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Remarks Welcoming Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom

February 5, 1998

Thank you very much. Mr. Prime Minister, Mrs. Blair, members of the British delegation, welcome to America and to the White House. We apologize for the rain, but the Sun is shining in our hearts today because you are here. Today we celebrate the unbreakable bond between our two nations. It led the fight for freedom in the 20th century, and we set our sights now on renewing our alliance for a new century with all its promise and challenge.

At the heart of all we have done and all we will do together in the future is the unshakable conviction that our people have the inalienable right to pursue their dreams in peace, security, and freedom, and the sure knowledge that we can always depend upon each other to stand for that conviction together.

These are good times for the people of the United States and Great Britain. Freedom and democracy are taking hold around the world. In both our nations, a vibrant new economy is growing, rooted in new ideas, new technologies, new scientific breakthroughs, changing the way we live and learn, the way we work and compete, the way to relate to each other and the rest of the world.

In both our nations we have moved to build a government for the 21st century going beyond the dogmas of the past, focused on giving our people the tools to make the most of their own lives: a world-class education, the ability to move from welfare to work, a system of retirement security as strong for our children as it has been for our parents. In this new era, a new Britain and a new America, true to our oldest and most cherished values, can blaze new paths for the world.

Our 21st century alliance, by example and exertion, must protect the promise we are working so hard to secure. We will stand together for peace, as in Bosnia where our troops are working side by side to secure the Dayton accords. We will search the new solutions to stubborn strife, as in Northern Ireland, where the Prime Minister's courageous leadership and the determined efforts of the Irish Government are clearing a pathway to peace. We will stand against those who defy the will of the international community, bringing terrorists to justice in the case of Pan Am 103, maintaining stability in the Persian Gulf, where the British aircraft carrier *Invincible* is patrolling the waters alongside our U.S. Fleet, something that our men and women in uniform find great strength in, Mr. Prime Minister.

Our 21st century alliance embraces the idea of a Europe strong, prosperous, democratic, and undivided for the first time in history. So as Britain maintains its friendship with America, it is playing a leading role in shaping that new Europe: a healthy European Union, reaching out to new members; a strong NATO taking in new allies; practical partnerships with new democracies, including Russia and Ukraine, all important steps on the road to a more peaceful 21st century.

Mr. Prime Minister, the earliest English settlers who came to this country had the vision to see over the horizon. Like them, you have shown the foresight, the imagination, the daring to envision a new world and the determination to make that vision real. You have invigorated Britain, issued an exhilarating challenge for a proud people whose best days, clearly, still lie ahead.

T.S. Eliot, who has been variously claimed by both our countries, once wrote in the "Four Quartets," "The end is where we start from." At the end of a century of friendship, let us pledge to connect our storied past to the unwritten promise of our future. Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to the United States.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:09 a.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to the Prime Minister's wife, Cherie.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Blair and an Exchange With Reporters

February 5, 1998

The President. Sorry about the rain, guys. Let me just say, to start out, the reason we're kind of hanging around like this is we're about to go into the back dining room there so we can have a working lunch. And I'm

looking forward to this. We're going to have 2 good days, and we have a lot to discuss, not only Iraq, which everyone knows about, and Ireland but also the plans that we're making together, or at least in common, for our countries domestically and a lot of other issues that will affect both the people of Great Britain and the people of the United States. This is going to be a good meeting.

Independent Counsel's Investigation

Q. Mr. President, would you like to use this occasion to tell the American people what kind of relationship, if any, you had with Monica Lewinsky?

The President. Well, I've already said that the charges are false. But there is an ongoing investigation, and I think it's important that I go back and do the work for the American people that I was hired to do. I think that's what I have to do now.

Q. Are you going to assert executive privilege, sir?

The President. First, let me make it clear, for 4 years we've been cooperating exhaustively. And that's a hypothetical question, as far as I know. Should it arise, I will await a recommendation from the White House Counsel about the institutional responsibilities of the Presidency. And then, when I get it, then I'll make a decision.

Situation in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, there are a lot of Republican leaders and armchair generals who want you to change your policy toward Iraq and to take out Saddam. What is your feeling about that now?

The President. Well, I would make two—first of all—and I believe that the Prime Minister has also made this point—what is the cause of the present standoff? It is the suspension of the inspections by the United Nations inspectors and the restrictions on where they can inspect. Our interest is in preventing Saddam Hussein from building biological, chemical, nuclear weapons capability, the missiles to deliver such weapons. That is our interest. That's where the authority from the United Nations resolutions rests. That's the first thing.

Now, the second thing, as a practical matter we can pursue that interest with available options. Would the Iraqi people be better off if there were a change in leadership? I certainly think they would be. But that is not what the United Nations has authorized us to do; that is not what our immediate interest is about.

Now, we intend to be very firm on this, and I hope that we will have the world community with us. But what I really hope most of all is that there will be a diplomatic resolution of this, that Saddam Hussein will move away from his present position.

Q. But if you were to order military strikes, I mean, they would not be directed specifically at him?

The President. Well, first of all, there's an Executive order that's been in place for over 20 years on that subject.

Q. Does that apply?

The President. It does. But let's not discuss hypothetically what targets might be there or what we might do. I think it is important that he understand that we are very resolute on the issue of the inspection system. And it's not an American issue. You might want to ask the Prime Minister about that.

Q. Are you saying there's an order to take him out?

The President. No, no, no. No, no, I was referring to the Executive order, I believe first issued by President Ford, saying that it is against—that political killing, or assassination if you will, is against American foreign policy interests, that we don't do that. But we are very firm in our resolve. And I was very heartened by the Prime Minister's statement in the White House there about his position.

Q. Are you concerned that Mr. Yeltsin's comments about the possibility of leading towards a war—I know he backed off that a little bit, but what are your views on that?

The President. Well, I doubt that that would happen. We had a good talk the other day, President Yeltsin and I did. And I know that he very much hopes that a violent confrontation can be avoided. So do I. But in the end, it is up to Saddam Hussein. It is not up to the rest of us. I haven't talked to a single soul who hopes there will be some sort of violent encounter here, not a soul.

Prime Minister Blair. That's absolutely right.

Q. There are a lot of diplomatic efforts by the French and the Russians in Baghdad right now. Do you think they can bear fruit and avoid a military strike?

Prime Minister Blair. Everyone hopes that a diplomatic solution is available and can work. We all want that. But I think all of our experience with Saddam Hussein teaches us that diplomacy has very little chance of working unless it is clear to him that if diplomacy does not work, then the threat and the reality of force is there.

And the reason why it's important for us to take the position we are, is because over these past few years the U.N. weapons inspectors have uncovered literally thousands of chemical weapons; they've discovered biological warfare capability; they've discovered the beginnings of nuclear capability. It is for that very reason that the inspectors are there. It's for that very reason that the U.N. has made it quite clear that the U.N. inspectors have got to go in, so that we destroy that capability to develop weapons of mass destruction.

And I think that the entire international community, whatever varying degrees of enthusiasm for using the military option, understands that Saddam Hussein has to be stopped and that it is absolutely essential in the long-term interests of world peace that we make sure that he can't develop these weapons of mass destruction, because he is a man who's used those weapons before. He will use them again if he's give the opportunity to do so.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, aside from your role on Iraq, do you have a specific role in the Middle East peace process now?

Prime Minister Blair. Well, we obviously want to do everything we can, both as Great Britain and also as the President of the European Union at the moment, to back up the efforts that are being made here to try and secure a peace settlement in the Middle East. I myself have both seen and corresponded regularly with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat, and we continue the whole time to see what we can do to move that process forward, because there is a process underway. It is a very difficult situation at the moment. But as we know from our own attempts to secure peace in Northern Ireland, if we don't try and push these processes forward, they very quickly slip back. So I think there is a great deal of urgency there, and we will obviously work with our American colleagues to see what we can do to help.

The President. We're going to talk about this quite a bit. I view the Prime Minister's interest in the Middle East in a very positive light. As you know, we are working—Secretary Albright has been working very hard to jumpstart these negotiations again, to get them through this next phase so we can go on to final status talks. And we're going to need all the help we can. And we need all the help we can in the world to rebuild the economic fabric, as well as—of the Palestinian areas—as well as a climate of confidence and trust between all the parties. So I'm hopeful we can make some headway, and we're going to talk about it.

Independent Counsel's Investigation

Q. Are you prepared to answer any questions on the Monica matter tomorrow?

The President. I can only say—I've said the charges aren't true. There's an investigation going on. And while that's going on, it's my duty to keep doing the job I was hired to do by the American people, and that's my position.

Q. Don't tell them anything we didn't find out.

The President. Don't worry, I give you my word on that. I'll protect you.

Q. Thank you.

[*At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.*]

Situation in Iraq

Q. Does the fact that you're drawing up a battle plan mean that action against Iraq is now well nigh inevitable?

The President. No, no. That's up to Saddam Hussein. I do not want a conflict. I don't believe the Prime Minister wants a conflict. I want a diplomatic resolution of this. But we know from the sheer volume and diversity of material that has been found by the

UNSCOM inspectors since 1991 that Saddam Hussein had been aggressively pursuing a weapons of mass destruction program, including biological and chemical weapons, as well as the capability to deliver them by missile.

Now, what we want is for the U.N. inspectors to be able to do their job, to finish looking at all the sites, and then for monitors to be able to check on a regular basis to make sure there's no rebuilding. It's as simple as that. And if that assurance can be given in reasonable form, that anyone with sound judgment would accept, then nothing is inevitable here. No one wants this. This is about trying to protect our children and their world in the next century from chemical and biological weapons.

Q. Could I ask you both if you believe you can undertake military action despite the vociferous opposition from the Russians and clear opposition from the French and the Chinese as well, because it does seem that the two of you are somewhat against the grain of international opinion at the moment?

Prime Minister Blair. Well, I certainly wouldn't accept that. I believe that there is a very clear understanding in the international community that the U.N. security resolutions about the weapons inspections have to be upheld. Saddam Hussein, after all, agreed at the end of the Gulf war that he was going to allow the inspectors in in order to destroy all the weapons of mass destruction. They have been, as the President has just been saying, for the last 6 years carrying out their work. They have uncovered vast arsenals of weapons and the possibility of making many more. So it's absolutely clear, I think, to everybody in the international community, that Saddam Hussein has to be stopped, that the capability to develop these weapons of mass destruction has to be destroyed and taken out. And of course we want to do that by diplomatic means. We all do. No one wants a conflict. But the bottom line has got to be that he is prevented from developing those weapons of mass destruction and brought back into line with the agreements that he entered into and is now in breach of.

The President. I think, to be fair, the Russians and the French have made strenuous efforts to get Saddam Hussein to comply, to do something reasonable and consistent with the United Nations resolutions. I think they share many of our frustrations. They started from a different place. But we are working very hard. I've had good conversations with President Yeltsin, with President Chirac, and with others around the world. We will continue to work to try to build the strongest consensus we can.

But let me say that the best solution is to have the weapons inspection program reinserted, have all the sites open, and have some system for regular monitoring. If you look at the astonishing results they have achieved—far more weapons, bigger volume of chemical and biological stocks found and destroyed by these UNSCOM inspectors than was destroyed during the Gulf war—that is the answer. And it's up to Saddam Hussein. No one wants a battle over this.

But if you think about the potential even a small amount of biological agent—the damage, the number of people that can be killed—if you think about the potential of it and you think about the evidence we have that the Prime Minister mentioned earlier, that he had actually used chemical weapons on the Iranians and on the Kurds, his own people, the United Nations resolution is right, and it needs to be seen through.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, we've had a few rocky weeks in the Ulster peace process. How optimistic are you that a solution can be found?

The President. Well, the thing I found heartening is that with these various actions, violent actions, that the main bedrock parties—nobody has quit yet. There was a time when with this level of provocation the whole thing would have just come apart. And I think that's a tribute to the trust that the parties have in the Prime Minister. I think it's a tribute to the efforts of the Irish Government. And frankly I think it reflects an understanding by the people who are around the edges of this process that the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland want a peaceful resolution to this.

So for those reasons, even though I don't minimize for a moment the enormous hurdles that lie ahead, I'm fairly optimistic. I

think the fact that the blows that have been rained on this process by people who thought that if they could go out and kill a few people it would come apart—the fact that it hasn't is a tribute to the Prime Minister, to the Irish Government, to the people of Northern Ireland working for peace, and to the public in Northern Ireland. That's where they are. They want this worked out in a peaceful way.

Public Responsibilities

Q. Can we take it from what you said on TV this morning that it matters what politicians get up to in their private lives? And could I ask you also whether you have any reason to be jealous of President Clinton in any way?

The President. I don't think so. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Blair. What I was saying, so that I can repeat it for you very, very clearly, is that what is important is that we focus on the issues, which are the issues that we were elected to focus upon by our people. And from my own point of view, what I was elected to do was to sort out the school system that wasn't working under the last Conservative government, sort out our welfare state, make sure that we produced a stable, well-managed economic situation, rebuild our relations with Europe, put through the program of constitutional change, developed the possibility of peace in Northern Ireland, tackled the issues of crime in our streets, dealt with the international problems we face like Iraq in a proper, mature, and sensitive way. And that's precisely what we're doing, and that is what people would expect us to do. That is what, actually, our people want us to do, the people in Britain and the people in America.

Independent Counsel's Investigation

Q. Might I just ask, sir, what is your next move with regard to the Kenneth Starr investigation? Is there going to come a time soon when you will again be able to address the American people and perhaps give them a fuller explanation of your relationship with this young woman?

The President. Let me just say what I just said to the American press. I have already denied the legal charges, strongly, and I do so again. But there is an ongoing investigation. Under those circumstances, the right thing for me to do is to go back and do the job the American people hired me to do, and that's what I am doing. And I feel very comfortable with it. I feel good about where we are. I'm gratified by the response of the American people to the State of the Union and the plans I have for the coming year. And I'm going back to work.

United Kingdom-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President—[*inaudible*]—important your relationship with the Prime Minister is?

The President. I think the relationship of the United States and Great Britain is very important. It is changing; it is maturing. Britain is a clear leader in forging a new Europe, and a lot of interesting questions have to be worked out.

Q. But your personal—[*inaudible*]—chemistry?

The President. Let me finish. But I think if you look at the success of the British economy, if you look at the commitment that Britain has to the kind of internal reforms under Prime Minister Blair's leadership that we have tried to undertake here, if you look at the things we have in common, and if you look at the—[*inaudible*]—I think that it's not surprising that there would be very good personal chemistry between us. I think it's good for the people of your country, good for the people of our country, that we recognize that we share values, we share interests, and now we have a common vision of the future. And I personally feel very good about it. I think it will help us in a whole variety of ways.

But I have to say I've never accepted the idea that there was ever an end to the so-called special relationship between the United States and Britain. I don't believe that. But I think the fact that he and I have—are sort of on the same wavelength about the present and the future is something that may well redound to the benefit of both our people. I certainly hope it does, and it's something I enjoy very much.

Q. What is this 21st century alliance you talked about?

The President. Well, I talked about it in there. I mean, if you look at what we did

in Bosnia, I think that's a pretty good indication of the kind of things we'll have to do in the 21st century. Basically, what are the great questions of the 21st century? Will this explosion of markets and the movement of people around the world and the movement of ideas and the movement of technology, will it lead to greater prosperity for all or just for a few? Will it lead to a stronger sense of global community, or will it lead to more chaos?

If you know what the answer is that you want, then it makes it easier to decide that you ought to do what we did together in Bosnia, just for example.

No one can chart the future with exactitude, but I think the fact that we have the same orientation and the same—where trying to build the same future for our children increases the chances that together we'll be able to make a difference.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:01 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; President Boris Yeltsin of Russia; and President Jacques Chirac of France. The President also referred to Executive Order 11905, United States Foreign Intelligence Activities, signed by President Gerald Ford on February 18, 1976, which was superseded by Executive Order 12036, signed by President Jimmy Carter on January 24, 1978. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, Maryland

February 5, 1998

The President. Thank you. Let's give the band a hand. Are they good or what? [*Applause*] Thank you. Thank you very much.

First of all. I want to thank Elizabeth for her introduction, and Nikole for her introduction of Prime Minister Blair. Weren't you proud of your fellow students today? [*Applause*] They were great.

Governor, Senator, Members of Congress, Nancy, all the faculty and administration staff here at Montgomery Blair High School, we are very glad to be here. I want to paraphrase something President Kennedy said when he and his wife went to Paris: I now will go down in history as the man who accompanied Tony Blair to Montgomery Blair High School.

I want all of you to know that in years to come you will be very glad you were here for many reasons. But one of them is that Hillary and I are convinced, based on our friendship with Prime Minister Blair and his wonderful wife, Cherie, that they are going to make truly historic contributions to the world of the 21st century, and you are a part of that because you invited him here today, and I thank you for that.

I want to just say a couple of things very briefly about this whole issue of education. You know that we just were in your computer room and we were E-mailing students in England. And I was thinking about how the first time I went to England, 30 years ago this year, I went on a ship and it took me 6 days. Now, people can look at me over a computer, and we can communicate in a matter of seconds.

One of the biggest questions we have to face as a people, and one of the great questions they're facing in Great Britain, is whether or not this new technology-driven, information-driven, scientifically exploding world all of you will live in will work to the benefit of all of our people without regard to their racial, their ethnic, their religious background, their income, or will it just benefit even more people who are privileged by birth to have a high income and then can get a good education? I am committed to making sure that every single American child is a part of the 21st century revolution.

And I just want to say that the first thing that I tried to do was to open the doors of college to everyone who would work for it. And I believe I can look at every one of you today and say, because of the HOPE scholarship, a $1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college, because of the lifetime learning credit, because of more Pell grants and more work study positions and more national service positions and better student loans with better repayment terms—if you will work for it, you can go to college in American today. You can do it, and that's important.

And now what we have to do in our country——

Audience member. We love you!

The President. Thank you.