

AMERICAN-AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION LUNCHEON
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[Handwritten initials]

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Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Mr. Floyd Blair, the President of the American-Australian Association, has thrown a little bit of a fly over me when he suggested in his introduction that I ought to talk about overseas investment. But when I look around here and see so many people who have a practical interest in investment in Australia, I dare not say a word in case I spoil what is already very good. Nor indeed would I have you suppose we sit and bite our nails and curse whatever measures may be taken in the United States because - though you may occasionally think to the contrary - we do know there are other people in the world, and that other countries have problems very frequently quite like our own.

You have a balance of payments problem that is by no means to be laughed off - one understands that. We have too, periodically - not that we have not had our flush periods in terms of our overseas reserves. But the last year, and in the current, or the anticipated financial year, there will be a good deal of run-down. But, still, we are not going bankrupt, and for the sake of the world, we hope just as much as you do to see an early recovery of the full strength of the dollar. This is, from the world's point of view, a matter of outstanding importance. I know the world has a great number of problems today. There are problems of international liquidity. These are very individual problems because some countries are much more affected than others. However, my idea of a perfect paradise - speaking as an Australian - would be a position of absolutely rugged strength sterling, of absolutely rugged strength for the dollar and a successful general election. These are very simple requirements.

But I would like to yield to Mr. Blair's blandishments in the other field and say something to you about Vietnam - and please don't think that I am casting Australia for a great role on this matter - though I think we always do as well as we can. I also know, not being entirely a fool, that the practical contribution of Australia to the struggle in Vietnam is widely understood and well appreciated in the United States. Its value may be principally symbolic, but it also is intrinsic and nobody is better aware than I am of the feeling which exists in many parts of the United States that you do not want to be cast in the role of the world's gendarme in perpetuity. You must become a little tired of having so many people in the world saying, "Well, they're the greatest power. It's their responsibility. Let them attend to it."

Now, I want to emphasise that has never been the attitude of my country, and never will be. We know you are a strong and a great power. We know that your strength is of vital significance to us. But we do not leave everything to you. We are your junior partner and we propose to continue to be an active one, contributing one, recognising mutuality that attaches to all engagements of friendship. This, I think, is something that, of course, is understood but that needs never to be forgotten.

In the nineteenth century, Great Britain was beyond question the greatest power in the world. In those days, her command of the seas gave her, in effect, command of the world. And who are we, her children in Australia, to complain about this tremendous inheritance. But all the time that Great Britain was the greatest power in the world, never let it be forgotten that she was probably

the most unpopular one. It must have been very difficult in those days to go through Europe without encountering scepticism, dislike, enmity and jealousy. I do not need to define these things to you because you are enjoying the benefit of them today. That is part of the price of admiralty. You expect to have a word of thanks. You don't get it and all I say to you is - don't expect it. The world isn't like that. All you have to do is say one thing, and I know you do : "We are the greatest power, and therefore we have the greatest responsibility because power and responsibility will always tend to equate themselves."

That is why people look to you and look to you not in vain. But I think what does need to be said is that a great power is not cynically to be presumed to be acting about a matter in pure narrow self-interest. I see that very great Frenchman, General de Gaulle, made a speech yesterday.... Anything I say about him must be said with profound respect because he has been a great and famous man and has done in his time great things for his own country. But when he goes on record as saying that America is engaged in a "dirty business" in Vietnam, then I really think that we have reached the limit.

Why are you in Vietnam? This is my favourite question whenever I encounter the doubter and the sceptic. Why do you suppose the Americans are in Vietnam? "For profit," some fellow said to me one day, in Australia, "for profit". "Yes", I said. "It's a new conception of profit. You've added a new meaning to a word in the dictionary - I compliment you".

Well, why? Because, in the short run, is the freedom of South Vietnam essential to the freedom of California? I don't suppose so. No. Is it because the freedom of South Vietnam is not unimportant to your friends in Australia? I know that you think of that but this is not the essence of it. You know, I may be the most naive fellow at the age of 70, and having been a Prime Minister for an awful long time I ought to have got over any of these rather boyish attributes; I may be extraordinarily simple-minded. But I think what is going on in South Vietnam is one of the greatest demonstrations by this country of the loftiness of its responsibilities that I have ever seen. This is a matter of vast importance. Why?

Because it has to do with freedom. People say freedom is a much abused word, it is a sentimental word. It may be much abused, but there is nothing very sentimental about freedom, about human freedom because human freedom has a sort of universal quality about it. I am concerned about my human freedom in Australia. But the young man round the corner in Saigon, he's concerned about his human freedom. It is the same kind of human freedom that we are concerned about and the same that you are concerned about. Whenever freedom is struck down anywhere in the world, we feel the impact of it because our own freedom has to that extent been reduced. No matter for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee. That is the essence of it.

In my opinion, freedom is one of the great innate attributes of human nature and it is therefore universal in its inner aspects. It is not divisible. You cannot sell out on the freedom of one country and think you have protected the freedom of your own. Freedom is not divisible. Freedom is not expendable. Though I do not want to appear to be using words of extravagance on this matter, we are, in our way, in South Vietnam for the same reasons you are in South Vietnam - because we both believe that this is not merely a battle against the people who happen to be communists (that has got merit in itself) but this is a battle

for the defence of things that have just as much validity in Oklahoma or Canberra as they have in Saigon. This is a matter of the freedom of human beings.

Let us elaborate a little on that. If we have a struggle of this kind and we have agreed that it's not just a struggle against something but for something, what is it for? What are these principles that we are concerned about? One of them, if I may be so old-fashioned as to remind you, is the right of every nation to its own sovereign independence, not to be pushed around by other people and not to be nibbled away by subversion - the almost divine right of every nation to have its own sovereignty.

I get very annoyed with conferences here and there when somebody wants to discuss the internal affairs of some other country and I have a fixed principle - each country has a right to run its own internal affairs in its own fashion and not to be interfered with by busybodies. You cannot run your own affairs unless you have a recognition of your free sovereignty - unless you are free from aggression, from attack and from undermining.

Now, it is this divine right of men to live free from aggression, free from unprovoked violence, living in their own homes in their own country without fear of attack, which is one of the great human rights, and it is because these human rights are the same wherever we live that we find ourselves in a common cause.

Now, I hope I am establishing in your own minds what I am trying to establish - the freedom of my country. We are right out there on the end of the line. Suppose the United States had done what some people would have had you do - stood clear. I wonder how long South Vietnam would remain an independent country. I wonder how long it would be able to resist being overrun by Ho Chin Minh in the North and ultimately by Communist China. I wonder how long..... Not too long, one might suppose. And if South Vietnam went, how long do we suppose Thailand could stand unaided because if it were a bad thing to go into South Vietnam, it would be an equally bad thing to go in to defend Thailand or an equally bad thing to go in to defend Laos. I tell you I can see this murky shadow coming down over the whole of the South-East Asian peninsula, pointing first at Malaysia, then at Indonesia with all the strange things that go on in that country, and then across a strip of water to my own land. These are tremendously important things. Our freedom - and not just our freedom - is part of that total freedom which your country has refused to abandon.

Really, it is essential to come back to the original question which I always put to myself. Why is America in South Vietnam? What would be the position if she were not? What would be the impact on the world's history? I do not want to see a state of affairs - well, I will not be here anyhow - but I do not want my children or grandchildren to see a state of affairs in which freedom is in an embattled position in the United States of America and has disappeared in most of the other countries of the world.

This would not do because freedom is universal. Freedom is not divisible. Freedom is something that you cannot

sell out and attacks upon which you cannot appease. It is something which when it is successfully defended has such things to say to the human heart and the human mind, lights such fires in them that all around the world the defence of freedom will find itself justified by the high feelings of free people who know that they have been delivered and who therefore live in hope.

That is a pretty long sort of sermon. But I really intended to say to you, on behalf of my own country, that we are vastly indebted to the United States for its stand on these matters. I am certain that all the people of the free world are vastly indebted. You will have critics, you will have grumblers, you will have doubters, but in the long run, perhaps not in the very long run, I think you may feel that you are the actors and the spokesman for an almost unanimous free world opinion.
