



PRIME MINISTER

E. & O.E. - PROOF ONLY

PRESS CONFERENCE - PRIME MINISTER - BRUSSELS HILTON,
4 FEBRUARY 1985, 4.30 P.M.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister there have been some developments since we left Australia on the question of the MX missile. Is it still your Government's intention to permit the U.S. to use our facilities for the tracking or monitoring or whatever of the missile.

P.M.: I don't think it's appropriate for me to convey Government decisions in such an important area via the media where I am in the position that I'm about to go to the United States. Clearly when I'm in the United States and having discussions not only with the President but with other administration officials this is an issue that will be discussed. Not only this issue itself, but let me make it clear we will be discussing a range of related issues I'll be making it very clear to the United States' administration that the Australian Government is not giving support to the strategic defence initiative. We'll be putting a firm position as my Foreign Minister, Bill Hayden, has been putting before in respect of the CTB. And so there's a range of related issues that I'll be dealing with in my discussions with the United States administration. Now I believe it's appropriate that when I've had those discussions that I'll be available after that to discuss these matters with you.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister does that now mean that the question of the MX is now hanging.

P.M.: I don't put it as hanging. I put it in these terms, that we - that is when I say we, the then Minister for Defence, Mr Scholes, and Mr Hayden, the Foreign Minister, and myself - when we considered this matter did not make a decision lightly. We were aware of the considerable importance of the matter. Now the issue has become a public issue and I have become aware of the extent of feelings on this issue - feelings which I understand. Now I'm simply saying that I will be taking those into account. I'll be also, as I say, discussing this whole range of issues with the United States administration. And I believe it appropriate, as I hope you would understand, that it makes more sense that I talk with you on these matters after I've had those discussions.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, on that point, where does it leave you when obviously the Left is against it, the Centre Left is against it, even some of your own factional support - Centre Unity in Victoria - and people within NSW are against it. What can you talk about with President Reagan in regard to this whole issue and still leave yourself reasonably flexible in terms of the Australian population.

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P.M.: Well I obviously have had conveyed to me certain views within Australia and I would be wanting to in terms of informing myself about the range of views to wait until I got back to Australia to have further discussions. But let me say that I have no apprehension about that. I understand the very considerable feelings that there are on this issue. I will go to the United States with a very clear intention as I say of putting a strong position to the United States administration on a range of issues in which it will be quite clear that the position of the Australian Government is not at one with that of the United States administration. I have indicated that in regard to two matters - the SDI and the CTB - and it's within that framework that I will listen to what's said. I'll be putting particular points of view about those related issues. And I think it's in the light of those discussions, which after all are going to take place in a relatively short time, that this whole matter will be more fruitfully open to discussion both with you, as representatives of the media, and with those various interests to which you refer in your question.

JOURNALIST: Would you see it consistent with Australia's responsibilities under ANZUS and with the U.S. under the alliance not to go ahead with support for the MX missile decision.

P.M.: Well, I'm not going to take that discussion any further Greg at this point. I mean I'm not going to avoid the issue at the appropriate time. I think it's more appropriate to have that discussion with you after I've put certain positions in my discussions in the United States. I can assure you that I will be open to discussions with you at the appropriate time.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke does Friday's statement still stand.

P.M.: Which Friday statement are you referring to.

JOURNALIST: Mr Beazley's statement on this matter.

P.M.: Well I believe he made the Friday statement. I think he's issuing another.

JOURNALIST: He's only said some other things that happened, but Friday's statement was that approval had been given.

P.M.: Yes well that is a statement of fact. Approval had been given. That is true. I mean there is nothing that can be said by me now or at some subsequent stage which changes that fact. What I'm saying to you is that I'm going to have discussions in the United States. I'm obviously going to take account of what's conveyed to me by my colleagues in Australia as well. And it's going to be in the light of the discussions that I have in the United States and in the light of the assessment of what I hear also from Australia and the discussions that I have with my Ministers in Australia that I'll be able to speak with you.

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JOURNALIST: Why didn't you also have these discussions before at the time with your Ministers. Why didn't you take this matter to Cabinet as you knew it was so important.

P.M.: Well there is a range of issues for which you have under our set-up, the Security Committee. This matter was considered by that Committee and reconsidered again. Now the issue has developed further and the appropriate processes in the light of those facts will be followed after the discussions I've had in the United States.

JOURNALIST: Surely the decisions were made at the time for harsh political and military reasons. What's changed apart from ...

P.M.: Let me make this point that it was not a decision that Mr Hayden and Mr Scholes and myself made flippantly. I hope that even those who are expressing most vehemently disagreement with that decision will accept that the Foreign Minister and myself and the then Minister for Defence thought about this issue in the light of the considerations then applying. Now it makes proper sense that in the light of the current circumstances that we examine the decision, that we look at it in the light of the discussions I have in the United States and with the people in Australia who are now properly involved and concerned. And I will follow those processes.

JOURNALIST: What I was going to put to you Prime Minister was is it not the case that we are presently committed to assisting the Americans with their MX missile tests and that situation could well change.

P.M.: As a result of the decisions that was conveyed to the Americans that is a fair statement of what the position is. Now I've made it clear - I hope now this is the last time because I've said it I think three or four times already - that the matter will be discussed amongst others, where I'll be putting a very strong position as I say on certain other related issues, the matter will be discussed when I'm in the United States. And then it will be discussed when I get back to Australia. Now you don't have discussions for the sake of just hearing words. It may be that out of those discussions there will be a development of position. But it's quite inappropriate that before I have those discussions that I should go any further.

JOURNALIST: If Australia does rescind its approval to co-operate with the MX tests could any parallel be drawn between that and the New Zealand refusal to allow port visits by nuclear powered ships.

P.M.: I believe not.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister is it possible that you are somewhat out of step with the feeling in Australia on this question.

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P.M.: I think it could be said quite clearly - I mean one would be a fool to say otherwise - that the decision that was made by myself and Mr Scholes and Mr Hayden and confirmed by the Security Committee, it obviously is the case that that decision is not in line with the attitude of a number of people. It's obviously clear.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister are you indicating that you are going to be influenced by the feelings in Australia now and you're going to indicate what the decisions are after you've seen President Reagan. To what extent are you going to be influenced by what you discuss with him. Is he going to influence your decision.

P.M.: No I'm not saying that. As in the original case, no-one determines the position for this Government from outside of Australia on this or any other issue. The decision that was taken by Mr Hayden, Mr Scholes and myself was not determined externally. It was a sovereign autonomous decision by the three Ministers concerned and confirmed subsequently by the Security Committee. My Government is not in the position and not in the business of having its mind made up for it by any Government outside of Australia - the United States Government, the United Kingdom Government or any other Government. And it has not been in that position up until now and it won't be in the future.

JOURNALIST: Is it a case now of you going to the Americans and suggesting to them that they might like to switch the tests elsewhere.

P.M.: It's not a matter for me to conduct discussions with sovereign governments through a news conference and say via the news conference before I meet a head of government, look this is what I'm going to be talking to you about. I mean that's never the way I've conducted my business. I don't intend to start now.

JOURNALIST: Are you saying the Government isn't bound any more by the Fraser Government's decision.

P.M.: Well Mr Hayden and Mr Scholes and myself did not make the decision in terms of saying that a decision made by a previous Government of itself bound this Government. It was a factor that we took into account.

JOURNALIST: How did you equate that decision with the Government's professed policy of not supporting the development of first strike capacity.

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P.M.: Well I think if you have a look at the transcript of Mr Beazley's press conference where the question of first strike was put to him, you will see an absolutely correct statement by Mr Beazley that when you talk about first strike you're not talking about a capacity, you're talking about an intention. I believe that was a perfectly correct statement by Mr Beazley. Let me make it quite clear by way of obvious corollary to that statement that if there by any perception on the part of we three Ministers that there was that intention on the part of the United States which intention is necessary for it to be a first strike, there simply would not have been any involvement by my Government with it.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister are you in a position to say what influenced your decision at the time. What prompted you make the decision.

P.M.: Well let me say that in the statement that has been made by Mr Beazley there is an indication of the considerations that here was a position where a previous Government had made a decision as I said in answer, I think it was to Mike, that of itself is not enough. I mean we are not saying that because any previous Government had made a decision our authority or capacity to consider it ceases. But in the alliance relationship that we have with the United States and on the assumptions that we made about the intention of the United States in regard to the possible use of this capacity, which I emphasise to you, our assessment was that there was no intention on the part of the United States to regard this as a first strike weapon - then taking all those things into account we made the decision that we did. I'm not trying to suggest to you that it was one of easiest decisions that confronted Ministers involved. We took it. Now obviously at this stage and I repeat, I think, for the fifth time - I hope it will be sufficient - I'm not saying it by way of criticism, I understand the interest that's involved in this subject, but I do hope you'll accept what I've said now, I've put it in good faith - but we obviously in our discussions with the United States on a whole range of related issues we'll be having further discussions about this matter. And included within those discussions will be the question of the attitude in regard to this capacity which has been tested and a whole range of other considerations. I'll have those discussions and further discussions when I get back to Australia. But I'll be prepared to talk with the press at both stages - following my discussions in the United States and obviously when I return to Australia.

JOURNALIST: Have you been surprised by the extent, breadth and depth of the reaction to this issue in Australia.

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P.M.: It's a good question, it's a hard one. I can understand the concern that people have about trying to have a world which is going to have the opportunity of simply saying living at peace, but a world in which there is going to be practical progress towards producing a position between the superpowers where the concept of deterrence which has operated since 1935 to relieve the world from the horror of nuclear conflict can operate at a lesser level of armament. I can understand that and I say unashamedly that while perhaps I don't make as much noise as some people about this I yield to no-one in my concern and involvement in that area. Now I understand that the decision has generated some concern, I believe unfoundedly, that the decision of itself represents some diminution or derogation from our Government's commitments to those high purposes. I simply want to say through this opportunity to the people of Australia the decision that was taken by myself and my two Ministers did not represent any such diminution. Indeed I think it's a matter of record that this Government and its Foreign Minister in 1983 and 1984 has pursued vigorously, and I believe demonstrably effectively in many areas, the concern of this Government with those issues. We haven't believed that the decision that was taken then - obviously Mr Hayden and Mr Scholes, but Mr Hayden particularly who had a continuing responsibility in these other forums - has not believed on behalf of the Government that the decision that was taken at that time operated in any way to diminish our commitment to or advocacy for a reduction of the levels of armaments in the relations between the two major powers. We have steadfastly pursued in every forum, particularly in the Committee of Disarmament, processes and strategies calculated in a variety of ways to try and reduce the level of tension, to try and get processes which are going to reduce the level of armaments. We are unqualified, absolutely unqualified in that commitment. Now I see that some people regard the decision that was taken as in some sense representing a diminution of that commitment. All I say to my colleagues and to the Australian people that that is not a correct assessment. We yield to no-one in our commitment to pursue within all relevant fora to pursuit of the reduction of the level of armaments so that we can get a more substantial basis for peaceful relations in the world than a continuing escalation of the level of armaments.

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