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**REMARKS BY PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON AND BRITISH PRIME MINISTER TONY BLAIR
DURING A PHOTO OPPORTUNITY THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON, DC
APPROXIMATELY 12:15 P.M. EST THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1998**

PRESIDENT CLINTON: 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 two 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. So this is going to be a good meeting.

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

PRESIDENT CLINTON: 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 exert executive privilege, sir?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: First, let me make it clear. For four 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 when I get it, then I'll make a decision.

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

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, I would make two points. First of all -- and I believe the prime minister has also made this point. What is the cause of the present stand-off? It is the suspension of the inspections by the United Nations inspectors and the restrictions on

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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. So that's the first thing.

Now, 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 interests 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, they would not be directed specifically at him?

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Well, first of all, there is an executive order that's been place for over 20 years on that subject.

Q (Off mike.)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: It does. Now -- 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 it.

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

PRESIDENT CLINTON: No, 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 about Mr. Yeltsin's comments about the possibility of leading towards a war? I know he backed off that a little bit. But what are our views on that?

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PRESIDENT CLINTON: 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. We don't -- and I don't -- 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: Yeah, that's absolutely right.

Q There are also 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: Of course 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 in 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, understand 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 has used those weapons before; he will use them again, if he's given the opportunity to do so.

STAFF: Last question.

(Cross talk.)

Q 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. And 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 in 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.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: We're going to talk about this quite a bit. And I'm -- I view the prime minister's interest in the Middle East in a very positive light. And as you know, we are working -- Secretary Albright has been working very hard to jump-start 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, and as well as a climate of confidence and trust between all the parties. So I'm hopeful we can make some headway. We're going to talk about it.

Thank you.

STAFF: Thank you.

(Cross talk.)

Q (Inaudible.)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: I can only say -- I've said the charges aren't true, there's an investigation going on. 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.