

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SECRET

SUBJECT

SERIAL No. T8/80.....

TEXT OF LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA,
THE RT HON. MALCOLM FRASER, CH MP, TO
THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM,
THE RT HON. MARGARET THATCHER, MP.

My dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to applaud the vigorous way in which your government has denounced the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and to tell you of my own concerns, which I know you share, about the implications of what has occurred. I feel that it will be necessary for Western governments to keep closely in touch about these recent events.

We have been deeply outraged, as I know you have, by what has occurred. The Soviet invasion is totally without justification and violates everything that the United Nations and detente stand for. As a mode of behaviour it gravely undermines normal relationships between nations.

As you will already have been informed, Australia has taken firm steps of its own to help to demonstrate to the Soviet Union that the latter's action is too costly to be repeated.

The purpose of our decisions is to contribute to international attempts to penalise the Soviets for their aggressive behaviour, and so seek to deter them from repeating it elsewhere. I believe that our actions again underline Australia's solidarity with our friends and allies, it has been one of our fundamental considerations that we and others must be seen to be taking tangible measures, in accordance with our national perspectives. In short, we should try to match our words with actions. Otherwise, it seems to me that there will be a danger of the Soviets, and possibly others, doubting our credibility and our resolve.

From the point of view of Western interests, and those of international security generally, what has happened in Afghanistan seems to me to represent a failure of the existing structure of deterrence. The Soviets felt free to act as they did and were prepared to accept the costs entailed. However, by concerted action now we can hope to make that cost unacceptably high, and thus to dissuade them from further aggression.

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As to their present aggression, I doubt very much that they will withdraw from Afghanistan at the behest of the United States and likeminded countries or in response to wider international protests. They will be moved to do so only by a sense of their own interests. If we were to insist repeatedly on Soviet withdrawal while being unable to compel it, we would run the risk of appearing ineffectual. In this situation I believe we should direct our main attention and efforts to future contingencies rather than past events, to deter the Soviet Union from further aggression rather than to seek a result which we might not be able to guarantee.

I believe we need to be particularly concerned that the Soviet move into Afghanistan could be the forerunner of a further Soviet move into Pakistan, or more likely Iran, bearing in mind the unsettled state of that country. If that were to happen, the Soviet Union would be well placed to exert a dangerous influence over the free world's oil supplies. This is a contingency that cannot be ignored.

I am concerned that the Western allies too often find themselves obliged to react to events, and perhaps there is a need for greater capacity for control and initiative on our part. As far as possible we should be able to anticipate events such as occurred in Afghanistan in order to forestall them, or to modify their consequences.

It was with this in mind that I thought it necessary to communicate directly with you and to advise you of the nature of our concern at recent developments and the perspectives in which we see them. There may be ways in which we can work more closely in the service of Western interests in the circumstances which now prevail, and I would very much welcome knowing your views.

I have written in similar vein to a number of our friends and neighbours, including those in our near region, and also to Jimmy Carter in response, particularly, to his initiatives and leadership. It seems to me that the world has entered a new and potentially more dangerous era and that there is an urgent need for likeminded countries to consider together how best to cope with the problems and challenges which lie ahead of us. No one country can hope to face these problems in isolation and accordingly, I have taken an early opportunity to inform you of our concerns.

Yours sincerely

MS of 12 Jan 1980.

(Malcolm Fraser)

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