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TELEVISION INTERVIEW WITH CHANNEL 9, ADELAIDE,  
GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON

Recorded on 12 September for screening on 16 September 1969

- Q. Prime Minister, you appeared to become quite irritated during a recent airport impromptu news conference when once again the subject of Australia's attitude to Russia's presence in South East Asian waters was raised. Do you feel that speculation on this topic has more or less got out of hand?
- PM. I think it has got out of hand. I wouldn't say I got irritated at the interview. What I got irritated at was being asked what about our defence arrangements with Russia, and there haven't been any and aren't going to be any and nobody has ever said there are going to be any.
- Q. It seemed that the words - correct me if I am wrong - that really irritated you were when once again the phrase was used: "our softer policy towards Russia".
- PM. Well, no, really the one was the defence one, but softer policy towards Russia, again, is something which I think people have just dreamed up. I don't understand it.
- Q. There is criticism of the fact that Mr. Freeth's statement was not discussed by Cabinet beforehand. Now, in the light of the speculation since that time, do you feel Mr. Freeth underestimated the impact his statement would have on the public of Australia?
- PM. I think that both Mr. Freeth and myself saw no alterations whatsoever in our policy approaches. Indeed, I think if you went back over policy speeches made by the previous Minister for External Affairs, you could have got the same kind of approach from them without any problem. Since there was no policy change whatever, it didn't seem to be of the significance that apparently pundits and commentators and people have tried to build into it.
- Q. Could I suggest then Prime Minister that what has happened is that that statement hit a tender spot in the minds of many Australians? The United States obviously wants to move its influence back a little from South East Asia at the present time. Britain is moving out of the area. I suggest that many Australians are coming to feel that Australia is becoming a little isolated and unimportant in the calculations of many of the major powers.

PM. I have no doubt at all that many Australians would feel that Australia was far more isolated than she used to be, and I, myself, have no doubt that this is true. The British will soon have no physical presence in the countries to our North, and the United States, though it will maintain its interest there and treaty obligations there, well, there is some doubt about what would happen in the event of hostilities, we don't know whether it would be in the countries to our North; so from that point of view I would think it was an accurate assessment to say we were becoming more isolated. I don't think it would be as accurate to say - what was the other phrase "not considered of any importance" - because I do believe that the ANZUS Treaty, as long as we maintain its spirit as we as a Government would do, shows that we are considered to be of great importance.

Q. Well, you make the point yourself there that "we as the Government" would do. In other words, there is some doubt perhaps in your mind about the other countries.

PM. No, the only doubt in my mind is that the Opposition wouldn't. You see, they wouldn't, . . . they would quibble about joint defence bases. They would try to renegotiate things like the North West Cape. They would in my view tarnish the ANZUS Treaty.

Q. Now you admit this feeling of isolation - perhaps there is nothing wrong this feeling. That it is a correct assessment.

PM. We must regard ourselves as more isolated than before. You and I grew up - or I grew up anyway until 1939 and subsequently, completely shielded by the British Navy. Britain was our shield. We had no standing forces of our own. The countries to our North were generally speaking run by European powers. There was no problem. But since the British decision to withdraw, since the changes that have taken place in Asia, I would say unquestionably we must consider ourselves as more isolated. We have no need to get panicky about it because I am sure Britain would come to our assistance and I am sure the ANZUS Treaty is our sheet anchor, but still we must regard ourselves as more isolated than before.

Q. People, I suggest, feel that the United States is perhaps not - this is perhaps understating it - perhaps not as close or as big a friend or as a strong a friend - that's the word - as we are always led to believe by the various statements both by yourself and by the President of the United States. For instance, the recent very searching Gallup Poll indicated that 62 per cent quizzed were in favour of cancelling the F-111 contract. Doesn't this once again indicate a lack of confidence in the United States?

PM. No, I wouldn't think there was any relationship at all. In the one case we are talking about a security treaty with the United States coming to defend us should our forces be attacked or should our country be attacked, and in the other case we are talking about in effect a commercial contract for a particular aircraft about which there has been a lot of discussion in the Press. I don't see the relationship between them.

Q. You don't think there is one?

PM. No, I don't.

Q. Looking at internal affairs at the present time, does the last Budget contain all of the Government's proposals for expenditure in this financial year - that is, if you make any new promises in your policy speech, does it mean they can't be implemented until the next Budget at the earliest?

PM. No, it doesn't mean they can't be implemented because one could always bring in supplementary Budgets during the course of a year, so physically something could be done. But you are asking me a physical question: "Is it possible for this to happen?", and I am answering in that sense and in that sense alone.

Q. This time, of course, as you have indicated before, you are not willing to give any indication of what might be said between now and the elections for instance?

PM. Well, now, I don't think you would expect me to.

Q. Do you agree with Mr. Whitlam that the Snowy Mountains Authority should become the nucleus of a national water conservation authority - in other words, wouldn't such an authority have avoided the Chowilla fiasco, for instance?

PM. I doubt very much whether it would have avoided the Chowilla fiasco and I don't think Mr. Whitlam has thought his proposals through at all. The Snowy Mountains Authority we are keeping as a planning authority, as the sort of people who can provide expertise to constructing authorities. But I think you would find that the States, for example, who have their own water departments, and who would want to construct their own dams and would want to use their own engineers and would want themselves to do the job, would have some reservations about a central power moving in and taking it away from them.

Q. Now, you have come over to South Australia this particular time on a flying visit and you attended a dinner with Miss Kay Brownbill. Is this just a courtesy call for the only woman in the Australian House of Representatives? I put it that way because it seems from all indications it is now, though still a marginal seat, Kingston, a fairly safe Liberal seat.

PM. So what is the question? Is it just a courtesy call? No, it isn't a courtesy call at all. It's a visit made because I very much want Kay Brownbill to hold the seat, and anything I can do to help is something I would be delighted to do. Not as a courtesy, no, but partly because I have a high regard for her personally, partly because I want to see it held.

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