

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Romano Prodi of Italy May 6, 1998

President Clinton. Good afternoon. Please be seated. I have very much enjoyed having this opportunity to welcome the Prime Minister to Washington again. For more than 50 years Italy has been among our closest allies. Today we charted a course to strengthen our cooperation for the next 50 years.

We discussed our common efforts to build an undivided Europe at peace. We welcomed the Senate's recent vote on NATO enlargement and hope the Italian Parliament will also act favorably soon.

I thanked the Prime Minister for Italy's contributions in Bosnia and more recently in Albania, where Italian troops played a critical role in bringing an end to violent unrest. We also discussed our deep concern over the situation in Kosovo. The absence of genuine dialog there is fueling a conflict that could threaten regional stability. We're working urgently to establish unconditional talks that can avert escalating violence. But we must and will be ready to substantially turn up the pressure on Belgrade should it keep blocking the search for a political solution or revert to indiscriminate force.

I congratulated Prime Minister Prodi on the historic step Italy and other EU members took this past weekend on the European Monetary Union. I admire the way he has led Italy on a path of fiscal responsibility and genuine recovery. I'm confident that a strong Europe with open markets and healthy growth is good for America and good for the world.

We discussed new ideas to reduce the remaining barriers to trade and boost prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic. I'm pleased that we've agreed to begin the next round of talks on an open skies agreement, with the goal of concluding an agreement as soon as possible to bring greater choice and better service to our tourist and business travelers alike.

We're also looking forward to the G-8 Summit in Birmingham, where we'll take the next steps in preparing our nations for both the opportunities and the challenges of the future.

As to the challenges, from terrorism to drug trafficking, from international crime to environmental damage, threats that disregard national

borders demand international responses. Italy has been at the forefront of international efforts to fight crime. It has led in getting the G-8 to join forces in combating crime rings that smuggle illegal immigrants for sweatshop labor and for prostitution. This will build on the work America and Italy have begun together to fight the horrendous international crime of trafficking in women and children. Victims are lured with promises of jobs, opportunity, and hope, too often to find themselves instead in conditions of virtual slavery and actual physical danger.

In Birmingham we'll announce a new joint action plan to crack down on crime rings that smuggle immigrants, bring the perpetrators to justice, and protect the lives of innocent victims. This is not only about public safety, it is about basic human rights.

The partnership between our two nations is far-reaching. Our extensive collaboration in science, technology, and space exploration makes that clear. But the friendship is anchored in basic values at the core of both our societies: liberty, tolerance, love of family, devotion to community and country.

In closing, let me note that this is the 50th year of the Fulbright program between the United States and Italy, a program that has given generations of our young people the chance to live with and learn from one another. As we celebrate all the ties that bind us, we are looking ahead to the next 50 years, to an even stronger and more vibrant partnership which will shape a brighter future for all our people.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Prodi. Thank you. Very few comments to add to your speech.

I enjoyed so much to exchange our views in what I can call the magic moment of American-Italian relations. We have no point of disagreement. We have—our goal is only to build up a stronger relation and to bring them into the future.

In a moment that is very favorable that we did in the last weekend, we concluded one of the most important achievements, never seen in world history, to put 11 different currencies

together. And this will bring, I'm sure—this is my firm opinion—a new period of strong growth, very similar to the period that you did in your country, President. And it's very rare to see 8 years of continuous growth without inflation, with decreasing unemployment, as you did in your country, and to think that the euro may give us the same possibility for Europe. But Europe needs a renewed set of relations between Europe and the United States because this new event needs a new organization of our relations.

So I am very favorable to the proposal of transatlantic—a new set of economic and political relations. To this new set, we shall start to work immediately and with a realistic program and with a long-range view.

Second, we analyzed our bilateral relations, and this was the easiest chapter because there are no fundamental problems of dissent. But we also analyzed the hot point of the regional difficulties in the Balkan and Mediterranean area. In this, we have not only to act together but to have the continuous fine-tuning of our action. Kosovo is a source of worry for us. But Bosnia is still there, with all the problems and with these long-term solutions that, briefly, you have indicated that we are executing together.

But another point that we analyzed is the Mediterranean area, not only the Middle East—that is, of course, the object of our attention—but the pivotal problem of Turkey, the Greece-Turkish relation, Cyprus, and all of that—in the end, the enlargement of the European Union to the east and the consequence that this enlargement will bring in world politics.

This has been the agenda. And I'm so happy that we could discuss this not only in deed but with a strong, strong common commitment.

President Clinton. Thank you.

Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press], would you like to go first? We will alternate. I will call on an American journalist; the Prime Minister will call on Italian journalists. We'll just go back and forth.

Court Decision on Executive Privilege

Q. Mr. President, while the matter remains under seal, lawyers familiar with the case say that a Federal judge has denied your assertion of executive privilege in the Monica Lewinsky investigation. Do you intend to appeal that decision? And what's the difference between your

case and Richard Nixon's effort to stop the Watergate investigation?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, as you pointed out, the matter is still under seal. And as I've said in all these cases, at least one party in every case should follow the judge's orders, preferably—it's better if both do. So I can't comment on it. But let me remind you, I have asked for the release of the briefs and the pleadings in the case so that you and the American people can evaluate my position and any differences that exist between that which we have asserted in previous assertions of executive privilege. I would also remind you that the facts are quite different in this case.

Q. How so, sir?

Europe-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, would you consider the four European countries part of the G-7 as the more natural counterpart to the U.S., even more so now that there is a European Central Bank—not a central political authority in Europe? And do you subscribe to the work of President Prodi for the launching of a new transatlantic negotiation for a new marketplace?

And for Mr. Prodi, the French President is resisting the idea of transatlantic negotiations. Will you take a leadership with that against his position?

President Clinton. Well, the answer to your second question to me, would I support the launching of new negotiations to broaden our partnership, the answer to that is yes.

I think the proper answer to your first question is that from the day I took office, I have supported increasing unity within Europe and any specific step that the Europeans might decide for themselves to take, including a common currency. And what I want is a strong, united Europe that is our partner in dealing with the challenges and in seizing the opportunities of the 21st century world. That's what I look forward to. I think that is one of the legacies I would like to leave when I leave office in 2001. So for me, this is a positive step, these things which are happening now.

Q. I'm sorry, on the G-7 though, Mr. President, I mean, there is no counterpart to the European Central Bank—

President Clinton. Well, on the G-7 we all—in the G-7, we operate by consensus, so it's not like—we do everything together anyway.

Prime Minister Prodi. On my side, it's true that the French oppose it at the present time, the negotiation. But they didn't oppose the general idea. They opposed the specific proposal, and we decided to go on. We decided that we must make a very concrete, step-by-step approach. We have a lot of things that we can deal with unanimity now, but we have decided that this is one of the most important issues, not because of Far East crisis but because of the future of humanity. We think that the relations between Europe and the United States are still the foundation of the world peace. This is what we told, and so we will have to accompany them with increasing economic and political relations.

From the point of view of the transatlantic negotiation, we shall find concrete steps to start immediately for the negotiation. I can't take the initiative alone, because I am part of the European Union, but I am happy to start this type of pressure in order to convince all my colleagues to have a quick starting of this negotiation.

I want to express also my gratitude—I already have done in another interview—to President Clinton, to the American people, for the attitude they had during this process of monetary union. It's completely infrequent to be so clear, so transparent, not to put any obstacle, any suspicion in this—such a big change—it will be a change also for American policy. This is enormous change in the world economy. And this is, I think, the real meaning of what is a long-term friendship.

President Clinton. Lori [Lori Santos, United Press International].

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Sir, Israel's Prime Minister says he won't accept U.S. dictates in the Middle East peace process. What will you do if Israel rebuffs the U.S. proposal for a 13 percent withdrawal?

President Clinton. Well, I don't believe Israel or any other country should accept the dictates of the United States in a peace process. We cannot and we should not attempt to impose a peace on parties because they have to live with the consequences. What we have tried to do for a good year now is to listen to both parties, look at the situation on the ground, understand their respective concerns, and come forward with a set of ideas that we believe are most likely to get the parties to final status talks.

Keep in mind, they're supposed to finish these talks a year from this month, by their own agreement. Now, the ideas we put forth, as Secretary Albright said, were accepted in principle by Mr. Arafat. The Prime Minister said he was unable to do so, but he asked that he be permitted to go home—not permitted but that he be given time to go home and talk through with his Cabinet what might be an acceptable position, bring it back to us, and see if we could bring the parties together. That is what we are trying to do.

And keep in mind what we are trying to do. We are not talking about here a final settlement of all the outstanding issues between Israel and the Palestinians. We are talking about a settlement of sufficient number of issues that will permit them to get into the final status talks within the framework embodied by the agreement signed here in September of '93.

And the first person to advocate a more rapid movement to the final status was Prime Minister Netanyahu. I have tried to find a way actually to do what he suggested. He said, "The facts have changed. The Government is different. Things are different than they used to be. Let's go on and go to final status talks and try to resolve all this at once in a package." I thought it made a lot of sense at the time, and I have done my best for a year now to find the formula that would unlock the differences between them to get them into those final status talks. That's all I'm trying to do. There's no way in the world I could impose an agreement on them or dictate their security to them, even if I wished to do that, which I don't, because when the agreement is over, whether it's in the Middle East or Ireland or Bosnia or anyplace else, they have to live with the consequences.

Q. Will you go Monday, if it's not—[inaudible]?

President Clinton. Well, I expect to do—first of all, we are working—let's wait and see what, if anything, Prime Minister Netanyahu comes back with. Let's wait and see, and then see where we are. I hope very much—I would like very much if we could get the parties together so they could get into the final status talks. I do believe if they could get over this hurdle, if they could demonstrate good faith to one another, and then they got in the final status talks and everything were on the table, all the outstanding pieces, then I think that give-and-take

would be more likely to produce a final agreement.

So I'm very anxious to get them over this hill, so they can get into discussing the final arrangements. That's one thing I thought Prime Minister Netanyahu was right about, but I hope that both sides will help us get there. That's what we're trying to do.

Italy's Role in the United Nations

Q. President Clinton, you have been praising Italy as a faithful ally of the United States. Now Italy is also a major contributor of the United Nations. Do you think that your Government would support a reform of the U.N. Security Council which would give Italy a bigger role?

President Clinton. Well, we would support an expansion of the Security Council with the membership still to be determined. I don't think we can dictate it all. And we would support other efforts to give Italy a larger role, generally. First of all, let me say that as long as I have been President, for 5 years, the Italians have been as forthcoming as any country in being willing to make contributions to solving our common problems, whether it's in Bosnia or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia or now in Albania, where you took the initiative. And all we had to do, if you will, was to sit on the sidelines and cheer you on and try to be supportive.

Then, in the government of Prime Minister Prodi, we see a remarkable strength and cohesion and singularity of purpose, which has led to a marked improvement in your economic situation, early entry into the European Monetary Union. So I think the prospects for greater roles of leadership for Italy in many, many different forums are quite good. And I would support that. I think that Italy can justifiably say, "We should be a part of more and more of these decisionmaking bodies because we're making a bigger contribution." And in general, I think that's a positive thing.

Randy [Randy Mikkelsen, Reuters], you have a question?

U.S. Forces in the Persian Gulf

Q. Mr. President, there are reports today that the United States has cut the level—cut its aircraft carriers in the Gulf from two to one. What does that say about the level of threat in the region and the state of U.S. relations with Iraq?

And what can you say about reports that morale among U.S. troops there is at an all-time low?

President Clinton. Well, we have sent—the *Eisenhower* is sailing on schedule, as you probably know. And there's been some speculation about the timetable there, but I can tell you that I have not—Secretary Cohen has not recommended a final decision to me on this, and I have certainly not made one, and we've done our best to keep all of our options open.

The main thing I want to reaffirm is our determination to see the United Nations resolutions complied with and the inspection regime continue until it finishes its work. But no final decision has been made on that yet.

Q. And the morale issue, sir?

President Clinton. I can't really comment on that. I think you should talk to Secretary Cohen about that to see if he agrees with the assessment of it.

But one of the things that we recognize is that as we ask more and more and more of our men and women in uniform and they have longer deployments, we're going to have to work harder to make sure they get adequate support and their families back home get adequate support in order to keep morale high. I can't comment on the specific assertion because I'm not sure that it's so. But I am sure that our men and women in uniform, because we have so many responsibilities in so many parts of the globe, are called upon to do quite a lot and be away from home base for extended periods of time. And that puts a bigger responsibility on those of us who make these decisions, beginning with me, to do everything we can to give them the support they need and to make sure their families are taken care of.

U.S. Aircraft Incident in the Italian Alps

Q. Prime Minister Prodi, are you satisfied with the way the American authorities are dealing with the accident in the Italian Alps?

Prime Minister Prodi. Since the first moment when I called personally President Clinton, I found a very warm and prompt response to the problem. And I have to thank Ambassador Foglietta, who is here, who—he understood immediately how big was our sorrow, how deep was our regret. And the following evolution of the problem—they've always kept with a daily communication between the American Government and the Italian authorities. So I am waiting for the future development of the case, but I've

seen a deep involvement of the American political authorities.

President Clinton. I'd like to just make a brief comment about that. This was a horrible human tragedy. I can't even describe how I felt the first moment I heard about it, and—

Prime Minister Prodi. I do remember your call.

President Clinton. My regret is profound. Since that time, we have done everything we could both to cooperate with the Italian Government in the investigation into the case and to handle the disposition of the charges, as well as the treatment of the families of the victims, in accordance with the agreements signed between our two countries and to be as faithful to it as we could. And we will continue to do that.

I regret terribly what happened. And I cannot bring back the people who perished, but I will do my best to make sure that we behave in a completely honorable way, in a way that is completely consistent with the commitments we have made.

Stewart [Stewart Powell, Hearst Newspapers].

Cuba

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask you about Cuba for a moment.

President Clinton. Go ahead, I'm sorry.

Q. Your former Atlantic Commander, Jack Sheehan, came back from a visit to Cuba—he spent a week there, spent 8 hours with Fidel Castro and returned with—seeing opportunities for some rapprochement with Castro. I wonder if you're now willing to undertake some steps to ease the embargo or take additional steps to provide humanitarian relief in Cuba, and secondly, whether you're willing to undertake any steps to dismantle or ease the defense perimeter around Guantanamo Bay as a symbolic gesture toward Cuba at this moment?

President Clinton. Well, in the aftermath of the Pope's visit to Cuba, I did take some steps which I hope would send the right signal to the Cuban people—[inaudible]—in the hopes that it would help to support a move toward a civil society there. As you know, what further steps I could take are clearly circumscribed by the passage of the Helms-Burton Act. And furthermore, there have been mixed signals coming out of the actions of the Government in Cuba since then about whether they really wish to have a rapprochement that is more than govern-

ment to government and maybe trade to trade but also includes what our real concern is.

Our real concern is for the people of Cuba: Can we move the society toward freedom and human rights and a democratic system? These things don't have to be done overnight, but then again, they have to be done. There has to be some clear signal.

I understand the desire of the Cuban Government to keep its health care system, to keep its commitment to universal literacy to even its poorest citizens. That's a commendable and laudable thing. But I do not accept, nor can I ever accept, some of the antidemocratic and, frankly, clearly anti-human-rights policies of the Government. So we have to have some basis for doing more, especially given the constrictions of the law. Now, nothing would make me happier than to see some basis for doing more. I think all Americans would like to be reconciled with Cuba because of our ties of blood in this country and because of its proximity to us.

Capital Punishment

Q. Mr. President, you have spoken of the common values that unify our two countries, but there is one big issue that is opening an ever-widening gap between the two countries, and it has a lot to do with values, and it is the issue of the death penalty. And I was wondering, because this issue is seen with tremendous sensitivity in our country, if you could give us a sense of what your personal feelings are on this issue. And I hope Mr. Prodi might want to add his own comment.

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I do not believe that our different views on the death penalty should drive a wedge between our two countries, since that is a matter of essentially domestic, not foreign, policy and since in our country criminal defendants are given extensive procedural protections to avoid abuse as well as extensive rights of appeal.

I support capital punishment under certain circumstances. The law in our country is that for most cases involving murder, it is up to the States of our Republic to decide whether to have the death penalty. Some States do have the death penalty, and some States don't. It is a question of State law. There are a few crimes on the Federal books for which capital punishment can occur. But it's, by and large, most of the cases—the great majority of the cases are matters of local law, State law in our

country. And unless the Supreme Court were to reach a contrary decision and invalidate all death penalty laws, which it has explicitly refused to do, under our Constitution it would remain that way.

Prime Minister Prodi. From my point of view, I belong to a country which the death penalty has been abolished since a long time. It is in the roots of our tradition, of our values, of our society not to have it, and I stick on it.

President Clinton. Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, CNN].

Hubbell and McDougal Indictments

Q. Thank you, Mr. President—Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. President. Mr. President, since your last news conference, Ken Starr has indicted Webster Hubbell and Susan McDougal once again. And at the same time Congressman Dan Burton has released all these prison tapes involving Webster Hubbell and his wife and his lawyer and others. I wonder how you would assess all of this in light of the problems that you and your supporters are facing as this investigation into the Monica Lewinsky matter continues to escalate and perhaps reach some sort of conclusion sooner rather than later. Obviously your thoughts on all of this would be interesting to all of us. [Laughter]

President Clinton. Well, I think it was clearly a violation of privacy of Mr. and Mrs. Hubbell for the tapes to be released. And I think virtually everyone in America now recognizes it was wrong to release selected portions of the tapes, apparently to create a false impression of what the whole record indicated.

On the other matters you mentioned, the parties have spoken for themselves about what they think was behind it, and I can't really add anything to that.

Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, did you discuss the eventuality to send troops to Kosovo?

And to Mr. Prodi, is our country available to send troops to Kosovo?

President Clinton. I suppose the literally accurate answer to your question is we did not discuss that. But I have made it clear, and I believe we have made it clear between us, that, at least from my point of view, no option should be ruled out. We do not want another Bosnia in Kosovo. Too many people have died there already in indiscriminate violence. And of course, it happened very quickly. Neither, however, do

we want to get in the position where Italy has to send troops to every one of its neighboring countries and the United States has to send troops every time there's a dispute in that part of the world.

But I don't think we can rule out any option, because we don't want another Bosnia to happen, and we don't want—both in terms of the human loss of life or in terms of the regional instability. So I wouldn't rule out any option. But I think the most important thing is to keep the carrots and the sticks we have on the table and for a genuine dialog to occur.

Look, this is not—we have a saying in America sometimes—this is not rocket science. You've got a part of Serbia which is 90 percent Albanian, and they want some kind of autonomy and to have their legitimate concerns addressed. The Serbs don't want to give up a big part of their country which they believe and is legally part of their country. So they obviously need to sit down and talk through how the legitimate aspirations of the Kosovo Albanians can somehow be manifest in giving them some measure of self-government and decisionmaking authority over their lives within the framework of Serbia. There are 50 different ways this could be worked out in a humane, legitimate way. They do not have to kill each other to get this done, and they should not do that.

Prime Minister Prodi. I completely agree, but probably the question was not put in the right way. The problem is not to send troops in the general way, but there is the problem of how to protect the border in order to avoid in the short term the problem of smuggling weapons from one side to the other one. Even this option is dangerous because, in some ways, whenever you send troops, you send hostages, potential hostages, to the situation.

But as President Clinton told, we didn't rule out any solution. We are just making an effort to arrive to a peaceful solution. And also we had a long conversation concerning the possibility of helping the civilian recovery of Kosovo in this difficult situation, in which Kosovo has been abandoned in some ways. But of course, you can't rule out anything now.

President Clinton. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President's 158th news conference began at 1:50 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. During the news conference, the following persons were referred to: President

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Jacques Chirac of France; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; Thomas M. Foglietta, U.S. Ambassador to Italy; Gen. John J. Sheehan, USMC (Ret.), former commander in

chief, U.S. Atlantic Command; President Fidel Castro of Cuba; and former Associate Attorney General Webster L. Hubbell, and his wife, Suzanna, Deputy Director of External Affairs, Department of the Interior.

Joint Statement: The United States and the Republic of Italy: A New Partnership for a New Century

May 6, 1998

The United States and Italy have built a strong, genuine and enduring relationship during more than fifty years of close cooperation. Today President Clinton and Prime Minister Prodi assessed the new opportunities and challenges before both countries as this century comes to a close and a new millennium begins. They agreed on a common agenda to create an even closer partnership in the 21st century.

Transatlantic solidarity remains the indispensable cornerstone of the U.S.-Italian relationship and the basis for a Europe secure, prosperous and free. As Allies in NATO, participants in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and partners in the U.S.-EU New Transatlantic Agenda, the United States and Italy reaffirm their confidence in a new Europe and a strong, enduring transatlantic community. Our shared commitment to build a better future does not stop at Europe's borders, but extends to the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

As we move into the next century, the world will require increased international cooperation to meet common challenges, foster economic development and uphold democracy and human rights. In pursuing these goals, we reaffirm our strong support for the international institutions we worked to create more than fifty years ago. The United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions must continue to play a key and reinforced role in tomorrow's increasingly interdependent world.

Joint leadership in political and economic areas is essential as we strive to enhance European security and address new challenges around the globe. We look forward to a historic NATO Summit in Washington in April 1999, which will celebrate NATO's fifty years as the most successful alliance in history, welcome

three new members and prepare NATO for another fifty years of close transatlantic cooperation. We recognize that maintaining our security will require vigorous efforts by the range of Euro-Atlantic institutions to promote stability in Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean.

An even stronger and more effective Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is a central part of our vision for a more democratic and stable Euro-Atlantic region. We will work closely within the OSCE to focus on ways to spread the security, democracy, freedom and prosperity enjoyed by Western Europe over the past fifty years to other areas of Europe in the coming years.

Europe is pursuing accelerated political and economic integration through the European Union, which the United States has consistently supported. Both the United States and Italy recognize the historic step just taken by Italy and other EU Members to create an Economic and Monetary Union. Italy and Europe can benefit from a successful EMU underpinned by sound macroeconomic and structural policies, which would also be in the best interests of the United States. Indeed, a successful EMU has the potential to benefit the entire transatlantic economic relationship, as will our shared determination to reduce barriers to trade and to work together in the WTO to promote multilateral trade liberalization. The EU, which demonstrates so clearly the vital link between democracy and prosperity, will become an even more dynamic entity and partner for the United States as it welcomes new members and projects increasing stability throughout the Continent.

We will strengthen our overall cooperation through these institutions and other mechanisms to enhance European security. We will consult closely on the most effective ways to prevent