

U THANT'S JUDGMENT ON VIET NAM

Comment by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

While U Thant, speaking at his first full-dress press conference since his re-appointment, did so with the authority of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, his comments, challenging the contention that Viet Nam is strategically vital to Western interests and security are those which derive from his personal judgment. There will be many in positions of authority who do not share this judgment and this certainly includes my own Government. We consider that the outcome in Viet Nam is vital to the security of the countries of South-East Asia and the Pacific and indeed of Asia generally.

We are convinced that other free countries of this region also believe this. I would include in this list Korea, the Republic of China, Thailand, the Republic of Viet Nam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia. It is my own belief that this view is also widely held in Japan, India and Indonesia.

The issue in Viet Nam is a basic factor affecting the prospects for peace, prosperity and progress and true national independence in this area of the world. It has been justly asserted that peace and prosperity are each indivisible. An issue which affects directly or indirectly the well-being of so many of the world's people must be vital in any realistic sense to the western world.

If communist expansion in South-East Asia had been allowed to proceed unchecked, I personally question whether the overthrow of communism in Indonesia would have occurred. With much of Asia under communist control and the sub-continent of India under threat, could the western world have remained inactive? But for massive and effective military and civil assistance from friendly countries outside the region, the countries of South-East Asia would either have to carry a crippling defence burden, frustrating to their plans of development and social improvement, or live under constant threat of external danger or internal subversion and terrorism. The free countries of this region want the western world to know that we regard the contribution made in particular by the United States to the security and progress of this area as fundamental to our prospects of security and national growth.

It is our judgment that in accepting these burdens, the United States is also performing a service vital to the prosperity, security and well-being of the entire free world.

CANBERRA,
12th January, 1966