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Letter from E.J. Bunting, Secretary to the Prime Minister, to Sir Arthur Tange, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 26 June 1962.

Dear Sir Arthur,

The Prime Minister had a meeting on 18th June at the Pentagon with Mr. McNamara, the United States Secretary of Defence.

The meeting was fairly brief. There was some exchange of views on the defence situation within South-East Asia. The most significant aspect of the discussion concerned the possible use of nuclear weapons.

The Prime Minister referred to the concern which the Australian Government felt about the possible use of such weapons by SEATO forces. He mentioned the comments made in the course of the ANZUS meeting by the Minister for External Affairs.

Mr. McNamara said that the Prime Minister could be assured that the United States fully understood the high cost, including in terms of hostile and lasting Asian opinion, of a decision to use any nuclear weapon. He said - stressing that this information was to be regarded as top secret - that there was a high probability that there would be no resort to nuclear weapons in any South-East Asia combat. In any case it would not be for a Field Commander to decide to use a nuclear weapon. This applies to a tactical as well as to a strategic weapon, and irrespective of circumstances. But for obvious reasons it is an aspect of policy which must be most highly protected.

I am sending this letter personally to you and a copy of it personally to Mr. Hicks.

Mr. McNamara supplied the Prime Minister with a copy of a speech made by him at the University of Michigan on 16th June. I attach a copy of this. Mr. McNamara said that he noticed that parts of the British press had chosen to interpret his speech as directed against Britain. He said that this was a misreading of the speech, and that his target had been France.