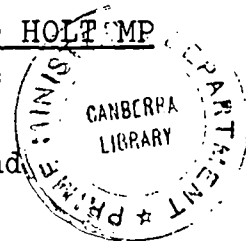


FORMAL OPENING OF SEATO CONFERENCE BY THE RT HON HAROLD HOLT MP  
PRIME MINISTER OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
27TH JUNE, 1966



Mr. Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, Ladies and  
Gentlemen:

It is an honour for me to be asked to open the 1966 SEATO Conference. I extend a warm welcome to you all on behalf of the Australian Government and people. This welcome embraces not only the Foreign Ministers and Delegations of countries with which we enjoy close and constructive relations both in SEATO and outside of it, but also the distinguished Secretary-General, General Vargas, and staff of the Organisation.

Australia has become more conscious in recent times that, through geography, trade and circumstance, we are increasingly part of the Asian scene. Australia has good cause to value the existence of SEATO. It has been a solid pillar of security for us. We have honoured our own commitments to our colleagues of the Organisation, and we are grateful for the support given to SEATO's purposes by those members of the Organisation who have made much more massive contributions.

There has been much talk of a "Domino Theory" in Asia. This propounds the view that if one country of South East Asia succumbs to Communist aggression, the others will topple in turn. We can claim, from its achievements, that SEATO has successfully applied the Domino Theory in reverse. We, and others of the area, have lived more securely: we have been able to plan more confidently for an expanding future. We have done so encouraged by the fact that SEATO provides a shield of protection and a means of constructive collaboration.

The Asian countries of SEATO have been able to build their defences and strengthen their economies. The year under review provides further heartening proof to that supplied in other recent years that those countries of Asia under Communist threat can - with outside help supplementing their own efforts - meet that challenge and proceed to prosperous economic growth.

We can point to countries of the region, some of them members of this Organisation, which have recorded notable gains of economic and social progress and are now advancing to new levels of achievement in an environment of stability. To those of us who live in the area there is inspiration in the visible evidences of improvement and progress. Some countries that I have visited recently seem transformed against my recollections of them in earlier years.

What is also heartening has been the emergence of positive and constructive attitudes to international instrumentalities for economic co-operation. Although National sovereignty has only been attained by some within the last twenty years, they display a commendable readiness to work with others and create the institutions for co-operation. The newly-constituted Asian and Pacific Council and the Asian Development Bank are welcome examples.

We have welcomed also the generous undertaking by the United States to make a Billion Dollar contribution towards economic development in South East Asia. Developments such as these reflect a spirit of hope more widely felt throughout the region.

Even in the heat of Military contest in South Vietnam, there are practical programmes being evolved for better times ahead.

There is the ferment of change in Asia to-day. The restlessness and turbulence give rise to the more dramatic episodes which are widely publicised. But these are only aspects of dynamic forces, some of them much more favourable, shaping dramatic movements in human affairs affecting the whole world.

SEATO has its critics, and, of course, it has its imperfections, but the fact is that since its formation, it has held Communism at bay. From South Vietnam, one of the SEATO Protocol States, where the thrust of aggression has been fiercest, we are now receiving much more hopeful reports. But while we have strengthened the foundations of our security, the need for SEATO is as strong as ever.

No region to-day contains greater dangers for world peace and security than Asia. South East Asia has been singled out by the Communists as a critical area of challenge. They believe that if their technique of so-called "Wars of National Liberation" can succeed in South Vietnam, it can be employed with similar success in many other countries.

Why did the SEATO Treaty come into existence? It was designed to enable its member countries to combine together to counter the Communist threat in Asia. It was built on the reality that, left to themselves, the countries of the area would fall to Communist pressures. It recognises that these pressures can take many forms. They vary in intensity: they require a variety of responses.

Thanks to SEATO, the Governments of member countries can expect assistance not only when declared conventional Military attack occurs across their frontiers, but they can also look for assistance when their authority and administration are under assault from those familiar Communist instruments - subversion and Guerilla warfare.

Communist aggression in South East Asia follows what has become a clear pattern. It usually begins covertly. There is long underground preparation. This includes political indoctrination, the training of cadres and the build-up of secret sources of supply. The initial threats are indirect. They are concealed and they mature slowly.

The response made by the SEATO Allies must, therefore, be carefully devised. There must be armed strength, of course, but we cannot win an enduring victory by military means alone. There is the battle to be won for the people's support, and to win this there must be political, social, administrative and economic measures acceptable to them.

On my recent visit to South-East Asia, it was of special interest to me to discover how earnestly the positive constructive tasks directed to a better way of life in the community were being promoted. Whether in South Vietnam, Malaysia or Thailand, I found that the Government concerned had turned its attention to this need for a positive, constructive programme of civic action and rural development. It is to be found to a growing extent among the programmes of the military forces. Our own Australian forces, wherever situated, gave a high priority to their activities in this field. No doubt we have a long way to go, but the processes are under way.

A notable feature of SEATO is that each member country retains its freedom of action about how best it can make a contribution. This flexibility is important because the problems we face are neither simple nor clear-cut.

Successive Communist challenges in Asia have failed. They have been met by the military strength of the government under attack. It has been supported by the military forces, logistical backing and economic strength of its partners, and of other friendly forces also.

The major challenge of Communism in Asia today is directed to South Vietnam. But it has met growing and determined strength of resistance.

SEATO is not merely an instrument for military security. Its purposes include the advancement of all in the region it serves. It is well constituted to help by practical assistance and friendly guidance.

SEATO has enabled us to exercise strength through combination. This has greatly helped the smaller powers to devote more of their resources to economic growth.

Australia, in common with some other members of the Organisation, has major problems of development, as well as those of defence. Left to ourselves, we would be overburdened and crippled with security costs. The existence of SEATO and other security arrangements ensures that members most directly threatened, and who are the least able to afford large military establishments, will neither perish nor impoverish themselves.

The wisdom, ability and experience assembled here should enable this conference to advance most usefully the purposes of the Organisation.

The ultimate answer to Communism must be found in the minds of the people. They must feel convinced that life has meaning, promise and better standards for them. We who oppose Communism must be more than anti-Communist.

We must demonstrate the false attractions of Communist ideology and expose its techniques of human manipulation. But we must stand together for the satisfaction of decent human aspirations and the precious enjoyment of individual liberty.

Your SEATO labours of today will do much to shape the Asia of tomorrow. I wish you fruitful and successful meetings.

I declare the conference open: