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PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

1 April 1979

US ARTICLE ON HYDROGEN BOMB

To-day's edition of the Sunday Observer states that "Classified information on how to make a hydrogen bomb has been circulating in Melbourne". It also reports that "the information, in the form of a 40 page article, including diagrams, was deposited in a Melbourne bank vault after it was given to the Sunday Observer".

The Sunday Observer acted responsibly and delivered that newspaper's copy of the article to the Government.

The Government has confirmed that the copy received from the Sunday Observer is the article that a United States magazine was recently restrained by injunction of a Federal Court from publishing in the United States.

It is understood that the U.S. Secretary of Energy Mr Schlesinger in an affidavit filed in the proceedings in the U.S. Court stated that publishing the article would irreparably impair the national security of the United States by making available to foreign nations secret, restricted data pertaining to the design and operational characteristics of a thermo-nuclear weapon. Mr Schlesinger also said that the information in the article would enable countries, which do not now have a thermo-nuclear capacity, to develop such weapons in a shorter time than would otherwise be possible.

The Sunday Observer claims that at least one other copy of the article is known to be in Australia

Our technical advisers agree with the assessment of the United States authorities and Australia shares the U.S. Government's concern.

Against that background, the Government is satisfied that publication of the article might well be useful to assist the acquisition of nuclear weapons by additional countries. Australia is a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and is committed to pursuing nuclear arms control and non-proliferation objectives as a member of the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva. The Government's position is clear and unequivocal.

Consistent with the principles which I outlined in my statement to the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in New York on 5 June 1978, an essential element in nuclear arms control is preventing the acquisition of nuclear weapons by additional countries. This involves the security of all Australians and indeed of all the world. Proliferation triggers further proliferation - causing instability and risk for all.

Publication of the article will, in the judgment of the Government, be prejudicial to the safety or defence of the Commonwealth. It is my duty to make the people of Australia aware of this judgment. A general objection to secrecy in the area of nuclear weapons provides no justification for publication of this material. Any person who may have possession of a copy of the article and who may be contemplating its publication must understand clearly that dissemination of this material can only be prejudicial to Australia.