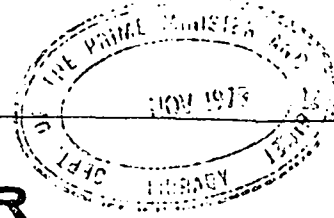




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PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS18 FEBRUARY, 1979

INDO-CHINA CONFLICT

Cabinet met today in special session to receive a report and briefing from the Defence Committee on events in Indo China. The Defence Committee met earlier today to consider the matter.

The Australian Government views with real concern the incursion of Chinese armed forces into Vietnam. This situation has arisen out of the earlier Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, and has developed to the stage where armed conflict has now erupted between China and Vietnam. I recall that on the 13th February, my colleague the Foreign Minister, Mr. Peacock, drew attention to the fact that some time ago the Government had identified this deteriorating and potentially dangerous situation. As a result the Government has been in close touch with other Governments which might be able to bring influence to bear on the situation.

The most recent development in Indo China adds to our earlier concern and to that of the world community.

The Australian Government calls on Vietnam to withdraw its forces from Kampuchea and on China to withdraw its forces from Vietnam.

The Australian Government has already asked the USSR, both in Moscow and through its Ambassador in Canberra, to use its special relationship with Vietnam to bring about a cease fire and withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea.

The Government cannot accept the use of force for the settlement of disputes, whatever their cause. The Government has noted the approaches in the past few days to the United Nations Security Council by both the Chinese and Vietnamese Governments - the one for the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea and the other for the withdrawal of Chinese forces from Vietnam. It has also noted that both sides have said they are ready to enter into negotiations for a peaceful settlement. It is our earnest hope that these opportunities to bring a halt to the fighting and to settle the matter peacefully will not be lost.

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Should the question come before the Security Council again, Australia, although not a member of the Council, would seek to participate actively in its deliberations.

The maintenance of peace and stability in the region is of great and fundamental importance to Australia. Our concerns are widely shared and we are continuing to keep in close touch with other Governments. In particular, the Government is expressing its serious concern to the parties most directly involved, and is calling again upon them to seek an immediate halt to the conflict.

The Government will continue to keep this matter under close review as the situation evolves in the coming days.

I also propose to ask the Office of National Assessment to give a full briefing on the situation to the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate.

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