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## PRIME MINISTER

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### ADDRESS TO THE R.S.L. CONGRESS

It gives me great pleasure to be present at this official opening of the 61st National Congress of the Returned Services League.

I, like the overwhelming majority of Australians am deeply appreciative of the basic commitments that motivate the R.S.L. The ideals of devotion to the nation, loyalty, service and the willingness to serve one's country in a military capacity overseas. The qualities of devotion and service that the R.S.L. exemplifies are of great importance to the well-being of the Australian Commonwealth.

The R.S.L. has nurtured these qualities and contributed to the vitality with which they are passed from generation to generation.

On every Anzac Day Australians reflect on their past and the qualities and sacrifices that made possible the freedom Australians now enjoy.

As the years pass this appreciation for past sacrifices has come to be shared by families who have come to Australia in the post-war years and whose children are such a vigorous and important part of Australia.

Every nation needs to take the time to reflect and affirm the values the R.S.L. represents - the values of patriotism and the capacity for sacrifice and achievement against odds.

It is a great tribute to the League that Anzac Day has come to serve this purpose. The motto of the R.S.L. is "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance". This motto has guided the League in relation to questions of the national defence. Today, the need for vigilance in the defence of liberty remains.

The international situation is one in which tensions have not been eliminated. There is a continued readiness on the part of some states to pursue their interests by the use of force. The influence of countries opposed to the freedom and respect for the individual is growing.

In acting effectively in such an international environment, Australians must be willing to view the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. There must be a willingness on the part of many people to discuss the needs of Australian defence and foreign policies: in ways which illuminate the underlying realities of the international situation; in ways which produce an ability to cope with challenge and complexity and in ways which serve Australia's national interest.

The discussion should be dispassionate and free of either stridency or false illusions. The Returned Services League has a significant role to play in the discussion of our foreign and defence policies. One of the major advantages democracies have over authoritarian regimes is that they have the benefit of the free play of discussion and debate.

This is not a restriction on foreign policy as some might think. It is in fact essential to the development of effective and sophisticated foreign and defence policies.

The Government has sought to take the lead in promoting this discussion by putting before the Australian public its perspective on the world, the problems and the opportunities it affords to Australia.

Let me refer briefly to one matter which I raised in my June 1 statement and which has occasioned some debate. I expressed the Australian Government's concern at the growth of Soviet military power, pointing to the fact that the U.S.S.R. now has a strategic and political reach - a capacity to influence and intervene - well beyond the established zone of Soviet security interests. This concern has also been expressed by the defence and foreign ministers of the NATO powers.

The Opposition Shadow Minister for Defence, Mr Hayden, seeks to deny that there is any reason for Australia to be concerned. He makes the acute observation that the NATO powers' statements relate to:

"events 14,000 kilometres away ... in the distant reaches of Europe."

Some people apparently cannot grasp that what happens in Europe is of vital importance to Australia - that we are no longer living in the days of sailing ships but in the days of I.C.B.M's. We no longer live in an isolated region but in a world of nations linked by the technological revolution. The Australian Government seeks nothing more than friendly and mutually beneficial relations with the Soviet Union.

But the Government must put before the Australian people its concerns. The Government must tell the truth as it sees it.

To adopt any other course would be to rail in its responsibilities to the nation.

If the concern we have expressed on the basis of evidence before us is misplaced, it is within the means of the USSR to make this clear. We fervently hope it will do so.

Since the Government came to office, it has acted to strengthen Australia's relations with a number of countries in the region and outside it. This year a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation has been signed with Japan.

Extensive discussions have been held with the Chinese leadership. In South East Asia our major concern is to support the ASEAN countries' efforts to promote internal development in the region. We believe the ASEAN countries are making significant progress and that it is vital that the conditions allowing this progress to continue are maintained.

Our attitude to foreign and defence issues are not based on ideological preconceptions but on a realistic concern for Australia's national interests.

In pursuing these interests, the nation with which we can have the closest cooperation is the USA.

America has assumed tremendous responsibilities in the world. In the Second World War, the USA ensured Australia's security from invasion and led the destruction of the Axis powers.

Since then, it has played an indispensable role in preserving world peace and security.

This Government will ensure that the ANZUS alliance with the U.S. and New Zealand is sustained. We will meet to the full our responsibilities under this alliance.

In this task, we have the overwhelming support of the Australian people. Those who tried to undermine the ANZUS alliance by attempting to prevent the visit of the Truxton have discovered where the commitments of the Australian people lie.

Although Australia has been facing great economic difficulties the Government has taken decisions to ensure that the defence of Australia will not be allowed to run down. Recognition of the realities of Australia's global and regional strategic circumstances gives rise to the requirement to formulate and implement a national defence policy.

Firstly, we must ensure that realistic diplomacy is employed to the full to support our security - and accordingly that of friends and allies.

Secondly, we must achieve within the practical limits of our available resources a steady enlargement of self-reliance in defence capability.

Thirdly, we must cooperate with and support our allies and regional associates in countering threats to peace and stability.

The Government recognises that Australian policy must be based on a comprehensive, independent and coordinated assessment and definition of our national interests, and on maintaining close consultation and collaboration with our allies.

Accepting responsibility to achieve greater military self-reliance in no way diminished the importance of our defence alliance with the United States. But we do not believe that America should alone bear the responsibilities which other nations share.

Our first concern must be to ensure that Australia is seen as a nation that is militarily competent, capable of independent effort and that has a realistic understanding of its strategic situation.

Military forces able to discharge a range of current and foreseeable tasks, and which have the ability to expand are an essential element in Australia's defence policy.

It is against this background that the Government announced earlier this year its intention to embark on a defence programme that will involve the expenditure in real terms of more than \$12,000 million in the next five years.

The first instalment of this programme has now been approved in the Budget for 1976/77 in which provision of \$2,178 million is made for Defence. This is an increase in real terms in excess of 7%.

Making such a significant increase at a time of acknowledged economic difficulties is an indication of the priority this Government attaches to national security, our refusal to follow the previous Government in its relegation of the nations defence to second place.

Further increases are planned in the later years of the programme, which is the time at which spending on substantial and long lead items begins to take effect. The White Paper soon to be presented by my colleague, the Minister for Defence, will elaborate on these matters.

In the equipment area advantage will be taken of the enhanced capabilities made possible by new techniques which have produced weapons with unsurpassed accuracy. Examples of this may be seen in the capabilities that will be available in the new long range maritime reconnaissance aircraft and the new destroyers.

The weapons system associated with these two purchases will herald a significant advance in the technological level of Australia's forces.

There is one final point which I wish to make. The Government recognises that in peacetime, with volunteer defence forces, there is a need to provide for an adequate community life for servicemen and their families.

The R.S.L. has done admirable work in assisting ex-servicemen, and their families in these matters.

My Government has and will continue to ensure that the defence forces requirements - not only the equipment and facilities - but also for conditions of service, receive the highest priority.

My colleague, the Minister for Repatriation, Senator the Honourable Peter Durack, will be addressing you later today so I will not comment on repatriation matters except to say that the Government has before it the reports of a number of expert inquiries all of which touch upon repatriation in some way,

In acting on these inquiries the Government will be guided by its commitment to preserving and improving the repatriation system - including retention of the Department and Commission - which have served the ex-service community of this country so well for some sixty years.

Both the Liberal Party and the National Country Party recognise that the repatriation system needs to be adjusted from time to time in line with the needs of ex-servicemen and women and their dependants.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for giving me an opportunity to relate the objectives of the Government to the ideals of this great national institutions.

I hope that your Congress is a very successful and productive one.

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