AUSTRALIA

PRIME MINISTER

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VISIT OF PRESIDENT NIXON TO CHINA

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. William McMahon, CH, MP

When President Nixon last July announced his intention of visiting China, I welcomed it without reservation and wished him good fortune in an initiative which had the full support of Australia.

Now that the visit is successfully concluded and a joint communique has been released, we can take stock of what was accomplished and - just as importantly - what still remains to be achieved.

The first point I make is that the fact of the visit itself -quite apart from what was discussed and agreed during it - was a gain for all of us. For the visit - unprecedented in itself and in its bold disregard of established practice - marked in a dramatic fashion the importance each side attaches to having both a clearer idea of the other's preoccupations and a more normal relationship.

Secondly, it is clear from the communique itself that this first high-level contact has not resulted in any fundamental reversals of foreign policies by either side.

Indeed, that was not to be expected for, as the communique notes, "there are essential differences between China and the United States in their social systems and foreign policies". Thus on issues such as Indo-China and Korea, the two sides were apparently able to do no more than to restate, and no doubt to elaborate, their established positions.

It is worthwhile noting that both sides by their attitudes during the talks made it clear that neither is about to abandon old friends.

The two sides were able to agree on some general principles of conduct which should govern relations between states and which the two sides were themselves prepared to apply to their mutual relations.

These principles, though couched in the language of the Bandung Declaration, are equally the principles of the United

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Nations Charter, to which China now subscribes; and they are principles which have long underlain in practice Australia's own foreign policy.

With these principles of international relations in mind, the two sides went on to state a number of agreed points. I draw particular attention to three of these:

- "Neither should seek hegemony in the Asia Pacific region and each is opposed to the effort by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony."

- "Both wish to reduce the danger of international military conflict."

- "Progress towards the normalisation of relations between China and the United States is in the interests of all countries."

The first two of these points augur well for the peace of the region of which Australia is part. But it would be wrong to suppose that their mere assertion, even coupled with the reiteration of the Bandung Principles, is all that is required.

For as the US side stated in the talks, "Peace in Asia and peace in the world require efforts" - and I emphasise "efforts", which are more than words - "to reduce immediate tensions and to eliminate the basic causes of conflict."

The reduction of tensions is thus not enough in itself; what is also needed is the elimination of basic causes of conflict. In this respect, it would be foolish to ignore that the Chinese side reiterated its support for what it describes as "the struggles of all the oppressed people and nations for freedom and liberation".

How do these words square with the Bandung Principles? What do they mean in practice, and how will they be understood by our friends and neighbours in Asia who are faced with subversive threats to their independence?

As to the third of the points to which I have drawn attention - progress toward the normalisation of Sino/American relations - the Australian Government sees great advantages in that process, and notes with satisfaction that a beginning is to be made with "people to people contacts ", the development of bilateral trade, and the maintenance of official contacts through various channels.

As long ago as May 13,1971, I said "That we want normal bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China."

So the US approach is in fact entirely in line with what we ourselves have been trying to do, in accordance with our long-standing objective - announced well before President Nixon's statement last July - of the progressive normalisation of relations with China.

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Unfortunately, we have not been able to make much progress towards that objective. The prime reason has been the difficult question of the Republic of China with its government on Taiwan.

As with President Nixon, so with us the Chinese side has taken the position that this is the crucial question obstructing the normalisation of relations.

Recognising the difficulty of resolving that question, we had wished to move first in other areas of our bilateral relations, such as trade and scientific and cultural relations.

I note that in respect of the United States, the PRC is prepared not to make Taiwan the stumbling-block in the way of normalising relations.

It may be that Peking will now be prepared to do the same in our case; we shall certainly test out the Chinese on this.

But it equally may be that the PRC has one policy in respect of the USA, which is a super power, and another in respect of middle powers such as Australia - even though in the joint communique the Chinese side stated that "All nations, big or small, should be equal."

We shall hope that the PRC will live up to its own words and will follow a consistent policy, but not being surprised if in the event the PRC has one policy for the big and another for the not so big.

Finally, I make again the point that I made last July: President Nixon's initiative in visiting Peking is a beginning, an exploration, not a settlement of matters at issue even between these two powers, let alone of wider issues.

But there is no doubt in the mind of the Australian Government that the visit has turned out, as we expected, to be a good beginning, one which opens up new prospects not only for the two participants but ultimately for a just and secure peace in Asia and beyond.

CANBERRA,
28 February 1972