

VISIT TO THE U.S. AND U.K. 1971

WASHINGTON

PRESS CONFERENCE AT BLAIR HOUSE

GIVEN BY THE AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER, MR WILLIAM McMAHON

2 NOVEMBER 1971

(See separate text for questions on Cambodia)

PM Gentlemen, I think I can start off by saying that yesterday afternoon I saw the Secretary for Defence and he gave me a rundown of the present position of the U.S. Forces in South Viet-Nam: And as far as he could his appreciation of what is likely to happen in the months to come. He painted a heartening picture of the situation both in terms of military capability and of their development programme and the kind of assistance that the United States was prepared to give. Their military programme is not of course, affected by the decision of the Senate when it threw out the Civil Aid Bill. So that they will be able to provide not only the war equipment but the other assistance that is needed to sustain a South Vietnamese Army and the Civil Programme. Regrettably I can't go into the details of withdrawals or transfers of equipment because the conversation was off the record and I can only give you a general impression of the discussions. At the same time the Secretary and Mr Packard who was with me, gave me an appreciation of the relevant strengths of the United States and of the Soviet. They pointed out that the United States was sufficiently powerful and that the build-up of the United States Forces was proceeding rapidly and would, in their view, provide the kind of deterrent that was needed in the interests of the free world. They also explained the position of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean and of the intention of the U.S. to maintain forces there as a counter-balancing force to the Navy of the USSR. In particular either one of them did point out to me the need for countries on the littoral of the Indian Ocean to be prepared to provide base facilities so that the fullest and most effective use could be made of the United States Forces for the use of the Naval Base at Cockburn and the Air Force Base at Learmonth and the extent to which the British/United States signal station would be put in the future. That's about the sum total of what was discussed yesterday in outline. Today I saw the President and again it was an off the record conversation. I can assure you of this one point - the discussions were frank - they could not have been put more frankly and in complete detail and I have no reservation whatsoever in saying that this is the kind of consultation we like and I doubt whether it could have been better. First, Mr Nixon, who was accompanied by Mr Kissinger, explained their policy in relation to China - that is the People's Republic of China - and their desire to bring the People's Republic of China into the comity of nations and to induce it to adopt policies that could lead to an expectation and a realisation of peace. Mr Kissinger took a very active part and explained in considerable detail the kind of conversations that had taken place in Peking on both occasions. He also explained the necessity for secrecy. The second point the President mentioned was the mission he would pay to Moscow and explained that the fact that he was prepared to visit both capitals clearly indicated that they were not trying to play one country off against the other, but were attempting to explain overall American policy and its desire for a detente and a reduction of tensions. And the position in the Mediterranean was explained

in much the same way as it was explained in the discussions with Mr Laird and the President went over much the same ground as MR Laird had gone over as to American intentions in South Viet-Nam. Pretty full details were given to me of what their intentions were, but for reasons I have given you I am unable to go any further than I have gone at the moment. One point I can mention to you because I think that this is of great importance to Australians was that he did agree with me that the phrase could be used that the United States Government, from the President down, recognised, or were prepared to confirm the unqualified and unconditional assurances that had been given to us in the ANZUS Treaty were as relevant and valid today as they were at the time the Treaty was negotiated.

We discussed in particular the problems of Japan against the background of the decision in the United Nations and the proposed visits to Peking and Moscow and also the difficulties associated with the realignment of currencies and the import surcharge. Mr Connally will be dealing with these matters in Tokyo shortly. But it was emphasised to me that the difficulties were not associated peculiarly with the United States and the Japanese alone, but with other countries and particularly the French. It was a very frank and useful discussion on the monetary problems.

Other matters were discussed of our bilateral trading relationships particularly the export from Australia of meat and the possibilities due to the dock strike of a carry over of supplies and matters of a similar kind. All in all I can give you this assurance that I could not have wished for greater concentration that occurred on this occasion. I think I should mention to you too in this context that subsequent to the second visit of MR Kissinger to Peking the President did, through the Australian Ambassador, communicate with me on several occasions. Those communications were, I believe, not only productive of the greatest goodwill but indicated a desire that we should understand the American point of view, and why they had taken the various initiatives they had taken. Later on I saw the Secretary of State and he too reaffirmed the assurances relating to the ANZUS Treaty and also went over the ground relating to South Viet-Nam and American military aid programmes there. It was a very interesting discussion and showed, I believe, the very high regard the United State holds for the Australian people and for the policies of the Australian Government. To me it has been a most valuable meeting and one I think which is of benefit to us because of the concrete and unqualified assurances that have been given.

Q Prime Minister, on the Indian Ocean - a question about the use of bases in Western Australia. Did the President ask you if this was possible or was it taken as a matter of course ?

PM It was more in the area of Mr Laird that the questions relating to bases were mentioned. But they would be only too happy to use the Naval Bases and they will, of course, want some sort of access in case they need repair facilities. It was MR Laird who was more interested in this question.

Q You gave him this assurance that American Forces would be able to use these Bases.

PM We had, of course, given that already. And they had also assured us that they would, when necessary, appreciate the opportunity to use the Bases.

(See separate text for questions on Cambodia)

- Q On the broader area, Sir, you raised just on Cambodia, is there anything said to you which has caused you any surprise in your discussions with the Americans perhaps? Or if not surprise whether or not they may have adopted perhaps a different tone from what you expected.
- PM It depended which area you localise it to.
- Q I thought I would just leave it up to you because obviously you have a fair idea on this occasion of the thinking of the American people on most issues. I was just wondering in your discussions with Mr Laird and Mr Nixon, were you surprised that they placed emphasis on any particular areas and were there any new answers which you found unusual given the playback you have had in Canberra?
- PM No but this might be wise after the event because so much was said that I thought was logical and wise but I didn't expect them to say and didn't think that their thinking had gone as far as it obviously had gone. To that extent I was surprised, Yes.
- Q Was this on China?
- PM Well, on several issues there their thinking was - we had given a lot of thought to it, we did not know how profound their thought was or how far they had gone and it was on these that the profoundness and the lengths to which they had gone that were a little surprising.
- Q It just occurred to me that you said it was several issues, one of them was China if that's any indication. Is that right?
- PM Yes.
- Q Sir, there has always been a certain ambiguity about the obligation of ANZUS for the presence of Australian troops in Singapore and Malaysia. Could that be clarified in any way?
- PM No I didn't pursue that. What I wanted was an affirmation, a strong affirmation that I received from both the President and Secretary of State of unqualified support for ANZUS, and the view was expressed to unqualified support not only from the Administration and the Congress but from the American people as well. They wanted to display complete goodwill towards Australia and this was just as important, perhaps more important to me, than the actual words of the Treaty itself.
- Q Why did you demand such a strong affirmation Sir?
- PM Because I think there is a lot of discussion going on in Australia today by people and not necessarily well informed, that ANZUS is starting to recede into the limbo of forgotten things. That is I didn't think it was true but naturally enough I want to get the strongest affirmation I can get in order to refute these suggestions.

Q Sir on this question, if I could just add one further point on this, the speech that was made by Mr Bowen in New York. It caused or was a matter of some controversy in Australia. You yourself in Parliament defended this speech as being supported by the Government. Did you raise the terms of that speech privately with Mr Nixon?

PM No

Q Well, put it this way, was it raised in any fashion or did you raise it that a change in Government in Australia would have involved any change in the existing relationship between Australia and America.

PM No

Q Did you discuss with MR Nixon or did you get any assurance from MR Nixon about trade with the United States, any suggestion that wool might get special treatment in import surcharges or tariffs?

PM You're in an area now that I am not able to discuss in any detail. I did talk about our trade relations with him and mentioned meat and wool.

Q Could I - I would like to ask just one more thing Sir. Did you ask Mr Nixon to come to Australia?

PM I informed him that he would be a welcome guest but at the same time I indicated that I would understand it if he found it difficult to come in an election year. He laughed when I said it and said well thank Heavens that you recognise the difficulties, it would be extremely difficult.

Q Speaking about requesting an assurance of their support for ANZUS, Mr Prime Minister, did you explain this feeling in Australia, that it was receding into a limbo of forgotten things and who held that view?

PM Could I make a correction. I did say that there was a feeling, some feeling, but not necessarily one that was widespread that ANZUS was receding into the limbo of forgotten things. I did not ask for a positive assurance relating to it, it was given then without any further prompting. But by this time, his feelings towards Australia, and towards the Australian people, and the high regard that he had for us as not only friendly, but willing allies and one who could be relied upon and trusted and relied upon, had become obvious.

Q Today, Sir, Mr Rogers had a press conference, the one that the press sat in on and during the course of which he remarked that the President was concerned for the Foreign Aid cut, that the decision of the Senate would affect the foreign policy posture of the United States and the rest of the world. Did the President expatiate on this with you because Mr Rogers referred specifically to Viet-Nam while he was in the context talking about obligations created in Asia and that this posed a threat in fact to the Nixon doctrine, in fact he used that expression, to refer to that part of the world if I may settle this for you ..(INAUDIBLE). He also said in the public

statement that there could be a collapse of the South Vietnamese economy arising from this fact and there does seem to me to be a conflict in what he said earlier about it being able to carry on and that they also will be reconciled... (INAUDIBLE).

PM First of all turning to what Mr Walsh said, this question of aid, of civil aid programmes was only touched on perfunctorily by the President and he did express the view that there would be a reinstatement or partial reinstatement of the aid programmes. He did not go any further.

Secretary of State Rogers dealt with it in greater detail but felt that not too much should be said about it. He was very sorry for the vote but particularly the large number of absentees and the fact that it was taken at the time when Mayoral and other elections were taking place but there is not much more I can add to what you already know. He also is hopeful that the Congress will take action to make additional appropriations but he did not want to be too forthcoming about it. As to what you said, MR Reid, about there seems to be an inconsistency, it has to be looked at in two ways. So far ^{as} the bulk of assistance to South Viet-Nam is concerned it is under the military funding programme and that won't be affected. As to the balance, it will be civil aid and I don't know to what extent civil aid is involved.

Q What is your view?
What do you think of it MR Prime Minister ?

PM Which ?

Q Not the Foreign Aid cut, the decision by Senate ?

PM When I'm in another country I don't like to make any critical statements relating to what that country has done. It is its business and I don't like interfering in its own domestic affairs other than to say this. I thought it was regrettable, I thought a mistake was made but I have a feeling that to a large extent the vote will be, in one way or another, will be reinstated by Congress. I can go no further than that.

Q Don't you believe Prime Minister, that it does affect us simply because the withdrawal of aid from the Asia Pacific region, would certainly cause us to rethink changes in Foreign Policy.

-PM (A) I don't think it will be any change to us. We will go ahead with our aid programmes
(B) Until I know exactly what the United States Government or Congress intends to do on Foreign Aid, I refrain from any comment other than what I have already made.

Q Is there any suggestion, Mr Prime Minister, that Australia may be called upon to put forward more aid to South Viet-Nam ?

PM There might be but I doubt whether it would be practicable.

Q In what circumstances might these be now requested ?

PM I don't know Ivan. That is hypothetical and I'm not getting involved into a world of hypothesis.

Q Sir, Mr Kissinger was in China for the first time at the time of the Labour Party delegation. Did he talk about that at all and the effects.... of the visit.

PM No, he didn't, he merely explained the kind of conversation they had, what it was about and the significance of it and its short and long term significance.

Q Did you get the feeling Sir that the United States was moving quicker towards diplomatic recognition of the PRC than we ourselves are.

PM No.

Q Did Mr Kissinger sit in throughout the entire interview Sir ?

PM Yes. And par-ticipated to a considerable extent.

Q Did they discuss the United Nations vote and the implications that it has for the United States relations with not so much China but the rest of the world ?

PM They did not do so but Secretary of State Rogers did.

Q And what did Mr Rogers say ? I have seen his public statement on the matter. They referred more to what they call the atmosphere in which it was taken than to the actual vote itself.

PM I can't go any further than I have gone because as I said I am limited to what I can say to what I have already given you. If there is anything more I think it's got to go from the Secretary of State Rogers and not through me.

Q Mr Prime Minister you made the point that... you specifically made the point of saying that prior to MR Kissinger's visit to Peking (I am sorry) prior to the announcement of Mr Kissinger's visit to Peking and the announcement of the pending visit of Nixon that the White House did communicate with you on several occasions. Are you saying Sir that they told you beforehand ?

PM This is the second visit ?

Q No, the first visit.

PM I didn't say so, I am sorry, I was referring to the second.

Q Sir, on this currency thing arising from the conversations today, were you able to fix mentally upon a timetable yourself, final decisions on currency ?

PM No, I can't and they can't either.

Q Did the President seem concerned about the way in which Mr Sato's position, in jeopardy in politics, would be affected by the decisions taken in both the economic and political level in America at the moment. This is the subject of considerable speculation throughout the world. I think I've heard you express some concern about this yourself.

PM I can but repeat what I said before that the President and the Secretary of State did refer to the importance of Japan in the world scene and not only because of its industrial and political position but because of the problems that were faced on currency re-alignments and trade as well. I can't go any further than that.

Q How about yourself? Did you raise the question of MR Sato's position as distinct from that of Japan as a whole?

PM Yes.

Q Could you tell us what your feelings were on this?

PMq No I'm sorry.

Q Mr Prime Minister, obviously attitudes to defence in our region was obviously quite a big part in your talk with the President today. Could you tell us something about that?

PM It was a big part of our talks. And it was emphasised that the United States had no intention whatsoever of withdrawing from the Asian region. What it was doing was matching its commitment to its capabilities and above all they pointed out that the ANZUS Treaty was for them part of the supreme law of the land and they gave clear and unqualified assurances that the ANZUS Treaty was just as valid today in the minds of the Administration, the Congress and the people of the United States as it was when the Treaty was first signed. That's the answer.

Q Mr Prime Minister, one of the significant discussions you had with the President today related to the American Naval buildup as planned in the Indian Ocean. How significant is this and what part will Australia play?

PM I think you have gone a little bit too far in saying the significant American Naval buildup in the Indian Ocean. What they intend to do is to have some kind of parity with the Soviet Union's Naval Forces that are now or might go into the Indian Ocean and I do hope that they will be able to have access to Australian base facilities when their Navy, or elements of their fleet, are there.

Q Does that mean an expansion of the facilities there are planned?

PM No, not so far as I know. That was not discussed.

Q MR Prime Minister, what do you believe you and Australia have gained by today's talks with MR Nixon?

PM They were very frank and honest discussions and they did show the wish of the United States Government to have consultations with the Australian Government on matters of mutual interest and importance to both of us. That was the first important effect. The second one without any doubt was the interest it has created in Australia about the viability and the permanence of the ANZUS Treaty. There is a tendency back home for some Australians to say well it doesn't matter very much and it is dying from lack of use and people do not care about it very much more neither do the people in the United States. Those two statements are wrong. It is a crucially important Treaty from our point of view. Secondly, so far as the Americans are concerned that is the United States, from the Government, Congress and the people of the United States, there is no doubt about it that they regard the assurances given in that Treaty as of crucial importance to them and assurances that they will respect. In their minds the terms of the Treaty will be maintained by the United States Congress and Government.

Q One other short question. Did you disagree with anything which Mr Nixon had to say ?

PM Not so far as I can remember. I would have to go over everything that was said in much greater detail before I could give a complete answer. But most of what he said and for that matter what Mr Kissinger and Mr Laird, not Mr Laird, and to a greater extent what was said by Secretary of State Rogers coincided with what we in Australia are thinking. I would like particularly to compliment the President for the frankness with which he expressed his views and the detail with which he went into the various problems that arose and the information conveyed to us.

And I think too - if I can say this - his liking for Australia is very great and for that reason I did express the hope that he might be able to come to Australia next year although I doubt whether it will be practicable.
