



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
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FK: Prime Minister, in his book, Bob Hawke accounts how at the time in 1991, you were not interested in sending Australian troops to the Gulf War, yet now you say at the time that you were saying that they should go after Saddam Hussein and finish him off. Did you support involvement in the Gulf War or not?

PM: I did. That is just a straight lie. A straight distortion. There were only two Ministers at the original meeting - this was about whether we committed people to Desert Shield - that was Hawke, Michael Duffy who was acting Foreign Minister and me. Without any notice I was asked around and he said "I might get a call from the United States, what do you think we'll do?" Typically Bob Hawke, he didn't say 'look, I think this is what we should do, now what do you think?' The question always is 'what do you think we should do?' You know, will the real leader please tell us what we can do here. And, I said 'well, I think, that we are going to continue to see this sort of criminal activity from this regime and I think we should be in a position to respond positively to a commitment on the interdiction role in the Gulf'. That was the first meeting of course Gareth was away and Michael Duffy was there as his acting Minister. The second was whether we committed troops to Desert Shield and it was a meeting between Hawke, Button, Robert Ray and the Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and me. Robert had just been to Washington, Gareth had been in touch with the United States and had also been in touch with other UN members and we had a discussion and Bob Hawke was encouraging a discussion which was some advice from Robert and Gareth that maybe it would be better if we take the four ships up to the top of the Gulf and commit a squadron of FA18s. They said their piece, Hawke sat back again not indicating a position. John Button was then asked what he thought. He gave a very negative response, generally negative response and they said 'well, what do you think?' I said 'well, look, I'm just listening, you people are the experts.' And Hawke said to me

'come on, come on.' And I said 'what, you mean I should say again what we should do here? Well, I'll tell you what we should do. I don't agree we should put a squadron of FA18s there, but I do believe we should commit to Desert Storm, but I'd leave two ships up the top of the Gulf and bring the other two home.

Now, that's what happened. To that, he has reworked all that to say because I didn't want to put a squadron of FA18s in and leave four ships up there. Because the American's wanted a commitment both moral and material, that two ships were enough, we didn't need to expose needlessly Australian planes or Australian ships. But, at no stage was there any recommendation from Hawke. He sat there while Gareth and Robert spoke and the decision was made when I said 'look, I believe we should put two ships up the top of the Gulf and let the other two come back.'

Now, Bob Hawke parades himself around as somebody who sort of backed the Americans in, well, he wanted to put them there. I don't deny that. But, like a lot of things Hawke wanted to do, he never had the courage to say so when it mattered and he didn't on that occasion and he hasn't since.

FK: Well, the comments you made yesterday, have caused some stir. When you say that Saddam Hussein should have been finished off the first time around and we wouldn't be where we are again today, what do you mean? Do you mean that he should have been assassinated?

PM: No, no, politically, just his regime should have been, essentially, rendered inoperative, defunct, I mean call it what you like, I mean defeated. No, I don't mean personally, I mean politically.

FK: The other attack the Opposition has been making on you Prime Minister, is about this purchase of the new house.

PM: Hang on, before we get onto that rubbish let's just stay on the main thing. I mean, look, the lot of the Iraqi Kurds and Shi'ites in this country has been a very sad and dismal one in all the periods since and there was a position and there was a strategic capacity to finish this regime off and that wasn't taken up. Now, I said in the Cabinet room at the time I think we should do that. So did Kim Beazley and Gareth Evans said 'well, that's not part of the UN mandate.' It wasn't, but there was still a strong body of opinion that thought that around the world and essentially what I did the other day was repeat that.

FK: Back to the House and the play the Opposition has been making of that. They say it is ironic for a Labor Prime Minister to be buying a \$2 million house in inner Sydney. In the game of politics, that is a fair enough point to score isn't it?

- PM: Look, Alexander Downer, he's not going to make it. I mean the poor silly thing, he is wondering around tied up now with Michael Baume, you know who is a piece of, essentially, parliamentary filth. I mean, look, the thing is and that is what he traffics in - filth, under privilege. Let Alexander Downer cut his own cloth. I mean, look, I've got a house in Sydney I've had for twelve years, I am moving one mile away to a larger house, that is the full story.
- FK: But, for them to make a play of it, isn't it similar to what you have done in the past with John Hewson buying and selling houses and the Ferrari?
- PM: No, I have never referred to, I have never said to John Hewson ever - where did you get money for this? or where did you get money for that? We've said look, he lived in Bellevue Hill and had a Ferrari, but nobody said "well listen John, hang on you paid this for that and what was it that you put down here and what margin did you have there and where did you ..." I mean, that's never been done. I mean, at the time John Hewson was embarrassed with his family affairs not a word came from me or the Government. At a time when Mrs Downer absolutely put her foot in it about the passports of her children, not a word other than an oblique reference from Gareth Evans which he apologised for. These people never stop and the thing about it is this Fran - they must think I live under a rock. I know all about them, about their personal lives, about their finances, but I never use it.
- FK: Is this sale going through in eighteen months time, is that a sign that you considering resigning from politics?
- PM: No, just as that suited the vendor and it suited me. I've got no particular purpose at this point living in the house and I won't have after then. So, what I'll basically do is sell the one I have and rent it and that suited ... I mean, the cheek of these characters is just unbelievable. But the gutlessness of Downer not to raise it in the House of Representatives when I was there, but to go and get somebody like...without any credibility, a person whose reputation is in tatters - Senator Baume, Michael Baume - to go and do it in the Senate with a couple of other Senators on the instructions of Alexander Downer, is the sort of....look, we have all got to make our political bed in life and then lie in it. Well, the public is making a judgement about him.
- FK: In the House tomorrow the Government's Privacy Bill comes up - the Opposition will vote with the Government, but they're planning to move an amendment calling for consultation with the Federal parliament, State governments and the community about the implications of international treaties before they're signed on to - do they have a point? Should there be more discussion about these kind of treaties before...

PM: No.

FK: ...Australia signs on?

PM: No. Well, when I say do they have a point about international treaties - no. Do they have a point about discussions? We already consult with the States, industry groups and community groups, and we do it extensively. What is their point of objection? They're snakey on the external affairs power of the Constitution. They're saying "how dare these Commonwealth governments usurp the roles of the States?" See, this gets back to the old debate - was the Federation an act of creation of the Nation, or was it basically a set of arrangements for States? Well, it was the former, not the latter. But the Liberal Party - 50 years after its birth, going nowhere, still messing around with States rights, and still trafficking in that nonsense - is trying to say this is an incursion of States rights if the Commonwealth of Australia enters into an international treaty. Are they going to say that when the Commonwealth ratifies the GATT Agreement, the Uruguay Round, that it is going to effect some industry and some state, and that's some transgression of State rights? I mean, when does this nonsense finish? This is an island continent nation - when does this rubbish about States rights finish?

FK: Well, there is some confusion still I gather in the Coalition about whether some MP's will call for a vote on the Bill - if they don't, is the Government tempted to call for a vote to try and force those ones who don't support the legislation cross the floor?

PM: Which legislation are you speaking about now?

FK: This is the Privacy Bill.

PM: Oh, the Privacy Bill - I thought you were talking about the treaties. On the Privacy legislation - look, Alexander Downer said - remember he had his great coming-out press conference a week or two ago: "I have got the coalition to agree not to oppose the Bill"? I mean, you could hardly bring yourself to announce it, could you? "We have agreed not to oppose" - not to support, but not to oppose the Bill. He sacked John Hewson for arguing that the Coalition should support the Bill, he fired him because Hewson had the temerity to come out and say he supported the Bill. Now the National Party are going to stand him up - they are directing their members to vote against the Bill - what is he going to do? Sack them? Or look like the turkey he has become? I mean, how does he look on this - he has come out and said "I have got the Coalition to agree not to oppose the Bill". Wrong. He got to the Coalition to agree to nothing because the National Party are now saying that "we'll do what we like". I mean his leadership...

- FK: National Party MP's are still holding their cards pretty close to their chest on whether they will actually force a vote and cross the floor - would you like to see that demonstrated? Would you help them call on a vote?
- PM: His leadership has no credibility and no strength, and that's is apparent in the National Party thumbing its nose at him. If it was up to him to fire John Hewson if any front-bencher from the National Party vote against the legislation, then he should fire them too.
- FK: There's no sign though that front-benchers will be the ones voting against him, only those on the back-bench...
- PM: It doesn't matter - his authority is shot to pieces whichever way it goes. He made an announcement on behalf of the coalition that the coalition wouldn't oppose the legislation. They are going to oppose it - some of them.
- FK: The Land Fund also goes into the Senate this week - the Aboriginal Land Fund. The Greens are saying they won't support it unless it's amended substantially - they have called your legislation a hoax and a hall of mirrors - paternalistic. Is there going to be another agonisingly drawn out debate like we had with the Native Title debate, over the Land Fund?
- PM: Well, there shouldn't be because this is a most highly consulted....this has been a consulted over piece of legislation, and there is no notion here that the Aboriginal community - certainly not the big representative bodies I have met - believe this is some paternalism on the part of the Commonwealth. I mean it wasn't that long ago that Senator Chamarette made a submission in the budget context proposing certain details about the fund - it wasn't so apparently paternalistic then. The commitment to self-determination is evident right throughout the Bill, it's set up under the ATSIC Act, Senator Chamarette says she wants a billion dollars committed in 3 years. We are committing well over a billion, but over a longer time frame because we think that is just simply more wise - that you can't spend that money...I mean, how could you spend \$300 million a year on land?
- FK: Well, are you going to try and talk to the Greens about this - will you try and persuade them?
- PM: And then the other thing is that she is taking her lead from the NSW Land Council. Well, it has a land fund which Premier Neville Wran established which is very well endowed, and maybe they're just not as interested in the federal fund as some other people in Aboriginal Australia are, and she shouldn't take that much notice of them.

FK: Will you be talking to the Greens about that?

PM: Well, I don't mind talking to them - I have sent them a letter, they have written to me, I have communicated back to them trying to cover the points off, and I am happy to talk to them. But I don't....right from the start I said when we introduced the Native Title legislation that there would be a Land Fund to cover the interest of indigenous Australians who couldn't avail themselves of the Mabo Native Title Legislation - who couldn't establish that connection with the land. That has been part and parcel of everything that the Government has said - it is even in the first Bill, that is the Land Fund is in the first Bill. Now, it is being amplified in this Bill, and it was on that basis that the Aboriginal community expected us to proceed with it, which we have after extensive consultations. So it's a very...it's very high-handed for the Greens to say "oh, no, well look we know better what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians need best here. We know better, and we are going to exercise our perogatives in terms of our own view". I mean, I just think that the Greens should do a bit of consulting too, but a bit of broad consulting and not just with particular groups with an axe to grind.

FK: So you're not...it sounds as though you're not too interested in their amendments?

PM: No, I'm not real interested to be honest, no.

FK: Prime Minister just finally, the polls are looking very good for the Government - there's much talk about the Government setting up trigger legislation - are you tempted to pull on an early election?

PM: Now did you write this question out Fran, or did you work yourself up to it?

FK: I have been working up to it Prime Minister.

PM: No. Nope. N - O - P - E. Nope.

FK: So we won't be going to the polls early?

PM: Nope.

FK: Prime Minister Keating, thank you.

ends.