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PRIME MINISTER

The Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser, C.H., M.P.

AFGHANISTAN: THE CHALLENGE AND THE LESSONS



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*The following is the edited text of an address
by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. Malcolm Fraser,
to the Queensland State Council of the Liberal Party of Australia
in Brisbane on 15 June 1980.*

We meet at a vital time for Australia. The hazards confronting the freedom of people and nations have increased since the year began. The historically invaluable influence of countries in the West to the cause of human liberty is yet again under challenge. It is a challenge which, if not faced now and successfully surmounted, has the potential to deny us at some time in the future, the victories in values and freedom that we seek for all future generations of Australians. It is about the nature and extent of that challenge and the dimension of our response that I want to speak to you today.

As the world knows, on Christmas Eve last year, Soviet troop carrier aircraft started landing at Kabul airport. Two days later, 5000 Soviet troops had taken over Kabul. President Amin of Afghanistan was killed the next day. By New Year's Eve, 40 000 troops were fanning out across Afghanistan to seize control of major towns. The new Soviet-installed president of Afghanistan, Mr Babrak Karmal, made his first appearance on Kabul television screens on New Year's Day.

Today, five and a half months later, 85 000 Soviet troops are locked in conflict against a valiant national resistance campaign that seems to have united significant elements of Afghan society. To say that the Soviet Union has acted, and is acting, brutally is not to engage in rhetoric. It is merely to describe the facts. When, in the Second World War, the Nazis wiped out the whole male population of a Czechoslovakian village—some 400 to 500 men—the whole civilised world recoiled in horror. Yet now, it is reported on evidence provided by the women and children who survived, that well over twice that number were murdered in cold-blood, and under Russian supervision, in the Afghan village of Kerala.

There are already over half a million refugees in Pakistan, people who have found conditions intolerable in their own country. It is feared that the number could quickly rise to one million.

Reassessment

These dramatic events demand a fundamental reassessment of widely accepted Western and Third World perceptions and assumptions concerning security and detente; perceptions and assessments

which have been comforting and lulling in their effect, but to some extent have reflected wishful thinking rather than hard analysis.

In a recent address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, the former American Secretary of State, Dr Henry Kissinger, when warning that a danger ignored is a debacle invited, argued that: 'I happen to agree with President Carter, that the danger to America is the gravest of the modern period'.

Events in Afghanistan have given us a new example of the Soviet Union's commitment to achieving great military power in pursuit of its ambitions. History since 1945 confirms that, where the Soviet Union perceives the opportunity for an advance, the concern for peace is instantly put aside. Remember the invasion of Hungary in 1956; the Berlin wall in 1961; the Cuban missile crisis in 1962; the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

It was the invasion of Czechoslovakia that President Brezhnev sought to justify through what is now accepted as the Brezhnev doctrine. What is pernicious about the Brezhnev doctrine is the imposition of Soviet dominance, in the guise of rendering assistance. The fact is that it is the Soviet itself which decides when 'assistance' is to be given.

Indeed, the Brezhnev doctrine virtually asserts that, once a country has become socialist, assistance will be given to make sure that it remains so. But the invitations to intervene, allegedly to provide assistance, are issued by puppet leaders. Notwithstanding the instability and tension created by Soviet behaviour, attempts at detente were made throughout the 1970s. But it soon became apparent that the view of detente by the West was not shared by the Soviet Union.

It is important to unpack the parcel of items labelled 'detente' in the last decade, and to distinguish what was beneficial and sound from what was illusory. What many people failed to realise was that the Soviet Union did not accept that detente precluded them from any action that would advantage them in the Third World, or in the world at large.

It was, to them, little more than a relationship with Europe and the United States, in which the threat of direct confrontation between superpowers was reduced. As a result, since detente, we have seen the

Soviet Union pursue a policy of unbridled competition and opportunism; actively and openly seeking to further international influence by subversion, by the provision of arms, and by the use of surrogates in Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen and Vietnam.

Of course, the most recent and most brazen example has been in Afghanistan, where the Soviet army—the largest and most powerful land army in the world—has been used to invade a defenceless Third World country. This indicates most clearly how long-held Soviet ambitions can be suddenly realised when an opportunity presents itself.

For, in 1940, when Hitler made overtures to Stalin, one of the prices set by Stalin for Russian friendship, was a recognition by the Germans that Soviet 'national aspirations centre south of the national territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean'. In the light of such a statement, the Singapore Foreign Minister was perhaps very much on target when he argued recently that there was nothing surprising about the Soviet foray into Afghanistan. Rather, he said, what was surprising was the 'gullibility of non-communists'.

The recognition of the true nature of the strategic situation brought about by the invasion of Afghanistan does not, any longer, permit gullibility. As a result of this invasion, the Soviet Union has succeeded in achieving:

- the creation of a client state
- a closer proximity to the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf
- access to alternative bases for strategic aircraft should the U.S.S.R. desire it
- an ability to deploy troops across the Pakistani border
- an inherent ability, depending upon the type of aircraft that may be deployed, to provide tactical air support over the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, and the Eastern half of Saudi Arabia
- the inherent ability to provide a limited air support to the Soviet Indian Ocean squadron.

Stability undermined

Stability, not only in South-West Asia, but also in the world generally, has been undermined. It is now up to all nations, and all people dedicated to freedom, to do what they can, singly or collectively, to deny the Soviet Union any further opportunity, whether in the Third World or in the world at large.

Regrettably, the world is no longer as many thought it to be; or, as many wanted to see it. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has shocked the West and moved it to reassess its assumptions about security and detente. As a result of this, in the court of world opinion, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan stands decisively condemned by Western countries and by the Third World countries.

The fact that the invasion of Afghanistan is of crucial significance is evidenced by a British White Paper on Defence on 2 April this year. It warned that the Soviet Union will continue to watch for opportunities to build up its influence in further countries and will be ready again to use its force.

It argued that the object of this drive for Soviet influence is to limit and reduce first the influence and then the security of the West. The likelihood of this is greater as a result of the fact that, while attempts were being made at detente with the Soviet Union, the balance of strategic military capability shifted steadily to their ultimate advantage.

Through the 1970s, Soviet military spending averaged between 11 and 13 per cent of GNP, while the comparable figure in the U.S.A. has been 5 per cent. As a result, trained military manpower, available to the Soviet Union, exceeds that available to the United States by over 6 million. Soviet ground forces outnumber those of the U.S.A. by nine to one; these divisions are supported by tanks, missiles and artillery which collectively outnumber the U.S.A. by a factor of two to one.

Taking this comparison on to the NATO-Warsaw Pact military balance, we find that the Warsaw Pact has a marked superiority over the NATO allies. It has over 200 divisions that could be promptly deployed, NATO has about 100. The Warsaw Pact armament includes 30 000 tanks compared with NATO with a little over 12 000. The Warsaw Pact forces have 5000 combat planes at their disposal, NATO just over 3000.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has over the years repeatedly warned of the dangers of the unceasing expansion and improvement of Soviet military capabilities and urged the West to enhance its own defence efforts in response. In 1976 the NATO Ministerial Council expressed concern at the high level of military expenditure by the Soviet Union and the continued disquieting expansion of the military power of the Warsaw Pact on land, air and sea, which the Council noted, were difficult to reconcile with the avowed desire of the Soviet Union to improve East-West relations. These sentiments were expressed again at the London NATO summit in 1977 and at the 1978, 1979 and 1980 Council meetings.

NATO ministers have clearly foreseen the prospect of Soviet military might threatening the stability of the military balance at all levels—conventional, nuclear, land, sea and air. Of course, gross comparisons of this kind do not take into consideration military factors and qualitative differences between forces on both sides.

For example, because of deep antipathy between the U.S.S.R. and China, Soviet planning must take into consideration two sets of contingencies; one in Europe and the other on the Chinese border. Nevertheless, these large disparities in military capability

are disturbing. In the coming decade, the Soviet Union will be seen by others, and will perceive itself, as having for the first time, a politically significant margin of nuclear superiority over the United States and its allies; together with its undoubted conventional weapon superiority.

Weapon superiority

This conventional weapon superiority was not as significant when the United States possessed greater nuclear strength than the U.S.S.R. But now that the Soviet Union has achieved its new strength, it will perceive, as will other states, that its margin of strategic advantage accords it greater freedom to pursue challenging and aggressive policies in the Third World and elsewhere.

This superiority will open up a window of opportunity for the Soviet Union in the 1980s. The window will be all the wider unless we understand clearly how the Soviet Union views concepts such as detente. It is no use us persisting with one view of detente and ignoring the quite different views of it held by the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union, taking detente in a different light, may be tempted to use their increased capability. In fact, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan could be the first exercise of a new-found Soviet confidence in the decade of the 1980s—'the dangerous 1980s'—as Henry Kissinger has described them.

Our task is to make sure that, while it is the first such exercise, it will also be the last. Undeniably, Afghanistan is important to Australia, not only as a test case for Soviet behaviour in the 1980s; but also because of its geographical location in a region of major strategic significance to the Western World—the oil producing countries of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.

At the other end of Asia, in Indochina, the Soviet Union continues to support actively Vietnam's military domination. As the price for its support, the Soviet Union has secured its access to air and naval facilities in Vietnam, which potentially threaten China, United States deployment capability based in the Philippines, and the independent countries of the region.

Because of the extent of the Soviet arms build-up; because of the strength of Soviet military superiority; because of Soviet moves in defiance of detente, Afghanistan has underlined most emphatically the reality of the world in which we live. In this world, Australia cannot afford to be complacent. How freedom loving nations together respond to the challenge of the Afghanistan crisis will be a crucial determinant of our security for decades to come.

Six lessons

Afghanistan is of crucial significance, and it is vital that its lessons be learnt and applied. I suggest there are six basic lessons:

- first, greater unity and cohesion among the allies of the United States is essential; and a much greater degree of consensus needs to be developed among all those who value national independence
- second, we must maintain absolute clarity and certainty in our signals to the Soviet Union, in order that our interests and the limits of our tolerance are not misread by Moscow
- third, new levels of defence preparedness must be achieved and maintained in order to demonstrate that major Western countries do not see their interests as being confined to Europe and its immediate environment
- fourth, channels of communication must be kept open to Moscow
- fifth, Western countries must continue to strive for arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, but they must do so recognising that they can only succeed if the necessary political preconditions are met. They cannot succeed as long as the Soviet Union persists with a concept of detente which allows for the relentless accumulation of weapons and their uninhibited deployment in Third World disputes
- sixth, Western countries must attend to strengthening their links with like-minded countries in their parts of the world, while recognising the particular problems and needs of such countries.

Such an approach must be pursued with resolution and steadfastness, over what may be quite a long period of time. But this approach offers the best prospect of a realistic accommodation with Moscow. It offers the best opportunity of continuing peace. The Australian Government holds firmly to the view that, at this time, it is vital to stand with our friends and allies.

The Government faced in January a challenge that involved difficult decisions for Australia:

- in our bilateral relations with the Soviet Union
- in the area of our relations with our major friends and allies
- in the area of our own defence spending and defence priorities.

With respect to our bilateral relations, on 9 January the Government announced a number of decisions intended to bring home to the Soviet Union and its people an expression of the strongest possible opposition to the Soviet action in Afghanistan.

In the area of trade, Australia has acted in concert with other grain exporting nations in support of the U.S. action to limit grain sales to the Soviet Union. We are also supporting the list of high technology items which North America, Japan and Western

Europe agree should be subject to export control. We have curtailed scientific, cultural and high level official exchanges with the Soviet Union. We have curtailed the operation of Soviet fishing projects, and cruise ships in Australian waters.

In seeking to act in concert with our major allies, the Government had hoped to secure Australia's support for an Olympic Games boycott. It is a matter of great regret that the Executive of the Australan Olympic Federation saw differently. With over sixty nations staying away from the Games, representing more than half the world's population, the world's rejection of Soviet behaviour has been formally registered with the Soviet leadership.

This brings me to a very serious point. Australia is now isolated in our region. China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and de facto New Zealand will not be attending.

In deciding to attend the Moscow Games, Australia is virtually alone in the region in company with only communist Laos, communist Vietnam and communist North Korea. I have to say that I find that a shameful and repugnant position to be in.

Defence of liberty

Australia, as an independent nation, with an unqualified record in defence of liberty and the right to be free, has a need and bounden duty to support other free and independent nations. To fail to do so is to deny our history. Moreover, as an ally of the U.S.A., Australia has a specific and urgent need to support the world's greatest free power. Each of these grounds standing alone is sufficient for a boycott. Both together represent an overwhelming argument to which it is not too late for the AOF to respond.

It is hard to understand, then, how the Executive of the AOF, exercising their independent right to make a decision, have decided to place their perceived duty to the international Olympic movement above their duty to Australia, and to all Australians.

The Government has always accepted the high priority that must be given in our national life to young people and their pursuit of excellence in all things, including sport. We will continue to act upon this priority. Our advocacy of a boycott represents our support of a higher priority. For, as the Soviet human rights activist and Nobel Prizewinner, Andrei Sakharov, has said:

The broadest possible boycott of the Moscow Olympics is necessary. Every spectator or athlete who comes to the Olympics will be giving indirect support to Soviet military policies.

Such a prospect is untenable. Whatever hold the world now has on peace will be made measurably more secure by Australian support of an Olympic boycott. I do not want to exaggerate the importance of what a country like Australia can do. But I do not

minimise it either. I reject those who want to write Australia down as having no influence in the world. The fact is that we have a voice and we can make a contribution towards the evolution of a common strategy.

Over the past five months, my Ministers and I have sought to do what we could to contribute towards a stronger Western alliance, under the leadership of the United States; and we have discussed with countries in our region, and in Europe, the consequences of Afghanistan. We have argued the need for closer co-operation and consultation. Our common objectives require that countries which value their national independence speak with strength supported by adequate defence capabilities.

In this respect, NATO's determination—already evidenced before the invasion of Afghanistan—to modernise and strengthen its theatre nuclear weapon system and conventional forces, is important. For its part, the United States is proposing real increases in defence spending over the next five years, taking it cumulatively to more than 20 per cent above the current level.

Defence decisions

The third aspect of our own response concerns the defence decisions announced in detail by Mr Killen on 25 March. These involve the raising of our own level of national defence preparedness; increased efforts in defence co-operation with friendly nations in our region; and practical measures in support of the United States, particularly in the Indian Ocean area.

Under the five year defence program announced by the Government, there will be an average increase in defence expenditure of 7 per cent per annum in real terms. Total defence expenditure in 1984-85 is expected to reach about 3 per cent of gross domestic product; and defence expenditure in 1980-81 is expected to show a real increase of 5 per cent above the 1979-80 level.

The program calls for an increase in expenditure on capital items. Since we came to government, expenditure on capital items has risen from 8.3 per cent of total defence expenditure in 1975-76 to almost 16 per cent in 1979-80; and it will rise to over 25 per cent by 1984-85.

For an island continent such as Australia, looking at two oceans, maritime surveillance is of great importance. In order to strengthen our capabilities in the air:

- we will double the Orion surveillance hours flown, and increase the number of crews available for this purpose
- we will modernise the ten older PB3 Orion surveillance aircraft so that, like the newer PC3s, these aircraft will be equipped with harpoon anti-shiping missiles. When launched from beyond the horizon range of ships, the harpoon missile has

devastating accuracy against surface vessels within a range of 100 km

- we will acquire seventy-five new tactical fighters
- we will upgrade our F111 aircraft to enable them to carry precision guided weapons.

For the Navy:

- we have decided to acquire a fourth FFG guided missile frigate from the U.S.A., and negotiations have already been completed for this, and orders placed
- we have already ordered one underway replenishment ship to be built at Vickers Dockyard in Sydney, and plan to order a second, also to be built in an Australian shipyard. Both these will provide fuel, oil, stores and weapons for ships at sea
- we plan to order a further ten Fremantle class patrol boats, in addition to fifteen already on order which are being built in Cairns.

In order to strengthen our capabilities on land:

- we have constituted the Third Army Task Force in Townsville as a ready reaction force, capable of offering support on short notice
- we are going to upgrade the Army's firepower by acquiring medium 155 mm calibre long range weapons and more mobile and lighter 105 mm weapons. In performance, range and rate of fire, these are the very latest in technology
- we plan to acquire some 2000 4 and 8 tonne trucks; with this order, we are seeking a high proportion of local production.

In my statement to the Parliament in February, one of the measures foreshadowed during the period of the five year defence program, was an expansion from 22 000 to 30 000 in the strength of the Army Reserve.

We are now looking to bring this forward more rapidly, by bringing the reserve units up to full strength by the middle of 1981. Our judgment is that we must enlarge the number of Australians trained for military service so that there is a bigger nucleus, and a younger nucleus (and I wish to stress younger), around which further expansion could take place more quickly in the event of strategic prospects worsening in the future. Expansion of the target figure of 30 000 would restore the reserve to the levels at which they stood at the early 1970s, before they were wound down by our political opponents.

Face implications

The reasons for embarking on this expansion can be distilled into one simple fact; which is that, at a time when international uncertainties are greater than for many years, the proportion of young Australians trained for military service is at its smallest for thirty years. The nation must face the implications of this situation squarely.

It reflects a trend, which if allowed to continue, would weaken our security. Indeed, if we did not halt

such a trend, we would rightly stand condemned by generations in the future.

Part of this program is already underway, in planning to organise reception, training, equipment, stores and support, capable of accommodating an increase in the reserve strength. The Government has stressed that reserve training requires not only dedicated officers and men and women who must give of their own time; but also, it requires an appropriate commitment by the permanent forces themselves along with adequate equipment and support.

The Government is determined that these provisions shall be made. In order to gain the young recruits, a major advertising campaign will be undertaken. Recent indications suggest that many young people are willing to come forward to serve the country by undertaking training in the Army Reserve. A heartening example of this is the revival of interest in university regiments which reflects growing credit on, and an increased sense of responsibility in, Australia's young people. It represents an encouraging perception and a welcome sense of awareness of the dangers in the present international order. The Government is determined to support its new defence preparedness with proper infrastructure facilities:

- Cockburn Sound naval base facilities will be improved in order to support deployments and base porting, and later home porting, of ships operating in the Indian Ocean
- the Learmonth Air Base will undergo improvement to ground facilities, fuel storage and weapon replenishment
- a modern air field will be built at Derby to fill the gap between Learmonth and Darwin
- patrol boat facilities at Darwin and Cairns are being upgraded
- the Garden Island dockyard in Sydney is being modernised, in order to support our fleet and allow re-fit work to be carried out on major vessels
- the Williamstown dockyard, where new destroyers will be built later in the decade, will be upgraded and modernised
- a new, widened and more secure defence communications system is being installed.

Of course, all of this is but part of the Government's program of initiatives for upgrading Australian defence capabilities. As the program unfolds, additional decisions will obviously be made.

Ours is a total package. It is supported by the Government's determination to develop a stronger industrial and economic capacity in the decade ahead; and our economic achievements of the last four and a half years have moved us significantly in that direction. At a time of increasing international economic pressures, Australia compares more than favourably with many of her major trading partners. This augurs well for Australia's future.

Understanding the challenge

Inevitably, it is a future of great significance for our young people, the quality of whose lives in the years ahead depends so much on the response that we make, as a nation, to the challenge confronting us. Part of our successful response involves understanding the challenge; identifying the dangers and the threats. We need a clear eye for our own objectives; a firm hand in reaching our goals. Let us proclaim the principles that guide the values we defend.

When decisions appear hard and complex, let us look to our principles and our objectives in order to clear the course that we must pursue. But in pursuing our principles and values, we must remember that the Soviet Union is also of this world; that, ultimately, they and we must find a means of living together if peace is to endure.

It must be understood that our determination is not directed against the Russian people but against the

policies of expansion and domination pursued by the Soviet leadership. These policies have come together in Afghanistan. That is why world leaders and individuals, concerned for human values; concerned for the cause of mankind, have determined to send a clear signal to Moscow. A signal, whose strength demonstrates to the Soviet Union that the judgments of the world cannot be ignored.

Each of us has a role to play in sending that signal. Each of us has a commitment to our own future. Without that commitment, our freedom and, perhaps, in the end, its existence will not be sustained. That is why each generation must be prepared to defend for itself the right to liberty, if liberty and the pursuit of happiness are to be guaranteed and secured. What we defend is an inheritance which extends beyond the span of a lifetime. Today's responsibility is ours; let us fulfil it well.