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FURTHER VIETNAM WITHDRAWALS

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. William McMahon

The Prime Minister, Mr. McMahon said in Brisbane this afternoon that President Nixon's statement at mid-day clearly indicated the growing capacity of the Republic of Vietnam to provide its own defence.

It was this growing capability and the success of the total Vietnamisation programme which had enabled President Nixon to announce the continuing withdrawals of United States' military personnel.

Mr. McMahon said that this same progress by the people, Government and armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam had made it possible for him to announce on 30 March, the withdrawal of 1,000 Australian servicemen from Vietnam beginning next month.

Mr. McMahon said that the President had sent him advance notice of the decisions. They would be taken into account by the Australian Government in keeping continually under review the problem of future arrangements about Australian forces in Vietnam.

Mr. McMahon said that the people and Government of Vietnam deserved praise for all they had done to make Mr. Nixon's announcement possible.

But it must be remembered that when Mr. Nixon had taken office he had been under enormous domestic pressure, as he still is, to end United States' involvement in the War by an immediate withdrawal of United States forces. Instead, President Nixon had taken the courageous and difficult course of reducing the United States' commitment only as the increasing capability of the South Vietnamese Government and forces made it possible to do so, without conceding to the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong all that had been so far achieved.

The President recognised that, the War would not necessarily end simply because United States' forces were being reduced. He had taken the view that the United States' responsibility extended not only to the citizens of his own country, but also to the people of the Republic of Vietnam who had suffered so much and who had called upon the United States for assistance against North Vietnamese aggression.

The Prime Minister warmly endorsed Mr. Nixon's call for an end to the barbaric use by the enemy of prisoners of war as pawns in negotiation.

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CANBERRA  
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