



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF DOORSTOP, SOUTH PACIFIC TYRES, SOMERTON,
MELBOURNE, 2 NOVEMBER 1990

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, would you like to comment specifically on moves by Mr Booker, the one who's being invited - I understand he's still considering it - but he has been officially invited. Is that not a good thing?

PM: The first thing I'd like to say is it would be a pity that Mr Booker couldn't get his facts right. I mean I was appalled in listening as I was travelling in the car this morning to Mr Booker's comments that we had put Australia's ships under United States command. Now that is a falsity and if he doesn't know the facts of Australia's presence in the Gulf it raises very serious questions about what he should be doing going there. The facts are these, that Australian ships are under Australian national command. In specific operations that arise in conducting the blockade there is a rotation of operational control. Now on certain occasions it could be under the United States control, other occasions under Australian control. For this man to be getting up and saying that Australia sent its ships there and put them under United States control shows that in regard to the fundamental question of the nature of Australia's presence in the Gulf he either doesn't know the facts or deliberately chooses to misrepresent the facts, which gives you an indication of the concern that I and governments have about private individuals going in. I mean what sort of confidence do you have about a man who, as I say, either doesn't know the basic facts about our presence or deliberately misrepresents them. It's one or the other.

JOURNALIST: So are you saying he shouldn't go -

PM: Well I'm saying that if he does go, if he does go, it would be a good idea first of all that he gets his knowledge of the facts right. That would be a good thing. And I repeat what I said before. I share the judgement of the European governments who are very much involved in this, that the intervention of private individuals can be somewhat destabilising of the unity of purpose against Saddam Hussein. Now having said that, obviously having the concern that we do for the interests of our hostages - which we are, as I say, on a daily basis pursuing through our official representatives - if, however, whether it's Mr Booker or someone else, they go

there and if they were to have some success in getting some out then obviously we'd welcome that. But I say whether it's Mr Booker or anyone else, it would be a damned good idea if they got their facts right.

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