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STATEMENT BY THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER
MR. JOHN McEWEN

The Acting Prime Minister, Mr. McEwen, said that he had called a Cabinet meeting in view of developments in the Middle East, which Australia, in common with all other likeminded countries, viewed with deep and growing concern.

Mr. McEwen said that, in view of the developing tensions, he had thought it essential that Cabinet Ministers should not only be kept informed of all that was known of the situation but should have an opportunity to consult.

Mr. McEwen said that he had been keeping in close touch with the Prime Minister, who has himself had the advantage of discussing this with President Johnson and Secretary of State Rusk. Mr. Holt also had an early opportunity of communication with Mr. Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister.

Mr. McEwen said that he was sure it would be expected of the Australian Government that it should join with others in every attempt to avoid tensions in the Middle East developing into conflict between the parties confronting each other there.

Mr. McEwen said that great principles affecting the freedom of passage over mercantile sea lanes were at issue, and this was of critical importance to great international trading nations.

Also involved was the right of independent member states of the United Nations to a secure, peaceful existence.

He said that, on the question of the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba, authoritative statements by the Minister for External Affairs have already been made representing the view strongly held by the Australian Government that the Straits of Tiran must be regarded as an international waterway through which vessels of all nations have a right of passage.

CANBERRA,
2ND JUNE, 1967.