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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP RESOLUTION AGAINST FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTING, NSW ALP CONFERENCE, SYDNEY, 30 SEPTEMBER 1995

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Mr President, I thought I would take this opportunity of the Conference to say something declaratory, to move a proposal which I urge the Conference to adopt. It is about the role of the French in the Pacific and the shameful decision by France to test nuclear weapons there. It says this:

. Conference condemns the continuing program of dangerous and environmentally irresponsible nuclear testing being conducted by France in the South Pacific.

. Conference notes the destabilising adverse effects of the program on the region and the infringement of the rights of the indigenous people of the South Pacific.

. Conference expresses its outrage that France's nuclear testing program seriously impedes progress on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the efforts to create a nuclear free world.

. Conference expresses its total opposition to all nuclear testing by all states in all environments.

. Conference calls on the Federal Government to continue its campaign to employ all practical measures at Australia's disposal to halt the French nuclear testing program, including through diplomatic efforts including resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and other multilateral organisations and regional bodies such as the South Pacific Forum; taking every appropriate step in international law to secure the end of the testing program; encourage individual campaigns of protest by Australians.

. Conference states that no new contracts for Australian uranium sales to France be signed or approved until France signs the CTBT.

. Conference calls on the Australian Government to take all actions in respect of existing contracts for uranium sales to ensure that such sales

make no direct or indirect contribution to the French nuclear weapons program.

Mr President, the Australian Labor Party and this Government has had a long and honourable history on arms control and disarmament issues. Right through the 1980s and the 1970s we urged the world to adopt a South Pacific nuclear free zone to support the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and we have also supported and developed the groundbreaking Chemical Weapons Convention.

Our objection to what is being done now is at a time when there should be a premium on non-proliferation, at a time when the world believed the cold war had ended. A democracy. Not a totalitarian regime, but a democracy has come out and said that in its view, the nuclear weapons game is not over. That the premium on non-proliferation will be lowered and it has basically said it is competent for it and others to go out and test nuclear weapons, to refine them further or to develop them in a primary sense.

Now by President Chirac overturning President Mitterand's decision for a cessation of testing of nuclear weapons at Mururoa Atoll, what we have seen there is a nuclear weapon state telling all the would be proliferators that it is basically okay to test weapons. The Irans, the Iraqs, the Pakistans and all of the others who are out there mucking around with nuclear weapons, France is out there saying it is okay. That is our objection.

Our second objection is that because it is a democracy it ought to have respect for the people in the area in which it is testing. That is, it is not testing these weapons in its own territory, its own metropolitan territory, it is testing them in an area of the Pacific it calls its own. And in debating this with one French newspaper, the editor upbraided me, he said this is French territory, this is France. I said yes I know, there are Polynesians all the way down the Loire Valley and Carcassonne and Aix-en-Provence, popping out behind the trees, down in the Dordogne, they are all over the place. The fact is, what France has done is call into question the legitimacy of its connections in the Pacific for its contempt and betrayal of the values that democracies have. The belief that other democrats around the world have had in France and its values and the betrayal of the people of the Pacific area. These are their points of objection.

The biggest problem that we face in the post cold war world is a cessation of testing of nuclear weapons and Australia will be at the forefront of the development of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. If some good comes from this we hope to pin France into it and it said it would support a zero threshold which would mean that we may have a treaty of substance. But beyond the treaty and the Non-proliferation Treaty, of course, we still have the great stock pile of weapons out there, decaying weapon inventories. I think what France has done is remind the world, remind everybody, that there are 50,000 nuclear warheads laying around the place, that we do have rotting submarines sitting in Vladivostok, that their reactors are overheating and they are being kept cool by pumps on the wharves and all of the other bits and pieces of industrial junk which has been appendages of that old desire to see

a big Soviet maritime force. It is true still, unfortunately, that there are 14 reactors the same as Chernobyl, that they have the same inherent design faults, that they are sitting in the Ukraine and Belarus? and these other places around northern Europe, that they threaten continental Europe, that they have to be replaced and that the premium has to be upon non-proliferation on the disposal of these weapon stocks and on making these electricity programs safe.

This is what France should be interested in and it is engagement with these issues which will bring security to France. Not some notion that it should be developing a weapons program itself and one which in some way will guarantee its security in the past. This is all a throwback to 1940 and 1941. This is all about Hitler going down the Champs Elysees. It is all about Chirac saying never again. Well, of course, we all know never again and anyone that owns nuclear weapons can say never again, but why must they refine their weapons and why must they add to the inventory and why can't they join the rest of us in cleaning the world up. This is what we want them to do.

Mr President, the good thing about this is we are having an impact on the French people themselves. I have placed articles in LeMonde, in Liberation and with other newspapers, we are winning the battle in France itself and President Chirac has just taken an enormous tumble in the opinion polls from an approval rating in the 50s - I think 58 - down to 32 per cent and a disapproval rating which has gone from 20 odd per cent to something like 45 per cent. It has been a complete reversal of his fortunes and that of his government. Now, we have got 71 per cent of the opposition in the European parliament, France's European allies - 71 per cent opposition to testing amongst the French people - and, of course, general support for the policies and processes that we have articulated and enunciated.

So, he is losing the battle in Europe, he is losing it at home, he is losing it in Germany which is a country that matters most to France in terms of public opinion, he is losing it, I think, all around the world.

We want to make clear that our opposition is not an opposition to France itself. France has given the world so much in its history with the French Revolution, with democracy, with its culture, so our opposition is not an opposition to France or the French people, it is an opposition to the French President's decision and the French government. We object to this unprincipled decision, to this betrayal of the interests of the rest of us and those in the Pacific by a democracy.

We have worked with France in the past to do things. I had the pleasure in 1988 of meeting Prime Minister Michel Rocard and proposing to him that we not sign the minerals convention and that we make Antarctica a wilderness park and that is where the movement towards the 50 year wilderness declaration for Antarctica came from. Bob Brown was chewing on a muesli bar at the time, I think. But, Mr President, the fact is the Matignon Accords in New Caledonia, those Accords which are about basically the peaceful resolution and transition of that place were things Australia joined France on.

So, we are not against France or the French people, but we are against this decision. We want it reversed. We want to see no more tests. We want the French to clean up their act. We want them to apologise and we want them to join the rest of us in cleaning the world of these dreadful weapons. That is what we want.

President Chirac says I am anti-French, this you know Mr President, Isn't true. All those antique dealers down the Rue de Bac and the Rue Madeleine and the Rue de St Honore know it is not true too. But what is true is that we are going to keep on his wheel until he lets off. What is true is I'll keep after him until he gives it up and I know the Australian people are going to keep after him as well. That we are not going to relent. That we do have good values and we do get indignant about these things and we did think the cold war was over and there was no more need for it.

The other thing is, of course, just from a point of view of sheer self interest. If you are a weapon state, I should imagine the thing to do is not let the bloke next door be a weapon state. So, France had a vested interest in the Non-proliferation treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as has the United States and Great Britain. If they have got them, their policy should be to let no one else have them. But they are not even that smart. They are out there letting the Iran's and the Iraq's and all the others muck around with them and saying good on you, go for your life. That is what we object to and we are not having it and we are going to protect the people of the South Pacific and we are going to argue their case for them.

At the South Pacific Forum there was unanimity of opinion against this. I heard a speech there from President Kabua from the Marshall Islands talking about the nuclear program in his country over the years and the wasting stock piles, leaking nuclear stock piles in that country and the proposals he has had put to them by nuclear weapon states to put more there. They have always been at it with these lovely little places scattered throughout the Pacific, taken communities that have been essentially taken down, used and abused, absolutely used and abused for development of these huge testing programs. It has been a shameful record by most of the democracies in the Pacific, but it shouldn't continue.

So, Mr President, I urge conference support for the resolution. I know there is a fair bit of bipartisan support for this. I welcome this, but I assure you the Government will fight this right to the end. Gareth Evans is in New York at the moment, where we are now putting together the support at the United Nations for a resolution which is condemning this testing and process and calling it into question and seeking a cessation of it. We will be using all of the forums we can to keep this pressure on and I know with the support of the Labor Party and the community of this country we can have a very big impact. Thank you very much.

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