



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH KERRY O'BRIEN AND HEATHER EWART, 23  
JANUARY 1987, ON AIRCRAFT BETWEEN SYDNEY AND SINGAPORE

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JOURNALIST: ... what do you think you will be able to achieve out of it on behalf of Australian?

PM: Let's get the first point. I read in all the papers that I have this passion to visit Israel as Prime Minister. It is true that I have wanted to visit Israel but as part of a visit to the Middle East. I believe that the Middle East remains one of the flash points of possible world conflict, and therefore Australia, as well as having an altruistic concern in trying to see the emergence of some peaceful settlement there has taken the people concerned also as a country involved in the search for a more stable world, wants to know what is happening there, to take the opportunity of listening to the leaders of these three important countries. And I repeat in particular, I don't go there in the role of a mediator nor do I go there with any inflated expectations of what we can do. We go there as a nation of good will, accepted and respected by the countries concerned. If they believe that there is anything at all that we can do to help the processes, of course we stand ready to do it.

JOURNALIST: Do you expect any difficulties at all in maintaining the Australian Government's even-handed approach in this region so far?

PM: I have had no difficulty since I have been Prime Minister in putting within Australia, and in all relevant forums, the fundamentals of Australia's position in the Middle East. That is firstly, our insistence on the right of Israel to exist behind secure and recognised borders and at the same time the recognition of the rights of the Palestinians. That is a view I had long before I became Prime Minister. It is now reflected in the attitude of the Government and of myself as Prime Minister.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, why is there no time for you or why are you not going to visit the West Bank or the Gaza Strip?

PM: It hasn't been regarded as essential. I am going to be seeing the King of Jordan who speaks with considerable authority and knowledge of that sector. I will be meeting with Palestinians in Jerusalem. I will have a full capacity to be informed, I believe, by those with an interest in the welfare of the residents of that region.

JOURNALIST: But if you are determined to demonstrate a genuine even-handedness, you are not taken at all by the import of a gesture where you would go to one of the major Palestinian settlements, particularly one under Israeli military rule?

PM: No, I don't think that it is necessary and it hasn't been put to me as being. I don't, myself, regard it as necessary. Let's get this thing right. We are not going to say - look, we are even-handed, I am now undertaking a visit here to prove even-handedness. That is an absurd perception. The world knows, and the countries in the region know, the integrity of Australia's position. So I don't have to go over there and organise an itinerary to prove something that is already known.

JOURNALIST: But do you think you are as familiar with the suffering and the plight of Palestinians as you have been over the years -- with that of the Israelis?

PM: Yes, I am aware of it. --I have had the opportunity of studying and listening to people. I met Mayor Freij in my office in Canberra. And I think he speaks with authority about this issue. He is certainly regarded as a person who speaks with authority.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, did President Reagan offer you any advice about this trip when he telephoned you?

PM: No, he didn't. He wished me well on the trip. He was very interested to know I was undertaking it. But no, he tendered no advice.

JOURNALIST: Would you expect that any advice might be offered from other quarters?

PM: No.

JOURNALIST: On what basis has Australia rejected the right of a representative of the PLO to attend a delegation in Australia later in the year?

PM: I have just had a brief discussion with the Foreign Minister earlier this week. And he expressed the view that it was probably not appropriate to do it this year. I haven't gone into lengthy discussions with him about it.

JOURNALIST: But even on the basis of brief discussions, on what basis does he have that view and do you agree with him?

PM: There is no necessity in his view to conduct this conference here at this time. As I understand it, and I don't pretend to know all the background, but as I understand it, there are conferences of a similar nature being held in other areas and that being the case, the view was put, and I agree with it, that no particular purpose would be served by replicating that in Australia.

JOURNALIST: It is a United Nations sponsored conference though, would there really have been much harm in having it in Australia?

PM: ... talk about great harm. There are many United Nations conferences all over the world. Just because a conference is sponsored by the United Nations there is no conclusion that follows logically from that.