



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, HMAS SUCCESS, 13 AUGUST 1990

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JOURNALIST: (inaudible)

PM: Well, it's the most serious decision I've had to take as Prime Minister, in consultation with my colleagues. But in the end, it's not a hard decision in that one knows that you can't sensibly follow a policy of appeasement in situations like this. It's of course, my hope that by the time our men get there in these three ships ... the need for their presence will have evaporated. But I was terribly impressed by the spirit of the officers and men with whom I had the opportunity of speaking. There was no sense of wild jingoism, there was a sense of understanding of the potential danger into which they were going and a very sober assessment of that, but a serious commitment to undertaking that mission and undertaking it successfully. I want to say to the people of Australia that they are entitled to feel very proud of these 600 men who are going on these three ships.

JOURNALIST: Given it is such a serious mission, do you think it was wise not to have actually got the formal approval of Cabinet before committing our forces?

PM: Well, I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't thought it was wise.

JOURNALIST: And what about the criticism that's emerged, some of it even from within your own Party, about the wisdom of this decision, particularly the suggestion that we're once again playing hand maidens to the United States?

PM: Well that, of course, is a nonsense. If that sort of reasoning had been allowed to stand, then you would be giving signs of encouragement to dictators who feel that they can simply invade and annex a small neighbour. This is not simply a United States issue, this is a world issue. Just as in the 1930s, appeasement was wrong then and the world paid a terrible price for it, so would appeasement be wrong in the 1990s. The important thing we've got to understand is this - that the Cold War has come to an end, we are entering a new era and in that new

era where the threat of superpower conflict has gone, then it's terribly important that the world shows that it's prepared to act and to act together to enforce the principles of the United Nations Charter. And Australia cannot, certainly should not, shirk its responsibilities in that situation.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, talking to the family of one sailor there today, they expressed the view to me that what difference do 600 sailors make. What would you say to that?

PM: Well, you spoke to one, I spoke to many more than one and overwhelmingly, I mean, as far as I was concerned, without exception, families to whom I spoke expressed the view that this is the right decision.

JOURNALIST: What about the, if we could turn to one other topic for a moment -

PM: No, wait a minute. Is there any more on -

JOURNALIST: What were some of the comments you were getting from family members ...

PM: Well, there was obviously sadness that their loved ones were leaving and going into a situation of potential danger and that's precisely what you would have expected. But, as I say, all of them understood, that's all I spoke to, understood the decision and supported it.

JOURNALIST: And walking around the ships, how did you feel, like, how did you ...

PM: As I've said this is, in a sense, the most serious decision that I've had to take in my period as Prime Minister, but while I thought long and hard about it and discussed it with my colleagues, in the end it was not a hard decision because the issue was clear.

JOURNALIST: Do you, by having taken this decision, what do you feel for the Australians trapped in Iraq and Kuwait? Haven't you raised the prospect that they are going to have a fairly uncomfortable if not -

PM: They were having an uncomfortable time any rate, as were the thousands of Americans, British, Australians, Europeans who are now confined within Iraq and Kuwait and we have been ceaseless in our diplomatic attempts, both directly through our own representatives and through other friendly powers and the representations that have been made for the safety of those people.

JOURNALIST: Do you have any reason, any more reason for optimism at this moment given those contacts that you've had though?

PM: One must honestly say that in regard to the people that are confined within Iraq and Kuwait that we haven't any evidence at this moment of any saner, more humane attitude on the part of the Iraqi authorities, but we will continue to press them to ensure the safety of those people.

JOURNALIST: Would you consider calling back the ships if they started to ...

PM: That's a question I'm not prepared to address.

JOURNALIST: If we could deal with just one other issue. The Left meeting yesterday on the ... not privatisation, on Telecom and on the airlines, how much harder does that make it for the Government to reach a rational decision on those two questions?

PM: I've got no public comment upon the processes that are going on within the Party. I welcome the fact that discussions are taking place. I'm confident that in the end we'll get sensible decisions.

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