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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

COPY NO. 12

**DEFENCE COMMITTEE**

MINUTE OF MEETING HELD ON 11 JANUARY, 1973

AGENDUM NO.  
1/1973

MINUTE NO.  
2/1973

FIVE POWER AND ANZUK ARRANGEMENTS AND WITHDRAWAL  
OF AUSTRALIAN BATTALION AND BATTERY

The Defence Committee had for consideration papers which examined several possibilities hinging on withdrawal of the Australian battalion and battery from Singapore.

2. The Committee did not consider the Government was called upon at this stage to make final decisions on the Australian force to remain in Malaysia/Singapore. Decisions on Australian forces would not be needed until later in 1973 when there would also need to be full and timely consultations with Singapore and Malaysia.

3. The Defence Committee has presented its views on the understanding that the Government

- (a) has already decided to withdraw the battalion and battery; and
- (b) intends to maintain its support of the Five Power Arrangements.

4. The Committee's Report is directed to defining objectives that in its view Australia should seek in the consultations which will shortly commence with New Zealand and Britain, and to seeking an indication from Ministers as to what forces the Government is willing to consider retaining in 1974 until another review is made.

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Political Commitment

5. The Government's affirmations that it will honour the full terms and letter and spirit of the Five Power Arrangements will have been assumed abroad to embrace an acceptance of the London Communiqué, and hence an acceptance of the obligation to consult with Five Power partners about measures to be taken should there be an attack or threat of attack on Malaysia or Singapore.

Possible Effects of Withdrawal of Australian Ground Combat Forces

6. Withdrawal of Australian ground combat forces must cause at least some further reductions of the ANZUK countries' forces if only in HQ and Support elements. Whether these reductions would be large would depend on British and New Zealand decisions: whether to withdraw their own ground combat forces. Both Governments may wish to retain these forces. But the British Government will need to weigh an adherence to past policy against political pressure to withdraw ground combat forces because of the withdrawal by Australia - Australia being the external power geographically most affected by Singapore/Malaysian security. The New Zealand Government could come under similar pressure. Pressures on both Governments would be reinforced by financial and manpower arguments should Australia withdraw logistics troops supporting N. Z. and British troops.

7. At this stage the Defence Committee estimates that the chain-effect of an Australian withdrawal of ground combat forces would stop short of total UK (and NZ) withdrawal of all their forces. But a reduction of the ANZUK military presence from about 6,400 men, (see Table below) and five ships, down to about 2,500 men (and the ships) is a likely result unless Australia offers to help ameliorate the financial and manpower implications for the UK and NZ of retaining larger forces. This is bound up with the central role Australia plays, by established arrangements, in logistic support: the arrangements would require retention to a level permitting their continued gearing into Australian supply and financial accounting systems and responsibilities.

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8. The following table summarizes the present composition of the ANZUK forces in Singapore and Malaysia.

CATEGORY/UNIT	APPROX STRENGTH			
	AUS	NZ	UK	TOTAL
Ground Combat Forces (28 Brigade)	880	590	1040	2510
Air Forces	15304	110	330	1970
ANZUK HQ (Integrated/all Services)	60	25	50	135
Communications - 9 Sigs Regiment	175	30	140	345
121 Sigs Squadron*	160	10		170
Naval Shore Support	20	10	80	110
Logistic Support Group (Army in the main)	530	170	460	1160
TOTALS	3355	945	2100	6400

- \* 1500 located at Butterworth
- \* Strictly an Australian unit with special functions but associated with the ANZUK force.

Objective of assisting UK/NZ to maintain Ground Combat Forces

9. The Committee concluded that broad and important Australian strategic interests will be served if the UK and NZ do not withdraw their ground combat forces for the time being. The Singapore task gives the New Zealand Government a rationale for maintaining its defence vote at a level of some (if limited) defence significance to Australia. It is an Australian interest that the UK continue to have the will, capacity and interest to deploy to an area where Australian defence interests could at some future time be threatened. (In the longer term defence co-operation among ANZUK countries may require some new perspectives and focus, beyond Singapore/Malaysia).

10. Moreover continued Australian adherence to the letter and spirit of the Five Power Arrangements suggests a need to off-set doubts about our own position upon withdrawal of our battalion and battery, by demonstrating a willingness to help maintain the reality, for a further period, of the ANZUK force.

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11. A total Australian force of up to 900 men in Singapore of all three Services would permit not only the service of significant national interests which we would retain in Singapore even if UK and NZ ground combat forces were withdrawn (see below, para 14), but would also be the estimated maximum force required to sustain the present agreed ANZUK support arrangements if UK and NZ ground combat forces were retained. Such an Australian force could be organized without any increase to other Army manpower in Singapore upon withdrawal of the battalion and battery. The cost would be in the range \$4.5 to \$5.5 million annually (the present Australian force of 1860 in Singapore costs \$11 million annually).

12. An Australian offer to retain up to 900 men on the foregoing basis, even if not accepted, could very largely defuse any British argument that it was Australia's "fault" that Britain was reducing its Far East presence. Negotiations with the UK and NZ should not commence from the maximum offer of 900.

13. It is considered that there are arguments which could command public and parliamentary acceptance for Australia providing non-combat manpower in support of the UK and NZ ground combat forces for a period after 1973, even though Australia had declared its own ground combat force presence to be an outmoded form of assistance.

### Residual Forces in Singapore if all ground Combat Elements were withdrawn

14. Should the UK and NZ nevertheless withdraw their ground combat forces, Australian national interests would be served by retaining Australian elements totalling 340 men in several roles in Singapore which would seem to accord with the Government's policies, ranging from defence aid projects to communications commitments to the Malaysian Navy. They would include signallers engaged in undisclosed intelligence collections of value now to Australia, Britain, and New Zealand, and of great potential value in a defence emergency

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involving Australia at any later time, and for which no effective substitutes can be installed elsewhere until 1975 and thereafter. This activity in Singapore has also a proven training value for the Australian Army in a highly-milted operational requirement.

15. Numbers of this dimension (140) would require additional supporting and administering elements which could run to a further 200 men. The cost of a force of about 350 would be in the range \$3.3 - \$4.9 million annually provided Singapore gave us rent free accommodation. But Singapore might feel that the nature of the force no longer justified this concession.

16. Integration or combination of Australian residual elements with UK and NZ residual groups, under a command organisation like the present ANZUK arrangement, would be by no means axiomatic. A combined force under the one command would probably be desirable if there were equitable cost-sharing and if the total number of "functionals" provided by the three countries was 600 or more, justifying an integrated ANZUK logistic support group.

17. Whatever the case, marginal adjustments in residual force compositions would have to be negotiated with the UK and NZ to assist public explanations and justifications of the retained Australian force.

18. In a situation of complete withdrawal of ANZUK ground combat forces, leaving some 2,500 men in the region including 1,500 Australians at Butterworth, and residual units of all three countries in Singapore, Australia's share of the contributed forces would actually increase - from a little over half of the present 5,400 men, to about 75% of the residual 2,500. Moreover in actual numbers the British withdrawal could exceed ours. We should not in these circumstances allow our partners to lose sight of our continuing high level of involvement, especially at Butterworth.

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19. It would remain to be seen whether, through careful political preparation, such a large total reduction of the ANZUK force (6400 down to 3500) could be prevented from having a destructive effect on the value of the Five Power Arrangements. On balance, the Defence Committee considers at this stage that, assuring disturbance of the RAAF presence at Butterworth is not an early prospect, Malaysia would probably profess indifference to the change in the ANZUK forces, which would be confined to Singapore, and that the Singapore Government would adjust itself to the withdrawal of the ground combat capability. But the previous contribution of the Five Power Arrangements to security and confidence would to some extent be weakened.

Other Related Considerations

20. If the UK and NZ withdraw their ground combat forces, the ANZUK command arrangements in their present form would require extensive review. At this stage therefore, Australia should avoid assurances to UK and NZ about existing command formulae and allocation of senior posts.

21. Whatever happens, present cost sharing arrangements will require re-negotiation.

22. No early decision or action in regard to the RAAF at Butterworth seems desirable. However, it has been the practice to rotate one company at a time from the Australian, UK and NZ battalions in the ANZUK Force to Butterworth for security duties. We should inform the UK and NZ governments that, when the Australian battalion is withdrawn, this task will be carried out by an Australian Company with the rotation being mounted directly from Australia.

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23. It will in fact be convenient to Australia to maintain the support force (including the Signals unit with its particular functions) in Singapore throughout 1974 because:

- (i) housing in Australia will be a difficulty in the short run;
- (ii) during the re-organization phase Army would not necessarily be able to reabsorb some of the logistics personnel who might therefore have to be discharged though of potential value later on;
- (iii) the facility in Australia to substitute in part for the special signals unit would not be ready until the period September 1974 - February 1975;
- (iv) of the value from the recruiting point of view - overseas service is considered a valuable feature for recruiting.

Exercises

24. There would, under present circumstances, be considerable practical and political barriers to large-scale exercising as a viable alternative policy to resident forces. Assuming a continued air and naval presence, air and naval exercising (including in conjunction with forces of the local countries) could be maintained and there is some scope for an increase. Assuming their being welcome and this is not certain, the Australian Army could deploy limited numbers of forces (up to company size) to Malaysia for exercises soon after the return of the battalion. But deployment on a battalion scale could not be contemplated for at least two years after withdrawal.

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25. A significant caretaker unit located at a particular point (Singapore) would not be justified simply for receiving ground forces on exercises which might take place in Five Power countries, or which in future might focus on Indonesia or elsewhere. Opportunities for exercising with Malaysian and Singaporean ground forces on a significant scale do not at present exist. Exercises by visiting small Australian ground force units could take place (provided Malaysia continued to make facilities available) on an Australian-only basis or in conjunction with UK and NZ units if available. But the international political value would be questionable.

Central Conclusion and Question for Decision

26. The central question, which will determine what continuing Australian activities in Singapore will be permissible and to what extent the UK and NZ Governments can be assured that Australian Servicemen will continue to provide the logistic systems which are part of the original arrangements, is whether the Government could confine its actions to satisfying its electoral pledge to withdraw "the battalion and the battery". The activities to be continued in Singapore, and the Australian negotiating position with the UK and NZ, will diminish to the extent that the Government considers it must, as well as withdrawing the battalion and battery, also withdraw other Army elements in Singapore. These number about 750 as against the 900 men in the battalion and battery.

27. Examination of what precise numbers would best serve the national interest might best be left open until Government leaders have had the opportunity to hear the views of the Prime Minister of New Zealand and the UK Secretary of State for Defence during the next four weeks.

Recommendation

28. The Defence Committee has assumed that the Government has decided that the battalion and battery will be withdrawn after the expiry of their tour of duty in late 1973, and that this decision

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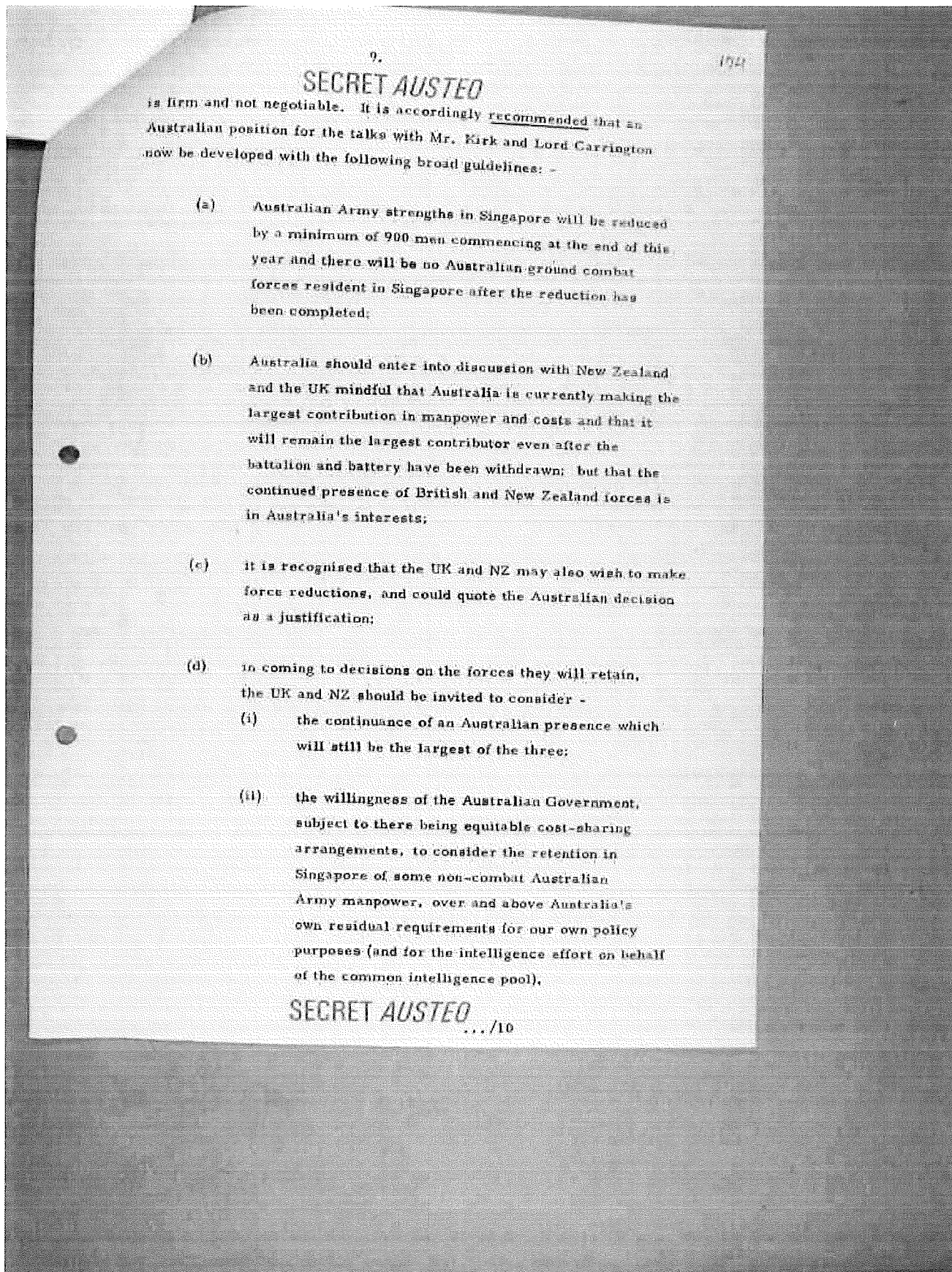




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is firm and not negotiable. It is accordingly recommended that an Australian position for the talks with Mr. Kirk and Lord Carrington now be developed with the following broad guidelines: -

- (a) Australian Army strengths in Singapore will be reduced by a minimum of 900 men commencing at the end of this year and there will be no Australian ground combat forces resident in Singapore after the reduction has been completed;
- (b) Australia should enter into discussion with New Zealand and the UK mindful that Australia is currently making the largest contribution in manpower and costs and that it will remain the largest contributor even after the battalion and battery have been withdrawn; but that the continued presence of British and New Zealand forces is in Australia's interests;
- (c) it is recognised that the UK and NZ may also wish to make force reductions, and could quote the Australian decision as a justification;
- (d) in coming to decisions on the forces they will retain, the UK and NZ should be invited to consider -
  - (i) the continuance of an Australian presence which will still be the largest of the three;
  - (ii) the willingness of the Australian Government, subject to there being equitable cost-sharing arrangements, to consider the retention in Singapore of some non-combat Australian Army manpower, over and above Australia's own residual requirements for our own policy purposes (and for the intelligence effort on behalf of the common intelligence pool).

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- (e) when the Australian battalion is withdrawn, the requirement for a company for security duties at Butterworth will be met by providing the unit, on rotation, from Australia. This could be presented publicly as being for training purposes.

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Sir Arthur Tange, CBE  
Secretary, Department of Defence  
Chairman

Admiral Sir Victor Smith,  
KBE CB DSC  
Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee

Sir John Bunting, CBE  
Secretary, Department of  
the Prime Minister and  
Cabinet

Vice Admiral Sir Richard Peek,  
KBE CB DSC  
Chief of the Naval Staff

Sir Keith Waller, CBE  
Secretary, Department of  
Foreign Affairs

Lieutenant-General Sir Mervyn Brogan,  
KBE CB  
Chief of the General Staff

D. R. S. Craik, OBE  
Representing Secretary  
to the Treasury

Air Marshal C. F. Read,  
CB CBE DFC AFC  
Chief of the Air Staff.

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