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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with British Prime Minister Blair
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister Blair

Notetakers: Tony Campanella, Robert Ford,
Cindy Lawrence, Sean Tarver, Matthew Sibley

DATE, TIME AND PLACE: August 6, 1998, 4:46 p.m. - 5:06 p.m. EDT
Oval Office

Prime Minister Blair: Hi, Bill. (U)

The President: How are you doing? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: I'm fine, enjoying my holiday. (U)

The President: Are you in Tuscany? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Yes. (U)

The President: God I'm jealous. Have you been to Sienna? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: We're going there next week. (U)

The President: Oh, that is a great place. Isn't that a beautiful little town? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Yes, it is. (U)

The President: When I was there about ten years ago, I ate at a four star restaurant. I can't remember its name, but it had a sign of a fish, like a peace symbol, or something. I had a three-hour lunch there and they had to carry me out. (U)

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Reason: 1.5(d)

Declassify On: 8/07/08

DECLASSIFIED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE
INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL,
E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)

ISCAP APPEAL NO. 2013-090, document no. 29
DECLASSIFICATION DATE: October 14, 2015

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Prime Minister Blair: It's a good place to be carried out from. Are you on holiday? (U)

The President: The House is here for another month, one more day actually and so we are all working here. I am going to go on holiday in ten or eleven days. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Weren't you up with Steven Spielberg? (U)

The President: I spent the weekend up in Long Island with him. We talked about you. He and Tom Hanks came here last month and showed me their movie "Saving Private Ryan," about Normandy, before it was in the theater. It's an enormous film, really good. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: So you're back in your office. (U)

The President: Yes, I'm sitting here in my office. It's a beautiful day outside. I'm concerned about the Japanese situation, really worried. But that is not why I called. Gerhard Schroeder was here yesterday and we had a long talk. He's apparently still leading the polls by a solid 5-8 points. You think he is going to win don't you? (U)

Prime Minister Blair:

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The President: He just thinks it's time for a change? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Yes. You can never tell for sure.

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The President: Well, you know, it's the second time we've met; it was much more relaxed this time. The first time was in Germany and I was on a campaign swing for Kohl, so you can imagine, but we had a good talk

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Prime Minister Blair:

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The President: E.O. 13526, section 1.4(d) The longer you hang around this business, it becomes apparent that very few people make it this far by accident. They don't just give these jobs away. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: Yeah, I think that's true. (U)

The President: I called you to talk about Kosovo. It is getting worse. The headlines show that, but Milosevic is going for a military solution. Serb security forces are not only suppressing Albanian militants, but are also engaging in a systematic campaign against the civilian population. I think we are getting closer to a major humanitarian disaster. (S)

Milosevic has a sense of doing this under the threshold for NATO military response because he believes that NATO will respond only with a UN resolution, but Russia guarantees to block it. My view is, at a minimum, we need to make him think again. We need to finalize planning that we started, identify forces and think about some sort of ultimatum to get him to stop the offensive and restore autonomy for Kosovo. (S)

I believe we ought to make it clear that, while we would like to get UN authority, we can do it without it. I know you differ here, and Albright talked to Cook about asking the UN Security Council for the necessary authority. (S)

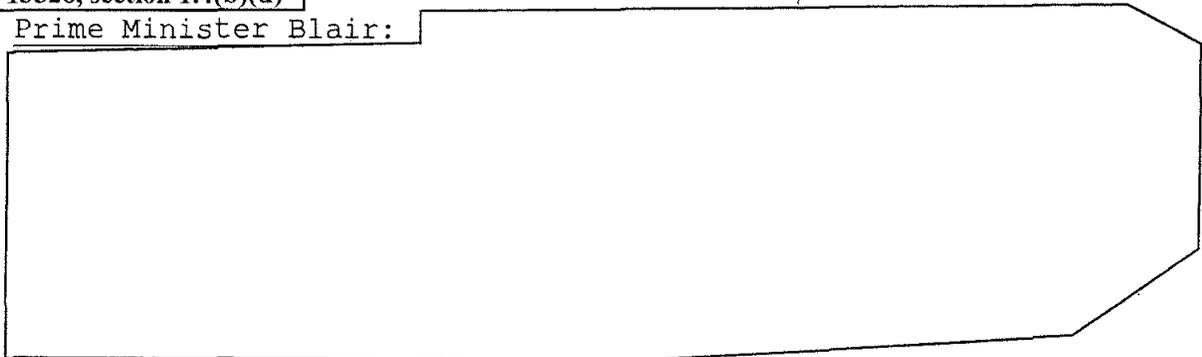
Let me tell you we are headed to a collision on Kosovo and what is going on in Russia. I talk to Bob Rubin about every day. I am still quite concerned about their economy and about the stability of the Yeltsin government. His health is deteriorating and a lot of noise is being made about controls on freedoms to get order in society. (S)

What I'm afraid of is, if things get worse in Kosovo, a lot of civilians will be dying and others turning into refugees. If we put Yeltsin into this box, he will be forced to abstain because it is so bad and would really hurt him at home politically with the economy the way it is, or he can keep with Primakov and veto it and run the risk of alienating the rest of the world at the very time he needs the most support from the international community. While it is better to have UN support, I am very worried about bringing this to a vote right now. (C)

Milosevic thinks he has a free hand. I talked to you and John Major and I understand you have different system to decide legal authority there. One thing I had our guys do -- there is a basis: there have been a number of cross-border incursions and threats to international observers, which could be a trigger for self-defense. Also, there is Milosevic's record of threat to international peace and security and then the humanitarian atrocities. I think we could construct a legal case, but if I can't convince you about it, we don't have a chance with Chirac and Kohl. (C)

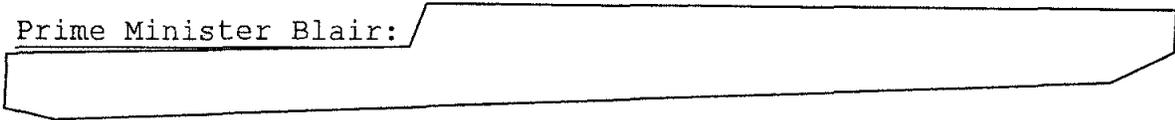
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Prime Minister Blair:



The President: Let me ask you this then. Shouldn't we try to get Chirac and Kohl to sign off on ultimatums we would give Milosevic? Word of planning would be somewhat helpful. Convince Chirac and Kohl that a UN resolution is not legally necessary. I know how Chirac is on this, but it will hurt Yeltsin if we put him in a position of having to sign off or block now. (C)

Prime Minister Blair:



The President: We can nose around it. His economic problems are horrible and his internal political problems are awful. I'm very worried about this. Yeltsin was going to go on vacation in



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August, but then he had to come early, even though his health needs the rest. I am going over there and meet with him for a few days in September, but I'm very worried about this. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

[Redacted]

The President: I don't know, we have to work on that. We have to work through another option, apart from a Security Council resolution. They would have to raise holy hell, but, in the end, if we handle it in the right way, it would be the best of three bad alternatives. Better than forcing them to veto it. Better than forcing him to eat it. My problem is I am afraid what happens if we let it deteriorate more. There is a rumor, news story, of 500 people in a mass grave. It may not be true, but the other side is trying to force us in, too. We have all those problems you and I discussed before. People want us to be their air force to get independence. But I think the near term problem is we went through all this with the Bosnian civil war and I don't want to replay it with another Muslim population.

~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

[Redacted]

The President: Yes, that is exactly what's doing it and Primakov gave it to him. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

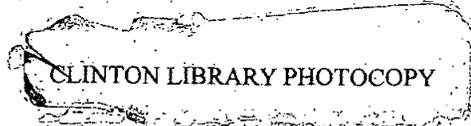
[Redacted]

The President: I'm going to call Helmut first and nail him down. Kinkel's been aware of where the French are. Given the impact on their election, but might help him electorally. But basically it is a domestic election, so my guess is no effect.

~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

[Redacted]



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The President: We will nose around some more. They may decide to shape this and go along with us, but right now I don't see it. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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The President: Maybe they will want to try to go along with us on a resolution, but I doubt it. Let me mention a couple of other things. The Security Council had a discussion about Iraq today with Kofi. I think we have to play a measured game here. I think this is a reaction by Iraq to the fact the IAEA says they couldn't recommend ending the inspection regime and going to monitoring on the nuclear issue. ~~(C)~~

This was a serious report that we had nothing to do with, on very specific issues. It could be they simply overacted, but my instinct right now is to not come out with a bellicose reaction at this point. We ought to be relaxed and work with the Secretary General and focus on inspection requirements. We will just say that we will postpone sanctions reviews until Iraq achieves compliance. ~~(C)~~

Butler was very upfront. I think the Iraqis may have been showing a little leg about it. About every six months they try to provoke us with their rhetoric, but they may come back. With all these other problems in the world we should give Kofi a chance to work through this. If not, then we can say to hell with them and we leave the sanctions on indefinitely. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair: What about these reviews? ~~(C)~~

The President: I think they overread the IAEA refusal to recommend ending the inspection regime and going to monitoring on nuclear. The IAEA said they had just a few more things to do here. It would have been reviewed in August for monitoring in October but, for whatever reason, they reacted the way they did. Now is not the time for us to overact. They probably hope we will do that and spend a lot of money moving the fleet back in, but I don't want to do that right now. We'll monitor it closely, but, on the other hand, don't let them think they can wish this away. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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The President: I think we might, but hopefully we'll have our course on Kosovo by then. Two other things.

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I talked to you about Lockerbie. I have the decision memo in front of me and I will work through it as quickly as I can and get back to you on that. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair:

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~~(C)~~

The President:

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Prime Minister Blair: Yes. ~~(C)~~

The President: You have more riding on it than I do. The Scottish regime has enough restrictions as it is. Go back to your holiday, tell Cheri I said hi, have a wonderful time, and drink a glass of wine for me tonight. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair: All the best to you. (U)

The President: Thanks. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: We are thinking of you. (U)

The President: We're doing fine. Thank you. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Thanks Bill. (U)

-- End of Conversation --