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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: Joel Schrader, Jenny McGee,
Miles Murphy and Lawrence Butler

DATE, TIME May 8, 1999, 3:26 - 3:46 p.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Air Force One

The President: Tony, can you hear me? (U)

Prime Minister Blair: Yes, you're on Air Force One are you?
(U)

The President: Yes. This was a "great" day wasn't it? ~~(U)~~

Prime Minister Blair: I am afraid these things happen. ~~(U)~~

The President: That's what I said too. ~~(U)~~

Prime Minister Blair: It is bad, but we have just got to steady
our nerves on it, really. ~~(U)~~

The President: Yes, that's what I did. I just went out and
made a statement saying that we hit several important command
and control targets, and that the damage to the Chinese Embassy
and the deaths and injuries were completely inadvertent. I
extended deep regrets to the people and the leaders of China but
said it is important to remember why the strikes were necessary
and how to put an end to them. ~~(U)~~

They asked about the Chinese and Russian reactions and whether
it could derail the diplomatic efforts we're making toward a
peace deal. I said I hoped not because that was the quickest
way to get it over with and I restated the conditions and
pointed out that we'd done over 10,000 sorties and because TV is

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Reason: 1.5 (a, b, d)

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INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL,
E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)

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in Belgrade, they could cite every time there's unintended consequences, but our pilots have literally risked their lives to avoid hitting innocent civilians in Serbia -- shot at from rooftops and in the middle of civilian areas, they have not responded. They have done everything they could to dodge the weapons and go on. We have to remember what caused these strikes and what could end them, but our conditions have to be met. No one would like to stop them more than me. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: That is absolutely right. The TV cameras are not in Kosovo but if they were, they would be seeing people killed every day by Serbs, by Milosevic. (S)

The President: Yes. If we had one TV picture of the 15 men being roped together and burned alive, they would be demanding that we bomb the hell out of them, people would be wondering why we haven't leveled the place, but our people need to be telling that to the media all the time. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: What I did today was to get the NATO conference to go through all the atrocities in the last two weeks in Kosovo. We did a press conference on the same theme. I understand when something like this happens, people get very nervous about it, but day after day after day, things are happening without any cameras and no one reports a bit of it. Milosevic can take the cameras to wherever he likes and point to these things. But in Kosovo this is a daily happening, as a result of deliberate policy, not as an accident. (S)

The President: I am with you. I just wanted to check in to make sure we're on the same page. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: No doubt, Bill. I'm sure you've said the right thing.

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

The President: I am with you. (S)

Prime Minister Blair:

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

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

The President: That is right. They asked, "What about the Russians and Chinese saying this was barbaric?" I said it was not barbaric but a tragedy. We ought to take that word and turn it on them. ~~(S)~~

Prime Minister Blair: You are absolutely right.

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

The President: Let me ask a couple of questions. In Germany, I did what you suggested. I did an hour interview with the press people from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Macedonia and Albania. Did it get press coverage? ~~(C)~~

Prime Minister Blair: Absolutely, it got a lot of coverage.

~~(C)~~

The President: I think we all need to do more of that, reaching into other countries. One other thing, when I was there, I did a lot of spade work with our people working on humanitarian stuff about Macedonia, with the view as quickly as possible of turning Macedonia into a way-station and you know telling them we would move all of the refugees through there. We would need to get Turkey to agree to take about 100,000, get safe passage for them to Turkey. I believe we have enough money to do this. If my supplemental passes the Senate this coming week, and I think it will, what we would like to do is go to Turkey, with whatever help we get from Europe, and build these camps. We could build camps for 20,000 which are quite comfortable with public space, schools. They are tents, but nice tents. Also, if worse comes to worse, they can be winterized with wooden floors and heaters. They would be quite adequate. Obviously, it would be better to get them to Turkey anyway because the climate is better. ~~(S)~~

Then we could build a couple of camps in Macedonia; it would be easier to secure a throughway if we could get them direct cash to the government in a hurry -- which you could do quicker than me through the EU -- then tell them we want to make Macedonia a throughway, not permanent stops for refugees. We will be able to get the numbers manageable and stabilize this thing in the next few weeks. If they know where we were going, they'd do a lot better to hold and fend off domestic opponents. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: I totally agree. That is an excellent idea and I will do everything to facilitate it. I spoke to Santer about getting European money released. The critical priority is to get money as quickly as possible that will buy their goodwill for forward transit to Turkey. We need to talk to Greece as well, but that is an excellent idea and exactly what we need to be doing. (S)

The President: When does Prodi take over? (S)

Prime Minister Blair: It's not quite clear, not for a couple of months. I should think we need to get Santer to work on that.

[REDACTED] E.O. 13526, section 1.4(b)(d) [REDACTED] If necessary, we can get the money ourselves and then get it back from the EU. They really need money quickly. I will speak to Santer in the next couple of days. (S)

The President: If I get my money this week, I will ship some too. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: If I get the money there, we'll have the goodwill to facilitate all of this. I totally agree this is the right thing to do if Turkey is willing to do it. (S)

The President: We can put these camps up in a hurry for 20,000 people for about \$20 million by the time you clear the land, work sewage, water and all that. That is \$1,000 a person, that's not all that much. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: When you consider weapons and everything, it is a pretty sensible investment. (S)

The President: I will work on this and get your guys in touch with our guys. We have to get money to Macedonia and Turkey to take 100,000, build transit camps in Macedonia that are physically separate and secure a commitment to build camps in Turkey and then get safe passage. We also need to get money to

Albania. They've taken a lot in homes now, but we need better camps now. (S)

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

Prime Minister Blair: Right. We need to watch in Albania, particularly because a lot of refugees are living with families and are not getting any support. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] If necessary we can do it ourselves with Germany and France and get it back from the EU. (S)

The President: The EU Parliament doesn't have to vote on it. Does it? (S)

Prime Minister Blair: [REDACTED]

The President: What if you got a letter from every EU member to Santer saying release it tomorrow? Would it help? (S)

Prime Minister Blair: Yes, it would help. In the end, we should probably just give them the money ourselves and then get it back from the EU. (S)

The President: Do we need to call anyone else about this incident with China to buck them up? (S)

Prime Minister Blair: I was going to speak to D'Alema anyway. (S)

The President: Okay, I will call Jacques. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: I still think that in the end, the public understands that in war these things happen. We have this operation in NATO and SHAPE working better now. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The media is just bored with pictures of refugees. We need actual pictures of what is happening in Kosovo. (S)

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

The President: Okay, I will work on that. I don't have any great ideas but I'll work on it. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: There are ways we could do it. We are looking at, but I think people, all the time, need to be reminded of the basic principles. When I went to Macedonia and saw those people, any doubt immediately leaves you. What has happened to these people is just dreadful. We need to make all the right diplomatic moves, but just carry on. (S)

The President: I'm with you. Where are we on Ireland? (S)

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

Prime Minister Blair: We got a little bit of a breakthrough last week, because Sein Fein came up with far more positive language. [REDACTED] I have a totally different proposition which is based on words rather than product and now I have to say to them you may not get product, but you may get better words. (S)

Sinn Fein may say, "you've got better words, we want an answer tomorrow." For six months, we've been trying to get better words. You can't rush. We actually had a good series of meetings at Downing on Thursday and there is some possibility there. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] But we're not quite yet at an absolute critical moment. When it is at a critical moment, if you are willing to do so, to help. It may take in the end, a high profile intervention in this. (S)

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

The President: Yes. I will do whatever you want me to do. (S)

Prime Minister Blair: I know Bill. You've been fantastic on this. I will try to bring this to a boil next week and will keep in touch. (S)

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The President: I'll keep working on all of this and if I need to call you again I will. (C)

Prime Minister Blair: Okay Bill. (U)

The President: Thank you. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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