



EMBARGO: 8:00PM

PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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ADDRESS TO THE STATE ZIONIST COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

On this occasion, which celebrates the 33rd anniversary of the founding of Israel, a memorable event for other nations and other peoples as well as for the Jewish people, I think it is appropriate to reflect on the significance of Israel's experience for Australia.

Both Israel and Australia are young societies, both established in countries of immense antiquity. And yet how different is the character of the antiquity of the two lands for there is a real sense in which the vast majority of Australians would be more familiar with the age-old names and places in Israel than with the oldest names and places in this country.

Australians have had to come to terms with Australia. It was an alien land, and only in comparatively recent times have we come to feel fully at home in it and familiar with its environment. How different is the situation of Israel. There was an age-old homeland repossessed. The challenge was not to know it, but to defend its survival.

I suggest that both countries have attracted their people because of an idea. For Australia, that idea has been freedom - the longing of people to be free of oppression and fear, and the search for opportunity to build one's own life in a land of peace, where security is not in question from day to day. Freedom has also been a dominant idea for Israel - the freedom to realise the dream of home for an age-old people, and to follow the vision of justice and peace.

And if Australia was a harsh environment for Australians to come to terms with, how much harder has it been for the Israeli people to maintain their commitment to their vision. But there has been a preparedness to risk much to risk all, for the sake of that vision.

It is the presence of a dream which has given rise to the magnificent spirit of Israel and which supports its capacity as well as its right to survive. The fire of conflict in the defence of that dream has, I believe, produced a realism and a standing which make the people of Israel an example to other nations. The proximity of danger encourages realism, because the costs of delusion are potentially mortal.

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The Australian people too have fought for their ideals - and have realised their national identity as a result. Both nations still face the risks of an unstable world. But Australians have been fortunate in the enjoyment of their freedom - without the constant challenge to national survival which has faced Israel. We have been able to pursue more pleasant ways, and to concentrate far more on realising our private ambitions and ideals, at least in recent decades. As a result, we have built here a way of life which I believe is without compare in the world - a way of life with higher levels of confidence, openness and trust between people than exists anywhere else in which freedom and individual achievement has become taken for granted.

That difference is fundamental to our attitudes - we tend to take for granted what Israel has never been able to assume - national survival. The result is that Australians often have a low awareness of matters affecting our national security.

I am often asked: Why does Australia, as a middle-ranking power, speak out in the way we do on matters which are more directly the business of the super powers? The attitude is that as a middle-ranking power, Australia cannot do much about these issues, so the conclusion is often drawn that it would be more sensible to confine ourselves to matters of trade and aid, and of regional and local security.

It is sometimes even suggested that Australia is in some way demonstrating an unrealistic and grandiose view of its place in the world by concerning itself with major questions that involve world peace with Soviet imperialism, with European security arrangements, with the future of Israel.

The best answer to this question would be to take the person asking it to any Australian town, from the largest to the smallest, and invite him to look at the memorial he would find there to the Australians who died in the wars of this century. The lists are long.

Too many Australians have died in places remote from their home - in Europe, in the Middle East, in Korea, in South-East Asia - for us to be unconcerned about the preservation of world peace. Their sacrifice not only confers a right but imposes a duty on Australia to speak on these issues.

The middle-ranking countries of the world should recognise that they have a role to play. It would not only be foolish, but a political and moral failing to assume that nations such as Australia should be seen but not heard on the great issues. It is not some exaggerated and unrealistic notion about the extent of the influence an Australian voice can have which moves me to speak out on these issues. It is rather my belief that in a Western world characterised by a great deal of self doubt and division, and by a degree of disillusionment which has not yet been wholly overcome, every contribution to clarifying issues and strengthening resolve is valuable.

Obviously there is a limit to what a nation of 14 million people can do, but there are some things Australia can do. Our history shows that the great issues of peace and security affect us all, even if the threats are far away.

The graves of Australians in the Middle East and Europe provide a basis for our right to speak out - and the basis of an obligation on every Australian government to do so. Our responsibility to the future of this country provides a further basis of a right to speak out.

All wisdom on matters of security and world peace does not reside with the super powers. A nation of the middle rank, realistic about protecting its own vital interests, must form its own independent judgments, and then speak out on their behalf.

That is a matter that Israel well appreciates - it is less well appreciated here. No Israeli government would believe that anyone but Israel would define and defend Israel's vital interests and the broader interests of regional peace. And in saying this, you will not understand me to imply any lessening in the degree of support which Israel is entitled to expect from other countries.

In Australia, there is a temptation to commit one of two dangerous errors. The first is to imagine that distance is so protective of Australia, that Australia can afford to be inward-looking and unconcerned with wider issues of security. The other is the equally dangerous assumption that irrespective of what we do, another country can be relied on to secure our national interest, that our great historic allies remove from our shoulders the necessity to do anything of substance ourselves, or to form our own independent judgments.

Both assumptions are wrong. They are mistakes that tend to occur when a people has enjoyed long peace and where conflicts have been far away. They are errors that would seem strange to Israel.

Israel is a nation unmistakably independent in its thinking and strong in its expression. There is a realism in its thinking which is a valuable example to Australia. We in Australia need to realise that our interests are bound up with world peace, that we should be concerned with relations between the super powers, and prepared to speak out on behalf of our own independent judgments about the ways in which Australia's interests can best be served.

Some two years ago at Harvard, Solzhenitsyn spoke of the prevalence in the West of a self-deluding interpretation of the contemporary world situation. "It works", he said, "as a sort of petrified armour around people's minds ... it will be broken only by the pitiless crowbar of events". We must hope that Solzhenitsyn is wrong in his conclusion that only after bitter experience will people see things as they are.

But he is surely right in identifying the capacity for self-delusion as a critical danger. I believe we are fortunate to have in the United States at the present time an administration whose foreign policy is based on principles which will contribute effectively to securing peace. When this is the case, it is a sign not of dependence, but independence, to say so clearly and unequivocally.

So much depends on the President of the United States that if he embarks on a course which we believe advances our ideals we should say so. He depends on the support of a congress which is in turn greatly influenced by American opinion. The American people in turn are influenced by their awareness of what people in other countries are thinking.

Our concern with the future of our own children and our own country must lead us to become involved in putting our conception of what the situation requires. This is not a presumptive view of what can be achieved by 14 million Australians. We are not powerless to work for good in these great issues.

We in Australia can take heart from the example of Israel which shows what a small nation can do when it is determined to defend what it knows to be right.

I make these points not to raise issues of foreign policy in the Middle East, issues on which the Government's policies are well known and firmly held. I make them rather to record the recognition by the Australian Government of the magnificent achievement embodied in the State of Israel. I make them also to express the opinion that the experience of Israel shows the vital importance of smaller nations making their own independent assessments of their interests and ideals.