SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE DINNER IN HONOUR OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA, THE RIGHT HONOURABLE WILLIAM MCMAHON AT THE ISTANA ON FRIDAY, 9 JUNE 1972

Mr. Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, Gentlemen,

My colleagues and I extend you a warm welcome on this your first visit to Singapore since you became Prime Minister. You are no stranger to us, and we recall with pleasure your presence here during the 1971 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

In the 18 months since then, there have been momentous political changes in the world. President Nixon's visits to Peking in February, and to Moscow in May, made most countries re-examine their positions, to assess what changes the future will now have in store for them. The easy assumptions of cold war politics are no longer valid. But it does not necessarily follow that there will be any immediate or precipitate change in the political and security climate which has so far kept Southeast Asia, outside of Indo-China, an area of relative tranquility.

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Change there must be. For my own part, I would prefer the dust stirred up by all these dramatic events to settle, before coming to firm conclusions on which to base any changes in policies. Certainly it is not necessary to start changing our friends, though nothing is lost by making new friends of old adversaries of cold war days.

The recent series of accords between America and Russia reinforces the trend towards the acceptance by the super powers of their desire and now their declared policy to avoid confrontation against each other. They have accepted the division in Europe, since the Second World War, as a fact of life for the foreseeable future. By the recent series of agreements between the West Germans and the Russians, West Germans and the Poles, the agreements in Moscow and the Berlin Four Power agreement, the Europeans have substantially cut down the dangers of conflict in Europe itself.

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Unfortunately, there have been no such accords over Asia. One probable result of President Nixon's earlier discussions in Peking is to lessen the likelihood of a collision between America and China. There are other major powers with long term interests in Asia, and in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. They were not present at the Peking discussions. Further, they have not yet reconciled their different views of the shape of things to come. America, China,

Japan and Russia may take some time to agree what are the limits of their respective capacities to influence events in the different countries of Asia. Nor is it clear how much naval power can add to their economic and political influence on the littoral states of Asia adjoining the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and on the island nations lying off the Asian Continent.

Meanwhile, the war in Indo-China grinds on. We must hope there can be a negotiated settlement that will enable American forces to withdraw, and not in disgrace, that the South Vietnam these forces leave behind can be allowed to sort their future out by themselves without external interference by force. If this could happen, then a confident Thailand will act as a buffer for Malaysia and Singapore. Then we can have more time to adjust ourselves to the changing forces acting on Asia, the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Your visit, Mr. Prime Minister, comes at a time when this whole region is preparing to adjust to the altered situations consequent upon the dramatic changes in policy of the great powers. It is still not altogether certain what these changes will be. There is nothing alarming about uncertainty, provided the future is not placed in jeopardy by hasty reaction.

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Amidst all these uncertainties, it was a source of satisfaction that we were able to maintain steady co-operation between Australia and Singapore. They contributed to the climate of confidence which helped us ride through some difficult times in the last few years. Such progress as we have made, despite the adverse turn of events in 1965 and 1968, was due, in part, to the quiet understanding and support of our friends, of which Australia was one. And the defence arrangements of the Commonwealth Five have provided continuing stability to an area important to us, the people who live in it, and perhaps to you, in Australasia. And there is no reason why we should not make further progress in regional co-operation, to consolidate the present stability of the region. With a little luck, Southeast Asia should be able to withstand drastic changes in the Indo-Chinese situation. In these matters, we have common interests.

And now, Your Excellencies, gentlemen, I ask you to rise and drink a toast to the health of Her Majesty the Queen.

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