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SUBJ: Australian Views on South Asia

1. Australian EmbOff in strictest confidence has briefed us on Prime Minister McMahon's meeting on November 4 with Prime Minister Gandhi and his letter from Washington to President Yahya. Mr. McMahon met Mrs. Gandhi immediately before her meeting with President Nixon. During conversation in which Mrs. Gandhi reviewed her Government's position on East Pakistan crisis, she noted in particular her Government's desire to avoid war. In addition, she stressed that GOI deeply convinced of need to avoid becoming dependent on USSR for arms. India, she said, was acquiring supplies from other countries such as France

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in order to avoid dependence on Soviets. She also noted that Soviets had urged GOI to avoid war "whatever the cost."

2. Mrs. Gandhi also discussed with Prime Minister her Government's objections to UN role. She noted that originally GOI had sought UN involvement without success. Now she feels that UN involvement would tend to freeze situation without bringing about basic political settlement. With respect to proposal for UN presence in refugee camps, she said it was not practical as long as refugee flow continued at rate of 13,000 to 15,000 per day.

3. Mrs. Gandhi also discussed her own political problems and said that it was not practicable for India to refrain from all aid to dissidents in East Pakistan. She stressed her Government's fear that an extremist regime influenced by Peking would ultimately come to power. She xxxx told Prime Minister McMahon that in GOI's view GOP must come

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to terms with Mujib. She noted in passing that before present crisis, India had thought of Mujib as "American stooge," whereas now they recognize he was only effective leader of East Bengal.

4. PriMin McMahon urged Mrs. Gandhi in her meetings with American officials to stress fact that problem was not an Indo-Pak dispute, but one between peoples of Pakistan. This fact he felt was not sufficiently understood by USG. PriMin McMahon also told Prime Minister Gandhi of letter he was sending to President Yahya from Washington on situation.

5. Focal point of letter is McMahon's suggestion to Yahya that he urgently consider taking steps to achieve a political settlement based on negotiations with Awami League and its leaders, particularly Sheikh Mujib. McMahon said that GOP alone must bear responsibility for settlement of dispute which was essentially a matter of domestic competence.

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Nonetheless a settlement must take into account ultimate aspirations of people of East Pakistan. In writing to Yahya, McMahon drew particular attention to fact that his letter being sent after his meetings with USG and Congressional leaders, as well as meeting with Prime Minister Gandhi.

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