Chapter - II

Australia’s Military Involvement in and its Withdrawal from the Vietnam War
The prevention of the Southeast Asian region from falling a prey to the aggressive communism and the ensuring of the free passage of sea routes to the US and Europe being the chief preoccupation of Australia,¹ eventually got degenerated into almost an obsession that showed the corresponding enhancement in Australia's excessive dependence on its new powerful ally, the U.S. As Rostow has pointed out the Australians were "not likely to forget what a close call its was in 1942 when they were saved from Japanese invasion by the American victories in the Coral sea and at Guadal canal".²

Australian Involvement in Vietnam

Following the conclusion of Geneva Agreement, the US replaced the French in Vietnam and established direct channel of contact with the Saigon government. A transferal agreement was signed by both the US and France on December 13, 1954 which made the required provision for the transfer from the French to the American military advisers, of the function of training the South

² Ibid.
Vietnamese army".\(^3\) Thus, the United States assumed the responsibility of defending the non-communist world's interests in Southeast Asia.

For the US, Viet Minh was always an unacceptable replacement. President Eisenhower offered American support to President Diem\(^4\) of South Vietnam against Communist aggression. He wrote a letter to Diem on October 1, 1954, offering "to assist the government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means. The government of the United States expects that their aid will be met by performance on the part of the Government of Vietnam in undertaking needed reforms".\(^5\) The letter of Eisenhower inaugurated the US involvement in South Vietnam. Eisenhower was successful in making the struggle in distant Indochina very significant to the Americans by his famous phrase 'domino theory'. Continuing the policy of his predecessor, President Kennedy said that Vietnam "represents the corner-stone of the Free world in Southeast Asia, the key stone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the


\(^4\) Ngo Dinh Diem (1901-1963) was born in a Catholic family. He was appointed as the Minister for the Interior in 1933. He tendered resignation to that post on the grounds that all powers were entrusted to the French rulers leaving no provision for the Vietnamese to have independent initiative. For two decades thereafter, he remained an active nationalist. Emperor Bao Dai asked Diem to form the government with himself as Prime Minister on June 16, 1954. Meanwhile, a referendum was held in South Vietnam to decide whether Vietnam should remain a monarchy or a Republic. He got rid of Monarchy as well as Bao Dai following the one sided elections he conducted on October 23, 1955. On October 26, 1955, he was proclaimed the President of the new Republic of Vietnam (RVN). After consolidating his position, President Diem proceeded to annihilate his opponents in South Vietnam. Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, (London, 1967), pp. 845-892; D.R. Sardesai, *Southeast Asia: Past and Present*, (New Delhi, 1997), p.191.

Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of communism overflowed into Vietnam. Thus the stage was set by the two American Presidents for a major American involvement in Vietnam. The flow of American military advisers and equipment was maintained to boost the morale of the South Vietnamese army.

The unpopular and atrocious rule of Diem paved the way for the formation of National Liberation Front (NLF) on December 20, 1960, "a broad national unified front whose sole aim was to liberate South Vietnam". Undoubtedly, this revolutionary movement had the guidance and the support of North Vietnam. By April 1964, NLF controlled 42% of the villages while South Vietnam controlled only 34 per cent. Attributing the NLF's growing power and influence to the diplomatically bad performance of the Saigon government in the domestic front as well as the war front and also to the North Vietnamese effective support, the US was determined to launch an attack on North Vietnam. The alleged North Vietnamese attacks on the US destroyers 'Maddox' and 'C. Turner Joy' stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2 and 4, 1964, provided a convenient pretext for the US to plunge into action. Reacting sharply, the American Congress passed the "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution" on August 7, 1964, authorising the American President "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression".

Interpreting this resolution, called a "blank check", as a declaration of war, Johnson Administration involved the US in a wider war. The US military

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
9 Sardesai, n.4, p.317.
10 For text of "The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution" August 7, 1964, see Gettleman, n.8, p.250.
personnel in South Vietnam numbering more than 20,000, who were primarily advisers, were joined in early March 1965 for the first time by Marines whose role was to fight, and by 1967, there were more than half a million US troops in South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{11}

At this critical moment, the US was indeed happy to find a trustworthy friend and an ally in Australia. For its part, Australia already concerned about its security interests, intensified its efforts to involve the US in the affairs of the Southeast Asia and to support the US commitment depending upon the exigencies of the situation in Southeast Asia.

The main feature of Australian foreign policy was its unflinching loyalty to the 'protector', manifest in its excessive reliance on its 'protector' and this became the cardinal feature of Australian foreign policy. This peculiar aspect found its expression during the US involvement in Vietnam. This concept of 'Loyalty to the protector' seemed to lay bare certain lacunae apart from offering a few crumbs of advantages to the Australian security. Australians' staunch support of their strong allies brought them the stigma of being "proxy – imperialists". The haunting fear of aggression made Australia to mistake consultation for diplomacy in its utter confusion when it blindly adopted the decisions made by its powerful ally. Thus Australia's unquestioning loyalty seem to have fostered to a tendency in Australian policy makers to blindly toe the line traced by the US at the expense of their independent judgement. Consequently, the Australians found their self-confidence in pursuing their foreign policy on the wane. The Vietnam War too made the Australian dependence on the US unduly excessive manifest in the lack of independent initiative in the foreign policy front. All the Prime Ministers of Liberal-Country Party Coalition flirted with the idea of being loyal to the

'protector' throughout their respective tenure of office. Had the Vietnam operation been successful, Australia's political loyalty to the US would have been applauded but it happened otherwise.

In the course of its involvement in Vietnam War, Australia was also influenced by the wrong signals sent by China and its new found ally, Indonesia. The 'China threat' became the determining factor for Australian policies towards Asia-pacific region. In Southeast Asia, no country was capable of offering a check to China's thrust. The containment of China and the prevention of the falling of dominoes in Southeast Asia, became the articles of faith in the newly forged strategic and defence policies of Australia. Britain's rather slow withdrawal from Southeast Asia at a time when the threat from China was looming large, heightened the strategic sensitiveness of Australia. Australia also perceived the establishment of communist government in North Vietnam as a factor favouring the realisation of communist China's ambitions and aggressive designs in Southeast Asia.

The expansionist designs of the People's Republic of China manifested themselves in the Sino-Soviet border conflict and the Sino-Indian War justified the Australians' fear of Chinese threat. But the obsessive fear of China resulted in Australia's inconsistent and inadequate policies towards the Vietnam War. The one major constraint of the Australian External Affairs Department was that it never had a provision for a separate department or analyst to furnish a reliable and objective assessment of the situation in Hanoi, throughout Australian involvement in Vietnam.12 The American perceptions of the Vietnam conflict that found expression in the Presidential statements and in the State Department publications were drawn upon heavily by the Australian government to shape and justify its

own policy towards Vietnam. All these could not minimize Australia's Sinophobia. The Melbourne Age wrote about the significance of South Vietnam to Australia's defence:

Self-interest alone, dictates a role for Australia to play in maintaining this unhappy country as a bulwark, no matter how shaky, against the downward sweep of China into Southeast Asia.  

Likewise, The Brisbane Courier–Mail commented that "were Vietnam to fall... with it would go Laos, Cambodia and probably Thailand". Thus, the domino theory was propagated forcibly and recalled frequently in Australia. Paul Hasluck, the Australian Foreign Minister, hence said in June 1964, that what was happening in Vietnam was the fall out of "the determination of China to establish Chinese hegemony throughout Southeast Asia, working in the first place through the agency of her North Vietnamese puppets". In the same year, Hasluck travelled all the way to Moscow to convince the Soviet Union of the aggressive postures of Peking regime.

Apart from China, Indonesia, the nearest Asian neighbour to Australia too made its contribution to enhance Australian Security concerns. Earlier, when Indonesia was fighting for its independence with the Dutch, Australia championed the cause of Indonesia's freedom and worked hard to invite international attention to it. After Indonesia attained its independence, Australia, along with India, co-sponsored Indonesia's admission to the United Nations in 1950.

---

14 Ibid.
During the post-independence period of Indonesia, Australia was dismayed by certain events like Indonesian efforts to regain West Irian (Irian Jaya) between 1957-63 and also "confrontation policy", designed to "Crush Malaysia" during 1963-1966. When Indonesian paratroopers landed on Malayan Peninsula during "confrontation", Australian military which was stationed in Malaya since 1955 in accordance with its obligation under ANZAM Treaty, had to fight against Indonesian soldiers. After 1963 when Malaysia was formed, Australia promised to defend Malaysia's territorial integrity and independence, holding that Malaysia was its "only hope of a bastion against China".\textsuperscript{17} Much to the chagrin of Australia, Indonesia, during Sukarno's period, got its relations strengthened with the Soviet Union and China. "Forward defence"\textsuperscript{18} became the cardinal principle of Australia's defence policy when its relations with its nearest Asian neighbour became enfeebled.

Since 1961, the feasibility of troop deployment to assist South Vietnam was considered and studied by the US State Department. Subsequently the focus was shifted from the unilateral American intervention to a multilateral SEATO intervention on March 31, 1962. The then South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem wrote a letter to ninety -- three countries in which, while explaining North Vietnam's aggressive actions, he urged them to condemn north Vietnam and made

\textsuperscript{17} Barclay, n.15, p.79.
\textsuperscript{18} "Forward Defence" was the strategic policy pursued by Australia towards Southeast Asia from 1955. The salient features of this strategy were expounded by Australian Chiefs of Staff in April 1964 : "Australian defence policy is soundly based on the principle that the security of the Australian mainland and its island territories is best achieved by a forward defence strategy to hold Southeast Asia. Thus providing defence in depth for Australia. For this reason, Australia has participated fully in collective defence arrangements, thereby contributing to the security of more immediately threatened areas in Southeast Asia and in turn attracting the support of powerful allies, particularly the United States". Gregory Pemberton, \textit{All the way : Australia's road to Vietnam}, (Sydney, 1987), p.205.
no request for any kind of assistance,\(^{19}\) probably because he hesitated to express the idea of engaging foreign troops in South Vietnam to counter North Vietnam. After Diem was killed, Saigon regime was pushed into the whirlpool of political instability, taking advantage of which Viet Cong\(^{20}\) mounted an offensive. Driven into desperation, the Saigon leaders sought foreign economic and military aid at a time when a number of Congressional leaders were dissatisfied with the inadequate efforts of America's allies in Vietnam war. So, the US policy makers including the President, were bent upon convincing the American allies of the dire need for a concerted international effort in Vietnam. Australia also came under American pressure for greater assistance and participation in the conflict. The 9\(^{th}\) Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the SEATO held at Manila on April 13-15, 1964, assumed importance because it was here that the stage was set for the involvement of the SEATO members in the Vietnam war. Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, went to Manila with a determination to muster support from the SEATO members. In a statement at the meeting on April 13, Secretary Rusk said;

> South Vietnam is the target of a continuing aggression directed, supported and supplied from Hanoi. The communists have increased their attacks.... SEATO's mission – the preservation and strengthening of peace and security in the treaty area – is as relevant today, indeed, as critical today, as it was in 1954. This is a time to rededicate ourselves to this mission, as my country now does.\(^{21}\)

---


20 The term *Viet Cong* or Vietnamese Communists, is an epithet coined by Ngo Dinh Diem. It came to refer to those units and leaders who were strictly local Southerners. However, Vietnamese used the term Viet Cong for any Communist, regardless of regional origin.

21 For text of statement made by Secretary Rusk at the opening session of the SEATO Council of Ministers held at Manila, April 13-15, 1964 see, *Department of State Bulletin (DSB)*, May 4, 1964, pp.690-692.
As the outcome of the Meeting would suggest, Secretary Rusk succeeded in his mission. The meeting of the Council of Ministers of SEATO expressed "grave concern about the continuing communist aggression against the Republic of Vietnam", believing that "the defeat of the communist campaign is essential not only to the security of the Republic of Vietnam, but to that of Southeast Asia", and gave a call to the members of SEATO so that "they should remain prepared if necessary to take further concrete steps within their respective capabilities in fulfilment of their obligations under the treaty".\(^{22}\) During his visit to South Vietnam, on April 7, 1964, two days after the SEATO meeting, Secretary Rusk encouraged emphatically told South Vietnam that it "should go ahead now and move with considerable vigour and activity in explaining their case to the rest of the world" and seek the assistance of "a political sort, an economic sort, perhaps in other respects, from the free world".\(^{23}\) Complying with the US suggestions in July 1964, General Nguyen Khanh, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam, addressed an appeal to the heads of the State of thirty-four countries including Australia, for increased aid to his country in its struggle against communist subversion and terrorism.\(^{24}\) Earlier in May 1964, Secretary Rusk also sent a cable to all the American Embassies of American allies, instructing them to ascertain whether their host countries were inclined to offer assistance to the beleaguered South Vietnam.

In the wake of a strong, direct and specific request, Australia received from the US, Alan Renouf, Australian minister in Washington, immediately advised Canberra to respond positively to the US request. Australian government

\(^{22}\) For text of the communique issued at the close of the Council of Ministers of SEATO at Manila, see *Ibid*, pp.692-693.

\(^{23}\) *DSB*, May 4, 1964, pp.695-696.

\(^{24}\) "South Vietnam and Australia", *CNIA*, October 1964, p.28.
responded accordingly. On June 8, 1964, The Australian Defence Minister, Shane Paltridge, conveyed his government's decision to the US on increasing its existing programme of assistance to Vietnam. The American embassy in Australia dispatched a note, listing the items of assistance Australia might provide.

This positive response of Canberra buttressed up its credentials as an important ally of America in Vietnam War. The elated Dean Rusk remarked that of all its allies Australia alone gave a thoroughgoing favourable response to the US request. Again, when Prime Minister Robert Menzies visited America in June 1964, President Johnson, applauding the formidable commitment of Australia, said; "for us here in the United States it has been a source of great strength to know that there stands a nation so dedicated to freedom's defence as Australia".

For the US, Australian participation in Vietnam was of a greater political importance because it wanted its own efforts in South Vietnam to be deemed as an international effort to save democracy. As a matter of fact, the allied support was very limited. The international support that the US boasted of, included "a shipload of coffee from Latin America and an X-ray unit from Europe". While South Korea sent 20,000 military personnel, Australia deployed only 1500 soldiers in South Vietnam at the end of 1965. Australian assistance, though modest, was considered significant. First, of the few countries which sent troops to Vietnam in response to the American call Australia was the foremost. Second, Australia was the only SEATO member providing aid to South Vietnam. America's position was so precarious at that time that it needed SEATO members' support to convince the Congress and the American Press about its involvement in Vietnam. But the

26 Pemberton, n.18, p.199.
situation in SEATO was that, if USA insisted on SEATO members' participation in the action in Vietnam, members like France and Pakistan were ready to obstruct or withdraw from the pact. Britain was unequivocal in demanding negotiations with Hanoi instead of courting escalation of war in Vietnam. Australia was the only SEATO member to remain loyal to USA at this critical hour. Third, Australia made the offer of assistance when such gestures from allies were badly needed by the Johnson Administration to impress upon the American Congress so that it would adopt Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

Further, demonstrating its loyalty, Australia reacted swiftly to justify American retaliatory actions during the Tonkin Gulf incident. In a statement made on August 5, 1964 i.e., one day after the second controversial Tonkin Gulf incident took place and two days before the American Congress considered Gulf of Tonkin resolution, the Australian Foreign Minister, Hasluck, categorically said, that the US action was completely justified. Again on August 11, he made a statement in the House of Representatives:

The Government, the Congress and the people of the United states of America have gained our respect and honour for their acceptance of the great responsibilities that come with great power and for their sober, determined but restrained use of their power for the peace and security of other people.

The Government believes that this action was completely justified as North Vietnam could not be left undisturbed in its capacity to launch and renew such attacks.

In seeking peace, as the final objective of our policy we recognise the need at the present time for the deterrent effect of power, and we ourselves within the limits of our capacity are determined to stand with our allies in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in the defence against Communist aggression in Southeast Asia.29

Australia's operations in Vietnam were part of its programme to ensure the physical presence of the US in Southeast Asia for its defence and to contain the southward expansion of communism from China. Its policy of "forward defence" against aggression on its shores was in accordance with the American "forward defence" against communism. Australian involvement in Vietnam started in 1962 with a quasi military contribution though its political involvement under SEATO aid programme could be traced back to 1954. In conformity with its military involvement which was the first of its kind as announced by Australian Foreign Minister Sir Garifield Barwick on May 7, 1962, Australia sent a team of 30 Army instructors to Vietnam to train the South Vietnam army in jungle warfare village defence and the allied activities. Besides this, Australia offered training facilities to the Vietnamese military in its army schools. Australia also provided economic aid to the tune of £ 3,500,000 for the defence and for the social and economic budget of the villages in South Vietnam.30

The 'protocol' of SEATO considered Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam as protected States. But in 1956, Cambodia and in 1962, Laos opted to be out of SEATO umbrella. Withdrawal of Britain from Southeast Asia reduced SEATO to a mere 'Paper Tiger'. The indifference and inactivity of France and Pakistan imperilled the very existence of SEATO. But, both the American and the Australian commitments in Vietnam were primarily due to their SEATO obligations. In the course of his discussions with Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman on March 15, 1962, Secretary Rusk, "reaffirmed" that the United States' obligations.

obligation under SEATO Treaty to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitution's process, "does not depend upon the prior agreement of all other parties to the treaty, since this Treaty obligation is individual as well as Collective". Paul Hasluck, also made a similar statement in reply to the query by J.F. Cairns leader of the Australian Labour Party (ALP) in the House of Representatives to the effect that the Australian commitment in Vietnam flows from the general obligation assumed under the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty to resist armed attack and to counter subversive activities within the Treaty area". But the ruling party's use of the SEATO obligation to defend its Vietnam policy was strongly challenged by the ALP. The leaders of the ALP argued that Australia's involvement in Vietnam did not come under the SEATO obligation because South Vietnam was not a member of SEATO but only a protocol state and that there was no obligation to defend a protocol state unless all the members of the treaty agreed to take concerted action and therefore Australian involvement in Vietnam was purely a bilateral affair. The opposition refused to be convinced by neither the rationale behind Australian participation in Vietnam War nor the grounds on which the Australian government sought justification for supporting the American effort in Vietnam. A.A. Calwell, the ALP leader, said:

We are not involved under the SEATO Treaty, for the simple reason that South Vietnam is not a member state of SEATO and there is no obligation for any member state to go to war in defence of a 'protocol state', unless all member states approve that course.

32 *CNIA*, October 1964, p.29.
ALP's views on this subject were echoed by Australian Press. A leading Australian Daily *Age* wrote on November 24, 1966.

SEATO may be the cover for Australia's participation in the Vietnam War. But Australian troops did not land in South Vietnam as the result of any SEATO procedure. Nor does SEATO have any but the most tangential part in the determination of allied strategies and tactics in Vietnam. Australia's membership of SEATO is neither necessary nor sufficient for its involvement in the Vietnamese War.\(^{34}\)

In 1962, Australia, therefore, made its first military contribution to the Vietnam conflict by its despatch of an army training team of 30 officers and warrant officers "expert in techniques of jungle warfare". The Australian training team, whose strength was raised in due course to include 222 men, did a commendable job. Paying tributes to the men of this team, David Fairbairn, Minister of Defence, said in a statement in the House of Representatives on March 23, 1972 that they "served with very great distinction in nearly all provinces and made a material contribution to the improvement in the operational effectiveness of the Vietnamese armed forces".\(^{35}\) Australia made its first Air Force contribution in 1964 when it sent a flight of three Caribou Transport aircraft which was subsequently expanded to a squadron to provide transport to allied forces throughout South Vietnam.\(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) *Ibid.*


\(^{36}\) *Ibid.*
But the Australians were thoroughly convinced the rationale behind the military involvement of their country in Vietnam as a demonstration of Canberra’s unflinching loyalty to Washington. When the Australian government invoked SEATO as the "sole pretext" for its military involvement, many in Australia remained unconvinced. Whitlam, leader of the Labour Party, complained: "There was one reason and one reason only for us going in – we went in because the US went in". 37

Further, in response to the decision taken by the high-level US military and civilian leaders including Secretary of Defence McNamara and JCS Chairman General Wheeler, General Westmoreland and Ambassador Taylor in Honolulu on April 20, 1965 to deploy the troops of the US and its allies to bolster the forces of Saigon government, Menzies Government sent the first contingent of Australia which arrived in Saigon in May 1965. 38 However, the Australian response to their country's involvement in the Vietnam War (1965-1971) which was initially positive, subsequently underwent drastic changes.

One could discern three stages in the evolution of Australian reaction to the War. To start with, during the period 1965-1968, the Australians did not raise any objection to the use of their resources to support the US whose determined effort was to arrest the tide of aggressive communist expansion. They were also happy about the encouraging performance of the US and its allies on the battlefield. It was under these favourable circumstances that the Holt Government tripled the strength of its troops in Vietnam to 4500. If at all there was any uproar, it could be attributed to the opposition to the issue of the conscription, but not to the Australian participation in the war as such.

37 Pemberton, n.18, p.296.
38 CNIA, May 1965, p.118.
During the second stage i.e., from 1968 to mid-1969, the Australians began to entertain second thoughts about the very Vietnam War and especially about Australia's involvement, the reasons being:

- The disastrous Tet offensive of February 7, 1968 in which the North Vietnamese forces overran US special forces camp at Langvei, South West of Khesanh Killing 300 allied troops.\(^3\)

- Australians did not see any reason in waging a losing war.

- Australians also began to believe that it was unethical to sacrifice the precious lives of the Australians for the sake of propping up an undemocratic military junta regime in Saigon much against the wishes of the Vietnamese People.

- Australian Parents were in a dilemma whether to continue to exhibit their loyalty to the nation by sending their sons to the war or to non-cooperate with the government by yielding to sentimental pressures of their wards who were opposing conscription vehemently.

The third stage in the Australian reaction lasting from the later half of 1969 to the Australian troop pullout in 1972, was marked by exciting developments. A swing in public opinion against the Vietnam war was noticed. Most important, the youth in increasing numbers, particular the University students, the intellectuals and others belonging to various other sections of the society, came out opposing vehemently not only conscription but the very Australian association with the war. Gorton who became Prime Minister in January 1968 when the anti-war movement was gaining momentum, found himself confronted with an awkward situation. He

---

could not deviate from the policy of loyalty to the US and ditch Australia's powerful ally by effecting radical changes in his Vietnam policy independently. At the same time he could not remain insensitive to the mounting public opinion against Vietnam war. It was at this juncture that the announcement of the policy of Vietnamisation in November 1969 by President Nixon soon after he assumed office came as a boon for Gorton who initiated the process of gradual diminution in Australia's military role in Vietnam. The process of slicing the number of Australian forces in Vietnam launched in November 1970 was brought to a close by the end of 1971.

The fact that Australian combat troops were sent to South Vietnam despite the latter's strong opposition to the deployment of foreign combat troops on their soil, puzzled the Australians. In his personal observations sent to Washington on April 15, 1965 on the US decision to introduce third country troops in South Vietnam "to bring the war to successful conclusion as quickly as possible", the US Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson said; "I gravely question... massive input of non-Vietnamese military forces. As we have learned, we are dealing with volatile and hyper-sensitive people with strong Xenophobic characteristics never far below the surface".40

Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam, brought out by the Department of External Affairs of Australia, in 1975, indicted the Menzies government saying that "in pursuing its paramount concern with the Australian alliance and Australian forward defence interests the Australian government... showed in its actions and particularly in the process of negotiations minimal consideration for Vietnamese wishes".41 The Saigon leaders, therefore, "were

made to accept the necessity of such forces by persuasion and by the weakness of their own position". The practice was that the US would sound the prospective donors of the aid to South Vietnam and once the positive response was obtained, it would be communicated to Saigon government which in turn would make a "formal request". Prime Minister Menzies therefore did not misrepresent facts as alleged by his critics, when he informed Parliament on April 29, 1965, thus:

The Australian government is now in receipt of a request from the Government of South Vietnam for further military assistance. We have decided – and this has been after close consultations with the government of the United States – to provide an infantry battalion for service to South Vietnam. We decided in principle some weeks ago that we would be willing to do this if we had the necessary request from the Government of South Vietnam and necessary collaboration from the United States.

In any case, the Australian military involvement in Vietnam began in May 1965, when Menzies government sent the first Battalion of Royal Australian Regiment (IRAR). While informing the House of Representatives of the first dispatch of the Australian forces, Prime Minister Menzies said: "I make it clear that the government has no desire to have Australian forces in Vietnam any longer than is necessary to ensure the security of South Vietnam". Australian involvement reached its peak during the period of Prime Minister Harold Holt (1966-67) when there were as many as 8000 Australians involved in combat

42 Ibid.
44 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD), House of Representatives, 45, pp.1060-61 in Pemberton, n.18, p.294.
45 CNIA, February 1972, p.118.
operations in South Vietnam. This number paled in comparison with those of the American forces, which was as high as half a million. Yet, given its limited capacity and resources Australian contribution was by no means scanty.

Holt left his indelible impression on the Australian foreign policy with his famous phrase, "All the way with LBJ". His analysis of the Vietnam conflict was in agreement with that of his predecessor Menzies. 'Loyalty to Powerful ally' was the battle cry of the Australian foreign policy, manifested in the intimate relationship of Holt and Lyndon Johnson. Small wonder, during Holt's Prime Ministership there was three fold increase in Australian forces in Vietnam. This was in addition to the shooting up of the strength of Australian Advisory group to 83, an offer of Six RAAF Caribou Transport planes in 1964 by his predecessor Prime Minister Menzies. When Holt visited USA in June 1966, he repeated that Australia would go "All the way with LBJ". He visited many Asian countries including South Vietnam and stressed the security and stability in Asia as significant factors for Australia. The US President Lyndon Johnson' visit to Australia in October 1966 was acclaimed as an outstanding success of Holt's government. Elated by the warm reception given by the Australians, he returned Holt's compliment blissfully, "Every American and LBJ is with Australia all the way". When Holt suffered from a watery grave while swimming off the coast of Australia, President Johnson travelled all the way to Canberra to attend the memorial services of his "personal friend" and "staunch ally" on December 23, 1967.

47 Pemberton, n.18, p.335.
Establishment of Australian Task Force (ATF)

In accordance with the decision taken by David Anderson, Australian Ambassador in Saigon and Admiral Sharp of the US on April 29, 1965, the Australian force in Vietnam was placed under the operational control of General Westmoreland, Commander of US Operations in Vietnam, for the defence of base areas and for patrolling in the vicinity of base areas and as a mobile reserve. Therefore, the IRAR which was sent to Vietnam in May 1965, served initially as part of the US Army's 173rd Air Cavalry Division at Bien Hoa, northeast of Saigon, for one year, obviously because the Australian contribution to the Vietnam war was not significant compared with massive deployment of American forces.

Neither the Australian officers nor the troops were happy about this arrangement for various reasons. First and foremost reason was the desire of the Australians to serve under Australian national control which would enable them to conduct war operations they deem fit. Second, to minimise the disastrous casualties. Third, "dissatisfaction" of the First RAR with the conduct of operations by 173rd Airborne Brigade on the "level of tactics". Fourth, the increase in Australian army contribution from one battalion in 1965 to second and third battalions in 1966 and 1967 respectively. No doubt, serving American command "would have given the Australian effort more publicity". But, this factor had no appeal to the Australians who were incurring casualties in terms of heavy losses. In any case, thanks to the keen interest of General Wilson, Chairman, and Chiefs of Staff Committee (1966-1970), initiative was taken to establish ATF. Accordingly, Prime Minister Holt made an announcement on March 8, 1966 that the Australian battalion then serving in Vietnam would be expanded to form the

51 *Ibid*, p.60.
"self-contained" Australian Task Force.\textsuperscript{52} Subsequently, Brigadier Jackson, Commander of the Australian Army Force in Vietnam (May 1965 to May 1966) and Westmoreland, decided to assign Phuoc Tuy province to ATF as its own area of tactical responsibility.

For several reasons, Australia decided on Phuoc Tuy province which later gained "a special place in the history of the Australian Combat role in the South Vietnam theatre". First, in the absence of the US and Saigon operational units, Australians would enjoy complete freedom to carry on operations they deem fit. Second, since it was far away from the borders of Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam, chances of major military operations were less. Third, located in the southeast of Saigon and in the North of Vung Tau port, it turned out to be strategically important by virtue of its containing a major road (Route 15) which connected the capital Saigon with Vung Tau port. Fourth, the geographical proximity of Vung Tau port with its good anchorage and major airfield, facilitated both the deployment and the evacuation of Australian forces, should the necessity arise.\textsuperscript{53} Describing the importance of Vung Tau port, Alan Strettons, Lt. Colonel in the Directorate of Staff Duties and later the Commander of Australian Force Vietnam in 1969, noted that "in selecting Vung Tau, General Wilton showed remarkable military judgement and that there would have been a greater loss of life if the Australian Force had been allocated to any other province".\textsuperscript{54}

This did not mean that Phuoc Tuy Province carried negative aspects to make the job of the Australians tough. It was important strategically and politically not only to South Vietnam but also to the NLF. It presented "an almost

\textsuperscript{54} Horner, n.49, p.14.
classic environment" for guerilla warfare. It was a stronghold of the NLF which had established a revolutionary force with well maintained local links. For two decades since the resistance to French colonial rulers in 1947, it witnessed communist led guerilla warfare. When opposition to Diem's rule gained momentum, NLF had a main force unit of 5000 troops. The NLF raised a locally recruited provincial battalion called D445, which controlled the important 'Route15' and enjoyed support of the local people. Therefore, when the Australian force went to Phuoc Tuy Province, it found the NLF firmly established with a highly disciplined and well-knit organisation. Another drawback which was no less important, was that the Australian Force lacked knowledge of the specific character and problems of the province.

Problems faced during the operational period, made the job of the Australian forces all the more difficult. Though primarily meant for encountering North Vietnamese communist infiltrations, in reality Australian troops were confronted with South Vietnamese guerillas drawing support not only from Hanoi but also from the local people. In other words, Australians had to carry out dual functions, namely conventional operations against the North Vietnamese infiltrators and non-conventional operations against the guerilla and the pacification of the local bases of the guerilla forces. While the Australians required enhanced manpower for carrying out the multiple tasks, the US remained indifferent and the Saigon troops continued to be callous. The result was that the operational efficiency of the Australians was undermined. For example, Australians laid a minefield at Dat Do Hai, but it was not patrolled due to the failure of the South Vietnamese troops to offer the required support. As a result, this pacification operation boomeranged when the guerillas removed the mines and used the same against the Australians themselves. According to a Task Force commander, half of the casualties of ATF during September 1968 – May 1970

55 Frost, n.53, p.62.
were from "our own mines".56 Again, in less than two months after it began its operations, the ATF commanded by O.D. Jackson was involved in the first and last major conventional military operation against the North Vietnamese forces at Long Tan on August 18, 1996 in which 18 Australian forces were killed and 21 were wounded.57

Despite setbacks, ATF's record of achievements was impressive. The "offensive operations" which was the first priority of the ATF "destroyed the ability of the enemy to sustain operations in the area on a significant scale or to use the province as a major base".58 In August 1966, the task force dealt a severe blow to the Viet Cong "that the communist forces avoided further major clashes with the Australian force".59 During the Tet offensive in 1968, the Task Force joined the allied forces in neighbouring provinces to inflict "a defeat on the communists from which they have never recovered".60 In Phuoc Tuy province, the Task Force focussed its attention after May 1969 on "providing security for the population, on improving the capabilities of the local population and on isolating the enemy from his sources of information, food and other support".61

Australians were aware that any war could not be won without the sympathy and support of the local people. Therefore, apart from military operations. Australian forces were involved in a 'Civil Action Programme' which according to Broekmeijer one time Assistant Chief of NATO, included such things as "building schools, establishing hospitals and improving medical care, as well as providing new irrigation systems, better water supplies and better

56 Horner, n.49, p.29.
57 Ibid, p.28. Also see the article "Australia since 1945" by Dr. H.W. Knott of the Australian National University, exclusively written for Susan Bambrick (ed.), The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Australia, (Melbourne, 1994), pp.123-124.
58 CNIA, February 1972, p.118.
60 Ibid, p.119.
61 Ibid.
communications". These were the popular schemes the people of South Vietnam "have never seen in the past", either during the French colonial period or during the existing military dictatorship. This programme was launched not only to earn the support of the local people but also to deny the same to the NLF. 'Civil Action' team undertook, 'strategic hamlet programmes' to develop rapport with the local population. Australian technical civil team completed "construction of eight class rooms, a Vietnamese information service headquarters, a district market, a maternity ward, a three room dispensary, a town meeting hall, large warehouses, a dozen capped wells, a district head quarters building and a police check point, besides offering assistance to destitute villages by such means as the distribution of food and clothing, medical and dental assistance" and "in the repair of war damage and construction of refugee villages". Suffice it to say that the people of Phuoc Tuy Province had shown immense regard for the Australians, thanks to the Australian strategy of "winning the hearts and minds" of the inhabitants. Explaining the impact of the activities of the Task Force in Phuoc Tuy Province for a period of five years, Australian Defence Minister David Fairbairns felt proud to aver in the Parliament in February 1972:

The activities of the Task Force in Phuoc Tuy Province ... have given the inhabitants of the province the time to develop their own security forces and to restore the fabric of administration. The territorial forces... have been re-organised, reequipped and given a much higher standard of training. The agricultural situation in the province is sound and improving; markets are working; schools are functioning; the roads are open.

The Task Force's mission in Phuoc Tuy Province came to an end when it was withdrawn in November 1971, following the announcement of the Prime

63 Larsen & Collins, n.43, p.113. Also see CNIA, February 1972, p.119.
64 Jane Ross, "Australian Soldiers in Vietnam" in King, n.12, p.81.
Minister McMahon in the Australian Parliament on August 18, 1971 that Australia's combat troops would be pulled out of Vietnam and that they would be back home by the ensuing Christmas. Having declared that the South Vietnamese were capable of assuming Australia's role in Phuoc Tuy Province, he was committed to saying that Australia would give South Vietnam $28 million over the next three years in aid of the civilian projects. Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war ended on December 18, 1972, when the final group of about 60 military advisors were withdrawn from Saigon.66

Yet the decade-long Australian involvement costed dearly. In all, 50,000 Australian personnel drawn from all the three services, served in the war to the credit of themselves and their nation. Of them, 492 were killed or died and 2876 were either wounded or injured.67 Given the hostile circumstances under which the Australians fought, the number of those killed or wounded or injured put together could not be considered great. During the period of its involvement in the war, Australia spent $182 million for military expenses and $16 millions in civilian assistance to South Vietnam.68 When compared with American cost of the war, Australia's was evidently far less. But Australians' moral, political and diplomatic support to the U.S. was invaluable.

Strategic interests of Australia played a dominant role in shaping its relationship with America. The Vietnam War was the first military adventure for Australia alone, in the absence of Britain's participation. Australian involvement in Vietnam marked a watershed in its policy of sending troops abroad to fight for its powerful ally. It was a visible manifestation of Australia's desire to engage America in Southeast Asia and of its unswerving loyalty to the alliance with the US. As Trever R. Reese has pointed out, Australia's support for the American

67 CNIA, February 1972, p.120.
68 Browman, n.39, p.288.
policy was "virtually unconditional".69 This was the bright side of the coin of
Australia's cooperation with the US. The other side was quite disheartening.

Though Australia and the US seemed very intimate during the Vietnam
War, differences erupted between them over certain issues. Apart from a strong
diplomatic support to the US in terms of military contribution to South Vietnam,
Australia could not rise to the expectations of the Americans. Only after a series of
American requests for sizeable military assistance, Australia responded initially
with a token contribution by which it occasioned adverse criticism from American
critics of war.

In 1966, Senator Fulbright, a great critic of the Vietnam war, remarked that
Australia and New Zealand "believe that the United States will carry the whole
load and that our men will do the dying and that we will pay the bill. Otherwise…
why they do not send more than a token force".70 JCS Chairman General Wheeler
told President Johnson in a National Security Council Meeting on February 7,
1968, "the Australians are incapable of providing more troops".71

Australians also felt annoyed that their sentiments were deeply hurt when
President Johnson announced the suspension of bombing of North Vietnam in
April 1968, without consulting them. But the apparent desire of Australia to
encourage the American presence in Southeast Asia subsided all the differences.
Especially the Vietnam experience elevated the arduous efforts of Australian
policy makers and the Foreign Ministers to engage the US in Southeast Asia,
especially after the Second World War which for the first time brought direct
threat to Australia's security.

69 Reese, n.13, p.331.
70 Ibid, p.332.
71 Berman, n.48, p.157.
The Tet offensive of January 1968 totally shattered the morale of the allied forces. The prolonged war in Vietnam resulted in simmering discontent and violent anti-war demonstrations in both USA and Australia. Lyndon Johnson's announcement that he would not seek a second term, reflected the intensity of the opposition of the American public to the Vietnam war. A similar kind of development was noticed in Australia too. Australians lost enthusiasm they had in 1966 for Vietnam war. A certain weariness and disenchantment with the Vietnam war was clearly perceptible. Australian conscript forces sent to Vietnam became the target of the violent antiwar demonstrations, as people felt that their youth were sent to a foreign war only to perish. Australia's foreign policy came in for severe criticism from the general public.

Australia's perception of North Vietnam as a proxy of communist China and its subsequent policy of "hanging on to the coat buttons of USA", played their own role in paralysing Vietnam. But for its involvement in Vietnam, and its being the only reliable ally in Southeast Asia during 1960s, the period of intimacy between USA and Australia, the latter was never a global ally to the US. Australians frankly acknowledged that but for the American intervention in Vietnam, "the threat of communist aggression would have moved closer to our own shores". Though Australian military contribution to Vietnam was not at all encouraging to the Americans, Canberra's political contribution seemed to have made amends. Because of the US desire for allied support Australian troops were involved in Vietnam. Otherwise, Australia's contribution to the US involvement would have been confined to the political and diplomatic spheres only. While Australia's traditional ties with Britain began to ebb, its political ties with America flourished. The Vietnam war served as a catalyst to Australia's growing relationship with the USA, and Asia and in particular the Southeast Asian

72 Patridge, n.52, pp.311-312.
countries. Since the days of Harold Holt, Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular, was given priority in developing the political and economic relations. Once the US decided to disengage itself from Vietnam, the rationale behind Australian involvement also diminished. The changing world scenario reflected in the US–China rapprochement, Sino-Soviet rivalry and the shift in the US attention towards Europe, had their own impact on Australian perceptions of Southeast Asia.

Conscription

Conscription was not new to Australia. In view of the vastness of its size and territorial boundaries, Australia was always in need of a large army but was handicapped by its thin population. To meet the growing needs of national defence, Australia resorted to imposing different forms of military service. In Australia, the Defence Act of 1903 prescribed compulsory service for all male citizens of the age group of 18 and 60 in "time of war" or "danger of war" and exempted "persons whom the doctrines of their religion forbid to bear arms or perform military service". The act was amended in 1910 to enlarge the scope of exemption to accommodate 'persons who satisfy the prescribed authority that their conscientious beliefs do not allow them to bear arms'.

In 1911, conscription was introduced for the first time in the history of Federation of Australia. Accordingly, Australia started a military training programme for a call up of 12 to 16 years old youths who were required to serve at home. Because of "widespread opposition and resistance in the Australian community", conscription scheme was scrapped in 1929. The Federal Labour

74 Ibid.
Government reintroduced conscription during the Second World War and consequently in 1942, the conscripts were required to serve in the entire area of Southwest Pacific. This scheme too was abandoned in 1959.

In 1964, the Menzies government introduced National Service Scheme under which the young men with twenty years of age were entitled for two years of compulsory service in regular army. But the announcement in March 1966 by the Prime Minister Harold Holt, the successor of Robert Menzies, that the conscripts would be sent to fight in Vietnam along with the regular forces, provoked intensely adverse reactions in the Australian Society. Not withstanding the staunch opposition, the conscripts were sent to Vietnam on April 19, 1966, for the first time.

The National Service Act of 1964 authorised the government to go in for conscription under circumstances of "invasion or apprehended invasion of, or attack of apprehended attack on Australia by an enemy or armed forces". But the people did not believe that Vietnam war would come under the scope of the act because, the Boer war, two world wars, the Korean war, the Malayan and Borneo conflicts were fought without the participation of conscripts overseas even though conscription service was introduced in the country according to the needs of that time. Sending National Service men to Vietnam was a glaring deviation from the traditional defence Policy of Australia. The government's arguments about the threat of communism effected changes in the modes of warfare and the need to integrate regular units and the conscripts, proved futile. The issue of sending conscript troops to Vietnam led to acrimonious debate in the country not only on

76 Ibid, p.100.
78 Smith, n.73, p.9.
79 Ibid.
Australian participation in Vietnam but also on the mode of conscription for military services. Until 1969, many Australians supported Australian involvement in Vietnam but a great majority opposed the deployment of conscripts in Vietnam.

The National Service Act of 1964 provided exemption from all military services or from combat duties alone for those who were conscientious objectors to the bearing of arms. To quote in Act in part: "A person, whose conscientious beliefs do not allow him to engage in any form of military service is, so long as he held these beliefs, exempt from liability to render service under this Act." The Act also said: "A person whose conscientious beliefs do not allow him to engage in military duties of a non-combatant nature, shall not, so long as he holds these beliefs, be required to engage in duties of a combantant nature".80 During 1965-71, out of 1012 men who had applied for exemption on conscientious grounds, 733 were totally exempted and 142 were exempted from only combat duties.81

Australians' refusal to participate in Vietnam war assumed varied forms apart from their conscientious objections. According to the Act, Australian males who turned 20, were required to register for service so that the selected persons would enlist themselves into the service. Of the 51,000 enlisted, 17,424 conscripts were sent to Vietnam while some of the conscripts refused to participate in the Vietnam war. A small number of persons refused to register themselves under the pretext of "conscientious beliefs".82 Some objectors felt that this war did not impinge on the defence of Australia. Some others argued that this war was against Vietnamese nationalism and so unconscionable.83

80 Ibid, p.120.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
In a debate in the Parliament, the ALP Leader Arthur Caldwell attacked the government on conscription:

We do not desire to see another eighth division of Australian troops sucked into an Asian jungle or swallowed up by the quick sands of Asia. If we are to be committed we ought to know the extent of the commitment.  

In 1968, when the government introduced changes in the National Service Act for strict registration procedures, the ALP proposed some amendments and one of those was:

29A(1). A person whose conscientious beliefs do not allow him to engage in military service, whether in relation to a particular war or otherwise, is, so long as he holds these beliefs, exempt from liability to render service under this act.

The opposition ALP claimed that this would gratify the conscience of those people who have objections to participate in Vietnam war. The Government dismissed ALP's argument saying that this would affect the discipline of the army and encourage people to evade their patriotic duties.

Conscription faced widespread opposition from the public on the ground that it was connected with an unpopular overseas war where Australia was not at all threatened territorially. The Australian involvement came under public scrutiny as casualties increased and as there was no apparent end or prospect of quick victory in near future. The public also began to realise that what was happening in Vietnam was a clear suppression of national revolution on Vietnam land by the allies supporting South Vietnamese government.

84 CPD (House of Representatives) 11 August 1964 p.185 in Hamel - Green, n.75, p.10.
85 Smith, n.77, p.124.
The ALP, the Sydney University Labour and Liberal Clubs who together organised the first anti-conscription meeting on November 11, 1964, formed at its another meeting on November 29, 1964, the Youth Campaign Against Conscription (YCAC), strengthening the anti-conscription movement.\(^87\) The anti-conscriptionists organised demonstrations outside the US consulate in Sydney in March – April 1965, following the starting of American bombing of North Vietnam and the enlarged involvement of the Australian combat troops. On June 19, 1965 YCAC gave an appeal to the youth through the daily. *The Australian* to take the following pledge:

*The undersigned young Australian male citizens being of an age making us liable for military service, declare that WE OPPOSE OVERSEAS CONSCRIPTION because.*

*We believe that we may be sent to fight in Vietnam. This would be a moral wrong and an unjust call upon our lives by the government of our country. We share a fundamental belief that to safeguard the future of our nation. Australia’s role in these perilous times is to seek an end to Southeast Asian disputes, through negotiations for peaceful settlements - not to pursue the murderous path to world conflict through prolonging the slaughter in Vietnam.*\(^88\)

Many young people from all over Australia responded positively to this call. Another anti-conscription movement called "Save our Sons" (SOS) which was started by two people, Joyce Golgerth and Pat Ashcroft in Sydney on June 5, 1965 called upon the mothers to raise their voice against conscription.\(^89\) To draw the attention of the Australian public YCAC and SOS jointly organised different types of demonstrations. In the four chief cities of Australia, they burnt draft cards and organised a sit-down during the Melbourne Moomba parade and vigils at Prime Minister Herald Holt’s Melbourne residence.\(^90\)

---

87 Hamel - Green, n.75, p.107.
The ALP which could not oppose the Vietnam war unequivocally as many of its members felt that alliance with the US should be maintained at any cost, focussed attention on the issue of conscription. In Australia, a bitter debate ensued on the nature of conscientious objection to particular wars. The rightness or wrongness of Australia's participation in Vietnam war became the hub of the issue and it became inseparable from conscientious objection to particular wars. It appeared that ALP was causing a lot of embarrassment to the government by supporting the anti-conscriptors. Though many Australians supported the government policy of military commitment to Vietnam to demonstrate support to the US, majority of them strongly opposed sending of conscripts to Vietnam. Thus, the integration of regular forces and conscripts for the first time during the Vietnam war, proved unpopular.

The 'Don't Register' Movement which was launched in Melbourne in early 1969, was more radical than the previous organisations. In four major cities of Australia, it organised large demonstrations against registration to National Service in March - May 1969. When a large number of students were arrested, demonstrations, anti-conscription marches and sit-ins were held in support of them. Slowly, the resistance movement spread to professors of the Universities and to other sections of the society. Public opinion began to mount not only against conscription, but also against Australia's very commitment in Vietnam war. As a sop to pacify the demonstrators in August 1971, the Australian government reduced the period of National Service to 18 months from 24 months, but this did not work. On the whole, though the uproar over conscription subsided following the Australian government's decision to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam in 1971, its role in moulding Australian public opinion against the Australian military involvement in Vietnam could not be underestimated.

Public Opinion

In Western countries, public opinion proved to be a powerful weapon of the people. It contributed to the fortunes and misfortunes of the governments in their particular political decisions. The Vietnam war which was an important issue in the history of the foreign policy of Australia, was followed keenly by the public. In Australia, Morgan Gallup Poll which was affiliated to Gallup International, was the only organization to conduct interviews. Subsequently, newspapers and political parties started conducting their own public polls, since May 1954, when the Viet Minh forces delivered a death blow to the French. Morgan poll asked the Australians: "If the French are driven out of Indochina, do you think Australia will be greatly affected?". 31 per cent responded, "Yes greatly", 17 per cent said, yes, a little", 16 per cent said, "no" and 30 per cent had "no opinion". When the electorate were asked in 1962 whether Australia should go and fight if America goes to war against the communists in Southeast Asia to defend Thailand, 61:27 per cent of it favoured the proposal. In September 1965, 56:28 majority approved of the Australian government's decision to raise the number of troops in Vietnam from 1100 to 1450. In July 1966, 64 per cent supported Prime Minister Holt's statement that "We would go all the way with America in the defence of South Vietnam and Southeast Asia". In 1967, Premier Ky's visit to Australia was welcomed by about 70 per cent.

Morgan Gallup opinion poll revealed that the public impulse to Australian commitment in Vietnam was heading to a remarkable opposition. The table given below shows the response of the Australian public.

92 Murray Goot and Rodney Tiffen, "Public opinion and the politics of the polls", in King, n.12, p.133.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid, p.135.
96 Ibid.
"Do you think we should continue to fight in Vietnam or bring our forces back to Australia"?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th>9/65</th>
<th>9/66</th>
<th>5/67</th>
<th>10/68</th>
<th>12/68</th>
<th>4/69</th>
<th>8/69</th>
<th>10/69</th>
<th>10/70</th>
<th>10/70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring Back</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40*</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Morgan Gallup Poll APOP Subscribers Reports.
* Bring Back Now.97

A major change in the trend was evident in 1969 from the above table. But one interesting aspect of Australians' perception of Southeast Asia and the communism, deserved notice. Three years prior to this when the Australians were asked whether the US should withdraw from Vietnam, only 21 per cent said 'yes', while 67 per cent wanted the US to carry on its commitment in Vietnam.98 This betrayed a peculiar tendency of the Australian public who did not like their own people fighting in Vietnam and at the same time ardently desired the US presence in the region.

In influencing public opinion attacking the government's Vietnam policy, the opposition party ALP played a significant role. In its criticism and opposition, the ALP focus was on sentimental aspects like the morality, brutality of the Vietnam war and conscription. Reintroduction of conscription by the Menzies government at a time when the recruitment for regular army was lagging behind, as Norman Harper has remarked, was like "a red rag to the bull".99 ALP described

97 Ibid, p.135.
98 Ibid, p.137.
conscription in terms of lottery as "lottery of death". Important Labour Party leaders like Whitlam, Calwell and Clyde Cameron vehemently criticised government's decision to send conscripts overseas. In an outright attack on government's decision to send boys devoid of the enfranchise to fight in Vietnam, Clyde Cameron said: "These boys will be compelled to give their livers in ... a cruel and dirty war waged against the local inhabitants in support of a corrupt, cruel and ruthless military dictatorship".101

To the ALP which had been critical of the Saigon government ever since it was formed as per the 1954 Geneva Agreement despite its scant regard for democracy and democratic institutions, was appalled at the Australian support to prop up an undemocratic government was most appalling. At its 27th Commonwealth Conference, the agonized ALP shrieked: "Preservation of the undemocratic and corrupt government of South Vietnam is not worth one drop of Australian blood."102 No wonder, when the visit of South Vietnam's Prime Minister Air Vice-Marshal ky to Australia took place in January 1967, seven months after he seized power, the ALP organised demonstrations against ky and labelled him a 'fascist', 'gangster quisling' and 'a miserable little butcher'.103 The demonstrations against ky in Brisbane and Canberra reflected ALP's emotional opposition to conscription and the Vietnam war.

In a bid to bring more pressure on North Vietnam, the US resorted to bombing the enemy areas with "unprecedented intensity".104 Stanely Karnow, an American journalist who presented a panoramic account of the involvement of the

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
103 Ibid, p.296.
US in its "longest – and undeclared - war," reported: "By the time the Nixon administration signed a cease-fire agreement in January 1973, the United States had dropped on North Vietnam, an area of the size of Texas, triple the bomb tonnage dropped on Europe, Asia and Africa during World WarII". The American strategy proved an utter flop. Pointing out that "the bombing backfired", Karnow said that far from forcing the communists to sue for peace" the raids rekindled their nationalist zeal, so that many who may have disliked communist rule joined the resistance to alien attack". In February 1966, McNamara, JCS, told reporters in Honolulu: "No amount of bombing can end the war".

The indiscriminate bombing of North Vietnam offered a convenient weapon to the ALP to expose the loopholes in government's Vietnam war policy. The ALP, at its 27th Commonwealth Conference at Adelaide in 1967 as discussed already, expressed its anguish about the languishing democracy in South Vietnam and also voiced on humanitarian grounds a deep concern over the bombing of North Vietnam on humanitarian grounds. The ALP said in this context:

We will use every initiative at our command to achieve a negotiated peace so that all foreign forces can be withdrawn from South Vietnam. The bombing of North Vietnam must cease immediately. We maintain that the National Liberation Front must be recognised as a major party in any negotiated settlement. We insist the napalm, phosphorus bombs and similar weapons of war be withdrawn from the conflict so that thousands of innocent people are not shrivelled to death in agony.

Various reversals of American policies like the cessation of bombing to pave way for peace talks, withdrawal of America troops and the Vietnamisation of the war, re-inforced the galloping ALP anti-war movement and promoted the intensification of its attack on the Australian government's policy. On April 22, 1968, the Johnson administration made the first announcement of policy which later under Nixon administration came to be known as "Vietnamisation". The Defence Secretary Clifford declared that the South Vietnamese have "acquired the capacity to begin to insure their own security (and) they are going to take over more and more of the fighting". On October 31, 1968, five days before the 1968 presidential election, Johnson announced that all bombing of North Vietnam would be stopped and that the negotiations would begin.

Earlier on August 8, 1968, Richard Nixon in his speech, by way of accepting the presidential nomination by the Republican National Convention in Miami, pledged to "bring an honourable end to the war in Vietnam and inaugurate "an era of negotiations" with leading communist powers." On June 8, 1969, 5 months after assuming the office, President Nixon announced the withdrawal of 25,000 American troops from Vietnam. Again, on September 16, 1969, he announced the second round of US troop pullout of about 35 thousand men. Three days later, Nixon announced a 50,000 men reduction in planned draft calls. The Paris peace talks which started on May 13, 1968 was a reflection of the American war fatigue. Though Australia was not invited to take part in the negotiations, it sent an observer to Paris. These developments convinced the increasing number of Australians of the need for the withdrawal of their forces in Vietnam. ALP demanded an immediate withdrawal of Australian forces. In June 1968, Prime Minister Gorton, refused to follow the American model but accepted the proposal of phased withdrawal in toto.

111 Ibid, p.238.
112 Ibid, p.239.
Religious Institutions

The other vehement critics of the government's policy towards Vietnam to reckon with, were churches, academics and students and trade unions in Australia. The Anglican church was divided in its opinion although thirteen archbishops and bishops mildly protested in 1965 against the Vietnam war. On March 12, 1965, Prime Minister Robert Menzies received a letter from a number of Bishops of the Anglican church stating:

There are a number of us deeply concerned that our government should be seen to taking positive steps with others, towards an honourable and peaceful settlement of the fighting in Vietnam. It seems to us that our government, because we owe so much to our ally, the United States of America, is morally bound to help our ally, in the friendliest and most loyal spirit, to avoid a policy that can lead to an extension of hostilities. We would hope that our nation, living as we do in the Asian world, would join with the Pope, U Thant and the distinguished leaders of the other Western nations... in bringing to a close a war that is costing so many lives and reducing the economy of Vietnam to chaos.\(^\text{113}\)

By 1967, the opposition to government's policy from the churches was intensified. The General Assembly of the Victorian Presbyterian Church appealed to the Australian government to strive for a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam war. The Quakers, the Congregational Church and the Methodist Church were stern opponents of the government policies in Vietnam. The annual meeting of the Methodist Church in Victoria and New South Wales criticised the military activity in Vietnam and appealed for a cessation of bombing in North Vietnam. The Australian Council of Churches condemned conscription and demanded withdrawal of American and all other allied troops from South Vietnam.\(^\text{114}\)

\(^{113}\) CNIA, March 1965, p.139.  
\(^{114}\) Harper, n.33, p.304.
Students

Many Australian Universities served as forums from which emanated series of protests against the Vietnam war and the Australian and the American policies. Academics were the main participants. In November 1967, *The Australian Journal of Science* published a statement signed by 677 scientists appealing for the halt of bombing and for the de-escalation of military activities by all belligerents. As part of their opposition to Vietnam war, students tried to disrupt meetings of prominent political leaders. When Prime Minister Holt visited Monash University in 1967, students handed over a copy of the "Thoughts of Mao Tse tung". Main targets of students' opposition were conscription and the sending of National Service trainees to Vietnam. Some of the University Clubs went to the extent of raising funds to assist National Liberation Front. In 1967, the Seaman's Trade Union attempted to stop the departure of two ships called 'Boonaroo' and 'Jeparit' loaded with weapons and occupied by Australian soldiers to Vietnam.

An important dimension of the anti-Vietnam war movement was the growth of anti-American feeling which was intensely emotional to the extent of being violent on many occasions. Students of Adelaide University burnt an American flag in September, 1966. During President Johnson's visit to Melbourne in October 1966, demonstrators successfully managed to splash paint on his car. On July 4, 1968, Students from La Trobe, Melbourne and Monash Universities, staged demonstrations in front of the American consulate in Melbourne and clashed violently with the police safeguarding the consulate. They pulled down American flag and broke down the windows. Otherwise, most of the Public demonstrations were peaceful. The student community was also furious about the military junta

115 Ibid.
116 Ibid, p.305.
government of Saigon in support of which Australia had sent its forces. The visit of Nguyen Cao Ky, Prime Minister of South Vietnam at the invitation of the Australian Government in December 1966, only added fuel to the fire. *Age* (Melbourne) warned that "to go on with (the visit) now would be an incitement to violence." Though seething with rage, and deeply emotional, the students saw to it that their demonstrations did not take violent turn.

**Labour government's Foreign Policy Changes**

Losing power to the Liberals in 1949, the Australian Labour Party staged a comeback to power in December 1972, after serving for 23 long years as the opposition party. Gough Whitlam not only became Prime Minister but also became his own Foreign Minister until 1973 when, due to pressure of work, he was obliged to hand over the Foreign Ministry to Senator Willesse. Besides the domestic policy, foreign policy also underwent dramatic changes as the Socialist Administration of Whitlam sought to give the country a more independent stance internationally. Making a general comment on foreign policy at a press conference a few hours after assuming office on December 5, 1972, Australia's new Prime Minister said that his government would "reassess a whole range of Australian foreign policies and attitudes... with the general intention of developing more constructive, flexible and progressive approaches to a number of foreign policy issues". Making a particular mention of his government's 'independent' approach. Whitlam said:

... the general direction of my thinking is towards a more independent Australian stance in international affairs, an Australia which will be less militarily oriented and not open to suggestions of racism, an Australia which will enjoy a growing standing as a distinctive, tolerant, cooperative and well regarded nation, not only in the Asian and Pacific region, but in the world at large.120

120 *CNIA*, December 1972, p.169.
Whitlam's 'independent' approach sought to give a 'new tone and temper' to the conduct of foreign policy without prejudice to the basic structure of Australia's foreign policy.\textsuperscript{121} It also aimed at maintaining friendly relations with all nations regardless of differences of economic and social systems. Australia would strive to lessen tensions by narrowing the differences between states. Moreover, in shaping and pursuing its foreign policy, Australia would be influenced by its own national interests and not by those of other states including the US. All that the new government did in the foreign policy front was "house-cleaning", meaning putting away for good" many of the shibboleths of the cold war".\textsuperscript{122} It was ensured that the exercise of the reorientation of Australia's foreign policy would not embarrass its 'big brother' the US either. To quote Connor, "the independent line was consistent with the Guam doctrine which called upon US allies to look less to the United States for guidance in regional affairs".\textsuperscript{123} But Whitlam went ahead with his "whirlwind revisionism" in such "rapid succession" that it gave the impression that what Whitlam was attempting at was a "wholesale change".\textsuperscript{124} Whitlam gave due articulation to this in May 1973:

On December 2, the nation changed its government, but did not and could not by that act change the essential foundations of its foreign policy. Australia's national interests did not change. Australia's international obligations did not change. Australia's alliances and friendships did not change. Nevertheless, the change is real and deep because what was altered is the perception and interpretation of those interests, obligations and friendships by the elected government.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{121} J.D.B. Miller,"Australian Foreign Policy: Constraints and Opportunities - I", \textit{International Affairs}, April 1974, p.234.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{124} Miller,n.121, p.235.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Asia 1974 Yearbook}, p.91.
In any case, in less than a year, Whitlam government was able to establish a new pattern in international relationships with "the minimum of political fuss at home".\textsuperscript{126} Internationally, Whitlam's foreign policy initiatives had mixed reactions, namely, while the US viewed with misgivings, the communist world was quite pleased. Therefore, a new direction Whitlam sought to give to his country's foreign policy was manifest in his government's attitude towards the US, China and North Vietnam.

\textbf{Chill in the Australian - American Relations}

The new Labour government continued to consider the US as the principal ally of Australia. At the same time it sought to put an end to the previous Liberal government's 'loyalty to the protector' syndrome by which the importance of Australia's alliance with the US had been "exaggerated out of all proportions".\textsuperscript{127} The transformation of status of Australia which was as an American 'Protege' to start with was discerned in Australia's swift and sharp reaction to the American bombing of North Vietnam. When on December 18, 1972, the Nixon administration announced the resumption of bombing and mining of North Vietnam and affirmed that full scale raids would continue until "such time as a settlement is arrived at".\textsuperscript{128}

Interestingly, Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war ended following the withdrawal of a final group of about 60 military advisors from Saigon on the day of resumption of American bombing of North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{129} Whitlam government which was thirteen days old, vehemently attacked Nixon's resumption of bombing. Whitlam sent a strong - worded private note to President Nixon

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid}, p.88.
\textsuperscript{127} D.J. Murphy, "Problems in Australian Foreign Policy, January to June 1973", \textit{Australian Journal of Politics and History}, December 1973, p.332.
\textsuperscript{128} Browman, n.39, p.333.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{The Times}, March 20, 1974.
denouncing the resumption of bombing. Three members of Whitlam's cabinet - Jim Cairns, Clyde Cameron and Thomas Uren - also openly condemned US action in Vietnam. After a cabinet meeting in Canberra on January 9, 1973, Whitlam issued a threat by telling the reporters that if the bombings were resumed "I will not limit myself to a private letter but I will make a public statement". By way of endorsing the strong criticism of Nixon by his three senior Cabinet colleagues, Whitlam was prone to holding the American bombing of Vietnam responsible for any deterioration in Australia-United States relations.

The Australian Trade Union Movement too reacted sharply by registering its strong protest against the American bombing. On January 9, 1973 Bob Hawke, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), warned that ACTU might impose a total ban on American shipping and other American goods and services if the US resumed its bombing.

Sweden too condemned American bombing. Prime Minister Olof Palme likened the US bombing of Hanoi with Nazi massacres during the World War II. Palme again emphatically said to a group of correspondents on January 10, 1973, "I have no regrets. I would do it all over again with the same formulations". US retorted by downgrading the level of its diplomatic mission in Stockholm. Sweden was asked not to send a new Ambassador to Washington. But the US reaction to Australian criticism was not so sharp as that in the case of Sweden. Indeed, the Australian Prime Minister's letter piqued President Nixon most when Washington sent two protests to Whitlam government. Commenting on this The Hindu observed:

---

130 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
Though Canberra's reaction has hurt Washington more than Swedish criticism, the US has been careful not to alienate Australian public opinion because that country until recently was not only a close American ally in the Pacific, but was also one of the nations which had sent its troops, now withdrawn, to aid Saigon.\textsuperscript{137}

Though Australia decried American bombing, it took every care to see that its denunciation of bombing did not adversely affect its strategic alliance with the US in the ANZUS. Even though Whitlam's note to Nixon contained censures of American bombing, the protest note emphasised that it would in no way affect Australia’s basic relationship with the US in the ANZUS. Prime Minister Whitlam told a Press conference in Canberra on January 9, 1973:

\begin{quote}
The only cloud on the horizon in relations between the United States and Australia arose when the bombing was resumed. The ANZUS is our crucial international treaty. What goes on in Vietnam, what has gone on in Vietnam, has not been under ANZUS.\textsuperscript{138}
\end{quote}

Curiously enough 18 years before the Labour returned to power, T.B. Millar emphasised that Australia would continue to adhere to the ANZUS treaty irrespective of the Party in power. In his article in the \textit{Pacific Affairs} in 1964, Millar observed:

\begin{quote}
Which ever party is in office, the logic of Australia's position in the world is such that no radical change in the attitude to the United States can be expected. What could be expected from a Labour government would be a more independent 'tone' and a louder public assertiveness. This would not necessarily be detrimental to the working of the alliance.\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid}, January 11, 1973.  \\
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{The Times}, January 10, 1973.  \\
\end{flushright}
While Whitlam government's pronouncements to the effect that "ANZUS is essential and must continue",140 pleased the US, its comments on SEATO made Washington feel chagrined. For long ALP felt "uneasy over SEATO".141 As a leader of the opposition in the Australian Parliament, Whitlam many a time dismissed SEATO as "moribund". Though he continued to hold the same view even after becoming Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, his Labour government neither adhered to it nor withdrew from it but sought the restructuring of the organisation with focus on cultural and economic aid.142 On January 27, 1973, a month after he became Prime Minister, Whitlam told the annual summer school of the Australian Institute of Political Science that SEATO, which was an anti-Chinese alliance, lost its relevance in view of the rapprochement taking place between the US and China and hence the need to change its character and composition to make it "genuinely representative of the region without ideological overtones".143 In other words, as an Indian analyst put it, Whitlam like Indian policy-makers, wanted it to be transformed into a larger forum in which all Asian and Pacific countries might participate, irrespective of ideological or other differences with the hope that it would help "to free the region from great-power rivalries" and insulate it from ideological influence.144

Echoing Whitlam's view the 1973 the Defence Report said: "Australia favours a less militant and less ideologically oriented posture on the part of the Australian Government... including the elimination of the elaborate, but unrealistic military planning activity".145 As if this was not enough to incur the

140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Connor, n.122, p.23.
144 Dilip Mukarjee, "Australia under Mr. Whitlam's independent stance", Times of India, October 17, 1974.
145 Asia 1974 Yearbook, p.91.
wrath of the American administration, Whitlam "pursued the idea patiently and punctiliously" in his discussions with the leaders of India, Indonesia and Malaysia.\textsuperscript{146} Indonesian leaders, who would not pardon China for its critical role in the Indonesian communist bid to grab power which manifested in the abortive 'Coup' of 1965, "strongly opposed" the move which envisaged China's participation in an Asian organisation. Other ASEAN countries shuddered at the idea of doing anything that would provoke their "big brother". They were apprehensive of China's aggressive designs. More than all, as Miller has pointed out, "they were also anxious that ASEAN, their own instrument (especially Indonesia's) should not be overshadowed by something bigger but less suited to their needs".\textsuperscript{147} Whitlam's move to reshape or to replace SEATO did not fructify but it certainly displeased the US, whose brain child was the Manila pact. In any case, according to the communique of the SEATO Council meeting on September 29, 1973 in New York, SEATO, in view of the changed situation in the treaty area, "should place greater emphasis on supporting the internal security and development programmes of the two regional members, the Philippines and Thailand, and that its military activities should be reduced".\textsuperscript{148}

Whitlam's stand on various other issues was not viewed favourably by the US. The Australian Labour government identified itself with the Afro-Asian bloc in the UN over certain issues like South Africa and Rhodesia. Whitlam welcomed ASEAN proposal to convert Southeast Asia into a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality and his government also supported Sri Lanka's proposal to declare Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and opposed the idea of the development of Diego Garcia into an American naval base in the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{149} The Indian

\textsuperscript{146} Miller, n.143.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} \textit{International Herald Tribune}, October 1, 1973.
\textsuperscript{149} Connor, n.122, p.23.
Prime Minister Indira Gandhi time and again pointed out the danger posed by the US presence in Diego Garcia to India's security. Needless to say that the Soviet Union voiced its opposition to the American naval base in Diego Garcia.¹⁵⁰

The Labour government of Whitlam was also critical of the Battle – Berwick Agreement of 1963 which, having been was concluded with the US by the previous Liberal government of Menzies, provided for the Americans an exclusive control of an area at Northwest Cape, in Western Australia where the US had set up naval communications station. As Australia was denied access to this area Whitlam thundered:

Australian soil should not be used by other powers unless Australia has an effective voice in the policies of the region on her soil. It is irresponsible for a government to abdicate its right to decide how an ally can use its territory.¹⁵¹

Though the issue was amicably settled following the conclusion of a new agreement with the US in January 1974, which provided for the use of the station jointly by both the countries, it served as an irritant if not a deterrent, to Australia's consistently good relations with the US, soon after Whitlam formed government.¹⁵²

The Nixon government got so disenchanted with Whitlam, that it was disinclined to extend an invitation to him to visit the US when the Australian Prime Minister was visiting Mexico and Canada in connection with the Common-wealth Prime Ministers' conference in June 1973, while an invitation was extended

¹⁵¹ E.G. Whitlam, Australian Foreign Policy, (Melbourne, 1963), p.7 cited in Murphy, n.127, p. 332.
¹⁵² Miller, n.143, p. 430.
to the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and Japan. The sorry state of Australia's relations with the US prompted *Sydney Morning Herald* to say in its editorial "Anti-Americanism" on June 1, 1973.

> We know now that we have a Government hostile to the Government of the United States. The knowledge must profoundly disturb every Australian who values our alliance and close relationship of mutual trust and cooperation with the United States as indispensable to our security.\(^{153}\)

The American Press also expressed its anguish. *The New York Times* went to the extent of advising President Nixon to arrest the slide in Australian–American relations. *The New York Times* said in an editorial that to refuse to invite Mr. Whitlam to the White House would be an imprudent display of public resentment: "Was it really a snub or did the system break down?."\(^{154}\) Though Nixon finally invited Whitlam, the invitation episode indicated to what extent the relations between the 'protege' and the "bigger ally" chilled.

**Warming up of relations with China**

While Australia's relations with the US reached its nadir, its relations with China blossomed out during Whitlam's Labour regime which believed that Australia's security depended on stability in the Southeast and East Asia regions. Even the ALP, as the opposition party, advocated the normalisation of relations with China. When Whitlam, as the leader of the opposition, paid a visit to China one year before he assumed office as the Prime Minister, he was accorded a rousing welcome. Confident of the prospect of the success of his party in the ensuing parliamentary elections, Whitlam's advisers identified a site for Australia's embassy in Peking. Whitlam even groomed one of his chief foreign policy

---

153 Cited in Murphy, n.127, p. 33.
154 Murphy, n.127, p.23.
advisors, Stephen Fitzgerald, an ambassador designate to China. This was diametrically opposed to the Liberal Government of Prime Minister McMahon's anti-communist stand which according to the Labour leaders, was based on "fear and distrust". While taking over charge from Prime Minister Gorton in 1971, McMahon professed that his would be an anti-communist government. No wonder, Prime Minister McMahon made a blistering attack on Whitlam's China visit.

Unlike the previous conservative governments which remained adamant in pursuing a policy of anti-communism, Whitlam government was pragmatic enough in its approach to China, which was not only expansive but also ranked first in the world in terms of population. With its burgeoning economy and military power, China earned for itself the status of a mighty power if not a superpower. A potential power like China was bound to play an important role in the international affairs. The Australian Labour Government took cognizance of the breakdown of monolithic communism under various nationalistic pressures. It was aware of the fact that the third world countries were not entirely distrustful of the motives of the communist powers but were disposed to them favourably. Even the United States which considered China as its potential foe, was all set for a rapprochement with this communist giant. The US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's seemingly clandestine visits to Peking in 1971 only to pave the way for Nixon's visit to China clearly indicated the high profile role that China was destined to play in the world affairs. For its part, China also was eager to maintain friendly relations with as many countries as possible and to remain a responsible power shedding its aggressive postures.

156 Miller, n.121, p.231.
The manner in which Whitlam went about with the process of normalisation of relations with China, indicated the anxiety on the part of the Labour government to fulfil its election promise. On December 5, 1972, the day on which he became Prime Minister, Whitlam had instructed the Australian ambassador in Paris to initiate a dialogue with his Chinese counterpart on the issue of mutual recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations. On the same day, Whitlam sent a message to his Chinese counterpart Chou En-lai, in which he expressed his desire for the normalisation of relations between his country and China. He added: "I hope... that this will be but the first step in the growth of a more substantial relationship between our two governments and peoples and one marked by understanding, friendship, and co-operation". On December 10, 1972, Prime Minister Chou not only expressed his deep appreciation of Whitlam government's "desire of normalising the relations between China and Australia as soon as possible" and also "positive steps" taken to that end, but also identified some fields of future co-operation, thus:

I am convinced that the normalisation of Sino-Australian relations is in conformity with the interests and common desire of our two peoples.

It will open up good prospects for friendly cooperative and personnel exchanges between our two governments in the trade, cultural, scientific, technological and other fields and help further strengthen the friendship between the people of China and Australia.

Meanwhile, after successful negotiations, the ambassadors of Australia and China issued a joint communique in Paris on December 21, 1972, stating that "the

---

158 For text of Prime Minister Whitlam's letter to his Chinese counterpart, see CNIA, December 1972, p.632.
159 For text of Chou's letter to Whitlam, see CNIA, December 1972, pp. 632-633.
two Governments have agreed to exchange Ambassadors". Accordingly, on the same day Australia recognised Peking as the "sole legal Government of China" and Australia's diplomatic relations with Taiwan "came to an end". The very next day, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Whitlam issued a statement on Australia's new relationship with China. The statement read:

It has long been the objective of the Australian Labour Party to establish diplomatic relations between Australia and the People's Republic of China. It accordingly gives me great satisfaction to announce that this important step has now been taken.

While it has long been recognised that Australia's geographical position gives it special interests in the Asian region, up until now we have not come to terms with one of the central facts of that region, the People's Republic of China. The serious distortion in our foreign policy has now been corrected.

Whitlam justified his government's step to recognise China by claiming that what had been done to distort or imbalance the conduct of Australia's foreign affairs in the past, had now been undone. "Failure to accept the reality of China's existence was no less harmful to our interests than almost exclusive concentration or relations with the United States," said Whitlam in his lecture on Australia's foreign policy to a gathering of academics at Queensland University on November 30, 1973.

In its enthusiasm for closer relations with China, Whitlam government considered as redundant not only SEATO but also Australia's policy of 'forward defence' which was identified by the previous Liberal government as "the best

---

160 For text of joint communique issued by the Australian and Chinese Ambassadors to France, see Ibid, p.632.
161 CNIA, December 1972, p.631.
form of resistance to communism in Southeast Asia." As Professor Neill of Australian National University has pointed out, Australia's "withdrawal from the posture of forward defence has even further reduced the chances of a collision with China." Obviously, to convince the Australian public of its repudiation of forward defence, the Labour Government declared that there was no threat to Australia for the next fifteen years. Firmly believing that chances of an invasion of Australia were close to nil, Whitlam regime substituted 'forward defence' by 'continent defence' which meant that Australian forces' concentration would be confined to other own' continent.

The Labour Government's slogan "continental instead of Forward Defence" meant that the Australians no longer intended to defend their huge continent with the help of advanced bases in Singapore, Malaysia, or Vietnam, nor by sending out expeditionary forces as they did to aid Britain in world wars I and II.

In other words, Australian forces would be garrisoned within Australia and Australia would serve as its own base for operations against any invading army. This strategic review was the result of Whitlam Government's assessment of changing international scenario as reflected in relaxed international tensions and the rapprochement between the US and the PRC. The Labour Government also firmly believed that the prospect of Australian involvement in Asian wars was remote. On August 22, 1973, Australia's Defence Minister Lance Barnard told Parliament: "we and our advisers do not at present foresee any deterioration in our strategic environment that would involve consideration of the commitment of our

163 Miller, n.121, p.232.
164 Neill, n.162, p.105.
forces to military operations to protect Australia's security or strategic interests".\footnote{167} One month later, he said: "No one is threatening our security for the next 10 to 15 years".\footnote{168} Nonetheless, he added that Australia would not remain complacent. The Government would alter the structure, size and equipment of its forces to conform to the changing strategic situation.\footnote{169} This, as Haubold had suggested, would enable Australian armed forces to "operate independent of logistical support from any other power".\footnote{170} Australia's continent defence policy did not also mean isolationism. As Barnard affirmed Australia would remain concerned with questions of regional security with no trend towards isolationism.\footnote{171}

Robert O' Neill, head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the University of Canberra, said that in pursuing the policy of 'Continent defence'. Australia was also influenced by the prospect of the establishment of a 200-mile economic zone by the United Nations Conference on law of the sea : "We must orient ourselves primarily toward deterring away attack on our continent, on Pacific islands, on our territorial waters (especially if the UN's Law of the Sea Conference decides on the establishment of a 200-mile economic zone) on our air space and on our maritime links".\footnote{172}

Labour government's defence policy also marked a break with the forward defence policy which laid emphasis on jungle warfare in conformity with which Australian troops were involved in the campaigns during the World War II and in the Indonesian confrontation with Malaysia and the Vietnam War. On the other hand, the new policy laid emphasis on military training away from jungle warfare, its areas being more suited to the defence of mainland Australia. Barnard hence said :

\footnote{167} \textit{Australian}, March 19, 1975.  
\footnote{168} \textit{Straits Times}, September 25, 1975.  
\footnote{169} \textit{Ibid}.  
\footnote{170} Haubold, n.166.  
\footnote{171} \textit{Australian}, April 19, 1975.  
\footnote{172} Haubold, n.166.
No longer can we be content to develop expertise solely in jungle warfare. The Australian continent presents a great variety of terrains and our army must have the ability to handle all of them. The fact that much of Australia is flat and arid reinforces the view that so far we have concentrated too much on the jungle.\textsuperscript{173}

The Liberal opposition had never accepted Government's assurance of peace for 15 years and had constantly attacked the suggestion. But it was the adverse comment by the top military official on this issue that embarrassed the Government. Dissociating himself from Labour Government's claim that Australia faced no defence threat for the next 10 to 15 years, Admiral Sir Victor Smith, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, said in his opening address at the annual meeting of the Naval Association in Canberra on March 17, 1975: "Such a statement is incomplete; it is inaccurate and I could never support it".\textsuperscript{174} Sir Victor was supported by the former Chief of the Naval Staff Vice-Admiral Sir Richard Peck who said that the strategic assessment had been politically distorted.\textsuperscript{175}

Reacting to these negative comments Prime Minister Whitlam, who was in Peru in April 1975, sought justification for his government's defence policy, through a recorded radio message which was broadcast in Brisbane:

\begin{quote}
The Government had never said an attack on Australia was impossible. We have concluded on the basis of the best advice available, that such an attack is highly unlikely within 10 years or more. That is the advice the previous Government received and it came from the same authorities who advise my own government on the strategic situation. That situation is constantly under review. Of course there will always be uncertainties from time to time; no one can guarantee a period of full uninterrupted peace. But that's no reason for believing that an external threat is imminent. To assume that what is possible must be probable would mean putting the country on a permanent war footing - with all that would mean for the economy and the welfare of our people.\textsuperscript{176}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Australian}, March 18, 1975.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Ibid}, April 28, 1975.
Volte-Face in Australia's Vietnam Policy

Australian political parties and the general public were sharply divided over the issue of Vietnam war. While the Conservatives, during their long spell in power, were steadfast in their opposition to the loss of Vietnam to communism which to prevent they had deployed Australian force in Vietnam, the Labour Party took a diametrically opposite stand. However, Vietnam turned out to be a "political goldmine" for the LCP. Though a major section of the Australians who viewed Vietnam as "a popular war" and initially supported the Conservative government's Vietnam policy, ultimately opposed the war, seeing its "implications and consequences" particularly for Australia, in which the Conservative government was pulled down and the Labour was voted to power in 1972. Therefore, the outcome of the Parliamentary elections of 1972 was in sharp contrast to the 1966 elections in which the Conservatives won convincingly on the slogan "all the way with LBJ" in Vietnam. As the opposition leader, Whitlam was vociferous in his attack against the Liberal government's policy towards Vietnam war. In fact, for the first time as far back as in 1954, the year which witnessed the birth of SEATO, Whitlam warned in the House of Representatives against not only American "military involvement" but also that of Australia in Indochina. Maintaining the same line and lamenting the disastrous consequences of Australia's participation in the Vietnam war, Prime Minister Whitlam said in the House of Representatives on April 8, 1975:
After all these years, after all of the blunders and bloodshed of thirty years, what tolerable or feasible objective can any foreign government set for itself except the ending of the war, except ending of the killing as soon as possible? We outsiders never have the right to intervene.... Those who acted for Australia as the government mistook entirely the nature of Australia's interests and obligations and her rights.... All of us are still paying the prices for those mistakes in economics, in loss of confidence, in western civilisation itself.... It was a mistaken attitude after the revolution in China that led step by step to the mistaken view of Australian interests and American interests and mistaken actions in Indochina. Surely we have learnt our lesson at last.177

Australia's establishment of diplomatic relations with China foretold a similar measure by Canberra with regard to North Vietnam. Australia's recognition of China which was in conformity with the realities of the international politics, was dictated by Labour Government's desire to do away with ideological barriers in the cultivation of relationships with other nations. Therefore, the establishment of formal diplomatic ties with North Vietnam soon after that with China, was a logical development. Accordingly, Prime Minister Whitlam announced in Canberra on February 26, 1973 that his government had agreed with that of North Vietnam to establish diplomatic relations with each other at the ambassadorial level. This meant the dramatic reversal of the policies pursued by previous governments in the preceding decade.178 North Vietnam, with its fifth largest and well disciplined and equipped army and its people exhibiting extraordinary will power to humble one of the most powerful nations of the world, earned for itself the right to be recognised by the nations which respected the desire of the Vietnamese to remain free of foreign domination and independent enough to

177 For text of Ministerial Statement made by Prime Minister Whitlam in the House of Representatives on April 8, 1975, see Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Foreign Affairs Record, (AFAR) April 1975, pp.172-177.

pursue their own policies for the national advancement. It was any body's conjecture that this initiative of Canberra, though dictated by Whitlam governments 'independent' approach, would ultimately incur the displeasure of the United States.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs made a legitimate claim on September 21, 1973 that the development of its relations with the Southeast and East Asian regimes, the broadening of its scope of contacts and the increase in the range of its policies, would allow a more independence stance. Hence Australia, as soon as Labour government was formed, hastened to open diplomatic relations with twenty one countries including China, North Vietnam, 'East Germany and Cyprus. It also agreed to open Cuba's first ever diplomatic mission in Canberra. For Hanoi, Australia's recognition was of special significance as it entailed Canberra's breaking ranks with Washington over this issue. As Asia Yearbook pointed out, North Vietnam's "special interest" in cultivating relations with Australia besides Sweden and India, suggested that it wanted to strengthen relations with countries which appeared to be following an independent foreign policy. Though Australia recognised North Vietnam, it continued to recognise and maintain diplomatic relations with and offer civilian aid if not military aid to the government of South Vietnam.

Consequent on its recognition of North Vietnam, Australia addressed itself with the problem of recognition of the Viet Cong government of People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) with whose forces Australian troops had fought in the past. Australia did not wish to infuriate Washington further by according recognition to the PRG whose rival government in Saigon was still supported by the United States. Further, at a time when the American military mission in

180 Asia 1974 Yearbook, p.88.
181 Ibid, p.91.
pursue their own policies for the national advancement. It was any body's conjecture that this initiative of Canberra, though dictated by Whitlam governments 'independent' approach, would ultimately incur the displeasure of the United States.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs made a legitimate claim on September 21, 1973 that the development of its relations with the Southeast and East Asian regimes, the broadening of its scope of contacts and the increase in the range of its policies, would allow a more independence stance.\textsuperscript{179} Hence Australia, as soon as Labour government was formed, hastened to open diplomatic relations with twenty one countries including China, North Vietnam, East Germany and Cyprus. It also agreed to open Cuba's first ever diplomatic mission in Canberra.\textsuperscript{180} For Hanoi, Australia's recognition was of special significance as it entailed Canberra's breaking ranks with Washington over this issue. As \textit{Asia Yearbook} pointed out, North Vietnam's "special interest" in cultivating relations with Australia besides Sweden and India, suggested that it wanted to strengthen relations with countries which appeared to be following an independent foreign policy.\textsuperscript{181} Though Australia recognised North Vietnam, it continued to recognise and maintain diplomatic relations with and offer civilian aid if not military aid to the government of South Vietnam.

Consequent on its recognition of North Vietnam, Australia addressed itself with the problem of recognition of the Viet Cong government of People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) with whose forces Australian troops had fought in the past. Australia did not wish to infuriate Washington further by according recognition to the PRG whose rival government in Saigon was still supported by the United States. Further, at a time when the American military mission in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[179] \textit{Australian}, September 22, 1973.
\item[180] \textit{Asia 1974 Yearbook}, p.88.
\item[181] \textit{Ibid}, p.91.
\end{footnotes}
Vietnam was not yet over, and the US was unhappy over Australia's ending of its military role in Vietnam unilaterally and abruptly, the recognition of the PRG which would mean snapping of connection with the Saigon government, would not be received well in Washington.

Maintaining relations with the Saigon Government, Canberra felt, would enable Australia to play the role of an 'honest broker' to assist the Vietnamese communists and anti-communists to bring to an end the civil war in Vietnam by remaining sincere to the Paris Peace accords of 1973. Australia therefore, exercised restraint in recognising the PRG though such a step would not contradict its 'independent' approach and though by May 1974, PRG had already been recognised by 39 socialist, African and Asian countries and maintained information bureaus in the Scandinavian nations. On February 7, 1975, two months before the fall of Saigon government to the Viet Cong, the ALP voted at its meeting against recognising the PRG. However, Whitlam told the delegates that, for the PRG, to set up an information service in Australia would be a logical step. In fact, a hint to this effect was given by Jim Cairns, Australian Overseas Trade Minister, as far back as on December 13, 1973, when he told a press conference in Hanoi that Canberra would recognise the PRG "in one form or another", which prompted the South Vietnamese government to react by protesting formally.

Australia was not the first to permit the PRG to establish a 'mission' in its capital. It may be recalled that in May 1974, France became the first Western nation to accept the idea of a "permanent mission" of the PRG in Paris. French sources, however, maintained that the move did not mean that diplomatic relations were being established with the PRG, although delegation members were allowed

---

183 *Times of India*, February 8, 1975.
to enjoy some of the customary diplomatic privileges and immunities. Nonetheless, the curtain was drawn on this issue on May 6, 1975, the very next month after Saigon was capitulated by the Vietcong, when Australia formally recognised the PRG government of South Vietnam.

Though Australia maintained relations with North Vietnam and the PRG, its only representation in Vietnam was through the Embassy in Hanoi. The Australian ambassador in Hanoi was also accredited to Saigon where he presented his credentials in February 1976.

Whitlam's government not only recognised the two communist governments in Vietnam but also showed interest in Vietnam's membership of the United Nations. While the PRG government of South Vietnam applied for membership on July 15, 1975, North Vietnam did so two days later. South Korea too applied for UN membership on July 29, 1975. Australia not only welcomed but also co-sponsored the UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution for granting membership to Vietnam.

The US indicated that it was prepared to support a "package deal" whereby all the three applicants were admitted. But this proposal was turned down by China and the Soviet Union. On August 11, 1975, the US vetoed admission to Vietnam. Daniel Moynihan, the US delegate, stated that the US had for the first time vetoed the admission of a new member because "we will have nothing to do with selective universality, a principle which in practice admits only new members acceptable to the totalitarian states".

When the UNGA adopted on September 19, 1975 a resolution supported by Australia and others to consider "immediately and favourably" the applications

185 Indian Express, May 23, 1974.
186 AFAR, May 1976, p.256.
from two Vietnam states, the US vetoed again on September 30, 1975. Finally on September 20, 1977, the unified Vietnam was admitted as the 149th member of the UN when Australia was ruled by the Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser.

**Australia’s Aid to Vietnam**

The Australian Labour Party, while it was in opposition and thereafter in power lost no opportunity to condemn Australia’s participation in the Vietnam war as unwarranted, uncalled for and unjustified. The Labour Party was convinced that far from contributing to the restoration of peace in Vietnam, it had helped the intensification of the war with disastrous consequences not only to the people of Vietnam but also to the outside powers who got involved militarily. During his visit to England, Whitlam said on December 20, 1974: "I doubt if anyone in this country would take it amiss if we declare that Australia's involvement in Vietnam had been a mistake". He added: "It was a mistake and only now are we repairing the damage". The Whitlam government, therefore, not only frankly admitted Australia’s part in the devastation of Indochina, but also assumed moral responsibility for rebuilding the war-ravaged economy of Vietnam. In a statement in the House of Representatives, Prime Minister Whitlam said on April 8, 1975:

*It is not possible that the nightmare of Vietnam will ever pass from the memory or the conscience of any man or woman of our time. Nor should it. But the work we are now doing to build good, constructive relations with peoples and nations, throughout the world will outline even that bitter memory, will at least even the bad and destructive things inflicted on the people of Vietnam during the past thirty years.*

---

188 *Times of India*, September 21, 1975 and *KCA*, November 1975, p.27428.
189 *The Hindustan Times*, December 21, 1974.
190 *CNIA*, April 1975, p.177.
In its policy towards Vietnam, Australia pursued two objectives, namely, immediate objective and long-run objective. Pursuit of the immediate objective required Canberra to take initiatives to de-escalate the war and to bring to an end the hostilities and eventually the war itself. In this direction, the first and foremost step taken by the Whitlam government within a week of its assuming office was to order the termination of Australia's military involvement in Vietnam. Accordingly, the last Australian troops in Vietnam returned home just before the Christmas of 1972. Another important development following the withdrawal of a final group of 60 military advisors, was the decision of the Australian government on December 27, 1972 to end all defence aid to non-communist Saigon government. This decision meant the revocation of a commitment by the previous Liberal government of McMahon to offer $28 million over the three-year period ending 1973-74 towards defence and civil aid to South Vietnam. Whitlam considered this as the "most-important step" because in his view the best way "to reduce level of violence was always to stop contributing to that violence." But some observers remarked that this surprise aid cut would adversely affect Nixon administration which was at that time making frantic efforts to obtain congress nod for military aid.

Yet another step taken by the Labour government to bring the war to an early end was to use its "diplomatic influence" to convince the rival parties of Vietnam to give up belligerence and to strive for peace through national reconciliation. Accordingly, before the fall of Saigon, the Australian government adopted the policy which was designed to encourage the combatants in South Vietnam to accept the negotiated settlement. Following the conclusion of the

192 *AFAR*, April 1975, p.175
Paris Peace Agreement in January 1973, Australia urged "adherence to the negotiated settlement." In doing so, Australia was better placed as it was diplomatically represented in both Hanoi and Saigon. Though Canberra by then did not recognise the PRG, the latter was not unfriendly to it.

No doubt, repeated "gross breaches" of the Paris Agreements by both sides limited the scope and effectiveness of Australia's peace drive. Yet, as Whitlam himself had pointed out, Australia "lost no opportunity to encourage the Vietnamese parties to implement the Agreements to the full, and to deplore the breaches of the agreements by both sides". While the Australian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister persuaded their Vietnamese counterparts in Hanoi and Saigon, Special Minister of State, Bowen, the Deputy Prime Minister Cairns and the Minister for Defence Barnard maintained "personal contact" with the Vietnamese Ministers and officials.

On March 13, 1975, about a month before the collapse of the non-communist Saigon government, Prime Minister Whitlam wrote to both the South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Theiu and the North Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh emphasizing Australia's support for the implementation of the Agreements and Australia's concern at the continued lack of progress, the continued fighting and the breaches of the Agreements repeated by the both sides. Australian Prime Minister was not unreasonable when he boasted about Australia's diplomatic initiatives in Vietnam which was passing through a critical period in its history then. In a statement made in the House of Representatives early in April 1975, he noted:

196 AFAR, April 1975, p.175.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
The fact is that the Australian Government has been foremost among nations in seeking to end the war and to relieve the sufferings it has caused. In this immediate emergency, no government has been more active, more concerned and, reflecting the wishes of the Australian people, more generous.¹⁹⁹

The collapse of Thieu government in Saigon on April 30, 1975 did create anxiety in some quarters. The conservative opposition tried to fix Whitlam by referring to his government's defence planning assumption that there was no threat to Australia for 10 to 15 years. In a curt rejoinder, Whitlam emphasised that Australia's security was not weakened by the fall of Saigon. "Who rules in Saigon is not and never has been, an ingredient in Australia's security", he proclaimed.²⁰⁰

After the fall of Saigon, Australia pursued a new policy which aimed at maintaining friendly relations with North Vietnam and the PRG in the south but, also counselled the Vietnamese to create an environment in which they could live in peace and amity and pursue their national goal of resurrection of their economy. Accordingly, Australia "urged the victorious forces to show compassion to their former enemies".²⁰¹ In tune with this policy, Australia, as mentioned earlier, established diplomatic relations with the PRG in less than a week after it capitulated Saigon. Canberra also agreed to the reopening of the Australian embassy in Saigon which was withdrawn temporarily on April 25, 1975 i.e., five days before the fall of Saigon and its surrender to the PRG.²⁰²

The second objective of the Whitlam government's Vietnam policy was "to help rebuild a devastated Vietnam".²⁰³ As pointed out earlier, Whitlam felt that Australia was morally obliged to make its contribution for the economic

²⁰¹ "Response to the events in South Vietnam", n.194.
²⁰³ *AFAR*, April 1975, p.175.
reconstruction of Vietnam. His views were echoed by his Cabinet colleagues too. Australia’s Overseas Trade Minister Jim Cairns said on December 6, 1973 that his country would assist in any way to help reconstruct the war-torn country. Australia which was one of the countries that sent troops to Vietnam war, he said, had an obligation to help because of the damage done to North Vietnam during the War. 204 A beginning in this direction was made when Prime Minister Whitlam announced on September 21, 1973 the shipment of Australia’s first consignment of the aid for North Vietnam, consisting of 70,000 kilos of wool and 772 tonnes of roofing iron valued at $600,000. 205 Australia took a major step in the direction of promoting economic relations with Vietnam in December 1973 when Cairns paid visit to Vietnam. In fulfilment of commitments made by Cairns during his 1973 visit, Australia sent two trade missions separately to North Vietnam and South Vietnam in 1974. 206

As a part of its long term objective, Australia did much to rehabilitate the Vietnamese. In 1974, Canberra contributed $1,150,000 to international organisations for their rehabilitation efforts in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. 207 On March 28, 1975, responding to an urgent appeal from the ICRC, Whitlam announced an aid of $200,000 as an initial contribution to purchase food stuffs, tents and medical supplies for the Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees. 208 In less than a week, Australia again offered $ one million to the UNHCR’s relief work among the refugees in all parts of Indochina. 209 Again on April 7, 1975, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Willesee announced a further grant of $ one million to help the South Vietnamese refugees. 210 The amount was given to UNHCR which was

204 Hong Kong Standard, December 7, 1993.
207 AFAR, April 1975, p.174.
208 Hindustan Times, March 29, 1975.
210 Australian, April 8, 1975.
working with the UNICEF and ICRC to help Indochinese refugees. The Australian
government aid to international humanitarian organisations operating in Indochina
during the financial year 1974-1975 totalled up to $3,500,000. In addition, on
April 3, 1975, Prime Minister Whitlam made a public appeal for $ five million
refugee aid fund, to be co-ordinated by the Disaster Emergency Committee of the
Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

Besides offering liberal grants to international agencies for relief
operations, Australia also participated on a large scale in transporting food and
other relief supplies to the areas of need, in evacuating Vietnamese citizens to
areas of safety and in evacuating Australian citizens (including embassy staff and
their dependents) besides refugees and other chosen persons to Australia. In
carrying out these multifarious refugee operations, Australian Government was in
an advantageous position because it maintained diplomatic relations with the
Governments of North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Despite the fact that there
prevailed a situation since March 1975 of "unparalleled chaos and unexpected
rapidity of events" caused by the suddenness of the collapse in South Vietnam
"because of what President Ford described on April 3, 1975, "a unilateral
decision" by President Thieu, Australia tried its best "to apply its resources to save
lives, to relieve suffering," following the call received on March 29, 1975 from the
Governments of South Vietnam and the United States of America for air transport
assistance.

Expressing its deep concern for the children whose parents died in the war,
Australian government paid particular attention to them and arranged for taking
them to Australia where they were turned over to 'adoptive' parents approved by

212 Ibid.
213 "Response to the Events in South Vietnam", n.194.
State and Territory adoption authorities.\textsuperscript{215} The first batch of Vietnam orphans numbering 215 who arrived in Australia was kept in quarantine in Sydney. The Federal Immigration Department made arrangements to turn these orphans over to their prospective Australian adoptive parents on April 10, 1975. Meanwhile, Australian government's announcement on April 8, 1975 that more South Vietnamese orphans would be allowed to come to Australia, led to the second mass airlift of children to Australia.\textsuperscript{216} Australia not only provided medical teams from the RAAF to assist in the movement of children but also arranged for 'stand-by' medical teams through the Australian Red Cross.\textsuperscript{217}

In the relief operations carried by the RAAF, the most challenging task was the transportation of people from zones of conflict and the distribution of the relief supplies to the places of refuge of these people.\textsuperscript{218} Australian government made available seven RAAF C-130 Hercules transport aircraft to move civilian refugees away from the battle zones to safer areas. Canberra also ordered other Hercules aircraft to be kept on 'stand by' for use in an emergency. On April 2, 1975, the RAAF airlifted 1480 refugees in seven separate flights from Phan Rang to Cam Tho, south-west of Saigon. From April 4 to 17, 1975, the RAAF aircraft were used for airlifting food and other relief supplies from Saigon to the island of Phu Quoc where the Saigon government had opened a refugee centre.\textsuperscript{219} Acknowledging the humanitarian role of Australia's aircraft in Vietnam, Admiral Noel Gayler, US Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific sent a message to Canberra on April 2, 1975:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{215} "Response to the Events in South Vietnam", n.194, p.14.
\item \textsuperscript{216} \textit{Australian}, April 9, 1975.
\item \textsuperscript{217} "Response to the Events in South Vietnam", n.194, p.14.
\item \textsuperscript{218} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{219} \textit{Ibid}, p.15.
\end{itemize}
Please accept my warm appreciation and deep admiration for your help to evacuate the many desperate refugees from Da Nang. Australia can take great pride in the rapid decision to meet an absolutely essential humanitarian requirement.\textsuperscript{220}

Again on April 4, 1975, the American Ambassador in Canberra called on the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs to congratulate the 'good show' Australia had presented.\textsuperscript{221}

However, Hanoi, which was all praise for the pursuit of the 'independent' foreign policy of Whitlam's Australia, had expressed concern that the airlift by RAAF Hercules aircraft might be aiding South Vietnam against North Vietnam or the PRG. In a clarification offered on April 10, 1975, Prime Minister Whitlam stated that the RAAF aircraft were chiefly used for ferrying supplies to meet critical and immediate human needs.\textsuperscript{222}

On April 2, 1975, Canberra had taken a decision that the role of the RAAF aircraft should be confined to the transporting of emergency relief supplies only.\textsuperscript{223} Accordingly, the RAAF aircraft was prohibited from carrying South Vietnamese government officials on April 2, troops and refugees on April 3 and journalists on April 4, 1975. Two factors compelled Canberra to take this decision. On April 2, 1975 at Phan Rang, a number of South Vietnamese soldiers and other Vietnamese males forced their way aboard on C-130 Hercules aircraft endangering Australia's air crews. Second, Australia clearly did not wish to be seen to be favouring one side or the other" when its "presence in Vietnam at that time was purely one of humanitarian concern".\textsuperscript{224} But a Melbourne newspaper reported on April 10, 1975

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{220} AFAR, April 1975, p.174.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{222} Australian, April 11, 1975.
\textsuperscript{223} "Response to the events in South Vietnam", n.194, p.30.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid, p.16.
\end{flushleft}
that Whitlam appeared to have buckled under the pressure of North Vietnam and the PRG when he scaled down the RAAF's refugee relief operation in South Vietnam.225

On April 30, 1975, Fraser, the leader of the opposition, was also critical of the Whitlam Government when he complained that the Whitlam Government had conspired with Hanoi in the interests of Communist North Vietnam, and that the refugees had been sacrificed in the interests of Whitlam's expediency. Continuing his blistering attack, Fraser accused Whitlam of lacking in compassion and concern for people whose lives were at stake. He said that Whitlam Government remained indifferent when many citizens of South Vietnam appealed to it to show magnanimity and do everything in its capacity through its embassies in Moscow, Peking and Hanoi to secure mercy for those Vietnamese who were former employees of the Australian embassy in Saigon and the relatives of the Vietnamese living in Australia as citizens, residents or students.226 Prime Minister Whitlam, nonetheless, stuck to the stand he had taken in the statement he made in Parliament on April 10, 1975, which runs as follows:

Now it is true that after Phan Rang when South Vietnamese troops barged aboard a C-130, we decide there would be no further positions arise where officials or soldiers of the South Vietnamese Government would be aboard our aircraft. I would apprehend that there would be no members of the House who would suggest that RAAF aircraft should be used to ferry South Vietnamese troops. We are not engaged in a Dun Kirk Operation. Australia does not have allies anywhere in Indochina and has not had any allies in Indochina since 1927. We have been concerned to relieve human suffering and this country under my Government has spent millions of dollars in rehabilitating Indochina.227