trying to have it redrafted to avoid any implication that we're undermining the common requirements of NATO. That is kind of where the diplomacy is. Sandy and the rest of the Foreign Policy Team will review this 30-day strategic campaign plan -- and I got your message the other day -- and we'll share it with you. And we're making the arrangements for the secure video teleconferencing between our teams. So, we're kind of rocking along here. But I'm concerned with Milosevic's peace initiative and his release of the POWs and the collateral damage, which is getting publicity. I'm worried about Allied unity. I feel good about continuing this for months, if necessary, but we've got to keep everybody else in harness. Milosevic is in more trouble than we think, or he wouldn't be going to all this trouble to stop the bombing. (S)

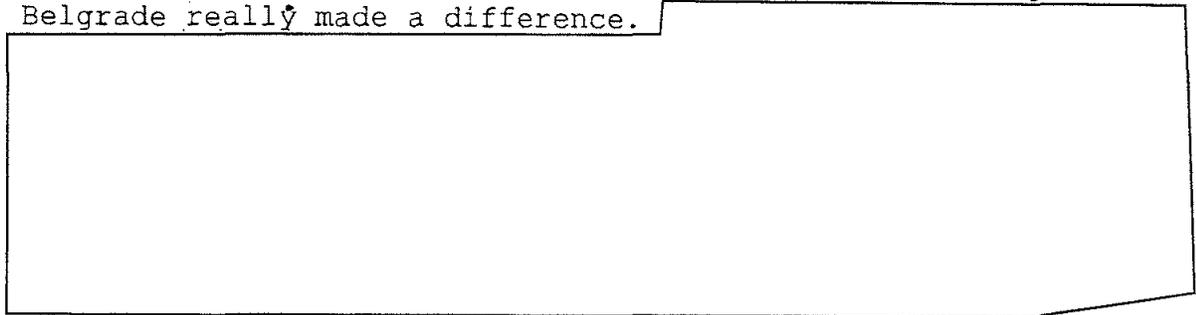
Prime Minister Blair: Yes. (S)

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The President: What do you think? (S)

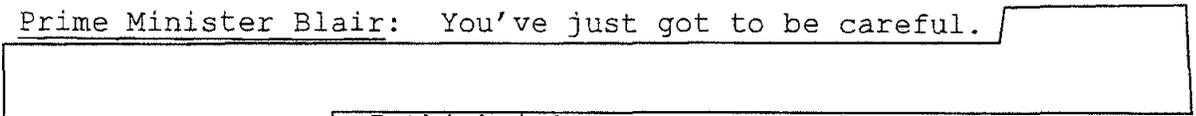
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Prime Minister Blair: I agree entirely. First, the military campaign is going a bit better, and I think it's beginning to do real damage. Taking out the power stations and blacking out Belgrade really made a difference.

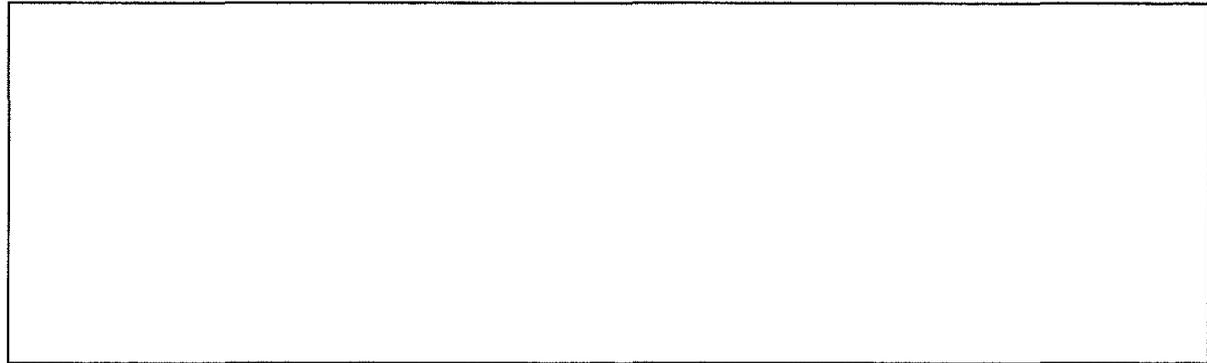


The President: They were too wimpy on the NATO thing. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: You've just got to be careful.

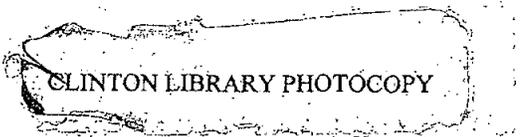
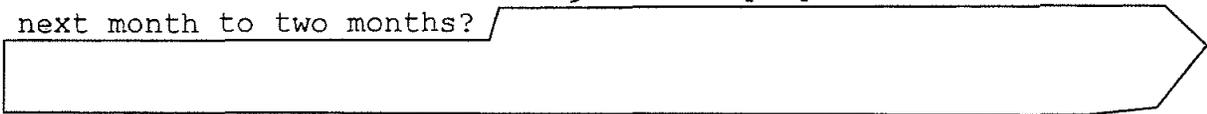


I think it's necessary to have constantly -- and I am trying to get it sorted at this end -- people who go up and talk to those refugees -- everyone has a horror story to tell. The most horrible things have been going on in there. I don't know whether public opinion in other countries is different -- ours is pretty solid -- but most people, if they think the campaign is beginning to work, will hold with it. (S)



The President: Also, there is going back, and there is going back. If they don't think it's strong and reliable and gives them autonomy, even if you and I were there, we would have a problem with the military elements. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: I agree. But, Bill, what is your frank assessment about how much damage we are prepared to do in the next month to two months?



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[Redacted]

The President: I agree with that. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: [Redacted]

[Redacted]

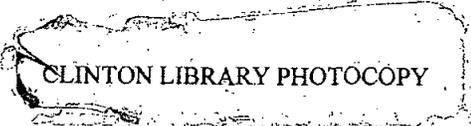
The President: I think we should stick where we are. The Europeans feel strongly about it. I don't feel strongly, I could go either way, but I have been publicly strong about leaving it in the country, because I don't want to be accused of having a campaign for a greater Albania and disrupt the front-line states. I think we ought to hang in there. The rest of the EU have been pretty adamant against independence and we ought to hang in there with them on that. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: True. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(b)(d)

The President: First of all, I strongly agree with that, and we hammered Chernomyrdin on that. Let me tell you how I look at this; I think it might also be helpful on the presentational aspect in Europe. I rarely talk about Kosovo now that I don't talk about Bosnia. It took us almost four years to get that together and get Dayton. We defeated ethnic cleansing, but we did not reverse it, because so many refugees were not going home. The Kosovars have to be able to go home. We not only have to defeat it, we have to reverse it. When I remind people of our work in Bosnia, I think it reinforces it. I've got a full-time person now doing nothing but Kosovo public affairs and getting these stories out. What I think we need to look at is, either we should have some more of those people -- should we put more people on it? It's delicate; it's in other countries where this problem exists. I don't want to mess on people's turf. Maybe talk to D'Alema and others about it. It would help if there were more of these people in the Italian press and other



countries that are getting a lot of pressure, in the Spanish and Portuguese press and others. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: Is your thinking that public opinion is going soft in those countries? (S)

The President: I think it's softer in those than ours and I don't know if they have a strategy for dealing with it.

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On the bombing campaign, one thing I hope will happen, now that we have hit and taken out most of the bridges, I think we may be able to focus more on power systems. And, looking at all hours at more military targets, that will reduce further horror stories about collateral damage, like the bus that got hit on the bridge. That is, we can do more, more freely and with fewer civilian problems. (S)

One thing I said here that sends a good message, that shows our resolve: I just comment on the weather, that the weather is better in June than in May and July is better than June. All you've got to do is say that. Psychologically, it's a very good thing to say, and I've said it a couple of times. (S)

One or two other things -- we're going to open another camp in Albania, like you are in Macedonia. If it appears we've been too reluctant here and we haven't done enough there, this thing could spin out of control on us and collapse our timetable. We don't want opponents to be able to say we didn't do enough there, so we've got to bring them here. We just have to work on it. I leave this afternoon for Belgium and Germany, so I'll check with you when I get back, or maybe while I'm there. I'll see Dehaene and Schroeder. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: Yes, the Macedonian situation with the refugees is very worrying. We're trying to get unblocked some European money. I talked to Michel Camdessus about the IMF position on Macedonia. I'm trying to get Macedonia to agree to a big transit camp to drain off the problem, and we're also taking some more ourselves. But I think we really have to watch Macedonia. (S)

The President: I do, too. I'm worried about the politics of Macedonia. The government could collapse and consensus could

disappear. The country is so small and so poor. These numbers could change that. ~~(S)~~

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(b)(d)

Prime Minister Blair: [redacted]

The President: Good for you. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: We've got to just manage them through this. [redacted]

[redacted] Kosovo is about the size of the county of Yorkshire in England, that is, it's not small, but it's not vast: it's not unimaginably large. [redacted]

[redacted]

The President: I agree, there is a chance of that. ~~(S)~~

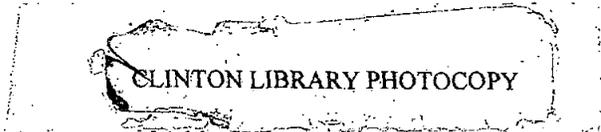
Prime Minister Blair: [redacted]

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The President: That's bullshit, and we know it. We want, obviously if we could, to get out where Russia plays a bigger role and a positive role. That will reinforce the position of the progressives within Russia and stabilize the situation and have a good lead into the 2000 elections. I also think it will help us keep the Alliance together. [redacted]

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[redacted] If we can achieve our objectives of having defeated and reversed ethnic cleansing and kept the Alliance together -- with the ties between Russia and the West stronger, not weaker. That might be too much to hope for. ~~(S)~~



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Prime Minister Blair: That would be a full hand. It would be a great thing to achieve. [redacted]

[redacted] That's where the people are on this. (S)

The President: I agree. (C)

Prime Minister Blair: Hillary is going to the camps, is she?

(C)

The President: Yes. (C)

Prime Minister Blair: Her presence and the pictures that will come out of that -- all the time, we've got to repersuade people, remind them, really. You know the public attention span. We had a terrible nail bomb thing going off in London, [redacted]

[redacted] but for four days, Kosovo ceased to be in people's minds. We have to persuade them about it. Littleton happened and obviously the whole of America starts to refocus. (C)

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The President: We didn't want Jesse to be able to bring out those soldiers, because people would feel we had to do a good turn. I mean, we got three guys going home, but a million can't go home. (C)

Prime Minister Blair: It's a constant, constant business. Her going to the camps will make a big difference. When you go and talk to them, then you realize what you have to do. (C)

The President: Alright, my friend. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Have a good time in Germany. Speak to you soon. (U)

The President: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --