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Australia

Angry at Leak Of Cables

CANBERRA

The sensitive relationship between Australia and the U.S. suffered another serious setback yesterday when a newspaper here published highly classified diplomatic cables detailing the sharp exchanges between the two governments after President Nixon ordered the resumption of bombing of North Vietnam in December 1972.

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam has instituted an extensive departmental investigation into the matter but so far has not called in the federal police. It is understood that there has been no official reaction yet from the U.S. over the disclosures, but Whitlam is reported to be "extremely angry."

The cables, leaked to the weekly newspaper *Nation Review*, "carried a variety of classifications up to "top secret." They covered the period of four weeks in late 1972 and early 1973 shortly after the Labor party took office in Australia.

Whitlam wrote a strong private letter of protest to Nixon over his bombing decision and three ministers of the Labor government condemned the American action publicly. Waterfront unions placed a ban on American shipping.

The extracts from cables passing between the Australian Foreign Ministry and its embassy in Washington were apparently totally unprepared for the Australian reaction, despite the stated Labor party attitude throughout the 1972 election campaign.

There was a violent reaction in the State Department, and the White House, under pressure from American shipping companies, demanded that the Whitlam government curb anti-American union activity.

At one point, the Americans came close to threatening Australia with reciprocal trade union action.

Whitlam later told the American ambassador in Canberra, Walter Rice, after the bombing had been suspended, that if the Vietnam War resumed he would have to "contemplate" joining censure action against the U.S. in the United Nations.

Overall, the picture emerging from the cables is far more serious and much more bitter than either side would admit at the time. It also makes nonsense of Rice's claims, before he left Canberra last year, that the attitudes and policies of the Labor party, as well as its election prospects, were fully reported by his embassy and understood in Washington.

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