



VISIT TO THE U. S. 1968

WASHINGTON

EXCHANGE OF TCASTS BETWEEN PRESIDENT JOHNSON
AND PRIME MINISTER GORTON IN STATE DINING ROOM
OF WHITE HOUSE

27 MAY 1968

THE PRESIDENT

Mr. Prime Minister, Mrs. Gorton, Secretary and Mrs. Katzenbach, Ambassador and Mrs. Waller, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:-

Mr. Prime Minister, I have a confession to make tonight... I have been talking quite privately to your wife. I hope and I believe this was not a violation of protocol. But I needed advice. Two years ago, your predecessor--our late and beloved friend, Harold Holt--made a promise to me. During our visit prior to the Manila Conference, in the cool of the evening over a mint julep, he very generously said that if things ever went wrong here in the United States, I would always have a political future in Australia. Mr. Prime Minister, I have been somewhat curious to know whether that might still be true.

Bettina, as you know, Mr. Prime Minister, is a daughter of New England. She said, "Mr. President, you will always be welcome. But Australians are a lot like you Texans--you are never as bad as they say you are when they're mad....and you are never as good as they say you are when they love you." Mr. Prime Minister, let me assure you tonight that I do not intend--I may reassess that a little later--I do not intend to stand for office in Canberra. This is a considerable sacrifice, since I can truthfully say there is no place outside my own native land where I really feel more at home.

Mr. Prime Minister and Mrs. Gorton, I hope that you will feel equally at home here in America and I hope that you will come to visit us often. Lady Bird and I are pleased and honoured that we should have this opportunity to be the first to welcome you to our country as Prime Minister.

The friendship that joins our two countries is a vital force in the struggle to transform the world's hopes into tomorrow's realities. It is a partnership which grows stronger and deeper with the passage of time. It extends from trade and mutual defence to man's newest frontier--the exploration of outer space. Right now that partnership is being tested--tested in the hardest way that the ties between nations can be tested, and that is by the commitment of our men to combat. Tonight we are in a decisive phase of the struggle for peace and order in South East Asia. Talks have begun, but the other side is forcing the pace of battle; it is pouring men and supplies into South Vietnam at an unprecedented rate. Let me tell you this....

--In Paris we shall remain patient but firm in the quest for an honourable peace. Ambassador Vance will be here in the morning to report to me and the security council, and to report to you, Mr. Prime Minister, on the developments there.

--In Vietnam tonight your men and ours--and the gallant South Vietnamese, the South Koreans and the Thais who have fought so long for the right of self-determination--and all of our allies-- will turn back this offensive.

--In time--and I pray it may be soon--the other side will turn from fantasy to reality; from violence to genuine peacemaking.

I know there are some in Asia and elsewhere who are wondering tonight whether the United States will maintain its commitments in Asia; who are wondering tonight whether the strains of this struggle will lead us to withdraw and leave two-thirds of humanity to its fate without American assistance or American support. As you so well know, Mr. Prime Minister, with your years in political life, I cannot speak for my successor, but I can speak for myself, and the answer is no; we will not withdraw until there is an honourable peace. I do not think that my country will permit us to do otherwise.

If you look back over the years since 1941, you will see how steady the performance of the American nation has been. We must put aside the Senate speeches that have been made and the debates that have gone on and you will see that from one Administration to another-- from Republican to Democrat--the United States of America and its people has steadily understood its interests in Asia and has acted on them. I deeply believe that this will be true in the future as it has in the past. All the energy and influence that I can command will be in that direction. I think, Mr. Prime Minister, it will be true for a very simple reason: every year that passes brings us closer to Asia and brings us closer really to the other regions of the world; closer in terms of military technology; closer in terms of communications; closer in economic ties; and closer in terms of simple human friendships.

If I may depart, Mr. Prime Minister, I think you will be interested to know that this afternoon I saw a report that on the list of choices for R and R-- rest and recreation--in Vietnam, Australia was the first choice of the American fighting man. I think you will also be pleased to know that of the thousands who have gone there, who have been taken into your homes, and they have been entertained as if they were their own sons, that so far as we have been able to ascertain, there has not been one, single misunderstanding or violation of your hospitality or your courtesy--and that is saying something of Vietnam fighting men who are on rest and recreation in Australia.

In the years ahead, we hope that the new Asia that is being born will be increasingly organized to shape its own destiny. It should be able to do more for itself and rely less on the United States. But I have no doubt that there will be no return here to isolation. I have no doubt that America will remain the partner of Australia, and I have no doubt that Australia will continue to give leadership to the new Asia and the free Asia as far ahead as any of us can see. One of the comforting and pleasing developments of the last few years has been to see the leadership that the Government of Australia has given to this huge population that makes up two-thirds of the world; that this little country, through its leaders, has gone out and met with them, visited with them, exchanged views with them, and let them know that we are one and that we are trying to build toward a better day where we can fight the enemies of hunger, disease and poverty that are rampant in that area.

Mr. Prime Minister, your presence tonight is proof that this partnership is still vital and still growing. We are so pleased that you could bring your Maine lady with you and join us on the boat last night and that we could find all the differences that we had and solve most of them before the dinner tonight. We think this visit of yours, so soon after you have taken over the responsibilities of the Prime Ministership, will be of great help to us and will endear you to this country.

Mr. Prime Minister, we hope that your visit here--and you will be visiting other parts of our country--will give you an insight into the affection that the American people hold for the Australian people. In sunshine and in sorrow, we have stood side by side. Although Ed and Ann Clark found it so pleasant out there that they dared not take more than two years of it we are sending you some other Texans who we hope will be representative of this country and be concerned with the future of Australia. The young Ambassador said to me, Mr. Prime Minister, when I talked to him about two or three countries, "Why are we so high on Australia?" I said, "If I could be Ambassador--and I am not sure I can under the next Administration--if I could be, the one country that I would want to be Ambassador to is Australia." That is when he made his choice. That is when he decided he wanted to go to Australia.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, we welcome you and your party. We know that our talks will be fruitful. We assure you of our continuing co-operation and friendship. We now ask you to join us in a toast to the great lady who symbolizes our common heritage... Her Majesty, The Queen.

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PRIME MINISTER

Mr. President, Mrs. Johnson, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Guests:-

I must first of all thank you, Sir, for extending such a warm welcome to myself and to my Maine lady--that is spelled with an "E". You know, Sir, you have spoken tonight of a number of matters which beset us today. But in doing so, you have mentioned other matters which beset us in the past and which you will remember because you came to Australia at the time when these things were threatening then.

You went on missions over Papua and New Guinea in the defence of Australia at the time these things were threatening. I flew at that stage in company with pilots of the United States Air Force who had come to see what was threatening then did not prevail--and it did not prevail. These difficulties, these problems, are borne on me tonight more than they ever have been before, because I stand here in a historic residence and my mind goes back to the time when, for example, one former President sat here and mourned the loss of more Americans in conflict than have been lost in all the wars since between 1860 and 1865, and exercised will and exercised judgment in order to see that a nation due to become great did become great, and did not become split. I can imagine well--because you showed me today upstairs, the room in which this great man slept--what those five years or six years, however long it was that man sat there, beset not only by an enemy across the potomac--and I am bound to say that I speak as a convinced confederate; at least

I would have been then--but not only by an enemy across the potomac, but by the cooperheads inside the union, by the riots taking place in New York so that regiments had to be brought back from the army of the potomac to put it down by the vilification and attacks of Horace Greeley and the newspapers--and newspapers are now much the same as they were then--and through it all, because the end was an end that was good, he saw that whatever was required to be done was done, and it was. If it had not so been done, then there would not now be a United States of America.

Things don't change that much. I know that at one subsequent stage, part of the house in which I stand apparently inadvertently caught fire. But that has, of course, nothing to do with Australia, Sir. I dare say that people responsible for it eventually finished up in Botany Bay as transportees.

I don't think that I should, on this occasion--which is a happy and a festive occasion--for too long talk about matters that are too serious. I tried this morning to set forth what Australians think about what you are doing in the United States. When you speak of leadership that we give, we give that leadership, if we do, and we try to because we are protected and shielded by a greater power. We will give greater leadership in the future because we will have in the past been protected and shielded by a greater power. The coat of arms of my own country, Sir, is borne on one side by a kangaroo and on the other by an emu. Neither one of these creatures, so the botanists tell me, is physically able to move backwards; they can only move forward. We will and we have.

There is little time for figures to be presented to a meeting such as this, but at least in the last decade one can say that the gross national product of my country has doubled at an average rate of five and a half per cent; that the expenditure on foreign aid has doubled; that the expenditure on defence has trebled; that our population has increased by one third. But that is all in the past. I remember, Sir, if I may translate it a little later into idiom, something which struck my mind when I was young. All of the past is prelude, which means "You ain't seen nothing yet".

But still we, like you, do have to contribute more than we would wish to to the protection of other peoples against attack, to the building up of a region which you could have said, which was once said by a British Prime Minister, was a faraway region of which we know nothing, but which, as far as we are concerned, is a close region of which we know much. We have to contribute to that because unless it happens, unless the people living there have a greater chance to improve their living standards to be able to live a reasonable and decent life, then in the future there is little hope for a reduction in that money necessary, but in one sense wasted for defence.

So, we have to do it, and you make it possible for us to do it. But if this is achieved, if it is possible to beat the swords into plowshares, if it is possible to translate the aircraft into factories, if it is possible to take people out of uniform to be productive, then we can see in that area of the world something growing, something growing not only for their own benefit, but for our own because we will sell them things, for your own, because you will sell them things, for our own, because we will buy from them that which they peculiarly can produce. And we may--who knows, because man is born to travel as the sparks fly upward--but we may achieve an era nearer to a time when men can live in peace, when men can live in peace throughout the world, when these great political schisms which, for

so long as I can remember, have torn the world to pieces may become muted and instead of people saying. . . "I will run through facism all the people of the world" or "I will run through communism all the people in the world", we may have instead a brotherhood of men. Who knows? I don't, but I am sure that what you are doing and what we are trying to help you do in a minor way is the only method by which this shining goal might eventually be achieved.

So I do not, as I say, wish tonight to make too serious a speech, but I would like to repeat a tribute that I made this morning, and that is. . . . that the power inside this country, utilized as it is being utilized by this country, is to me the only sure--not sure--the only hopeful beacon, not only for this country, or for mine, but for the peoples generally of the world. Well, the "Maine Lady" of whom you spoke, long ago said to me something which she said I was to remember on any occasion when I spoke to a gathering of people. It is a little quatrain. It says. . . . "I love the finished speaker, I really truly do. I don't mean one who is polished, I just mean one who is through".

Mr. President, though I could for an hour go on expressing the same feelings that you have expressed, I think it is unnecessary because I think between friends short exchanges are understood and detailed explanations are not required.

Therefore, I am through.
