

OUTWARD SAVINGRAM
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

INWARD SAVINGRAM, 1965.
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From:

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Vietnam

During April there were some signs that the Soviet Union was prepared to move towards discussions on Vietnam, perhaps by means of a Cambodian Conference. Such a conference seemed unlikely by the end of May, with Hanoi and Peking working against it. Soviet policy on Vietnam had become immobile.

2. Australia's decision to send a battalion of troops to Vietnam was reported by Pravda but not conspicuously. On 15th May the Ambassador was called to the Soviet Foreign Ministry and handed a statement in which the Soviet Government condemned Australia's decision to send troops to Vietnam.

3. In summary, the Soviet statement claimed that Australia was setting out on the path of direct and unprovoked aggression against the Vietnamese people. It violated the principles of international law and the Geneva Agreements. This was not an isolated act but part of a series of hostile actions by Australia in relation to the Vietnamese people and in support of United States aggression. Australia's policy, it claimed, was contrary to the interests of strengthening world peace and Australia must assume a serious responsibility for the consequences of its actions.

4. The Soviet Government, through Bangkok, complained to the Thais on 18th May that they had allowed the United States the use of their airfields to bomb North Vietnam and wanted that the Thais must assume responsibility for the consequences of these acts. (The Japanese had a similar approach in March.)

5. The Australian reply to the Soviet statement was handed to Mr. Zemyanin, Soviet Deputy Minister, on 29th May. It regretted that the Soviet statement was based on a distortion of the situation in Vietnam. It affirmed that the direct and unprovoked aggression emanated from Hanoi, through its control and direction of the Vietcong in South Vietnam. It drew attention to findings by the International Control Commission of breaches by North Vietnam of the Geneva Agreements. It referred to the infiltration by North Vietnam of armed personnel and materials into South Vietnam stating that it was the channels used for this which were under attack and not the people or authorities. Heavy responsibility must be borne by North Vietnam for its actions. It stated that the Australian decision to send troops had been taken after most careful consideration and in

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AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY, MOSCOW
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
~~OUTWARD SAVINGRAM~~
INWARD SAVINGRAM 25226.

The conviction that there was no other way, while North Vietnam continued its policies, to defend the freedom of South Vietnam and indeed of other countries in South East Asia. The statement considered that the Soviet should exert its influence on the authorities in Hanoi and Peking who could remove the causes which have given rise to the existing situation in Vietnam and elsewhere in the area.

6. Zemyanin said he would pass this statement to his Minister but offered some preliminary comment. In this he repeated points made in the Soviet statement of 15th May. His attitude was that responsibility for affairs in Vietnam fell almost wholly on the United States and the pressures of the world, including those which Australia might exert, should be directed against the United States to stop its bombing of the North and to withdraw its troops. There was no indication in Mr. Zemyanin's comments that the Soviet Government was taking or planning any initiatives that might open up the way to talks.

7. The American Embassy confirmed to us at the end of the month that the Soviet Government was not taking up suggestions that the Embassy might have some discussion with them over Vietnam.

8. Also evident during the month were signs of Soviet irritation with United States policies, an irritation which could arise from frustration at not being themselves in command of the development of events in Vietnam while they were very much concerned by the potential dangers in the situation.

9. This irritation was reflected in a Tass statement of 21st May, which commented on President Johnson's speech on the 20th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. In particular this took on a personal note directed at President Johnson himself.

Mr. Shastri's Visit to Soviet Union

10. The official communiqué contained little in the way of strong material. The Soviet side wanted to include paragraphs on Cuba, the Dominican Republic and the multi-national force, but the Indians had resisted this. There was only a short reference to Vietnam, the Soviet side accepting an Indian draft at their last meeting. It expressed great concern at the situation in Vietnam, stated that bombing of the North should stop immediately and a solution found within the framework of the Geneva Agreements.

11. In the course of discussions the Soviet side gave no hint to the Indians that they would like them to take initiatives over Vietnam or that they were taking any themselves.

12. The Indians re-stated to the Soviet their own ideas on peaceful relations between states and the communiqué, at Indian instigation, reaffirmed ideas of peaceful co-existence. The Indian side sought this having the forthcoming Algiers Afro-Asian Conference in mind.

13. The Soviet steered clear of taking sides in Indo-Pakistan disputes. They did not discuss the Sino-Soviet dispute. Each side expressed separate views in relation to East and West Germany.

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