

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO U.S. AND U.K.

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt,  
at Mascot Airport on his return from overseas

17th July, 1966.

It is very good to be back in this crisp air of Australia once more and to feel that I can say "mission accomplished" with a full heart. I think you've had a very good cover of all that's been happening with me, from what I gather from the papers that have reached me. Perhaps the only matter which wouldn't have been dealt with in any detail up till now by the press was my visit yesterday to the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command, Admiral Sharp, in Honolulu, where I had quite the most comprehensive briefing on the military operations, the build up of military strength and the conduct of operations that I've had in the course of the whole tour. And this rounded off in a most valuable way the discussions I've been having at the political level.

The main purpose of my journey was, as you know, to try to establish a warmer and closer personal working relationship with the Prime Minister of Great Britain and the President of the United States. From the time I took office, both of them had of their own initiative suggested to me that I continue with them the same close and intimate communication which had developed between each of them and Sir Robert Menzies. So that when I came to meet them, I met them as one who had got quite close to them by way of this exchange of correspondence. But there is no substitute for the personal contact. Each of them had in turn suggested that I make a visit in order that we might get to know each other better, and I was able to do this of course with the two of them. And I can say without reservation that as a result of this there has developed between myself, Prime Minister Wilson and President Johnson a working relationship and an intimacy of personal knowledge which, I think, will make for a most useful and advantageous exchange in the future, and which will benefit our respective countries in the closeness of our co-operation.

I am rather sorry that the concluding reports I saw in one or two of the papers, covering my remarks in Washington, implied a good deal of criticism on my part of the British Government. That read more into what I said than I certainly intended. Indeed, I believe that, having regard to his own political difficulties and the problems he faces in the United Kingdom, that Prime Minister Wilson has shown great courage and purpose in the line he has taken in relation to South Viet Nam. It's true that he did not see the bombing episode in the same way that the United States and ourselves did, but he made it clear that he was still supporting American purposes and presence in South Viet Nam.

He and I had a very close exchange. I think the night at Chequers in which we spent three hours alone together and covered a great deal of ground was foundational to continuing good relations in the future and we were able to follow that up with talks at No.10 Downing Street the next day. I mention this because I think rather less has been made of the talks in London, although they were certainly no less extensive than the talks we had in Washington between the President and myself and his advisers. In each case I was able to talk, not only with the leaders of the governments concerned, but with their most senior colleagues, and this has given me a very rounded and quite full picture of what each administration is doing in respect of a lot of matters in which we are interested.

2.

Now tomorrow I meet the National Press Club in Canberra and I shall try there to survey the contacts and discussions in rather more depth. But I hope you won't expect that of me so early in the morning after so long a journey.

All I would add by way of conclusion is that all the objectives which I set out to achieve were fully accomplished, and a great deal more that went beyond my most sanguine expectations. Some problems have been revealed. But it is interesting to note that the concept I advanced at the outset - of an Asia which, under the protection of the might and power of the United States, had been able to expand and extend economically and in co-operation - has been seized on with enthusiasm by President Johnson and his colleagues. It doesn't, of course, state anything new but at least it states publicly some of the developments and puts them together in a co-ordinated way which, I think, had not been done effectively before. So this was a valuable contribution which Australia was able to make and, certainly, it was appreciated.

I, for my part, was very glad to have the second opportunity of seeing the President and his colleagues and a good deal of value was gathered from the second visit, supplementing the first. I shall long remember and treasure these experiences as the representative of this country, feeling the warmth that radiates to us in these two great democracies. They value us as a partner, as friend, as colleague in the purposes we share in common. And Australia must feel proud that our place in this area of the world is recognised as an important one by two of the powerful leaders of the democratic countries of the world.

Thank you.

.....