



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
INTERVIEW WITH SARAH MACDONALD, TRIPLE J, 25 OCTOBER 1995**

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MAC: Prime Minister, could France have done the world a favour by resuming nuclear testing?

PM: No, but I think we have got to draw something good from the debris and what Australia has now decided to do, what this Government has decided, is that we will establish at the core of our policy a commitment to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. That is, we will go beyond the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, that we will commit substantial resources to that, but we will go beyond that and seek to eliminate the 50,000 strong stock pile of nuclear weapons.

Now as well as that, we will commit substantial resources to expediting negotiations on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as a first step towards eliminating nuclear weapons and we will kick start negotiations on fissile material production and stock piles also as a step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

So, at the end of the Cold War and the changed strategic environment, we think it is now time, particularly with the heightened focus on what France has done and the objection to it, to actually now strike out and make a new direction, to actually not simply stop testing but to actually be rid of the weapons themselves.

MAC: But if countries like France and China won't listen to us when we say stop testing, do you think they are going to listen when we ask them to get rid of their weapons as well?

PM: Well, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty which France has said it will sign and others may sign, we have had a very strong reaffirmation of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty this year. That was one of the things which, of course, soured us with the French. When there was so much optimism around about the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the French then decided to test their weapons. But now they have

said they will sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The thing you have got to know about nuclear weapon states is the thing they now fear, as the rest of us do, is that someone else will get weapons too. So, from their point of view there would be some clear interest on their part to make sure that the country next door doesn't get weapons. So they may sign and, I think, will sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, it will then be a case of urging Russia and the United States to move forward on their START obligations and start to de-construct their nuclear warheads and then reprocess the material and that would be part of a generally broad policy of doing that.

MAC: We'll talk about what Australia will do to achieve this goal, you are going to set up an eminent persons groups to report to the UN, what would you like them to report to the UN about?

PM: I think practical and innovative thinking on ways to reduce existing arsenals and halt proliferation. Australia is not a weapon state, we don't have nuclear weapons but we have had some success, indeed quite a lot of success, with the chemical weapons convention. There we succeeded in abolishing a whole class and category of weapons. This is what we are seeking to do with another class and category of nuclear weapons. So, we will bring into a group those people who have a deep knowledge of the whole development of these weapons programs and of course disarmament and the treaties and processes to actually de-construct them.

MAC: Why when Gareth Evans goes to the International Court of Justice, why would he argue that the Court shouldn't actually make a ruling about the legality of nuclear weapons, why shouldn't he just have our first scenario and that is that weapons should be illegal.

PM: We are saying that the best option is for the Court to make no judgment because its finding either way - legal or illegal - will make nuclear disarmament more difficult. If the Court is to come to a judgement we would prefer it to find nuclear weapons illegal and to acknowledge the practical difficulties which follow. Because it has never been a legal matter as to whether they are legal or not, they are weapons of mass destruction. Their very design, building and potential use has got naught to do with legalities, it has got all to do with power and to do with defence or a deterrent defence. But, those who want to be rid of the things think that a judgement inside the courts may help, well if it is a judgement for their legality, of course, all the people who believe that nuclear weapons are abhorrent would have taken the step backwards. If to say they are illegal, I think, we'll find that you then have the major powers walking away from the International Court of Justice. Is that going to do us any good?

MAC: You talked about it, it might be achievable I think some people think to get rid of the stockpiles, but do you really think that one day in your life time we will a world free of nuclear weapons?

PM: Well, I think, it is a possibility now. I never thought that too many years ago. But now the strategic environment of the bipolarity of the Cold War has changed and we are looking at regional problems and we are also, I think, from the point of view of military hardware, witnessing the success of these pin point accuracy weapons where you don't need the mass explosion and the mass explosive force of nuclear weapons as a deterrent. You can see in Iraq how these pin point accuracy weapons were deployed. We may be getting to the point that people in defence administrations with defence responsibilities around the world, will think in terms of the precision of these sorts of weapons versus nuclear weapons.

Such a process, that is removing the warheads, would have to take place within the context of a continuing deterrent policy whereby the deterrents which are held by the nuclear powers are gradually wound down. But, the main thing to begin with is to ban further testing, to kick start negotiations on fissile material production, to stop more of it being produced, to stop the diversion of materials and proliferation and then start grinding away at the stock piles. That is how I would see it and, I think, those things are achievable.

MAC: Why do you think the world is going to listen to Australia, as you said we are a relatively small country and we are not a nuclear weapons state. Why are they going to take notice of our move?

PM: We have had a number of successes with the chemical weapons convention where we put our back to it with a number of other countries that succeeded in banning the use of a whole class or category of weapons. We have had success in other things such as the peace accords in Cambodia, APEC - putting together a huge transpacific free trade agreement, free trade proposal - and, of course, in Antarctica.

Let me tell you about Antarctica. I first raised this actually with the former Prime Minister of France at a time when we were about to sign the Minerals Convention and that would have seen the green light to mining and exploitation of Antarctica and I put to Prime Minister Michele Rocard in 1988 that we shouldn't advance and sign the Minerals Convention, that there was a better way. We didn't understand Antarctica, that we shouldn't tear it to pieces, not in some sort of premature scramble for resources, particularly for oil, and that we should set aside the Minerals Convention which was ten years of work and seek to declare Antarctica a wilderness park. Now, that happened, it took some time and there were a lot of negotiations and a lot of consultations along the way but it happened. As the Chemical Convention happened. As APEC is happening.

So, I think, because Australia has no axe to grind in these things, that it is not a weapons state but it does have mature foreign policy

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processes and disarmament is one of the things we have specialised in, but not over played our hand in, that we can be effective and, I think, practical in getting results.

MAC: Australia is still contributing to the nuclear industry by providing uranium and lots of environment groups say that this actually compromises our arguments in the world stage on nuclear weapons.

PM: I don't believe it does. We don't provide uranium to weapons programs. They go to civil power programs and we have, of course, through the IAEA a set of international safeguards to protect against diversion to weapons programs. But if we stop the production of fissile material, then that doesn't become a question. And then, of course, you have got whatever will be the outcome of the intellectual tussle over greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels and the civil nuclear power. None of these things are simple, but Australia's position has always been that we have supported a Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and we have been opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the diversion of these materials. I think the fact that Australia is actually in the business and has a say in the IAEA and is regarded as a player with integrity in these issues makes us more effective.

MAC: Would you like to use our strong position in Asia to convince countries like India and Pakistan which is where a lot of the world is worried that nuclear development may happen to actually go away from that goal?

PM: Were we to succeed in moving towards this goal, the pressure will come on those countries to declare their hand and make clear where they are. But, there can be no such pressure while a major democracy like France is out there encouraging people to test weapons. That is our objection to the French. That is, that they are out there saying at a time when the rest of us trying to keep the horse in the stable, to not see the nuclear option bolt amongst a group of other countries, France is out there saying it is okay - you can have as many bangs out there under ground or above ground as you like - and, I think, that is the real sin that the French have committed.

MAC: Were you disappointed today that Bill Hayden didn't bring up French nuclear testing in his speech to the UN?

PM: Well, it is in the text and it is published for and on his behalf and on behalf of Australia. Whether he actually said it is a matter for him and his time constraints. This is the problem of these major international events, I think people only get about five minutes and that's it.

MAC: Shouldn't he have put it up the top of his speech?

PM: Well, it is about the UN, it is about a body which he had an involvement with as Foreign Minister. Obviously, it was in the speech

to be given, but what we have done here today is indeed far more significant than a comment about France. As I said to you earlier, what we have done here today, is establish at the core of our own policy a commitment to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons of all classes. No Australian Government has ever taken that position before.

MAC: Finally, there has been a lot of hoo-ha today in the press about Cabinet meetings and sponsorship, do you reckon you are worth \$20,000?

PM: I'm not part of any sponsorship things and I didn't attend that gathering. The press are better off the trivia and onto the main things like you and I were just speaking about. You were going better before you got around to that question.

MAC: [laughs]

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