PRESS STATEMENT:

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September 15th, 1963

FRENCH BOMB TESTS

In the last two weeks the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty has been revived as a public issue by the French decision to conduct nuclear tests in the Pacific area. Earlier this session, Sir Garfield Barwick had made a comprehensive statement on the Treaty, outlining its achievements and its limitations. He then went on to say that it was unfortunate that not all countries had agreed to be bound by the Treaty. General de Gaulle, President of France, in a television interview, welcomed the Treaty but indicated that France would not be bound by it and that France was going to conduct nuclear tests somewhere in the Pacific.

Sir Garfield said that it was a matter for "profound regret" that France, by refusing to sign the Treaty, had made the pact less effective than it might otherwise have been. He pointed out that France's refusal to join could provide an excuse for other countries, such as Communist China, to remain outside the pact. It will make it extremely difficult for either Russia or the West to bring pressure to bear on Communist China to cease her tests when the time arrives. In addition, continuance of French testing at some time in the future could serve as an excuse to allow one or more countries to withdraw from the Treaty because the Treaty does provide for the right to withdraw from its obligations if one of the parties believes that its vital interests are being affected and jeopardised by remaining in it.

If France achieves independent nuclear power and has the will to employ it, it could bring a disturbing influence to the politics of Europe and the world. This almost certainly will make it much harder to arrive at further agreements between the power blocs. In addition, the French decision means that, to some extent, the earth's atmosphere will be further contaminated by radioactive fall-out.

When he was in Paris, Sir Garfield said that he expressed to the French Foreign Minister his "deep regret" at the decision that the French Government was then about to take. Later, the Australian Government, in announcing its intention to sign the Treaty, had urged all countries, including France, to adhere to it.

New Zealand has taken a similar attitude to Australia and countries in South America have also expressed concern about the proposed French tests in the Pacific. This has led France to issue a statement in Paris which has been conveyed to the Australian Government.

The French have taken exception to the fact that we have protested against their tests but they say we did not protest against previous tests that have been undertaken. The French Authorities seem to have drawn the conclusion that this is unfair discrimination against France. French representatives have said that if the attitude adopted by Australia and the other countries continued, it could endanger friendly relations between France and the countries concerned.

At the outset, the French protest was based on a misunderstanding because, for many years, the Australian Government has advocated universally controlled disarmament and a universal Test Ban Treaty.

I have taken some pains to explain the language used by Sir Garfield Barwick because I believe it has been moderate and fair and needs no apology. It did not deserve the French reaction which came from
France last week. Nevertheless, this reaction seems to be in keeping with current French attitudes to international affairs. General de Gaulle seems bent on re-building the glory of France at enormous cost to the average French citizen. He knows that he can only do this if he possesses nuclear power. One may almost wonder if General de Gaulle is remembering the defeats at the hands of the Germans in 1870, 1914 and 1939. For nearly 100 years France has been a defeated nation. General de Gaulle, however, has an intense sense of history and an intense feeling for the glory of France. It would not be out of keeping with his temperament to want to re-build that country's past greatness. The excuse he gives for continuing nuclear tests and for wishing to build France into a nuclear power is that until general and complete disarmament of nuclear and conventional weapons is achieved, it is unsafe for France to rely entirely upon the nuclear deterrent held under NATO control, under British control and under American control. For my part, I do not believe this is a valid excuse. I think it is an excuse thought up to justify his desire to re-build France to her former majesty and greatness and this again would explain the stern and school masterly tones in which France has replied to the feelings expressed by Australia. Australia has, of course, rejected the French view and the French protest. We stand firm by what has been said.

In taking the attitude that he has, General de Gaulle misconceives the nature of nuclear strategy and the change that the Test Ban Treaty brings about. While there was no Treaty, the western powers could not afford to fall behind the Soviet Union in nuclear technology. These nuclear tests were needed for the west to maintain its deterrent power so that the western world might remain free. On the other hand, while there was no formal Treaty, the Soviet Union would not limit her tests in pursuit of the same kind of knowledge. Both countries have now formally recognised the danger of this race and in signing the Treaty have put an end to it.

France is protected, as are all the countries of Europe and, indeed, ultimately Australia, by the protective umbrella that the western deterrent creates for all the free countries. Independent nuclear deterrents held in the hands of France or other countries will make ultimate world disarmament and inspection more difficult to achieve.

Australia has rejected the French protest and I believe all Australians will object to the fashion in which Australia has been lectured and the other countries in the Pacific have been lectured by the President of France. The world is now too small for one country, no matter how large or small, to play this kind of power politics exclusively in her own interests, ignoring the interests of her allies and the world at large.