Hello ladies and gentlemen.

In Parliament last week the Minister for Defence, Mr. Fairbairn, made a major statement on defence and at the same time tabled a White Paper on the subject. This was a most important occasion because the Government's advisors had for several months been engaged in a comprehensive re-examination of the nation's strategic position.

Perhaps the most important reason for this assessment is that Australia is in a part of the world which is undergoing great changes and the Government considers it vital that Australia should be involved in those changes in every respect - economic, social, diplomatic and military.

I don't want to attempt in a brief broadcast to dissect Mr. Fairbairn's speech entirely, but I would like to put before you one or two of the main points he made which are fundamental to the Government's approach.

We believe Australia in the 1970's and 1980's must base its approach to defence on two premises - the need for a greater degree of self reliance, and closer defence links with our friends to the north, as well as maintenance of traditional defence relationships. This duality in our requirements is perhaps the most significant emerging feature in our defence policy.

Bearing in mind the degree of self reliance the Government considers necessary for Australia, we are working to ensure that all three services, the Army, Navy and Airforce, are well equipped and up to strength. For instance we consider that the role we envisage for the forces will require maintenance of a Regular Army of about 40,000, and in the field of equipment, the Chiefs of Staff and the Department of Defence are currently together analysing some 70 larger weapons systems and major equipment which the services consider desirable in the foreseeable future.

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But of paramount importance is our involvement in our region. While our political opponents have preached withdrawal and isolation, the Government by positive diplomacy and defence cooperation, has achieved a unique standing in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Our physical presence in the region is an integral part of the five-power defence arrangement – Malaysia, Singapore, Britain, New Zealand and Australia – a most useful contribution to security. Without our tangible contribution to the agreement there is no doubt our Asian allies would suffer a lack of confidence in the five-power agreement.

Australia has to be ready for dangerous contingencies and must do this both through cooperation with our allies and the establishment of our ability to act alone in the kind of circumstances we can conceive developing in our region. I emphasise this is consistent with the American hopes of progressively negotiating understandings which would reduce tensions among the four great powers – the Soviet Union, China, the United States and Japan.

But we must acknowledge that if old security dangers recede, some new ones may take their place. While the Government naturally prefers that Australia should not be involved in insurgent situations in South-East Asia at all, it is essential that if it is in the national interest to become involved, and this can be clearly identified, then we should have the physical capacity to do so. We must be able to provide the kind of support which will enable local forces in the area of insurgency to acquit themselves effectively against their adversaries.

Finally I want to emphasise the fact that the Government continues to attach great significance to the ANZUS Treaty. The American commitments to Australia under that treaty are as strong and effective as ever. The Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean is a disturbing influence. It is certainly a weapon in a Soviet diplomatic offensive in the Indian Ocean states, including those from which vital petroleum supplies are obtained. Our response has been to encourage a Western reaction to this presence adequate to demonstrate to the countries of the Indian Ocean that that ocean does not, and will not, become a Russian preserve and that Western interests there remain positive and well secured.
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This is the kind of reaction from our allies that we seek to obtain throughout our part of the world, a reaction based on involvement from which springs understanding, and not from isolation, wherein lies the danger of conflict.

Goodbye for now.
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