

SOUTH-EAST ASIASTATEMENT BY THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

The Acting Prime Minister, Mr. John McEwen, announced in Canberra tonight that the Cabinet had made a wide-ranging review of current developments in Malaysia and South Vietnam with particular reference to Australian obligations in the South-East Asian area.

Mr. McEwen said that Ministers had over recent weeks been giving constant attention to information flowing to them on South Vietnam and on both the military and diplomatic aspects of Indonesia's confrontation with Malaysia, including the latest information on the views of the Malaysian and British Governments about the continuing threats from Indonesia and the steps being taken to meet them.

The Minister for Defence, Senator Paltridge, during his visit to South-East Asia and the United States, would personally assess the position at first hand and would report back to the Australian Government. The Minister's report would cover possible future courses of action having regard to Australia's over-all commitments to the security of the area.

"The recent Indonesian decision to withdraw from the United Nations and new Indonesian military activities in support of their policy of 'confrontation' have heightened tension between Indonesia and Malaysia," Mr. McEwen said. "The latest Indonesian military activities included noticeable building-up of Indonesian forces on the Borneo border. These developments had led to the recent deployment of additional British and Malaysian forces."

Mr. McEwen expressed disappointment that Indonesia is persisting in this policy of military 'confrontation'. The Australian Government continued to hope for changes in Indonesian policy which would allow peace, security and prosperity to be established in the area. "However, the Government is quite clear as to its obligations to Malaysia, a free and independent nation and a fellow member of the Commonwealth, and is firm in respect of its responsibilities," the Acting Prime Minister said.

On Vietnam, Cabinet had before it reports from its diplomatic representatives and the views of the American Government. "The Australian Government is concerned that the South Vietnamese leaders resolve their domestic differences in the overriding interests of the security of South Vietnam and indeed South-East Asia," Mr. McEwen said.

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Ministers expressed appreciation on behalf of the Australian people of the efforts of the United States Government to assist the people of South Vietnam to build a free and stable society and to defend themselves against Communist aggression. This was in keeping with the resolution of the United States Congress of 6th August which included the statement that "The United States regards as vital to its national interests and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in South-East Asia".

Mr. McEwen said the Australian Government had obligations under SEATO to South Vietnam. Australia has provided military and civil assistance to South Vietnam, including a training team of Army instructors, and a detachment of the R.A.A.F. It is in close consultation with the Vietnamese and U.S. Governments about further assistance.

Canberra,
18th January, 1965.