

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER

MR HAROLD HOLT IN NEW YORK

1ST SEPTEMBER, 1966

President de Gaulle's Statement on Viet Nam

President De Gaulle is reported as saying in Phnom Penh, Cambodia that the United States must agree to a timetable for the withdrawal of its forces from Vietnam before a negotiated settlement of the war is possible.

The disturbing feature of this statement is that the French President seems to demand that firm commitments be made for the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam before even the opening of negotiations.

It seems that President de Gaulle ignores the basic cause of the fighting in South Vietnam, which is the aggression both indirect through infiltration and subversion and direct through the movement of regular armed forces by the regime in North Vietnam against its neighbour, South Vietnam.

Surely any question about the withdrawal of American and Allied forces should take place within the context of negotiations for a settlement and must be balanced by guaranteed undertakings that the people of South Vietnam would no longer be subjected to the aggression from which they are suffering.

Those of us, like the United States and Australia, who are supporting South Vietnam have many times appealed for discussions which would indicate willingness on the other side to move towards a settlement on just terms based on the Geneva Agreements of 1954.

The free countries of South East Asia have felt a strengthened security and made noticeable progress behind the shield provided by the American presence in South Vietnam.

Speaking as the representative of a country situated close to South East Asia, and with recent, first hand knowledge of conditions there, I must say that an unconditional withdrawal of American forces would cause grave concern among the people of South East Asia.

It is not a question, as President de Gaulle is reported as saying, of the peoples of Asia submitted to the law of foreigners from over the Pacific.

The people of South East Asia understand and welcome the support of the United States and others in helping them to establish the conditions under which they can really decide their future for themselves, free from fear of aggression.

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