

# TOP SECRET

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## MINUTES OF THE DEFENCE COMMITTEE AT A MEETING ON TUESDAY, 20TH APRIL, 1965

### PRESENT

E.W. Hicks, CBE  
Secretary, Department of Defence  
(Chairman)

Air Marshal Sir Valston Hancock  
K.B.E. C.B. D.F.C.  
Chief of the Air Staff

Sir James Plimsoll, C.B.E.  
Secretary,  
Department of External Affairs

Lieutenant General Sir John Wilton  
K.B.E. C.B. D.S.O  
Chief of the General Staff

Sir John Bunting, C.B.E.  
Secretary  
Prime Minister's Department

Vice Admiral A.W.R. McNicoll  
C.B. C.B.E. G.M  
Chief of Naval Staff

C.L.S. Hewitt, O.B.E.  
Representing the  
Secretary of the Treasury

AGENDUM  
NO.17/1965

### NO. 21/1965: POSSIBLE AUSTRALIAN FORCE CONTRIBUTION TO SOUTH VIETNAM

The Defence Committee considered the problems associated with the deployment of a Battalion in South Vietnam in the light of :-

- (a) Inwards Cablegram No. 1281 from the Australian Ambassador in Washington wherein he advised that presidential approval had been given to requesting the Australian Government for the use of an Australian Battalion in South Vietnam and that a further conference at the Ministerial level would be desirable to discuss timing, role and deployment.
- (b) Inwards Cablegram No. 341 from the Australian Ambassador in Saigon advising that consideration of the timing of the deployment of an Australian Battalion would need to take into consideration the sensitivities of the South Vietnamese Government.
- (c) The attached paper from the Chief of the General Staff.

2. The Defence Committee concluded that :-

- (a) A decision on timing was necessary so that an Army planning team could proceed to Saigon and Danang which would absorb approximately 12 to 14 days in concluding the necessary planning talks. In addition the means of transport would need to be determined quickly in relation to the timing so that arrangements could be made to charter Civil aircraft, which could prove difficult, in addition to using the capacity available in HMAS SYDNEY, and plans developed for future maintenance support.
- (b) A request for the use of the battalion should come from the South Vietnamese Government and the Committee considered that initially the Australian Ambassador should not be associated with the American Ambassador in any approaches to the South Vietnamese Government.

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- (c) The chain of command requires determination so that the South Vietnamese are given nominal command but operational control is held by the United States on the lines envisaged in SEATO Plan 7. The battalion should be under the immediate command of the United States with the Australian Battalion Commander being given a directive specifying the role. On information currently available the role would be as set out in paragraph 7 of the C.G.S's paper. This would need to be further discussed with the United States Administration in the next round of discussions in Washington.
- (d) These further discussions in Washington appear necessary before the Australian Ambassador in Saigon can approach the South Vietnamese Government. The Army planning team should not be sent to South Vietnam until after the discussions between the Australian Ambassador and the South Vietnamese Prime Minister. It is inevitable that there will be a lag in time after the decision to send the Battalion to South Vietnam has been announced and its actual deployment.
- (e) Urgent consideration should be given to the timing of the presentation of the decision either through Parliament or in the press.
- (f) Mr. Cabot Lodge might be invited to discuss with Ministers the ultimate objectives of the American policy in South Vietnam in the light of the world reactions to President Johnson's recent address and the present position in regard to the availability of troops from other nations.

(G. ADAMSON)  
Secretary,  
DEFENCE COMMITTEE  
20/4/1965

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