



SYDNEY

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER
MR JOHN GORTON ON ARRIVAL HOME AT MASCOT
AIRPORT

2ND JUNE 1968

PRIME MINISTER : Good morning to you all. Well, we have just done 24 hours of flying, so I don't feel particularly in the mood for a very lengthy session, but in this room before I left, I said I hoped on the journey I would have the opportunity to form better impressions of American attitudes towards Asia and of the attitudes of the various candidates for the Presidency. I think I have been given the opportunity to do that, and I think it has been valuable. I have had, of course, many meetings with President Johnson, who is going to be in control of matters until January next year. I had quite a long talk with Vice President Humphrey, the Democratic candidate whom people in the United States appear to give an edge to for nomination at the moment - I wouldn't know. I had about an hour with Governor Rockefeller, one of the Republican candidates. I was unable to see Mr Nixon, but I did have quite a long telephone conversation with him. I saw the Secretary for Defence, and the Acting Secretary of the State Department (because Mr Rusk was ill), and the Secretary of the Treasury, I had good opportunities to talk to leading members of the business community in New York. For these reasons, I believe that the trip was valuable, and in discussing it with my own colleagues, I will be happier in my own mind about any decisions we may come to regarding our own actions. I think that is all I wanted to say. If you have one or two questions you would like to ask, fire ahead.

Q. Prime Minister, can you say whether your discussions with the candidates and President Johnson in any way indicate a firm attitude on America's part to remain in Asia after 1971?

PM: Well, when I arrived and was received by President Johnson in the morning, I made a speech at the White House, indicating our wish that the United States should maintain an interest in Asia. That night at the White House Dinner, he gave unequivocal assurances as far as he was concerned that that interest would be maintained - unequivocal assurance in language which is open for you to read. This, of course, as he pointed out, has validity, specific validity as far as he is concerned only until January next year, but he is going to be significant in the Democratic Party even after that.

Q. And the candidates?

PM: The candidates appeared to me to support the attitude expressed by the President.

Q. When you say "appeared" to you to support this attitude, they weren't any more definite than just appearing to support it?

- PM: Well, they were private conversations with each candidate, and I don't think I ought to go into details of it but just say I came away with the firm impression that they did go along with maintaining an interest in Asia.
- Q. You don't feel uneasy then.....
- PM: No.
- Q. --of the likely policy under a new President?
- PM: Of those candidates to whom I spoke, I don't feel uneasy.
- Q. What sort of bearing do you think your discussions will have on the Five Power talks beginning this week?
- PM: Well, the Five Power talks are talks between Great Britain Australia, New Zealand, Malaya and Singapore concerning the Malaya/Singapore area, and I don't know that my conversations would necessarily have a direct bearing on the outcome of those talks.
- Q. Nor on what contribution we might make.....
- PM: Well, you are getting a bit close to the conversations.
- Q. Prime Minister, were you able to gauge how the Viet Nam peace talks were going?
- PM: Yes; I had the opportunity during a breakfast session with President Johnson and a number of members of his Cabinet to receive a briefing from Mr Vance who had come back from Paris from the peace talks. I can only say that the briefing indicated that very little progress, if any, had so far been made, but the talks were continuing.
- Q. Did he indicate any optimism, or of.....
- PM: He indicated hope.
- Q: In what way, Sir?
- PM: Well, the talks were still going on. That 's about it.
- Q. Could you say, Sir, how your talks on trade went?
- PM: Only that we re-expressed our hopes that quota systems wouldn't be imposed on products that we particularly wished to sell there such as meat and other products of that kind. If people want to put tariffs on, that is one thing. We put tariffs on ourselves..... After all, this is a matter for their legislature, not for their executive.
- Q. Anything on the wool tariff, Sir?
- PM: Only a discussion expressing hope that something might be done about it.

Q. Mr Prime Minister, in your absence, there has been speculation about the defence relationship between the two countries. Did you get the impression in the United States that they wanted us to indicate our intention of firmness in staying in South-East Asia before they committed themselves; and were they willing to commit themselves regardless?

PM: I think they would be prepared as a world power to maintain their interest in Asia but they would be happy for assistance provided to them as they are happy for assistance provided in Viet Nam.

Q. They didn't lay it on the line.....

PM: Nobody was twisting anybody's arm.

Q. You weren't twisting their arm by any chance?

PM: I'm not in a position to. I'm not big enough!

Q. Will you be making a statement to Parliament, Sir?

PM: Well, I will consider it and discuss it with my colleagues whether a statement should be made to Parliament or not. These were very largely private conversations, other than the ones that were on public record - speeches by myself or by the President. It is a little difficult for me at this stage to work out what value a statement might be to Parliament, but if there appears to be value in information which Parliament should have, then I would seek to give that to Parliament.

Q. Mr Gorton, regarding your statement about the Israeli-type army for Australia. Mr Eggleton made a remark about it being the "last resort". Would you care to amplify that at all?

PM: I have no idea concerning Mr Eggleton, but on the matter you raise, they asked me a question concerning Australian defence, and they brought in this matter of an Israeli-type army. I sought to define what an Israeli-type army in the Australian context could be considered to be - which is a regular army allied to a citizen military force. One hopes, as Australia grows that a citizen military force would build up and be better equipped and so on. This, of course, is existing policy; there is nothing whatsoever new in that at all. This is what we have been seeking to do for some time. As to the programme of achieving this, nothing at all was said, nor will anything be said until such time as we know what resources are available for defence as a whole, for the Army as a whole, and for allocation between the various kinds of regular/citizen military forces and so on. At that stage, of course, the first statement will be made to the Parliament.

Q. Did you take the opportunity, Sir, of informing yourself personally on the F-111?

PM: No. The Air Force have a team of experts over there, and I think they would probably be better able to do this than I could.

Q. Sir, during your absence there have been certain allegations made about tapping of Parliamentarians' telephones. I bring this up because in August last year, the late Mr Holt said he had received an assurance from the Attorney that before any Parliamentarian's telephone was tapped, the Prime Minister would be informed. Could you say, Sir, whether any Parliamentarians' telephones have been tapped?

PM: Not as far as I know.

Q. This is in relation, in the case of one of them, to conscientious objectors and Viet Nam.

PM: No matter what it is in relation to, not as far as I know.

Q. In your absence, on this matter there has been a rumpus, as you no doubt know, about:

PM: Well, I have been moving pretty fast. I haven't this in any depth. It has just sort of washed across me as I have been going, but go on.

Q. Are you likely to enquire personally into the Simon Townsend affair, to give it that tag, or will you leave it to the Minister concerned and the . . .

PM: I think I would like to know a bit more about whatever it is that went on while I was away, before I could answer that sort of question. I have really been on a split-second schedule for almost as long as I can remember, a split-second schedule dealing with the matters over there.

Thank you.
