PRESS STATEMENT:
MALCOLM FRASER:

DEFENCE EFFORT AND INDONESIA

November 18th, 1962

The debate on the Defence Estimates this year was quite different from previous debates. In earlier years, the Opposition had always said that we are spending too much money on defence and that Defence establishments should be reduced in all directions. This year, the Opposition confined itself more to a criticism of the Australian forces and the Government effort without saying that those Forces are too great for present needs.

The Government values very greatly responsible criticism of the Defence effort which is made by such bodies as the R.S.L. and other interested people throughout the Community. This criticism and advice is always well considered.

The Government, however, makes its final decision on how much money is to be spent on each of the Services, in the light of the strategic intelligence assessment of the threat to Australia. This is based on our own Intelligence reports, on our knowledge of what is going on in other countries and, in particular, it is based on the most valuable knowledge and co-operation that we get from our Allies. It is not always realised how closely defence planning is integrated with countries like the United States through SEATO and ANZUS, Australia's two defensive treaties. In this planning, other countries also, of course, have their own Intelligence reports, and I understand much of these are available to the Government.

Australian forces are planned to work in close co-operation during any emergency, especially with United States Forces. That is why our Forces have been re-equipped with weapons that can use common lines of supply.

The strategic assessment in this area has been and is that a global war, while possible, is unlikely, but that local wars in South-East Asia are quite possible. Indeed, the Indoc-China war proves that this is so. If one of Australia's SEATO partners is attacked by a Communist country Australia could be involved, together with the United States and other countries. Australia's policy has been to equip her Forces to be able to meet such commitments quickly. The small, well-armed force that is quickly on the spot could, in some instances, be more valuable than a larger force that takes much longer to get into the field.

Recently, some people have put the view that Australia was let down over West New Guinea and that, therefore, we need larger defence forces now. I'd like to examine this proposition for a few moments. It is then argued that because we were let down over West New Guinea we cannot rely on our Allies if East New Guinea were attacked. A grave error lies in this belief. We were not let down over West New Guinea to start with. For a long time we had realised that the Indonesians were likely to gain possession of West New Guinea. I have said before that while it is possible that there is an Imperialist movement in Indonesia, I do not really believe there is. West New Guinea was part of the old Dutch Empire. The Indonesians, who had to fight for their freedom against the Dutch, always regarded themselves as heirs to the whole Dutch Empire. At the last moment when the agreements were being signed, West New Guinea was excluded. This is going back to 1949.

There is a lot of emotion in the Indonesian attitude and some logic. At least, as near neighbours, we should take the trouble to try and understand their point of view. Because they did understand the Indonesian point of view. Because they did understand the Indonesian point of view, the great Powers - the United States in particular, had no particular brief for the Dutch in West New Guinea and recognised that a cancer would be ever
present in this part of the world, capable of stirring up a local war, unless the Indonesians gained possession of West New Guinea.

Now the argument runs because the United States did not fight to keep the Indonesians out of West New Guinea they won’t fight to keep them out of West New Guinea, and therefore Australia is in grave danger. There is no comparison whatsoever between East and West New Guinea. We are tied by the ANZUS Treaty to the United States, and an attack on East New Guinea would be equivalent to an attack on Australia in the terms of that Treaty. The United States would not break her Treaty obligations, and it is nonsense to talk as though she would. However, the people who have the belief about which I am talking go on to argue that since we cannot rely on help in East New Guinea we therefore have got to greatly expand our defence effort very quickly. This would be foolish for two reasons. Firstly, because I have said the situations are not the same. They are quite different between East and West New Guinea and secondly, if we began a vast increase in our defence program at this period of time it would be considered in Indonesia as being directed against Indonesia. While there is still much goodwill in Indonesia for Australia, it would be more than foolish to indicate to Indonesia that we regard their country as our No.1 potential enemy. We are both in this part of the world, and we will both stay here. We are near neighbours and we have got to get on together. Governments should not do anything which would make it more difficult for our two countries to get on.

This, of course, does not mean to say that conditions cannot change. In the 19th century British leaders looked upon France as the great enemy. Within a matter of 5 years France became an ally and Germany the enemy. Germany was the enemy till 1945. Now Britain is allied to Germany and Russia is the enemy. Attitudes and alliances change and conditions can change. We have to be ready for them and be prepared to adapt ourselves if they do. But there is little point in hastening these changes, especially if they are ones that may be founded on suspicions which can, quite often, be ill-founded.
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