



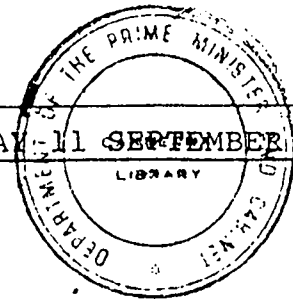
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# PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

THURSDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 1980



## STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE

### ON THE PRIME MINISTER'S OVERSEAS VISIT

The Foreign Minister and I have just returned from visits to the United States and to India. I want to say something about these visits and also to relate them to the pattern of Australia's foreign policy as it has developed over the last five years.

I believe that in the perspective of history it will be seen that these years constitute a key period in the evolution of our foreign policy - an innovative and constructive period during which Australia established a distinctive role for herself in international affairs.

The two stages of the visit serve to bring out and symbolise the key elements in this evolving pattern. Washington, of course, is the nerve centre of the Western alliance of which we are a member. The visit to New Delhi to attend the Second CHOGRM Meeting represented three other essential elements of our policy.

First, our concern to create a system of regional consultation and co-operation which will forge a strong sense of shared identity and generate habits of working together to solve regional problems.

Second, our commitment to developing the full potential of the Commonwealth as a vital, innovative, problem-solving instrument, one capable, on a range of issues, of acting as a catalyst when deadlock or stalemate threaten.

Third, our belief that Australia should seek to strengthen its links with other middle-sized powers and that there is an important role for such powers in world affairs.

The Western alliance, regionalism, the Commonwealth and the strengthening of relations with middle-sized powers: these are four essential components of our foreign policy. Moreover they are interlocking and interdependent components. It is important, therefore, both to bring out the character of each component part, and of the relationship between them.

We have been members of the Western alliance since the signing of the ANZUS Pact in 1951, that is virtually since its inception. The commitment of my Government to that alliance is and will remain unequivocal. That commitment is not a matter of lip-service reluctantly paid. Nor is it a matter of passively following the lead of others.

It is an active, substantive effort to contribute to the resolve of the effectiveness of the alliance. The alliance is vital to us in two respects.

First, it offers the ultimate guarantee of our security should a direct threat to Australia ever eventuate. Second, as the necessary instrument for maintaining a global strategic balance, it is the one thing that can ensure a measure of stability in international affairs - in our region as in others.

Should that alliance falter, should the Soviet Union gain ascendancy in Europe, the consequences would very soon be felt in our part of the world as Soviet military resources become available to be used freely outside the European theatre. Let this be clearly understood: Australia's commitment to the Western alliance is ultimately not based on historical ties or ideology or cultural compatability, important as those things are.

It is based four-square on an appreciation of Australia's interests and what they require. That is why we provide facilities for the United States. And that is why Australia concerns itself with the condition of the alliance and with the nature of the strategic and political threats the alliance faces.

In my address to B'nai B'rith International in Washington, I took advantage of a platform in the capital city of the principal member of the Western alliance to discuss the nature of the challenge facing the West, the problems posed by mistaken and complacent perceptions in the West which hindered a proper response to that challenge, and the need to adjust the alliance to present realities.

I know that there are those in Australia who would say that it is inappropriate for an Australian Prime Minister to speak in these terms; that we should leave such matters to the United States and the major European powers; that we will not be listened to. I reject all that. It is one thing to recognise ones limitations; it is another to exaggerate them and make them the excuse for passivity.

Australia is not a great power, but neither is it a negligible factor in international politics. It is a significant middle power which will be listened to - is listened to - when it advances informed and reasonable views. As to the substance of the analysis I presented in my Washington speech, let me add this.

If there is disagreement about that analysis, let us hear the arguments and let us discuss the issues. That would be the healthy response. But all too often what we get are not arguments but a tired, mindless, unenlightened resort to accusations of "kicking the communist can" or "Reds under the bed" which rule out rational discussion of vitally important matters.

These slogans also ignore the fact that what is at issue is not communism as an ideology or conspiracy, but the massive military might of a super-power. It is not a case of Reds under the bed but of Soviet troops in Afghanistan and Soviet arms and equipment in Kampuchea.

I turn now to the Second Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting at New Delhi. As Members will be aware, these meetings came about as the result of an Australian initiative. After the success of the Delhi Meeting I think it is clear that this has been one of the most useful foreign policy initiatives ever undertaken by Australia. It links together and integrates two of our most important concerns: the region and the Commonwealth.

As a vast country, Australia has to think of its region on a large scale, extending from the sub-continent to our northwest to the islands of the South Pacific. But the degree of contact among the sub-regions within this wider area has been quite limited and no forum existed which would bring them together on a regular basis. One of the important functions of the CHOGRMs is to remedy this deficiency.

Another function performed by the meetings - and one which we had very much in mind when we proposed them - is that they provide a forum which allows the small island states of the South Pacific to make their views heard.

During the last five years the community of independent island states in the South Pacific has enlarged significantly. Australia has been sensitive to the needs of that community and has increased its aid and assistance very rapidly and substantially. But we have also been aware that their needs are not only material, but that as small and geographically remote countries with limited human resources, they face difficulties in registering their presence in the international community and finding the opportunity to have their problems discussed.

Australia once faced similar difficulties and required and received help from others; we are aware of the problem. We had it in mind when we moved to inaugurate the CHOGRMs.

In New Delhi, the fact that Father Lini, within weeks of his country achieving independence, was able to get up in the Opening Session to address the Heads of Government of the 15 other countries and to explain the problems Vanuatu faces testified to the success of the CHOGRMs in this respect. In my opening remarks at New Delhi I stressed that the spirit of the initiative was practical and pragmatic: its orientation was towards the tackling of specific functional problems and projects; its aim was to enhance regional co-operation. The deliberations which followed bore this out.

They were informal and private, characterised by frank discussion of the real issues rather than by ritualistic posturing. I do not propose to describe in detail all of the various areas for action that were agreed upon at New Delhi. These are set out in the Communique which I hope, at the conclusion of this statement, to table. But I draw attention briefly to certain decisions involving forward-looking positive action which, I believe, are particularly important.

Heads of Government agreed, for example, that all four working groups - on terrorism, illicit drugs, trade and energy - that were set up at the First Regional Meeting should continue, in some cases with expanded terms of reference.

The consultative group on trade is to pay special attention to the protectionist policies of the major industrialised countries against competitive developing country exports from the region. And in the vitally important field of energy the consultative group is not only to continue its work on non-renewable energy sources but is also to devote attention to certain aspects of the conventional energy situation; there is lack of information about the precise energy characteristics of some of the CHOGRM countries, and resource and need surveys are therefore to be given priority.

A working group is to be set up on industry, and it is the Government's hope that this will produce particular benefits for the small island developing countries of the region, especially to help them take advantage of SPARTECA - a special trade agreement designed to give developing countries in the Pacific region access to our market without expecting reciprocal benefits for us from them.

In addition an expert study group is to recommend a program of action for co-operation in the field of agricultural development.

Our decisions at New Delhi reflect the needs of the region and represent a substantial program of joint action. As in the past, Australia will contribute wherever it can. While the main emphasis was, quite properly, on practical matters, the Meeting also gave Heads of Government the opportunity to exchange views on the security questions relevant to the region. We approached these recognizing frankly the differences which existed among us concerning the interpretation of the causes and nature of some recent developments.

What I believe emerged, and what is reflected in the Communique, is that despite the differences there is a very substantial level of agreement among us as to what is desirable for the region as a whole, and what we should work towards. We agreed in opposing intervention and interference in the internal affairs of states, including Afghanistan and Kampuchea. We agreed in calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Kampuchea. We agreed that the peoples of Afghanistan and Kampuchea should be free to determine their own destiny.

All the Heads of Government were concerned to prevent the escalation of great power confrontation in the region. All differences were not resolved. That was not the purpose of the Meeting. But we all left with a much clearer understanding of our respective positions and a much more accurate appreciation of the thinking behind these positions.

I have stressed the regional aspect of the CHOGRM. But I would like to stress equally the Commonwealth aspect. During the last five years Australia has played an extremely active part in the affairs of the Commonwealth. We have rejected absolutely the views that it could only be a talking shop or that it was merely an interesting anachronism on the world scene.

As I said at the beginning, we have proceeded on the assumption that it is an instrument which can be used to solve problems, and that it can be particularly useful in situations where great powers are reluctant or unable to act. Events have already justified that assumption.

Within the framework of the Commonwealth, and using the resources it provides - not the least the atmosphere of trust and confidence between leaders who have grown to know each other well - Australia made a significant contribution towards resolving the conflict in Zimbabwe. We also took a lead, along with our Commonwealth partners, in working towards the setting up of a common fund. These are achievements of substance which have given the Commonwealth a new relevance in international affairs. The view that the Commonwealth is outdated is itself outdated.

The last aspect of the New Delhi Meeting I want to touch upon - because it illustrates another facet of our foreign policy - is its significance as a further step in developing our relationship with India. That relationship was too long neglected by both sides.

In the last two years, as a result of the two CHOGRMs and my visit to India in 1979 as the special guest of the Indian Government for their Independence Day celebrations, we have rapidly made up ground. The relationship with India is important in its own right. She is a large and substantial country with a considerable capacity for influencing events in the world. But the development of the relationship is important in another respect in that it signifies the importance we attach to the role of middle-sized countries in world affairs, particularly when they are able to act together.

The super powers are, of course, militarily predominant. But events increasingly make it clear that there are limits to their political power, that in fact their very size and power makes it difficult for them to deal effectively with some issues. They arouse suspicion: they bring too much power and weight to bear on situations: they attract the attention and participation of the other super power and convert the issue in question into a super power matter. On these issues, middle-sized powers are often better placed to play a constructive role. Again, Zimbabwe provides a striking example of the truth of this proposition.

I think I have said enough to show that my visits to Washington and New Delhi fitted in to a pattern of activity which is purposeful, which is congruent with Australia's interests, and which contributes in a positive way to the goals of security and development.

On occasions in the past Australian foreign policy has been too modest and passive. On other occasions it has suffered from delusions of grandeur and the absence of a sense of limitations. Our present policy avoids both these errors. It is realistic without being cynical: and it is principled without being utopian.

When we came to office in 1975 we promised a foreign policy of enlightened realism. We have kept that promise.