

WASHINGTON

PRESS BRIEFING GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. JOHN GORTON AT BLAIR HOUSE

28 MAY 1968

Q. Can you tell us anything of substance about today's talks with the President?

PM. I cannot go into any sort of--any sort of detail, or any sort of substance, really, other than what is covered in the communique.

Q. In general, Sir, would you say that you have achieved the objectives which you brought here with you?

PM. I think that I have a much better idea in my own mind, I think on matters on which I wish to have ideas, and I think it has been and will be of considerable assistance to me. And I think probably that was a major objective.

Q. From what Mr. Bundy told us at the White House Conference, he defined the ANZUS Treaty as applying to forces of all the signatories in the Pacific area. But he left ambiguous, whether this would apply to Australian forces in Malaysia, Singapore under a new setup such as would emerge ultimately from the June conference. Have they in fact expressed any opinion on whether ANZUS does apply in that?

PM. I wouldn't say any definite--I don't know I can give you any definite answer to that either. ANZUS is a treaty--I think it does apply in the three defined areas.

Q. It does or does not?

PM. I think it applies in certain defined areas. But I would want to check this with the External Affairs people before I was sure that that was correct. But by and large, I think it has been, what shall I say--I cannot think of the exact words--a matter--never spelled out whether it applied in Malaysia and Singapore area or not.

Q. But that is exactly the point. It has never been spelled out. The point is have you made a judgment in your mind now as to whether it would apply to these two countries?

PM. Well, you are asking really the sort of questions which one can pursue it to the point where it is the whole sort of subject of discussions. And I do not think I am free to do that.

Q. Can I ask you this, then. This question, was it raised with the President? Can you say this publicly?

PM. I do not think I am going to say anything about specific questions raised with the President.

Q. Possibly you would feel free to do it if I asked the question in a different context. Are you in a position now to make a judgment on the suggestions by the Tunku, Mr. Lee, that Australian forces should remain in the Singapore-Malaysia area?

PM. I would answer that question saying I think I am in a better position to form judgments on the whole of the area, Far East Asian area, not just confining it to the part of that area which you asked about.

Q. There is no reference in the communique to any statement of Australian views on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty?

PM. Our position I think is known to the American Government. They have been transmitted before. They have been made clear in the United Nations by our spokesmen there. I would in a shorthand way express what our man in the United Nations said--"Yes, but." Yes in principle, but. And that is well-known. The "buts" being quite significant.

Q. Yes. We get back to asking you about the but. Was it discussed?

PM. I think the whole variety of questions were discussed, and if we get down to the question of whether this one was or was not, or the other one was or was not, by an elimination contest we get down to me saying--disclosing things which I do not feel free to disclose.

Q. Are you going--has it been decided that you will definitely go to Texatom--on Thursday?

PM. On Thursday. I think this definitely has been. This has been. Yes--we will be flying down from New York to the ranch and back again. We will only be there for a couple of hours. I will be missing a lunch I was otherwise going to attend, although not missing I gather seeing Governor Rockefeller who we had hoped would be at the lunch but who in fact is apparently not going to be. But there it is.

Q. What do you see as the value of this? I know apparently General Westmoreland is going to be there. Can he give you any more of an up-to-date picture of what is going on than Mr. Rusk or Mr. Clifford must have given you?

PM. Can I answer that question in my way. If a Head of State is visiting Australia, and I asked that Head of State to come down to my farm and that I would arrange a meeting with somebody I considered important for him to meet, I would expect that Head of State to accept the invitation that I gave. On your specific question as to General Westmoreland, I do not know that I could see any direct information that would not be available in other ways, except perhaps a fresher and more up-to-date and more immediate report on the situation as he saw it--he having within a matter of hours I think, having left it. But that kind of information I suppose would have been available in a day or two anyway.

Q. When are you seeing Rockefeller, Sir? Would that be Friday?

PM. We are still trying to work that out. You mean the candidate?

- Q. Yes.
- PM. Yes. We are still trying to work that out.
- Q. But you plan to be back in New York by Friday morning?
- PM. No--Thursday night.
- Q. Ch, I see.
- PM. This is a very rushed, very hurried visit. I gather it is sort of a lunch. And then away again, back to New York.
- Q. Were you able to make any arrangements with Mr. Nixon?
- PM. No. He is down in Texas, and he will be down in Texas on the Thursday when we are there, at Dallas. But he is fully engaged in his primaries until ten o'clock at night on that Thursday night. And this time change makes it impossible to fit that in. We then have to be back in New York. We have to fly back. I think that--I am sufficiently short of sleep as it is.
- Q. He won't be going up to New York on Friday?
- PM. No, he is down campaigning down there. So, so far, the only people that I am sure to be seeing are the President himself and of course candidate Humphrey. And I would hope that one could see Rockefeller, and if it were again possible on the way back through California, where I think he is still going to be, Mr. Kennedy. But these primary campaigning seem to be pretty solid sort of jobs. I will miss seeing as many candidates as I should ideally have liked to see.
- Q. Sir, getting back, you said earlier that you had a much better idea of the matters which brought you to Washington. Have you made up your mind on these matters, or are they still fluid?
- PM. I think I have got impressions and beliefs which would--which will help in the eventual making of decisions. Does that answer your question? I think it does. I think it answers it precisely.
- Q. Your talks with Mr. Vance, or the briefing that you attended this morning given by Mr. Vance, can you discuss this?
- PM. Only in the most general terms, I think. But--it was a progress report, I think you can describe it, if that is the right word. It was a report on the attitudes which the North Vietnamese have been taking up. In fact, after the point of refusing point-blank to admit there were any North Vietnamese troops at all in South Vietnam, an indication of what the North Vietnamese had refused to admit, and the intransigent attitude they had taken, of a certain disappointment that what was thought to be constructive suggestions by the United States on "Let us get this established and try and start from there," had just been turned down--and I suppose one could say forecast or speculations or hopes of what might or possibly might not happen in the future.
- Q. Did you feel that Mr. Vance was not very hopeful about what could eventuate?

PM. It seemed to me that he thought it would be a long time before--long time before the present phase might finish. Although again, the thing is unpredictable.

Q. Sir, can you tell us something about the talks you had this afternoon with the Secretary of Commerce Smith and the Secretary of the Treasury Fowler?

PM. Well, we discussed--expressed Australian interests, and our hopes that such things as our export of meat to the United States would not be affected by any action, that the international agreement might be proceeded with--expressed our hope that it would be proceeded with, expressed our interest in sugar, international sugar agreement business in Geneva coming to a successful conclusion. And that kind of--those are examples of the matters upon which we put forward arguments designed to indicate that we felt that any prevention of our access to this market, any additional prevention would go badly in our interests, and eventually not really be good for the United States' interests, either.

Q. Did you discuss the equalization tax, Sir?

PM. No, no--it was commodity matters.

Q. What about the wool tariff? Did you discuss that?

PM. Well, that falls in with--yes--wool and meat.

Q. Are you any more hopeful?

PM. Well, we put our case as strongly as we could. But there are a lot of difficulties, as you know, inside the United States, as you know indeed inside our own country, the particular interests involved.

Q. Along the same direction, but I am going to do it in a different way--and ask if you are under any compulsion to revise your warning to your Party meetings that the forward defence policy of the Menzies era may have to be amended?

PM. Well, the report of what I was alleged to say at the Party meeting indicated that there were a number of possibilities in front of us, but the situation was not as clear-cut as it has been, and those possibilities are still possibilities. And I do feel that, at the beginning, that I am in a better--I feel inside myself I am in a better position to form judgments on which of these possibilities we should eventually decide to do.

Q. Do you fore see a defence review in Australia, Sir, after you go back?

PM. Not a defence review, I do not think. We will be looking at defence in context of the budget. But sort of, you know--I am not quite sure what you mean by defence review.

Q. Well, a general review of Australia's strategic position in South East Asia.

PM. Oh, well--I daresay that that will be a subject of Cabinet discussion, yes. But that is not a strategic paper or anything, a three year plan or anything of that kind.

Q. Could you give us a hint, however slight, what this ultimate judgment might be?

PM. No. I would want to talk to my Cabinet colleagues. I would want to make a full report to them. I think they after that should make it on behalf of the Government to the Parliament any statement that might be made. We are both in a very awkward position, I think--you as newsmen and me as somebody being interviewed, because you are really asking questions which are quite proper questions to which you ought to have the answers, but I am in a position where I cannot give them. We have been having conversations which were essentially private conversations.

Q. To put it another way, are you thoroughly satisfied in your own mind as to the future role the United States will play in that part of the globe?

PM. In Asia?

Q. Yes.

PM. I feel the United States will not lose interest in South East Asia.

Q. That is pretty vague.

PM. Well, I said that much.

Q. Was the private nature of the talks your idea or Mr. Johnson's, or sort of mutual?

PM. I do not think you could say it was mine or Mr. Johnson's. I think in the very nature of things, discussions, if they are to be completely open and full and free and frank between two Heads of State, must be private and must not be discussed afterwards, or if they are, then there are no further such discussions. But really, the value of them is if they are completely open and free. And I cannot talk about what they were about. It is self-defeating.

Q. There is a section in the communique that deals with the support of the dollar. "The Prime Minister reiterated his full support of the President's programme to reduce the United States balance of payment deficit", which is three to one in the United States favour. What is the point of that?

PM. Well, to tell you the truth, we did not go into that. But in the communique, it sort of slipped past. This refers to, which it should refer to, our belief that the taxation proposals of the Administration and their involvement in supporting the National Bank, and the need to reduce the United States overall deficit, were all necessary if the power of the United States was to continue. Now, there was no great discussion on those points. But this arises, I would take it just in passing noting that we do believe that the stability of the United States dollar needs to be maintained in the world. This has been stated departmentally, and that I think did not engage our attention, because it was agreed.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, do you see any possibility that Australia will adhere to ASEAN or one of those regional groupings that are beginning to emerge in your part of the world there?

PM. You say do I see any possibility of it. We are interested in the region. It would need careful studies by the External Affairs Department to see whether a particular regional grouping upset some other type of regional grouping in the same area. But we would be interested I think. We would see a possibility in the future of participating in arrangements which were designed to assist the progress of the region. I think we would be interested. But then the particular proposals, whether it was Asian or something else, would need study. But in principle, we would be I am sure--the possibility of us being interested in regional arrangements.

Q. Through inadvertence, the three of us were waiting outside for the conference to begin--not realizing it was under way.

PM. You did not miss anything.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the ultimate judgment quote--what that might have referred to.

PM. The what what? You want to ask me what?

Q. A reference to an ultimate judgment that would have to be reached.

PM. It was in answer to a question that was asked. Is that what you meant?

Q. Yes.

PM. You came in just as I was answering somebody's question. I do not remember what the question was, but I think it was along the lines of--I cannot remember what it was.

Q. You said you were in a better position.

PM. That is right--that I felt I was in a better position to form an ultimate judgment, or an ultimate decision with my Government--form an ultimate judgment and ultimate decision.

Q. If you do not get to see Senator Kennedy--and it does not look like you are going to--and Rockefeller now has become doubtful or more doubtful than it has appeared in the last couple of days, you will only have seen the President and Vice-President Humphrey. Don't you think this visit will kind of lose some of its value?

PM. I think it would be more valuable. I don't think there can be any question that it would have been more valuable had I been able to see more candidates. But that does not mean that it is in any degree not without great value to have seen those I have seen.

Q. It might be better if you do not see any candidates, because you might call on the wrong ones.

PM. It has great value, too, in seeing officials. I know secretaries of the various departments change, but there is some continuity in them, and I think there has been some value in that, too--for the most part sitting in on discussion.

Q. The President the other night made a specific point that he could not speak for his successors. But you still feel that you have learned enough from here to make your ultimate decision.

PM. I think I am in a much better position, I think are the words I used, to make an ultimate decision. And of course nobody can tell what August or November will hold. It may be a completely satisfactory position to form an ultimate judgment. But on the other hand it may be just in a better position.
