



12 ENGLISH

Semester IV

Reality into Prose:
VIETNAM - A REPORTER'S WAR

You are Australian minister for external affairs, Paul Hasluck, who has been challenged to justify the Australian position in Vietnam during a press conference. Address the press, giving your response.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press ... The take-over of South Vietnam by the Viet Cong guerrillas can only be seen as part of a communist thrust by China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The war in Vietnam is not a civil war as the media at times tries to make out, but deliberate, sustained aggression, started, controlled, directed and supported by South Vietnam from the North. In the conflict, the standard communist tactics of subversion, terror, murder, attacks on women and children and the wanton killing of village administrators are being employed daily by the Viet Cong.

Hence, it is the policy of the Australian government to ensure, that through organisations such as ANZUS and SEATO, and with the powerful support of the United States, neither South Vietnam nor any more innocent and defenceless nations will fall like dominoes to communist oppression and Australia will remain a secure democratic nation in this somewhat culturally alien and politically unstable region. And, South Vietnam happens to be one of those protocol states acknowledged by the South East Asia Treaty Organisation, and that means our country's obligations under the SEATO treaty, including military obligations, extend to that country. On one condition, of course, and that is that the government of the country concerned asks for our assistance.

Mr Hasluck, {name}, Sydney Morning Herald. Has there been any such plea for help from the South Vietnamese?

Yes. The Australian government is now in receipt of a letter from the Government of South Vietnam requesting further military assistance and we have decided, after close consultation with the Government of the United States, to provide an infantry battalion for service in Vietnam. Should there be any misunderstanding, I think I should say here and now that Mr Menzies, myself and the federal government decided in principle some time ago that we would be willing to offer our support if we received the appropriate request from the South Vietnamese government and the necessary collaboration with the United States.

Mr Hasluck, {name}, Courier-Mail, Brisbane. What do you, as minister for external affairs, say to reports that the Australian government is so anxious to provide the USA with moral support in Vietnam that the Australian government in fact asked the Government of South Vietnam to make the request?

Absolutely ludicrous. The take-over of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to the security and well-being of Australia and all the countries of south-east Asia, however I do not believe that Mr Menzies or myself would ever consider sending military advisors to Vietnam without the express direction of that country's government to do so, in the same way that the United States and the Free World Forces would not, on any account, enter Vietnam without the proper invitation. I assure you that our actions in Vietnam at this time are simply an expression in direct action of our SEATO obligations.

Sir, {name}, The Melbourne Age. Do you honestly believe that one small Australian battalion will provide the assistance required by the South Vietnamese Army?

The commitment of 800 Australians to Vietnam will obviously not turn the tide of the war. Yet I feel the decision of the Menzies government at this time to send the first Royal Australian Regiment to Vietnam is of immense importance to our nation, as we will help the South Vietnamese, will help the Americans and most of all will help Australia in recognising its obligations to its Asian neighbours, as a Pacific Power.

Mr Hasluck, why do you feel we must support America in their war efforts? I mean, has this war really got anything to do with us? (S.M.H.)

As a nation, we do not and must not overlook the point that our alliances, as well as providing guarantees and assurances for our security, make demands upon us. We have to bear in mind, and make preparations against, the possibility of other developments in this region which could make demands on our defence capacity. And, since we have recognised that for many years the South Vietnamese have been fighting and dying for what are Australia's interests as much as their own, the battle against communist domination that is, it is my judgement that Australia has no alternative but to commit a battalion to South Vietnam, as the most useful additional contribution we can make at this time to the defence of the region.

Minister, {name}, Daily Telegraph. Is such a method of regional defence wise? How can Australia benefit from such policies for forward defence?

The Menzies government today in the 1960s has an enormous stake in helping to preserve stability in this region. Our security is tied to that of all countries of south-east Asia and understanding that it would be immensely more difficult to defend Australia on our own soil alone, our strategic defence frontier must be as far forward as possible. Today, that frontier is in South Vietnam.

So Mr Hasluck, what could Australians expect for the future if Mr Menzies and our government had not decided to adopt a position in the Vietnam crisis? (C.M.)

If we and the United States were to leave South Vietnam this very day to its own devices, or had we not taken any position at all, the Australian population could expect communism, acting through North Vietnam and China, to take over South Vietnam. Thailand and Malaya would then be in an intolerable position and we here in Australia could soon find ourselves facing communist aggression close to our shores. Containment of the militant forces of communism in South Vietnam is therefore vital to the future of Australia's peace and security. That will be all. Good day gentlemen, ladies.