

WASHINGTON

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS BETWEEN PRESIDENT
JOHNSON AND THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN
GORTON IN THE EAST ROOM OF THE WHITE HOUSE



27 MAY 1968

THE PRESIDENT

Mr. Prime Minister and Mrs. Gorton, Secretary and Mrs. Rusk,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:-

Mr. Prime Minister, it is a very great pleasure for Mrs. Johnson and I to welcome you and your most charming wife to our country. We have very little to offer in the way of surprises. Mrs. Gorton is a native of New England. We have some New England weather for her this morning. But she already knows all of our secrets anyway. Even if she did not, you, yourself, Mr. Prime Minister, are the Prime Minister of Australia - and the Australians and the Americans have so much in common that we seem to understand each other almost on sight anyway.

Our people have been moulded by the same forces. Both of our continents are vast. Both of our histories are young. Both of our Governments are free. All of our people were drawn from many lands. We both enjoy an abundance which, for most of the world, is yet just a dream.

We share a common vision. We see a world where might does not make right. We strive for a world where nations can live together in peace and freedom under the rule of law. We have been fighting for this dream for a long time now. Twenty-five years ago we fought side by side from the Middle East to the South Pacific. Today we are fighting side by side in the rice fields in Vietnam.

I do not know how close we may be to success in our common - and our historic - cause. But I do know that you, Mr. Prime Minister, come here at a moment of very historic importance. Our American aim is now, as it has been from the beginning, to achieve peace with honour, a peace which will permit the people of Asia and the South Pacific to work out their own destiny in their own way. We have never sought anything else, and we will not accept anything else. I believe that Australia shares that aim, and I look forward with a great deal of anticipation to our conversations about this - and about many other common concerns.

Mr. Prime Minister, you and your countrymen are always welcome in Washington. I think you will soon find that although you are half a world away from Australia, you are still very much at home.

Thank you very much.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. President, Mrs. Johnson, Secretary Rusk and Mrs. Rusk, Distinguished Guests:-

Thank you, Mr. President, on behalf of all Australians, for the honour which, through me, you do my country. We value this the more since it comes from a power which is not only great, but which, since the end of the last world war, has assumed all the burdens and responsibilities of being great.

You helped reconstruct Europe. In large measure, you financed the constructive work of the United Nations. You have without stint given blood and treasure to protect small nations from subjugation by force or by threat. And you seek to raise the living standards of people in every corner of the world. For this your country has received scant thanks - yet at one time, through sole possession of atomic power, you could have imposed your will upon the world - and did not. You could have chosen to conquer, but chose to set free. You could have looked inward, but instead you chose to look out. If the United Nations has not brought that end to war which its founders sought, if the world is still torn by strife as it is, that is the fault of others, not of yours.

You have assumed, Sir, as I said, many burdens, and today one dominates our minds. Even as we stand here, our men fight in Vietnam together, as they fought in other wars, to protect small nations from overthrow by force of Governments elected by the people. Even as we stand here, diplomats in Paris seek to discover whether there is hope of ending that fighting and securing a peace - just, lasting and honourable - giving to the people of South Vietnam a chance themselves to choose their future path without fear or threat.

You, Mr. President, bore the lonely weight of decision to continue to resist force with force. You, Mr. President, by your recent gesture, brought the North Vietnamese to talk. You, Mr. President, relinquished chance of further office to give those talks such chance of success as they may have. And for that we admire and salute you. It is that struggle which engrosses us today, but when it is decided, that solution will be one step only in the solution of other problems to which men and nations are born, which have arisen in the past, which exist now, and which will arise in the future in a world in transition.

So the Revolutionary War decided whether America would or would not be independent. The War between the States decided whether the union would continue or fragment. The Second World War decided whether the world would be subject to fascist tyranny. Just as those decisions engrossed the hearts and consciences of those then living, and decided a particular matter but did not provide solutions for future conflict or for progress, so will the outcome of the war in Vietnam decide that matter - but not those questions for decision arising in the years ahead.

As Australians see it, those problems, although worldwide, are likely to be most acute in Asia. We see there an area which needs an economic and technical base such as Europe already has. We see there an area where development and progress are essential if the peoples of those divergent nations are to support and defend something dynamic and developing - not something stagnant. We see there an area crying for technical skills, a more experienced administration, a more equitable sharing of an increasing income - and we see there an area subject, above

all, to the threat of subversion, terrorism, and aggression. In some way, Sir, because of internal division, parts of Asia are reminiscent of the Balkans before World War I - and in some ways they may pose the same dangers, dangers aggravated by the eagerness of agitators to exploit divisions.

Perhaps, Mr. President, though I don't think so, we Australians see this out of perspective - because it is here that we, contiguous to Asia - part of the South East Asian region - live and breathe and have our present and our future. It is here that we feel that we can best contribute to stability and to progress and to preserving its political freedom which seeks economic freedom as its concomitant. It is here that we can play our part. But we cannot effectively play it alone. As for ourselves - we are not a great power, though we are destined so to be. In our nation are new frontiers and boundless opportunities for those who will risk in order to win; for those who will work in order to build; for those who will endure initial hardship to gain distant goals. We shall grow in numbers and in industrial power, and further develop the use of our natural resources, and in growing, Mr. President, will grapple with existing problems and prepare for those which wait in the corridors of the future.

But for the present, we, who for two centuries were shielded by the British Navy, have as our major shield the ANZUS pact, and behind that, and because of that, we can the sooner grow to that stature we shall reach, we shall the sooner reach a position to repulse any attack the future may hold from any quarter, and by any means. We can the sooner grow in capacity to offer more economic and technical assistance to the Governments and peoples of our region. I do not mean that we do not now play our part in defence, as we do in aid, or in seeking to foster trade which may be more important than aid. But I do mean that because of your assistance, because of the ANZUS Treaty and what it implies, we can divert to building a future strength, resources which would otherwise be now diverted to defence, to the future detriment of defence, and to the future diminution of our ability to render as much help in the region as we would wish. This is to us the virtue of the ANZUS pact. And allied to it is the sure knowledge that you - while providing that shield - recognize that behind it we, as we build our country, are free to make and will make our own foreign policy decisions subject only to our treaty obligations.

Sir, I have not been here before in my present office, yet I feel I come not as a stranger. On too many fields of battle we have stood together fighting for the concept of freedom, fighting against aggression. On too many occasions we have co-operated in the economic plans to help the world's underprivileged advance their standards of living. There is too much common heritage of a system under which Government is chosen by a majority, dismissed by a majority, protect minority rights, yet refuse to be coerced by organized minority demonstrations. There are too many bonds for any Australian Prime Minister even to feel that here he is a stranger.

And so as in the past, so may it be in the future. Looking down the vista of the years, I hope that you in your greatness now, and we in our present strength and our greatness to come, will together give protection, stability, advancement, encouragement, will help to foster, along with and depending on the people who live in that region - a new world in Asia to redress the balance of the old. If this can be done, if we can do this together successfully, the price to be now paid will, in the future, be thought by humanity small.

Thank you, Sir.
