

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SPEECH

BY

The Rt Hon. J. G. GORTON, M.P.

ON

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Ministerial Statement

[From the 'Parliamentary Debates', 15 May 1969]

Mr GORTON (Higgins—Prime Minister) [8.0]—by leave—Mr Speaker, the House will recall that I was to have had discussions with the President of the United States and members of his Administration on the 1st and 2nd of April, but because of the death of General Eisenhower the discussions which were to have taken place assumed the nature of preliminary discussions, and it was agreed that these should be continued on the 6th and the 7th of May. I now take the opportunity to report to the House on those discussions. They took place with the President, with the Secretary of State, the Honourable William Rogers, and with the Secretary of Defence, the Honourable Melvin Laird. I also took the opportunity to meet the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and some members of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The purpose of my visit was not to deal with any one specific subject. It was, in one sense, a practical expression of the close, frank and continuing relationship between two good friends—Australia and the United States of America. And it was, too, a visit designed to get to know the new President personally, to understand his thinking and to let him know my own. The ties between our countries, the common objectives of peace and progress and

human dignity transcend the personal relationships of any two individuals. But I believe these ties are reinforced, and practical working between two countries is made smoother, if two individuals—one a President and one a Prime Minister—have discussed common problems, have come to know one another, to understand one another, and to trust one another. And I believe that this understanding was attained, and one result which has some value for us was the arrangement made between him and me for direct communication on matters of concern to both our countries during the formative stages of policy and prior to major announcements of policy.

The subjects covered in the various discussions were the situation, and the courses open to us, in Vietnam; the importance attaching to the ANZUS treaty; the question of the continuing interest of the United States in Asia post-Vietnam; the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; and such matters as defence procurement in Australia and the present plans of the United States Air Force regarding the F111 aircraft. Through all these discussions there was a deep feeling of warmth towards Australia, a feeling of a special relationship, a generous acknowledgement of the part Australia had played

and was playing to achieve common objectives. And I felt this to be so not only in the Administration but amongst the Senators I met on Capitol Hill.

Sir, it is understandable that my discussions with the President should have begun with Vietnam. We both wish ardently for peace in that country—but we both believe that peace can only be secured on any just or lasting basis by guaranteeing to the people of South Vietnam the right to choose the government they wish without the fear of terror or intimidation; the right to live without the ever present threat of murder, kidnapping or extortion. The President has today spoken publicly along the lines on which he spoke to me, and his speech is clear and unambiguous. We must now await the response of North Vietnam. But this Government agrees completely on the objective of free, internationally supervised elections, at which candidates of all parties could stand, as the objective for which the struggle is waged. This was discussed both during my original visit in April and during the visit just concluded.

As a result of our discussions, and of the President's speech today, there are three things which I firmly believe to be true.

Firstly, I do not believe that America will accept any fake peace or disguised surrender, nor will she retreat from the requirement that the South Vietnamese people should themselves choose their own government.

Secondly, if in the future and before there is any agreement on the proposals made by the President today it is decided to withdraw some United States troops unilaterally—and I do not say that this will happen—this should be regarded as a sign of strength. It should be so regarded because it would indicate a belief on the part of the United States that the South Vietnamese had so strengthened their own forces, and been provided with equipment for those forces, that they were themselves able to remove from the United States some of the burden which that nation has borne. It would, I believe, be a tragic mistake on the part of North Vietnam or anyone else should they interpret any such move as a prelude to a general withdrawal or as indicating any retreat at all by the United States from their determination to persevere until the attainment of the objective of a free choice by the South Vietnamese.

There will be those who will say, should there be such American reduction of force, that Australia too should at once reduce its forces.

I believe that would be a wrong thing to do. For one thing, the Americans have greatly increased their forces since our contingent was committed; and for another it would be a shabby thing, the Americans having built up the South Vietnamese forces, to take some of the burden that is borne by half a million Americans, for us to withdraw our own forces and, to that degree, impose a further burden—or at least, to that degree prevent a lessening of the burden borne by the United States.

Thirdly, I believe that President Nixon, as his speech showed, and subject to the requirement for a free choice by the South Vietnamese people being attained, will be flexible, untiring, and persistent in seeking to bring the fighting to an end. In this he will have our full support and our prayers will go with him as he tries to achieve this end.

Mr Speaker, perhaps the strongest guarantee of Australia's future security against physical attack is the ANZUS treaty. It was first concluded under Mr Truman in conditions prevailing after the close of the war with Japan. But recently it has appeared that there was in some quarters a tendency to question whether the provisions of the Treaty still apply with the same force and certainty as at the time of its conclusion. Any grounds for such questioning should surely now be removed. The new President and the new Administration have strongly underlined the importance and the significance which they attach to that treaty. To quote from the public statement issued by the President:

Australia is a member of Anzus and Seato, two alliances which are fundamental to our—

That is American—

strategy and position in South East Asia. As between us—

America and Australia—

Anzus with its provisions for mutual aid in developing our individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack, and its declaration that 'no potential aggressor should be under the illusion that any of them—

That is, Australia, New Zealand or the United States—

stand alone in the Pacific area' is of great importance to both our countries.

And again:

All things considered I think Australia and the United States can both be proud of the contribution we are making, as partners, to the security and progress of the Pacific region to which we both belong. That partnership and that contribution will continue.

Mr Speaker, those two extracts are a strong, forthright and unambiguous re-affirmation of the application of the Treaty—and rather than weary the House with the statement as a whole, with the concurrence of the House I incorporate it in Hansard.

THE WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

It has been a great pleasure to welcome Prime Minister and Mrs Gorton to Washington. Mrs Gorton is of course returning to the land of her birth, so we always have a special greeting for her. Prime Minister Gorton is no stranger to our shores either, and he has come as the Head of Government of one of our closest friends and allies in the world. We will always be delighted to see them both. This visit has been most useful for me and, I think, for other officers of this Government. It has given us a chance to get acquainted with an outstanding statesman with whom we expect to be working very closely in the future.

Australia is a member of ANZUS and SEATO, two alliances which are fundamental to our strategy and position in South East Asia. As between us, ANZUS, with its provisions for mutual aid in developing our individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack, and its declaration that 'no potential aggressor should be under the illusion that any of them (Australia, New Zealand or the United States) stand alone in the Pacific area,' is of great importance to both our countries. Australian troops are fighting beside ours and those of other free world nations to help South Vietnam preserve its independence. Australian forces are stationed in Malaysia and Singapore as part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, and Prime Minister Gorton has recently announced that these forces will remain after the British forces withdraw in 1971, to continue making their important contribution to the security of that area. This is a historic and far-seeing decision, and needless to say, it has our full understanding and the decision has our support.

Australia is also making an outstanding contribution to peaceful co-operation and economic development in its part of the world. It participates wholeheartedly in the Colombo Plan, the Asian Development Bank, and many other regional activities. In percentage of national income devoted to foreign aid, Australia ranks second in the world. This is a record of which any nation can be proud. All things considered, I think Australia and the United States can both be proud of the contribution we are making, as partners, to the security and progress of the Pacific region to which we both belong. That partnership and that contribution will continue.

These two days have provided opportunities for us to discuss a whole range of subjects, including

of course, Vietnam and regional security generally, but including also a number of topics outside the security field. Australia is geographically closer to some of these problems than we are, and Prime Minister Gorton has been in office a year longer than I have, so I have very much appreciated the opportunity to exchange views with him. I have obtained a number of new insights, but fundamentally, I find the perspective from 'down under' is very much the same as it is from Washington. This visit has been both profitable and enjoyable for us. I hope that you can say the same, Mr Prime Minister, and that you and your charming wife will come and see us again.

It may be said that this statement affirms nothing new since the ANZUS Pact already existed—and in one sense that is true. But I believe that for a President just come to office newly to re-affirm, in such strong terms, the importance of the Treaty is of considerable significance to us, and to our future—and that that in turn is of significance to the United States and other free nations of the world.

One further outcome of the talks on ANZUS is that it has been decided to hold a meeting of the ANZUS Council in Canberra in August. The United States will be represented by the Secretary of State, the Honourable William P. Rogers. We have also agreed that meetings of officials of the three countries should continue to take place from time to time, and for this purpose there will be a meeting in Washington later in the year.

But the ANZUS Treaty does not merely provide that we shall be assisted if our forces or our country is attacked in the Pacific. It also provides that we shall co-operate in the establishment of installations to help our joint defence. Under Article II of the Treaty we have an obligation jointly to maintain and develop our collective capacity to resist armed attack. To say we have this obligation is not to say—as some falsely pretend—that we must accept any and every proposal for any establishment for any purpose.

The Australian Government must and does retain the right of decision on any proposal. Just as it must be, and is, provided with full information concerning any proposed base. But we have signed a Treaty much to our advantage, and this imposes obligations on us if we are to live up to its spirit. A responsible Australian Government would therefore need to be convinced that there was good reason for rejecting a proposal, as, of course, it could.

There are some who argue that there is good reason to refuse any proposal for a joint defence establishment because such an establishment might become the target of attacks in nuclear war and might therefore endanger us. My Government rejects this argument. I cannot assert that in nuclear war there would be no possibility at all that such installations might be subject to attack.

But I will deny that this is reason to reject such establishments. They contribute to the military effectiveness and protection of that power on whom the safety and independence of Australia might, in the future, depend. They assist that power on whose capacity for military defence the peace of the world may well depend.

In my judgment Australia is subject to less danger, nuclear or otherwise, having these bases and a joint defence treaty than she would by not having these bases and not having a joint defence treaty. Furthermore, as a nation we expect to be given protection in time of danger: and we must therefore expect to give assistance in return. What sort of a pusillanimous, unworthy, nation would it be that said: 'We rely on you to protect us—but oh no we won't incur the slightest risk to help you protect yourselves, and us, and others'?

This Government will not say that. If there be those who take a different view, that is their right. But it is equally their duty, if they aspire to alternative government, to state publicly they do take a different view, and would not have these bases, and give their reasons for it.

I come now to the question of maintenance of secrecy about the purposes and operation of such bases. This has, I know, caused concern to others as it has caused some to me, and it was a matter specifically discussed with the President. In general, one would wish to give as much information as possible. But 'as much information as possible' must mean as much information as would not impair the effectiveness of an installation or enable a potential enemy to discover more quickly or more certainly its purposes, and if the advice of military leaders and military scientists is that little or no information should be given because it would help a potential enemy then we should accept that advice in peace as we would unhesitatingly accept it in war. This we have done, and will continue to do.

The President, however, agreed with me that if any information is given, or is intended to be given in the United States in such a way that it becomes public, then such information must at the same time be given here. And if selected members of the United States Congress under pledge of secrecy make any visits to installations, so too, provided they take the same pledge of secrecy, must comparable members of this Parliament be permitted such visits. To use the President's own words, in this matter: 'The same ground rules will apply to both our countries'. The restriction of information on defence establishments is nothing new. To a greater or lesser degree it is a practice of all administrations in all countries at all times, and for reasons I have stated, and subject to what I have just said, we will continue the practice. But again, if there be those who would depart from this practice, who would insist on disclosure of information before agreeing to a joint defence project, it is their duty to Australia clearly to say so now even though that course might assist a potential enemy.

The question will be asked whether or not provisions of the ANZUS Treaty, so clear in relation to Australia, New Zealand, and New Guinea, apply as clearly to Australia's forces stationed in Malaysia and Singapore. It would be misleading of me to say that this was so in all the variety of hypothetical situations which might arise, for while the Treaty is quite specific as to certain areas it is not specific about those of which I now speak. Yet I think it would be equally wrong to assume that in certain circumstances United States assistance would not be forthcoming either under the ANZUS Treaty or in some other way. Indeed any attempt now to codify in advance those situations in which ANZUS might apply and those in which it would not apply could well be restrictive, and, being restrictive, do harm.

Answers to questions about our forces in these areas are to be sought not in the ANZUS treaty alone but in the whole complex of actions and undertakings by Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the countries of the region. These actions and undertakings may be summed up as follows: Australia has decided that it will maintain forces in Malaysia and Singapore after the British withdrawal in 1971, for purposes and under

conditions already stated to the House. The President of the United States, publicly and privately, has backed, supported, and applauded that decision. What we seek to do is to prevent a threat arising against Malaysia or Singapore or the region, and we seek this by showing a willingness to assist militarily in stated circumstances to maintain security—and we see this only as a means to the end of advancing economic development in the area, strengthening the capacity of the countries in the region to defend themselves, and encouraging regional co-operation, peaceful change, and progress. The United States shares these objectives and is contributing to these ends. I am sure she will continue to share the objectives and contribute to these ends in Asia generally and in the region of Asia of which I speak.

Indeed President Nixon, during our private talks authorised me to express his own attitude as outlined now. He said that it was the purpose and the determination of the United States to continue to participate in the Pacific and to strengthen the forces of freedom and progress in Asia. He said that he recognised fully the United States' continuing role and responsibility in that part of the world. He said that by birth, by experience and by belief he knew that the stakes in Asia went far beyond what happened in Vietnam and that what happened in Asia in the future could well affect the future history of the world. He had, he told me, always been Asia-oriented as his history during 14 years in Congress would show. He had been born on the Pacific Coast, had gone to war in the Pacific, and he would continue to be Asia-oriented.

The House may like to know that before being said publicly here this paraphrase which I have just given was confirmed with the President as an accurate paraphrase of his views.

Mr Speaker, I think it is not without significance for Australia that such a firm statement should be publicly made by the new President at this time, and following so soon on our own decisions. In the course of our future history there will be many situations which cannot now be clearly foreseen, and as they cannot be clearly foreseen it is idle to speculate about them. But given the approach of the United States as I have just expressed it, given the shared

objectives, and given the close working arrangements that already exist, I think we can be confident that should a threat develop then there will be the closest consultation and co-operation as to the means of combating that threat.

I shall, moving on, touch only briefly on the other matters discussed. I set out to the Administration and to the President the Australian Government's reservations as to signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty at present. Reasons for these reservations have been stated in this House before. Our questionings include anxiety as to whether the Treaty offers an effective safeguard to a threatened country; the number of countries which have stated they will not sign it; the other countries which have not yet decided whether to sign it or not; the terms of the inspection clauses, and so on.

I found the President fully appreciative of our position. He understood why the Australian Government was not signing the Treaty until our questionings were resolved to our satisfaction. I am satisfied that no pressure at all will be applied by the United States Administration to induce us to sign.

I also took the opportunity, at the request of the Minister for Defence (Mr Fairhall), to seek from the Secretary of Defence, the Honourable Melvin Laird, and from the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, General McConnell, further information as to intentions of the United States Air Force regarding the F111 aircraft, and general information regarding the aircraft itself. The original intention to purchase some 1,500 aircraft for the United States Air Force and the United States Navy has, as the House well knows, been very considerably reduced and I understand that the existing order is for 493 aircraft of which 141 are F111As which are comparable with our own F111Cs. The Chief of Staff was emphatic that the United States Air Force regarded the F111 as an exceptionally good aircraft and that it would be in service at least until 1980 and probably much longer. The United States Air Force expects the wing carry-through box to be tested to 8,000 hours, or two aircraft lifetimes, by July and intends then to remove current restrictions on the operation of the aircraft. However, the original contractual arrangements called for testing for 16,000 hours and I made it clear that

we would not wish to take delivery of our aircraft ourselves until that period of testing had been satisfactorily completed. It was again confirmed that the arrangements for the ceiling price for our planes remained in effect.

These general matters were the subject of our discussion, but I understand there are many technical details and matters still under study by the Defence and Air Departments of Australia and that these will still need clarification and study by the Minister for Defence and the appropriate specialist officers at a later stage.

Mr Speaker, most of what I have said has dealt, in one way or another, with matters of defence. This is natural, for our own security in a changing world depends to a very great extent on our relations and arrangements with the United States—and on the credibility of United States power being maintained. I believe the President

will be resolute to see that this power is maintained. He believes that if it is not, the peace of the world will be jeopardised. He will pursue an American position of strength and that strength will not be reduced until the world becomes a more secure and peaceful place.

But defence is only a means to an end—the end of preserving the national independence of peoples so that they can pursue in freedom prosperity and the provision of opportunity for the individuals who make up nations. We, this Government, will do what we can to help in these objectives.

I present the following paper:

Prime Minister's visit to the United States of America—Ministerial Statement, 15th May 1969.

Motion (by **Mr Erwin**) proposed:

That the House take note of the paper.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Whitlam**) adjourned.