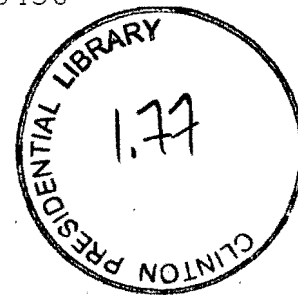


THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom

NOTE TAKERS: Roger Merletti, Bonnie Glick and Frank Jarosinski

DATE, TIME December 18, 1998 -- 9:42 a.m. - 9:51 a.m. EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hello, Tony? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Hello. (U)

The President: How are you? So far so good. Everything is going as well as can be expected. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Good hearing from you, Bill. I think there are two issues we need to think through. How much more do we need to do with Ramadan coming up? Secondly, then, what is the strategy for the day after? Those are the two things that concern me, but so far it's been successful. Your assessments are showing we did well. What is your consensus? (S)

The President: So far it looks good. Our initial assessment is really good, but it's too early to make any judgments. I'm looking at the reports and they look good, and I think politically we're getting good support in the region, and the world, except the Russians are mad because they weren't consulted first. But if we had they would have told the Iraqis. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: That's right. On the other hand, it would have been difficult to say that to them. (S)

The President: Then I think we'll face some questions in the Council of how to go forward. We ought to try to go back to

~~TOP SECRET~~

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something to devise a system that could lead to immediate and meaningful actions by Iraq, like documents being given back over. Then we can look to broaden oil-for-food to make it look like we have no problem with the Iraqi people. This is what I think we should do in terms of the UNSC. I had a pretty good talk with Chirac yesterday. What's your domestic situation?

~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: Pretty good. Parliament is fine. I think the most important thing for people is they understand that we have reduced his military capability significantly. One of the things is that you are not able to kill him personally. We don't want to harm the civilians, so you target these particular buildings. What I think is important is to show that his command, control, and delivery system is so damaged that his ability to mount offensive attacks and cause trouble in the region is greatly reduced. If we were in a position to announce that we put back his military capability by several years, I think people would be supportive. The public is ambivalent. They don't want lots of people killed but they would like to see that his military is damaged. They want to know after 4 days of bombing something has been accomplished. We've got to be able to say to people here's what hitting these targets means and he's a significantly reduced threat. See what I mean? ~~(S)~~

The President: We've got to have our military and intelligence folks as a guide. It has to be fact driven. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: Butler's report detailed all the weapons that the UNSCOM people have uncovered and included a detailed, blow-by-blow account of hassle and obstruction. We need a constant diet of fact for the public of what these systems could have done and what destroying them gives us. That's what keeps opinion with us, and it allows us to say, "Look, this thing has had an effect. His ability to pose a danger has been reduced." You don't want to get back into the UNSCOM business, or we'll be doing this every three months. I think we need to tie up the military side and then have a political strategy. We need to get into a situation where there are demands made of him. I think from my conversation with Chirac this morning, if we get the right basis of a diplomatic initiative together, France would be able to say to Iraq, "You've got to get these things together or you'll get hit again at the end of Ramadan." I think it forces Saddam into a policy of containment that is considerable without landing us into where we were. ~~(S)~~

The President: Yes, I agree with that. We need to work together on it tomorrow or in the next couple of days. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: Yes. (U)

The President: "Our intelligence is pretty clear that Usama bin Laden may be ordering some sort of attack in the next couple of days and it's important that we work together on this. I hope you'll get a review on this. ~~(TS)~~

Prime Minister Blair: Our people will cooperate in any way. ~~(S)~~

The President: I know your guys are skittish about giving us something. I think your lawyers are worried. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: I will work on that. (U)

The President: Ok. One more thing - Northern Ireland. You did well. ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair: Yes, I think we will get somewhere on the decommissioning stuff. ~~(C)~~

The President: Well, I'll be in touch. If we can do anything else to help you on this, let me know. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Thank you. (U)

The President: Ok. Thank you. (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Good-bye. (U)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --