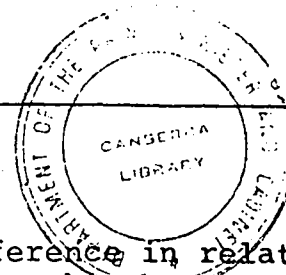


PRESS CONFERENCE, CANBERRA

Prime Minister:

I thought it might be useful if I called this conference in relation to the Office of National Assessments because there has been a good deal of writing going on about the subject and a good deal of it as far as I am aware anyway, is not accurate. There are some things that are certainly inaccurate in relation to my own views, and in fact, do not coincide with what I have publicly stated in the Parliament itself. It is worth recalling that the Office of National Assessments was established as a result of one of the main recommendations by Mr Justice Hope when he was looking at Australia's security organisations. It was out of that recommendation that the Office came to be formed. Mr Justice Hope had drawn attention to the fact that the Government didn't have one body drawing together assessments from all the factual knowledge available to government. The Joint Intelligence Organisation which had done part of this work in the past was more narrowly based, more defence orientated, and in modern circumstance, governments need assessments on a much wider range of matters than ones that are purely defence related.

There are economic matters, political matters and a whole range of subjects of importance to governments in the modern age where information available to government needs to be assessed in as impartial and objective atmosphere as is possible. That was the reasons for the establishment of the Office of National Assessments. I believe that the Office has undertaken that work well, and I also believe that the basis and the nature of the assessments that are available to government is much better, and much more broadly based, than those that did come from the Joint Intelligence Organisation.

That in itself is not a criticism of JIO, because its charter was different, it was a different kind of organisation. But, I wanted to make the point that ONA came out of a recommendation by Mr Justice Hope, that was designed to make sure that governments had available to them the best possible assessments on a range of strategic, political and economic matters that are important to governments when they come to decisions on a wide variety of subjects.

So much for background. The role of ONA is important. It will continue to be important. I think it has filled its task well, and the quality of its assessments have been good. We all know there are problems at the present time, but I have got confidence in the way the Director General is handling those particular problems. It was he called in ASIO to examine certain matters. There will be a report. The Director General, I have no doubt, will act upon that report as he thinks fit. I do know he is concerned to get to the truth of the matter, and that any decisions need taking as a result of it, well then they will be taken.

But, I went over to the Office of National Assessments this afternoon to tell the numbers of the office very much what I have told you - that I have confidence in what they are doing, it has been important to government, and that the work is necessary and must continue, and that I have confidence in the way the work has been undertaken. I do not believe that there has been - or I am certainly not conscious of major attempts by people in Foreign Affairs, for example, to get at the Office of National Assessments.

Prime Minister: (Cont .)

One of the factors that that has been related to in the writings is what has happened to Afghanistan and the possibility of different assessments in relation to that. But, people in the Department of Foreign Affairs have seen detente very much go out the window with the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The advice coming to us overall, has been pretty rugged and pretty determined in relation to what Australia might do.

People, and I have said this in the Parliament, might vary on the Soviet's reasons for going into Afghanistan, but there is certainly no difference between the government and the government's advisors on the dangers and the consequences that flow out of that invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Whatever their motives for going there, as I said in that first statement, the consequences are more important than motives for the first or actual move, because it is agreed that if new opportunities are likely to unfold, they will take advantage of it. If opportunities don't unfold, they are also prone to create them. But, in a sense, for today, that is by the way.

What I did want to say, is that I have confidence in Bob Furlonger as Director-General, I have confidence in the office. They have served the Government well. There are difficulties at the present time. I am confident of Mr Furlonger's capacity to overcome those difficulties. He has the authority to do so, and I know he has the determination to do so.

Question:

Prime Minister, have you made that declaration because you fear that stories over the past week have damaged ONA?

Prime Minister:

It is not a question of fear. Quite obviously the sort of stories that have occurred are damaging, and there is a likelihood that there will be more stories. There will be stories over the weekend I would imagine, and Michelle, you won't mind me saying it, but the story in the middle of the Age today was one which made me think that perhaps I ought to move as I have done - to speak to people in the office itself and to have this press conference, because within my knowledge, much of that story is just not accurate. And I am not picking up the Age but it just happened to be on the front page and it happened to be written today. I think it is very hard for people who basically don't speak to the media, they are not able to get on their own feet and defend themselves, that the Prime Minister might be after elements in the office about this or about that. They wonder what the truth is. They wonder then, perhaps, whether the Government does hold the office in high regard, or whether it doesn't, and they wonder whether we feel that they have in fact been fulfilling a role as the Government originally determined as a result of Mr Justice Hope's report.

So, that is the reason I went over to the Office of National Assessments. It is also the reason why I am holding this press conference.

Question:

What do you actually see as the difficulties, in the office at the

.../

Question: (cnt.)

moment, and I would ask you to be specific on that because you are saying what you want to avoid is inaccurate speculation about the office....

Prime Minister:

The difficulties I think are largely internal to the office. Mr Furlonger might like to comment about that, but the things that I think can be very damaging and make life very difficult and painful for members in the office is when they read things about my attitudes, my motives, things that I am alleged to have said or other Ministers might have said about the worth of the office and this sort of thing. That I think is something which has been written. It looked as if it was going to go on being written because of some questions that had been put into my office this morning, so I thought I ought to try and stop it.

As far as I am concerned, it is just not true.

Question:

How do you view, then, the loss of whatever it is, lost, of a top secret document, a highly confidential document?

Prime Minister:

Obviously Mr Furlonger regards that as serious or he would not have called in ASIO and advised me after he had called in ASIO. I state that in that order to show that the Director General himself regarded it as a very serious matter and acted upon it, and advised me of what he had done. I also, obviously, regard it as a serious matter, but I have also said that I am confident in the way the Director General is handling the matter.

Question:

Justice Hope, six months ago, publicly warned the Government in a report to Parliament that there was a lack of security within Government Departments. He didn't name them, he specifically spelled out the security of handling documents. Six months later we find out that a top security document has disappeared. Surely you must be more than concerned?

Prime Minister:

I have already said that I regard it as serious. The Director General regards it as serious. He called in ASIO as a result.

Question:

You said the problems in ONA are mainly internal. How does the loss of a classified secret document an internal problem?

Prime Minister:

It happened within matters - Bob, you might like to answer that, but it seemed to me that it occurred out of events within the organisation itself. I think it also plain that there have been one or two....

Question:

..you could say that about the ...inaudible.. case, couldn't you? .../4

Prime Minister:

Well, you could say it about one or two personality problems within the office and I think that is what I was referring to. Obviously the loss of a document of that kind is one I have already said I regarded as serious, and it must be a concern to the government as such. But it is also important to know whether or not I have confidence in the way the matter, up to this point is being handled.

Question:

Do you think the document was lost, or do you think this was the act of some internal saboteur?

Prime Minister:

I am not going to try and pre-empt what ASIO might have in its report.

Question:

Does the personal expression of confidence that you gave to the ONA this afternoon extend to each individual member of the office?

Prime Minister:

It extended to the organisation as such, and the work that the organisation and its members as such, as a collective body of people, have been undertaking.

Question:

Do you believe that the two ONA officers who provided information to the Labor Party were acting in a disloyal fashion? Can you tell us, what if any, action has been taken against those officers, and can you tell me whether you are happy with the action that has been taken or the lack of action if no action has been taken?

Prime Minister:

I think if you read my statement in the Parliament on that you would have an answer to most of those questions, because I made it perfectly plain in that statement in the Parliament, the nature of the advice that they had passed on to an officer of the library which would seem to be not consistent with the basis of other things that are written in other places, or for that matter, would seem to be not consistent with the sort of speeches that came out of the Opposition, and the nature of the advice that was given by those two officers to the officer of the library, was written down in their own terms and signed by them. So they made it perfectly plain what they had said. Any question of disciplinary matters is a matter for the Director General, but I did say in that statement, that I regarded the fact that when they were challenged about what they had done, they made it perfectly plain, there was no attempt to hide it, and made a full statement of what had occurred, why, the motivation, and of what they had said, as a mitigating circumstance. Any question of any other action is for the Director General.

Question:

Can you tell us what action has been taken by the Director General?

Prime Minister:

Disciplinary matters are matters for the people in charge of the officers concerned, and I would prefer that Mr Furlonger answer that question if he wants to.

Mr Furlonger:

Prime Minister, I would say that I have taken certain additional action, but I don't think I am prepared to say publicly what that action is.

Question:

Could you say how much progress has been made in trying to relocate the document?

Mr Furlonger:

No, I can't at this stage comment on the ASIO investigation. I think it will take another week possibly. I am not sure yet just how long will take. But I do want to make it clear, as the Prime Minister has said, it was my initiative that caused ASIO to come in, and my only objective is to get at the truth, and when we know what the truth is, then I will consider what further action, if any, needs to be taken.

Question:

Do you deny, categorically, the reports that there is a faction fight within ONA, that you are under seige from various other intelligence organisations and that the reports we have read are that ONA is divided into various factions which are trying to knock each other off?

Mr Furlonger:

I think that if you look at the statement made by all the ONA staff the other day, which was a united statement, made in support of me and in support of the organisation, and in support of ONA, and in which they denied that there were any factions, I think that that answers that question.

In so far as other intelligence bodies are concerned, it is not true that there is tension existing between ASIO and JIO and the other bodies. We have very good co-operation with all the other intelligence agencies, and I expect that to continue.

Question:

Mr Furlonger, what was the time period between you calling ASIO and when you believe the document went missing?

Mr Furlonger:

No, I am not prepared to comment on the matters that will be covered in the ASIO report.

Question:

Are you willing to tell us when you see the report, whether you will let us know, the Prime Minister let us know, in broad outline

Question:

the conclusions..

Prime Minister:

I don't think we can pre-empt the result of the report. It might recommend action it might not. I think we have got to get that report and then make a judgement about it ...

Question:

But can you tell us when you get it, can you give us an outline when it is completed and when you get it?

Prime Minister:

That is asking me to make a judgement before I know what is likely to be in the report. I would sooner get that particular report and then see how it would be best handled.

Question:

Except that you are giving a very fulsome expression of confidence in general in ONA today, can you tell us in a week or whenever this report is ready, whether you still feel that that is justified?

Prime Minister:

Let's see what happens then. Noone has suggested that there aren't some problems. There obviously are. And I haven't suggested that there aren't some problems. What I have had confidence in and do, is the nature of the work that ONA has done, the kind of assessments that they have provided to governments on a wide range of matters and as I believe, of high quality. That doesn't mean to say the government agrees with all parts of it. You get assessments, you get advice. Governments have to make their own decisions. But that is the nature of it. In relation to the current problems, I have confidence in what the Director General has done to this point in handling those particular matters, and I support him in doing that. He didn't ask that he should do this or that, he has taken his own action in relation to it within his own responsibility. And I support that. I think it is important, therefore, to have clearly in mind, what we are talking about and what has been said, because there are problems. The extent of action, if any that will need to be taken, will depend significantly upon that report that comes from ASIO. But, I do remember the time when governments did not have the kind of concerted assessment machinery that is now provided by ONA, and the advice that then came to governments was much inferior - in some cases it was entirely absent.

There is one other way that the Office of National Assessment works which I think we might have forgotten. In relation to economic matters, there is an economics assessment board which has representatives of Treasury and other people on it, and while the Director General has final authority for the assessment that comes forward, I am not aware of clashes between the various assessments board on economic matters or the general assessments board, the national assessments board which includes officers from Foreign Affairs and JIO.

Prime Minister: (Cont.)

So, in the assessing machinery itself, it is not ONA standing apart, the machinery draws in the operative departments or instrumentalities in areas where their advice and expertise is necessary. I think that is something which has been a little forgotten in discussing ONA, maybe something secluded in a part, in fact, it is not.

Question:

..inaudible... problems usually exist within ONA?

Prime Minister:

There is the problem of lost document to start with.

Question:

You said problems. What are the other problems?

Prime Minister:

I think it is very plain that there have been some problems involving people.

Question:

Would these include disloyal elements?

Prime Minister:

Look, you are using those sorts of words. I am not going to use that sort of word.

Question:

With the ASIO investigation, is it empowered merely to track down this document or examine material handling procedures within ONA, or is it also empowered to examine the source of some of these stories that are appearing in the media and which you say are inaccurate?

Prime Minister:

Mr Furlonger commissioned the inquiry, so perhaps he had better answer that.

Mr Furlonger:

I have asked ASIO to first of all, look into all the circumstances surrounding the missing document, and that could well lead them to a fairly wide field. I have also asked them to review our security procedures, and I made it plain to them that I don't interpret their investigation in a narrow, legalistic kind of sense. I want a full inquiry that will get to the bottom of all the circumstances that relate both to the missing document and to our own security proceedings

Question:

Would you say that in that case, in the future, officers of ONA will not be allowed to answer inquiries from politicians other than

Question: (cont.)

responsible ministers, or that they will not any longer be allowed to answer inquiries from the Parliamentary library or similar organisations?

Prime Minister:

The library has its own rule, and it makes its own, that it is meant to get advice from sources where the advice is publishable. That is a library, and if you want to question that rule you should go to the library...

Question:

... whether the ONA advice is publishable in a sense.

Prime Minister:

Basically, their assessments are not publishable. There are specific ways in relation to the opposition for example, or for that matter, other members of Parliament if they are going to get access to the assessments, but for the leader of the opposition, the deputy leader of the opposition if they ask for a briefing on various matters, I would have thought it would be given. I don't know of an occasion when briefing has been refused, but in fact, most of the briefings have come when the facilities have been offered. There seems to be an incapacity in the opposition to ask.

Question:

...use the results of that briefing in Parliamentary speeches in the same way as they would be allowed to use the results of the Parliamentary research service.

Prime Minister:

Obviously, a lot of the work that ONA does and the briefings if they are to be as full as possible, depend upon classified material, which is not publishable.

Question:

Do the internal problems that you referred to earlier include any expressions of concern or any complaints at all from any country outside Australia...

Prime Minister:

No. None that have reached me at all.

Question:

Two questions - you said in the Parliament that these people only provided unclassified material to the library. That means that it is publishable, doesn't it, if it is unclassified?

Prime Minister:

Well, it if is unclassified..

Question:

If it is unclassified, would it be publishable?

Prime Minister:

Unclassified would be publishable, if that it all that it is.

Question:

I am quoting you there, so what they gave the library...

Prime Minister:

I hope you are quoting me accurately.

Question:

...you used the word unclassified in Parliament, you defended these people. You said presumably what they gave to the library was publishable.

Prime Minister:

No, I think that you are doing it the wrong way around, because, basically, the kind of judgement that anyone working closely in ONA has access to classified information. It is not a question of the leader of the opposition having access to briefings. He has got access.

Question:

I am not thinking of the leader of the opposition, I am thinking of the Parliamentary library.

Prime Minister:

It is their own rule about publishable material so if you want to question that then you go to them for it.

Question:

My second question is going to be did you have any role in the bouncing of Jim Dunn?

Prime Minister:

No, none. You probably knew about it before I did.

Question:

You have already made a public statement about the transfer of Mr Andrew Campbell from ONA. Why will you not publicly define the actions being taken against him unnamed ...inaudible?

Mr Furlonger:

I think I prefer not to comment.

Question:

I think it is a curious situation because we are told that some action

Question: (cont.)

against them, the Prime Minister has made a statement to Parliament about it, yet we are not informed what sort of action has in fact been taken. I mean, I would have thought this was a fairly serious issue. Have these people been disciplined or haven't they? If they have been disciplined, what has happened to them?

Mr Furlonger:

Well, they have been disciplined but it is an internal public service matter, and ...

Question:

So was Andrew Campbell and yet you made a public statement which some people thought was libellous. So what is the difference?

Mr Furlonger:

I think I would prefer not to talk about Andrew Campbell at this point in time.

Question:

Can you tell us why you differentiate between the two cases? It seems quite illogical to me, and I think to everyone else here to condemn one man and explain what has happened about him, yet you won't do the same in the case of this fellow.

Mr Furlonger:

Well, you used the word libellous, and that is one reason for not talking about Andrew Campbell.

Question:

But the other two are unnamed so that doesn't figure in the consideration there, surely.

Mr Furlonger:

I think I would prefer to leave this question of the other two. Let's see what comes out of the ASIO report. We will look at the totality then, and what further action may or may not need to be taken.

Question:

Is there a link between this missing document and the two people?

Mr Furlonger:

I am not suggesting anything.

Question:

Obviously you are bringing us into the position where on the one hand this press conference is called because of ambiguities and misunderstandings and inaudible misrecording because we are not given all the information on all the folk. Now, with respect to both of you, and if we are on a question such as this, given factual

Question: (cont.)

answers, it is going to continue and it is your fault.

Mr Furlonger:

Well, we can't give you all the facts until ASIO's report is complete.

Question:

...but what we have done to these two Surely, you must know that, Mr Furlonger?

Prime Minister:

Normally if there is a disciplinary matter for an officer in charge of an instrumentality, and members of the staff, members of the public service, that is a matter for the public service. If the officers themselves wish to appeal against any disciplinary matter there are provisions to appeal in the public service - it is not normal for public statements to be made about this.

Question:

There was one though made about Andrew Campbell.

Official:

Thanks very much.

Question:

Can we ask you whether you are going to Salisbury, Prime Minister.

Prime Minister:

Yes.

Question:

You are going?

Prime Minister:

Yes.

Question:

Do you care to say more about that before we leave?

Prime Minister:

I will be leaving next Tuesday and will back on Saturday or Sunday week.

Question:

Are you going anywhere else?

Prime Minister:

No.

Question:

How long will you be in Salisbury?

Prime Minister:

Two nights.

Question:

I will just ask one more question on ONA. There have been quite a few stories about how this so called Belgrade document which is supposed to refer to a group of people operating inside ONA. I was wondering whether you are aware of such a document?

Prime Minister:

No.

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