

INTERVIEW WITH DON BAKER, CBS

HONOLULU

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Question

Prime Minister, you had two meetings with the President, and obviously discussed the perceived threat that is common to both our countries. Did you arrive at any conclusions?

Prime Minister

I think Australia and the United States have a very common view and understanding of the dangers and also of the actions that need to be taken. The President's State of the Union message, where he stated very clearly his intentions, the United States intentions, is a very important document and one that is essential to the well-being and security of the United States, United States allies and indeed, of independent nations around the world. I hope that that is a document, or a statement, that will be built upon. It gives us a starting point. The United States has announced increased defence budgets. Australia will be adding to its own defences. We will be co-operating even more closely with the United States in surveillance and patrolling in the Indian Ocean, and undertaking a number of other activities all of which are designed, on Australia's part, to do what Australia can to help demonstrate a collective determination to do what is necessary. I hope that as many countries as possible will strongly support the President of the United States. In terms of a perception of the threat, in terms of an understanding of what needs to be done, I believe the United States and Australia are really on common lines. I say this, not from the point of view of 14 million people that go along and say to the United States "we support, right or wrong", because we have to make our own independent judgements of what is in our interests and what is in a sense, the free world interest. But we very strongly believe that the United States is right, that the course that the President has taken is right, and that we therefore need to do everything we can within the limits of our capacities - of 14 million people - to support that position.

Question

Do you think the people of Australia, and more specifically, the law makers will support you?

Prime Minister

In Australia? I have not the slightest doubt about the law makers in Australia. I have not the slightest doubt about the will and determination of the overwhelming majority of the Australian people.

Prime Minister (continued)

One of the things, if I may say it, that was stimulating in Washington, was the extent to which senior Congressional leaders, senior Senators, who have been around the Capitol for a long while, were saying the Congress is behind the President, the people of the United States are behind the President, perhaps in a way that has not been seen since 1945. We all know the divisions and difficulties that came after Vietnam. Therefore, as an ally of the United States, it was a very good thing indeed to see that sense of purpose, that sense of determination, not just from the Administration, not just from the President, but to be told that it was something that carried through right across the United States.

Question

Prime Minister, one final question. Yesterday the President recommended the most controversial part of, I guess, the defence package - the draft, or at least the registration for the draft including men and women. Did he discuss this with you?

Prime Minister

No. What the United States does in enhancing its own defence effort is obviously a matter for itself. We did not discuss, really, what we were intending to do. I did advise the President that additional proposals for defence would be examined by my Government very shortly after my return to Australia. We had indicated that we were prepared to support the United States with increased patrolling and surveillance of the Indian Ocean and that our respective defence people would need to work out how the total effort can be best integrated together. We indicated a number of other things that we, from our own perspectives, had decided, as contributing to the joint effort. I would see what the President has done in that particular decision as another of the courageous acts. The President and the Administration has shown much courage in dealing with the present crisis and in dealing with the Iranian crisis not only courage, but a much needed restraint, having in mind the lives of the hostages and the overwhelming imperative to have those hostages released and returned, without harm, to the United States. So, what the United States needs to do, I have no doubt the President will pursue with vigour and determination.