

## Reluctant Ally

### NEW ZEALAND'S ENTRY INTO THE VIETNAM WAR

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NEW ZEALAND's military commitment to South Vietnam was perhaps the ultimate policy expression in the 1960s of the importance the New Zealand Government gave to the maintenance of its alliance relationships. New Zealand was reluctant to be involved militarily in South Vietnam, partly because the Government believed that a foreign military solution to the Vietnamese situation was not possible, and partly because it was not convinced that a New Zealand contribution was really necessary, given the great resources of its allies. Nevertheless, New Zealand had to take into account the expectations of its allies, and the need to preserve the alliance relationship came before New Zealand's own inclinations. New Zealand, however, kept its military aid at token level, a level which was at decided variance with that of the rhetoric used to justify the aid.

New Zealand's military involvement in South Vietnam had its roots in two beliefs held as articles of faith by the decision-makers after the 1950s. The first, and by far the most important, was that New Zealand depended for its security upon the United States and must give a high priority to maintaining its relationship with that country. The maintenance was believed to involve giving support to American regional security policies. The second belief was that Communist governments in Southeast Asia would pose a strategic threat to New Zealand's security. Thus when the United States became involved in preventing the rise to power of a Communist government in South Vietnam, two imperatives to New Zealand involvement reinforced one another. In addition, New Zealand had developed the habit of co-operation with its other ally, Australia, in regional security matters, and Australia's enthusiasm for involvement became a third factor in New Zealand's policy.

New Zealand had been conditioned by its history to rely upon a friendly Great Power for its security and in return to respond to that Great Power's cues in foreign policy. It had grown up as an economic and cultural colony of a global power, Britain, and identified itself with that power. National defence had been automatically relegated to the 'mother country'. Automatically, too, New Zealand had supported British foreign policies where it could. As late as the 1950s, New Zealand

governments had only with reluctance adopted policies that ran counter to Britain's.<sup>1</sup> The decline in Britain's power had led New Zealand to engage another protector, the United States, by way of the ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-United States) mutual security treaty. Again, New Zealand had striven to harmonize the protector's policy with its own.<sup>2</sup> This propensity had been reinforced by New Zealand doubts about the strength of the American commitment to New Zealand.

Close consultation and cooperation in the foreign policy field had been normal with one other nation, Australia, since the Second World War,<sup>3</sup> and had been formalized with Australia's membership of ANZUS. By the 1960s New Zealand was seeking closer economic ties with Australia as it saw its traditional market in Britain threatened by the latter's desire for membership of the European Economic Community.

Southeast Asia had not been an area of great interest to New Zealand governments before the 1950s, but that had changed with the advent of the People's Republic of China. The new China was perceived as a hostile and expansionist power, and it was thought that it was trying to dominate Southeast Asia, to the detriment of New Zealand's security, by promoting the establishment of Communist governments throughout the region. A Communist Southeast Asia was seen as against New Zealand's national interest.<sup>4</sup> In the early 1950s, New Zealand had begun to contribute to the combatting of Communist insurgencies in the region, and had become a foundation member of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), a body set up to oppose the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia.

Although New Zealand was eager that Communist advances in Southeast Asia should be halted, it was reluctant to become too heavily involved itself in the task. New Zealand governments were also doubtful of the efficacy of purely military solutions to the problems of the region, particularly those of the countries of Indochina. In 1954, while eager for a political alliance to deter Communist advances in Asia, New Zealand joined Britain and Australia in opposing the military intervention in Indochina proposed by the United States.<sup>5</sup> In 1959 a Labour government similarly opposed an American plan to intervene militarily in Laos when the Laotian government seemed threatened by North Vietnamese-backed insurgents.<sup>6</sup> Once, again, the New Zealand Government believed that the

1 Sir Alister McIntosh, 'The Origins of the Department of External Affairs and the Formulation of an Independent Foreign Policy', in *New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, New Zealand in World Affairs*, Wellington, 1977, I, 30.

2 *ibid.*, p.11.

3 New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *New Zealand Foreign Policy Statements and Documents 1943-1957*, Wellington, 1972, p.17.

4 *External Affairs Review* (EAR) May 1954, p.6.

5 Sir Anthony Eden, *Full Circle*, London, 1963, pp.113-14.

6 Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, Auckland, 1976, p.323; W.B. Harland, 'New Zealand's Relations with the U.S.A.' in *New Zealand Foreign Affairs Review*, May 1970, p.9.

situation could be better resolved politically.

By the beginning of the 1960s, the Communist insurgency in South Vietnam was becoming the greatest concern of Western governments interested in Southeast Asia. The immediate starting point of New Zealand's involvement in South Vietnam was the Kennedy Administration's decision of November 1961 to increase substantially American aid to that country. The American government was eager to associate its allies with its actions, and almost immediately canvassed Australia for a contribution.<sup>7</sup> At the ANZUS Council meeting in May 1962 the Australian government responded by offering to send military advisers to Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> The New Zealand Government, however, was more cautious in its response. No offer was made at the Council meeting, but after the American Secretary of State had visited Wellington some days later and addressed the Cabinet on the security situation in Southeast Asia, the Prime Minister announced that proposals for New Zealand to send a specialist team to South Vietnam would be discussed the following week. Although the Prime Minister would not specify the type of team, it was expected to be a military training one.<sup>9</sup> If the proposals were discussed, no positive decision was forthcoming. This may have been due to the intervention of a crisis in Laos the following week.

When the Prime Minister next addressed the question of aid to South Vietnam, the emphasis was on non-military assistance. 'It is clear . . . that the struggle in South Vietnam will be long, tense and bitter; accordingly, I think it necessary that the countries friendly to Vietnam consider urgently ways in which they might help the Republic in meeting its difficulties. New Zealand should, I think, examine the possibility of further assistance under the Colombo Plan.'<sup>10</sup> Indeed, when further aid to South Vietnam was announced in August 1962, it consisted of a civilian surgical team.<sup>11</sup> Yet the South Vietnamese (and the Americans) were primarily interested in a New Zealand military training team. The South Vietnamese Foreign Minister indicated during a visit in November 1962, that his government would greatly appreciate a New Zealand military contribution along the lines of Australia's.<sup>12</sup> The request was repeated by the South Vietnamese Ambassador in May 1963.<sup>13</sup> The New Zealand Government's lack of enthusiasm for providing military advisers is revealed in the Prime Minister's statement that the Government had merely 'kept the possibility of meeting this request under review'.<sup>14</sup>

7 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam', mimeographed, 1975, p.5.

8 *ibid.*, p.6.

9 *Waikato Times*, 12 May 1962, p.5.

10 *Report of the Department of External Affairs* (RDEA), 1962, p.6.

11 *Statements of Ministers of the Crown*, No. 16/62, 20 August - 1 September 1962, pp.6-7.

12 EAR, June 1963, p.27.

13 *ibid.*

14 *ibid.*

A decision to provide some sort of military aid seems to have been made only at the June 1963 ANZUS Council meeting. On the day the meeting ended, Prime Minister Keith Holyoake, announced that New Zealand would 'probably' send a small team of service personnel to South Vietnam to give assistance in a non-combatant role to the South Vietnamese forces. The Prime Minister was careful to emphasize that the struggle in South Vietnam was 'essentially a struggle to be fought and won by the Vietnamese people themselves . . . . In this struggle we are not asked to undertake combat duties; this has not been asked. And it would not be appropriate.'<sup>15</sup> Later Holyoake would concede that it was 'the need for allied solidarity in supporting the people of South Vietnam in their struggle' that had prompted the Government to offer assistance in the form of a small military team.<sup>16</sup> It was not, then, the need of South Vietnam for the team so much as the need of the Americans for political support that New Zealand had met.

Once again, however, there was no follow-up. No moves were made to implement the decision during the year. The Government was apparently made uneasy by the Buddhist agitation in South Vietnam against the Diem government. When the Prime Minister was questioned in the House of Representatives in August about the decision, he said that the Government was still considering the possible roles that a New Zealand service team could be given, but added that it might well not be the time to reach such a decision.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the political turmoil in South Vietnam, there was an election due in New Zealand that November.

By the beginning of 1964 there were new governments in both South Vietnam and the United States, while the Holyoake government had survived the New Zealand election virtually unscathed. The new American administration began putting pressure on its allies for further contributions to the effort in South Vietnam. An aide-mémoire was circulated among them indicating directions in which additional assistance would be welcomed. These included military aid short of combat units.<sup>18</sup> A note to the Australian government suggested that Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom between them provide a range of army and air force training personnel, pilots, reconnaissance aircraft, communications engineers, and medical and dental teams.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly afterwards, in May 1964, the New Zealand Government finally announced a military contribution to South Vietnam in the form of a team of army engineers. This was followed by an Australian announcement of further aid. The New Zealand Prime Minister said that New Zealand was already giving economic and technical assistance to Viet-

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> RDEA, 1964, p.30.

<sup>17</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (NZPD), CCCXXXVI (1963), 1522-3.

<sup>18</sup> N.H. Harper, 'Australia and the United States', in G. Greenwood and N. Harper, eds, *Australia in World Affairs 1961-65*, Melbourne, 1968, p.354.

<sup>19</sup> 'Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam', p.8.

nam, 'but we must do more'.<sup>20</sup> Two years later Holyoake was to say that New Zealand had made the contribution at the request of the April 1964 SEATO Council. South Vietnam's request, he made it clear, was a secondary consideration. 'In April, 1964, the Council agreed that members should do more to help South Vietnam. In response to that call, and in response also to the request from South Vietnam, New Zealand sent a detachment of army engineers.'<sup>21</sup> At the ANZUS Council meeting held in July 1964, the Americans gave New Zealand a pat on the head for its contribution. The *communiqué* issued at the end of the meeting said that the Council 'noted with satisfaction that the members of ANZUS had increased their assistance to the Republic of Vietnam since the SEATO Council meeting in April'.<sup>22</sup> The ANZUS Council members agreed that they would remain prepared to take further steps within their respective capabilities to assure the defeat of the aggressors.

The sending of the engineers was questioned by the Opposition in Parliament, and the Government felt the need to emphasize the non-combatant nature of the unit. The Minister of Defence told the House of Representatives that the unit's tasks would be allocated to it by the Vietnamese Ministry of Works, and that these tasks were very far removed from the tasks of combat engineers.<sup>23</sup> The Government's defensiveness indicated that it continued to believe, as did the Opposition, that a New Zealand combat role in Vietnam was inappropriate. The United States, however, was considering a further escalation of its level of aid to Vietnam, and indeed of the level of the war itself. In October, 1964, President Johnson appointed a working group to draw up political and military options for direct action against North Vietnam. This group presented its recommendations to the National Security Council in November. All three options included some sort of bombing campaign against North Vietnam. The first option was for the United States to undertake reprisal raids only; the second to begin a high-pressure systematic bombing campaign without let-up and the third option was for a gradually escalating bombing campaign. This option also included the possibility of a 'significant ground deployment to the northern part of South Vietnam' as an additional bargaining counter.<sup>24</sup> On December 1, the President approved the first option, and decided that if the Saigon government achieved some stability in the near future, a gradually escalating bombing campaign would be initiated. Special envoys were to brief the key allies on American intentions, and the President said he wanted 'new, dramatic and effective' forms of assistance from several of these allies, specifically mentioning Australia, New Zealand, Canada and

20 EAR, May 1964, p.22.

21 EAR, July 1966, p.32.

22 EAR, July 1964, p.54.

23 NZPD, Vol. 338, pp.201-202, 19 June 1964.

24 N. Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers*, New York, 1971, p.334.

the Philippines.<sup>25</sup> In each case, the envoy was to explain the American plan and 'request additional contributions by way of forces in the event the second phase of United States actions were entered'. Thus, if the systematic bombing of North Vietnam were begun, possibly accompanied by a ground force deployment in South Vietnam, the Americans wanted to escalate the visible support for their actions. The *Pentagon Papers* do not spell out the nature of the forces wanted. The draft position paper presented to the decision-makers says only: 'Australia and New Zealand will be pressed through their ambassadors, not only for support, but for additional contributions'.<sup>26</sup> However, a memorandum sent to the Chief of Staff of the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, as part of the implementation of the December 1 White House decision, clarifies the point. 'Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines should be encouraged to provide combat *advisory* personnel now, and in the event of U.S. troop deployment in RVN [Republic of Vietnam] to provide combatant units to reinforce DMZ [Demilitarised Zone] defense.'<sup>27</sup>

According to the United States Army, the usual procedure for soliciting allied support during the Vietnam war was for political soundings of the target governments to be made first, followed by the Military Assistance Command sending the governments a list of the types of unit it most needed. The target governments then chose from the list what they wished to send, and South Vietnam made a formal request for it.<sup>28</sup>

On 4 December 1964 William Bundy, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, spoke to the New Zealand and Australian Ambassadors in Washington. Bundy outlined the American plans for a phased escalation of the military attack on North Vietnam. He referred to the possibility of the United States committing more than a division of combat troops, together with such ground troops and advisers as Australia and New Zealand might be able to provide.<sup>29</sup> Bundy indicated that President Johnson would be sending personal messages to Menzies and Holyoake.<sup>30</sup> The personal message to the Australian Prime Minister was sent on 14 December, and in it the President asked for two hundred more military advisers, and also alluded to the possible need to 'go down the road in the future' with combat units.<sup>31</sup>

The New Zealand Government's response to the American plans was to express grave doubts that bombing would break Hanoi's will, and to

25. *ibid.*

26. *ibid.*, p.376.

27. S.R. Larsen and J.R. Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, Washington, 1975, p.3. Emphasis added by Larsen and Collins.

28. *ibid.*, p.5.

29. Evan Whitton, *National Times*, Sydney, 5-10 May 1975, p.23.

30. *ibid.*

31. 'Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam', p.12; *National Times*, 5-10 May 1975, p.23.



predict that it might lead to an increase in North Vietnam's infiltration of South Vietnam.<sup>32</sup> New Zealand also had doubts about the advisability of sending allied ground forces into Vietnam and was not willing to make a commitment on the matter.<sup>33</sup> According to Australia's *National Times*, whose reporter Adele Horin interviewed an unnamed Washington source with access to the relevant cables, the New Zealand Government went further than this. It pointed out that the Vietcong made its gains because of instability and lack of effective leadership in South Vietnam. Larger and larger booster shots from the United States would inevitably be needed to keep the system going. The West could not create from the outside a viable political structure for South Vietnam. Air strikes would not have a great effect: once started it was hard to see how the United States could stop short of committing considerable forces. Finally, New Zealand did not see the justification for combat troops and would not support such a move.<sup>34</sup>

This account is generally confirmed by a Ministry of Foreign Affairs writer. According to R.M. Mullins, who was head of the Ministry's Defence section when he wrote, the New Zealand Government appreciated that the situation in South Vietnam was partly due to the failure of the Saigon Government to win the allegiance of the population. 'The prospect in the South was for continued instability and, until more stability was achieved, external assistance could prevent a collapse but not lead to a significant improvement in the security situation. . . . We recognised that the most external assistance could do would be to buy time for the South Vietnamese themselves to show better results.'<sup>35</sup> Mullins wrote that the Government was under no illusions that air attacks on the North could lead to a significant reduction of North Vietnam's support for operations in the South, or incline Hanoi towards negotiation. 'We were therefore extremely cautious about what could be achieved by the introduction of allied ground combat forces, believing that this could change the nature of the war and must lead on to the commitment of very considerable forces. . . .'<sup>36</sup>

The Australian reaction was very different from New Zealand's. The Australian government told the Americans that while it could not provide any more combat advisers, it was willing to look at the idea of sending some actual troops to Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> The contrast in attitudes is shown up in a set of notes compiled by Assistant Secretary Bundy for a meeting between President Johnson and the Secretary of State on 6 January 1965. Bundy mentioned that the idea of introducing limited American ground

32 Sheehan, *Pentagon Papers*, p.335.

33 *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, Boston, n.d., III, p.257.

34 Evan Whitton, *National Times*, 5-10 May 1975, p.23.

35 R.M. Mullins, 'New Zealand's Defence Policy' in *New Zealand Foreign Affairs Review*, July 1972, p.17.

36 *ibid.*, p.18.

37 'Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam', p.12.

forces into South Vietnam concurrent with the first air attacks on North Vietnam had great appeal for many of his colleagues. 'For your information, the Australians have clearly indicated (most recently yesterday) that they might be disposed to participate in such an operation. The New Zealanders are more negative. . . .'<sup>38</sup>

The American government was not prepared to plan military intervention or to begin bombing North Vietnam until there was more stability in the political order in South Vietnam. During January, however, the Australian government tried to encourage the United States to begin the all-out bombing campaign, promising that the Australian government would give full diplomatic support.<sup>39</sup>

At the beginning of February, the Americans began the retaliatory air attacks on North Vietnam. As has been noted by T.R. Reese, the Australian reaction to this was enthusiastic, while New Zealand's was more cautious.<sup>40</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 20 February, Bundy informed the Australian and New Zealand ambassadors that the United States was now prepared to inaugurate staff talks about possible intervention by ground forces. The Australian government accepted the proposal on 24 February, but New Zealand at first rebuffed the idea. However, ten days later, on 2 March, the New Zealand Government changed its mind and agreed to participate in staff talks.<sup>41</sup> This coincided with the American initiation of a continuous air war against North Vietnam. New Zealand was now under request for the 'dramatic' expression of support that President Johnson had wanted to coincide with the escalation of American effort.

New Zealand troops were already actively involved in the defence of Malaysia against Indonesia, and the Government did not want a further commitment elsewhere that might strain the country's military and financial resources. In 1965, New Zealand's regular army comprised only 5,374 soldiers. Only half of this number were in fighting units, and from this meagre pool a battalion of infantry and a commando unit were maintained in Malaysia. Both had been committed to combat in Borneo in February. The regular army was supplemented by a part-time Territorial force of 9,000, most of whom were conscripts. The Territorial force was liable for overseas service in time of war or other emergency.<sup>42</sup>

Long before the military staff talks began, the United States unilaterally landed the first foreign ground combat units in Vietnam. Two battalions of Marines were sent to guard Danang air base on 8 March. The talks between Australia, New Zealand and the United States were held in Honolulu on 31 March.<sup>43</sup> They were concerned with what

38 *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, III, 297 and 686.

39 'Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam', p.14.

40 T.R. Reese, *Australia, New Zealand and the United States*, London, 1969, p.21.

41 Evan Whitton, *National Times*, 12-17 May 1975, p.25.

42 *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1966*, Wellington, 1966, pp.258-60.

43 Evan Whitton, *National Times*, 12-17 May 1975, p.26.



the first two countries could send to Vietnam, and how it would be used, if the political decision to send the troops was made. Virtually simultaneously, President Johnson decided to commit American ground troops to active operations in the Vietnam war. National Security Action Memorandum 328, dated 6 April 1965, records that on 1 April, 'The President approved the urgent exploration with the Korean, Australian and New Zealand Governments, of the possibility of rapid deployment of significant combat elements of their armed forces in parallel with additional Marine deployments'.<sup>44</sup>

Soundings of the Governments concerned were evidently made immediately after the decision, for the United States Army Department's researchers record that both Australia and South Korea indicated informally on 3 April 1965 that they were willing to send combat troops.<sup>45</sup> Significantly, there is no mention of the attitude of the third government concerned—New Zealand. At this stage, New Zealand was still hesitating.

On 13 April, after consulting with the New Zealand Government, Australia formally offered troops to the American Government.<sup>46</sup> One piece of evidence suggests that at this point the New Zealand Government was still not inclined to make an offer itself. A State Department message to the United States Embassy in South Vietnam on 15 April informed Ambassador Taylor of the Australian offer. The message reportedly added: 'New Zealand appears negative.'<sup>47</sup>

It seems that New Zealand was not so much fundamentally opposed to American military action in Vietnam as unconvinced of the necessity for a New Zealand contribution. An important element in the New Zealand attitude appears to have been that the United States had adequate financial and military resources for effective aid to Vietnam and New Zealand did not. This outlook, however, did not preclude willingness to contribute if the need arose. When the Australians consulted New Zealand about their offer of troops, the New Zealand Government did not oppose it.<sup>48</sup>

It has been suggested by one scholar that once Australia had committed troops, New Zealand's position became politically embarrassing. A refusal by New Zealand to send troops might have had the effect of complicating relations with Australia as well as the United States.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, the Deputy Prime Minister of the time, J.R. Marshall, has said that the Australian action was decisive in regard to the timing of a New

44 Sheehan, *Pentagon Papers*, p.442.

45 Larsen and Collins, p.9.

46 'Australia's Military Commitment to Vietnam', p.16; *National Times*, 12-17 May 1975, p.27.

47 Evan Whitton, *National Times*, 12-17 May 1975, p.27.

48 Interview, Sir John Marshall, 30 January 1980.

49 W.K. Jackson, 'New Zealand and Southeast Asia', *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, IX, 1(1971), 7.

Zealand offer.<sup>50</sup> Even so, it seems that a further nudge from the United States was necessary before the decision was taken. The New Zealand Government made no decision before an envoy from President Johnson arrived on 19 April.

The American government already had a very accurate idea of what New Zealand would send to Vietnam eventually. This knowledge presumably came from the military staff talks of 31 March. A cablegram from the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon to the State Department on 17 April suggested that the South Vietnamese Government be told that 'We believe it entirely possible to obtain the following contributions; . . . Australia, one infantry battalion; New Zealand, one battery and a company of tanks'.<sup>51</sup>

The obtaining of New Zealand's contribution was apparently done by Johnson's special envoy, Henry Cabot Lodge. On arrival, he was reported as saying: 'I am not going to ask New Zealand for military assistance—they know what to do.'<sup>52</sup> It seemed that they did. On 20 April, after Lodge had discussed Vietnam with the Prime Minister and other ministers for nearly two hours, the Cabinet agreed in principle to send a combat unit to Vietnam. The Minister of Defence was asked to recommend whether an artillery unit or part of the battalion in Malaysia should be sent, or whether the engineers already in Vietnam should be converted to a combat unit.<sup>53</sup> The Americans were not to be told until the Minister had reported back to Cabinet. It is probable that the New Zealand offer to the United States was made in the last days of April.

Despite New Zealand's hesitations and hopes of not being involved, it had been realized by the policy-makers that American expectations gave New Zealand very little choice if it wanted to preserve the ANZUS relationship. During Southeast Asian crises in 1954 and 1959, New Zealand had had a chance to object to military intervention before it had taken place, and had helped other powers act as a constraint on intervention. New Zealand had demurred in the early stages of this situation, too, but once intervention had taken place, the situation was different. The American government expected its Pacific allies to support policies which were undertaken to ensure the security of their region, and in this case had made it clear that the support should be more than verbal. If tangible support were not given, the New Zealand Government feared, the Americans might well abandon an active role in Southeast Asia and return to a more isolationist attitude.<sup>54</sup> New Zealand's interest was believed to lie in encouraging American concern for the security of

50 Interview, Sir John Marshall, 30 January 1980.

51 Sheehan, *Pentagon Papers*, p.445.

52 R.N. Kennaway, *New Zealand Foreign Policy 1951-1971*, Wellington, 1972, pp.75-76, quoting the *Press*, Christchurch, 20 April 1965, p.1.

53 Sir John Marshall, personal communication, 27 March 1980.

54 See J.R. Hanan, Minister of Justice, *Dominion*, 11 May 1965, p.1.

Southeast Asia,<sup>55</sup> and, ultimately, for the security of New Zealand. The necessity for New Zealand, in considering its Vietnam policy, to insure against any possible diminution of American concern for New Zealand's security was made clear by the Minister of Works, P.B. Allen, on 3 May: 'Whether we like it or not, it is an indisputable fact that our security rests ultimately upon the willingness of our allies to come to our aid. By helping our allies in matters affecting their national interest as well as our own, we have a just claim upon them in time of need.'<sup>56</sup> The Prime Minister himself was to say on May 13: 'If we are not prepared to play our part now, can we in good conscience expect our allies to help later on?'<sup>57</sup>

The National government saw no obstacles to a military commitment on the domestic political front. Although the opposition Labour party had spoken out against a military solution to the problem of South Vietnam, the Government had little doubt that the majority of New Zealanders would go along with a military contribution.<sup>58</sup> The Deputy Prime Minister of the time recalls that the Government was sure that sending troops to Vietnam 'wouldn't do us any harm electorally'.<sup>59</sup>

The formal South Vietnamese request for New Zealand troops did not come until 10 May 1965, and the public announcement of the Government's decision to send an artillery battery was held over until the opening of the 1965 parliamentary session on 27 May. Speaking of the reasons for the decision, the Prime Minister mentioned three significant developments which were the implied stimuli to the New Zealand commitment. They were the worsening situation in South Vietnam and the resultant stepping up of American military assistance; the Australian decision to make available a battalion of infantry; and the 10 May request from the South Vietnamese government.<sup>60</sup> This last can be discounted, since it would not have been made without American prompting and prior New Zealand acquiescence. The citing of the Australian decision as an influential factor, on the other hand, tends to confirm earlier suggestions of its importance. The Deputy Prime Minister, J.R. Marshall, chose in the House of Representatives to emphasize other reasons for the New Zealand commitment: 'The crux of the matter for us is that Communist aggression in Vietnam is a threat to us. If South Vietnam is overrun and becomes a Communist State it becomes the base for the next move in the Communist plan for world revolution. . . . Our security and way of life are at stake and we cannot stand aside.'<sup>61</sup> This sort of rhetoric would seem to have justified a much greater New

55 G.R. Laking, 'Problems of New Zealand's Foreign Policy', EAR, May 1967, p.20.

56 *New Zealand Herald*, 3 May 1965, p.1.

57 EAR, May 1965, p.12.

58 Interview, Sir John Marshall, 30 January 1980.

59 *ibid.*

60 NZPD, CCCXLII (1968), 8.

61 *ibid.*, p.17.

Zealand effort, whereas the New Zealand military force was obviously a token contribution to the American effort. It was a political rather than a military contribution, as the Prime Minister was prepared to admit. New Zealand's military aid to Vietnam, he wrote in May 1965, 'will have political value out of proportion to its size'.<sup>62</sup> A larger military effort was precluded partly by the demands of the Malaysian commitment, partly by lack of finance, but mainly because it was not believed to be necessary. The United States had the resources and the will to use them.<sup>63</sup>

*Realpolitik* had dictated a course of action to the New Zealand Government about which it had considerable reservations. The ultimate factor in the Government's decision was the belief that it must act in concert with its allies if New Zealand's security were to be assured in the future. From the beginning, New Zealand had been cautious about military involvement in South Vietnam, and even after the American commitment of combat troops, it appears to have hesitated before offering a contribution. The Americans' urgent political need for visible support, coupled with Australia's eagerness to provide it, inevitably reduced New Zealand's room to manoeuvre if it wished to maintain its alliance relationships. Thus, although New Zealand was somewhat uncomfortable with the policies of its allies, it fashioned its own policy in accordance with theirs.

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62 EAR, May 1965, p.10.

63 Interview, Sir John Marshall, 30 January 1980.