MR RUDD: This has been a useful dialogue. The Bahrainis should be congratulated for organizing it. The IISS should be congratulated for providing the software for it. I’m constantly impressed by what transactions occur formally and informally at gatherings of this nature. Enough from me - over to you folks.

QUESTION: I’m from the Gulf Daily News in Bahrain. I’m just trying to get more of the local angle about what Australia is doing in Bahrain. I just want to ask you, what is Australia doing to ensure security in the region? Are you doing some training or talks with GCC countries?

MR RUDD: Well let me say first of all in the Emirates we have 500 or so troops in the base at Al-Minhad. And from there we service our operations in Afghanistan where we have nearly 2000 troops. This is an important operation for us and we rely intrinsically on the support of our friends in the Emirates and Bahrain. We have had I think in the better part of the last 20 years Australian naval units servicing various operations both in the Gulf and in the Arabian Sea. Currently the HMAS Melbourne is here. It’s out in the counter terrorism exercise, which rolls on. And episodically it engages in counter piracy exercises. We rely very much on our friends in Bahrain for porting facilities for the vessel. And also on top of
that yesterday I spoke with our Australian naval commander who is responsible for the entire CT maritime exercises in the Persian Gulf with navies from three to four different countries. So you ask what we are doing in the region. There’s a few things. And we have been doing it not just in the last few weeks, but for the last 20 years. And that is all made possible by the strength and depth and breadth of the diplomatic relationship we have with the Gulf states frankly since the beginning.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you about Julian Assange. He’s an Australian citizen and we were wondering how things were going to develop going forward now. He’s on record as saying that he thinks the Australian Prime Minister and Attorney General have said that he can’t come back to Australia and that they are cooperating with the US trying to get him or close Wikileaks down. Is this correct? Is he able to come back or would you ever consider taking his passport?

MR RUDD: Well the first thing I would say is that I would not respond to any comments reported or otherwise by Mr Assange. That is a matter for him.

Secondly, what I will describe is the legal processes in which the Australian government is currently engaged. First of all the Australian Attorney-General has made clear that the Australian Federal Police have been asked to investigate whether Mr Assange has breached any element of the Australian criminal law.

Secondly, if he has done so then our system would be one whereby reference would then be made to the Director of Public Prosecutions and actions would be undertaken before Australian courts. Internationally, we operate in full cooperation with Interpol and normal international legal arrangements which are then activated by police and judicial arrangements around the world. We in Australia are a nation of laws. We adhere to legal processes both national and international and on these matters we do not engage in political intervention.

You also asked about Mr Assange’s passport. Any action in relation to his passport would be entirely contingent on the recommendations provided by the Australian Federal Police. As I said these are definitely at arm’s length from the Australian Government. These are law enforcement agencies and judicial agencies which undertake these examinations independently. Those agencies are fully engaged with their international counterparts.

The last thing I would say is the Australian Government unequivocally condemns the actions by any of those responsible for the unauthorised release of classified and confidential information and diplomatic communication between states.

Its consequence is to undermine the business of diplomacy. The business of diplomacy is necessary, including in the 21st century, because sometimes confidential communication between states is the only means by which intractable real problems in the real international community can be dealt with and solved. There is a real principle at stake here. And that is it.

QUESTION: In case that he is brought to justice, do you prefer that he faces trial in Australia, or somewhere else?
Again I make the point, these are matters to be independently determined by the Public Prosecutors, by the police authorities in the first place, and thirdly in proper collaboration with our partners around the world. These should be resolved as a matter of legal principle and legal detail between these professional entities, not subject to individual political interference by any individual government.

**QUESTION:** Would the Australian Government be interested to ensure that all the procedures if taken against Mr Assange would be legal and no misuse of...

Australia is a country of laws. Therefore the full force of the law in Australia and abroad will be brought to bear in relation to any individual responsible for the unauthorised release of classified confidential information,

It does not matter whether it’s Mr Assange or anybody else. That is what we would do, and we do so at arm’s length from the political arm of the government of the day in Australia - that is why we have a professional body called the Australian Federal Police, that is why we have a professional body called the Director of Public Prosecutions, that is why we are dealing with counterpart institutions around the world, and we will continue to do so.

**QUESTION:** On Afghanistan, are you going to withdraw after [inaudible]?

**MR RUDD:** No, Australia is committed to Afghanistan for the long term. We noted Hamid Karzai’s statement that a transfer of security responsibility should occur by 2014. We respect that.

The Australian Government has particular responsibilities in the province of Uruzgan where we are training the Afghan national army, the Afghan national police. We are engaging in development work for the local economy in that area. Significant flows of Australian development assistance to that area as well as work with the governance of that province as well.

So we are in close and continuing partnership with the Afghans at a national and at a provincial level and we are there for the long haul. We will do so within the framework of what President Hamid Karzai has said about his intended date for transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan forces themselves.

**QUESTION:** Away from WikiLeaks and Afghanistan, recently Brazil recognized a Palestinian state, an independent state, along 1967 borders. If Australia received a request from the Palestinian Authority as well as what happened with Brazil, what will be the Australian answer?

**MR RUDD:** Our position is clear cut on this. We have long supported a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. In fact we have had that policy since about 1947 and haven’t really shifted from it. We have many Palestinian Australians. We have many Arab Australians. We are deeply committed to the principle of not just an independent secure state of Israel but an independent secure Palestinian state as well.
Secondly, however, we also appreciate the reality that this will be shaped very much by the current peace process and that the questions of a final state of settlement include many unresolved questions including boundaries and other matters which are yet to be determined. Therefore we believe it’s appropriate to await the conclusion of those deliberations.

Finally what I would say however, as I go to Ramallah myself, again, in the next week or two is that we remain strong, consistent supporters of the financial and development needs of the Palestinian Authority. We are significant contributors of official development assistance to the Authority, as we are to UNRWA as well in terms of the specific needs within Gaza and we will increase that level of assistance following my visit to Ramallah.

QUESTION: Piracy – is there any plan to reduce this piracy in the Somalian causeway or on the ocean [inaudible]?

MR RUDD: Piracy is a challenge to all states and of course is a particular challenge in this region. That’s why we in Australia are committed to the maritime security operations here in this part of the world. Both historically on the counter terrorism front, also on the counter piracy front and from time to time together with other navies we are participating in these operations. This is a challenge in various parts of Southeast Asia as well, where we have seen these problems in the past. All states have an interest in maintaining open sea lines of navigation and communication - that includes Australia as well.

QUESTION: Animal rights activists and groups were talking about mistreatment of sheep in Bahrain and Kuwait and banning from Government of export of live sheep and livestock to these two countries. Do you foresee any action taken by your government and, if so, to what extent are you deliberating that with both countries?

MR RUDD: Australia takes seriously both its national and international obligations for the proper protection of animals and that includes those associated with the live sheep and, from time to time, live cattle export trade.

Therefore, we are always attentive to the representations made by any importing state about the conditions of animals. We have relevant regulatory authorities in Australia which look at these matters in great detail. I have recently myself spoken with regional governments about particular recent reports.

My understanding is that action on these is now in hand through the relevant Australian and Gulf and wider Arab world authorities. These are important principles – the proper protection and wellbeing of animals. These are not to be pushed to one side. We take our obligations seriously.