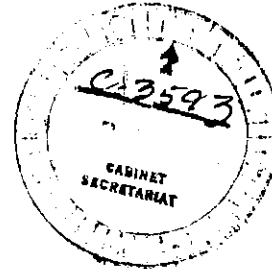


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CABINET MINUTE

Canberra, 15th May, 1962.



Decision No. 241

Without Memorandum - Australia's Contribution to the Maintenance
of the Stability of South-East Asia.

The Cabinet noted -

- (a) that, at the ANZUS Conference, the United States had expressed a determination to stand firm against Chinese aggression in South-East Asia;
- (b) although this was not a final political decision, the United States would almost certainly be willing to carry out armed intervention alone in South Vietnam, but would welcome the presence of as many as possible of its other SEATO partners;
- (c) the United States would be prepared to use a tactical nuclear weapon in the area, if they thought this necessary, but would not wish to expand any conflict there into a global war and do not regard themselves as committed to the use of a nuclear weapon. Such a weapon would be most useful in smashing airfields and blocking passes. The United States had no intention of using this weapon against centres of population;
- (d) the United States representative at the ANZUS Conference had conceded that the plans for military intervention in the area would be likely to require a decision that a nuclear weapon be used, but was agreeable to discussions with Australia and New Zealand to attempt to identify in advance guide lines for the use of the nuclear weapon;

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- (e) that a decision in regard to the possible use of the weapon might have to be left to Commanders in the field without full political consultation;
- (f) that the use of a nuclear weapon by the United States in South-East Asia would be a great diplomatic victory for the Chinese, because no Afro-Asian nation would be likely to approve its use;
- (g) that, although Australia was not presently a combatant in South-East Asia but had offered to provide instructors in jungle fighting and village defence, the greatest care should be taken, if we were to advise the United States on the use of a nuclear deterrent in South-East Asia, that any advice we might offer should be advice from a neighbour, not from a combatant; and
- (h) that, if Australia were to provide military instructors who would, as requested by the United States, wear distinguishing national uniform, this would be a significant political decision.

2. The Cabinet decided that it should conduct a careful and comprehensive examination of -

- (i) the implications of the stationing of Australian Service personnel in any South-East Asian country, including full consideration of the military implications, with the advice of the Chiefs of Staff; and
- (ii) the provision of an Australian combatant group to any South-East Asian country in support of -
 - (A) an operation initiated and undertaken solely by the United States; and
 - (B) an operation invoked by SEATO.

3. The Cabinet was informed that, if the United States were to request combat assistance from Australia in South Vietnam (apart from the request for instructors, no such request has been received), the United States defence leaders had in mind that Australia might supply -

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- (a) two ships for patrol purposes off the delta of the Mekong River;
- (b) three regiments of parachutists;
- (c) engineering units to assist the construction of roads and bridges; and
- (d) a signal unit, or units, or instructional personnel.

4. The Cabinet agreed that any early disposition of Australian military forces in South-East Asia -

- (a) should preferably be part of a SEATO operation because we would not wish to be involved in a conflict in Asia which would be almost exclusively between white and coloured, and because one advantage of a SEATO operation would be that the likelihood of the use of a nuclear weapon would be diminished; and
- (b) should be on the request of the Government of the country into which our forces were to enter.

5. The Cabinet agreed that, if Australia were requested by the Government of South Vietnam to supply instructors in jungle fighting and village defence, we should reply that we were willing to provide competent people in an advisory and instructional capacity.

6. The Cabinet agreed that public justification of our willingness to provide these instructors might be along the following lines. South Vietnam is among the protocol countries associated with SEATO. When Malaya, which is not a protocol country, was troubled by Communist bandits after achieving independence, Australia was asked to make some personnel available to help the local Administration to counter these banditry operations. These Australian personnel played a useful part in countering aggression. In the case of Vietnam, this is a protocol country associated with SEATO and Australia is willing to discharge the obligations she has accepted in this area. In Vietnam there is insurgency similar to that which occurred in Malaya, which is being fomented by the Vietcong who are also Communist bandits. Their aim is to overthrow the

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Government. If this were achieved, it would pose the greatest possible threat to Australia. If the Government of South Vietnam asks us to supply instructors in jungle fighting and village defence, we regard ourselves as completely willing to do this.

Certified true copy

J. F. Lumma.

Deputy Secretary to Cabinet.

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