

FOR PRESS:



PM. No. 85/1967

REVIEW OF STRATEGY IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr Harold Holt

The Cabinet Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence today continued its comprehensive review of Australia's future policy and strategic role in South-East Asia.

The main elements of the review are the implications for Australian defence policy of the British plans for withdrawal from East of Suez and the Australian contribution in Viet Nam.

Today's discussions were of a preliminary nature and did not involve the taking of any specific decisions. The implications of the British decision require a fundamental reappraisal of our role in South-East Asia. They are extremely complex and will require considerable time to work out. As well as studying these for ourselves, we intend to talk to other governments about them.

There are certain short-term aspects arising from Britain's plans. These are mainly of a logistic or other technical nature, and have already been under discussion at the Service level. But the main implications are longer term.

A number of more immediate matters were also reviewed today, including the state of the Vietnam war, which remains the most immediate and urgent defence preoccupation of the Government. The meeting considered the assessments given by the American envoys, Mr Clark Clifford and General Taylor.

Present at today's meeting were members of the Cabinet's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Service Ministers and the Defence Committee. Other meetings will be held as necessary.

CANBERRA,
25th August, 1967.

BACKGROUND NOTE: The Defence Committee referred to in the last paragraph (in addition to the Cabinet Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee), comprises the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the three Service chiefs, and the Secretaries of the Prime Minister's, External Affairs and Defence Departments, and the Treasury.