



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF UNEDITED INTERVIEW WITH PAUL LYNEHAM,  
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E & OE - PROOF ONLY

LYNEHAM: Prime Minister, welcome again to the program.

PM: Thank you very much Paul.

LYNEHAM: Why is it in Australia's direct national interest to become involved in potential war so far from our shores?

PM: Because we are now in a new era, after the Cold War, where it's important that the international community establishes its authority through the United Nations to ensure that aggression will never be condoned or acquiesced in. If Australia, in the future, or any of Australia's neighbours who want the assistance of the international community through the United Nations, we have to make sure, by our actions now, that the authority and the capacity of the United Nations is established. This is something that was envisaged from the very beginning in 1945 by Dr Evatt, who was one of the important foundation originators.

LYNEHAM: It hasn't happened that often though, sir, has it?

PM: No, because in the Cold War period, in the whole of the Cold War period the Security Council was never able to operate because every conflict was in the context of a superpower conflict and there was always the threat, if not the actuality, of the veto.

LYNEHAM: So do you see this now, perhaps, as a sort of precedent for keeping the peace in a post-Cold War world?

PM: Yes, indeed. One would hope beyond it being a precedent that any would-be aggressor will now see that there is a determination on the part of the world community not to tolerate aggression.

LYNEHAM: What of those who say, if sanctions were worthwhile in the first place why not keep them in place until Saddam Hussein backs down?

PM: Well there is an indefiniteness about that. What the sanctions were intended to do was to convey, in the strongest possible way it was thought, a clear message to Saddam Hussein. It wasn't intended to, as I said in my

statement to the House, to starve the Iraqi people but there is no evidence that Saddam Hussein has got that message and so the international community has said a stronger message must be given.

LYNEHAM: The extension of the operational role of our ships. They move first, if I understand it correctly, from the Gulf of Oman up into the Persian Gulf to exercise with the allied vessels.

PM: That's correct.

LYNEHAM: Does that amount to a commitment to fight?

PM: Well what it does is this; it's a commitment and immediate response by the Australian Government to the specific request made in the United Nations Security Council Resolution to Member States to provide support. Now our naval forces are there and they have been there in the Gulf of Oman to, in fact, give effect to enforcing the sanctions. Now that role is, in fact, substantially finished for some time now because there is no movement of ships through there. Now what the Security Council has said is that there will be preparedness to use force after the 15th of January if there hasn't been acquiescence. Now what our ships, therefore, are going to do now is to go up and to exercise with the ships of the United States, Britain and Canada. There will be a fairly massive aircraft carrier grouping there. Our ships have the particular capacity through their equipment and their training to provide escort capacity. They will go up there - it would be the worst thing you could possibly do is to say; oh well they'll be available if you want them when the whistle blows, because that would be dangerous both in terms of maximising efficiency of your asset but most importantly, as well, in maximising the safety of your men on your ships.

LYNEHAM: Of getting our people up to speed?

PM: Sure, yes.

LYNEHAM: They would, therefore, though be within missile range, wouldn't they ...

PM: Yes. I made no attempt to disguise in the House, in fact I asserted quite clearly, that this is going to be potentially very dangerous.

LYNEHAM: You also said our ships would be under Australian national command but US operational control. Now how does that work Prime Minister?

PM: It works this way; that in the end we retain the command, the national command. Our decision is operative as to whether they are there or not. Of course it was envisaged at the time of the Security Council Resolution where you've got ships of the United States Navy - and that's the overwhelming and the largest force there - and

the Canadians, and the British up there at the sharp end, if you like, and where we're going ... of running their own game. It was envisaged and understood that there would be operational control. So what we do in advance is that we work out the operational rules, we do that, our relevant defence people do that with the United States, and then our commanders ensure that if operations occur that we are operating according to those rules. If they have any reason to believe that the rules are not being adhered to, we're being asked to do something not agreed on in the operation, also we'd need to refer that back.

LYNEHAM: Well what sort of roles do you envisage for these vessels?

PM: Well they are part of the air defence, they provide part of the air defence capacity for the force there.

LYNEHAM: Could they be involved in escorting landing craft, in case say of the landing on Kuwait or bombarding shore facilities, things like that?

PM: Well what is basically envisaged, I mean they are going to be there to perform the roles which are appropriate in those circumstances, but really what they are best and most appropriately equipped for is to provide part of the air defence cover.

LYNEHAM: You said in your statement; it is not proposed to make any other contribution of naval, ground or air forces.

PM: Yes, those were the words I used, and I said, to fine that up, that this commitment that we're making is significant, it's proportional to our interests and it is practical and that is the right way to describe it.

LYNEHAM: Was this forced on you by the factions -

PM: No, I mean -

LYNEHAM: inaudible

PM: I don't want to get political about this but I must say that I was totally appalled by the incapacity of the Leader of the Opposition on a matter of such profound importance to this country that he couldn't leave miserable party politics out of it in his response. It was suggested that this position that I've put, on behalf of the Government and the people of Australia, is something forced upon me by factionalism. I and my leadership colleagues, and the Minister for Defence, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, we examine this thing closely and thoroughly with the input from the Minister for Defence coming from his discussions with the defence people. Out of all those processes -

LYNEHAM: That was an executive decision?

PM: That was the leadership. I had a meeting with Senator Button and Paul Keating and myself and Evans, they are the four leaders in the Parliament and I also had Senator Ray. Out of this whole process our clear decision was that what was significant, proportional and practical was the commitment that I announced in the House. Now - and let me say that when I put that to the Caucus today it was accepted, I think as I understand it, without dissent.

LYNEHAM: Because some Caucus Members were saying, Prime Minister, that they feared a sort of open-ended Vietnam style -

PM: But it's not only Members of the Caucus. Let's be quite clear. What we're talking about here is the commitment of Australian naval forces into a potential war situation. Now anyone who's got any concern for their country and its interests are going to think very seriously about that. What is appropriate to be done there is to do what I've said. The words I used in the House were the appropriate words. You must be significant, you must be proportionate, you must be practical. That is how we estimate that contribution to be made. In our assessment I am able to say on that basis that it's not proposed to make any additional commitments. The question was raised in the Caucus; well may there be more? If so, will there be discussion? I answered to that; I don't expect that there'll be more, that's why I make this statement that no more is proposed. If there were circumstances that arose where we needed to consider more then of course there would be a discussion and there would be a further statement -

LYNEHAM: So an upgrading of the forces is not out of the question?

PM: Well I don't believe it will happen and that's what the nature of the statement is. I'm simply saying I've conveyed to my colleagues - and if I think it would be implicit in the statement I made - that if some particular circumstance arose where a request was made, then we would consider it but there would be no expectation on our part, no expectation on our part that there is going to be such a request because let it be remembered for a nation of 17 million people the commitment of 3 vessels like this is a very, very significant commitment and it's a very practical one because we have the equipment on those ships and the training with those other navies which enables us to go with them and perform a very important task. It is a very significant contribution that Australia's made.

LYNEHAM: Two more Australian medical teams will join the hospital ships in the Gulf. How many Australian casualties have been predicted in the event of a war?

PM: Well we haven't got any precision on what Australian casualties there will be in a war. I mean there have been figures that have been bruited around in regard to the Americans if they were involved -

LYNEHAM: It's very frightening figures.

PM: Some reasonably frightening - well war is a frightening thing. You don't have war without casualties. That's why we don't want war if we can possibly avoid it.

LYNEHAM: Whatever the outcome, some critics will say - you will agree with this - that you know they'll say that you've risked Australian lives to cater to American interests.

PM: I dealt with that in the House and I said this was an absurdity, as it is. The facts show that it's an absurdity. Look at the sponsorship of the United Nations Security Council Resolution. The sponsors were - these are the sponsors; the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain and Canada and Romania and with twelve countries voting for, one abstention, two against - Cuba and Yemen. Now you can't possibly say in those circumstances and given the unanimity there's been on so many of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions that this is the United States. We're fortunate that the United States, the wealthiest and most powerful nation, is taking an important role which is supported by the Soviet Union and by right across the spectrum of nations. The interests of the world are at stake here as well as the interests of the United States.

LYNEHAM: Did you ever think of delaying or postponing today's statement because of the suggestions that our hostages might soon be free?

PM: That occurred to me but then it was quite obvious, Paul, that that would be the wrong decision. We came to the conclusion that the decision regard the commitment of our forces was the right one, it needed to be taken. It was suggested that well they may be - an announcement of their release might come in 24 hours. You look first of all at the practicalities - and I do this within the situation let me say of putting to your listeners that every day the position of our hostages has been on my mind. Our people have been working there relentlessly and we've changed the situation from the 2nd August, when there was 170 people there where it's 30 now. Every woman and child who's wanted to leave has been able to leave. It's now got from 170 down to 30 people that are there.

LYNEHAM: What if they say we were going to let them go but Hawke made this statement -

PM: I'm coming to that but I'm putting it against the context of a Government that's worked through its officials, not within the glare of publicity. We have been working to reduce and reduce the number of people there. Now let's say I'd waited for 24 hours and in that 24 hours they'd said well we're going to release your hostages and then I'd said alright now I'll make the statement. The hostages are still there, they don't get out immediately so what happens? They just get retained. I mean that's the worst possible thing

that if we said we were going to release them and then oh now, your Prime Minister's made a statement, we'll hold them again. The second point I make is that the Iraqi Ambassador here in Australia yesterday made a clear statement that he didn't believe that the Prime Minister's statement would be making any difference.

LYNEHAM: And finally, given the information available to you, how do you now think this will be resolved?

PM: Good question. Let me express my hope first and then how I think the odds are. My profound hope, of course, is that Saddam Hussein will withdraw and meet the requirements of the United Nations. That is both my hope and I think on balance - although one cannot be certain - I think on balance he'd more likely than not that before the 15 January he will meet the requirements of the United Nations. We can't be sure of that but the one thing I think we can be certain of is that we maximise our chances of getting that decision by having the decision of the United Nations Security Council we have and by Australia and like-minded countries giving the support to that Resolution that we have.

LYNEHAM: Thanks for your time, Prime Minister.

PM: Thank you very much indeed.

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