

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR JOHN GORTON IN TOKYO, JAPAN.

7 MAY 1970

- Q. Mr Prime Minister, did you have any substantive talks yesterday with Mr Sato about Cambodia? Could you tell us how close are Australian and Japanese attitudes to the Cambodian issue and America's recent actions there?
- PM: Yes, we did have some discussion on the Cambodian situation which has of course been caused initially by the North Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia's neutrality. I think we are very close together in that both our countries, as I understand it, have as their desire a really neutral Cambodia - one which is genuinely neutral, one which is not occupied by any other forces and one, which, as a result of some kind of international inspection, can be seen to remain neutral. On the question of America's recent reaction, our own Australian attitude I think has been made perfectly clear.
- Q. I understand that very recently your Minister for Development, Mr Swartz, has told your Parliament that Australia is considering the possibility of offering weapons to Cambodia. Has Australia indeed offered weapons or decided to provide weapons assistance to Cambodia?
- PM: This is a matter which is not dealt with by the Minister for National Development in fact, but by the Minister for External Affairs and the Government. There was a request as I understand it for some kind of assistance from the Cambodian forces but the Government has reached no decision on this as yet.
- Q. What do you expect the Djakarta Conference to accomplish?
- PM: I think that the question is one which is rather a difficult one to answer since I am asked what I expect an international conference to accomplish. I can answer what I hope it would accomplish and what I think it has a chance of accomplishing. And that is I would hope for an expression of opinion by a number of powers in the Asian area that a truly neutral Cambodia would be a step towards genuine peace, and that it would be in the interest of the peoples of the world if the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong - all those - the South Vietnamese - all those who are now in Cambodia, all were to withdraw and to allow a truly neutral Cambodia. As I said in our own House of Parliament, one means by that that one hopes for a truly, genuinely neutral Cambodia, not one which is called neutral, but occupied in whole or in part by North Vietnamese forces.

Q. I would like to ask you a question in connection with the planned British troop withdrawal from east of Suez and the question of security in Asia. After the British withdrawal, what kind of role would you expect Japan to perform in the interests of security in this region of the world? Precisely, do you expect Japan to make any direct contribution to the defence and security of this area?

PM: Well, it is not for me to come to Japan and state what one thinks Japan should do, and I understand that was the question. What is likely to happen, although it depends to some extent on the result of the next election in Great Britain, is that there will be a withdrawal of British forces, as is known. But this does not mean that there will not be a capacity and a willingness to bring British forces back should a crisis develop. This is not something which, as far as I know, has been worked out in the detail of the number of forces, but there will be a withdrawal and a capacity and a willingness in certain circumstances to bring British forces back. For our own part, we are maintaining in the area elements of an air force, some ground troops and some naval support which we hope will contribute to the stability of the area. It is not for me to comment on Japan - what Japan might wish to do - and I don't propose to do that.

Q. Sir, do you believe that Prince Sihanouk, in the present circumstances, is able to achieve the genuine neutrality that you spoke of, and if he isn't, do you think the Lon Nol Government itself can do it?

PM: The present Lon Nol Government is the government which is the government of Cambodia, and I would hope that the discussions in Djakarta might make it clear that a genuine neutrality is desired for Cambodia, and that as a result of that genuine neutrality, all foreign forces would be removed from that country. If that genuine neutrality were in fact achieved, then surely it would be a matter for the Cambodians to decide which government then ran that country in that kind of neutrality. But I should make it clear that as far as Australia is concerned, the Lon Nol Government is the government with which Australia is dealing.

Q. When you said you would hope all foreign troops will be withdrawn from Cambodia, do you mean, Sir, simultaneous withdrawal of US troops, North Vietnamese troops, and Viet Cong troops, all of them together, at the same time - simultaneously? Do you contemplate Australia will make this request at the Djakarta conference?

PM: I wouldn't want to anticipate the precise form that the Djakarta Conference would follow, but I believe that the objective that would be sought would be a Cambodia which was neutral and in which there were not troops from other countries - any other countries. And therefore, a Cambodia which did in fact have that neutrality which was guaranteed to it under the Geneva Agreements but which was violated by the North Vietnamese actions. The only way in which that neutrality can be a reality is if there are no foreign troops in Cambodia. This would be the objective. Just exactly how that objective would be attained must obviously be a matter for the conference. But I cannot myself see it being attained if the suggestion is that all troops other than North Vietnamese troops should be withdrawn.

Q. Sir, you said that you might like to see some kind of international inspection body checking the neutrality of Cambodia. What kind of international inspection body - something from the UN or some other kind of organisation?

PM: I understand that the Lon Nol Government itself has suggested that the International Control Commission - the ICC - might be re-established. There have been some comments on that from the Canadian spokesman. I believe myself that as long as there is an effective international method of inspection, and I emphasise an effective international method of inspection, it is not of terrific importance just how that international inspection is arrived at or made up. Perhaps it might be something which was put in by the United Nations. But the composition - the actual arrangements - for such an international inspection are, I would have thought, less important than the end result of having an effective international inspection. Perhaps I might add - perhaps I should have said, effective and impartial.

Q. Sir, both India and Pakistan have declined to take part in the Djakarta conference. Do you have any comments to make on that?

PM: Only that I believe that taking part in conferences of this kind is a matter to be decided by the Governments concerned. If the Government of India and the Government of Pakistan have decided that they don't wish to take part in it, that is their decision to make and that is the comment that I would make upon it.

Q. Sir, in your talks with Mr Sato yesterday, did you reach an agreement with him that you would support the ICC as the international inspection body, or did Mr Sato agree that he would support an Australian proposition of this kind?

PM: The talks with Mr Sato didn't go into detail of that kind at all. A large part of the talks that we had were engaged with relations between our own two countries in fields of trade and in fields of cultural relations. This indeed took up most of the time, quite contrary to what has taken up most of the time of this press conference. But on the question of Cambodia - the question that you asked me - what we did agree on was that we would like to see a genuinely neutral Cambodia. We didn't go into the sort of details of which you have spoken.

Q. To get away from Cambodia, could you elaborate on just what you did discuss on the matter of trade - was there a complaint from Mr Sato?

PM: No there was no complaint by Mr Sato. We were glad, both of us, that trade relations had grown in the way in which they have. As you know, Japan is our best customer now, and we, I think, are Japan's third best customer. There was the problem which I raised of the very low price for wool which is being paid at the moment - not paid by Japan as a result of negotiation - this is not a matter of any complaint, but I pointed out that the auction system had led to a price for wool which was disastrous as far as Australian woolgrowers were concerned. I did notice in one of the newspapers this morning that this was reported as me asking for Japan to buy more wool. This was not strictly accurate. What I was suggesting was that the price for the wool that was bought might, to the ultimate advantage of both our countries, be made higher. I pointed this out as a difficulty that Australia suffered. There are many other countries that buy our wool, but Japan buys more than others.

Q. To carry this Cambodian thing out of the repetitive realm, assuming that the North Vietnamese troops in Cambodia do not withdraw, and assuming that the American troops somehow get bogged down, does your Government have a policy with respect to the indefinite continuation of hostilities inside Cambodia?

PM: Both my Government and myself have a policy of not answering hypothetical questions based on assumptions which have no basis.

Q. Prime Minister, when you were referring to wool a moment ago, can you tell us if you put to the Japanese Prime Minister any concrete way in which this disastrously low wool price position could be overcome? Did you tell him that your Government intends to suspend or do away with the auction system which has created this?

PM: No, Mr Barnes, I didn't do that. The object of what I had to say was to make it clear to the Japanese Prime Minister that this was a matter of very great concern to Australia and of great concern to our economy. And that we believed that it would be necessary to find some way to remedy that situation, and to indicate to him that this should be the subject of continuing discussions between the two Governments and between businessmen in Japan and the people concerned with the selling of wool in Australia. I believe that this message - that it was something which really did need to be worked out and discussed between our Governments - was accepted by the Prime Minister and I am hopeful that the discussions which I suggested will, as a result, take place. Perhaps they would have taken place anyway, but I think they will now take place and I think that the Government of Japan does know of our genuine concern. That was the object of raising this matter - not to try and work out at that level the detailed remedy.
