

(SUNDAY 13 APRIL 1975)INDO-CHINA

THE TRAGEDY OF INDO-CHINA WHICH HAS BEEN GOING ON NOW FOR 30 YEARS ONCE AGAIN DOMINATES THE HEADLINES, OUR TELEVISION SCREENS AND THE DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT. FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTERS HAVE HAD TO REPORT TO PARLIAMENT ABOUT AUSTRALIAN ACTIONS IN VIETNAM. I AM THE FIFTH AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER TO DO SO. LAST WEEK, HOWEVER, THERE WAS A DIFFERENCE IN MY POSITION FROM THAT OF MY FOUR PREDECESSORS. THE AUSTRALIAN ACTIONS I HAD TO TALK ABOUT, INCLUDING ACTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMED SERVICES, WERE SOLELY HUMANITARIAN AND HAD TO DO WITH EFFORTS TO END THE FIGHTING, TO REDUCE SUFFERING. IT IS A VERY REGRETTABLE THING THAT THE 30 YEARS OF SUFFERING BY THE PEOPLE OF INDO-CHINA SHOULD STILL BE SEEN BY SOME AS A MEANS OF EXTRACTING POLITICAL CAPITAL AND POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. FOR INSTANCE, THERE HAS BEEN A PRETTY PATHETIC ATTEMPT TO CRITICISE AUSTRALIA'S ROLE IN EVACUATION EFFORTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM. THE BEST ANSWER TO OUR CRITICS HAS COME FROM OUR AMERICAN FRIENDS. THE UNITED STATES COMMANDER IN CHIEF IN THE PACIFIC AREA, ADMIRAL NOEL GAYLER, SENT ME THIS MESSAGE ON 2 APRIL:

"PLEASE ACCEPT MY WARM APPRECIATION AND DEEP ADMIRATION FOR YOUR HELP TO EVACUATE THE MANY DESPERATE REFUGEES FROM DANANG. AUSTRALIA CAN TAKE GREAT PRIDE IN THE RAPID DECISION TO MEET AN ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL HUMANITARIAN REQUIREMENT. WARMEST RESPECT. (SIGNED) ADMIRAL NOEL GAYLER, UNITED STATES COMMANDER IN CHIEF PACIFIC."

AND THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR, MR MARSHALL GREEN, LAST WEEK PERSONALLY THANKED US FOR THE "GREAT SHOW" PERFORMED BY AUSTRALIAN PERSONNEL IN HUMANITARIAN WORK IN VIETNAM X

A MORE SERIOUS EFFORT TO USE THE VIETNAM TRAGEDY AS A POLITICAL FOOTBALL COMES WITH THE ATTEMPT AT SOWING SEEDS OF NEW FEAR AND NEW DIVISIONS IN THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY X
WHATEVER ONE MAY THINK ABOUT THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM, WHATEVER ONE'S VIEW OF ITS ORIGINS AND THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN THE WAR, THE FACT IS THAT VIETNAM HAS NEVER BEEN A QUESTION AFFECTING THE BASIC SECURITY OF EITHER AUSTRALIA OR THE UNITED STATES X
AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY AND LONG TERM INTERESTS ARE NOT AFFECTED BY THE POLITICAL COLOUR OF THE RULERS IN SAIGON X

IT WAS THAT FALSE VIEW WHICH MISLED THE UNITED STATES AND SUBSEQUENTLY AUSTRALIA, INTO ITS INDO-CHINA INTERVENTION. IN THOSE YEARS WE HEARD THE STORY THAT WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN VIETNAM WAS PART OF CHINA'S ALLEGED DOWNWARD THRUST BETWEEN THE PACIFIC AND THE INDIAN OCEAN. I DON'T THINK ANYBODY WOULD AGREE WITH THAT VIEW TODAY. CERTAINLY IN LAST WEEK'S DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT NOBODY DARED TO REVIVE IT. IN FACT, THE SUPPORT GIVEN TO NORTH VIETNAM HAS COME NOT SO MUCH FROM CHINA BUT FROM THE SOVIET UNION. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MISTAKE TO REGARD EVERY COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT AS PART OF A MONOLITHIC BLOC ACTING IN UNISON, SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE. THE WORLD IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS THAT, IT NEVER HAS BEEN. THESE OVER-SIMPLIFIED VIEWS - THE DOWNWARD THRUST, THE DOMINO THEORY - HAVE LONG BEEN DISCREDITED. THE PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE HAS RIGHTLY DISMISSED THE DOMINO THEORY AS "OLD HASH". WE DON'T HELP AUSTRALIA'S CAUSE, WE DON'T MAKE AUSTRALIA STRONG OR SECURE BY RETURNING TO OLD FALSEHOODS AND OLD MISLEADING MYTHS. OUR REAL INTERESTS AND OUR REAL STRENGTH LIE IN A CALM EXAMINATION OF THE REAL SITUATION.

OUR STRENGTH, OUR SECURITY REST ON FACTORS AND RELATIONSHIPS ULTIMATELY UNCHANGED BY EVENTS IN INDO-CHINA~~X~~ THE REALLY IMPORTANT RELATIONS ARE THOSE WHICH HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SINCE DECEMBER 1972 - OUR RELATIONS WITH OUR CLOSEST AND LARGEST NEIGHBOUR INDONESIA, OUR RELATIONS WITH OUR GREATEST TRADING PARTNER JAPAN, OUR RELATIONS WITH CHINA, OUR ACTIVE SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ASEAN MEMBERS, OUR EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT THE INDIAN OCEAN DOES NOT BECOME THE NEXT AREA OF CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE SUPER-POWERS~~X~~ ABOVE ALL, AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY, AS WITH THE PEACE OF THE WORLD, RESTS ULTIMATELY UPON MAKING THE DETENTE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION A SUCCESS AND WITH ASSOCIATING CHINA IN A WIDER DETENTE~~X~~ THESE ARE THE GREAT RELATIONSHIPS AND THE GREAT FACTORS WHICH DETERMINE THE SECURITY OF AUSTRALIA~~X~~ THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN UNREMITTING IN ITS EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THOSE RELATIONSHIPS~~X~~ OUR SUCCESS IN DOING SO IS THE REAL GUARANTEE OF AUSTRALIA'S LONG-TERM SECURITY~~X~~

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