

PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE: BLAIR HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Prime Minister

I would like to say at the outset that there have been very useful and productive discussions with the President, with Secretary of State Vance, and Deputy Secretary of Defence. Those discussions I believe have shown the remarkable identity of view and of interest in the recent events that have emerged in Afghanistan and in relation to Iran.

Australia believes that this does represent a very serious and a very dangerous situation. We believe that there is a long haul ahead of all independently-minded countries, of which the United States of course is in the lead and foremost, and that there is a long haul ahead of us that could extend over a number of years. We are in a different environment. Maybe what has happened in Afghanistan has made us all see the Soviet Union in its aggressive acts more plainly than was the case before. In this new environment it is our view that we need a collective determination on the part of as many independently-minded countries as possible to make sure that a recurrence of the kind of events that have occurred in Afghanistan will not be with us. These are matters of great and fundamental importance. That of course is why I am here, with the full authority of the Australian Cabinet, to discuss these matters with the President, to go on for discussions in the United Kingdom, in Bonn and in Paris.

I believe that it is important for a country such as Australia to have the clearest possible understanding of the views of the major countries- and of this country in particular- as an assistance, and a necessary ingredient, in our own future policy determination. I must say that I am delighted with what I have seen in the United States, of United States intentions in what has happened in recent weeks.

We in Australia, from our perspective, believe that it is very important that the United States stand against aggression and in this case, take a very strong position against what the Soviet Union has done in Afghanistan. That has occurred. The United States actions stand clear. The President has made a necessary and enormously important statement in the State of the Union message which spelt out in clear terms the interests and intentions of the United States. Now that has provided a lead to many other countries, and it has given confidence to many other countries. This again, I believe, will help in establishing a collective will, a collective determination, which will establish an environment which will be designed to deter the Soviets from pursuing any further Afghanistans.

In the Australian view, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan does establish a more dangerous situation than that which prevailed in Berlin, or Cuba, or Korea, in earlier times. All of those challenges to the Western world were important. They represented an ideological challenge. They were also events of great regional significance. Those ingredients are very much present in the circumstances of Afghanistan. But beyond that, in Afghanistan there is a further ingredient: possession of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, the presence of their forces there, is likely to open up opportunities in the future for a move through Iran, perhaps, gaining an influence or a control over a part of Middle East oil. If that were to

Prime Minister (continued)

occur, the Soviet Union would gain an enormous weapon which could severely damage or even destroy many advanced industrial economies, many economies, right around the world. That is an added ingredient that was not present in relation to the Berlin blockade, the Korean War, or the Cuban missile incident.

For these reasons, Australia takes a very serious view about it indeed. Quite plainly, what 14 million people can do in these circumstances is limited. But we take the view that if a country has a view, as we have, we ought to state it, and to the extent that we can, we ought to act upon it. We take the view that it is not good enough to sit back and wait until everyone else has acted, because if every nation does that nobody will act. The United States which has, could well be left standing alone. Leadership of the independent nations of the world is an awesome responsibility. I believe that the Presidency of this nation, of the United States, is clearly the toughest and the hardest job in the world, that there must be many times when it was also the loneliest job in the world. I would believe on these occasions that not only the United States' President, but the American people might like to know that there are other governments and people that have a very similar view to their own about the importance of certain events. I do carry that message from my own Cabinet, and from the vast majority of the Australian people, who would share with the people of this nation, a very common concern about events in Afghanistan.

There are other elements of course, in that particular invasion. It was a non-aligned country. That offers something of a warning to many nations around the world who might have thought that the position of a non-aligned status would give them immunity from this kind of aggression. It, of course, is the first time there has been an invasion outside the accepted area of the Soviet power bloc. Those are also two additional reasons which cause us to re-assess the circumstances and the strategic environment in which we live.

In addition to these matters, the President of course has had to deal in a firm way with the enormously difficult and tragic problem of the hostages in Iran. I would like to, on this public occasion, extend to the President not only my own sympathy and the sympathy of the Government and the Australian people, but extend that sympathy to all the people of the United States for what they have had to endure during the period in which some of their own citizens have been held hostage. We are obviously delighted, as everyone must be, that a small number of hostages have been able to get out of Iran and that Canada has been able to help and be of assistance in that. I think that was wonderful news. We will all be looking forward to the day when all those hostages are released safely, just as eagerly I believe, as will the people of the United States. Our sympathy and support goes to the President & the United States people in that particular instance.

We have taken a number of decisions on our own account, of which I informed the President today. I said that I thought that we were now in a changed strategic environment. That has some consequences. A little while ago we offered to the United States to take on greater responsibilities for patrolling and surveillance in the Indian Ocean. That has been very warmly accepted by the United States. Officials of our defence departments and defence forces will be consulting together quite urgently to work out the best way in which that can be encompassed.

Prime Minister (continued)

It is likely that there will be a requirement for greater use of staging facilities through Australia. It is likely that there will be a requirement for greater joint exercises between United States and Australian forces. We will be looking forward to doing everything we can to assist in those particular measures if the need arises.

We have already authorised a review of our own defence expenditure. I can only say in the circumstances it is highly likely that the Government will accept an increased requirement for additional defence in Australia.

We have also made a decision to offer to consult with and provide additional co-operation with our regional partners in relation to some of these matters, but that is something that we would need to discuss very closely with them.

We are going to provide additional civil aid in the South Pacific. There are a number of small and fragile economies in the South Pacific, new nations, island states, and I think it is important that collectively we do what we can to achieve a greater rate of advancement in their own economies. This, again, is in part a response to the changed environment that we are in.

Over the last three years our civil aid to countries of the Pacific has grown very greatly, but we had made a decision in principle a week or two ago to provide additional support and additional aid. I informed the President of that.

We expect there will be early discussions between defence personnel of the United States and of Australia to work out the defence matters between us. We also discussed a greater co-operation in coal and shale oil technology. Both of us will be reviewing the opportunities for more co-operation in those areas which are of an obvious importance in the current energy crisis.

We also jointly agreed that there is a need to seek by all means of which we are capable, to do more to assist the economic take-off in third world economies. That represents a continuing and pressing problem which must be of concern to many nations. In the environment, as we move forward through the 80s, I think it will be important to try and achieve a greater rate of progress than might have occurred in past years.

It is now open to you for questions.

PRESS OFFICE TRANSCRIPT

THURSDAY, 31 JANUARY 1980

PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE:BLAIR HOUSE

QUESTIONS

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Question

Prime Minister, the State Department told us that Australia has been helpful to the Americans in the case of the hostages in Tehran. Can you reveal what Australia has done, what Australia is doing to help the Americans?

Prime Minister

No. We have not been part of the release of the hostages which were assisted through the Canadian Embassy. I am not saying we would not have been helpful, but the plain fact remains that was something which was arranged by the United States and the Canadians.

Question

Is Australia taking part in negotiations perhaps on behalf of the Americans, with the Revolutionary Council of the Iranian Government?

Prime Minister

On the general question of hostages, we have sought to be helpful, and if through exchanges in communications there is anything that we can do, of course we will. I had thought that your question was related to the release of the six hostages. I might have misunderstood it in the first instance. But I cannot go into the details of the way in which Australia from time to time might be a channel of communication in that particular matter.

Question

Can you say whether our Ambassador is involved?

Prime Minister

No. I do not think it would be helpful to pursue it.

Question

Prime Minister, could you explain at all your mention of a larger role for Australia in the Indian Ocean. When will the talks on what you are going to do begin, and will you actually put ships into the Indian Ocean?

Prime Minister

Well, we have ships in the Indian Ocean and we have our Orion maritime surveillance aircraft patrolling around Australia. They obviously now patrol some aspects of the Indian Ocean. What we have said is that we are prepared to do more, and that might involve ships. It could involve aircraft. It could involve ship visits. Our defence people have to work out the best way our increased effort can be accommodated within the total overall objective. Now, I hope they will both get down to it, and do it as quickly as possible, but we are prepared to act upon it just as soon as our defence people can come to their decisions about the best way of doing it.

Question

What is the size of your naval presence there now?

Prime Minister

Oh, it would vary. It is obviously small compared to your navy. We have established a major new naval facility on the coast of Western Australia which would have the capacity of being used much more than has been the case. When I was Defence Minister ten years ago we agreed that that facility would be available for the use of United States ships if they wanted it, as they have used other Australian facilities from time to time. The numbers of ships that we would have in the Indian Ocean varies, but we have obligations in South East Asia and also in the Pacific. It is not only an Indian Ocean matter that we look at.

Question

Where are the facilities sir?

Prime Minister

At Cockburn Sound, south of Perth, Western Australia. It is a major new naval facility that has been constructed over recent years.

Question

Was the question of providing home base facilities for the American Navy discussed at all?

Prime Minister

It is too early to go into details of what might happen, what sort of facilities might be required. What is most likely is staging facilities for onward transport through Australia to other parts. The United States, I understand, is firming up its own requirement over the next few weeks and after that would be able to speak to us with more precision than they were able to do today.

Question

Prime Minister, on the question of the hostages, just to clear that up, are we channelling communications from the United States to the Iranian Government?

Prime Minister

Oh, look, there have been some communications as I understand it. If we can be helpful because we have our Embassy in Tehran, we would certainly want to be. But I do not really want to say more than that.

Question

Prime Minister, did you discuss the Westinghouse Case and the application of anti-trust laws?

Prime Minister

No. We did not discuss bilateral matters of that kind.

Question

Prime Minister, did you seek anything specific from the President? Did you ask him, for example, to take tougher sanctions against the Russians, or did you specifically seek a greater American presence in the Indian Ocean?

Prime Minister

There is no need to seek a greater American presence in the Indian Ocean, because that greater presence is there. That decision has been made. What we now have to do is to seek to accommodate a greater effort by Australia into that and work out the best way it can contribute to a total effort. In addition, of course, the United States is undertaking long-term planning and so must we. That is where the review of our own expenditures would be highly relevant.

Question

What about the question of further economic sanctions against the Soviet Union?

Prime Minister

No. That question did not arise. In talks with Secretary Vance, I mentioned the fact that we had frozen the exports of some materials, raw materials, to the Soviet Union, pending an examination of the matter by the Australian Government. Our officials will be discussing what is called the COCOM list, which is broadly a high-technology list of exports which European countries and the United States broadly refrain from exporting to the Soviet Union. But it also has some strategic materials on that list. Our officials will be consulting together to see whether it is possible to get to an agreed position in relation to it. That would obviously seem to make much more sense. Now, those discussions will take place and there will be a report to the Government as a result.

Question

Prime Minister, one more question from me. There are still four U.S. Embassy people unaccounted for in Tehran. Is there any possibility that they are at our Embassy or that we know anything about them?

Prime Minister

I have absolutely no knowlege of that whatsoever.

Question

Prime Minister, in relationship to your statement on the great collective effort in the region around Australia, does this imply that you might be thinking of re-fashioning the alliances such as ANZUS, SEATO, or even encouraging talks with NATO powers to create a new form of defence alliance independently of the United States?

Prime Minister

I do not think it is a question of forming new defence alliances. Recent events have re-established in stark terms the relevance of the ANZUS alliance, and that is obviously important so far as we are concerned. But when I meant collective determination I was not talking just about our own region. I believe there needs to be a collective determination amongst all those nations that have a concern for the independence of nations, for the right of nations to govern themselves. Unless we can exhibit that collective determination, I believe we face a difficult and serious time ahead of us, for reasons which I would have made plain to you. This can emerge, and I would hope will emerge, through the decisions of nations, through the attitudes they take, through their own determination and through their own will. This is what it is really all about, the will and the determination.

Question

On the Olympic Games, if President Carter does announce on the 20th or 21st of February that the United States will not participate in the Moscow Olympics, will the Australian Government follow suit by boycotting the Games and take necessary measures to ensure that Australian sportsmen do not participate in the Moscow Games?

Prime Minister

Our own position at this point is I think identical with that of the United States. Our own Olympic Committee has undertaken to put our view to the International Olympic Committee and after that there will obviously be discussions between the Olympic Committee and the Australian Government. But let me only say I believe an effective boycott of the Olympic Games is one thing that would bring home to the Soviet Union and to the Russian people, more starkly than anything else, the determination of the world outside the Soviet influence to demonstrate their opposition and abhorrence of their invasion of Afghanistan. It is possible for the Russian Government to hide the impact of sanctions from their own people for quite some time. But it is not possible for them to hide the impact of an effective boycott of the Olympic Games. They plainly want the Olympic Games to be a major public relations success within the Soviet Union, with the athletes of all countries going to Moscow and as it were, paying homage to the Soviet Union through their presence at the Olympic Games. It is the strong view of the Australian Government that this is not the appropriate time for athletes of the free world, of the independent world, to be doing that. It is all very well for people to say that politics and sport should be kept separate. But the Soviet Union does not do that. For a very, very long while, there have been a number of governments that have virtually made sport, and for that matter cultural affairs an extension of their own government's personality. They involve the two together.

Prime Minister (continued)

In other areas, South Africa introduced apartheid into sport, introduced political elements into sporting events. It is no good now people, after that, coming and saying that politics and sport should be kept separate. There was an attempt made to do that years ago. It proved quite impossible. The Government has also expressed the view in the longer term that the best way of preserving the spirit and the ideal of the Olympic Games, which is important, and free from political influence, might well be to have a permanent Olympic centre established in Greece.

Question

Prime Minister, can I follow up on the previous question about regional co-operation. You referred to the necessity for consultations about greater co-operation with our regional partners, can you say which countries you particularly have in mind, and what sort of level those conversations will be at, and what sort of areas for greater co-operation you envisage.

Prime Minister

The consultations will be with Australia's traditional regional partners. in South East Asia; Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, are the traditional five, in a sense. But we have very close relationships with Papua New Guinea as well, and other countries close to us.

Question

New Zealand?

Prime Minister

Consultations with New Zealand are always very close. The relationship is as one would expect. We co-operate and consult on all important matters between us. Consultations will be taking place on an official level. Then we will see whether some decisions are necessary.

Question

Prime Minister, is Australia trying to convince other nations to join the boycott, and what are the prospects that the number will grow?

Prime Minister

Well, the number seems to be growing. There seems to me to be greater international support for the boycott almost daily. Our Foreign Minister, Andrew Peacock, has been travelling through the five ASEAN countries and India and Pakistan and discussing with them Australian concerns with current problems. Just as I am discussing these matters with the President here, and with Prime Minister Thatcher, and in France and Germany, so too, he is having a full exchange of views with those other countries. Then we will be as best advised as we can be from our regional partners and friends, as well as from the nations which are the major determinants of what happens in these matters. That of course, in current circumstances, I regard as quite vital in the formation of our own future policies.



Question

Prime Minister, did you and the President discuss Australia as a possible site for an alternative Games?

Prime Minister

No. We did not.

Question

Do you feel that the grain embargo has been an effective tool against the Soviet Union?

Prime Minister

I think there are some signs that it is being an effective tool, and I certainly would hope that it is. Australia, as you know, is co-operating in that, and in a number of other measures. Senator Glenn made a statement in the Senate yesterday commenting upon the decisions that Australia has made up to this point. It might be worthwhile getting a copy of his remarks in the Congressional Record.

Question

Prime Minister, what sort of strategic assessments did the President give you of the consequences South West Asia of the Soviet invasion. In particular, did he give you any hard intelligence or other information that might suggest that the Soviet Union has designs on Iran or other countries in the region?

Prime Minister

There is a full exchange of intelligence information and views between the United States and Australia. That goes on on a continuing basis. I believe that the assessments of the importance of what has happened are very similar; the assessment in the United States and the assessment in Australia. I do not think there are any significant differences between them. I have said in Australia that I do not believe there is a grand design by the Soviet Union in terms of having made a decision to move on a fixed timetable; to do one thing and then to take a second step six months or twelve months later. But I have always believed that, motivated by their communist ideology, that the Soviet Union will take advantage of an opportunity if an opportunity arises, or if an opportunity can be created. That, of course, is the danger of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, because opportunities could arise in relation to Iran or Pakistan, or could be created in relation to one or the other or to both. That creates a new and sensitive, and highly dangerous situation. The President's State of the Union message was very much needed. I also believe that it was a statement of great strength which deserves the respect and support of countries such as Australia, indeed of all nations that are concerned for their own independence.

Question

So you are really relying largely on supposition as to what the Soviet intentions might be rather than any intelligence or -

Prime Minister

No. We are not relying on supposition at all. We are relying on the total and long history of communist expansion. That gives you very good empirical evidence. The pattern of their behaviour in the past has been demonstrated in recent weeks to be the pattern of their behaviour in the present. We have no evidence of any kind to indicate that their pattern of behaviour in the future is likely to change into more peaceful directions.

Question

How long do you think it will be before the Australian Olympic Committee reaches a decision on a boycott. Are you concerned that a decision has not already been taken?

Prime Minister

I would have preferred that they had made the kind of decision that the United States Olympic Committee has. They, I know, respect the Government's view in relation to this, and I believe will argue the Government's view strongly when they present that to the International Olympic Committee. So let's wait and see what happens after that.

Question

Prime Minister, you came half around the world to today's talks. What would you say you have accomplished of importance?

Prime Minister

I think they have demonstrated in this instance, a very close identity of interest between the United States and Australia. They have identified a pretty common assessment of the dangers that are faced, and they have clarified the kinds of things that we can do in our own region in broad general support of the initiatives that the United States has taken. They have certainly given - Mr. MacKellar is with me and the officials and myself - a much better insight into United States thinking than you can achieve through normal cables and reporting, through normal official channels. Being able to talk with your counterparts is always highly relevant and I believe vastly important.

Question

When you announced your intention to come here, you were reported as intending to put pressure on President Carter to take a tougher stand. Since then, the purpose of the visit appears to have changed to a display of moral support and an explanation of Australia's actions. Were you accurately reported initially, and if so, what has happened in the meantime to change the purpose of the visit?

Prime Minister

Well, if I commented on every speculative report I would never stop commenting.

Question

The report was based on highly-placed sources.

Prime Minister

It appears that some of your colleagues know what that term sometimes means. "Highly-placed sources" is an interpretation. It does not really say what those sources are. No. It would have been impertinent to suggest that I was coming here to put pressure on the President of the United States. I stated from the outset quite plainly, There was no need for interpretation because I stated what the purpose was: to have an exchange of views on matters of great importance to Australia and of great importance to other countries; to put my government in the best possible position to take the most responsible and sensible decisions in the future about our own Australian and regional security. Now the discussions here do not need any other purpose than that. That was the purpose and that has been fulfilled, as I believe in a very adequate way, in the discussions that have taken place this morning and this afternoon.

Question

As a result of these talks, do you hope that in future the administration will be more sympathetic to the Australian Government's viewpoint on issues such as the Westinghouse Case.

Prime Minister

They are legal matters. I think you need to go to lawyers for that sort of thing.