DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

CABLEGRAM.

TOP SECRET

DBB/M3N/KC: Copy No. 25. G. 5113 to 5121-5124 to 5135.


1630

TO:

Australian Delegation to Geneva Conference,
GENEVA..................GC 35.

Australian Embassy,
WASHINGTON...............365. (Pass to Ottawa 104.)

Australian High Commissioner's Office,
LONDON...................1170. (For External.)

Australian High Commissioner's Office,
WASHINGTON.............192.

Australian Embassy,
PARIS....................127.

Australian Legation,
BAGHDAD..................Saving 55. (For your information only.)

Australian High Commissioner's Office,
NEW DELHI................Saving 12. (For your information only.)

Australian Commissioner's Office,
SINGAPORE..............Saving 66. (For your information only.)

TOP SECRET. IMMEDIATE.

In view of complex and sometimes conflicting
developments in Geneva, Washington, and elsewhere, we feel it
necessary to summarize Australian position at this stage so that
misunderstandings will not exist. We note, for example, reports
of United States and French references to expectation that
Australia may, after elections, join in "collective defence" or
"action by allies". Following should be used by you in talking
to government to which you are accredited.

2. Australia has agreed to examine with other
countries possibility of a collective defence in South-East
Asia. It has also agreed to Five-Power Staff Agency talks to
undertake military planning studies in order to recommend possible
courses of action to enable an effective line of resistance to
further Communist aggression or infiltration in South-East
Asia to be established. Agency will examine all possible
courses of action in light of current situation and known
capabilities of anti-Communist countries. Military studies
by agency would be without commitment to governments participating.

3. Australia has not agreed to internationalization
of military operations in Indo-China. The Government is naturally
reluctant to consider long-term commitments on eve of elections
which will decide who is to have responsibility for next three
years. However, elections are not only or even principal
reason why no Australian decision has yet been taken in favour
of internationalization and in order to prevent misunderstandings
you should make it quite clear to Government to which you
are accredited.

4. Australian Government does not consider it yet
appropriate to make decision on Internationalization of military
operations because -

[Signature]

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(a) Geneva Conference should first have genuine opportunity to reach settlement;
(b) decisions have not yet been made on military and political objectives of internationalization nor is it clear to what extent it would have French and Vietnamese support;
(c) at present the greater part of the Asian world would strongly oppose it and is unlikely at present to be shifted from this view and we could not at present get United Nations backing.

5. The degree of independence afforded Vietnam would affect the attitude of Governments towards internationalization.

6. Internationalization of military action could as we see it have following alternative objectives:
(a) to defeat Vietminh completely,
(b) to bring about a de facto partition of Vietnam and perhaps of other states,
(c) to preserve enclaves in Tonking Delta, South Vietnam, Cambodia and possibly Laos.

7. The military practicability of achieving any of foregoing with forces likely to be made available by international action should be examined at forthcoming meeting of Five Power Staff agency. However, on information at present available we doubt whether complete eradication of Vietminh is possible.

8. Nature of international assistance contemplated by United States is not clear. If confined to equipment there would be little risk of war spreading but situation would be no different from at present. If confined to air and naval assistance it is difficult to see how Vietminh could be substantially repulsed unless additional French forces arrive in greater numbers than seems likely. Again the Five Power Meeting may throw light on these judgments. Intervention of ground forces from United States and other countries would in our view involve serious risks of Chinese communist intervention in turn. This would lead to pressure on all of us to agree to bombing of China and this in turn could mean a third world war. Australia feels that we must do all we can to prevent such an outcome.

9. Nor is there clarity as to the circumstances under which France or United States would contemplate intervention. What is the irreducible minimum which either will require at Geneva and, in the absence of which they will call for intervention? From some sources we have gained impression that Americans regard internationalization of conflict as preferable to almost any settlement likely to be negotiated.

10. Our attitude to the discussion on collective defence which is to be held when the time is ripe, is that it involves considerations going beyond the provision of forces for Indo-China. We have no quarrel (apparently unlike the Americans) with the references by Churchill to establishment of a 'system' of collective defence. See also our 00.18 on timing.

11. As long as these matters are imprecise Australia is bound to respond cautiously to the various steps, potentially involving commitments, which may lead us to and present us with
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no more than the alternative to join or not to join in an internationalized war initiated by one or other of the powers.

12. In brief Australia considers every effort should be made at Geneva to reach a negotiated settlement in Indo-China on honourable and reasonable terms. We do not necessarily reject possibility of partition of Vietnam (combined probably with preservation of Laos and Cambodia) as an acceptable settlement (provided it is supported by effective "guarantees") and one that would be preferable to alternatives set out in paragraph 5 above. If a settlement is reached the possibilities would be good of securing a collective defence which would either include South and South East Asian States or have their sympathy. Mr. Casey on several occasions has publicly stressed importance Australia attaches to Asian opinion and also to fact that military assistance to any State is useless unless the government of that particular state desires it. We attach importance to continuance of United Kingdom efforts to lead opinion in India, Pakistan and Burma.

13. If Geneva appears to have failed, Governments concerned should then consult and agree that it has failed irrecoverably. It is right to be discussing privately now the implications of this and the purposes and potential effects of internationalization. We are well aware how essential it is for Australia and rest of free world not to give United States impression that it is being deserted by its allies. At same time American (or French) proposals must be examined on their military and political merits.

14. Provided we keep our objectives and commitments under full examination and control it is right too to apply to Communists a deterrent in the form of evidence that France's friends are considering serious steps if there is no settlement.

15. Indications are that Russians are also conscious of dangers of hostilities widening. But time is short as Geneva Conference will probably break up soon if no progress is made there on Indo-China question. In our view the time has come for some confidential and frank exchanges between United States and U.S.S.R. and Chinese Communists in addition to present United Kingdom and French efforts. If in the long run situation worsens and drastic action is required, our own public opinion and Asian opinion will expect to be assured that every effort was made to find peaceful solution.

16. Please inform us of reaction to your discussions.

Cost £534/17/10.

MIN & DEPT. E.A.
MIN. & DEPT. DEFENCE.

P.M'S.

27th May, 1954.
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