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ANNEX 'B'

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

INWARD CABLEGRAM

I.13773

SAJ.

DATED: 2nd April, 1965
2200

FROM:

REC'D: 3rd April, 1965
1635

Australian Embassy
Washington.

1152. SECRET

For the Minister from Waller.

Vietnam.

1. I saw Rusk on 2nd April and spoke as you had instructed.
2. In replying Rusk first gave an outline of the military situation.

He said that in this situation there was "considerable room for manoeuvre" in that no significant redistribution of communist forces (Chinese and Russian) was visible.

He deduced that neither China nor the U.S.S.R. was deploying for general war.

As regards the recent reduction in the scale of Viet Cong activities, this reduction was, he thought, without political significance.

He regarded it as a lull which would proceed a more intensive Viet Cong drive, probably in the Da Nang area.

There were reports of movements of Viet Cong forces from the Delta area northwards.

These reports tended to confirm the conclusion that the Da Nang area would be the target for the more intensive effort.

No massive increase in infiltration, such as could be expected to proceed entry by the Viet Cong into the third phase of guerrilla warfare was perceivable.

The flare up in the fighting of the last few days did not signify the end of the lull because this fighting had resulted from initiatives taken by the ARVN.

It should be remembered that although there had been a lull in the fighting over the last three weeks, such fighting as had taken place in this period, when computed on an annual rate, was no smaller than the annual rate for 1964.

3. Rusk continued that the U.S. preferred not to put into South Vietnam large American ground forces because such a move could have unfavourable political and psychological repercussions.

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7. Rusk clarified the purpose of the use of force against North Vietnam as follows.

He said that it was the expectation of the U.S. that by the use of force against North Vietnam, accompanied by an upturn in the situation in South Vietnam, Hanoi would eventually be brought to face two alternatives - either to seek negotiations or to recognize that a very large military effort would be needed.

The U.S. hoped that when this point was reached, Hanoi would seek negotiations.

If Hanoi opted for the other alternative the U.S. would simply have to meet the new situation that would ensue (Rusk's implication was that a new situation would be met with such force as was required).

8. Rusk next talked of what he called the political situation.

He said that there were the four following possible circumstances which might reveal the chances for profitable negotiations :-

- (A) The U.S. would respond to the 17-nation appeal in simple and reasonable terms.

It might be that when all the responses to this appeal had been received, clues about a peaceful settlement would emerge.

In other words, the appeal and the response to it would at this time show or rule out the possibilities of a public initiative.

If the communists were to respond in an offensive way, some psychological benefit would accrue for our side.

- (B) The British had today sent out a message to the members of the 1954 Geneva Conference and to the members of the I.C.C. asking for a statement on views on the situation in Vietnam and on the circumstances they considered a peaceful settlement could be reached.

The U.S. would closely scrutinize the replies to this message to see whether they produced anything of value.

- (C) Gordon Walker's visit to South-East Asia might open up possibilities for a peaceful settlement.

- (D) U Thant might establish contacts which would lead to something.

(I gather from this remark that the U.S. would not be adverse to efforts by U Thant along these lines).

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The U.S.' reaction would depend very much on what the signal was and how it was transmitted.

For instance, if the signal was private, the U.S. would pursue it privately.

If it was public, international pressures might develop for a conference.

The U.S. would not be keen to negotiate in a conference because if the conference were to fail, the situation would be brought very close to war.

12. North Vietnam seemed to feel, Rusk went on, that all she had to do was to pursue the war in the South while absorbing a fair amount of punishment herself from the U.S. and she would in due course triumph.

This assessment was probably based upon the history of political instability in Saigon.

Accordingly, every week that the present Government of South Vietnam held office was to the good.

Another military coup in Saigon would make the situation "extremely fragile".

While rumours of such a coup still occurred from time to time, there was no real indication that one was in the offering although no one could ever be sure.

13. Rusk concluded his outline of the position by stressing that before embarking upon discussions designed to lead to a peaceful settlement, it was essential for the U.S. to have some indication that such discussions would be worthwhile.

He added that in looking to the future, the U.S. did not see ahead "any clearly-defined scenario" which would have much relation to actually what might occur, there were too many uncertainties in the situation.

But the U.S. was going to continue to make good her commitment to South Vietnam.

North Vietnam would have to stop or the U.S. would go on "gnawing at her".

14. Addressing himself to the question of whether Australia might be able to help in London, Rusk said that the problem in London, he thought was not with the British Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary, but with the Labour Back-Benchers.

He did not therefore see scope at this time for any help by Australia with the British.

He thought there was more to be done by Australia in places like Bonn, Rome, The Hague or Stockholm where Australia might have somewhat better access and where anything Australia could do would be important.

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He then referred to reports that Hanoi was encouraged by disunity in the western world and to the fact that western unanimity during the Cuba crisis had assisted the U.S.S.R. to come to the right decision.

Prime Minister
Minister for E.A.
Minister for Defence
The Hon. H. Holt
Mr. P. Shaw
Mr. E.W. Hicks
Sir John Bunting

3rd April, 1965.

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