

TELEVISION INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME
MINISTER, MR JOHN GORTON, AT THE LODGE,
CANBERRA, FOR GTV9 MELBOURNE.



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Interviewer : Mr Alan Reid

Mr Michael Schildberger : This is the first time on Australian television that we have been able to bring you a direct telecast from the Prime Minister's Lodge in Canberra. The Prime Minister, Mr Gorton, has agreed to speak to us tonight about the significance of his recent, just completed tour of America. Sydney "Daily Telegraph's" Alan Reid travelled with the Prime Minister in America. He is here tonight to interview the Prime Minister.

Q. Mr Gorton, President Johnson gave you more time, in my experience, than any other Australian Prime Minister has received. You also had contact with three out of the five Presidential candidates. I know you have to allow for the unforeseeable, but is your impression now that the U. S. will remain interested in Asia?

PM: Let's take this in stages. We don't have to have an impression up until January next year because the present President, who will be in office up until January next year has unequivocally stated in the speech he made to the White House Dinner that there would be no diminution in the U. S. interest in Asia, and although he couldn't speak for his successors, he could speak completely for himself. And this carries us through for the next six or seven months. We don't have to form an impression. That's a definite statement. For possible successors, we do have to form impressions and the impressions that I have formed are that the man who is most likely, so I am told, to be the Democratic nominee for President at the next Presidential election, Mr Humphrey, will be at least as strong, if not stronger than President Johnson on the necessity for involvement in Asia by the United States. On the Republican side, I believe from the soundings I have been able to make from my direct talks with Governor Rockefeller, my telephone talk with Mr Nixon and from talks with significant backers of the Republican Party, that there will also be likely to be - very likely to be - continuing interest in Asia by the U. S.

Q. Is this interest, in your view, based on their realisation of their self-interest or is it altruistic or a mixture of both?

PM: I think it is a mixture of both. I think it is a realisation of their self-interest. I think it is a desire which has been quite evident in what the U. S. has done in many fields over the last decade or two that their self-interest is served by the advancement of the interests of other countries, just as in a sense, ours is. It's a mixture of self-interest and altruism, because altruism, if it is to be regarded as trying to build up other countries, will have the effect of having the self-interest also served.

Q. President Johnson at his White House Dinner went to great lengths to answer your speech on the Lawn. He committed himself very deeply to it. He took a line that could possibly influence his successor. What influence do you think President Johnson will have upon (a) a future Democrat Administration and (b) a Republican Administration?

PM: I think he will have considerable influence on any future Democrat Administration, although I don't know that that influence would be needed if in fact Mr Humphrey were to be the Democrat nominee and were to be elected as President. But even if that weren't so, he would be a past President, a past President who had relinquished the chance of office for an endeavour to bring peace and prosperity to Asia. He would have relinquished an almost certain - I think this is true - an almost certain chance of being re-elected as President, for this purpose. This, together with his long experience as majority leader in the Senate would, I think, lead him to have a great effect on any future Administration, a Democrat Administration. Now, his effect on a future Republican Administration would not, of course, be so great, but I would think that even a future Republican Administration, if it were in fact needed, would be affected by the influence which President Johnson could bring to bear in the country generally. But I don't know that a future Republican Administration would need to have any of this kind of. . . .

Q. Senior Administration officials in Washington, as I understand it, expressed the desirability of Australia maintaining its defence associations with both Malaysia and Singapore and the desirability of us maintaining a presence there. Did you in fact put what seems to be the realistic viewpoint that we could maintain a presence there only in the light of them taking a certain line of action?

PM: Well, I'm fascinated to hear this question. . . . The Senior Administration, as you understand it, expressed a particular point of view. Well, I've no doubt that you have methods of assessing these things, but all I can say is that your understanding must be based on something other than any public statement that I have made or am going to make on this matter. You asked me did they have this view. That is for them to make public or not make public, and I'm not going to comment on whatever impression it may be that you have received from whoever it may be that you have talked to. What was the second part of that question?

Q. Did you emphasise to them that our attitude in Singapore and Malaysia, our presence there, would be governed by attitudes that they might possibly take?

PM: Well, I think in answer to that, all I would say would be to refer you to what I said when I arrived, and we were going to make the speech on the Lawn, but made it inside instead, and that speech indicated Australia's abiding interest in South-East Asia, abiding desire to see that its standards of living were raised and said that we had a present and a future in that area and we had a part to play in that area in trying to achieve the results that we wanted to achieve but that we could not effectively play it alone.

Q. Your approach in this seems to me to have been somewhat different from both Sir Robert Menzies and Mr Holt who, so far as I understood their emphasis, it was that we should do everything possible to encourage America to stay in Asia. Now, as I interpret your approach, maybe incorrectly, it was that we would not be staying in Asia unless they were there. Was this in fact your approach?

PM: Well, this is a very wide question. I think we can't divorce ourselves from Asia. I think we can't say we won't have an interest in Asia no matter what other powers may do. We would because we are contiguous to the area. Because we are interested in the area, we would do what we could to try and underpin the economies, to provide the technological requirements of the area, even if we had to try and do it alone. But I don't think that alone we could do it with sufficient effectiveness, with sufficient force, to achieve the results that would need to be achieved in the next few years in that area. There are others who would need to come in, and of these others, I think the U.S. is the most significant.

Q. There seems to be some confusion about your Israeli-type defence statement to the Washington Press Club. My interpretation of the thing was that this was one of many options that you were keeping open against future defence needs for Australia. Is that interpretation correct?

PM: Yes, well, I think you were there at the time the question was answered, and I think your interpretation is relatively correct, except that we were asked, you will remember, the question did we believe in an Israeli-type defence force. I said on this matter I wouldn't comment - the actual Israeli-type defence force - but that I would seek to define what we in Australia would regard as an Israeli-type. That is a force which has a Regular Army component but which has a back-up force, well equipped, properly equipped, properly trained, quickly able to go into action and a growing capacity to do it and a growing amount of numbers to do it of the citizen forces type of military capacity, where in order to back up your regular forces you have a capacity to quickly get into action military forces, although the people of whom those back-up forces are composed are citizens for most of the time but who are trained to be able to take their place quickly in an emergency.

Q. Basically you were not announcing any proposed policy. You were dealing with a contingency which might arise in extreme circumstances?

PM: I wasn't announcing any new policy at all, or indeed a contingency which might arise in extreme circumstances, but rather seeking to define, to give a definition of what could be loosely described as an Israeli type - very loosely described as an Israeli-type policy, which is indeed the sort of policy we now have - that is Regular Forces backed up by Citizen Military Forces, but suggesting that one of the options - and in this you would be quite correct - one of the options for the future could be - not a diminution in any way of our Regular Forces ready for action at a moment's notice but rather a strengthening of the back-up Citizens Military Forces who would come in behind those Regular Forces. This is one of the options, one of the objectives, and one of the ones that we have always had.

Q. President Johnson had you there when General Westmoreland gave his analysis of the present situation in South Viet Nam. Basically, he said that this could be a desperate throw on the part of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese which could run out. Did you accept that analysis, or did you have any reservations about it in the light of events there?

PM: No, this was an assessment which was made on the basis of the Intelligence information available to General Westmoreland that the Tet offensive for a start, and the present attack on Saigon was in some sense almost a suicidal operation in order to try and have a political effect on the peace talks which were at present going on. Now, I have no way of checking the basic infallibility of the Intelligence on which General Westmoreland based his report, but it does seem that the original Tet offensive was, from a military point of view as concerns the North Vietnamese, unsuccessful; from a political point of view overseas, far more unsuccessful than it was in the country itself. It is not therefore unreasonable to suppose that this assessment of General Westmoreland's is reasonably accurate.

Q. In the military but not in the political sense?

PM: In the military sense accurate in that it was unlikely to lead to any decisive military result. In the political sense accurate in that it might overseas lead to some political advantage to the North Vietnamese which the military results of their present operations would not justify.

Q. Just two more questions, if I may. Do the Americans ascribe the same importance to ANZUS as we do, and is the general interpretation that it extends to our forces in the Malayan, Singapore area?

PM: They, I am convinced, do ascribe the same importance to ANZUS as we do, and particularly to the defence of Australia and of New Zealand. As to the particular areas in which ANZUS might apply, this is something which I think I couldn't properly accurately comment upon in answer to your question.

Q. You leave on Wednesday - looking very fresh, if I may say so, after the exhausting tour you have had - for another tour, this time of South-East Asia. What are your intentions there? Are you planning any substantive talks or what are you after there?

PM: No. Mostly as far as Viet Nam is concerned, I want to see our own troops up there. I want to take what opportunities I can to visit them, and I suppose I'd be too much of a nuisance if I went too far forward, so they may not allow me to do that, and I understand. But I want to see them wherever they are so far as I can do it without upsetting them or causing too much trouble to them. As far as Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia are concerned, the main objective of this visit is to show that there is from a new Prime Minister of Australia the same interest in the area, the same desire to meet the leading figures in the area as was evinced by my predecessor, Mr Holt, that there has been no change in Australia's continuing and abiding interest, no change in Australia's desire that the leaders of each of the countries in our region should know each other, and I would hope that this visit would show that, and would help to show the peoples of the region concerned that there is this continuing, neighbourly, friendly interest, this desire to help and to be a part of the area in which we all live.

Q. Are you considering laying the groundwork for any say, formal non-aggression pact or something like that with Indonesia?

PM: If Indonesia were happy to have a non-aggression pact with ourselves, with Malaya and Singapore, we would be happy to do all we could to see that such a non-aggression pact did become a reality

Q. Thank you, Mr Prime Minister.