

June 27, 1972

FINAL COMMUNIQUE OF THE SEVENTEENTH SEATO MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING

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SEATO 17TH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING

CANBERRA 27-28 JUNE 1972

1. The Council of the South-East Asia Treaty Organization held its Seventeenth Meeting in Canberra from 27 to 28 June 1972, under the Chairmanship of the Honorable Mr. Nigel Brown, Q.C., the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Governments of Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States participated; France and Pakistan did not participate. The Republic of Vietnam, a Protocol State, was represented by an Observer.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

2. The Council discussed developments in South-East Asia during the fourteen months since it last met in London. The Council noted that two principal changes had been, on the one hand, the full-scale attack against the Republic of Vietnam by virtually the entire North Vietnamese Army, supported by new sophisticated weapons and, on the other, the further reduction of American forces in the Republic of Vietnam to 49,000. It condemned the blatant violation of the Geneva Agreements by North Vietnam and regarded the aerial and naval response to it as an appropriate and understandable measure against the flow of war material to North Vietnam which had made the attack feasible. The Council expressed the hope that this response would be helpful in bringing the invasion to an end and leading to meaningful negotiations.

3. The Council noted that, despite setbacks suffered in the invasion, the Armed Forces and people of the Republic of Vietnam have demonstrated their growing capacity to defend themselves effectively, notably in their determined defense of An Loc and Kontum. The Council also noted Khmer and Lao peoples and Governments have continued to resist Vietnamese attacks.

4. The Council recognized the continuing needs of the Republic of Vietnam, the Khmer Republic and Laos for assistance to support their relief and rehabilitation efforts and to meet other problems stemming from the North Vietnamese military invasion. A considerable amount of assistance, has already been provided to these countries in the form of direct grants, imports of essential items, commodity import assistance, exchange support and other programmes. The Council expressed the hope that all nations concerned with problems arising from the assault on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of independent states in Indo-China would increase their efforts to assist in these fields.

5. The Council recognized the growing danger to the region from covert forms of Communist intervention and interference, including externally-promoted insurgency, subversion, infiltration and terrorism. It observed with concern that there has been

an intensification of such activity in the region. It noted the disruptive effect on stability and the threat to vital social and economic development caused by these activities. It recognized the importance in the present circumstances of developing further SEATO's ability to provide advice and assistance to countries so threatened.

6. The Council noted with gratification that the President of the United States, while continuing to honour defence commitments in the Treaty Area, had visited the People's Republic of China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics with a view to improving both bilateral relations and the prospects for a world at peace. It welcomed these visits and expressed the hope that their success would open up opportunities for a lessening of the threat in the Treaty Area and for an equitable negotiated settlement of the war in IndoChina.

7. The Council was pleased to note the conclusion of agreements between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics including those limiting defensive and offensive strategic weapons and setting the basis for further negotiations on strategic arms.

8. In keeping with the spirit of the Pacific Charter, the Council was pleased to note the progress made in regional cooperation in building up resilience amongst countries of South-East Asia. It noted the growing importance of various regional groupings and the initiatives they are taking towards progress and stability in the area. It observed that the growth of national self-reliance and increasingly close co-operation would promote the well-being and security of the countries of the region.

9. The Council noted with satisfaction the significant contribution to security in the area provided by ANZUS and the Five Power Defence Arrangements. The Council also welcomed the statements in the Australian White paper on defence, reaffirming Australia's commitments in South-East Asia and pledging its continuing aid to the countries of the area.

10. The Council concluded that on balance, the chances of building a Lasting peace now seem better than they have been for a long time. It welcomed this situation and was strongly of the view that this was the moment to reaffirm collective security arrangements for the region, the existence of which had contributed to the improved climate. It recognized that no alliance could remain static and that it must be flexible and ready to respond to the challenges of a changing world and reflect the ideas and aspirations of the peoples of the area.

VIETNAM

11. Developments in the Republic of Vietnam were described to the Council by the Observer from that Protocol State. He confirmed that the overwhelming majority of the South Vietnamese had remained loyal to the Government despite the massive invasion of North Vietnamese troops which had overrun some areas and caused hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee before the enemy. The Vietnamese Observer emphasized that the regular armed forces had been supported by regional and self-defence units in repulsing the North Vietnamese attacks, and that the Communists had not succeeded in winning popular support for the invasion.

12. The Council expressed support for the people of the Republic of Vietnam in their search for a peaceful solution to the war and for internal stability, and noted the progress being made towards even greater self-sufficiency in the face of enemy action. It noted, in particular, that the brunt of all fighting on the ground is now