



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON PJ KEATING MP

HAWKE MEMOIRS - COMMITMENT TO GULF WAR

Much has been made of questions raised two months ago in the Hawke Memoirs concerning my commitment to Australia's involvement in the Gulf War.

I do not wish to prolong this - I simply make the following points:

My considered support for Australia's involvement in the Gulf has been corroborated by a number of sources today. Namely, by the recollections of Senator Evans and Senator Ray, my speech to the House on 21 January 1991, a report by Mr Grigson of the Sydney Morning Herald at the time and an office note taken by a member of my personal staff.

That part of Mr Hawke's personal record which refers to "what has the US done for us" also appears in my office note but the person who said it was not me.

It is clear that my recollections of those events conflict with those of the former Prime Minister in some respects. This is regrettable but not a matter of earth shattering importance. The main thing was and is that Mr Hawke and I both supported Australian involvement in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Mr Downer has now climbed into this debate. If this helps in any way to preserve his leadership Mr Hawke and I should drop some other bon mots which might attract his attention.

Easing Mr Downer into the New Year is a high priority for me.

Mr Downer has had ample opportunity to question me on this matter over the past two months and has failed to do so except on a day when he knew I would not be in Question Time. Mr Downer to this date has still raised no matters of public importance.

Meanwhile, the real news today is not the continuation of any minor hostilities between myself and Mr Hawke but the avoidance of major ones in the Gulf.

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