



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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SPEECH TO THE STATE ZIONIST COUNCIL ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 34TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF ISRAEL

In 1948, when the State of Israel was founded, it seemed that the dream of Jewish people everywhere was at the point of realisation. That dream was the attainment of peace and justice, after centuries of deprivation. Israel's creation seemed to offer at last the great fulfilment of "a haven for the Jewish people". But in the few decades since the achievement of that independence in 1948, Israel has had to fight four wars to maintain it.

There could be no more bitter reminder of how hard it can be to secure a goal which most Australians take for granted, the goal of national survival, of national security and safety. Throughout the 34 years of its history, Israel has lived in an environment of continuous threats to its very existence.

Few Australians have experience of living under such a threat, most of us can only try to imagine what it must be like. But our appreciation of the magnitude of Israel's difficulties is no less intense for that. That appreciation lies at the heart of Australia's unreserved support for Israel's right to exist over the last 34 years. Our belief in this right has remained central to our Middle East policy throughout these years and this policy will not change.

It is now approaching five years since President Sadat visited Israel and made his historic address to the Knesset, thus opening up the period of Israel-Egypt rapprochement which has given so much hope for the future. Through that visit, and through the Israelis' willingness to respond, the stage was set for resolving the hatred, bitterness and suspicion engendered by the conflicts since the Second World War. That resolution is nowhere near fully accomplished. But the curtain on the first act is coming down as Israel completes its voluntary withdrawal from the Sinai under the Camp David Agreements with Egypt.

This voluntary withdrawal, coming at this time, means that future generations will attach a very special significance to the 34th anniversary of Israel which we all celebrate tonight.

This withdrawal will return to Egypt all the Egyptian territories occupied by Israel during the 1967 war. It is an action which has required great courage and great wisdom on the part of the Israeli Government and people. The territories were the gains of war, and they have been put to use as the coin of peace.

With high levels of tensions elsewhere on Israel's immediate borders, in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, Israel has had to maintain high courage indeed to implement this peace on its border with Egypt. Egypt has been the only Arab neighbour with whom it has so far been possible for Israel to establish a treaty of peace. But let us hope that this year's anniversary of Israeli independence will not only mark the end of a chapter in the search for peace in the Middle East. Let us hope it will also be remembered as the opening of a new chapter in this search, for peace, a search which is important to all countries, including Australia.

I believe Australia can take pride in the fact that our participation in the peace process has been real, and that we have done what we can to advance a cause so close to all our hearts. We have contributed a contingent to the Peacekeeping Force, over 100 men, as well as equipment. The establishment of that force has been a crucial element, a decisive element, in the willingness of both Israel and Egypt to find and implement peace.

There are two things which I would like to say about our participation in the Sinai Peacekeeping Force. Many people here will recall how fashionable it was after the United Nations was frustrated as a peacekeeping agency by the attitude of the Soviet Union, to denounce the continued efforts of Israel, Egypt and the United States to maintain the momentum of peace. The Australian Government had to consider the question of our participation in the Peacekeeping Force against a chorus of scepticism about the Camp David peace process. There was widespread doubt and cynicism about President Reagan's request that Australia join the multinational force and a good deal of alarm in some places about what might be involved.

When we took our decision last October, making it conditional on significant European participation, we had no certainty that wide-ranging participation would eventuate. But we felt that a country like Australia could make a significant contribution, that we could help encourage other countries to take part so that the force could be put into being. We felt the risks of failure were outweighed by the positive gains to be achieved.

Our decision involved making a judgement against an uncertain future. There are risks, especially in a democracy, in coming to decisions which have to be based on assessments which cannot be proved, but in an uncertain world, taking such risks is sometimes well justified. Henry Kissinger, who played a key part in building up confidence between Egypt and Israel, recently made a comment which is very relevant to this. "Often", he said, "expertise consists of management of the familiar, while society needs a vision of a future that no one has yet experienced".

As everyone knows, the Australian Government's judgement and decision on the Peacekeeping force has been confirmed by events. A wide cross-section of the international community has become involved, and the members of the Peacekeeping Force are now taking up their positions from El Arish to the straits of Tiran. There is little doubt that Australia's decision was a catalyst in achieving the genuinely multinational force which was clearly vital for success. It is a matter for satisfaction that little of the cynicism of earlier days is now to be heard.

There have been further gains as well. As a consequence of the wide participation in the force, a number of Israel's friends have gained a better awareness of the risks Israel has taken of the courage Israel has shown. Since the European governments reached their agreements with Israel to join the force, President Mitterrand and Lord Carrington both visited Israel. Both held discussions which were constructive and gave reassurance to the Israelis that European policy goes beyond the development of dialogue with the Arabs. They obtained in turn a clearer understanding of the imperatives of security for Israel.

All of this should be of comfort to Israel, and it is certainly gratifying to Australia, for there can be genuine advances in perceptions of problems and attitudes to their solution as a result of such meetings and discussions.

This leads me to a further aspect of Australia's approach in relation to our support for the peacekeeping force. Our concern from the start has been forward-looking and the Camp David Accords contain two parts. The first deals with the return of the Sinai, and only a very few years ago it would have been hard to believe that the success which is now imminent could come so quickly.

The other part deals with autonomy for the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza after the establishment of an elected self-governing authority. As I have noted on other occasions, these two parts of the accords are not separate: they are interconnected - two parts of a total and very carefully negotiated package at Camp David.

Recent outbreaks of violence in cities on the West Bank show how close to the surface are the tensions that exist in that territory. The aspirations of the Palestinians are a significant factor underlying that violence, and if the momentum of Camp David is to be maintained, a way needs to be found for Israel to give appropriate recognition to them.

We believe, as Mr Street said during his recent visit to Israel, that the legitimate rights of the Palestinians include a homeland alongside Israel, and the right to participate directly in decisions affecting their future. This of course is not recognition of the PLO.

Indeed, while the PLO refuses to recognise Israel's right to exist, there can be no consideration by Australia of the question of recognising the PLO. If the PLO genuinely wants peace, they will change their policies, they will recognise Israel's undoubted right to live within secure and recognised borders. Their denial of Israel's right to exist is provocative. It does nothing to open the door to peace. Without willingness by the PLO to face the reality of Israel's rights, there will be little with which to build on what has already been achieved.