

PRESS CONFERENCE, 4 TREASURY PLACE, MELBOURNE

Prime Minister

I will say something first and then I will read a text of the letter that is being delivered to the Olympic Federation later today.

First I would like to remind you all of the significance of Afghanistan, why we are concerned and why it is different. It is a watershed. It does represent the first significant use of Soviet troops outside what had been accepted as the Soviet sphere of influence. Czechoslovakia and Hungary, tragic and horrible as they were, were both in the accepted sphere of influence of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe.

Afghanistan was a different case. It was a non-aligned country. But that did not protect Afghanistan from attack, and that, I believe, says something to all members of the non-aligned movement. So, it is a new situation. Now, that does not represent a return to the cold war. That was a different time and that is past. We do go into the 1980s with the international scene gravely and seriously troubled with difficulties of a kind that we hoped had been put behind us a long, long while ago.

It does not help to use the rhetoric, the language of the past. That is why I say quite specifically, the period ahead of us does not represent a repetition of something that occurred once before. It will be different if, for no other reason that it is in a different decade and time has gone on very significantly. But it is also different for one or two other reasons. Over all of this period, the Soviet Union has been spending about 12 per cent of its Gross National Product on arms and armaments, a very large expenditure indeed, of a kind I believe that has probably not been matched by any other country - certainly not matched by any of the democracies.

So, they have been improving the quality, the effectiveness and the range of their armaments in both conventional and nuclear fields. That is a different situation where in the past, during what was called the cold war and what was known as the West - our allies - certainly had nuclear superiority, and much more nearly conventional quality than might now be the case.

That again means that it involves a different situation, and as we believe as we have said, a more dangerous situation. So, there is a clear need for us to consult with our regional friends and partners and also a need for us to consult with major party principals, the principal actors on the stage - the United States and the United Kingdom in particular.

Andrew Peacock is not going to South East Asia, to India and Pakistan, and I am not going to the United States and to the United Kingdom with any grand design or with a plan to put. We are going to achieve an exchange of ideas and views on a matter of the utmost seriousness to all of us: to all people who want to support the independence of nations, the independence of states, free from

Prime Minister (continued)

domination by others. That is really what it is all about.

So it is for consultations, for an exchange of views, helping to build a consensus amongst all of those who want to support the independence of states. If Australia can contribute something to that, then so we ought.

I have already said that the weight a nation of 14 million people can put into the scales is very obviously limited, against the weight that the United States or Europe combines, through NATO, through the Common Market, can put into the scales is obviously very significantly limited. But that does not remove the obligation for Australians to do what Australians can on a matter which is of vast importance and which could be of infinite importance to our children and to the people who will live and will want to make their homes and bring up their families in Australia down through the generations.

So, consultation alone is the purpose of why we are going overseas - to help to build, if we can, that consensus of independently-minded nations.

Now, quite plainly in the discussions today there was a significant exchange of views, not only in relation to Andrew Peacock's visit. He is expecting Cabinet's views to be sent to him. There were preparatory discussions yesterday between the Foreign Minister, myself and senior officials, the Defence Minister, also Michael MacKellar who is accompanying me to the United States and to the United Kingdom. There will be confirmatory advice going to Andrew Peacock in relation to that. There was obviously a good deal of discussion about the nature of the talks that will take place in Washington and later in London.

One of the matters that we discussed considerably, concerned the Olympic Games, and I want to read you the text of a letter, shortly, that will be sent to the Australian Olympic Federation. It sets out the totality of our view, and I believe it does it in clear and concise terms. But, before doing that, I want to issue a warning and a plea - please don't treat the Olympic Games, itself, as the issue. The issue is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. That is the thing that is important. That is the kind of thing which we want to see is not repeated, and cannot be repeated, anywhere else, anywhere around the world. The Olympic Games, as events have turned, has a relationship to that. Yet the Olympic Games themselves are not the issue. The issue is Afghanistan and the invasion. And so, please, I hope you can remember that.

Now, the text of the letter that will be sent to the Secretary of the Australian Olympic Federation:

I am writing to advise you officially of the Government's views on the holding of the Olympic Games in Moscow. You will be aware that the Government takes the most serious view of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, and regards it as a grave threat to world peace and to all independent nations. It also believes that the great majority of Australians would want their Government to express in strong terms our complete opposition to the actions of the Soviet Government.

The Government considers that one of the most telling ways in which the opposition of Australia and other independent nations to the Soviet actions can be expressed, particularly to the people of the U.S.S.R., is by an effective boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow by the Olympic Committees of those nations.

President Carter has recently written to the United States Olympic Committee urging it in consultation with other National Olympic Committees to advise the International Olympic Committee that if Soviet troops do not fully withdraw from Afghanistan within the next month, Moscow will become an unsuitable site for a festival meant to celebrate peace and goodwill. In the event that Soviet troops did not withdraw within that time he urged the U.S.O.C. to propose that the Games be transferred or cancelled.

Our Government takes a similar view and I am writing on its behalf to ask that the Australian Olympic Committee join with U.S.O.C. and other National Olympic Committees to express to the International Olympic Committee the strong view that if Soviet troops do not withdraw as suggested, Moscow will become unsuitable as a site and that the Games should be transferred to another site or sites or be cancelled for this year.

It is the Government's belief that the Australian Olympic Committee, our Olympic athletes and our people will fully understand its reluctance to propose such a serious course but it is quite satisfied that in the event of the continued occupation of Afghanistan by the U.S.S.R. an effective boycott of the Games will bring home to the Russian Government and people, perhaps in a way no other step could, the great seriousness in the eyes of independent nations of the steps the U.S.S.R. has taken.

I would also like to assure you of the Government's continued support of the principles underlying the Olympic Games. This year the Government has agreed to contribute \$700,000 to the Olympic appeal and a cheque for the balance of \$500,000 will be handed over later this week. Whatever happens it is the earnest wish of the Government that these monies be used to give our athletes the opportunity to pursue their excellence in sport and engage in peaceful competition with the athletes of other countries. It is difficult to do this in a country where the Government of that country has so recently violated the basic principles upon which the peace and goodwill of nations depends.

It is equally our earnest wish that all possible steps be taken to preserve and enhance the Olympic ideal, and the Australian Olympic Committee can be sure of the Government's full support for its endeavours to that end. Olympic Committees around the world will no doubt be studying with great seriousness all the options available. One option, particularly for the longer term, would be a permanent site in Greece for the Olympic Games. If that were the desired outcome, this Government would support it, including with an appropriate financial contribution.

Question

It is very hard to tell exactly whether or not ... inaudible ... any sort of boycott of the Olympic Games?

Prime Minister

Well, this letter will be handed around so you can judge, quite exactly for yourself. We are taking the view, similar to that which President Carter took with the American Olympic Committee, and that is; we are saying that if the Russians stay in Afghanistan, Moscow will become an unsuitable site for the 1980 Olympics and in that event, we would be urging the Australian Olympic Committee, along with the United States Olympic Committee, and that of any others that can be so persuaded to seek to transfer the Olympic Games to another site or sites. We have also said quite plainly, that an effective boycott of the 1980 Olympics in the circumstances that have unfolded, could well bring home to the Soviet Union and people, the seriousness of the action that they took and the strength of the opposition of independent nations more clearly than any other single act.

Trade sanctions in all these matters can be very important, but, the Moscow Olympic Games are going to be highly visible to all the Russian people. It was clearly the objective of the Soviet government to have all the Russian people know and understand that the athletes of all the nations of the world were coming to Moscow, to Russia - to pay homage might be too strong a word - but, by their coming, to pay their respects to the Soviet Union as hosts to the 1980 Olympics. But if that were not the fact, if there were to be an effective boycott, then the message would get home to the Russian people and to the Russian government, very effectively indeed.

And with the President having announced his decision in relation to it, and with the Australian government having taken the serious view that it has of these particular matters, we believe we need to support that stand.

Question

Supposing Australia's athletes and the Olympic Committee don't agree with the Government and want to go to Moscow? What would be the Government's attitude then?

Prime Minister

Well, let's see what happens to the response that has been put. But I had noticed even on the news screens tonight that some athletes who are now training and obviously wanting to test their skills against the athletes of other countries, have been saying that they believe the appropriate thing would be for the Games to be transferred to another country in the circumstances that prevail. I believe that those athletes who have already stated that kind of view - and quite a number have been asked - are really putting matters first which are of great importance to Australia and to their families; putting them above what must be a tremendous ambition, a tremendous hope, and a tremendous test for them of all the time and effort that has gone into becoming an Olympic athlete.

Question

Would Canberra withdraw finance?

Prime Minister

No. I said quite plainly that I wouldn't. That is in the letter that I read out. It could be used for other purposes, but it will be handed over, it will be in the hands and the responsibility of the Olympic Committee.

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