

*Trilateral Discussions*

Q. Are they talking again?

*The President.* Oh, yes, yes. We sat there for however long, an hour and 25 minutes today, with all the parties in the room, including the major members of each side's team, as well as the leaders, and everybody had their say. And there was some—we got beyond people stating their own positions to actual conversation, and I'm quite hopeful. I think the proof is always in what happens tomorrow, not what happens today, but I think at least we've got a process set up and we can go forward.

*Middle East Peace Process*

Q. Mr. President, have you been able to insulate the peace process from the domestic political problems affecting you and the Prime Minister?

*The President.* Oh, absolutely.

Q. How so?

*The President.* You show up for work every day. It's not a complicated thing.

Q. These clearinghouses, are these to clear those obstacles that stand in the way of Netanyahu going through with the next phase of the withdrawal? Is this to satisfy him that these various issues like unilateral declarations are being resolved so he can go ahead? I don't understand the clearinghouse.

*The President.* No, no. What I am saying is—no, there is a steering committee that we had set up at Wye that is supposed to deal with things like—

Q. Well, yes, prisoners, for instance.

*The President.* No, no, that's different. It's supposed to deal with things like—the steering committee deals with things like the weapons confiscation and destruction issue, the size of the police forces, all those specific issues that were set up at Wye not being dealt with in the security committee, not being dealt with in

the informal channel on prisoners, not being dealt with in some other way.

And so what I would say, as I think you will get a report before the end of the day here, that these folks have gotten together, the reports have been made, and I think a determination will be made that a number of the requirements of the Wye agreement have been met so that we can go forward. But this is a complicated matter, obviously, and I hope we can stay as close to the schedule as possible.

Q. He set preconditions for going in. His latest one was unilateral declarations of statehood; he said that yesterday. Before that, it was the covenant. You got the covenant taken care of. What I am trying to determine is whether his preconditions have been swept away.

*The President.* Well, the meeting we did yesterday was part of the Wye agreement. The other question is one that I think both sides should observe, which is, it is okay to advocate how you want this to come out. That's okay. Neither side should try to stop the other from saying what their vision of the future is. That would be a terrible mistake. But it is not okay to imply that we're not going to resolve all the matters that were listed in the Oslo agreement for negotiations by negotiations. That is what we've got to do, and that's where I think the line ought to be drawn and the balance ought to be struck. If we stick with that, you know, we'll have fits and starts; it will be hard parts, but we'll get through this. We'll get through this just fine, and it will come out where it ought to.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:35 a.m. in the Matak Headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Death of A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr.  
December 15, 1998

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. Throughout his life as a scholar, lawyer, and

judge, Leon Higginbotham was one of our Nation's most passionate and steadfast advocates for civil rights.

When Leon Higginbotham was named to the Federal bench at the age of 36 by President Kennedy, he was the youngest Federal judge to be appointed in three decades. He served with distinction and eventually became judge of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. He also found the time to write and speak with idealism and rigor on the great dilemmas of race and justice. And because of this remarkable service and his indelible spirit, I had the honor in 1995 to award Judge Higginbotham the Presidential

Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given to citizens in the United States.

His retirement was spent remarkably—helping to draft the Constitution for a democratic South Africa and teaching a fresh generation of students at Harvard. Judge Higginbotham's life, as much as his scholarship, set an example of commitment, enlargement, and service to young minds at home and abroad.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, and their four children.

## **Address to the Nation Announcing Military Strikes on Iraq** *December 16, 1998*

Good evening. Earlier today I ordered America's Armed Forces to strike military and security targets in Iraq. They are joined by British forces. Their mission is to attack Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological programs and its military capacity to threaten its neighbors. Their purpose is to protect the national interest of the United States and, indeed, the interest of people throughout the Middle East and around the world. Saddam Hussein must not be allowed to threaten his neighbors or the world with nuclear arms, poison gas, or biological weapons.

I want to explain why I have decided, with the unanimous recommendation of my national security team, to use force in Iraq; why we have acted now; and what we aim to accomplish.

Six weeks ago Saddam Hussein announced that he would no longer cooperate with the United Nations weapons inspectors, called UNSCOM. They are highly professional experts from dozens of countries. Their job is to oversee the elimination of Iraq's capability to retain, create, and use weapons of mass destruction and to verify that Iraq does not attempt to rebuild that capability. The inspectors undertook this mission, first, 7½ years ago at the end of the Gulf war, when Iraq agreed to declare and destroy its arsenal as a condition of the cease-fire.

The international community had good reason to set this requirement. Other countries possess weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. With Saddam, there's one big difference: He has used them, not once but repeatedly,

unleashing chemical weapons against Iranian troops during a decade-long war, not only against soldiers but against civilians; firing Scud missiles at the citizens of Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Iran, not only against a foreign enemy but even against his own people, gassing Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq.

The international community had little doubt then, and I have no doubt today, that left unchecked, Saddam Hussein will use these terrible weapons again.

The United States has patiently worked to preserve UNSCOM, as Iraq has sought to avoid its obligation to cooperate with the inspectors. On occasion, we've had to threaten military force, and Saddam has backed down. Faced with Saddam's latest act of defiance in late October, we built intensive diplomatic pressure on Iraq, backed by overwhelming military force in the region. The U.N. Security Council voted 15 to zero to condemn Saddam's actions and to demand that he immediately come into compliance. Eight Arab nations—Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman—warned that Iraq alone would bear responsibility for the consequences of defying the U.N.

When Saddam still failed to comply, we prepared to act militarily. It was only then, at the last possible moment, that Iraq backed down. It pledged to the U.N. that it had made, and I quote, "a clear and unconditional decision to resume cooperation with the weapons inspectors." I decided then to call off the attack, with