



AUSTRALIA'S MILITARY COMMITMENT TO VIETNAM

This Paper, which the Government has had prepared on the Australian involvement in Vietnam, is tabled in accordance with the Prime Minister's statement in the House of Representatives on Tuesday, 13 May, 1975.

AUSTRALIA'S MILITARY COMMITMENT TO SOUTH VIETNAM

This paper has been prepared in accordance with a direction from the Prime Minister of Australia that an objective appraisal should be made of Australia's military involvement in South Vietnam.

The decision in April 1965 to send a battalion for active service in South Vietnam was the crucial issue in Australia's commitment. However, that decision can only be interpreted in the light of the development of Australian policy in the four preceding years, and the significance of the decision only appears in the two years following the decision when further forces were committed. This paper is therefore presented in three parts:

Part 1 Australia - Vietnam 1961-64

Part 2 Australia - Vietnam 1965

Part 3 Australia - Vietnam 1965-67

To reduce the records of seven years of government (1961-67) to a few pages must inevitably result in over-simplification and the degree of over-simplification must be the measure of any distortion which results. In highlighting the main issues involved there are certain generalisations which can be made which will stand under detailed examination. These generalisations are based only on official documents and are concerned primarily with Australian provision of aid of a military nature to South Vietnam. No account is taken of Australia's domestic political issues, of party pressures or of public opinion, all of which played a large part in explaining the decisions and the negotiations mentioned in this paper.

Despite the fact that the Government of South Vietnam on 29 April 1965 announced that the Australian battalion was sent in response to a request from South Vietnam, this is not borne out by the evidence of the documents.

There were requests for aid of various sorts from South Vietnam to assist in its effort against growing communist insurgency, but the requests for military aid were largely generated by initiatives from the United States. These initiatives were political and not military in motive. The United States did not need the military aid but it did desire the military presence of its friends and allies in order to show to the world that the United States was not alone in its efforts against communism in South East Asia, to show that it was not replacing French colonialism in the area and in order to re-assure Governments indigenous to the area that members of SEATO were in fact prepared to make a practical contribution to defence against communism.

In providing aid the Australian Government always insisted that it should be acceptable to the South Vietnamese Government and many assurances to that effect were received from Vietnam. However,

in pursuing its paramount concern with the American alliance and Australian forward defence interests the Australian Government over a period of time showed in its actions and particularly in the process of negotiations minimal consideration for Vietnamese wishes.

Nevertheless, the South Vietnamese attitude to the question of military aid was somewhat equivocal. At first they believed that they, the South Vietnamese, were capable of solving the problem of insurgency and they were opposed to the possibility of Western forces fighting on South Vietnamese soil and killing Vietnamese citizens whether of the North or the South. However, with the growing success of the insurgency and with the escalation of aid to the insurgents from North Vietnam, China and the Soviet Union, successive South Vietnamese Governments came to accept the realities of their political and military weaknesses and were prepared to accept Western military aid. This acceptance was often in response to American pressure. However, opposition remained; this opposition was due in part to a fear of the capital which opposition forces both in North and South Vietnam could make out of a Western presence, and in part to the national and military pride of the South Vietnamese people and particularly of the Generals. This produced an official state of mind which although prepared to accept a Western military presence as an undesirable necessity was still reluctant to ask directly for military aid. Moreover, there was widespread resentment of the increasingly insensitive actions of Western Governments in pressing aid upon them. Offers of aid could be accepted but direct requests were very reluctantly forthcoming and on occasion, only under pressure.

Australian military assistance to South Vietnam was not at any time in response to a request for defence aid from South Vietnam as a Protocol State to SEATO as a Treaty organisation. Although successive Australian Governments sought publicly to justify their actions as being "in the context of" or "flowing from" Australia's membership of SEATO and the theory of the Protocol State or on the ground that military assistance under SEATO could be on a bilateral as well as a collective basis, the commitment was in fact made as a projection of the forward defence policy to which they were committed.

Australian military aid to South Vietnam was in fact offered and supplied in response to the known and frequently expressed wishes of the United States for political support from its friends and allies, even though the offer of a battalion rather than an agreement to meet other specific requests from the United States was made to suit the interests of the Australian defence development program.

The provision of military aid by Australia was decided upon for political reasons and was in support of the fundamental aim of Australian policy towards South Vietnam, which was to ensure the long term defence interests of Australia. These were seen in terms of the ANZUS and SEATO Treaties and the theory of forward defence against the victory of communism in South East Asia, an area seen as vital to Australia's future. This was a policy developed in Australia independently of any outside pressure. The cornerstone of this policy was

seen as a compelling necessity to commit the power of the United States to the Asian area and thus to commit her to a practical guarantee of active support to Australia through the ANZUS and SEATO Treaties.

Australia's concern over the stability of South Vietnam as part of the general defence against communism in South East Asia grew in intensity in proportion to the growing success of communist insurgency in South Vietnam.

Despite Australia's concern over Indonesia and the possibility, given Australian commitment in Malaysia, of over-committing Australia's limited defence forces, the Australian Government wished to react positively to American hints for assistance. A growing sense of urgency as a result of insurgent success produced an increasing willingness at the political level to make further military commitments to the defence of South Vietnam. By December 1964 through January 1965 this reached a peak where Australia's policy makers, being most anxious about what appeared to them to be hesitancy and confusion in America's policy, were eager to convince the United States of the need for more resolute policy and more active measures.

The Australian Government's four decisions 1965-67 to increase combat forces in Vietnam were logical extensions of the decision of April 1965. Negotiations concerning these extensions illustrate once again the dominance in Australian official thinking of the concept of forward defence, and the importance of the American alliance. The negotiations also reveal once again constant United States pressure at political, diplomatic and service levels. The period is marked also by little concern with Vietnam's wishes and national sensitivities.

There is one further problem which has been the subject of public debate but about which it is difficult to come to any firm conclusion, that is the question as to when Australian forces^{first} became actively involved in combat situations. There is no doubt about the official directives on this matter. When the first instructors were sent to South Vietnam, the directive to their Commanding Officer specifically precluded any activities other than those necessary to a training role unless the prior consent of the Australian Government had been obtained. Moreover, despite the wishes of the South Vietnamese Government to concentrate the Australian instructors in a northern province subject to insurgent activities, the instructors were located in base training areas and not in any province likely to be over-run by insurgents. However, the military authorities, recognising the realities of the situation, suggested that the instructors would probably be involved in combat situations produced by insurgent attacks. Nevertheless, the official directive was given precluding any activity other than the instructional role. When in May 1964 an additional 30 instructors were sent to South Vietnam it was then agreed that the role of the AATTV should be extended to permit their employment in the field at battalion and lower levels as advisers, and it was recognised that, in the circumstances, casualties were to be expected. So that

the official record is clear, the decision to permit instructors to move into the field where it was probable that they would be involved in combat situations was not taken until May 1964. However, whether or not before May 1964 individual Australian instructors working with American units participated as advisers in the sort of active patrol activity that would bring them into "combat situations" can only be determined by a detailed examination of Australian and American unit and command reports. Certainly, the Australian authorities knew on 23 May 1962 that the United States advisers were involved in combat situations - nor was this denied publicly, although it was somewhat qualified in public announcements by the United States.

AUSTRALIA - VIETNAM 1961-64

Early in October 1961 the Australian Government became aware that the United States was so concerned at the situation in South Vietnam that it was considering military intervention. Australian intelligence sources took a similarly pessimistic view, reporting during November 1961 that within six months Government forces in South Vietnam might be incapable of mounting significant offensive operations without massive assistance and that intervention on the scale of at least two divisions would be necessary if an adequate breathing space against Viet Cong attacks were to be ensured. There were nevertheless doubts among some Australian officials that such assistance would prove effective. The Charge d'Affaires in Saigon admitted in November 1961 that he had "serious doubts about the efficacy of introducing Western ground troops", although he believed that President Diem and his officials would welcome them; he suggested, however, that Western naval and air forces could make an important contribution. The Australian defence authorities considered that although foreign intervention might contain and even eradicate Viet Cong control (providing access through neighbouring borders could be sealed off) it would not be capable of removing the Viet Cong influence which had been felt by so many for so long.

On 17 November 1961 the Australian Ambassador in Washington was officially informed that the United States was considering increasing its assistance to the Republic of Vietnam, although this assistance would be in the form of equipment, transport, training and advisers rather than combat forces; an indication of Australia's views and willingness to assist was requested. The Australian Prime Minister replied on 26 November that he was examining the possibility of increasing Australian assistance to the Republic of Vietnam and hoped to be able to make a decision after the coming Federal election.

The first Australian initiative came, however, from the Ambassador in Washington who reported on 5 December that demonstrable Australian support for the Republic of Vietnam would make a very favourable impression on the United States Administration and suggested that Australia might supply counter-insurgency training personnel, small arms and ammunition. These suggestions were discussed by representatives of the Departments of External Affairs, Defence, Navy, Army and Air on 14 December. It was clear from this meeting that the motivation for providing assistance was predominantly political and that the Services were unwilling, for manpower reasons, to make more than a token commitment to the Republic of Vietnam. Accordingly the Ambassador in Washington was informed on 19 December that while Australia could supply some small arms and ammunition it could make no more than a token contribution in training.

Suggestions from the United States Administration that Australia should give military aid to the Republic of Vietnam were clearly initiated by the State Department rather than the Pentagon. The United States military authorities in Saigon told the Australian Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam in December 1961 that no Australian assistance was required in either training or the supply of arms and ammunition. The United States Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam said, however, that he regarded an early increase in the Australian contribution (he appears to have had in mind the use of military personnel at least for the protection of civilian projects) as a matter of the highest importance. On 16 February 1962 the Australian Ambassador in Washington reported that there had been considerable resistance in the Pentagon to the use of non-American foreign military personnel in South Vietnam, but that the Pentagon had now agreed to a State Department proposal to ask Australia for counter-insurgency and jungle fighting instructors.

During March 1962 Australia received two approaches from the Republic of Vietnam on the question of military assistance. On 13 March the Australian Ambassador in Saigon reported that the Republic of Vietnam's Assistant Defence Minister had asked if Australian military instructors in Malaya could assist in the training (in Malaya) of the Vietnamese Civil Guard. On 31 March President Diem wrote to the Australian Prime Minister, setting out the Republic of Vietnam's case against the communists and noting that the Republic "has been compelled to appeal for increased military assistance and support from Free World countries to help prevent it from being overwhelmed". The message concluded by requesting that Australia should condemn communist aggression.

Between February and May 1962 Australian policy moved towards military assistance to South Vietnam. On 16 February the Ambassador in Washington cabled a recommendation that any American request should be considered favourably because the provision of even a handful of instructors would help make Australia's mark with the United States Administration. On receipt of this cable the Minister for External Affairs asked the Minister for Defence if the Australian Army could supply suitable officers for training work in South Vietnam and the latter replied on 14 March that while Australia could make no more than a token contribution in training it would be possible to make available 10 officers and some warrant and non-commissioned officers. At the ANZUS Council meeting in Canberra on 9 May the Prime Minister told Admiral H.D. Felt, Commander of the United States Pacific Fleet, that Australia was willing to supply instructors and this decision was endorsed by Ministers on 15 May, provided that a request was received from the Republic of Vietnam. Although Felt admitted that Australian military assistance was not at that time needed, he said that America regarded our military presence in South Vietnam as most important and suggested that we might also supply two radar patrol ships, engineer units, a signals unit and one transport aircraft.

These suggestions were made known to Ministers on 15 May and although no specific decisions were made it was agreed that any early disposition of Australian military forces in South East Asia should be at the request of the Government involved and preferably carried out as part of a SEATO operation, to avoid the appearance of a non-Asian intervention. Two days later the defence authorities agreed that Australia should offer up to 30 Army training personnel and one Dakota transport aircraft, but Felt's suggestion of two radar patrol vessels was not approved.

On 24 May 1962 the Minister for Defence announced publicly that Australia was providing military instructors "at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam". The correctness of this claim is, however, a matter of interpretation, unless the Republic of Vietnam's approaches in March are to be considered a sufficient invitation. The Australian offer was communicated to President Diem on 10 May by Admiral Felt, who had flown straight to Saigon from the ANZUS meeting. Diem was reported to have expressed great satisfaction. On 18 May the Republic of Vietnam's Ambassador in Canberra informed the Department of External Affairs that his Government accepted with pleasure Australia's offer of instructors, but there appears to have been no direct approach by Australia until 25 May, when the Ambassador in Saigon handed a copy of the Defence Minister's statement (already made public in Australia) to Diem; the latter again expressed great satisfaction and asked for his appreciation to be conveyed to the Australian Government.

Military advisers recognised that Australian instructors would be liable to Viet Cong attack at any time and would probably have to carry arms. The probability that they would become involved in operations against the Viet Cong was not explicitly stated in the Defence Minister's public announcement, although it could be argued that it was implied. However the official directive to the Commander of the force forbade any activity other than training.

There remained only a decision on how the Australian instructors were to be employed. The Government of the Republic of Vietnam at first wanted them to establish an independent jungle training school in the northern province of Quang Ngai, an area in which Diem feared a Viet Cong breakthrough. Diem's reasoning appears to have been that commitment to such an area (he likened it to the Dardanelles) would encourage a deeper Australian involvement and that any disaster there might lead to massive third nation intervention. The future leader of the Australian team visited Quang Ngai and reported that it would be a difficult but challenging project within the capacity of the team, but it was strongly opposed by both United States and Australian army authorities, the latter arguing that it was an area of high Viet Cong activity in which the team would be likely to become involved in action outside the instructional field; there was, in any case, no United States logistic support available and it was undesirable

to have to depend on South Vietnamese forces. It was then recommended that the team be divided and integrated with United States staff, 4 instructors going to headquarters in Saigon, 22 to three locations in the Hue area and 4 to Duc My (near Nha Trang). The allocation of the instructors to training establishments was announced by the Minister for Defence on 26 July 1962, approval of the terms of the announcement having already been received from the Republic of Vietnam. The Minister for External Affairs was obviously disappointed that the political impact of the Australian contribution should have been diminished by the team's dispersal and integration with the United States instructors. Three months later the Minister for External Affairs asked the Minister for Defence if more instructors could be provided for South Vietnam, but this suggestion was opposed by the Army because of the strain it would place on manpower resources.

The next request for assistance came on 14 February 1963 when the Australian Ambassador in Saigon reported that the United States might ask Australia for a small R.A.A.F. component. He recommended sympathetic consideration of such a request on the grounds that the Americans believed that they were winning the war and that it was time for Australia to make a contribution and get some share of the credit. The Ambassador was told that Australia would prefer not to receive such a request and he communicated this to the United States authorities in Saigon, but on 2 April Australia nevertheless received a United States request for one Dakota squadron and 16 additional pilots. The real difficulty posed by this request was the need to explain a change from a non-combatant to a combatant role to the Australian public. The formal reason for refusal, which was conveyed to Admiral Felt on 4 April 1963, was that the possible re-equipment of R.A.A.F. transport with Caribou aircraft made the supply of Dakotas impossible. The following month the United States again asked for 16 R.A.A.F. Dakota pilots, the request being re-inforced by representations from the Republic of Vietnam's Ambassador in Canberra on 24 May 1963. Defence opposed the request because of manpower shortage and although External Affairs saw some merit in accepting it was decided that the Army training team was sufficient to demonstrate Australian support for the United States.

At the April 1964 SEATO Council meeting in Manila it was agreed that members should if necessary be prepared to take further concrete steps to support the Republic of Vietnam. On 6 May 1964 the United States Embassy in Canberra delivered a note to the Department of External Affairs which emphasised President Johnson's desire for more free world countries to "show their flags" in South Vietnam, listed existing non-American assistance and suggested that Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom might between them provide a range of army and air training personnel, pilots, reconnaissance aircraft, forward air controllers, communications engineers, shipyard advisers and medical and dental teams. A few days later the United States Embassy in Canberra delivered a more detailed list of items specifically requested from Australia. It included:

- a minimum of 6 three-man battalion adviser teams
- an additional training cadre for corps centre
- additional special forces personnel
- a helicopter unit
- a fixed wing observation and liaison unit
- a fixed wing transport unit
- 2 or 3 surgical teams.

Both the Australian Embassy in Washington and the Department of External Affairs urged that the American request should be considered sympathetically. The former cabled on 11 May 1964 that while it was appreciated that there were physical limitations to what the Commonwealth could do it was recommended that we should make as prompt and positive a response as possible. South Vietnam was an area in which we could, without disproportionate expenditure, pick up a lot of credit with the United States. Our objective should be to achieve such an habitual closeness of relations with the United States and sense of mutual alliance that in our time of need (the possibility of a crisis in relations with Indonesia) the United States would have little option but to respond as we would want. In Canberra a Department of External Affairs memorandum suggested that, while the value of the Australian training team should not be underestimated, our main object in providing additional assistance was that of supporting the United States and encouraging Thailand. The Minister for External Affairs appears to have shared these views, sending a cable to the Embassy in Washington on 14 May which said "We should like the United States Government to know that we are anxious to reply promptly and sympathetically to their suggestions".

The United States proposals were referred for consideration to the relevant defence advisers who reported that South Vietnam was a key strategic area and that if it fell the West would be unlikely to hold Laos, Cambodia and Thailand; this would in turn make the future of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines very uncertain. A further argument in favour of increased assistance was that it would influence the obligation which the United States might feel to Australia in an emergency. After examining the resources and commitments of the types of personnel and equipment requested they recommended that Australia could offer:

- an additional 30 N.C.O.s for the army training team
- an army dental team
- an army driving/servicing instructional team together with a light aid workshop detachment
- a detachment of 6 Caribou transport aircraft (by October 1964).

It was also recommended that the role of the army training team should be extended to permit its employment in the field at battalion and lower levels as advisers. These recommendations were accepted

by Ministers on 29 May. It was recognised that Australian casualties must be expected if the army training team were to be employed in the field.

Details of the Australian decision were cabled immediately to the Australian Ambassador in Saigon with instructions to inform the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. The Vietnamese Ambassador in Canberra was informed the same day and reminded of his earlier discussions with the Department of External Affairs. The Ambassador agreed that Australia could announce that the increased aid was being made after consultation with the South Vietnamese and United States Governments. The Australian Ambassador in Saigon later reported that Acting Foreign Minister Mau had expressed warm appreciation of the decision and agreed with the reference to prior consultations with the South Vietnamese and United States Governments.

The final arrangements were, however, delayed by doubts as to whether all the assistance offered was actually needed. Mau told the Australian Ambassador on 1 June that Australia could take it that there was a requirement for all aid items proposed, but the United States Charge d'Affaires and military authorities in Saigon subsequently stated that there was no military requirement for the army dental teams, the army driving/servicing instructional team or the light aid workshop detachment. They suggested that Australia should instead send an additional 25 army training personnel. In consequence the public announcement of Australia's increased commitment made by the Minister for Defence on 9 June omitted the items not required by the United States authorities, but noted that consultations were proceeding for the provision of some 20 army instructors in addition to the 60 already definitely committed. The text of the Minister's statement were forwarded to Saigon to allow a parallel announcement there, but the Vietnamese were given no prior warning of the changes in the Australian contribution. The Vietnamese Foreign Minister was also given the text of the announcement and on 15 June he wrote to the Australian Ambassador expressing his "keen satisfaction" at the imminent arrival of 30 new instructors and the Caribou aircraft and at the prospect that 20 other technicians might also be sent. On 17 June the Australian Ambassador reported that the Embassy in Saigon had been mildly embarrassed by successive instructions from Canberra to inform the Vietnamese of Australia's decision to provide additional aid, to ask the Vietnamese if these items were needed and then, having been assured that they were needed, to inform the Vietnamese that some of them would not be provided.

The United States military authorities' request for a third group of Australian army advisers was supported by a senior Australian officer who visited Saigon in June 1964 and the team was increased in number from 60 to 83. The team suffered its first combat casualty (one soldier had been accidentally killed on 1 June 1963) on 6 June 1964 when Warrant Officer K.G. Conway was killed during a Viet Cong attack on a special forces camp 55 miles west of Da Nang.

During July 1964 the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam, General Khanh, addressed a written appeal for assistance to the Heads of Government of 34 countries, including Australia. As translated and published in Saigon on 25 July the letter expressed the firm hope "that your government will kindly grant us all the support you deem possible and opportune in order to help us successfully fight the Communist aggression". In Australia's case this written approach was followed up on 5 August by the Republic of Vietnam's Ambassador in Canberra, who called on the Acting Secretary of the Department of External Affairs to formally thank Australia for assistance already given and to request "continuing help". There was no direct Australian response to these requests, although the Minister for External Affairs wrote to a number of countries commending General Khanh's appeal.

The Australian Government continued to view with concern the deteriorating political and military situation in South Vietnam. On 3 September 1964 the Minister for External Affairs sent a cable to all Australian representatives abroad emphasising that our national interests were to

- help a government in South Vietnam which would continue to fight the Viet Cong, oppose North Vietnam and give some hope of eventually unifying the country
- retain an active United States presence in South Vietnam
- prevent a failure in South Vietnam which would lead to a collapse of the will to resist in other countries.

Australia also sought to gain a clearer idea of how far the Americans were prepared to commit themselves in Vietnam, but it became evident that the United States would maintain only a holding operation until after the November presidential election. Once the election was over the momentum of American policy, encouraged by the ever-worsening situation in Vietnam, began to increase. The Australian Minister for External Affairs, who visited Washington in late November, was told by Defence Secretary McNamara that if it became necessary to apply increased pressure on North Vietnam by air attack it would be very helpful to have Australian aircraft either participating or standing by to protect Thailand, Laos and South Vietnam. McNamara said that the United States would be looking chiefly for a public demonstration of Australian support. On 4 December 1964, White House Adviser William Bundy gave the Ambassador in Washington a clearer indication of the direction of American policy. This envisaged that, although the instability of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam at present precluded a sharp new program, any further dramatic activity by the Viet Cong would be opposed by air strikes in North Vietnam and the stationing of surface-to-air missiles and one division or two battalions of United States marines near the border between North and South Vietnam. Bundy said Australia might contribute 200 extra combat advisers to such a force, but he did not have in mind the use of Australian fighter aircraft.

On 10 December 1964 the Republic of Vietnam Prime Minister (Huong) made a strong direct request for increased Australian military assistance to the Australian Minister for Air, who was then visiting

Saigon. Huong asked for more army instructors and air assistance and argued that Australia's security depended on the survival of South Vietnam; the Americans, he said, felt lonely and hesitant in their present position and needed stiffening by the support of nations like Australia. However, the Australian Ambassador believed that this request was inspired by the United States.

No doubt prompted by the trend of events in Washington, Defence already had increased Australian assistance under consideration when Huong's appeal was received. On 11 December a committee reported that Australia could supply:

- one infantry battalion
- one squadron of the SAS Regiment
- logistic support elements
- approximately 10 additional army instructors
- HMAS "Sydney" and 2 frigates/destroyers for transporting the above.

Three days later, however, the Prime Minister received a message from President Johnson which suggested that Australia provide:

- 200 additional combat advisers
- minesweepers
- LSTS
- salvage and repair ships
- hospital ships.

The list appears to have been drawn up without an adequate knowledge of the equipment of the Australian armed services, which did not possess any of the last three items. The recommendation from Defence, reported on 16 December, was that Australia could supply 17 more instructors (bringing the team in Vietnam up to a total of 100), but that commitments in Malaysian waters would make it undesirable and perhaps impracticable to offer any minesweepers. The Prime Minister sent a personal message to President Johnson on 18 December informing him that Australia was unable to supply either the ships requested or any significant number of army instructors. Australia was however willing to send representatives to discuss the possible positioning of United States, Australian and New Zealand troops in the northern parts of South Vietnam. This was followed by a cable from the Minister for External Affairs to the Australian Ambassador in Washington on 22 December which emphasised that while Australia was not qualifying her support for the American effort in South Vietnam, it was important to know how far the United States was prepared to go and what would be the outcome of escalation and/or negotiation.

AUSTRALIA-VIETNAM 1965

The Decision

The fundamental reasons for Australia's providing combatant ground forces in South Vietnam in 1965 are vividly demonstrated in negotiations between the time in December 1964 when Australia agreed to contingency staff talks concerning the possibility of sending troops to South Vietnam, and the actual offer of the battalion in April 1965.

The basic concept behind the Australian action was that of forward defence. This rested in turn on a belief in the fundamental strategic importance in Australia's defence of the South East Asia area, and on the necessity to prevent the spread of communism and political instability in the area. Given Australia's military weakness, this policy had to depend for success upon membership of ANZUS and SEATO, and above all upon the presence of the United States in the area. To this end it was Australia's aim to ensure that the United States did not waver in its commitment to South East Asia and to support the American presence politically, diplomatically and if necessary militarily. It was believed that only by these methods could real meaning be given to the ANZUS Agreement and Australia's defence be assured. All these elements appear in the following review of Australia's diplomatic activity during the period January to April 1965.

On 7 January 1965 Australia's Ambassadors in Washington and Saigon were informed that Ministers were gravely concerned at the outlook in Vietnam and recognised the necessity of taking whatever steps were possible to advance Australia's vital interest in securing success in South Vietnam. On 5 January Washington reported long discussions with the United States officials as to their purpose and aims, from which it became clear that military staff talks with Australia must remain in suspense until the political situation in Saigon was stabilised. The Australian Ambassador supported the United States idea of applying progressive pressure to North Vietnam in order to bring Hanoi to negotiate. A further report received on the 7th from Washington explained that United States policy was once again in the doldrums, nor was it expected that mounting military pressure upon North Vietnam would be decided upon even after the American elections. Apparently the President preferred that the United States should "muddle along" in South Vietnam trying to do better with policies which had not succeeded in the past. Again on 13 January the Embassy in Washington reported that the political situation in Saigon was not suitable for the introduction of phase 2 of America's plans for escalating pressure. The United States was not prepared to move. In Australia on 13 January military authorities made an assessment of the current military situation and concluded that the prospects of victory had become more remote. They were convinced that without strong and stable leadership or without the introduction of a new factor such as counter action by the United States or other nations the situation would deteriorate further.

At departmental consultations in Canberra on 15 January, it was decided that Australia should be forthcoming with the Americans and that she should encourage the United States to plan for phase 2 (that is for air strikes between the 17th and 19th Parallels directed against infiltration from the North). Australia's willingness to take part in military talks was once more expressed. On 16 January in Saigon the Americans again raised the question of Australian aid, saying that the greatest need was for combat advisers. The next day the Australian Government decided to promise full public and diplomatic support for the United States if that country decided upon increased military activity. However on the 19th the Embassy in Washington reported that the United States was still worried over Saigon's political instability but that military staff talks with Australia would be relevant if the situation improved.

On 19 January lengthy Ministerial instructions were sent from Canberra to Washington. Once again the Ambassador was informed of Australia's grave concern at the outlook and instructed that he should take advantage of any opportunity to bring certainty to American policy and planning. He was to be tactful because of the disproportion in power between Australia and the United States, but he was to suggest that Australia would give full public and diplomatic support if the United States were to initiate air strikes against North Vietnam's infiltration system. He was informed that the Government did not believe that the Viet Cong threat was negotiable at that stage, but the Government was also worried about the Indonesian situation and would not support a call for a Geneva Conference if air strikes resulted in such a suggestion. When these views were put to Bundy on 21 January his reply was that the President would surely say that if we were so concerned then why could we not contribute 50 more instructors? The necessities of Australian defence expansion were again explained. Bundy again pointed out that there could be no escalation in Vietnam until the Saigon Government proved itself. The Ambassador made three points to Bundy: he emphasised Australia's anxiety over the situation in South Vietnam, that it seemed to be that a coherent plan for increasing pressure on North Vietnam was no longer in operation, and that Australia was willing to give what help was possible. He concluded his report by saying that Australia must keep up the pressure.

On 26 January the Ambassador reported that the Australian Prime Minister visiting Washington shared the anxiety at the way things were going and thought he might assure the President that we would support him politically and militarily if pre-emptive landings became necessary. On 28 January the Acting Prime Minister agreeing with the Minister for External Affairs sent a message to the Australian Prime Minister in London expressing the view that Australia should be concerned to sustain the Americans in their commitment to Vietnam while Australia was doing its share in Malaysia.

On 29 January the Minister for Defence raised with the Americans in Saigon the possibility of stepping up the campaign. On 2 February the Ambassador in Washington reported that we needed to do all in our power to strengthen the American resolve, to follow a firm line based on a credible threat against North Vietnam. It was suggested also that an attempt should be made to clarify the extent of the United States commitment to ANZUS. With this last point the Minister for External Affairs disagreed, preferring to concentrate on the essential purpose which he supposed was to remove any hesitation on the part of the Americans and with Australia's limited resources to go with them but not rush out in front. On 4 February Forrestal in Canberra explained that support for America from other countries and Australia was needed because it was important politically. In reply Forrestal was informed that it was feasible for Australia to make a combat battalion available for service in South East Asia if the Australian Government so decided.

On 7 February Washington reported South Vietnamese and United States air strikes against targets in North Vietnam in retaliation for Viet Cong attacks on United States bases and barracks. Australian Ministers supported the action. On 9 February the Australian Minister for Defence told Governor Harriman in Washington that Australia was still ready to enter into military staff talks concerning phase 2 operations just as the Prime Minister had told President Johnson the previous December. On 10 February the Minister for Defence reported from Washington that the United States was at the edge of entering phase 2 and again pointed out, this time to Bundy, that Australia was ready to enter military staff talks. He referred to Australia's own need for 1,000 instructors, which explained our inability to meet United States requests of this type. When the Minister raised the possibility of a SEATO operation in Vietnam, Bundy pointed out that for SEATO to operate South Vietnam would have to appeal for help and he doubted that this was wise for fear of refusal by some members. The same day the Australian Ambassador commented on the new spirit of urgency and robustness in the United States Administration, and believed the beginning of phase 2 was close. However the stage was not yet reached where staff talks could begin. The Minister for External Affairs repeated that the Australian aim should be to remove any hesitation on the part of the Americans and within our limited resources to give what aid we could. On 18 February the Minister repeated to Washington his strong support for all the Americans had done and his hope that in the immediate situation the only determinant of American action would be the effect such action would have in checking aggression and strengthening morale in Saigon. On 20 February came the news that the United States was prepared to inaugurate the staff talks and believed that it would be necessary to put in substantial ground forces but not in the style of pre-emptive landings as in the phase 2 plans. This was reinforced by a report that the United States was not at present considering any initiatives which might lead to peace talks. On 24 February Australia officially agreed to participate in the talks but emphasised that this was not an agreement to contribute

ground forces, and that further information as to the planned use of forces was required. Full departmental consideration followed in Canberra. Emphasis was again laid on the strategic importance of South Vietnam and the necessity to give public and diplomatic support to the American program of increased pressure on North Vietnam. More information on United States thinking was requested. On 29 March the Government informed its Ambassador in Washington that their firm support for America's present action was based on the belief that in the present circumstances it would check aggression, restore confidence in South Vietnam and lead towards an acceptable settlement.

On 4 April the report on the staff talks in Honolulu was received in Canberra. The conclusion was that the United States wished to have a contribution of Australian forces in South Vietnam. If approved, it was assumed that a request from the South Vietnamese Government would follow. The Australian representative at the talks believed that Australia should offer a battalion to the defence of such a strategically important area. On 6 April Australian military authorities confirmed the recommendation, believing that it was vital to Australia's strategic interests to have a strong United States military presence in South East Asia, and that it was essential to show a readiness to assist the United States to achieve her aims in South Vietnam. Australia should therefore offer a battalion. On 7 April the Government agreed to the recommendation and on 8 April received a message from Saigon that the United States was pleased with the Honolulu talks and that their officials had once more stressed the value in South Vietnam of "Third Country" flags. It was also reported that the Premier of the Republic of Vietnam, Dr Quat, appreciated the military requirement but had to move cautiously in view of possible opposition from nationalist elements.

On 9 April the Government decision was explained to the Australian Ambassador in Washington. The Government had agreed to accede to what amounted to a request even though the United States had stopped short of making a formal request. The Government believed that the Australian battalion would be important in itself and of great importance in present and future Australian-American defence relationships. It was decided also that when informing the United States Government of the decision to offer a battalion it should be pointed out that this would disperse Australian forces further and would thus limit the Government's military capacity elsewhere in South East Asia and New Guinea. Therefore Australia must look for support from both the United States and British Governments in dealing with difficulties elsewhere.

However, it was not until 13 April that the Ambassador reported that he had made the offer of a battalion. The delay is explained by the effect of President Johnson's address at Johns Hopkins University: it was thought that this address indicated that the United States was again considering the possibility of negotiation, in which case the offer of a battalion would have been inappropriate. The offer was made to the Secretary of State on 13 April and the Secretary responded that the President would be

most appreciative and that in his own opinion the sooner the battalion was provided the better. The Ambassador also reported that the Secretary had taken the point that the further dispersal of Australian forces might require Australia to look for support from the United States and that the President was fully aware of the United States commitment pursuant to the ANZUS Treaty.

The Matter of the Request

In the first instance, therefore, the offer of troops by Australia was made to the United States and not to South Vietnam.

Article IV paragraph 3 of the SEATO Treaty stipulates that "no action on the territory of any state designated under paragraph 1 of this Article or in any territory so designated shall be taken except at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned". As the Australian Government used the "umbrella" of the Treaty publicly to justify its policies in South Vietnam, the question of invitation or consent on the part of the South Vietnamese Government requires consideration.

The Australian Government was aware of and participated with the United States in attempts to elicit the necessary formal request. These efforts took place between 9 and 29 April. The negotiations reveal the methods used and the degree of spontaneity behind the Vietnamese request.

On 9 April the Australian Ambassador in Washington reported that the request would have to come as a matter of form from the South Vietnamese Government. He added that the State Department had given instructions that Quat should be specifically asked to request Australia to supply the battalion.

Despite earlier reports that South Vietnam had been informed of Australia's willingness to contribute if requested, on 12 April the Australian Ambassador in Washington reported that he had been advised that General Taylor, the United States Ambassador in Saigon, had not yet raised the question of the Australian battalion with the South Vietnamese Government. On the previous day the Australian Ambassador in Saigon had reported that, given South Vietnamese nationalist sensitivity and the fragility of the political front, he saw advantages in having prior consultations with the South Vietnamese rather than simply having them informed by the Americans that Australia would respond to a request. Otherwise, Australian action would be seen as implying that the Australian offer was prompted exclusively by American advice and the relationship with the United States, and that Australia was indifferent or insensitive to Vietnamese needs, taking their eventual request for granted and not considering them genuinely independent. On 13 April the Australian Ambassador in Saigon reported that in Taylor's opinion it would be better if he, together with the Australian Ambassador, called upon Quat when the time came to inform him of the Australian

Government's readiness to supply a battalion if requested. However in Washington the American view seemed to be that expressed by Rusk, also on 13 April, that it would be better for Taylor, by himself, to sound out Quat before Australia's offer was made.

After discussion among Ministers in Canberra as to whether or not they should work only through the Americans, it was agreed on 21 April that the American and Australian Ambassadors should together see Quat in order to obtain agreement from the Vietnamese. However in Washington Bundy's reaction to this suggestion was that it would be better for Taylor to see Quat first to make the point that Australia was ready to contribute if requested, and only then should the Australian Ambassador approach the South Vietnamese. The Australian Ambassador again pressed for a joint approach, to which Bundy now agreed. However in Saigon on 24 April Taylor in fact followed the course outlined by Bundy and raised the matter with Quat by himself. As a result, the Australian Ambassador in Saigon on 24 April sought and on 27 April obtained Canberra's approval to see Quat alone but he was unable to do so until 28 April.

Meanwhile on 26 April the Australian Ambassador had reported from Washington that Quat had not yet given his agreement and that no one knew when he would do so. It was felt that Taylor would have to speak to Quat again if he did not reply very soon. The Australian Government on 27 April indicated that it was anxious that a request should be obtained as early as possible, but on the same day Saigon again advised Canberra that because of Vietnamese sensitivities it would seem desirable in any public announcement to include references both to the Vietnamese request and to prior consultations among the Vietnamese, the United States and Australian Governments. On 28 April the Australian Ambassador in Saigon expressed a hope that the Vietnamese could be given prior guidance on the content of the Prime Minister's planned statement as consultation with them on the present proposal had been minimal. He also reported that Quat had on 27 April welcomed the Australian Government's offer and agreed to an announcement by the Australian Prime Minister of the decision to provide a battalion in response to a Vietnamese request. Later, on 29 April, the Ambassador reported that Quat had not handed him a formal written request but had agreed verbally. In an endeavour to formalise matters the Ambassador planned to hand a note to the Vietnamese Secretary of State, Bui Diem, confirming the Australian offer, the Vietnamese acceptance of it and their expression of a request for the despatch of the force. Also on 29 April, Bui Diem agreed to send a letter acknowledging the Ambassador's letter and confirming the Vietnamese Government's request. Later the same day Quat's letter, which the Australian Government accepted as a request, was despatched. This letter stated that the Ambassador's letter confirming Australia's offer had been received, that the Republic of Vietnam confirmed its acceptance of that offer and requested the despatch of the battalion on the basis discussed. Also on 29 April the Australian Government announced that, being in receipt of a

request from the Government of South Vietnam and after close consultation with the United States, it had been decided to provide an infantry battalion for service in South Vietnam. The terms of this announcement had been communicated to Washington before receipt of the letter from Dr Quat of 29 April. The Vietnamese Government's official communique issued on the subject and dated 29 April began "Upon the request of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam the Government of Australia today approved the despatch to Vietnam of an infantry battalion ...".

Despite this communique, it would then appear that, the offer of the battalion having been made by Australia first to the United States, the two Governments together (with the United States predominating) subsequently arranged for the formal request from South Vietnam.

In terms of Article IV paragraph 3 of the SEATO Treaty, however, the further question as to whether Australian military aid was acceptable to South Vietnam and whether Australian combat forces were in that country with the consent of its Government needs to be examined.

Prior to April 1965 there had been other requests from the Government of South Vietnam and frequent expressions of appreciation of aid supplied. The request made in general terms by President Diem in March 1962, the request for pilots made by Ambassador Tran Van Lam in May 1963, General Khanh's wide and general appeal in July 1964 and the appeal by Prime Minister Huong in December 1964 have been placed in their context in the chronological survey of Australian-Vietnamese Relations 1961-64. There is no evidence in Australian documents to show that the requests by President Diem, by Ambassador Tran Van Lam and General Khanh were prompted by external pressure, although it is notable that the Ambassador's request for pilots was received while Australia was considering a similar request from the United States. However, in the case of the strong direct request from Prime Minister Huong, and of the request from Dr Quat, there is evidence of such pressure. The conclusion suggests itself that although the South Vietnamese authorities were initially reluctant to request external military forces as distinct from general support of a military nature and continued to display this reluctance in varying degrees, they were brought to accept the necessity of such forces by persuasion and by the weakness of their own position, and they did on various occasions indicate that the forces were appreciated and welcome. Consequently, the Australian military presence in South Vietnam can clearly be said to have received their consent.

The Relevance of SEATO

The documents show quite clearly that Australian troops were not sent to South Vietnam as part of or in response to SEATO Council Planning, nor were they sent in response to an appeal to SEATO as a collective organisation from South Vietnam as a Protocol State of SEATO. In the following paragraphs the mass of evidence in the documents to support this conclusion is condensed to a brief summary.

As early as 15 May 1962 the Australian Government decided publicly to justify non-combatant, and later combatant military aid to Vietnam as being in accord with or in the context of SEATO. This decision taken by Ministers seems to have been taken without any departmental advice. It was not until August 1964 that any serious analysis by officials of the relevance of SEATO appears on the files. This analysis began by admitting frankly that Australian assistance was in fact given in response to the wishes of the United States that Australia should provide some military assistance to Vietnam in the form of a services "presence". The analysis then went on to argue that it was unwise to endeavour to justify Australian aid as being covered by a public treaty such as SEATO or in terms of Article IV of paragraph 1 of the SEATO Agreement. This was because the Government of South Vietnam had not formally invoked SEATO, because of the non-combatant role of our forces, as well as the very small response they represented. It was pointed out that Article II would be a more appropriate justification as it provided for self help and mutual aid to counter and prevent subversive activities directed from outside a given state. However, under the terms of the Protocol, Article II did not apply to Protocol States. However, it was suggested that paragraph 2 of Article IV would provide a "useful umbrella" to justify Australian action. This Article provided that "If in the opinion of any of the parties the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or the political independence of any party in the Treaty area or of any other state or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than by armed attack, or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defence".

Because the South Vietnam Government never invoked SEATO as a Treaty Organisation and because of the difficulties of interpretation involved in any attempt under these circumstances to use the Treaty provisions as a justification for Australian action, the Government preferred not to specify any particular provision of the Treaty, but to argue in general terms that Australian action was in accordance with Australia's

obligations under the Treaty. More specifically while using the Treaty as a "useful umbrella", justification was based upon three arguments. The first was that South Vietnam was in the Treaty area and was for the purposes of Articles IV and III designated a Protocol State. The second argument accepted past interpretations made of the Treaty by the United States and argued that the Treaty obligation was individual as well as collective and that therefore obligations could be fulfilled by bilateral agreements as well as by collective action. Thirdly, it was argued that a collective SEATO policy had been in existence and maintained over a period of time. In support of this, reference was made to three Resolutions of the SEATO Council: that of 29 March 1961 which noted with concern the efforts of an armed minority with external aid acting in violation of the Geneva Accord to destroy the Government of Vietnam, and declared its firm resolve not to acquiesce in any such take-over; that of 1963 in which the Council expressed the hope that Vietnam with external support could maintain its advance towards economic stability and international security; and that of 1964 when the Council gave special attention to the deteriorating situation in Vietnam, the official communique stating (with France abstaining) that the Council agreed that member states should remain prepared if necessary to take concrete steps within their respective capabilities in fulfilment of their obligations under the Treaty.

Immediately before the Honolulu staff talks Departments gave some consideration to "the credibility of maintaining the view that what we had in South Vietnam flows from our SEATO obligations". As a result it was clearly realised that the arguments represented above were exceedingly weak in view of the conspicuous absence of any collective SEATO activity. Moreover it is notable that, when the Australian Government came to explain to the United Kingdom the crucial military staff talks which took place in Honolulu in March 1965 between Australia and the United States concerning the provision of military aid to Vietnam, Australia represented to the United Kingdom that these were informal talks arising out of ANZUS affairs. No suggestion was made that these crucial talks as a result of which Australian combat troops were committed to Vietnam, were in any way part of a SEATO operation.

Again, the status of Australian forces in Vietnam was not governed by any authority deriving from SEATO but was based upon an exchange of letters with the President of Vietnam giving Australian troops in that country diplomatic status on the model of the Pentilateral Agreement on Mutual Defence Assistance in Indo-China concluded in 1950 between the United States, Vietnam and other Governments.

No matter what the theoretical arguments which could be raised concerning the relevance of SEATO to Australian

action, in practical terms the facts are clear.

Although the Government of South Vietnam at different times appealed to the Heads of Government of over thirty countries, it did not at any time appeal to SEATO as a collective treaty organisation. Because there was no request of this type, the SEATO plans devised by SEATO military advisers specifically to assist a Protocol State and to counter communist insurgency in South Vietnam were not used, nor could the Treaty Organisation operate. There is certainly nothing in the documents to suggest that the sending of Australian troops was the subject of a SEATO Council decision.

Not only did South Vietnam not appeal to SEATO but the United States Government was for a variety of reasons specifically opposed to the use of SEATO as the machinery by which increased military aid could be introduced into South Vietnam. As a result, several Australian suggestions to the United States that any Australian aid should be related to SEATO received no support.

In its early thinking before the commitment of United States combat forces, the United States occasionally suggested that the situation in South Vietnam might require SEATO operations and very occasionally hinted that SEATO provided a justification for its presence. But the real justification was always based upon the fact of a bilateral agreement and not upon the SEATO argument. Moreover, the fact is plain that American military plans for aid to Vietnam were not of direct relevance to SEATO and in fact on occasion were in conflict with SEATO military planning. This was known and understood by Australian military planning authorities, and was specifically mentioned in the Honolulu talks. Because of these facts neither the United States nor Australia, when reporting its action in Vietnam to the Security Council, did so in terms of SEATO.

In the light of the above evidence and no matter what the theoretical possibilities of arguing as to whether or not Australian action could possibly be justified in terms of the SEATO Treaty, the fact is apparent that Australian troops were not sent to Vietnam as part of a SEATO operation or as a result of consultations among the SEATO powers as a treaty organisation.

AUSTRALIA - VIETNAM 1965-67

The four decisions made by Australian Governments to increase troop levels in Vietnam (announced on 18 August 1965, 8 March 1966, 20 December 1966 and 17 October 1967 respectively) were all essentially a logical extension of the 1965 decision to send combat forces to Vietnam, and a measure of the importance placed on the American alliance. General support for United States policies in Vietnam did not necessarily mean unqualified approval of policies of escalation, nor was it conceded that Australia should increase her forces in Vietnam progressively as the United States increased its own troop levels there. Successive Governments retained control of the timing, extent and nature of Australia's added commitments in Vietnam, and each decision was taken in accordance with assessments of changes in the political and strategic circumstances of the region and with due regard for the Government's total defence program and its domestic commitments. But the option of refusing to increase troop levels was never considered.

The dominant influence throughout the period was pressure from Americans at political, diplomatic and service levels for Australia to increase her commitment in Vietnam. Australia's contribution was, of course, too small to be very significant militarily: the chief United States motive was the need to prove that her Vietnam policies had the support of other countries, and the more United States policies were called into question, the more she required her allies publicly to proclaim support. At the end of the period under review here the pressure which she exerted was described as "extremely strong".

In contrast to the Americans, the Vietnamese only intermittently exerted pressure on Australia to increase her military aid to their country. However, before Australia's biggest troop increases (the commitment of the second and third battalions) discussions took place between the Australian and Vietnamese Governments. These discussions did not, according to official spokesmen, result in specific Vietnamese requests for more troops. Despite Australia's concern that her increased assistance be justified in terms of Vietnamese requests, in three of the four cases of increased Australian assistance it was considered unnecessary to ask the South Vietnamese Government for a formal request for aid. The South Vietnamese Government was merely informed of the decision either shortly before or after the announcement by the Australian Government. Twice the Vietnamese Government and the Australian public were informed that the increase was in pursuance of earlier requests and once that it was as a result of continuing consultations between the two Governments.

The First Increase

The first increase in the numbers of Australian combat troops in Vietnam was prompted by a request from President L.B. Johnson to the

Prime Minister on 26 July 1965, just as the United States was about to increase her own forces to 44 battalions and to endorse the "search and destroy" strategy. Similar requests were sent to other countries: the United States wanted a "clear signal to the world - and perhaps especially to Hanoi - of the solidarity of international support for resistance to aggression in Vietnam and for a peaceful settlement in Vietnam".

In a covering note, the United States Charge d'Affaires in Canberra said that he had been asked to state that the United States fully recognised the difficulties that would be involved in any additional Australian contribution in Vietnam during 1965, but it hoped that when the full scope of United States decisions became known, the Australian Government might also take additional build-up measures that would permit an earlier contribution than present military plans would allow.

The Prime Minister asked for immediate advice on the request, as when United States' plans were publicly announced it might be necessary for the Australian Government to give some public indication of its own position about additional assistance.

When the request was first considered in the Department of External Affairs it was stated that "in the immediate future, it is clear that we can only look for marginal extra contributions", of which "the most attractive in political terms is the idea of building up the battalion to a battle group". Departmental advisers doubted that Australia should plan for a two-battalion effort in South Vietnam early in 1966, or that, even if such plans were approved, the United States should be informed of them. Given the uncertainties in Indonesia, Malaysia and New Guinea, no such decision should be taken without "a careful examination in the light of continuing United States and British policies in South East Asia" - and this had not been done.

At a meeting on 29 July 1965, Service and Departmental advisers considered what could be done within Australia's present capabilities. An additional 250 men could be despatched, but if there were any intention of sending a second battalion, the Army needed to have an immediate decision in order to plan for despatch in February or March 1966. Three criteria were suggested for making a recommendation to the Government - what was necessary for the military effort in Vietnam, what was necessary to continue to attract American support in the area, and what would satisfy Australian public opinion - and on all three counts it seemed unnecessary to commit an extra battalion. In the following month, therefore, the Minister for Defence recommended to his colleagues that Australia should:

- (a) build the Infantry Battalion into a Battalion Group by the addition of ancillary and supporting units;
- (b) retain the National Service intake at the existing figure of 8,400 per annum, to be reviewed at the end of 1966;

- (c) authorise the Army to plan and prepare on the assumption that a second battalion might be committed in March 1966;
- (d) restrict on a need-to-know basis knowledge of the planned build-up and its objective;
- (e) inform the Americans that we were unable to contribute more than the forces indicated in (a) and explain why.

Departmental advice to the Minister for External Affairs, tendered on 16 August 1965, stressed the impossibility of forecasting future events in the Malaysia-Singapore-Indonesia area, and urged again that for this reason no formal indication should be given to the United States "that we are planning to make a second battalion available for service in Vietnam in 1966", though she should be told of the planned increase in the National Service intake, and that Australia's capacity would be reviewed in 1966. The Department also thought that Australia should avoid any commitment to "progression", i.e. that as the Americans increased their forces so Australia should do more.

When Ministers considered the question they endorsed recommendations (a) and (b), but directed that no planning or preparation whatever should be made on the assumption that an additional battalion or any other additional forces would be committed to Vietnam.

The Australian Embassies in Washington and Saigon, and the High Commissions in London and Wellington were informed of the Government's decision on 17 August, and asked to inform the Governments to which they were accredited. The Washington Embassy was told that "we would like you to present it in a way that will make the greatest favourable impact on the Americans".

There is no evidence in official documents that the South Vietnamese Government had made any request for further Australian military aid at this time. Nor is there any firm evidence to suggest that the Vietnamese were consulted on the question before 18 August, the day the Australian Government announced its decision. The view was expressed in Australia that it would be necessary to confirm with the Government of South Vietnam that the further contribution of forces remains acceptable, but the message actually sent to the Australian Embassy in Saigon was simply to "inform" the South Vietnamese Government of the decision, "in context of a step in pursuance of their earlier request".

There were delays in decyphering in Saigon, but the message was conveyed to the Acting Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam on 18 August, some hours before the official announcement in Canberra (which took place at 8 p.m. in the House of Representatives). The Chairman of the National Leadership Committee, Major General Nguyen Van Thieu, expressed pleasure that the Australian force was being built up.

He asked what the possibilities were if, at some time in the future, the Vietnamese Government were to make a request for additional forces. The following day the Vietnamese Ambassador to Australia called on the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs to convey his Government's "thanks and appreciation" for the increased Australian military aid.

The Second Increase

The background to the second decision to increase Australian troop levels in Vietnam (announced on 8 March 1966) was very different from that to the first in so far as no formal request was received from the United States or, until the last minute, from South Vietnam. In fact, Australian Ministers and officials went to considerable trouble to ensure that no such request should be made until the Australian Government was ready to give serious consideration to the matter. There was nonetheless very intensive lobbying and hinting by the United States for over four months before the announcement. In Washington, Saigon and Canberra, United States diplomatic and service officials made it abundantly clear that the United States hoped that Australia would increase her Vietnam force, while Australian Ministers, whenever questioned publicly, stated that no formal request for increased aid had been received.

Towards the end of 1965, United States officials took a gloomy view of the Vietnam situation. In Saigon, United States Defence Secretary McNamara in an informal talk with the Australian Ambassador* said that the United States had been surprised by the strength and violence of the enemy reaction to the American introduction of ground forces. The choice for the United States as he saw it was between putting in still more troops - Vietnamese, American and others - or accepting eventual defeat, and the United States would not accept defeat. McNamara thought that there would be a long and costly military effort and that neither the military situation nor the preparations made by the Vietnamese were far enough forward for pacification to be undertaken on any significant scale. He agreed that negotiations would carry many dangers as things stood at present. In asking for the Ambassador's assessment of the situation McNamara also asked him, whether action against North Vietnam should be intensified and whether Australia could send a second infantry battalion to Vietnam. The Ambassador said the second question was for the Australian Government to decide, but he was certain that any request would receive prompt and serious consideration.

During December 1965, there were reports of discussions on many occasions: the Minister for External Affairs during his visit to Saigon in December 1965 said that both the Americans and the South Vietnamese raised the question of additional assistance; the Ambassador

* United States Ambassador Lodge, Generals Wheeler, Sharpe and Westmoreland were also present.

in Washington reported talks with Bundy and with Harriman (who passed on President Johnson's thoughts as "background for our decision"); and the United States Ambassador in Canberra spoke to the Prime Minister. There were also talks in Canberra between United States Embassy and Departmental officials, and in Washington between the Head of the Australian Joint Services Staff and Pentagon officials.

The Australian Government was in no doubt, therefore, about the desire of the United States Government to see an increased Australian contribution. Ministers, however, saw no need to rush into a decision: if an extra battalion were committed it could not be done before March or April 1966; the defence group did not favour further piecemeal contributions; and a decision should await the outcome of ministerial discussions with the United Kingdom in the latter part of January 1966.

In the New Year defence planners began a detailed examination of what increases could be made to the forces in Vietnam, and finalised their report on 10 February, after the completion of the British defence review, and after the Prime Minister had defended the United States' resumption of bombing North Vietnam. The planners outlined possibilities rather than making recommendations but, as the Departmental representative explained to the Minister for External Affairs, the balance of opinion was that Australia should contribute enough land forces to make up a task force.

Consideration by Ministers was further deferred pending the visit of United States Vice-President Humphrey, although at a press conference with Humphrey the Prime Minister was quoted as saying that Australia had been considering for some time what more could usefully be done in Vietnam. He denied American pressure on Australia and said that the United States had made no request.

Thus it was not until 3 March 1966 that Ministers finally decided to replace the force of some 1,400 men with a substantially enlarged contribution of forces in the form of a self-contained Australian task force of some 4,500 personnel under Australian command. When he told President Johnson of the decision the Prime Minister commented that his military advisers considered that the provision of a force of this size represented the upper limit of Army capacity, having regard to existing military commitments in Malaysia. Furthermore, while they advised that the force could be sustained, they had made it clear that short of a major emergency it would not be practicable to enlarge it. The Government had believed that the task force would be the most militarily effective contribution Australia could make to the allied effort in South Vietnam and it judged that it should go so far at that time, in consequence of the high importance of the issues at stake in South Vietnam and to make a clear demonstration of Australian support for the massive efforts of the United States.

During the months preceding this decision, the Australian Government was no more anxious to receive a formal request for more military assistance from South Vietnam than it was to receive one from

the United States. In an interview with the Vietnamese Foreign Minister in December 1965, the Minister for External Affairs made it clear that "the position was that when we were ready to receive a request we would let him know and he would make one". The Vietnamese subsequently restricted their efforts to making the Australians "informally aware" that Vietnam would welcome increased aid. In December 1965 Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, "made what was almost a request" to the Australian Minister for External Affairs for army and air force assistance, and Ky repeated this request to an ABC interviewer. Foreign Minister Tran Van Do, while agreeing not to make a formal request, added that the Vietnamese Government would, of course, welcome any reinforcement of the Australian force in Vietnam even if these reinforcements were relatively small.

In the following months there seems to have been no further communication between the Australian and Vietnamese Governments on this question, until on 19 February the Australian Prime Minister was quoted as saying: "we hope to announce soon what Australia can do to supplement our present forces in Vietnam". The Australian Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam quickly suggested that any such announcement should be preceded by "adequate prior consultation with the Vietnamese", in order that it would appear that the Australian decision was taken in response to a Vietnamese rather than an American request. He also suggested, as had a member of the Department of External Affairs, that a formal request for aid should be sought from the Vietnamese Government.

Air Vice Marshal Ky showed immediate interest in the Prime Minister's reported statement, and the Australian Ambassador assured him "that no decision had yet been taken but that we would communicate with the Vietnamese Government as soon as possible after any such decision was reached". The Ambassador also informed the Australian Government that Ky was reported to have said previously that existing arrangements would not cover any further military forces that Australia might wish to send to Vietnam: "there would have to be a specific request from the Government of Vietnam".

On 4 March the Australian Government notified its Ambassador in Saigon that it had decided upon the commitment of the second battalion, and instructed him to advise Ky of this fact and work out with him the terms of a letter of request. The letter was to indicate that it constituted the final formal step following a series of consultations and should be available for publication. It should be a request in general terms only.

The letter was duly obtained from Ky and its contents cabled to Australia on 7 March 1966. It concluded: "The Government of the Republic of Vietnam wishes to request the Australian Government for any increased military contribution which it might be able to make in the present situation". The following day the Vietnamese and Australian Governments announced the decision simultaneously at 8.45 p.m. (AEST).

The Australian Ambassador in Saigon reported that Major General Nguyen Van Thieu and Air Vice Marshal Ky expressed appreciation

of the Australian Government's decision to replace the battalion with a Task Force and of the continued moral support which this implied.

The Third Increase

Towards the end of 1966 United States administrative, diplomatic and Service officials again indicated that, as United States presidential adviser William Bundy put it, a possible extra Australian contribution was "a subject on our minds". But perhaps because of recognition of Australia's determination to avoid receiving a formal request during the previous year and appreciation of the internal difficulties an election posed for the Australian Government, there seems to have been greatly reduced pressure from the United States.

The impetus for the third increase in Australia's contribution came clearly from the Prime Minister after he increased his majority in the November 1966 election, and the speed at which he desired to move surprised officials and the Minister for External Affairs.

Immediately after the election he told the Secretary of his Department that he wanted very early Cabinet consideration of sending an extra battalion to Vietnam, and that he did not want to wait to consider the question in the light of a review of needs and capabilities early in the New Year. He asked for a study of all possibilities including particularly (1) sending an additional battalion from Australia; and (2) re-deploying the battalion at present in Malaysia.

The Minister for External Affairs then asked the Australian Ambassador in Washington for a personal report of any indications of further thinking in the United States. The Ambassador replied that the Embassy had continued to receive hints from contacts in the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon that an additional military contribution from Australia would be greatly appreciated by the Administration and that American hopes of further support from the United States' allies stemmed as much, and perhaps more, from international and internal political considerations as from military necessity. The Ambassador referred to Johnson's need to seek Congressional approval for a large increase in his budget the following January and to the conflicting pressures on one side from the liberals to "accept negotiations and dangerous concessions to the Communists" and on the other from those who wanted to escalate the war with a view to getting it over quickly. The Ambassador believed that Australia's ability to influence the President's response to these conflicting pressures would be related to the scale of her military contribution and the readiness with which it was made. He suggested that if the fact of an additional contribution would be at least as important as the nature of such a contribution, this might provide more flexibility in the Government's consideration of the problem.

When Service and Departmental advisers presented their report on 13 December they opened it with a survey of the state of the war. They thought that the military situation in Vietnam had improved over the previous twelve months, but that given the allied forces then

available, defeat of the military aggression from North Vietnam and of the Viet Cong was unlikely to be achieved for some considerable time. Concurrently they saw a need for progress to be made in pacification and civil reconstruction, but this could only be achieved at the expense of the availability of forces for military operations. Thus the rate of progress in defeating aggression from North Vietnam and of pacification was directly related to the size of allied forces available. The report canvassed several options open to the Government in regard to all three Services and thought that while the most effective addition to the Army Task Force would be a third infantry battalion, early deployment would pose considerable problems. (Because of these the Army had recommended against the provision of a third battalion before August 1967.) There were, however, increases (totalling approximately 900 troops) which were needed to overcome known deficiencies in the existing forces, some of them specifically recommended by the Commander of the Task Force. Anxiety was expressed about making changes in the Australian contribution to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve given the situation in the Malaysia-Indonesia region, and it was agreed that any such variations should be discussed with the United Kingdom before any decision was made. As a general observation, the advisers stated that it was fundamental to Australian defence policy that we should make a contribution to the security of South East Asia which was consistent with our national resources and with our vital interests in the securing of the area against communist encroachment. On these broad strategic grounds they had previously recommended and the Government had approved a substantial Australian force contribution in the present conflict in Vietnam. There were elements in the present situation including the state of the war, the continuing build-up of United States forces and the apparent expectation in the United States Administration that Australia and other allies would increase their commitments, which suggested that a further increase in the Australian contribution would be appropriate. The nature and timing of any increase were matters for determination by the Government.

The Government accepted their advice against dispatching a third battalion and interfering with arrangements regarding the battalion then in Malaysia. It decided to increase the total number of personnel serving with the Australian Forces in Vietnam by more than one-third to a total of 6,300, with increased numbers coming from all three Services. The Army component was to be raised from 4,370 to 5,200. The Australian Ambassador in Washington was told of the decision on 16 December, and asked to check points of detail and acceptability with the United States Administration so that the Australian Government could make the earliest possible announcement. He reported back to Canberra on the same day that United States Defence Secretary McNamara had expressed particular gratification that Australia was increasing the level of her ground forces. United States approval of details was reported on 19 December.

There is no documentary evidence that the Government of the Republic of Vietnam was consulted about or given prior notification of this third increase in Australia's forces in Vietnam. The Department of External Affairs advised in a memorandum of 19 December 1966 that it did not seem necessary or desirable to seek a specific request from the

South Vietnamese on this occasion. The memorandum added, however, that there had been a continuing emphasis on consultations with South Vietnam and with the other allies (illustrated, for example, by the Prime Minister's visit to Saigon in April and Washington in June-July and the recent Manila Conference*). In any event, the broad terms of Ky's letter of 7 March, together with the continuing consultations at various levels seemed to provide a satisfactory basis for maintaining that the additional forces were provided at South Vietnam's request. It was suggested that, after the proposed aid increase had been made public, a South Vietnamese announcement of the increase could be useful if it emphasised the continuing consultations between our two Governments and with the other allies and drew attention to the increasing North Vietnamese aggression.

It was in fact some hours after the Australian Prime Minister had announced the increased assistance in general terms on 20 December that the Australian Ambassador in Saigon was instructed to inform Air Vice Marshal Ky of the decision. The information was conveyed through Foreign Minister Do, who agreed to say that a letter of request was not necessary because the two Governments had been in continuous consultation for some time, that Australia was fully aware of Vietnam's requirements, and that in making further forces available Australia was acting in the spirit of the Manila Conference.

The Fourth Increase

Expression of American interest in increased Australian aid to Vietnam during the first half of 1967 followed much the same pattern as the previous year: the United States made no formal request to Australia for an additional commitment in Vietnam, but United States military sources in Saigon and Washington made American wishes quite clear to Australian officials.

From Washington on 18 April 1967 the Australian Minister for External Affairs reported a meeting with United States Defence Secretary McNamara on the progress of the war. McNamara had no doubt that America could no longer lose the war, but they still had the problem of winning and that could be long and hard and there was no easy way which could point directly to victory. After considerable discussion of United States operations and the slow progress of negotiations, McNamara asked

* The Manila Summit Conference, attended by the political leaders and foreign ministers of Australia, The Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, the United States and the Republic of Vietnam, was held in the Philippines on October 24-25 1966, "to consider the conflict in South Vietnam and to review their wider purposes in Asia and the Pacific". In the Joint Communique released after the Conference, the participating nations declared their purpose to be peace in South Vietnam and throughout the Asian and Pacific area. However they were also determined "that the South Vietnamese people shall not be conquered by aggressive force and shall enjoy the inherent right to choose their own way of life and their own form of government. We shall continue our military and all other efforts as firmly and as long as may be necessary in close consultation among ourselves until the aggression is ended."

the Minister's views about the present level of forces and said that more troops could do more tasks but they brought with them political, economic and psychological problems. McNamara then illustrated the value of more troops by pointing to the specific task in Phuoc Tuy province being carried out by the Australians with two battalions and commenting that clearly we could do the same task more quickly with three. If the Defence Secretary also elaborated on the problems, the Minister did not report it, nor did he report any comment of his own on the specific issue of the troop increase.

But if United States probings of Australian intentions were not particularly insistent during the first half of the year, the rising level of public controversy in America over policies of escalation in Vietnam soon made the United States Administration more anxious to demonstrate that United States policies had the moral and practical support of her allies. Thus, President L.B. Johnson on 13 July brought the whole question of increases in troop levels into the public arena when, together with Defence Secretary McNamara and Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland, he indicated in a press statement that the United States would discuss increased contributions with her allies. A week later the White House announced the visit of presidential advisers Maxwell D. Taylor and Clark M. Clifford to Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Meanwhile on 15 July President Johnson wrote to the Prime Minister pointing to the need for additional effort, but not making a specific request.

The political situation in the United States was analysed by the Australian Charge in Washington on 25 July. He reported a fluid situation comprising many conflicting trends in opinion, increasing public scepticism about the war, and although he did not think the basic American commitment to Vietnam was being called into question he feared that if, following the United Kingdom's announced intentions to withdraw from South East Asia, America's allies gave a negative response to proposals for more troops it would have a disproportionately adverse effect on United States opinion. Under these circumstances Australia's response, as the most significant Western ally, was of particular importance.

The Clifford-Taylor talks held at the very end of July were broad-ranging rather than narrowly focussed on the question of troop levels. A number of papers, including a summary of main talking points, were prepared in the Departments of External Affairs and Defence for the use of Ministers. These cover political prospects in South Vietnam, the pacification program, prospects for negotiations, communist use of Laos and Cambodia, United States plans in regard to bombing as well as the issue of troops. Amongst other things the summary noted that the relatively optimistic picture of the military situation given by the President in his message to the Prime Minister contrasted with our own military assessments and with some private United States assessments. It noted also that the Revolutionary Development program had been making very slow progress and the South Vietnamese Army was not yet giving it adequate support. On the question of troops, military advisers expressed the view that in considering any future contributions of forces to South Vietnam a tank squadron and additional helicopter support should

be given first priority. (A request for the tank squadron had been received from the Australian Commander in Vietnam and defence advisers supported the request.) They suspected that a contribution on these lines would probably fall short of what the United States would have liked from us, i.e. more ground forces, but suggested that Taylor and Clifford might not be fully aware of the important implications of the British White Paper for future Australian defence arrangements.

At the talks themselves the Australian attitude was not to deny the substance of the United States view that there was a need for publicly declared allied solidarity and greater effort, but to bring into the equation the very considerable stretch already in Australia's military and economic effort, not only in Vietnam but elsewhere, and the new possibility in the light of recent British decisions that wider responsibilities would fall on us. For Australia, "effort" was not to be measured simply in terms of the Vietnam commitment.

The Clifford-Taylor talks thus provided a forum for a mutual exchange of views; they led to no immediate decision on the part of the Australian Government.

Defence and departmental officials continued to consider the details of possible further commitments with no great enthusiasm. By 18 August 1967 they had reached agreement that commitment of a third battalion would pose many difficulties; instead they favoured making available the additions to the Task Force which had been requested by the Commander in Vietnam. There was, however, a division of opinion over whether a positive recommendation against providing a third battalion should be made. There could be an embarrassing situation, it was suggested, if the Government were subsequently asked if it had acted upon the views of its official advisers. Although this suggestion met with some opposition, the weight of opinion was that the requests for additional forces received from the Commander of the Task Force should be recommended on military grounds; other possible contributions should be listed for Government consideration, and the disadvantages of providing a third battalion should be enumerated.

Ministers on 6 September decided in principle to commit the third battalion to Vietnam, but did not set the date for the announcement. Thus when the Prime Minister spoke with the United States Ambassador to Australia on 7 September, he told him only that he should let the President know that "we were not going to sleep", but that there were some important difficulties and complexities in the situation for the Government, such as the implications of British withdrawal plans, our budgetary situation, the local political scene in terms of the Senate election and the Capricornia by-election due shortly, and uncertainties still surrounding some aspects of the Vietnamese elections. There was nevertheless a will to assist.

Just as the Prime Minister had given the impetus to an early decision on troop levels at the end of 1966, so now he would seem to have provided the initiative in determining that Australia should offer more than, by implication, its defence advisers had recommended. When

the Australian Treasurer was in Washington in early October (and under instructions not to inform the President that Australia would provide a third battalion), he referred to the Prime Minister's leadership in making clear to Ministers "what the issues involved in Vietnam were ... and the critical importance of our association with the United States".

In reporting this meeting with the President, the Treasurer stated that the pressure put upon him to have our decision indicated quickly to Johnson was "extremely strong", and that the Australian Ambassador, who was also present, could not remember stronger pressure being brought to bear.

In response, the Treasurer explained to the President Australia's various commitments. The following day (3 October 1967) he suggested to the Prime Minister that the President should be told personally and confidentially what Australia proposed to do, and on 6 October the Prime Minister did so in a message sent to the Australian Ambassador in Washington for transmission to the White House.

He told the President of Australia's plans in regard to the Malaysia-Singapore region where, he said, what happened in the longer term would be determined in large part by the outcome of Vietnam and by the extent of co-operation by the countries in the region in maintaining their own security. He suggested that Australia's continued military presence would depend on reaching some understanding with the United States in the event of serious trouble developing in the Malaysia-Singapore region. He thought it desirable to discuss the United States' interest in the security and stability of South East Asia generally, the bearing of this on the security of the Malaysia-Singapore region and the part in this security which Australia and New Zealand could play.

In Vietnam, he said, Australia's forces would be increased by some 1,700 men to bring the numbers to over 8,000, and this, he assured the President, put Australia at the full stretch of present and planned military capacity. He added that to attempt to go beyond this would involve the Government in military, economic and political decisions which he and his colleagues would regard as publicly unacceptable in the existing climate of opinion apart from other considerations of national policy.

As in the case of the decision in March 1966 to commit the second battalion, there was consultation between the Australian and Vietnamese Governments before the third battalion was committed. During a visit to Saigon in late July 1967, the Minister for the Army discussed the Australian force in Vietnam with both Vietnamese and American officials. He declared, however, that neither the Vietnamese nor the Americans had made a specific request for more Australian troops.

There is, further, indirect evidence that some months later the Republic of Vietnam's Ambassador to Australia conveyed to the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs "an indication of a wish on their the Vietnamese part to have whatever additional support

we can provide".

There followed a suggestion on 10 October 1967 from a senior member of the Department of External Affairs. Although he no longer thought it necessary to seek a specific formal request from the Vietnamese Government for additional Australian forces he thought it important that the Vietnamese should be informed of our intention well in advance of the announcement on 17 October. On 14 October the Australian Ambassador in Saigon was asked to notify the Vietnamese Government of the decision, which was described as having been taken in the light of previous requests by the Vietnamese Government for such military assistance as the Australian Government was able to provide, a request which the Vietnamese Ambassador in Canberra had confirmed that month. The Australian Government saw this decision as being in fulfilment of the undertaking made by the Manila Conference Powers to continue military aid to South Vietnam as long as aggression continued there.

The Ambassador informed the Vietnamese Foreign Minister of the decision to increase military aid on 16 October, and the latter "expressed appreciation". After the Australian announcement of the decision on 17 October, Directory Chairman Thieu publicly welcomed the troop increases and praised both the military and civil activities of Australian and New Zealand troops in Vietnam.