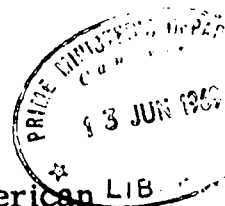


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REDUCTION IN U.S. FORCES IN VIETNAM

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton



It is necessary to draw a distinction between American force reductions made possible by an increase in size and fighting capacity of the South Vietnamese forces, and force reductions by both sides as a result of agreement with the North Vietnamese. We are now dealing only with the first of these.

The United States decision to withdraw twenty-five thousand of the half million men they have in Vietnam was foreshadowed as a possibility in my report to the House of Representatives on 15 May this year.

I then pointed out that if this happened it should be interpreted as a sign of strength because it would mean that the South Vietnamese had so strengthened their own forces that they could remove from the United States some of the heavy burden which that country has borne.

I pointed out also that it would be a tragic mistake for North Vietnam, or anyone else, to interpret such a move as a prelude to a general withdrawal or any retreat by the United States from their determination to persevere until the attainment of the objective of the right of self-determination by the people of South Vietnam. I believe both these observations remain true.

We must continue to hope for a peaceful settlement along the lines suggested by President Nixon's eight-point plan, and an opportunity for the South Vietnamese people freely to determine the kind of Government they want.

It may be urged that Australia should at once also reduce its forces.

I believe that would be a wrong thing to do. For one thing the Americans have greatly increased their forces since our contingent was committed and for another it would be a shabby thing, the Americans having built up the South Vietnamese forces to take some of the burden now borne by half a million Americans, for us to withdraw our own forces and to that degree impose a further burden - or at least to that degree prevent a lessening of the burden borne by the United States.

CANBERRA
9 June 1969