

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT HON.  
WILLIAM McMAHON, IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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FOREIGN POLICY

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23 AUGUST 1971

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The speech on foreign policy by my colleague stands out in complete contrast to the superficial approach of the Opposition.

To my mind, the Minister for Foreign Affairs has set out, in a responsible way, the Government's record and its attitude on the vital issues before us in the international scene. I commend him for what he has said in his first report to the House in his new portfolio.

There are one or two objectives of policy I want to stress. The first is to emphasise very clearly and very simply that our foreign policy is based on the fact that our own national interest must be of paramount importance at all times.

We are not going to be run around the place by anybody. We are an independent country. We will never be a satellite of any power, close though our relationships with others might be. But we must face realities.

We are not a great power and we cannot play a decisive role in resolving the big issues between East and West. Nevertheless, we have a role which we play, both in the region of South-East Asia and the Pacific, and in the wider international community as well. It is up to us to play that role responsibly.

Keeping in mind at all times that we have a long and honourable record for honest dealing in international affairs and that we want to live in peaceful and profitable co-existence with all. We want to achieve this objective no matter how different the political philosophies of other countries might be from ours.

I believe we are achieving that objective. And I believe those who advise us, our foreign affairs officers, have a mature and sophisticated approach to their duties which serves Australia well.

These observations need to be made because we are all conscious that this is a period of considerable change -- sometimes very rapid change -- and we must be alert to the consequences and flexible in our responses.

But we must not be pushed or panicked into new postures or adventures with unpredictable consequences smart though they may have appeared to be at the time. To the contrary, we must move forward deliberately after careful consideration of every step we take. And for good reason.

Foreign policy cannot be made by a series of unthought out adventures. It must evolve from the passage of events and our own appreciation of the trends of the future and our relationships with others.

We live in a world of interdependence. This goes for countries great and small. Our identification with the international world is :-

- . Our membership of the United Nations
- . Our membership of the Commonwealth of Nations
- . Our treaties with friendly powers and -
- . Our association in a variety of international and regional arrangements for security, trade and economic aid.

In this complex of relationships we have made some important advances in recent months as the Foreign Minister has pointed out. They have been dealt with fully and effectively. I will not go over the ground again.

But there is a second matter I want to raise in the context of a foreign policy debate. This is the way we conduct our foreign policy.

No medium power like Australia can negotiate effectively in sensitive areas of international relations in the full glare of the spotlights. The pursuit of our foreign relations depends on frank and confidential exchanges with many countries. We have to respect their confidences as we expect them to respect ours. We do not peddle the gossip of the diplomatic cocktail rounds in the capitals of the world.

The credibility of a government in its international dealings depends heavily on the sanctity of its undertakings and the security of the confidences given to it by others. No considerations of party politics must be allowed to compromise this credibility. The conventions for international conduct must be high and responsible.

I deplore the failure of the Opposition to respect these conventions. I deplore the recent antics of the Leader of the Opposition when he led a delegation to some of the countries of Asia, notably to the People's Republic of China.

I remind Honourable Members that the Leader of the Opposition went to China to play politics with wheat. He found himself declaring, on behalf of his Party, a foreign policy for Australia that was not within his power to implement. It was not the policy of the elected Government of Australia. It is a policy in conflict with our national interest. And very much - so very much - in line with the policy of the greatest communist power in Asia.

I do not complain about the action of the Chinese Leaders. They, too, have a national interest to promote - and have obviously done so.

But what I do call into question - and I believe a majority of Australians agree with me - is that, at a time when the Government was in contact with the Chinese seeking to open up a dialogue, a full surrender to Peking's point of view was made publicly by the Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition did not come back with any assurance of future wheat sales. He didn't come back with anything except defensive responses and evasive answers to those who criticised :-

- .. His conduct
- .. The concessions he volunteered in Peking and
- .. The gratuitous advice he offered to other countries.

He did, of course, come out of China saying that the Chinese Government was quite willing to participate in any renewed Geneva Conference.

Chou En-Lai has just made a categorical denial, saying there is no question of such a conference. The official Chinese press has also described talk about a new Geneva conference as "a sheer fraud which is ridiculous and absurd."

This surely tests the credibility of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeking as a Government to establish better relations with the People's Republic of China. In concert with our friends we hope she will join in the efforts of the countries of our region and the broader international community to promote peace and prosperity for all peoples in accordance with the Bandung principle to which Chou En-Lai himself has publicly subscribed.

We want to see this happen. And we will make our contribution where we can. We will do so without sacrificing one single part of our national interest. And we will try to achieve this objective while retaining an honourable position with our friends and allies.

I remind the House again that there is no sudden short cut to normal relations with China as history so clearly shows, particularly Soviet and Chinese history. Patience and hard-headed negotiation are needed.

The process is not one that will require, on our part, spectacular public gestures or instant decisions.

And this problem must be considered in the total context - it is important, I think, to see our own position clearly against the background of the forthcoming meeting of the United Nations and the planned visit to Peking by President Nixon before May of next year.

The Government's policy on representation in the United Nations of the People's Republic of China and of Taiwan has already been stated in this House during the course of this debate.

I have said it was inevitable and right that China should be a member of the United Nations and should hold the permanent seat in the Security Council. I have also said that we believed the Republic of China - Taiwan - should be given the chance of maintaining its membership if it so desired.

In the final result these are matters for collective decision by the United Nations.

There has been a lot of talk about there being only one China and that Taiwan is a province of China. But when the Leader of the Opposition states this proposition he evades the fact that there are two Governments each controlling a certain area with a certain population and each claiming to be the Government of the whole of China.

And he would put a seal of legality on the forceful takeover of 14 million people by a Government they do not want. He obviously does not understand that acceptance of the idea that Taiwan is a province of China implies that force can be used to restore control by China without invoking United Nations assistance.

The de facto situation is that neither the P. R. C. nor the R. O. C. exercises administrative control over all the territories they claim. While this situation exists - where two Governments are in political and jurisdictional conflict - third countries are free to recognise whichever Government they choose.

Australia has for many years recognised the Taiwan Government - the Republic of China - and in 1966 completed the formalities by establishing an embassy there.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has alleged publicly that the decision to send an Australian Ambassador to Taipei was arranged by the late Mr. Holt as Prime Minister without the knowledge of his Foreign Minister of the day - then Mr. - now Sir Paul - Hasluck.

This is utterly untrue. This is the second test of the Leader of the Opposition's credibility. The decision was made by the Cabinet of the day. It is on record and beyond dispute. This then is our position.

I believe it is in our national interest first to have a collective decision by the United Nations on the admission of the People's Republic of China and the status of the Republic of China - of Taiwan.

When representation in the United Nations is clarified we shall be better placed to examine the problems of recognition and diplomatic relations with Peking.

In his various public statements the Leader of the Opposition has endeavoured to suggest that the whole of South-East Asia is about to go - or should go - cap in hand to Peking. The truth is that South-East Asian countries are moving with caution - as we are.

They realise the desirability of adjusting to changing circumstances in Asia and the likely entry this year or next of Peking into the United Nations.

The Leader of the Opposition has said the Canadian formula is the one his Party would adopt for immediate recognition of China. This doesn't make sense because the espousal of any formula now would prejudge events yet to take place in the United Nations. And in any case only a naive person would set out what he would finally accept as his first position in any negotiation.

The Canadian formula "notes" China's claim to Taiwan. In his statement on the subject the Canadian Minister of State for External Affairs (Mr. Mitchell Sharp) said Canada had made it clear to the Chinese from the start of their negotiations "that the Canadian Government does not consider it appropriate either to endorse or to challenge the Chinese Government's position on the status of Taiwan."

But Mr. Whitlam, while adopting the Canadian formula as his own, also concedes Taiwan to China. And, as I have said, by so doing does not exclude the use of force in the resolution of this issue by the Chinese.

For reasons I have mentioned there is no need to rush into recognition.

Mr. Whitlam has said "we must accept the view of President Nixon that diplomatic relations must be normalised as speedily as possible." I have no knowledge that the President or his Administration have said that at all. This is the third test of credibility.

They, like us, have declared their attitude on China's admission to the United Nations. And they, like us, are seeking a dialogue in their bilateral relationship.

The Leader of the Opposition, on his recent ill-starred journey, not only dismissed the future fate of the people of Taiwan in a most casual manner. He also took upon himself the role of publicly declaring the policy Japan should adopt about her treaty with Taiwan.

I quote his own words at the National Press Club here in Canberra.

"We should be the first to point out to Japan that she is not in honour or reason irrevocably tied to a treaty forced on her when she was weak and dependent... we should say to her that she is now entitled to pursue her own interests which require a restoration of relations with China."

That is the Leader of the Opposition brashly telling one of the great powers of Asia and one that is likely to be, in the foreseeable future, a dominant power what it should do. Japan, I emphasise, is a very great trading partner of ours and one with whom we are associated in many regional activities.

This kind of advice disregards Australia's interest by assuming at once that it is to our advantage for China and Japan to move into a close relationship. It also smacks of interference in the internal affairs of Japan. Who are we to say "Japan is now entitled to pursue her own interests?"

In fact it looks precisely the kind of negotiating position China herself could take up towards Japan. In short, the Leader of the Opposition urges Japan to tear up her treaty with Taiwan and do business with China.

That any Member of this Parliament should seriously advocate such action is utterly deplorable in the context of our national interest. It displays either ignorance of international relations or a cynical opportunism towards international agreements.

It implies that international agreements such as A. N. Z. U. S. which is the corner-stone of our security are expendable scraps of paper.

This is the first time in Australia's history that a Leader of the Opposition has been the total advocate of another country's cause. It is a dangerous policy to this country. Let me quote some editorial comment from a leading newspaper in Asia. The Singapore edition of "The Straits Times" on 14 July said this and I quote :-

"The Australian Government is ready to discuss diplomatic relations with Peking and though recognition may be a long way off (Mr. McMahon's phrase) the intention is sincere and the endeavour is not assisted by the Labor Party mission's extraordinary behaviour,..... it is one thing for Mr. Whitlam to campaign in Australia for radical policy changes, but quite another to play Party politics openly in Peking. This is irresponsibility of a high order."

Mr. Speaker, a great deal has happened since then.

The fact that President Nixon and Premier Chou En-Lai have agreed to meet in Peking some time before May of next year has added a new dimension to the international debate on China.

The United Nations will meet next month, and in our contacts with China there has been some clarification of each other's viewpoints. I have no dramatic forecasts to make on what the future holds. It is difficult to see how Australia can have more than a marginal influence on American-Chinese relations.

Because America is a super-power and China a great power I think it may be inevitable that they will treat on a bilateral basis on the big issues. In saying this I do not intend to suggest that we expect to have no exchanges of views with America on all issues of common interest.

It is part of the practice of our diplomacy to keep in close, continuing touch with America and our other friends, particularly in the Asian and Pacific region. This we encourage and this we will continue to do.

And I emphasise what I said when I began. We will base our action on two principles :-

- (1) Australia's national interest comes first at all times.
- (2) And our diplomatic conduct accords with the highest conventions of honourable dealing and respect for the rights of others.

A clear understanding of the Leader of the Opposition's actions during his Peking visit makes it extremely difficult to reconcile them with these principles.

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