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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
DOORSTOP, REGENT HOTEL, AUCKLAND, 10 NOVEMBER 1995

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J: Mr Keating, what do you think CHOGM can achieve for the end of nuclear testing in the Pacific?

PM: Well, I think, it is a broad enough forum, representative enough to be able to competently express its view about the fact that France has extended the proliferation risk and has arrogantly decided to continue testing its weapons in someone else's domain.

J: So how do you react to Mr Major's statement yesterday that he really would have been hypocritical not to have supported the French who had no choice of following nuclear power?

PM: Mr Major made a contribution this morning and I was able to enter the debate myself. He makes a couple of valid points, I think. One is that the system of nuclear weapons has been an effective deterrent for most of the post war years, through the cold war years. My point is though that the cold war bipolarity has finished. That complexion has gone. There is now no more dedicated nuclear enemy. The real enemy now is the proliferators, the people who can divert mechanisms, material, technical advice and build weapons. So, most likely, if France believes it needs a nuclear weapon to defend itself, it is not going to need it to defend itself against the traditional enemies of the past like Germany or Russia, it is more likely, if it is to be attacked, it will be attacked by a terrorist or a terrorist group with a nuclear device.

J: Did you make this point today?

PM: I did and I made clear that therefore what France has done, the strike against France, is that it has made clear to the proliferators that bomb building is ok and it becomes a bit difficult to say 'oh, we will cease when the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty comes' because what you are really saying, in principle, is bomb building is ok and we will cease when we are good and ready and we have got our bomb built. So, that I think, is the point. The second thing I said today, the second strike against France, is that it is a democracy and it is also a democracy which I said many people around the table had fought for, fought to preserve French liberty and that the masthead of French society - liberty, equality, fraternity - was something that was not providing any equality or fraternity to the people of the Pacific. It is one thing a dictatorship or a military government going its way wilfully in disregard of communities, but it is another thing altogether for a democracy. Therefore the objection to France's testing program is, one, that it encourages proliferation and, two, that as a democracy it has turned its back on the ideals of its own democracy and also its back upon those who actually fought in defence of French liberty.

J: Mr Keating, was China also encouraging proliferation and is it being criticised?

PM: It is and it was. I mentioned China too to say that it is doing just the same thing as France. It is encouraging proliferators to develop weapons. The difference with China, of course, is that it is doing them in its own metropolitan area.

J: What do you think of the role being played by John Major?

PM: Well, it has only just started.

J: ... he seems to be saying, certainly in talks with the New Zealand Prime Minister last night, the position of those two Prime Ministers seems to be that the agreement was to agree to disagree and put it to one side and get on with the rest.

PM: The agreement, I think, will probably be to disagree, but it will not be put to one side. One hopes the communique will reflect the broad basis of that disagreement.

J: ... a proposal I understand for the New Zealand Prime Minister and British Prime Minister to issue a mini communique this evening, do you support that move?

PM: We haven't even finished the global discussion at this point.

J: Do you support their move though?

PM: I just told you, we haven't finished the global discussion at this point. I am not sure how the discussion will go for the balance of the afternoon.

J: In your discussions with Mr Bolger last night, did he raise that prospect of a mini communique?

PM: No.

J: Did Mr Major raise any other points?

PM: Yes, he made quite a number of points, I'm not sure that I've got my notes with me. He made a comprehensive set of points, one about development finance for developing countries ...

J: On the French question, did he have any other points?

PM: No, it was only that as a possessor of nuclear weapons there was a responsibility that he understood. He thought he understood President Chirac's position as a result of that which is something he has said before I think.

J: Prime Minister, do you think you are getting enough support from New Zealand in your opposition to the stance being taken by the French?

PM: New Zealand's position has been clear about this issue right the way through and, of course, Prime Minister Bolger is in their Chair, he is not in the debate.

J: Prime Minister, have you had any discussions with Dr Mahathir especially after his statement in support of you last night?

PM: I didn't realise that he had said something in support of me last night.

J: Well he did.

PM: No, I have since been told and I also said some things in support of him, in support of some of the points he made in his own contribution on this issue.

J: Could you elaborate on that?

PM: Just that he was referring to, as I had in Australia earlier referred to, the risk of the Chernobyl type accidents and that being the real problem for Europe. He was talking about, I think, \$400 million needing to be spent to encarcerate and to seal Chernobyl. The problem is that there are 14 Chernobyl reactors - there is 14 of them.

J: Are you going to have any private meetings with Mr Major?

PM: Yes I am down, I think I am seeing him tomorrow afternoon. Maybe the next day.

J: Do you think the fact that Mr Major has given precedence to his regional considerations over the desires of Commonwealth countries says anything about what [inaudible] other countries should put in the Commonwealth?

PM: Well I think that it makes clear that we all have distinct interests. I think what the Commonwealth can do is cut across regional interests. I mean some of the subjects under discussion make clear that it can cut across it is an organisation which has had, of course Its beginning is because of its contact and arrangements with Britain in the past and it goes across the world. And, you know, it cuts across a lot of regional boundaries and it can therefore address a lot of subjects that many other regional groupings could not. So in that sense it is useful. But I think Prime Minister Major's support for the French comes from the focus that France, and Germany, and Britain have had on each other since the opening days of this century.

J: Mr Keating, did you in your contribution raise the Nigerian matter?

PM: No.

J: Was there much discussion on that today?

PM: No, not at this point. It probably will be.

J: Could you tell us where you think that is up to?

PM: Oh I can only say where we stand on it. I think at this point, that is that we have called in the Ambassador in Canberra to express our disfavour at this decision and to say that we think it is wrong and no doubt there will be similar expressions here. Now whether one moves to then some sort of sanctions is a matter for debate. President Mandela, I understand, doesn't favour sanctions for instance.

J: Robert Mugabe does and some others do. Where does Australia stand on sanctions at this point?

PM: Well we will listen to the debate and see what we think about it.

J: Do you think it is important for the Commonwealth to actually take action against Nigeria, rather than just mouth words?

PM: Well that is the same thing, we will see when we go in there.

J: Prime Minister, Fleet Street seems to be in something of a lather. Have you been verbaled?

PM: I think I have to say I have been, yes.

J: Well, what were the circumstances of it exactly?

PM: Well as you know I like journalists. Most of the time I like journalists and I am used to the tricks of the trade. But I do reject and object strenuously to people who are imputing to me something I haven't said at all. The Queen was never mentioned in any discussion - not at all - and I do not refer to The Queen flippantly - ever. And some Australian journalist said he thinks that they are words that have been used by Les Patterson, by Barry Humphries. Now it may be, which makes the journalist even more culpable.

J: Isn't it very surprising that the newspaper concerned is [inaudible] newspaper?

PM: It is. I think the only thing about this is that the sort of cancer which the tabloids in Britain have had, has obviously had such an impact on the British press that it has moved into the broadsheets who feel they must use some of this too to be able to convey their message.

J: So what is your estimation of a British journalist at the moment, Prime Minister?

PM: Oh well I don't know.

J: Are you going to take this up with the Editor of The Guardian?

PM: Well I think Greg Turnbull put a statement out. Greg Turnbull was standing with me with Ric Simes and I just saw this person in the corridor.

J: The British press are also interpreting Mr Major's visit here as a victory. The British papers this morning are saying that his logic on the French nuclear issue has won over, particularly won over, New Zealand. Is that your interpretation?

PM: Well you should know, you're a New Zealand Journalist.

J: Well I am asking you what your interpretation is.

PM: You should know whether New Zealand has been won over or not. But they were not won over last night when I last spoke to them about this subject.

J: Mr Keating would you say that Mr Major was on the back foot during discussions this morning? You said that you and Mr Major

PM: Well he put his position forthrightly and I put mine, the Sultan of Brunei put his, Prime Minister Chan of Papua New Guinea put his, Prime Minister Mahathir, amongst others.

J: [inaudible] in a mood to issue the sort of condemnation. Gareth Evans says Australia wants a straightforward conference.

PM: Well I said that France and China should be condemned for their decision and for the reasons I stated earlier.

J: There was no support for Britain at all in those discussions?

PM: Not so far, but this global session hasn't finished.

J: Do you believe there will be any support for them from any countries?

PM: I don't know.

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