



NEWS RELEASE

NO

DATE

M/19

11 February 1974

PRIME MINISTER IN SINGAPORE

The following is the text of an address by the Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, to the Singapore Press Club on 8 February 1974:

"A year ago my principal task as a new Prime Minister of Australia was to explain the changes we were making in Australia's foreign policy in terms of our political inheritance after twenty-three years of Opposition.

A year later my task is to put the established, firm and irreversible policy of the Australian Government in terms of the realities of the international situation we, with all the countries of the region, now have to live with.

A year ago, it was very necessary, it was quite inevitable, that a new Government would stress those aspects of its policies which emphasised its independence from its predecessors. Now I emphasise those great matters which illustrate the inter-dependence of my nation with other nations, with old friends as much as with new associates.

It's most appropriate that I do so here, to the press, in Singapore, at this time.

To the press, because, naturally enough, properly enough, your writings have tended to emphasise - sometimes, dare I say, dramatise - the changes more than the continuity of policies. In Singapore, because I acknowledge that no nation has been more directly affected by some of our decisions and no nation is better entitled to a full explanation of the purposes of the Australian Government. And now, because there has not been a time since the war itself that the inter-dependence of all nations, not just the nations of our region, but of all, the very greatest with the smallest, has been made so vividly manifest -

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in all its complexity, all its fragility, all its vulnerability and in all its urgent reality.

It's no longer necessary, and it was never really correct, to measure the policies of my Government just by contrast with those of its predecessor.

Contrast enough I trust there is, but it is a mistake to see our policies only as a break with the past.

For four reasons. To do so ignores much that continues and much that would be happening whatever government was in power in Australia. Secondly, it ignores the steadiness of the Australian people, and any elected Australian Government ignores at its peril the determination of the Australian people to protect their reputation for reliability and dependability. Thirdly, it ignores the consistency of policy formulation within the Australian Labor Party.

These policies have long been a matter of public record and public debate.

It is just impossible for anybody to have been surprised by our major decisions unless we were to accept that it is surprising these days for elected governments to carry out their undertakings. And fourthly and most importantly, it ignores the fundamental fact that our policies are directed towards the future, not against the past.

We are not merely repairing the past; we are preparing for the future.

Sure enough in matters like China, like Viet-Nam, like Southern Africa, there is in our thinking and attitudes an element of apology, of reparation. But the great thing is preparation - preparation for a future of unparalleled opportunities with appalling consequences confronting us all if we fail to grasp them.

And the old attitudes, the old stances, the old frozen postures were just not adequate for such a preparation.

So it is in the context of the future that I wish our policies to be seen, because it is in that context that they are being developed.

And if you try to see them in that context, you will I believe be able to see their consistency and their true meaning.

They are all part of a pattern; it is a pattern for the future.

Basically, what we are trying to do for Australia, and to the extent that we have any influence over opinion or events beyond our shores, what we are trying to do in the region, is to build a range and breadth of relations in order to prevent any single preoccupation distorting or paralysing our actions and attitudes.

For most of the period that my party was in opposition, the overwhelming preoccupation of Australian policy was China - and that meant, of course, the containment of China by military action on the Asian mainland.

The American alliance, SEATO, the war in Viet-Nam, were forced into this single focus; all these matters were debated in terms of that over-riding preoccupation.

It is precisely because my Government rejects the premise of that preoccupation, precisely because we believe that the preoccupation to the point of obsession harmed Australia that we are determined to widen all Australia's relations to prevent other newer preoccupations doing similar harm.

Yet in acting to redress the past we do not over react against the past.

Take China itself. You should not get the idea that because we moved so very promptly to normalise relations with China after 23 years of mutual hostility that China is the be-all and end-all of Australia's foreign policy.

It was the classic case of when it is not necessary to delay it is necessary not to delay.

Again consider our policy towards the United States - because we choose no longer to beat the drum about the alliance, that is not to say that ANZUS is not still our most important and I believe enduring treaty.

And the same kind of consideration lay behind our decisions affecting the Five Power arrangements.

You should understand that our decision to withdraw the battalion and battery from Singapore - following incidentally on its withdrawal by our predecessors four years ago from Terendak - is part of a reconstruction and re-orientation of our whole defence policy.

In no way do we repudiate or down-grade the Five Power arrangements.

Those arrangements do not of course require Australia to maintain a battalion in Singapore.

We are convinced that the kind of army Australia needs for her own defence and for her most effective contribution to the defence of her friends should no longer be structured upon the concept of fixed garrisons overseas.

For a country like Australia the concept is unreal and anachronistic.

And for Australia it is a concept which cuts across her basic defence needs in modern times.

Her needs are for highly professional, high mobile, finely-equipped forces capable of, and experienced in, prompt cooperation with friendly forces.

This is the concept relevant to our needs.

The old concept worked as an inhibition - economically, politically and logistically - against creating the most effective defence contribution Australia can make.

And I confidently predict that the next two years will see Australian defence cooperation not only with Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand and the British presence in the region, but with Indonesia and Papua New Guinea brought to a more effective and efficient state than could ever have been achieved simply by keeping Australian ground forces - with all their impedimenta - overseas.

The desire for cooperation, the need for cooperation has not changed; all that has changed is the view of the Australian Government about the best way of achieving that cooperation and making it more valuable for all of us.

Some components of Australian forces are going home, but Australia is not going away.

And this, of course, is the very crux of the matter.

I hear in some quarters concern that Australia, or the present Australian Government, may go isolationist.

Isolationism is not an option for Australia or for any Australian Government.

Indeed, it was precisely my belief that we were isolating ourselves from half the world, from a quarter of the world's people in China, from the whole of Black Africa, from the other half of Europe east of the Elbe, from Latin America and even from India in any meaningful way, and my belief that our relations with Japan and Indonesia lacked their proper warmth that has informed, inspired and moulded the policies, actions and decisions of my Government and which dictated my own overseas visits and those of my Foreign Minister.

This Government - by action, by association, by inclination, by philosophy and above all by the necessities of the times in which we live and the region in which we live - is the most genuinely internationalist government Australia has ever had.

And even if our wishes were different, Australia's own needs would force internationalism upon us.

How could this great trading country whose lifelines lie through here be indifferent to what happens here?

How could this great resource producer whose prosperity depends upon the prosperity of the great resource users be indifferent to their success and well-being?

But we do make the distinction between internationalism and interventionism.

We believe that the end of the old interventionism is the beginning of a new internationalism in which Australia will play a constructive, cooperative, and generous part.

We know only too well that peace and security do not come because we want them or merely because we proclaim their desirability.

Peace and security have to be built brick by brick and bonded by the efforts, energy and imagination of the leaders of this region.

When people use the phrase Asian problems should be settled by Asian countries they sometimes tend to forget that the Asian continent does not end where the borders with Communist Asian countries start.

The present government, in formulating its policy, does take account of the views of countries like China and, to a lesser extent, North Viet-Nam and North Korea although, naturally, it does not take as much account of their views as those of traditionally friendly countries and geographically closer countries.

In its bilateral relations with some Asian countries Australia is going through a period of adjustment, but we are confident that in the longer run, once this adjustment has been made, our relationships would be more soundly based than in the past.

The confluence of our history and geography, our origins as Europeans, our location on the edge of South-East Asia-- give us a unique opportunity to demonstrate to the international community that countries with very different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds can evolve intimate and lasting friendships.

To this end we shall spare no effort to ensure that in the years ahead, Australia is accepted as a cooperative and helpful member of the Asian and Pacific region and a neighbour of the nations of South-East Asia.

The signs of this new approach are round us in this region.

In ASEAN, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines have and have sustained an organisation which is workable and relevant, and which reflects the common needs of the countries of South-East Asia.

Australia applauds the achievements of ASEAN, and the hope which it offers for the economic and social progress of the people of the region.

But we have no desire to intrude; I have said many times before that Australia does not seek membership of ASEAN.

What we do hope is that we can cooperate with ASEAN imaginatively and constructively as a neighbour and a friend.

We think we have certain skills to offer if these skills are needed; we know that we have much, in turn, to learn from you and your ASEAN partners.

The sort of fruitful cooperation which I have in mind is illustrated by the recent discussions which Australian officials held with representatives of ASEAN in Bangkok on possible Australian assistance to regional ASEAN projects.

The discussions which Prime Minister Lee and I have held about concluding a cultural agreement between our two countries - an agreement which we both favour in principle and which we will work quickly towards formulating - is a further indication of our desire to broaden the form and the depth of our relations with South-East Asian countries.

We know that you in Singapore, your Government and your business leaders, are looking to extend the fruits of your own hard-won economic progress to the region as a whole.

We hope that we, in some way, if only in a small way, can assist as a catalyst in this process.

There are certain fields of endeavour, in agriculture and technical and scientific training to name but two, where we believe we can make a valuable contribution to regional development.

My government is not alone in recognising the need for - the promise of - a new spirit of international cooperation, and this region is not the only one where nations are attempting to establish new forms of cooperative relationships, or where Australia is anxious to assist with that process.

But to Australia, South-East Asia is, of course, our immediate north.

Your hopes, your problems, your future are necessarily and for ever, part of our own future.

Much is written about Australia's "new nationalism"; I would rather put it in terms of Australia's new internationalism.

Of course, there is a national spirit awake and abroad in Australia.

But Australia wants no more for herself than Singapore wants for herself, and what all the nations in this region are seeking - a national identity within the international community, reasonable control over our own destiny and our own resources in a world where all nations are increasingly inter-dependent.

This is now the task exercising statesmanship throughout the world - to reconcile these three desires and needs of the peoples of the world - their desire for independence, their dependence upon others and our inter-dependence, all of us with one another.

We are living in times when these three great principles - independence, dependence, inter-dependence show themselves to be interlocked as never before.

Upon their resolution and reconciliation depends the future even the survival of civilisation itself.

You will not, I believe, find Australia - with a very strong sense of her own nationhood and identity, Australia with a very real sense of the dependence of her prosperity upon the prosperity of her neighbours, Australia with a very deep sense of her inter-dependence with and her responsibilities towards the international community, failing in her responsibilities or faltering in our determination to make the most of the opportunity for a better, safer neighbourhood at this very critical time in modern history."