



SPEECH

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Edited Transcript of Joint Press Conference Held by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean and Australian Defence Minister Stephen Smith

22 Nov 2010



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean holding a Joint Press Conference with Australian Defence Minister Stephen Smith after their meeting in Canberra, on 22 Nov 2010.

During his working visit to Australia, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean held a Joint Press Conference with Australian Defence Minister Stephen Smith after their meeting in Canberra, on 22 Nov 2010. Some of the issues discussed include the close and long-standing bilateral defence ties between both countries, deployments to Afghanistan, and engagement with China.

Mr Smith: I'm very pleased this morning to welcome Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Teo Chee Hean to Australia. It is not his first visit to Australia but we are very pleased to see him here. The Deputy Prime Minister has been visiting for the last couple of days. His visit will end tomorrow. He has been at the Shoalwater Bay where Singapore conducts what we describe as unilateral training exercises in an agreement between Australia and Singapore. And that agreement was renewed a couple of years ago, for a further ten years and those exercises are a very important part of the close defence cooperation relationship between Australia and Singapore. Deputy Prime Minister also

visited the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Pearce in Perth where there is significant aviation training elements, as far as Singapore is concerned. I was in transit in Singapore over the weekend, coming back from Lisbon, and our High Commissioner in Singapore told me that a lot of TV media in Singapore over the weekend had carried footage of Deputy Prime Minister's visit to RAAF Base Pearce. That's because it is regarded a very significant engagement as far as Singapore is concerned. So we are very pleased with the bilateral relationship that we have with Singapore. It is reflected generally but also by that close defence cooperation arrangements. In addition to our bilateral relationship, we of course deal with each other regionally. Historically through the so-called Five Power Defence Arrangements, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, United Kingdom and New Zealand. Next year, we will see the 40th anniversary of the Five Power Defence Arrangements. Most recently in terms of our regional engagements, last month, Deputy Prime Minister and I were in Hanoi for the first ministerial level meeting of the Asean Defence Ministerial Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) which essentially is the Defence Ministers' Meeting in the expanded East-Asia format. We regard that as a very important development so far as our regional architecture is concerned. We were both very pleased to be in Hanoi and both very pleased to work closely in that format. In terms of our bilateral conversation this morning, we dealt with those issues that I have just referred to, the strength of our bilateral engagement, the strength of our engagement regionally. We have also worked closely in Uruzgan province in Afghanistan. So far with Afghanistan is concerned, I briefed the Deputy Prime Minister on the weekend meetings in Lisbon. In Afghanistan, in terms of cooperation between Australia and Singapore, we are very pleased with the work that Singapore has done on the medical and surgical front; it is a very important part of the Australia-Singapore cooperative relationship in Uruzgan province. I briefed Deputy Prime Minister on the Lisbon meeting, we were very pleased as you would have gathered from the Prime Minister's public remarks and my public remarks, very pleased from the outcomes of the conference, setting the scene as it does for the transition in accordance with the Afghanistan Government and the national community objectives, in transition by the end of 2014. I also took the opportunity of briefing the Deputy Prime Minister on the recent very successful AUSMIN talks that were conducted in Melbourne. Both Australia and Singapore are very pleased with the engagement by the Obama Administration of the United States in the Asia Pacific and very pleased to see the enhanced engagement through the expansion of the East Asia Summit in the form of the ADMM-Plus. I briefed the Deputy Prime Minister on those talks including the United States Force Posture Review. As Secretary Gates made clear, it is a matter before the US Administration, no final decision having been made, that he again made the point that we welcome our engagements by the United States and the welcomed enhanced engagements by the United States in our region in the Asia-Pacific.

Deputy Prime Minister, very good to see you again, we first met in Singapore a few years ago at the Australia-Singapore Joint Ministerial Commission which sees Australian and Singapore Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence Ministers meet. It is one of two countries which Australia meets in this format and we will be meeting in this format here next year. Very pleased to see you on that occasion and also very pleased to have seen you in Hanoi recently. Particularly pleased to see you here in Australia. The Deputy Prime Minister will after this press conference have a formal meeting with the leader of the Opposition, Mr Abbott, will meet with the Foreign Affairs Minister later today, and tomorrow he will meet

with the Prime Minister. Very pleased to see you here again and would be very pleased if you could make some opening remarks.

Mr Teo: First of all, I'd like to thank Mr Smith for his very warm welcome here in Canberra. I know that he has just returned from a very busy schedule in Lisbon and I'd like to thank him for taking the time to see me this morning. Australia and Singapore have a very long defence relationship that goes back many decades. We have worked together in our region in South East Asia where Australia has played a major role in the security and stability of the region. We are very grateful for the opportunities that Australia has provided for Singapore to train here in Australia. It has been a great help to us, our training in Shoalwater Bay as well as our flight training in RAAF Pearce in Perth. I have just visited both places and it is going very well, and we are very grateful for the cooperation. In the Shoalwater Bay Area, I also had the opportunity to meet the local Mayor and the Councillors in the Rockhampton Area and I was very happy to see that they also have extended their warm welcome to the Singapore soldiers who come to that area regularly each year. We also had the opportunity to discuss on the multilateral level, the things that will be happening. Next year is the 40th anniversary of the Five Power Defence Arrangements, which provided a very good platform for the five countries, the UK, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore to work together to build capacity. It's been a remarkable arrangement, very flexible, able to move forward and deal with new kinds of security challenges that we all face. On the ADMM-Plus, which both Minister Smith and I attended just a month and a half ago, we are very happy that this has occurred, it is an important part of the regional architecture and we are of course very happy and delighted that Australia is a part of this and will be able to play a concrete and substantial role there. In Afghanistan, we are very thankful to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for facilitating our deployments into Afghanistan and the work that we do with the ADF in Uruzgan, and now also in Kabul. In Uruzgan, as Minister Smith has said, we've deployed the medical teams there, and also we've deployed the weapon locating radar to provide early warning for the base in Uruzgan. And also, the UAV, the unmanned aerial vehicle group operating out of the base that provides surveillance. We've also started to send people into artillery training school in Kabul together with the ADF counterparts. And we hope to continue to that in the coming year. All in all, we have had very good discussion and I am thankful, grateful for Minister Smith's meeting this morning.

Mr Smith: Well, thanks very much Deputy Prime Minister. Now, we are happy to respond to your questions on the bilateral relationship and maybe later we can respond to other issues.

Question: You said that you spoke about enhanced engagements by the US as part of the Ausmin talks, in the context of that, did you also discuss China?

Mr Smith: Deputy Prime Minister and I had spoken about China, and our region in the context of the ADMM-Plus, but as you know, in the course of the AUSMIN conversation, Secretary Gates and Secretary Clinton, Foreign Minister Rudd and I spoke about the regional architecture, and also China in the region. And we spoke about those matters today. One particular area that we spoke about was in the maritime area. One of the things that Australia was very grateful to Singapore for in the defence ministers' plus meeting, was Singapore's support for Australia to chair, together with Malaysia, the expert working group on maritime

issues. Singapore is a maritime country; Australia is a maritime country and continent, so we both have very strong interests in continuation of international norms and law of the seas where maritime issues are concerned. We spoke about those matters. On the Force Posture Review, generally, it is of course the case that no final decisions have been made by the United States. Secretary Gates made clear the Force Posture Review has not been finalised by defence or by him, let alone the administration. On China generally, Australia's view is well-known. We are positive and optimistic that China will emerge as the Chinese say into a harmonious environment, as a responsible stakeholder. The rise of any new power always brings with it issues that need to be addressed by the region and the globe. But we've been very pleased with the enhanced defence cooperation discussions and arrangements we've had with China in recent times. The visit here of General Guo, the Vice-Chairman of the Military Commission and also the recent naval exercise we effected with China. Deputy Prime Minister, you might want to add to those remarks.

Mr Teo: Singapore's view on engagement with China, particularly in the military area is that we should encourage them to engage more with countries in the region and other countries in the world because that will help them to understand the context in which they will be operating in the future, create better understanding and more transparency on the part of all parties. Like Australia, Singapore had also just begun to conduct exercises with China and we believe that this will also contribute to this process of mutual understanding and creating more trust and confidence amongst the forces in the Asia-Pacific.

Question: Mr Smith, the military support you envisaged in providing in Afghanistan. How is that going?

Mr Smith: Well as the Prime Minister and I have both made clear we believe we are on track in Uruzgan to meet our training and mentoring commitment over the next two to four years, that's within the 2014 objective set by the Afghanistan Government and also by the international community. As I made clear, and as the Prime Minister has made clear, and as the Lisbon Communique makes clear when it refers to using the phrase investing the proceeds of transition, we don't see that as being the end of our involvement or engagements. Indeed one of the strengths of the Lisbon Communique was a very strong message by the international community that once the training has been effected, province by province, district by district, Afghanistan security authorities are in a position to take lead responsibility for security matters, there will still be a role for the international community. In our case, as I've said publicly previously, it might be in an overwatch role, it might be some ongoing requirement for special services, it will certainly be a role by Australia and the international community in the development assistance capacity building area. But we need to take these issues step by step so we don't have a concluded view. Indeed, the necessary discussions are some time away. We want to first effect our objective, our mission in Uruzgan, which is to train the Afghan National Army 4th Battalion. From time to time, we do get requests either from NATO, or from ISAF to look at providing special or niche assistance and as the Deputy Prime Minister has indicated, one of the things we have done recently is to within our 1500 and 50 on average compliment to agree to the request to put about twenty trainers into the artillery school and we will be joined in the new year by a range of artillery trainers from Singapore as well. We have also in a separate context been asked to see if we are able to

provide some additional training capacity which we continue to look at and we have also, in the course of the weekend agreed that we can provide a small number of Australian personnel for what is prescribed as the Afghanistan field training centre, which is essentially their advanced military training school. From time to time, we get requests from what I describe as niche capability or training and where we can, we respond to those favorably, The artillery training is the most recent basic example of that.

Mr Smith: Have we finished with Australian and Singapore matters yet? Ok.

Question: Are you holding any talk about the proposed merger of the Singaporean stock exchange and the ASX while you are in Australia?

Mr Teo: I have no plans to hold any talks on this matter but perhaps we could take one step back. The whole Asia Pacific region is becoming more integrated. We talked about defence today, but certainly in the economic area, the whole Asia-Pacific is becoming more integrated. And I think there will be interest among people all over the Asia Pacific and in other parts of the world, to find ways in which they the capital markets, the investment markets can also be more integrated. So I think that whatever opportunities there are should be explored, but of course, this is a matter that regulatory agencies have to go through. They also have to go through a process in Australia and we will fully respect that process.

Question: Deputy Prime Minister, on that issue, would the Singaporean Government be considering relinquishing and selling off its holding in the Singapore Stock Exchange Institution, so that it would enable the merger to go ahead?

The question hasn't risen but perhaps I should also make a point about that. The holding of the Singapore Government, the so-called holding of the Singapore Government, actually arose out of the demutualization of the Singapore Stock Exchange. Well, that holding is held entirely for the benefit of the financial industry development fund. It is entirely for that purpose. So, the holding also is not voted at all. So there is no such issue of control by the Singapore Government, in the Singapore Stock Exchange.

Mr Smith: Thanks very much.

Mr Teo: Thank you very much.