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PRIME MINISTER

28 March 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW, KRANJI CEMETERY, SINGAPORE****E & OE.....****JRNLS:**

Your thoughts on this place, Prime Minister?

PRIME MINISTER:

It's always very moving to visit an Australian war cemetery because this is within viewing distance of the events, or the place where the events occurred that led to the fall of Singapore which was such an enormous psychological, as well as military turning point in World War 2 and it is always important for Australians to remember the tremendous sacrifice. They were all so young, is the thing that always affects me when I visit a war cemetery, their ages, the late teens and early 20s in most cases and one is reminded of the terrible waste of war.

JRNLS:

You're off to China now. What are you hoping to achieve there?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I hope to further build on what is already a good relationship. I believe that Australia and China have a lot in common for the future. We are obviously different societies and there is no point in pretending otherwise but providing the relationship is built on mutual self respect and on an understanding that different societies can nonetheless have complementary future goals. We have a good economic relationship with China. We have a lot to offer. Australia is a reliable supplier of raw materials. There are a lot of Australian companies that have established joint ventures in China.

20 senior men and women from Australian businesses are travelling with me so that's a token of the private sector's commitment to the Australian/Chinese relationship

JRNLST:

Prime Minister, on the human rights issue, how prepared are you to be pragmatic on the point of...

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I think one has to be sensible. It's never possible to say, and I won't, that human rights issues won't come up in a bilateral relationship. On the other hand my style and my view is that one should use the methods of quiet discussion and dialogue. One shouldn't be overly hectoring or moralising. On the other hand, Australia has values within its own society that are very important to us and we of course don't take any backward steps in relation to the defence of those values within our own society. But one has to in all of these things have a mixture of pragmatism and idealism. The important thing in a relationship of this nature is to focus on those things that we have in common rather than allowing those things which may be a point of discord to contaminate the relationship.

JRNLST:

Prime Minister, what is your Government going to do with the Russian aircraft with military equipment now stranded near Katherine?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the Defence Minister can probably talk to you in more detail about that, suffice it to say that after some discussion with the PNG Government and others, arrangements were made for the aircraft to fly to the Northern Territory and for the equipment to be unloaded. I think the details of what follows from that is really something that Mr McLachlan can fill you in on.

JRNLST:

Does it surprise you though, that this had happened? What was your reaction to hearing this great, big cargo load of...

PRIME MINISTER:

No it didn't surprise me that it ended up in the Northern Territory, no.

JRNLST:

Prime Minister, it's been reported that the Australian Government has decided to maintain Radio Australia as an English language speaking service only. What message does that send into the region as..

PRIME MINISTER:

I don't really want to comment on that. I have now been out of the country for a couple of days and it does relate very much to a domestic budget issue, although it does have overseas or international connotations. I think probably the preponderance of it is a domestic budget issue and therefore I won't talk about it.

JRNLSST:

What message in Beijing will you be sending regarding Australia's security treaty with the United States?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it's a security treaty borne out of an independent judgement by Australia that it is in Australia's best interest to have such a security alliance with the United States. It is not directed at China. It is not directed at anybody. It goes back a long way. The United States and Australia go back a very long way and no nation should see the security treaty between our country and the United States as being directed at it. We made an independent, hard headed assessment of our own interests as we should always do with these things and we decided that we would have a security treaty with the United States in 1951, only two years after the changes in China. There was no relationship between the two. It was forged in different circumstances and I will be making it clear as the issue arises to the Chinese Government that the alliance between us and the Americans is not directed at them, it is the result of a hard headed Australian assessment of Australian national interests.

JRNLSST:

Prime Minister, with this human rights issue, will it undermine your aspirations to play a regional role in Asia?

PRIME MINISTER:

No.

JRNLSST:

Prime Minister, what's your reaction to the appointment of a caretaker Prime Minister in Papua New Guinea?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well my view is that if the constitutional processes of Papua New Guinea are observed and maintained, which they appear to have been, that is a very positive step. It's not for me to give a running commentary on who should be in charge in Papua New Guinea. Rather, it is for me to speak of those things in which Australia has a

legitimate interest, such as the previous possibility of the introduction of mercenaries and also to observe in general terms how important it is that the democratic process be observed. Papua New Guinea is a young country. It's only had independence for 22 years and it's done very well to preserve democracy and I think all of us in Australia should have an understanding of the difficulties of preserving that system of government against a lot of regional pressures, a lot of fragmentary pressures so I think it's important that we respect what has been achieved and I will continue to monitor the situation and follow it extremely closely but it's a little unclear at the moment although it would appear as though a caretaker Prime Minister is emerging.

JRNLS:

Mr Howard, Prime Minister Goh especially wants Australia to play a bigger role in the security and defence of this region. How do you see your role in the region?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we already play a major role. We have a five power defence arrangement which of course involves Singapore and Malaysia and New Zealand and the United Kingdom. We of course have some close arrangements involving the training of the Singaporean defence personnel. We have a very big commitment to APEC which will, over time, provide greater economic security for the region and of course out of economic security grows political security. The two are always linked and political instability is often the product of economic denial and economic impoverishment so to the extent that we are participating with Singapore and other friendly nations in the area, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, we are building a far more secure and amicable part of the world and I am very well pleased with the relations between Australia and Singapore. We have a good open, confident, respectful relationship. Singaporean people are very welcome in Australia and I am very pleased that the Singaporean Prime Minister has said that he will visit Australia soon and I look forward to welcoming him and he will certainly be welcomed as the Prime Minister of a very close neighbour and a very friendly ally.

Thank you.

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