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Three assessment panels were formed in January to look at Iraqi disarmament, the humanitarian situation in Iraq, and Iraq's obligations regarding Kuwait. The panels presented their reports to the Security Council in April. The United States supported an examination of the current situation and exploration of ways to improve humanitarian conditions, particularly with regard to vulnerable groups such as children under age five and pregnant and nursing women. The United States has expressed its support for raising the cap on Iraqi oil exports under the oil-for-food program in order to meet humanitarian needs, and for certain other proposals made by the humanitarian assessment panel.

Resolution 1210 maintains a separate oil-for-food program for northern Iraq, administered directly by the United Nations in consultation with the local population. This program, which the United States strongly supports, receives 13 to 15 percent of the funds generated under the oil-for-food program. The separate northern program was established because of the Baghdad regime's proven disregard for the humanitarian needs of the Kurdish, Assyrian, Yezedi and Turkoman minorities of northern Iraq, and its readiness to apply the most brutal forms of repression against them. In northern Iraq areas where Baghdad does not exercise control, the oil-for-food program has been able to operate relatively effectively, as documented by the humanitarian assessment panel. The Kurdish factions have set aside their differences to work together so that Resolution 1210 is implemented as efficiently as possible.

Humanitarian programs such as oil-for-food have steadily improved the life of the average Iraqi living under sanctions (who, for example, now receives a ration basket providing over 2,000 calories per day, a significant improvement in nutrition since the program began) while denying Saddam Hussein control over oil revenues. We will continue to work with the U.N. Secretariat, the Security Council, and others in the international community to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people are met while denying any political or economic benefits to the Baghdad regime.

Northern Iraq: Kurdish Reconciliation

Since their ground-breaking meeting with Secretary Albright in September 1998, Massoud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and Jalal Talabani, Chairman of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), have met four times to continue their work towards full reconciliation. Both parties have condemned internal fighting, pledged to refrain from violence in settling their differences, and resolved to eliminate terrorism by establishing stronger safeguards for Iraq's borders. In particular, both parties have committed themselves to deny sanctuary to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), to eliminate all PKK bases from the region and to safeguard the Turkish border. The parties believe that key decisions on Iraq's future should be made by all the Iraqi people together at an appropriate time and through a regular political process. Their work is thus meant to implement a framework of regional administration until a united, pluralistic, and democratic Iraq is achieved. A Higher Coordination Committee (HCC) made up of senior representatives from the PUK and the KDP meets regularly in northern Iraq, and Officials of the State Department are in frequent contact with the parties to further the reconciliation process.

The United States is committed to ensuring that international aid continues to reach the north; that the human rights of the Kurds and northern Iraq minority groups such as the Turkomans, Assyrians, Yezedis, and others are respected; and that the no-fly zone enforced by Operation Northern Watch is observed. The United States will decide how and when to respond should Baghdad's action pose an increased threat to Iraq's neighbors, to regional security, to vital U.S. interests, and to the Iraqi people, including those in the north.

The Human Rights Situation in Iraq

The human rights situation in Iraq continues to fall far short of international norms, in violation of Resolution 688. For over seven years, the Iraqi government has refused to allow the U.N. Human Rights Commission Special Rapporteur for Iraq, Max Van der Stoel, to visit Iraq. U.N. human rights monitors have never been allowed in. Meanwhile,

increasingly disturbing reports of the most serious nature continue to emanate from Iraq. For example, 2,500 political prisoners have been summarily executed without due process of law since Fall 1997, according to detailed reports Mr. Van der Stoel received. Often, the bodies are said to have been returned to the victim's families showing clear signs of torture.

The assassination of three of Iraq's most senior Islamic clerics is of special concern. In February, Ayatollah Mohammed al-Sader—the most senior Shia cleric in Iraq—was assassinated, along with two of his sons, after attending Friday prayers in Najaf. This follows the similar killing of Sheikh Borojourdi in April 1998 and Ayatollah Ah al-Gharawi in June 1998. In each case, the killings reportedly followed months of arrests and interrogations by government security services, and have been widely attributed to agents of the regime. The deaths also come in the context of a resurgence of repression in southern Iraq, as the regime works toward the destruction of the Marsh Arabs' way of life and the unique ecology of the southern marshes. The regime also continues to ignore appeals by Mr. Van der Stoel and others for access by human rights monitors to investigate these reports.

In the north, outside the Kurdish-controlled areas, the government continues the forced expulsion of ethnic Kurds and Turkomans from Kirkuk and other cities. In recent months, hundreds of families have reportedly been expelled from Kirkuk. Reports from the Kurdish-controlled areas where the displaced persons are received indicate that they are forced to leave behind almost all of their personal property. Due to a shortage of housing, many are still living in temporary shelters.

The Iraqi Opposition

We are deepening our engagement with the forces of change in Iraq, helping Iraqis inside and outside Iraq to become a more effective voice for the aspirations of the people. We will work toward the day when Iraq has a government worthy of its people—a government prepared to live in peace with its neighbors, a government that respects the rights of its citizens.

On April 7–8, the Executive Council of the Iraqi National Congress met at Windsor, in the United Kingdom. The meeting produced three important results: it elected a seven-member interim "Presidency Committee;" it created an "outreach committee" to expand the INC's membership and build links to regional states; and it decided that a meeting of the INC National Assembly would be held no later than July 7, at a site to be determined. We applaud the Council members for this constructive, forward-looking meeting.

Senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska attended the meeting as U.S. observer along with Special Coordinator for the Transition of Iraq, Frank Ricciardone, as well as other State Department officials and staff from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I believe the joint U.S. Executive-Congressional team underscores the deepening cooperation within the U.S. Government on this important issue.

The interim INC Presidency Committee met for the first time on April 10. The group reportedly established a principle of rotating leadership and discussed plans to send a delegation to the United Nations to express views on humanitarian and human rights issues.

The United Nations Compensation Commission

The United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC), established pursuant to Resolutions 687, 692, and 1210, continues to resolve claims against Iraq arising from Iraq's unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait. The UNCC has issued over 1.3 million awards worth over $7 billion. Thirty percent of the proceeds from the oil sales permitted by UNSC resolutions have been allocated to the Compensation Fund to pay awards and to finance operations of the UNCC. Pursuant to decisions of the UNCC Governing Council, certain small claims are to receive initial payments of $2,500 toward the amounts approved on those claims before large claims of individuals and claims of corporations and governments may share in the funds available for claims payments. As money from Iraqi oil sales is deposited in the Compensation Fund, the UNCC makes these initial $2,500 payments on eligible claims in the order in which those claims were approved by the

UNCC. To date, the U.S. Government has received funds from the UNCC for initial installment payments on approximately 1,685 claims of U.S. claimants.

Conclusion

Iraq remains a serious threat to international peace and security. I remain determined to see Iraq comply fully with all of its obligations under Security Council resolutions. The United States looks forward to the day when Iraq rejoins the family of nations as a responsible and law-abiding member. I appreciate the support of the Congress for our efforts and shall continue to keep the Congress informed about this important issue.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Strom Thurmond, President pro tempore of the Senate.

Remarks on Departure for Littleton, Colorado

May 20, 1999

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I have just met with my foreign policy team, but before I speak on the situation in Kosovo, I want to say a few words about school violence. As all of you know, in a few moments I am leaving for Littleton, Colorado, where Hillary and I will meet with students and families from Columbine High School.

The news this morning of another school shooting, this one in Rockdale County in suburban Atlanta, is deeply troubling to me, as it is to all Americans. We thank God that the injuries to the students do not seem to be life threatening. This incident, again, should underscore how profoundly important it is that all Americans come together in the face of these events to protect all of our children from violence.

There is debate going on in the Senate today relevant to that, and we must press ahead aggressively with the national campaign that we met about here a week ago Monday. We have got to do this.

The national security team has just briefed me on what has been accomplished to date in Kosovo by the air campaign, on the progress of our diplomacy with our allies in Russia, on the humanitarian situation on the ground. I want to speak about some of the recent developments, but first I want to say a word about one person who has been critical to our efforts in Kosovo, and indeed, to our entire national security program. I am pleased to announce that I have nominated General Hugh Shelton to a second term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Over the last 2 years, he has provided extraordinary leadership, unwavering dedication to our men and women in uniform, unstinting efforts on behalf of military readiness and modernization. Our Nation is fortunate that this critical post will continue to be filled by someone of his experience, ability, and character.

Now, he also has, as all of you have noticed, great stature. We were joking in there a few moments ago, in a situation that is not really funny, that we had a vote about whether I should renominate General Shelton; and Secretary Cohen, Secretary Albright, Mr. Berger, and I voted for it, and he voted against it. But we overruled him, and he's going to serve another term.

Let me say that our effort in Kosovo was strengthened by the vote in the House of Representatives to approve the supplemental funding we requested last month. It is absolutely imperative that the Senate follow suit without delay. The measure will allow us to keep bringing aid to the refugees until they go home, to help the neighboring countries feeling the brunt of the crisis. Most important, it will give our military what it needs to see its mission through while maintaining the readiness of our forces around the world.

As all of you know, there are some things in the bill that I did not support, but it is terribly important that this aid be released as soon as possible to those other countries and to the refugees and that we get the support for the military. I will sign the bill as soon as it gets here, and it is important that it be passed without delay.

Now, let me again say what we are doing. The refugees must go home with security and self-government. The Serbian forces must

leave Kosovo. An international security force with NATO at its core must deploy to protect people of every ethnicity and faith in Kosovo. On this, our country is speaking with a single voice, as we see by the strong bipartisan support for the measure.

From the beginning, we have said that we believe that a peaceful resolution that meets these conditions would serve our interests, and we will continue to pursue one with our Allies and with Russia. We will also continue our military campaign until the conditions are met. I believe the campaign is working. Each day we hear reports of desertions in the Serbian Army, dissension in Belgrade, unrest in Serbian communities. President Milosevic should know that he cannot change the fundamental terms that we have outlined, because they are simply what is required for the Kosovars to go home and live in peace.

The question is not whether ethnic cleansing will be reversed but how much of the military will be destroyed because of his intransigence along the way; how much damage will be done to Serbia because of his delays? NATO is united in our determination to persist as long as it takes to achieve these goals.

Let me just make one other point about Kosovo. In the last few days, we have seen more disturbing evidence of the atrocities committed against innocent Kosovars, including some of the first photographic proof of massacres of unarmed people. In trying to divert attention from these crimes, Serbian forces are only committing more by placing civilians around military targets. It's like pushing someone in front of an oncoming train and then trying to blame the train for running them over. We will not allow this cruel tactic to deceive or divert us from our goal. We need to stay focused and patient in pursuit of our simple objective, to defend the right of a people to exist on their land without being subject to mass expulsion and mass murder. With continued support from Congress and the American people, that is exactly what we intend to do.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Remarks to the Community of Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado

May 20, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Do that cheer for me one more time.

Audience members. We are—Columbine! We are—Columbine! We are—Columbine!

The President. Thank you.

Dr. Hammond; Mr. DeAngelis; President DeStefano and the State legislators, county commissioners; Attorney General Salazar; especially Governor Owens, thank you for being here. To all the officials who are here; most especially to the students of Columbine and the students who are here from Chatfield and Dakota Ridge. And Heather Dinkel, thank you for standing up here in front of this big crowd and making a fine talk. Weren't you proud of her? She did a good job representing you today. [*Applause*]

I want to say a special word of thanks to the families who met with Hillary and me before we came over here, for telling us the stories and showing us the booklets commemorating the lives of their very special children. I also want to thank the fine young people who still are hospitalized with whom I spoke by telephone yesterday—two of them, Patrick Ireland and Sean Graves, are here today. They left the hospital to be here.

I know there are some other people here who are also still injured who have come. I thank all of you for coming. This has been a long, hard month for all of you, and as Hillary said, it's been a hard month for America.

You heard her say that part of our job in these last 6 years, more than we ever could have imagined when we moved to Washington after the election in 1992, has been to be with grieving people, after the Oklahoma City building was blown up and the Embassies were blown up and our airmen were killed in the bombing in Saudi Arabia and so many other occasions—and last year several times—after violence in schools. But something profound has happened to your