

TALK TO THE NATION
REDUCTION OF FORCES IN VIETNAM
STATEMENT ON RADIO AND TELEVISION BY THE PRIME
MINISTER, MR JOHN GORTON

16 DECEMBER 1969

Tonight I want to talk to you quite briefly on possible future developments in Vietnam.

In my Policy Speech before the last election, I had this to say to the Australian people -

"Should there be developments (in Vietnam) which result in plans for continuing reduction of United States Forces over a period, we would expect to be phased in to that programme."

Since I spoke, developments have taken place, and you have today heard the announcement by the President of the United States that a further 50,000 troops are to be withdrawn over the next few months.

What has happened is that the President has judged that there has been more improvement in the military situation than he previously anticipated, and that the programme of training and arming Vietnamese troops to take over more and more combat duties has been, and is being, successful.

It has therefore been possible for United States Forces to be reduced without endangering the objectives for which they, and we, entered the Vietnam war.

The objectives remain. They are the objectives of attaining a just peace - and of enabling the people of South Vietnam to live under a Government chosen freely by them, and chosen without the threat of terrorism or armed aggression from abroad.

I am sure the President of the United States will never abandon these objectives - and neither will we.

But it appears the growing strength and confidence of South Vietnamese Forces will enable them to play a greater and greater part in attaining those objectives. If this proves to be true, it will lead to that continuing reduction of United States Forces of which I spoke in my Policy Speech.

Therefore I have spoken directly with the President of the United States, in accordance with arrangements made on my last visit, and we were in complete accord in agreeing in principle that should the future situation permit a further substantial withdrawal of troops, then some Australian troops should be included in the numbers scheduled for such reduction. Such agreement in principle is all that has been reached, or all that can at present be reached.

Implementation of this arrangement can only occur in the light of future military developments in Vietnam and after full consultation and agreement with the South Vietnamese Government and New Zealand.

I expect that there will be much baseless speculation on these matters, and indeed there already has been. So I wish to make it clear :

That there is no firm timetable for further withdrawal of United States troops of which I know;

That there is no timetable fixed covering at what stage any Australian reductions would be phased in to the next United States withdrawal;

That there is no arrangement made as to how great any Australian reductions, which may take place in the future, will be.

These are all matters for the future and dependent on future developments and those future developments cannot now be accurately forecast. But these things are sure :-

- . We will not unilaterally withdraw any of our forces
- . We will not abandon the objectives for which we entered the Vietnam war
- . We will participate in the next reduction of forces at some stage, when it comes. But the extent and timing of that participation remains to be settled in discussions between all the Governments concerned; and
- . We will not participate in any reductions of our own forces which in any way endanger those of our forces which remain.

I am sure we will all be happy when the Vietnam war has reached a successful conclusion. I believe we should be happy that the South Vietnamese themselves are able to take over more and more of the burden of the day. We will remain to attain the objectives which we started out to reach. But we are glad we are able to make reductions without endangering those objectives.

Goodnight.
