

PRESS OFFICE TRANSCRIPT

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TUESDAY, 7 APRIL 1981

NEWS CONFERENCE, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, POLAND, RUNDLE

Prime Minister

At a number of times over recent months, there have been Soviet military manoeuvres and preparations. But I believe that many people are more concerned about current activities because other circumstances have to an extent changed. Quite plainly the Soviet Union's tactic and approach has been to bring pressure to bear on the Polish Government, to undertake rigid actions within Poland to prevent Solidarity, the free trade union, gaining independence and gaining significant power. That seemed to be the Soviet tactic for over a period of a number of months, but over the last two to three weeks circumstances seemed to have changed. The last confrontation between Solidarity and the Polish Government seem to result in yet another win for Solidarity and as a result of that the proposed national strike was called off. But in addition to that there was revealed at that time divisions between the Communist Party, and even some talk of what we almost believe to be democratic elections with more than one candidate standing and at the same time secret ballots being held. I believe that the Soviet Union might well be judging that the Government of Poland will never exert the kind of pressure on Solidarity that the Soviet Union would believe to be desirable and that therefore alters the circumstances, the nature of the current problems in Poland and the possibilities of Soviet action. There is information that we have had available over the last three or four days which is indeed disturbing and which could be the forerunner of military action. That is not necessarily so and at the moment we do not have the firm and hard evidence which would confirm that that is so. But, I issued the statement I did yesterday because up to this point, the Soviet Union has shown a degree of restraint which they did not show in Afghanistan which they had not shown in Czechoslovakia in earlier occasions, which they had not shown in Hungary and no doubt that degree of restraint is based on their own hard headed calculations of the interests of the Soviet Union and of the Warsaw Pact generally, but whether they will continue to make that judgement yet remains to be seen. Certainly it is a dangerous and difficult situation and our total sympathy must be with the Polish people because in their struggle to establish a degree of freedom within a monolithic Soviet system, I think they know that their own futures depend upon their own actions. That has been their experience historically and because of the circumstances and the nature of the divisions in Europe which grew out of the last world war, I think it is so on this occasion.

We will obviously be watching events over the last few days very closely indeed and if there are matters which can be said publicly, I will certainly see that the Parliament and the Australian people are informed.

Question

Sir, did you have a meeting scheduled with Mr Hayden on this subject (inaudible)?

Prime Minister

No.

Question

What was that meeting about?

Prime Minister

Look, that has nothing to do with this. Nothing at all. There has been some highly fanciful reporting on that particular matter.

Question

Did you seek a meeting with Mr Hayden and did you call it off?

Prime Minister

The circumstances that might have made that meeting desirable no longer arise.

Question

Sir, is there anything the west could do if the Soviet Union does invade Poland?

Prime Minister

There have been very close consultations, Australia is involved in those consultations. The NATO countries are obviously in close consultation as to the kind of action they might believe should be taken. The question of a military response as I believe, is not in contemplation because everyone knows what that would lead to, and this arises out of the rules, the ground rules, in a sense that were established after the last world war when there was a clear division in Europe, east and west, that division I think in the light of history was a tragic one and a very wrong one and should not have been established at the time. But it has been established and I believe the Soviets would know quite well that any move by the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact towards the west would lead to a third world war and military intervention in the Warsaw Pact area would likewise lead to that same conflict. I believe that is not in anyone's contemplation, not in anyone's plan. But there are many actions that can be taken, I think the time to make decisions about those would be after consultation that would occur if the Soviet Union took the tragic step to invade. A lot of preparations have gone on. There would be a heavier round of consultations and discussions. The Australian Foreign Minister, Tony Street, would be involved and we have taken steps over the last three months to make sure that we will be part of that process, that we would not be handed a fait accompli, you

know, participate or whatever without being able to contribute to the discussions.

Question

Have you spoken to anyone in Washington directly on this?

Prime Minister

No. The information they have and that we have as I understand it, is broadly the same and, as I understand it the concerns in the western world are fairly commonly shared and I think they are reflected in the media reporting which is not just based on something that I have said, or that President Reagan has said, it seems to be based on information that the media has been able to collect on their own account.

Question

Prime Minister, at the time of Afghanistan you saw the then Russian Ambassador to express Australia's deep concern. Do you plan similar action?

Prime Minister

Oh, he sought a meeting with me and wanted to travel to Nareen to do so, to explain and reason away the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Now, the Soviet Ambassador knows the Australian Government's attitude to these particular matters very plainly and very strongly. So far as we know, on the latest advice that I have had, that final decision to move troops in has not yet been made and I think we must pray that it never will be made, that the degree of restraint that I have spoken of on behalf of the Soviet Union will continue to be exercised because the consequences for Europe, for western Europe, for the east, indeed for the Soviet Union itself, will be to a degree unpredictable. And the Soviet Union, is of course, is in a very real dilemma. If it is correct, and I believe the evidence points to it, if it is correct that they have now come to a conclusion that the Polish Government will not exert the degree of pressure on Solidarity that is necessary to pull back the freedoms that have been gained and that of course, is necessary consistency and for the preservation of the monolithic nature of the Soviet empire. If they have come to the conclusion that the Polish Government either will not or cannot achieve that, then the Soviet Union itself is left with a great dilemma. If they allow that movement towards freedom in Poland to continue, the degree of freedom that might well be inconsistent with the preservation of the Soviet empire and which many believe would certainly spread to other members of the eastern block and might even spread to the Soviet Union itself. Now, are they prepared to tolerate that, to accept that because if so, the Polish people have opened the door to possibilities of peace and co-operation which even a short while ago we would not have dreamt of.

But if the Soviet leaders come to the judgement that that degree of freedom is inconsistent with the maintenance of the communist system, and on all history that is the judgement they would come to, then are they going to move to stamp it out and because I believe circumstances have changed to an extent, military intervention would have unpredictable results in eastern Europe and maybe even in the Soviet Union.

Question

Prime Minister, given their track record, and given the apparent failure of the west to be able to stop events in Afghanistan, to be able to get the Russians to withdraw, is it time now, do you think, for the west and countries like Australia that they will put teeth in their sanctions, that they will do something positive if the Russians intervene. Have we reached that stage?

Prime Minister

I believe that the reaction of western Europe, of the United States, of countries such as Australia to an invasion of Poland would be very substantial indeed. I believe there would be teeth in the sanctions that would be imposed, but the consultative processes that have been set in train basically involve making decisions after the event. There is in a sense again a dilemma for the west here, they do not want to take actions which would tend to push the Soviet Union in a certain direction.

Question

Will you agree sir, that if we fail to take some concerted action this time, that the Russians will continue to do what they like.

Prime Minister

I do not think the Russians have done what they liked in all places. They certainly have in Afghanistan, and I would certainly agree with you that if they do move their forces into Poland, then western Europe, the United States, supported by countries such as Australia, in a very full way will need to take action and demonstrate much more vigourously than was the case in relation to Afghanistan, that this is the kind of behaviour that cannot and will not be tolerated. For the reasons that I mentioned, I do not believe that anyone has in contemplation a military option so don't read that kind of option into my remarks.

Question

You would embargo (inaudible)

Prime Minister

I do not want to be lead into it at this point because it does

involve the closest consultation between ourselves, the Europeans, the United States and the processes for that consultation have already been organised if the Soviet should act.

Question

How quickly could that response take place?

Prime Minister

I believe the consultations could take place very quickly indeed. It would be my hope that that consultation would lead to concerted and joint decisions very quickly indeed.

Question

Personal consultations do you mean?

Prime Minister

I mentioned the Foreign Minister.

Question

Have you received any indication yet on what role Brezhnev is actually playing in Prague? Have you received any indication of what line he is putting at that conference?

Prime Minister

No, not to this point. His presence in Prague was unexpected. Indeed, this was something we only recently not long before he went to Czechoslovakia and this obviously adds to the significance of the occasion enormously. He apparently arrived Prague before other leaders and coupled with the other activities that we have noted are in process it adds weight to the concern that I think everyone is feeling at the moment about the future of Poland and about the nature of Soviet intentions.

Question

How serious is the news about Rundle as far as the Government's policies are concerned?

Prime Minister

I do not think it alters the policies at all. Oil search is expanding significantly. We still want to find substitutes if we can. It is very unfortunate that this shadow has been cast over the future of Rundle. There are other shale oil deposits and we, I think, do not know at this point whether the same kind of shadow would be over-hanging them. But I cannot add anything to the statement that was made yesterday. We have been kept informed in recent weeks and months of the concerns of the companies in relation to Rundle. We have known that the costs of development were rising. We have also known that some of the shale may not be mineable for certain reasons, technical reasons. It obviously means that if the project does go ahead, it is not going to supply the quantities of oil that one would have hoped, but it could still be a significant project. As I am advised, the statement that was issued yesterday was a balanced one and for the Government's part we are very glad that it has been made because we have known of the concerns for some time and have believed that those concerns should be made public.