

SINGAPORE  
DEPARTURE PRESS CONFERENCE

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PRIME MINISTER:

I don't know that there is anything particularly that I wanted to add to what I said yesterday. I did mention yesterday, I think, that these were four countries I had not previously visited. All of them have a significance of a special sort for Australia.

Cambodia is a country with which we have a special relationship in that, although we respect the neutrality and non-alignment of Cambodia we have been able to maintain good relations to a point where we represent American interests in Cambodia and we represent Cambodian interests in South Vietnam.

In Laos, there is a strategic significance for all of us who have an interest in the security and stability of this area, and I am looking forward to seeing at first hand something of the situation there and having useful talks.

Then on to Taiwan. Australia has recently decided to establish an Embassy in Taiwan. We recognise the wonderful economic progress - we applaud the economic progress which is being made there. There is a growing trade between our two countries and we have always made it clear that whatever future arrangement develops in relation to Mainland China this should not be reached at the expense of the 13 million people living in Taiwan. They are entitled to a separate national existence if that is the course they choose to pursue.

Then South Korea, Australia has a special interest in South Korea. We were the first country, as I recall it, to declare ourselves alongside the forces of the United States in helping to resist communist aggression in South Korea, and of course we have been associated with our allied forces in Vietnam. I last met with President Park at the Manila Conference.

Q. Is there any question of an Australian pull-out from this part of the world - Singapore and Malaysia?

P.M. No, Australia has no plan to withdraw forces from this area and indeed, as I pointed out yesterday in relation to the British presence here, we regard the presence of these friendly forces, which we understand are welcomed by Malaysia and Singapore, as contributing to stability in the area and able to add to the security and stability of the region as a whole. We have no plans to reduce our own forces.

Q. Do you feel the coming British pull-out will weaken the defence situation here from the military point of view?

P. M. Well, I don't think that this is the British intention. They would wish to contribute to security here and, as I said yesterday, we have known all along that the forces which have been built up beyond the normal strength to meet the confrontation issue were likely to be reduced to at least the pre-confrontation level, but I have no recent knowledge on this matter.

Q. There has been much talk of the establishment of a British base in Darwin and elsewhere in Australia. Do you think that such a base, a British base, could successfully help to replace Singapore in the military sense?

P. M. Well, we have made it clear that we would prefer to see the establishment continued in this area. We have well-appointed barracks here and the naval base itself of course is a great asset, a contribution to the joint security of this total area. But I think if I interpret the British thinking, they were disposed to move to bases in Australia only if it was found that they were not desired to remain on in their existing bases.

Q. One more question, Sir. Do you think that in the 1970's Australia could assume the role the British have played?

P. M. Well, we don't aspire to be more than a good neighbour making a contribution to peaceful progress here, helping in the resistance to aggression.

We found our own forces involved in a military sense five times in the last twenty-five years in this area of the world, but they have always been involved in resistance to aggression and in a defensive capacity. And that is what we see as our continuing role in this area of the world.

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