

INTERVIEW WITH PRESS - AFGHANISTAN

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Prime Minister

I will read through this first for those who want it on tape and sound.

The Government today considered the report from the Foreign Minister concerning the events in Iran and more specifically the Russian invasion of Afghanistan.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister have already condemned the invasion of Afghanistan as totally without justification; as a violation of everything the United Nations stands for; and as a mode of behaviour which will make normal relationships between nations totally impossible.

Soviet explanations of the Invasion have been rejected by the Government.

The Government, along with many others, is conscious that its actions and decisions must be directed to securing of circumstances where this kind of behaviour will not be repeated.

The Russians have invaded Afghanistan. Now, collectively, the world needs to demonstrate that the price of that invasion is much higher than the Soviet envisaged and higher than they would be prepared to contemplate on future occasions.

I made it plain this morning that it is not just a question of wanting the Russians out of Afghanistan but of establishing the circumstances in which this kind of action will not be repeated in the future.

It is against that background that the Soviet Union needs to understand that the price of its actions in Afghanistan will be a heavy one indeed.

There are inevitable limitations to the weight that a nation of 14 million people can put into the scales. Nevertheless we have taken a number of decisions on a broad front which are designed to demonstrate concern and to register the strongest possible opposition to the Soviet Union's actions.

- Some days ago at an earlier meeting the Government made a decision and a consequent offer to the United States to consult with them concerning greater Australian involvement in patrolling and surveillance of the Indian Ocean. Much needs to be determined and options considered, but this could involve Australian participation with the United States forces, or a greater independent effort by Australia to survey larger areas of the Indian Ocean.

The United States has reciprocated warmly to that suggestion. It is not one made merely against the short term position that we are now confronting. It is one made against the background of changed strategic circumstances which will involve greater co-operation between Australia, her friends and allies.

Andrew Peacock and myself have on many occasions indicated in the past that our objective in the Indian Ocean was to achieve balance at the lowest possible level. Those remarks and comments were made in happier days. We now look to different circumstances.

- Australia will support United States action in relation to wheat sales to the Soviet Union. We will not pick up any of the shortfall created by that decision and will urge other wheat exporting nations to take a similar view. Consistent with United States actions normal sales to the Soviet Union will not be affected.
- We will be putting to the United States at a meeting being held in Washington on Saturday that the 17 million tonnes shortfall resulting from President Carter's decision, should be handled in such a way that the international market in wheat is not prejudiced
- Any discussions or arrangements or agreements over fisheries matters are indefinitely suspended. This has particular application for two projects: a joint feasibility fishing venture off the North West Shelf of the Western Australian coast; and a feasibility fishing project involving jack mackerel in waters adjacent to Tasmania.

Any approvals previously given in relation to these fisheries projects are henceforth withdrawn.

- USSR Liner Shipping services at present operate to and from Australia in conference trades (Australia to Europe Shipping Conference) and in non-conference trades (Australia to Europe, and the triangular service East Asia/Japan, USA and Australia). Russian bulk shipping also carries primary produce bought by Russia from Australia.

These shipping operations and other facilities provided by Australia are currently being reviewed.

- There will be no further approvals for scientific research vessels to visit our ports.
- The visit of the Soviet Fisheries Delegation in February will not be permitted into Australia.
- We will not meet the Soviet request to station Aeroflot personnel in Australia to facilitate the Russian Airline's services going through Australia to other countries.
- In addition we are not prepared to consider their requests for direct Soviet/Australia air flights.
- Scientific collaboration with the Soviet Union is indefinitely suspended.
- Official talks and visits between Australia and the Soviet Union are also indefinitely suspended.
- No new programs under the Cultural Program will be entered into.
- A number of countries have made statements concerning the Olympic Games. Many, including Australia, would prefer, as a result of recent events, that the Games were not being held in Moscow. The Games are, however, an international event. They are not a

Russian event and should be seen in that context.

Any decision on this matter is therefore of a different kind to decisions affecting bilateral relationships between Australia and the Soviet Union. The Government will, therefore, be closely examining these wider aspects and assessing the views of a number of other countries.

In addition to these measures, the Government will be embarking on a wide range of consultations with other countries.

And finally what has happened in Afghanistan has demonstrated that the fears and concerns expressed in my Statement on Foreign Policy in June 1976, and repeated on other occasions by the Foreign Minister have been only too realistic.

Question

Prime Minister will our Ambassador be returning to Moscow (inaud.)?

Prime Minister

He will be returning.

Question

Has there no thought been given to withdrawing him?

Prime Minister

We believe that it is important to be able to maintain communications, to talk between governments. To shut off that kind of communication is very much a final and last resort measure. We believe it makes sense for diplomatic communication to be able to continue.

Question

Prime Minister why isn't Australia stopping its wheat sales to Russia - its beef sales, its wool sales. All you say here is consistent with United States actions. What is your reason for not taking actions on these (inaud.)?

Prime Minister

Because what we have done is consistent with the United States actions. Nobody has suggested that total commercial trade with the Soviet Union should be ended. The Government did not judge that that step should be taken.

Question

But why Prime Minister?

Prime Minister

Because we judged it so.

Question

But what are the reasons behind the judgment?

Prime Minister

It's a matter of judgment that the commercial sales of a normal kind

Prime Minister (continued)

ought to continue. Most other countries I think are taking a similar view. High technology trade is being suspended between the United States and I think Britain and the Soviet Union. But on the other hand that's an area where Australia is not really involved. Even in relation to Iran, where trade boycotts have been considered, only considered at this point, the general consensus has been that food trade should be exempt from any sanctions that might one day unfold.

Question

Sir that's a humanitarian reason.

Prime Minister

Has anyone else got a question.

Question

Were there disparate voices in Cabinet, some individuals or groups pushing for a further cut in agricultural exports and other groups advocating what you decided..

Prime Minister

What's been decided was a total view of Cabinet. It would be quite odd to give the views of individual ministers in Cabinet. But let me only say on a wide range of these issues there was a remarkable degree of unanimity on the kind of view that the Government ought to take.

Question

Prime Minister in realistic terms how effective do you think this can be? (inaud.)

Prime Minister

I drew attention to the fact that the weight of 14 million people put into the scales is necessarily limited. That remains so. But it is immensely important that countries such as the United States and Britain should not be left to carry this kind of burden alone - to know that they do have friends, that they do have allies, that are prepared to take what decisions they can in support of a general position that's important for the free world.

Question

Prime Minister if the US decided to boycott the Olympic Games in Moscow would you follow their lead?

Prime Minister

Well they haven't yet made that decision. We'll be keeping in close touch with a number of governments in relation to the Olympic Games. I don't want to go beyond the remarks in the statement at this point.

Question

Prime Minister what's your response to the Chinese initiative to draw together countries to form some kind of alliance against the Soviet Union?

Prime Minister

I haven't had an analysis of that. I've seen a newspaper report and I'd like to look more closely at what China has in fact proposed.

Question

Would it be something along those lines something you would favour - an alliance?

Prime Minister

I'd like to understand what China has proposed because up to this point it's been China's policy not to involve itself in foreign military alliances of different kinds. At the moment the report I have comes from the Melbourne Herald. (That's not saying anything particular about the Melbourne Herald except it's the only report I have on that subject).

Question

Prime Minister you suggested that shipping services will be reduced. Does that include cruise ships operating?

Prime Minister

Yes.

Question

Prime Minister at what level and when will the consultations take place with the United States about our further involvement in the Indian Ocean?

Prime Minister

Well they have been very much preoccupied. As the statement points out, that's not just a proposal that is put against the immediate background, immediate circumstance. It's designed as a long term proposal which we believe could be useful in terms of broad co-operation in security and strategic matters. So I think the timing is really dependent upon the United States getting their decks cleared of the pressing current issues and that we stand ready to participate in the talks whenever they are ready.

Question

On the joint Tasmanian fishing venture, it says approval will be withdrawn. Does that mean forever?

Prime Minister

Under present circumstances. Forever is a very long while.

Question

(inaud.)

Prime Minister

There are many countries that have been approaching us for access to Australian fisheries and obviously in the months ahead our fisheries arrangements won't stand still. We would be seeing what other countries are prepared to offer, what other countries are prepared to do.

Question

You mention that we're going to have greater Australian involvement in controlling the balance of the Indian Ocean. Can you give us any details of how that involvement will be greater or will (inaud) or will we put ships into the area or...

Prime Minister

Well these are the kind of things that we need to talk to the United States about. We're willing, we're prepared to make a greater effort and it will then be a question of how that determination can best be fitted into a total overall approach.

Question

You don't think we should make that greater effort unilaterally?

Prime Minister

Yes but you'll get the best advantage from it if it's integrated with what our friends and allies are also doing.

Question

Do you envisage a large or dramatic increase in Government expenditure on defence capabilities?

Prime Minister

Defence expenditure has been rising in real terms. We've made decisions which involve further increases in real terms.

Question

Do you expect it to go beyond those decisions and increase it even more than you have in the past?

Prime Minister

Financial guidance that has been given to Defence in recent times does involve a capacity, and within the financial guidance, for making additional equipment decisions, additional material decisions. Those matters aren't at the moment before Cabinet and obviously I don't want to preempt that. But I'm just making the point that the financial guidance that has been given does have within it room for additional material decisions to those that have already been announced.

Question

Was the Minister for Defence at today's Cabinet meeting?

Prime Minister

He's on leave. He was fully represented by an acting Minister. I spoke to him before the meeting. We had an exchange of views.

Question

In the Government's view Sir, does the sum of these decisions you have just announced, is it going to cost Australia very much either economically or diplomatically?

Prime Minister

It will cost Australia economically in a number of ways. I think it's difficult to put a firm figure on that - but it will obviously cost in a number of ways. To the extent that there is a cost it should be one that's a community rather than directed at individual areas or sectors, quite plainly. And in diplomatic terms I believe the cost to us in diplomatic terms, in international and strategic terms will be infinitely greater if we were not prepared to make this kind of decision. Cost - who with? Cost with your friends or cost with the Soviet Union? There will be a cost in terms of relationships with the Soviet Union. But in a sense that's already occurred. The kinds of arguments and views that were put by the Soviet Ambassador to myself and to the Foreign Minister again yesterday and the kind of response that that attracted that in itself will involve some change, at least in the atmospherics of relationships between the Soviet Union and Australia. So there is a cost there. But it's a necessary one and the advantages in other ways of doing what Australia can to stand for something, to seek to look to the future - the advantages in taking action on that count are very real.

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