BILATERAL

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 make 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 gowing 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

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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 m 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 Norm 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 being borne by the South Vietnamese themselves, and that their increasing capability and experience will enable friendly forces to continue to reduce their force levels,

13. The Council expressed appreciation for the continued assistance being given to the Republic of Vietnam in the economic and humanitarian as well as military fields by SEATO member countries and others, such as the Republic of Korea.

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14. The Council deplored the consistent failure of North Vietnam to negotiate meaningfully at the Paris Peace Talks or elsewhere a settlement for Indo-China. It agreed that the proposals presented by the United States, in conjunction with the Republic of Vietnam, to North Vietnam in private discussions in the latter part of last year offered a realistic and generous approach towards bringing about a negotiated settlement to the conflict by which the people of the Republic of Vietnam would be able to determine their own future. In particular, the Council endorsed the eight-point plan made public by President Thieu and Nixon in January last as an equitable basis for a settlement. It further commended the call for an internationally-supervised cease-fire throughout Indo-China and an exchange of all prisoners of war, to be followed by the withdrawal of all United States forces within four months, as a practical means of bringing the military conflict to an end.

LAOS

15. The Council deplored the fact that North Vietnam, in open violation of the 1962 Geneva Agreement, continues to transport troops and material through Laos to the Khmer Republic and the Republic of Vietnam, armed attacks on the forces of the Royal Lao Government, and support insurgency in Thailand from bases and training camps in Laos.

16. Repeating the call for full implementation by all signatories of the terms of the 1962 Geneva Agreement on Laos, including withdrawal of all foreign troops, the Council expressed support for efforts by the Royal Lao Government to secure and to preserve the neutrality of Laos.

KHMER REPUBLIC

17. The Council deplored the continued North Vietnamese aggression against the Khmer Republic. It reiterated its support for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Khmer Republic, and its respect for the desire of that Government to remain neutral.

18. The Council expressed its sympathy for the plight of the Khmer people, and its gratification at the substantial military and economic aid which is being given to the Khmer people and Government by their Southeast Asian neighbours and other friendly countries.

PHILIPPINES

19. The Council was given a comprehensive account of the security situation in the Philippines and, in particular, of increased subversive and insurgent activities by Communist elements.

20. The Council expressed its support for the continuing political, economic and social measures taken by the Philippine Government to raise living standards and to initiate social reforms in the country.

THAILAND

21. The Council noted the increased level of Communist subversive and insurgent activity which had developed in Thailand over the past year, more seriously in the northern and north-eastern provinces of the country bordering Laos. It observed that insurgents in Thailand have stepped up the frequency and boldness of terrorist incidents against the local populace and authorities. It noted that the insurgents continued to receive political support and substantial material aid, including high powered weapons, from sources outside the country.

22. The Council also noted the importance of the intensified efforts of the Royal Thai Government and Thai people to counter insurgency and to further economic and social development in the country, particularly at the grassroots level.

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23. The Council was pleased that member countries, both individually and collectively, were lending assistance to the Royal Thai Government in these efforts.

COUNTER-SUBVERSION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES OF SEATO

24. The Council emphasized the importance of continued efforts to assist regional members to cope with the problems raised by externally promoted subversion and insurgency. Solutions depended on increased understanding of problems and vigorous action to resolve them on the part of individual members as well as by SEATO.

25. The Council decided that SEATO programmes in the areas of information and research as well as its economic, social and cultural activities should be increasingly complementary to and closely coordinated with its counter-subversion and counter-insurgency activity. The Organization will assist wherever possible in training officials dealing with these problems.

26. The Council noted with satisfaction that member countries continued to provide aid to other member countries bilaterally in support of SEATO objectives.

CO-OPERATION IN THE MILITARY FIELD

27. The Council noted the Report of the Military Advisers and commended the Military Planning Office for its continuing work in keeping plans up-to-date and in organizing military exercises. These exercises provide useful experience in cooperation between members as well as in other aspects of military training. It commended the civic action projects which were undertaken in the Philippines and Thailand in connection with SEATO Exercises "SEA HAWK' and 'MITTRAPARB."

EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

28. The Council accepted with pleasure the invitation of the Government of the United States of America to host the Eighteenth Council Meeting in 1973.

EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

29. The Council expressed its gratitude to the Government and people of Australia for their generous hospitality and warm welcome and its appreciation for the excellent arrangements made for the Meeting.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

30. The Council noted reports of the Secretary-General and expressed appreciation for the work of the Civil Secretariat

31. In taking note of the forthcoming retirement of the Secretary- General, the Council paid tribute to the active and devoted manner in which General Vargas had served SEATO over the past seven years.

32. The Council appointed H.E. Mr. Sunthorn Hongladarom of Thailand as Secretary-General and extended a warm welcome to him.

LEADERS OF DELEGATIONS

33. The Leaders of the Delegations to the Seventeenth Council Meeting were:

Australia Hon. Nigel Bowen, QC, MP,

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Minister for Foreign Affairs

New Zealand Rt. Hon Sir Keith Holyoake,

GCMG, CH, MP,

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Philippines H. E. Gen. Carlos P. Romulo,

Secretary of Foreign Affairs

Thailand H.E. Mr. Pote Sarasin,

Assistant Chairman,

National Executive Council

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