

Exchange Mail

DATE-TIME	12/15/98 7:57:16 PM	DECLASSIFIED PER E.O. 13526 2013-0804-M 05/26/16 KDE
FROM	Smith, James A.	
CLASSIFICATION	SECRET	
CLASSIFICATIONREASON	1.5(d)	
DATECLASSIFIEDON	12/15/1998	
DECLASSIFYON	12/15/2008	
SUBJECT	DRAFT Memcon - POTUS-PM Blair, 15 December SECRET	
TO	Cosgriff, Kevin J.	
CARBON_COPY		
TEXT_BODY		

TRANSLATED_ATTACHMENT Blair121598.doc
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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: THE PRESIDENT
BRITISH PRIME MINISTER BLAIR

LOCATION: AIR FORCE ONE

NOTE TAKERS: JAMES SMITH, ROGER MERLETTI,
MARIANNA PAPADIMITRIOU, DOUG BAYLEY,
SEAN TARVER

DATE/TIME: 15 DECEMBER 1998/1538-1541 EST

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Hello.

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, Tony?

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Hi, Bill.

THE PRESIDENT: Tony, have you seen the report?

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Yes, I have.

CLINTON LIBRARY PHOTOCOPY

THE PRESIDENT: And what do you think?

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: I think it's pretty clear, really. He's saying he can't do his job properly, you know, and I think we are going to have to strike. The only basis on which we can leave it - I don't know on what basis, frankly. Is your instinct not to do it now?

THE PRESIDENT: No, my instinct is that we probably should do it. I just think, you know, if we don't, it'll be five weeks away and then we probably would not get anything.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Yeah. I think the problem is -- my concern is the proximity of Ramadan and whether there is some problem as a result of that. I think in terms of force itself, I think the conclusion of the report is pretty clear. So, you know, we could leave it, but there will always be reasons for not doing it. Now is as good a time as any to do it.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, that's our instinct. I may want to talk to you early in the morning; you're up and around before me. My instinct is we gotta go. You know, I will get a world of shit over here, that I jiggered the timing, but I didn't. This is a decision we made on November 15th when we didn't do it.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: That's right. It's important to point out the fact that Butler was always going to issue a report at this time, so you know we were always going to be faced with a decision when he reported. You could, if you wanted to, build up evidence over Ramadan and then do it after that if there is any reason. Well, that is fair enough, but what I am saying is on the basis of the report you would be totally justified, and we, too.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I think you know if it weren't for this political vote in the House, I would be doing it easily. I would have a harder time

explaining why
I did not do it. Our guys are afraid it will slip away. I just wanted to
see
where you were. My instinct is that I think we should go forward. We
have
another couple of trigger points yet, but it's not too many hours away.
I would
say get a good night's sleep and I will talk to you early tomorrow.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Okay, Bill, let's do that.

THE PRESIDENT: Good night.

PRIME MINISTER BLAIR: Goodbye.

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