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fire and the movement of large groups of armed individuals in the city. Further violence, including reported hostage-taking, has continued.

On April 9, due to the deterioration of the security situation and the resulting threat to American citizens, I ordered U.S. military forces to conduct the evacuation from Liberia of private U.S. citizens and certain third-country nationals who have taken refuge in the U.S. Embassy compound wishing to leave. U.S. military security assessment and enhancement teams deployed to Monrovia the same day in order to reinforce and assist the American Embassy. Evacuation operations commenced shortly thereafter. The evacuation, designated Operation Assured Response, is being carried out using MH–53 helicopters staged from Freetown, Sierra Leone. A small number of U.S. military aircraft are supporting this operation from Dakar, Senegal. Approximately 140 military personnel from the U.S. European Command's Special Operations Command are involved in this operation and are backed up by forces from the Southern European Task Force, U.S. Army, Europe. I have also ordered the deployment of U.S. Navy amphibious forces to the region to transport evacuees, if required.

Although U.S. military forces participating in the evacuation are equipped for combat, the evacuation is being undertaken for the purpose of protecting American citizens and is not intended to alter or preserve the existing political status quo in Liberia. I therefore expect that this operation will be of limited duration. A number of our helicopters have been fired upon, but have not been hit.

I have taken this action pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct the foreign relations of the United States and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with the War Powers Resolution. I appreciate the support of the Congress in this action to protect American citizens.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Strom Thurmond, President pro tempore of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 12.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Labour Party Leader Tony Blair of the United Kingdom

April 12, 1996

Q. Good morning, Mr. President—[*inaudible*].

The President. No, not yet. I may have something to say later today, but I think it's not appropriate for me to comment yet. We're trying to find out all of the facts.

Okinawa

Q. Mr. President, on Okinawa could you tell us some of the reasoning that went into that decision——

The President. Excuse me? I'm sorry.

Q. On the base in Okinawa——

The President. Yes. Well, Secretary Perry has been working very hard on that issue to try to deal with what we think are some very legitimate concerns the people of Okinawa have about the noise levels, access to land. And Japan has been a wonderful security partner for us for a long time, and they still are. They pay the highest percentage of support for American forces of any of our foreign host countries. And we thought we ought to try to work through these issues. And the Secretary has worked very hard at it, and so has the Japanese Government. And so I hope we've got a good resolution here that will permit us to defend our own security interests and pursue our interests in the Northern Pacific and fulfill our commitments to our Japanese allies.

Thank you.

President's Taxes

Q. [*Inaudible*]—your taxes. Do you have any advice for the American people?

The President. I always try to pay them. [*Laughter*] I've got an accountant, and I tell him to resolve all doubt in favor of the Government and go on. [*Laughter*] That's what I've been saying for 20 years now.

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

Discussions With Mr. Blair

Q. Mr. President, do you think you'll—[*inaudible*]—the next British Prime Minister?

Mr. Blair. Well, that is not a diplomatic question. [*Laughter*]

The President. If I were in his position that's the question I'd ask. Look, it's all I can do to keep up with American politics. I only hope he's talking to the next American President. [*Laughter*]

Q. Will you be sharing ideas, Mr. President?

The President. Yes, I'm looking forward to discussing a number of things, including, obviously, the Irish peace process and the process in Northern Ireland, which is very important to the United States. And I want to compliment Mr. Blair and his party. I think that the way they have proceeded in this has been very statesmanlike and very much in the interest of his nation and the cause of peace.

Q. And similarities between your two parties as well?

The President. I'll leave that to you.

Mr. Blair. I was saying to the President how immensely helpful people have found his visit to Northern Ireland a few months ago and what a boost it gave to the peace process. And I think that is still there, and it's still helping. I hope we can get it back on track very much.

Q. Mr. Blair, you'll be talking to the President about your own development of——

Mr. Blair. I think we will be talking about many things, Jeremy.

The President. If you give us a chance. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Blair. Quite so. And on that point——

The President. This is a great omen for the peace process. You've got the Americans' greatest Irish reporter here. [*Laughter*] How are you?

Mr. Blair. You're in very good company, Mary.

Q. Is there anything that Mr. Blair can practically do to bring about a revival of the peace talks in Ireland, a truce?

The President. He might have better ideas about that than I do. But the first thing, of course, is that there has to be an election law ratified in the Parliament. But I want to talk to him about it. We'll see what his ideas are.

Q. Do you want all of the parties to participate in the elections and to attend——

The President. Of course. We've always been for all-party talks and all-party participation. That is, all of the parties that are committed to a peaceful democratic future in Northern Ireland.

Q. And do you think Sinn Fein—[*inaudible*]—peaceful democratic future in Northern Ireland?

The President. We have to get back to the conversation here. I've already answered more questions than I meant to. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:45 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

April 6

In the early afternoon, the President and Hillary Clinton traveled to Dover Air Force Base, DE, where they met with the families of those who died in the aircraft tragedy in Croatia. In the evening, they returned to Washington, DC.

April 9

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

April 10

In the afternoon, following the funeral of Secretary of Commerce Ronald H. Brown at the National Cathedral, the President and Hillary Clinton attended the burial ceremony