PRESS STATEMENT

MALCOLM FRASER:

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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

GREATER INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS -

In the first weeks of the twenty-fifth Parliament there has been much greater debate of foreign affairs than in earlier Parliaments. In the Address-in-Reply members are free to speak on any subject they think fit, and many chose this particular subject. Then, a short while ago, Sir Garfield Barwick presented a comprehensive review of the world and the South-East Asian situation to Parliament, and this sparked off a debate solely devoted to foreign affairs.

It is not difficult to see why there is a greater interest. Our two nearest northern neighbours, Malaysia and Indonesia, have so far found it impossible to get on together and this, of course, greatly concerns us. We have pledged our support to Malaysia as has the United Kingdom, but at the same time we want, if possible, to develop friendly relationships with Indonesia. They and we will be neighbours until the end of time, and there is no sensible future in this part of the world if peace is not maintained.

What happens, of course, will largely depend on Indonesia's policy of confrontation to Malaysia. Our decisions have been made on this matter. We support Malaysia and will continue to do so. Confrontation cannot be allowed to succeed because past experience has shown us that this is the kind of appetite that grows on success. If Indonesia should be successful in her attitude to Malaysia she would, I believe, immediately embark on some other excursion. This, of course, would lead to an intolerable situation, and it cannot be allowed to happen.

CHANGE IN AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONSHIPS -

There has been a great change in Australia's relationships in the world in the past few years. Since the Cuban crisis of 1962 there has been a thawing-out in the relationships between the United States and Russia. This was the first nuclear crisis that the world has seen in which two powers, each with the ability to destroy the world, have confronted each other. In this case, firmness and resolution on the part of the United States caused the withdrawal of nuclear missiles from Cuba. I believe the Cuban crisis has shown Russia that if pressed in a vital interest the western countries, and the United States in particular will not flinch from using these weapons. I believe it is for this reason we have not seen a renewed crisis over Berlin since Cuba. If America had not been firm over Cuba we would certainly have been faced with a crisis in Europe.

It may well be thought that the possible end to this arctic winter between Russia and the United States adds to world security and consequently to Australian security. In a wide-world context this is, of course, true. In a narrow Australian context in regard to South-East Asia it may not necessarily be true. Let me explain this by reference to the past. In 1914 and in 1939 Australia was embroiled in world wars because we were allied by ties of blood or by ties of treaty with countries greater than ourselves who were forced to go to war to defend freedom. We took the only possible course and supported the United Kingdom, knowing that freedom in this sense is indivisible and that countries believing in the same things must support each other. The important thing to note, however, is that in these two wars the initial threat was not directed to Australia but to Britain or, perhaps in the Pacific to the United States with the disaster at Pearl Harbour. These countries, much greater than ourselves, were forced into war and we, because we believe in the same things, supported them.
The situation now, however, is somewhat different. Australia could be faced with an initial threat which would affect us primarily and which would affect our friends or our allies only because of their ties of blood or of treaty with Australia, or because of their general concern for security in this region, believing that any threat to Australia's security might ultimately be a threat to their own. But the significant point is that the initial attack could be directed to Australia. For this reason alliance and friendship with powerful friends is more important to Australia today than it ever was.

The two main treaties, of course, are the SEATO Treaty and, more particularly, the Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States, which commits the United States to assist us if we or our forces are attacked, not only in Australia but in the Pacific theatre. This is a powerful Treaty for Australia. It is one which I hope we will never have to invoke. And the fact that we have it probably means that its provisions will not be called upon.

In addition, of course, there would be the normal response that we could expect from the United Kingdom if we were under attack, just as the United Kingdom expected and received assistance from us on two previous occasions.

SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND COMMUNISM

The next two or three years may well decide whether any parts of South-East Asia can be saved from Communism. South Vietnam has experienced two military coups in the last twelve months. United States prestige, energy and money has been spent in trying to fight Communists supported and supplied from Communist China, North Vietnam or Communist Laos. There can be no certainty that this effort will succeed, even though the United States has renewed its pledge to remain in South Vietnam or Communist Laos. There can be no certainty that this effort will succeed, even though the United States has renewed its pledge to remain in South Vietnam within the last few days.

The danger is not that just South Vietnam might become Communist, but that if it did the United States' and Western prestige would suffer immeasurably. Other countries in South-East Asia would come to believe that the east wind would blow out the west wind. Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, even Pakistan allied to us in SEATO, might come to believe that the Communist regime is going to win. If this were so these areas would come to be dominated by Peking. Malaysia would then face infiltration from the north and confrontation from the south and her position would become intolerable.

All this shows that the position in South-East Asia is not a happy one for the Western World. The answer will not be found in pure military terms, but the availability of military forces and military effort are necessary in any short-term solution. This underlines the fact that Australia is in a vulnerable part of the world, and re-emphasises the necessity of our alliances and treaties with major powers.