

ASIAN TOUR 1967

LAOS

SPEECH GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. HAROLD HOLT
AT THE STATE DINNER IN VIENTIANE

1ST APRIL, 1967

Your Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, Mr. Prime Minister, may I thank you very warmly for the welcome you have given to me and Mrs. Holt and all those who have accompanied us here to Laos. We found the warmth of welcome extended to us on our arrival today confirmed by all the experience which has since come to us during a memorable day in this capital city of your country.

It is something of an occasion for my own country when for the first time in our history its Prime Minister makes a visit to this historic country and its notable capital of Vientiane, and we have appreciated greatly the manner in which you have welcomed us here.

We welcome, Prime Minister, your assumption of the leadership of your country. We were confident that under that leadership your country would grow in strength and would attract support and confidence. We ourselves were confident in that belief and we congratulate you that this confidence has been so strongly evidenced in the elections which brought you added strength when they were last held.

This visit I am making reflects the interest of Australia in an area of the world which previously did not exercise our attention very much. It is only in comparatively recent years we have come to realize how deeply involved our own future and wellbeing are in the future and wellbeing of the countries to our north, our neighbours of the countries of South East Asia in particular and of the Asian and Pacific regions generally.

It is particularly gratifying to me that you should have admitted me, as I understand the first visiting foreign Prime Minister, to be allowed to enter your Cabinet and have talks there in confidence with you and with your colleagues. We have greatly valued this discussion. We feel that this has led to a better understanding of the problems of your country. We believe that it will be of assistance to us in the decisions which we shall be making in future as to how we can best bring assistance and encouragement to you.

We respect the neutrality which is the official policy of your country and which has been assured to you if others observe that assurance under the Geneva agreement. We know that, like ourselves, you have an urgent desire for a stable and continuing peace, that in a condition of peace you hope to be able to develop a country which has known so many ravages, both from nature and from man in years that have gone by. We know that, because of the security problem you face, there is only a fraction of your budget that you can devote to constructive purposes, constructive works that will help to build a better life for your people.

Australia is well aware of the inroads which defence expenditure makes upon the national resources of finance and of manpower and we have found it necessary in our contribution to our own security and that of others in the area in which we live to double our expenditure on defence over a period of four years, and this has meant that less money is available for our own development, less money than we would wish to see applied is available for the assistance of others. But despite these demands we have done what we could to bring assistance to others, and I was delighted to find the ready recognition on your own part of the value which this assistance has meant to your own country.

It is fashionable for some who do not wish you well and do not wish us well, to describe this process of assistance as a new type of colonialism, the neo-colonialist of the propaganda which you and I read about so often. So far as Australia is concerned, we emphatically reject any such interpretation of the help we have been trying to give. For our part this is genuine help, help designed to assist others to a better way of life.

Of course every country which gives assistance has a motive of self-interest, one sort or another, but the self-interest which I believe is uppermost in the minds of those giving assistance around the world at this time is a sincere desire to build a better world, to enable countries less fortunate, less able to make provision for themselves because of military threat or because of poverty of resources, to carry on the work of progress in their country as a consequence of the aid which more fortunate countries can bring to them.

Any aid which Australia is able to give is given not on a basis of loan, not with any condition, not with any obligation on the part of the aid receiver. It is gladly given in the hope that this will help to make a better life for the people of that country.

We recognise the problems and the difficulties which face your own country. We have admired the courage of your Prime Minister in leading the country with such distinction and in uniting the Laotian people in the face of tremendous difficulties. We have also admired the progress that your Prime Minister has brought about and the stability he has achieved. I am very pleased that under his leadership the bonds of friendship have grown to such an extent between the two countries. This kind of friendship, I hope, will continue in the future.
