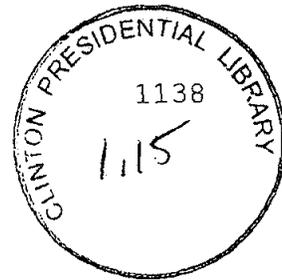


~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with British Prime Minister Blair

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Prime Minister Blair

Notetakers: K.C. Brown, Cindy Lawrence,  
Anthony Campanella, Joel Schrader and James  
Smith

DATE, TIME February 16, 1998, 5:14 - 5:41 p.m. EST  
AND PLACE: Camp David, Maryland

The President: Hello? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Hi, Bill. (U)

The President: Hey, Tony. I saw you on the Prime Minister's  
question time on C-SPAN yesterday. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: What a treat for you! (U)

The President: You got one hateful comment on Iraq from one of  
your back benchers, and one hit you on welfare reform. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: It doesn't much matter which row they  
come from, they're very often stingers. (U)

The President: It kind of reminds me of Paul Wellstone over  
here. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Well you know, it is from a very usual  
suspect. On Iraq, they are pretty good on the whole so it  
doesn't much matter. So you watched? What did you think of my  
opposite number there? (U)

The President: I didn't see him. I only saw the last 10  
minutes of you answering questions. (U)

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E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)  
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DECLASSIFICATION DATE: October 14, 2015

Prime Minister Blair: It is the sort of thing you would do really well, but frankly I could do without it every Wednesday. ~~(e)~~

The President: Well they just replayed it on C-SPAN last night. So, how are you doing? ~~(e)~~

Prime Minister Blair: I'm doing fine. We have two big problems to take care of at the moment: Northern Ireland and Iraq.

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

The President: Yeah. He was very good. I called him after you told me to and he was very good. ~~(e)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

The President: You're doing right. Absolutely right. I'll support you on this. Even our Irish guys have been great. Kennedy and Dodd say there is no choice and they promised to get in touch with Adams to say [gap]. ~~(e)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

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

The President: Let's hope they behave while they are out. That's the key, isn't it? ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

The President: I agree with that. On Iraq, I just talked to Sandy Berger. We have an agreed upon proposal to take to Kofi Annan about how to do this. The Russians keep saying...can you wait a second? ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair: Taking care of Buddy are you? (U)

The President: Yes, he's got to go outside. I have a door right here. I will let him out. (Pause) Sorry. Hillary is at another place working. We are not together. We're at Camp David. Here's the problem we all have to watch. Because of European public opinion and Arab public opinion, we don't want to look blood thirsty and have to go the last mile. Saddam needs a face saver. Kofi Annan would love to go in and save the day, which is fine with me. The problem from my point of view is, we can give them some sort of change in appearance here on how to deal with the presidential palaces but it can't undermine the integrity of the inspections and turn it from a professional process to fundamentally a political one. We are trying to arrive at language, whereby they open Presidential sites to UNSCOM but palaces would be treated differently. Palaces would be open to diplomats and political personages. I think we are agreed, at least that is what Sandy said. Apparently the actual palaces would be subject to UNSCOM and then Annan could name diplomats to go with them. But if you take UNSCOM out of the decision making and let Annan make all the decisions, the pressures on him would be enormous for a different standard. Annan is talking about taking Ekeus with him. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair: He's Swedish, right? (U)

The President: Yes. He was Butler's predecessor. He's now the ambassador to the United States as fate would have it. But that

might not be all bad, even though Ekeus is viewed as softer than Butler because he didn't put heat on the presidential sites. The truth is Ekeus was there at the beginning and he had so damn much work to do on other places that it was an acceptable compromise at the time. He wasn't really at the point because he was full up on other sites. It might work out all right. My worst nightmare is being isolated because we can't agree to something that looks perfectly all right on the surface. We simply have to insist on technically qualified inspectors. Look, I wouldn't know a chemical lab from a football field. We have a good opening position but the trouble is there is no place to go after the opening. You and I have to work closely together on this. I called King Hassan and had a long talk with him. He has been a good friend of the United States and of mine.

[Redacted]

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(d)

I told him to go to Saddam, call him and tell him that I have no interest in killing him or hunting him down. I'm not fooling with him. I just don't want his chemical and biological program going forward. By the way, the memo you put out on the web is phenomenally successful. But you must know that. Everybody wants it. (C)

Prime Minister Blair:

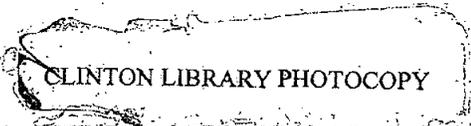
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E.O. 13526, section 1.4(b)(d)

The President: I agree. (C)

Prime Minister Blair: My view, very clearly indeed, is that the bottom line all the way through is that the inspectors have got to be able to do their job uninhibited. I don't care who accompanies the inspectors provided they are not interfering with the inspectors. That doesn't trouble me. (C)

The President: I agree. (U)



Prime Minister Blair: Where Saddam is at the moment is that he will let us in to the presidential sites, but only once, and Annan into the presidential palaces.

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

The President: It puts him in a terrible position. It looks good to him because he gets to be a peacemaker and the real issues are technical. Let me go back to the history a bit. The history is that UNSCOM originally was set up answerable to the Security Council and not to him, and he doesn't particularly like that. There was a working group and an oversight board. But there is a permanent staff at UNSCOM. The real problem is, for example, that if it were put under the Secretary General and out from under UNSCOM, all decisions would come to him: it would be up to him to determine which site to inspect, where and when. They would have to go back to him and he would decide when the files got closed, and which sites need future monitoring. What we tried to do is say, look we don't want to make those decisions either. We only care that independent, technical people are making the inspections.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(d)

Politically, the idea of letting these inspectors decide when to inspect and where to inspect and when to close files and which sites most likely require future monitoring is very important. You can dress it up in a lot of different ways. Our opening position, which Sandy said your guys signed off on, we can take to Kofi and the French and the Russians, but then what? It is hard to think of a fallback position if the French and Russians push us on this. I have enormous regard for Kofi Annan. I think he is a heck of a man,

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(d)

What I have found out dealing with this is that most people, even in our own country, have not thought much about the facts of chemical and biological weapons and how little space it takes to produce them and their capacity for delivering this stuff now. That is what basically concerns me. They say in the Middle East we are hypocrites. They say there are others who

have this, they say the Israelis, but no one else has shown a willingness to use them or share them with anyone else. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

Bill, just tell me this because I don't quite understand it, where is Saddam Hussein on this, where does he come down on this? My people have been unable to tell me. ~~(S)~~

The President: We don't know either. The only outstanding issue is who is in charge of the presidential site inspections. He even tried to get Newt Gingrich to bring a congressional delegation to the presidential sites. Newt was smart enough to know that one site has nearly 100 buildings that could be warehousing these chemicals, labs, and stuff. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: A huge complex. ~~(S)~~

The President: On biological agents, you hardly need a room the size of a photographer's darkroom to do it. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: That's right. Is he now saying the only outstanding issue is not the presidential sites but simply who authorizes inspections? ~~(S)~~

The President: It is my understanding...I've had so damn many conversations today, I am not sure I remember. I'm not sure I know the answer on monitoring and coming back again. My understanding is what he says is the outstanding issue is who gets to come into the presidential sites. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: Sites or palaces? ~~(S)~~

The President: Both, I think. He has a higher standard for palaces than sites, but he is basically saying he will let someone come in and look at both categories. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

The President: Yes and basically he thinks Kofi will be responsive to political pressures if he does that and will take us off line. Saddam thinks Butler is a stooge of America, but hell, I never even talk to Butler. He is a tough guy and I like what he is doing. I've reached the conclusion after eliminating

all possible alternatives that Saddam still has the makings of a chemical and biological program he doesn't want to give up. ~~(c)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

The President: Yes. I'm looking at some other things we can do and will call you back to talk about it. We'll need to stay together on this. If our two staffs are together and if he says he wants Kofi to make all of the calls, then we need to construct a good argument why that is not a good thing. ~~(c)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

The President: Awful. ~~(c)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

The President: I am going to talk to him tomorrow—or maybe tonight. If I get any clue, I'll let you know. Listen Tony, what's the most direct contact you have had with Iraq since 1991? For instance, has the British Foreign Minister talked to Tariq Aziz? ~~(c)~~

Prime Minister Blair: I honestly don't know. I'll have to check and get back to you. ~~(c)~~

The President: If I weren't constrained by the press, I would pick up the phone and call the son of a bitch. But that is such a heavy-laden decision in America. I can't do that and I don't think you can. ~~(c)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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

[Redacted]

The President: I agree. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

[Redacted]

The President: I can't tell you how critical it is. It costs us a hell of a lot of money to do all this moving around we are doing, not counting the political costs. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

[Redacted]

The President: Agree, but I will have a hard time selling anything here short of military action, but I can do that if I know it is real. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

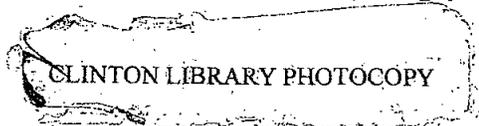
[Redacted]

The President: Can't allow that. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

[Redacted]

The President: I can't agree more. ~~(C)~~



Prime Minister Blair: If we stay in close contact tomorrow, when will we send him off to Baghdad? (e)

The President: I don't know. He wants to go Wednesday or Thursday. I will let you know. Let's keep in close touch on this. If you want to talk about this, I don't care if you get me up in the middle of the night if you want to. There is hardly anything more important. (e)

Prime Minister Blair: If I have more thoughts tomorrow, I'll just give you a call, shall I? (e)

The President: Yes, I'm not doing much more. (e)

Prime Minister Blair: Okay. Goodbye, Bill, all the best. (U)

The President: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --