

Australia Initiates Moves to Exchange Envoys With Hanoi

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SYDNEY, Australia, Feb. 1 —Australia whose troops helped to fight Communist insurgency in South Vietnam for more than 10 years, has instituted steps toward diplomatic relations with Hanoi.

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam has ordered the Foreign Affairs Department to report methods of opening formal links with North Vietnam while maintaining an Australian Embassy in Saigon, according to senior officials of the department.

Mr. Whitlam, who is also the Foreign Minister, declared at a news conference recently that some recognition of Hanoi was "inevitable" after a cease-fire in Vietnam.

According to authoritative sources in Canberra, the Whitlam Government is considering an economic aid program for North Vietnam, to repair war damage. The Government has already allotted \$13-million to South Vietnam for civil-improvement programs.

The Australian combat role in Vietnam formally ended late in 1971. The last contingent of 66 soldiers was brought home by Mr. Whitlam's order shortly after his Labor Party had come to power in the national election Dec. 2, ousting the anti-Communist conservative coalition that had ruled for 23 years.

Australian War Toll 415

Australia fielded 8,000 men in Vietnam at one time and suffered 475 killed, of whom 415 were battle casualties. The Labor party had opposed Australian participation in the war.

Mr. Whitlam ended the Australian involvement completely as one of his first acts in office. He followed this with diplomatic recognition of Communist China and East Germany. He also sent a stiff note to President Nixon condemning the intensive bombing of the North late in December.

Subsequently it was announced that a North Vietnamese delegation would tour Australia at the invitation of an Australian peace group. Veterans' organizations here have condemned the visit.