

New Zealand's Aid May Rise

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By Peter Harvey

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SYDNEY, Feb. 28 — New Zealand is planning substantial increases in its military contribution to the war in South Vietnam, authoritative sources in Wellington said this week.

New Zealand's Prime Minister Keith Holyoake has confirmed last night that his government had begun negotiations with Britain, Australia and Malaysia on possible increases in New Zealand's military aid to South Vietnam.

Holyoake refused to comment when reporters asked him if the consultations included reference to the possible redeployment of infantry units from the New Zealand regiment currently serving with the British Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaysia, but he said his Cabinet had decided on priorities that necessitated consultation with New Zealand Strategic Reserve partners — Australia, Britain and Malaysia.

Information from New Zealand government sources points to an increase within the next eight to ten months. At present, New Zealand has an infantry battalion, comprising some 800 highly-trained officers and men, serving with the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaysia, as well as a squadron of Canberra jet bombers and various logistic support units.

Observers in Wellington believe the Holyoake administration will soon give the

green light to increased forces in South Vietnam.

They expect that the battalion now in Malaysia will be sent to Vietnam to be joined later by the squadron of jet bombers. (New Zealand now has in Vietnam only 150 troops manning a battery of artillery pieces.)

New Zealand is not alone in planning to step up its military effort in South Vietnam. Canberra is also increasing its commitment. Australia now has some 4500 top-notch jungle fighters in Vietnam, plus a squadron of Caribou transport aircraft and a squadron of Huey helicopters.

Within the next few months, Australia will have another battalion in Vietnam which, together with support units, will bring its ground force up to some 6200 men.

Australia is also sending a squadron of Canberra jet bombers to Vietnam, while the Royal Australian Navy is dispatching one of its ultra-modern Charles F. Adams class missile destroyers — HMAS Hobart — to duty off South Vietnam with the U.S. 7th fleet about the middle of this year.

The battalion augmenting Australian forces in Vietnam will be sent from Australia despite the belief of some officials that the government should just shift the battalion now serving in Malaysia with the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve.