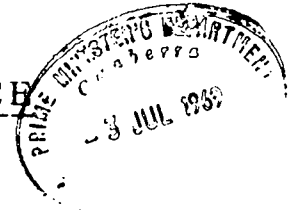


FIVE POWER CONFERENCE

Parliament House, Canberra.

19 June, 1969



OPENING ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR JOHN GORTON

Gentlemen:

What I am doing now is outside the Conference proper but it is something which gives me great satisfaction to do. That is, in the first place, to have the opportunity to welcome here in Canberra, the capital of Australia, distinguished Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers and those who have come with them, and to say that we are fully conscious of the honour which is done us by your travelling to confer in our country.

I think we have come together because we have a common interest - a common interest in the economic progress of the region in which we live and in which we have been, and I trust will continue to be, interested. I believe we all think the economic progress of this region must be reflected not only in bank statistics or statistics as to the holding of foreign exchange or matters of that kind, but must be reflected in an improved standard of living of the individual citizens who make up the countries of the region.

And I believe that all of us think - and I certainly think - that this kind of progress can best occur (now that the situation is completely changed from what it was previously because of the British decision to withdraw), that this progress can best occur as a result of continuing stability within the region, and as a result of all countries present, including Britain, contributing to military forces which can help to defend the region against external attack.

Stability within the region, that sine qua non, that requirement for the proper progress of the region, will depend on the absence of attacks or threatened attacks by any nation within or close to the region against any other nation within or close to the region. It will depend on the diminution and ultimate elimination of racial tensions in nations within the region.

It will depend on the creation of communities in each nation in which all citizens have, and are seen to have, the same opportunities for advancement in any chosen field of endeavour which the individual may wish to enter. And it will depend on growing and more widely-shared prosperity.

The defence of the region against outside attack - external attack - will depend, I think, on the full acceptance of the fact that the defence of Malaya and Singapore is indivisible, and on the acceptance of the requirements - the general planning, the provision of assistance, and the acceptance of the requirements which flow from the acceptance of that basic fact.

Our own approach, our Australian approach is, I hope and believe, well known. We wish to co-operate with countries in our region and to help when we can in all the ways in which we can. I believe that in fact we are doing so, though there is always room for argument as to whether we are doing so to the extent which others might wish. Still, we are doing so, and for the reasons I have given.

One of the ways in which we decided to do so is by the retention of some Australian forces in the area, a visible presence, a continuing visible presence, a presence which has been described - not by me but I see the validity of the description - as something which may appear to others at any rate to be the tip of the iceberg. We are retaining ground forces which will, for the best military, logistic and financial reasons and for great reasons of commonsense, be based in Singapore, provided Singapore wishes them to remain in the area; forces which will not, however, be confined to operations or exercises in Singapore, forces which are there under the concept that defence against external attack is, as far as Singapore and Malaya are concerned, in our view indivisible.

And we are retaining, as you know, air forces which will be based in Malaya, provided the Malaysian Government wishes us to remain in Malaysia, and provided, in the case of our ground forces that the Government of Singapore wishes us to remain in the best place to base our troops, namely, Singapore.

These forces have the objective of assisting - and I emphasise the word assisting - in defence against external aggression or subversion which can be clearly seen to stem from without the region and can be clearly seen to be supported by external regimes. And our forces are there for no other purpose. The maintenance of internal order in any country or the involvement in internal quarrels in any country are not, and will not be, our business.

I don't envisage that this meeting will arrive at the acceptance of firm military plans for operations or that it will attempt to lay down firm conditions, and spelt-out circumstances under which the various

forces which are available to assist against external aggression will be used. Indeed, I think it will be better for this not to be done and not to be attempted to be done, but rather that general understandings will be reached and actual decisions on the use of forces left to be made on each country's judgment of circumstances as they may arise in the future.

But I do believe and hope that this meeting will advance further the general concept of Five Powers being interested in providing assistance for a most significant region against attacks which may develop against that region from outside. I hope this meeting will advance planning on such things as radar control of aircraft; advance planning on such things as the joint exercises which may, and I sincerely hope will, continue to take place after the end of 1971.

I also hope this meeting will advance still further the idea that not from Australia, New Zealand or Great Britain alone, but that from Singapore and from Malaysia as well, there will be a capacity for joint opposition to any external threat which may arise and a full acceptance of the fact that the countries in the region - I include ourselves and New Zealand in my mind - will jointly exercise; will jointly be prepared to resist (again in each case subject to the judgments of each individual around this table or rather of each government represented by the individuals around this table) any external threat which may arise.

I do not think that I should, in making brief opening comments at this meeting, make any long speech. But given conditions of brotherhood inside the countries of the region, given conditions of progress because of stability inside the countries of this region, then we, all of us, have a duty to try to see to the best of the ability of each of us, that this progress and this stability is not endangered from without.

If the task, as is possible - who can tell what the future holds - if the task, as is possible, might at some future time become great, greater than the resources all of us are able to put together to counter, then we would hope and expect that there would be others that would come to our assistance. But whether that be so or whether it be not, if this conference does advance further concrete practical plans for how to operate, how to command, how to control joint forces, then I think it will have made a step forward. Not the only step - because the protection of existing regimes or the protection of governments of individual countries, including mine, is not dependent in the last resource on

force but rather on the judgment of all the individuals that make up those countries that they are well off comparatively and are therefore prepared to fight to retain that comparative position if it is threatened - but one significant step.

This, I think, is what this meeting is about, and I wish it God-speed in its deliberations. I believe that because of the calibre of those sitting around this table, either leading the countries which they represent or playing the most significant part in the defence plans of the countries which they represent, that there is every hope that this conference will achieve what it sets out to achieve. That in great degree is up to you.

And the measure of the success which you achieve in the next two days will be shown by events which occur in the next ten or fifteen years in the countries to our North and be shown by the effect on the world - because there will be a significant effect on the world, including Europe - of what happens in the next ten or fifteen years in this region.

I wish you gentlemen the best of luck and I believe that not only my own prayers and the prayers of Australians, but that indeed the prayers of all - whether they be Moslems, whether they be Buddhists, whether they be Christians, whatever they be, are with you in your deliberations, and I trust will sustain you in them.

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