

PRIME MINISTER INTERVIEWED: MELBOURNE AIRPORT ON DEPARTURE FOR UNITED STATES

---

Question

Mr. Fraser, rutile is on everybody's lips this morning.

Prime Minister

Yes, it is. Let me say something about that in just a moment. I do want people to concentrate and keep in mind the main issues that confront us. The main issue, as I have said on many occasions, is not a particular aspect of our reaction, whether it is the Olympic Games or something in relation to rutile, it is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and what needs to be done about that. Now, the United States has taken a number of measures. The President, I believe, the United States, Britain, other countries, deserve support in the general moves that they are undertaking to try and see that there are no more Afghanistans. I have also said that the weight that 14 million Australians can throw onto the scales is obviously limited, but that does not mean to say we should not use what weight we have. If the scales were evenly balanced, and what Australia can do or Australia can say, is the one thing that tips the scales the right way, then we would never forgive ourselves if we just sat back and said "well, we can leave it all to other people". Afghanistan is important for a number of reasons. It is the first time the Soviets have used their armies against a non-aligned country not part of the Soviet power bloc in the post World War sense. That is very significant for the non-aligned world. As I have said on many occasions, it also gives an opportunity to have an influence over Middle East oil supplies, striking at the heart of the economies of advanced industrial countries. Now, having said all that, that is the reason I am going overseas. Andrew Peacock is in South East Asia, India and Pakistan. In our own future policy development, it is very important for Australia to have as good an understanding at the highest level possible of the views of our close friends and neighbours, but also of the United States and of the United Kingdom. As you know, I will also be having discussions with Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt. So, I will have a good understanding of the United States' and the European view when I come back. That will be of enormous help. I think it is essential in framing our own policy attitudes for the future on these matters.

You asked me about rutile. I have spoken to Mr. Anthony this morning and that particular contract is under suspension. We had announced some time ago a complete review of our relationships with the Soviet Union, and that includes - we have announced a number of specific decisions - but that review obviously included trade aspects, matters that could be important in a strategic sense. In the light of what occurred when I was in Tasmania, we have asked that a study of that particular aspect be expedited.

Prime Minister (continued)

I can say a little more about that because in the past we have had a list of strategic materials that have not been exported to certain places. I will be discussing, in the United States, the need to have that kind of list again. But that particular contract, after discussion with Mr. Anthony this morning, is under suspension and so we will be able to look at that quietly. But, let me again make the point, that is not the issue. The issue is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Question

How much (inaudible) contract worth, do you know?

Prime Minister

No, I don't know.

Question

Mr. Carter has already taken a very strong stand on the issue. Do you think your voice will make that stand even stronger?

Prime Minister

The President of the United States' task - it is an awesome one - but also I think the loneliest job in the free world, in the world of independently-minded nations that want to govern their own affairs. I think it is terribly important that, where we believe the United States is right, where we believe that the United States is supporting the general interests of independent nations, that we say so. I think it is encouraging for anyone to know that he has his own people with him. I believe it would be encouraging both for the United States' people and for the President to know that in broad terms a country such as Australia supports what they are seeking to do in a matter as important as this. I certainly know it would make a difference to me, feeling as I do on an issue like this. But I carry the goodwill of a great majority of Australians in the discussions that I will be having over the next ten days.

Question

Do you believe the weight of the Western world will be able to force the Russians out of Afghanistan?

Prime Minister

I think that is very difficult. I would like to think so. But I have also said in the past that once armies have moved it is very difficult to get them rejected, to get them out. The critical matter therefore for independently-minded nations is to make sure that there are no more Afghanistans.

Question

Will defence in the Indian Ocean be the main topic of discussion?

Prime Minister

The Indian Ocean, obviously, will be an important element of the discussions, and why the Chief of Defence Staff is coming with me is to enable him to have discussions with his counterparts on the best way in which we will be able to assist in the patrolling and surveillance over the Indian Ocean area. We have equipment in our defence forces that are very well suited to this task, and we will be able to expand our effort. We have already told the United States that, so there will be some discussion of it. Broadly, the political, economic and strategic consequences of the Russian move into Afghanistan - that is what the conversations are all about.

Question

Has the fact that our own Olympic Committee not supported a boycott of the Olympic Games - will that embarrass your talks with Mr. Carter?

Prime Minister

No, it will not be embarrassing, but I would have hoped that the Olympic Committee would have a view of their own that they would put. The United States Olympic Committee has taken a firm view. The indications around the world are that a number of countries have serious reservations about the Olympic Games in Moscow. We would all love to be able to say politics and sport are separate, they have nothing to do with each other. But we know from the days of apartheid in sport, apartheid that came out of a Government decision, that it is not possible to keep politics and sport separate. We also know that a country such as the Soviet Union would use the athletes of the world going to Moscow for the Olympics as a marked propaganda occasion; all the world in a sense coming to pay homage to the Soviet Union in Moscow and the fact that it was an international Olympic event, and not a Russian event would become lost and submerged in the Soviet handling of the event. That needs to be very much understood. The advisers that we have, and who have studied the Soviet Union very very closely indeed, they tell us that no other single act would bring home to the Soviet Government and to the Soviet people so strongly, so vehemently, our strength of feeling about Afghanistan, as a boycott of the Olympic Games.

Question

Is the prime motive of this trip tactical, or as a show of support amongst Western nations?

Prime Minister

No, the prime purpose of this trip - and this is the element in which I certainly believe that I have the support of a great majority of Australians - is to make sure that I am as well advised as possible, the thinking at the highest levels, the United States and the United Kingdom so we can exchange views. In matters as important as this, countries do not go off

Prime Minister (continued)

on separate and independent tangents. There is a general interest here, an interest for all governments, for all countries, that want to maintain the independence of nations. Against that background, the consultation, understanding of each other's mind, is of vast importance, as I have said, for Australia. Quite apart from the normal diplomatic exchanges, consultations with Andrew Peacock in South East Asia and in India and Pakistan, that is one element, and then my own conversations in the United States, Britain, France and Germany, will give me an insight on how they see these matters. It does not mean to say we just sit and listen. It will be a general exchange of view and hopefully a meeting of minds.

Question

Do you hope to bring about possible retaliatory action by the Soviet Union in terms of trade with Australia?

Prime Minister

Oh look, if that happens, that happens. But we go into that sort of thing with our eyes wide open, because there are more important issues at stake. The kind of country that we leave our children - we are nearly at the end of this century, we will get into the year 2000 before very long, in two decades - the kind of country we leave our children as we go to the year 2000 and beyond, that is the important thing. That is the obligation and responsibility on us when there are great issues at stake. There should not be anything else in our minds.

Question

Do you hope to bring concrete proposals back to Cabinet?

Prime Minister

I do not think it is really that kind of a mission. Nobody, out of these discussions, is going to get the sudden answer, the final solution to the problems the Soviets have posed by Afghanistan. There is not some sudden, easily found key which will give us the total solution. I think that what we are really seeking to establish is a feeling of determination, of resolve, amongst countries such as the United States and Australia and many, many others around the world, and determination that we will need to keep with us not just for a few days, weeks, or months, but for years, because the Soviet Union has shown us again what she is capable of, what prepared to do, if the guards of, again, free and independent nations, is relaxed.