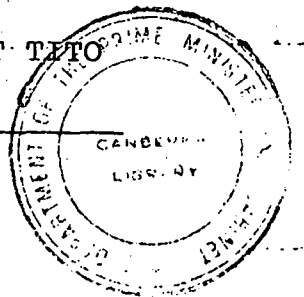


PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENTS ON THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT TITO



Prime Minister

I have asked the Foreign Minister, Andrew Peacock, to represent Australia at the funeral of President Tito. He will have to leave tomorrow. I think the funeral ceremony - the arrangements - are being made for Thursday of this week.

It is a matter that has been foreshadowed, I suppose, in the reports that we have all had over recent weeks, and even months, because the President has been very ill for quite some time.

There has been a good deal of concern expressed in different quarters about what might happen, could happen, within Yugoslavia, after the President. I think it must be the hope and the objective of all nations to make sure that the integrity of Yugoslavia is maintained. I do not think anyone would want the circumstances in which the Soviet Union took some actions which, in an iron-clad way, diminished Yugoslavia's independence.

The President will certainly be remembered for his real and successful efforts to establish a degree of independence for Yugoslavia from the generality of the communist world. There are many issues in which he took different views from that of the Soviet Union. His position in the Third World was one of leadership as a result of that. There obviously will be sensitive circumstances in Yugoslavia but I believe that Europe, North America, the United States, and many other countries, will be seeking to demonstrate their concern that the integrity of Yugoslavia be maintained. It is hard to think of anything good coming out of Afghanistan and the invasion of Afghanistan, but I believe that the reactions that the Soviet Union have had as a result of Afghanistan would make it very unlikely, certainly in the immediate future, that the Soviet Union would make any moves against Yugoslavia.

Question

Prime Minister, what do you now regard as the most serious threat to world peace: Iran, Afghanistan, or Yugoslavia?

Prime Minister

No, that is the wrong sort of question I think. It is the generality of events that have unfolded as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, coupled with continuing difficulties and concerns as a result of Iran.

Question

Sir, if the Soviet Union tried to move in, do you believe that the Western allies would intervene militarily to stop them?

Prime Minister

I would believe that Western Europe and the United States have demonstrated in recent days a greater cohesion, greater strength in the Western alliance, than has been seen for a very, very long time. I have not the slightest doubt that any move by the Soviets against Yugoslavia would be seen as a step that could lead to the most terrible danger for Europe and for the world. I would believe very strongly that the Soviet Union understands that, very significantly as a result of the reactions to their invasion of Afghanistan. If that had not occurred, if there had not been the kind of reaction that there has been from Europe and from North America, from the United States, then it might well have been a different circumstance. But that statement that the President of France and the Chancellor of Germany issues shortly before I was in Paris and Bonn, and you were with me on that occasion, indicated then that they were concerned that the invasion of Afghanistan - I think the words "whatever the motives might be could unleash a process which step by step could have the gravest, most serious dangers for mankind" - a move in Europe against Yugoslavia would compound that many-fold.

Question

Prime Minister does it not though, despite what you have said, add inevitably to the tension and to the instability throughout that broad region?

Prime Minister

I think there are chances that this will not occur, if for no other reason than it is something that has been expected for quite some time. Obviously, a good deal will depend upon the maintenance, within Yugoslavia, of the integrity of the administration, of the sense of purpose. We know there have traditionally been problems and difficulties within Yugoslavia as one nation. But the larger problems at the moment are problems that involve the Soviet Union, and expansion of Soviet power. I would believe that within Yugoslavia there would be a consciousness of that and a very real determination to maintain the kind of independence from the Soviet Union, from much of the communist world, which President Tito was able to establish with great skill and with great courage over a long period.

Question

While Mr. Peacock is overseas, do you intend him to have talks with any other leaders on the wider issues of Iran ...

Prime Minister

Of course he would be, yes. When Foreign Ministers are going -- we do not know yet the representation of all countries who will be at the funeral, but I was discussing this with Andrew Peacock this

Prime Minister(continued)

morning, and he will be seeking the opportunity for discussions with his counterparts from different countries. ~~It is not a question in these issues of having one discussion and that is the end of it.~~ It is a changing scene. It is necessary to maintain a very close contact, just as I did at Salisbury, so will he there. It is possible that he could visit one or two other countries in Europe, and possible, but too early yet to say, that he may come back through the United States. But that could depend significantly on whether Senator Muskie himself attends the funeral, or whether the United States attendance is from somebody else.

Question

Sir, why are you not going to the funeral?

Prime Minister

We have a very important guest here. Mr. Anthony is the very direct host, but having the third most important person from the People's Republic of China in Australia, is something that clearly involves me. It clearly involves the Deputy Prime Minister. In these circumstances, our place is very much in Australia. I think a number of heads of government, Presidents or Prime Ministers, will probably be at President Tito's funeral. But that will not be so with all Governments. The representation of the Foreign Minister at the funeral is a very appropriate one and a very proper one. That will, in a very full way, demonstrate Australia's concern and interest in the future of Yugoslavia.