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## Prime Minister Fraser's Speech Regarding Soviet Union Invasion of Afghanistan

**Mr Malcolm Fraser** (Wannon – Prime Minister) If there are people listening to the debate today and if there are people who have listened to the debates on this subject over the past week there are many out in the wider Australian community who will indeed be wondering at what has happened to this place. Before us are issues of great and fundamental national importance, issues that go to the very survival in the longer term of this nation, issues that go to the very survival of the kind of world in which Australians can live and prosper. But what kind of debate do we have? What kind of personalities do we have introduced? I want to try to get back to the basis of the issues which ought to be before all honourable members in this House. I refer first to a statement I made to this House on 1 June 1976. I said:

We want to help diminish the dangers of war and conflict, to help others – as well as ourselves – to live in peace and prosperity, and to work towards an international environment which is favourable to these ends. There is a yearning in the world for peace and security. These must be the constant objectives of our policy.

In recent years, abroad as at home, lack of realism has inhibited Australia from the constructive role open to us. A government does a great disservice if it encourages acceptance by the people of an unrealistic view of the state of the world in which they live. At home, the costs of a lack of realism have become very apparent in the economic dislocation Australia has suffered. Abroad, unrealistic notions that an age of peace and stability had arrived encouraged a neglect of power realities – a neglect that did not serve our interests.

Further in the same statement I said:

These factors show that a nation does not have to face a threat of imminent invasion before it has grounds for concern at the international situation. From our own point of view the primary concern is an international environment which could progressively limit the capacities of Australia, her friends, and allies, to advance their interests and ideals, which reduces options, which almost imperceptibly weakens the capacity to pursue our interests and advance the cause of human dignity.

...as understood by people throughout the world, detente meant not merely the search for security from nuclear war, but a genuine overall relaxation of political and military tensions.

This referred not only to Europe but also beyond. The statement continued:

The Soviet Union has an immense responsibility before mankind – to use its power and influence to strengthen the fabric of international peace and security. It has an historic opportunity to use its position to help build a stable and humane international order and to end the arms build-up. It will be judged by the great majority of mankind against these standards.

The time has come to expect a sign from the USSR that it understands this and that it is serious about reaching global accommodation with the West. A tangible signal is required from the USSR in the form of a restraint in its military expansion. The pace is being set by the USSR, not by the US.

Mr Speaker, when that speech was given in 1976 there were many commentators throughout this nation who regarded it as a hard line, Cold War statement. As events have sadly proved, it was all too accurate. The Soviet Union gave us a sign, but not the sign we wanted, not the sign honourable people would have prayed for. Instead, it has caused trouble in South East Asia, in Africa through Cuban surrogates, in north-east Africa and now in south-west Asia. In all these circumstances it is the Soviet Union, not the United States and the United States' friends, that has given cause for concern, for fear in many places, and for heightened tensions.

I think we need to understand why the invasion of Afghanistan is important. This was explained in my statement to the House, but let me repeat the fundamentals. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has invaded a non-aligned state, a member of the non-aligned movement and the Islamic Conference. The most powerful and largest land army in the world has moved for the first time outside what had been accepted as the Soviet bloc, the Soviet power grouping. That places the Soviet Union in the position potentially to exert pressure and influence, or even control, over the supplies of oil which are vital to countries such as Japan and European countries and which are of great importance to Australia and many other countries. That is a new element in Soviet moves that has not been present in previous crises. It is for that reason that we believe that this is potentially the most serious of all the crises since 1945.

The Soviets are moving in Africa, south-west Asia and South East Asia. Tensions in the Indian Ocean are heightened. Tensions in the Indian sub-continent, where there have been difficulties between states, are worse than they were. The strategic balance between the USSR and the United States is not in the favour of the United States and the United States' friends. There is nuclear parity now, where before there was nuclear superiority by the United States, but there is conventional superiority by the Soviet Union which the United States is setting about to counter.

These are the great issues and the great consequences that affect our environment. They have not been mentioned by the Australian Labor Party, which is more concerned, regrettably, about personality politics than these fundamental issues that should be before all of us. We have wanted and we want a bipartisan policy on these particular matters because they are so important to the fundamental issues which should unite all Australians. I can only say that all Australians must be ashamed of their Parliament on this day – and must have been ashamed on earlier days – when they find their politicians and representatives arguing so bitterly about matters of such concern to this nation.

The charge that this situation has occurred because of this Government's desire for domestic political gain is an absurdity. That is like saying that this Government was able to cause the invasion of Afghanistan. It is like saying that this Government was able to cause the vote of 104 nations of the United Nations – the majority of which are non-aligned – and also able to

cause the vote of the Islamic Conference. Whatever powers this Government may have had, we do not pretend to that total influence and power that is implicit in the suggestion that this situation has been caused for domestic political gain. If the Government had received the support of the Opposition on these matters, as I believe it was entitled to receive, there certainly would have been no politics involved. There are no politics in this question, I understand, in the United States. There are no politics in it in the United Kingdom. There the Government and the Opposition understand the importance of the issues and broadly support the thrust of what is done.

Then we come to the Olympic Games, about which so much has already been said. Here we have the Leader of the Opposition and the Government both saying that, because of what has happened, an effective boycott of the Olympic Games would be the most effective means of getting the message through to the Soviet Government and to the people of the Soviet Union. We all know that over the last two or three years the Olympic Games have been built up as a great social and political event, in the Soviet's terms, which represents a mark of approval of its foreign policy. For two or three years the Soviet people have been told: 'All the nations of the world are coming to the Soviet Union to pay homage to us, the first socialist state in the world, as a mark of approval of us and of our foreign policies'. If the flags are absent and the benches are empty, that cannot be explained to the Soviet people. Then the mark of abhorrence, which we share with the Labor Party, would become evident.

The Leader of the Opposition agrees with what I am saying. He agrees that an effective boycott would be the best means of getting this message through. He having said that if a boycott were effective and were supported by other nations he would support it, we had a right to expect, without dispute and without argument, that it would be supported. Then why is it not supported? He says that there is no sense and no justice in a boycott, which does not seem to flow from what he had said earlier. Then yesterday we heard these two sentences:

If the Olympic Games go ahead we say unreservedly that Australia should participate. If there is an effective boycott, the Opposition supports it.

If the Opposition believes, as the Leader of the Opposition does, that this is the way to get the message through to the Soviet Union and to the Soviet people, if the Leader of the Opposition believes that an effective boycott will achieve that and if he says that he will support it if it is effective, then I plead with this Opposition to work for it and to help to make it effective. I ask it to help prevent this world in the 1980s from going down the terrible and dark slide that we pursued once before when, after 1936, national leaders would not make the decisions or take the steps necessary to prevent the holocaust and the cataclysmic events which led to tens of millions of people being killed and wounded from 1939 to 1945.

Somebody said earlier in this debate that the view we have of the situation is the view of one person – myself. Again that is an absurdity. It is the view of 104 members of the United Nations. It is the view of members of the Islamic Conference. It is the view of Mr Bani-Sadr, the new President of Iran, who has stated:

The Soviets are at our doors. If they succeed in reaching the Persian Gulf they would control not only Iran but the whole of the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent.

Willy Brandt, a socialist and a noted statesman in Europe, has said:

No one in the European Parliament's Political Affairs Committee will, I think, dispute the fact that the world situation in which we and others find ourselves is fraught with danger.

Mr Carter has said – I think he is right – that this could be or could become the most precarious situation since World War II. Jim Callaghan, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has said:

Their actions have made the world a more dangerous place ... Following the invasion of Afghanistan the Soviet Union has added to that deterioration by the contemptuous flick of the wrist with which Dr Sakharov has been banished to Gorki. The question that some countries are now bound to ask is whether they will be the next to be threatened ...The shadow of the Soviet Union hangs over many countries in that long arc stretching from Turkey to Pakistan.

To suggest that this is the view of one person is a total absurdity and offensive indeed, because it is the view also of those countries in South East Asia to which the Foreign Minister has spoken. It is the view of the United States and of the United Kingdom. It is the view of France and of Germany which, in a joint communique, indicated that the invasion of Afghanistan could put in step those processes which one by one could lead to the most dangerous consequences for mankind.

Whatever views people might have about the reasons for Russia's move into Afghanistan, the possibilities and consequences that are opened up as a result of it are matters on which there is, as I understand it, total agreement amongst our advisers and amongst all the countries with which we have talked on this particular matter. If the Leader of the Opposition wants briefings from the Office of National Assessments on the facts of the situation, he knows that they are available to him and that there are accepted procedures. If he asks for approval he will be given it and Mr. Furlonger will brief him. That was not done. Have I got to say on every occasion: 'Do you want a briefing?' There are other agencies of government that brief the Leader of the Opposition, as he well knows. We have set those matters in train more forthrightly, I believe, than any other government – although, to give credit, Mr. Whitlam, my predecessor, also allowed the Leaders of the Opposition to be briefed on certain matters.

I have already said that this Parliament has no cause for pride in the charges that have been made across it in recent days. The debate of personalities does not advance the cause of this nation. That is what I presume all of us are here to do – to advance the cause of the Australian people. There is an element of agreement on these issues. We agree that Afghanistan causes a dangerous situation. We agree that the Soviet Union should be condemned for its action. We also agree that a boycott of the Olympic Games would be the most effective means of getting that message through to the Soviet Union. Why then do we find that the petty internal differences within this House make it so impossible to build on that and to achieve a national consensus in relation to it? I ask all honourable members to remember what it is about. We know what happened when Germany marched into the Rhineland and step by step after that until world war came about. The President of the United States and others are now about

preventing that situation happening in the early years of the 1980s. What we are about involves the independence and the very survival of the way of life which is so important to all Australians. I suggest that we now put these matters aside. The Government has had enough of this nonsense and we intend getting on with the business of governing this nation. I move:

That the question be now put.

**Mr Hayden** – Mr. Speaker –

**Mr Speaker** – Order! The honourable gentleman will resume his seat.

**Mr Hayden** – I would think it appropriate for the Prime Minister not to gag debate if he is a man of –

**Mr Speaker** – Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I draw the attention of all members of the House, particularly those on my right, to the fact that it is not the practice of this House to thump tables. The method of acclaiming a speech is to say “Hear, hear”, and I expect that to be –

**Government members** – Hear, hear!

**Mr Hayden** – The Prime Minister is not going to gag me! It took him two days to get into the House.

**Mr Speaker** – Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

**Mr Hayden** – Mr Speaker, I want to make some positive suggestions about bipartisanship. I have two substantial propositions to put to the Government to establish bipartisanship.

**Mr Speaker** – Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

**Mr Malcolm Fraser** – I think the Leader of the Opposition should have the opportunity to speak.

**Mr Speaker** – Order! The right honourable gentleman will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has moved: ‘That the question be now put’. Under the Standing Orders I am obliged to put that question. Does the right honourable gentleman seek leave to withdraw the motion?

**Mr Malcolm Fraser** – I seek leave to suggest that the Leader of the Opposition should be entitled to speak. He had not moved or seconded this motion. I know that he was sitting there. In the circumstances in which I have asked to see whether it is within the capacity of this House to develop an Australian approach to these matters, I believe that he should be entitled to speak. I ask that he be given that opportunity.

**Mr Speaker** – The Standing Orders will be adhered to. The Prime Minister has asked for

leave to withdraw his motion.

Motion – by leave – withdrawn.

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