

COMMONWEALTH
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AND COLD WAR
SOLIDARITY

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P R E S S



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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMDA	Anglo–Malayan (Anglo–Malaysian) Defence Agreement
ANZAC	Australia–New Zealand Agreement (also Pact)
ANZAM	Australia–New Zealand–Malaya Agreement
ANZUK	Australia–New Zealand–United Kingdom Agreement
ANZUS	Australia–New Zealand–United States Security Treaty
ASA	Association of Southeast Asia
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASPAC	Asian and Pacific Council
CAB	Cabinet Office Records, UK
CINCPAC	Commander-in-Chief, Pacific
CO	Commonwealth Office
CSR	Commonwealth Strategic Reserve
DEA	Department of External Affairs
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DO	Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office
EEC	European Economic Community
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party

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MNLA	Malayan National Liberation Army
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRC	People's Republic of China
PREM	Prime Minister's Office Records, UK
ROK	Republic of Korea
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
TNA	The National Archives, UK
UK	United Kingdom
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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Introduction

Australia has pursued successive strategies of engagement with Asia under both Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Liberal–National Party (Coalition) governments since the mid-1980s. These have ranged from the Hawke–Keating (1983–96) era policies of ‘enmeshment’ and ‘comprehensive engagement’ to the Howard Government’s (1996–2007) ‘practical regionalism’, to Kevin Rudd’s 2008 initiative for an Asia-Pacific Community. In October 2012, the Gillard Government’s (2010–13) *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* continued to emphasise the pursuit of deeper and broader engagement across the economic, socio-political and security spheres.¹ Coalition Prime Minister Tony Abbott (2013–15) said in 2013 that foreign policy under his government would be “‘more Jakarta, less Geneva’”.² In 2017, the Turnbull Coalition Government’s (2015–18) *Foreign Policy White Paper* embraced the ‘Indo-Pacific’ strategic concept as defining the scope of Australia’s economic and security engagement with Asia.³

There is no doubt that these strategies of engagement have resulted in successful economic outcomes. Trade with the Asian region as a percentage of Australia’s total trade increased from 38.5 per cent in 1973, after the

1 Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), 1–3.

2 Quoted in Dennis Shanahan, ‘Jakarta Relations Beyond Boats, says Tony Abbott’, *The Australian*, 21 September 2013, available at: www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/jakarta-relations-beyond-boats-says-tony-abbott/story-fn59nm2j-1226724097032.

3 Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). The *Foreign Policy White Paper* defines the ‘Indo-Pacific’ region as ‘ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia and the United States’. The ‘Indo-Pacific’ was first mentioned in the 2013 Defence White Paper; see Australian Government, *Defence White Paper 2013* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

opening of relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC), to 65.9 per cent in 2018.⁴ However, despite this ostensible success, Australian governments, businesses and opinion leaders continue to emphasise the pursuit of 'deeper' engagement with Asia. The catalyst for this book is the observation that the persistent rhetoric of Asian engagement actually indicates Australia's political distancing from the region during the 1970s, rather than its progressively deeper integration.

This book presents an alternative account of Australia's postwar engagement with Asia from 1944 to 1974 based on comprehensive new archival research. The major historical works dealing with this period focus on Australia's relationships with Britain and the United States (US), and their ramifications for Canberra's Cold War policy of 'forward defence', leading to the Vietnam War.⁵ In the foreign policy literature, the orthodox narrative of the period praises the wartime Curtin and Chifley ALP governments (1941–49) for pioneering an Australian foreign policy independent of Britain, emphasising Australia's role in the formation of the United Nations (UN) and support for Indonesian independence from Dutch colonial rule. It then typically excoriates the conservative Liberal–Country Party (Coalition) governments from Menzies to McMahon (1949–72) for their obsequiousness to 'great and powerful friends' and uncritical support for US Cold War objectives in Asia. The policies of the Menzies era are seen through the prism of Cold War geopolitics as inexorably resulting in Australia's misguided involvement in the tragedy of Vietnam.⁶

4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australia: Pattern of Trade 1975–76* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1977); Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Composition of Trade Australia 2017–18* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2019).

5 See, for example, Gregory Pemberton, *All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Peter Edwards, with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992); Garry Woodard, *Asian Alternatives: Australia's Vietnam Decision and Lessons on Going to War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004); and Peter Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing; and Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 2014).

6 See reviews in Joan Beaumont, Christopher Waters, David Lowe, with Garry Woodard, *Ministers, Mandarins and Diplomats: Australian Foreign Policy Making 1941–1969* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 1–7, 16; Jeffrey Grey, 'Memory and Public Myth', in *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory*, ed. Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 139; David McLean, 'Australia in the Cold War: A Historiographical Review', *The International History Review* 23, no. 2 (2001): 300–01; David McLean, 'Too Much Memory: Writing the History of Australian–American Relations during the Howard Years', in *Australia and the World: A Festschrift for Neville Meaney*, ed. Joan Beaumont and Matthew Jordan (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2013), 237–57; and David McLean, 'From British Colony to American Satellite? Australia and the USA during the Cold War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 52, no. 1 (2006): 64–79.

In this view, it was only with the election of the Whitlam ALP Government in December 1972 that Australia could break free from the Cold War ideological straitjacket to forge a more independent and constructive Australian foreign policy as part of the Asia-Pacific region. The conditions for genuine engagement with Asia were made possible by Whitlam's diplomatic recognition of the PRC in December 1972, and the formal ending of the last vestiges of the White Australia policy and withdrawal of the final Australian military personnel from South Vietnam in 1973. The acceptance in the late 1970s of large numbers of Indochinese refugees by the Fraser Coalition Government (1975–83) is considered another important antecedent for sustained engagement with Asia, which then came to fruition with the Hawke (1983–91) and Keating (1991–96) ALP governments.

This narrative of Australia's engagement with Asia is a myth. It originates in and remains a legacy of the bitter ideological debates over Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.⁷ From this orthodox perspective, the end of the Vietnam War and abandonment of Australia's failed Cold War policy of forward defence cleared the way for closer, more independent relationships with regional countries. More than a quarter of a century on from the end of the Cold War, it seems appropriate to examine the period under consideration in this book in a new historiographical light. Much of the research and writing on Australia's engagement with Asia is by scholars who were active supporters of the anti-Vietnam War movement, former diplomats critical of Australia's Vietnam involvement, or strong supporters of the Whitlam Government and its policy agenda in the 1970s. Events and experiences during this era were formative in defining a worldview reflecting the 'radical national' interpretation of Australia's history, which tells a story of the country's struggles to free itself from British colonial domination and then subservience to Washington.⁸

This book starts from a different set of premises. It accepts that during much of this period Australian governments believed that the nation's security was dependent on the guarantees of its 'great and powerful

7 David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith, *Reinventing Realism: Australia's Foreign and Defence Policy at the Millennium* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), 8–9; Mark Beeson and Kanishka Jayasuriya, 'The Politics of Asian Engagement: Ideas, Institutions, and Academics', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 55, no. 3 (2009): 365–67.

8 On 'radical national' historiography, see David McLean, 'From British Colony to American Satellite? Australia and the USA during the Cold War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 52, no. 1 (2006): 64–67.

friends', traditionally Britain and then increasingly the US. It accepts the premise that under Coalition governments from 1950 to the late 1960s, the primary aim of Australia's defence strategy was to maintain a British and US military presence in Southeast Asia. It accepts that Australia's Cold War military posture of forward defence was part of the policy expression of this strategy. By not seeking to problematise these aspects, the book decentres the bilateral dynamics of Australia's relationships with Britain and the US from the core of its analysis. Instead, it considers them the structural conditions for Australia's postwar engagement with Asia, and inextricably linked with decolonisation and the Cold War—the great historical movements of the time.⁹ The erosion of these structural conditions in the late 1960s marked a profound turning point in the substance of Australia's involvements in the region. Starting from these premises allows for new patterns to emerge from a fresh reading of the archival sources.

The central argument of the book is that the circumstances of postwar decolonisation intertwined with the Cold War drew Australia deeply into its geographical region of Southeast Asia, despite its historical fears and the barrier of the White Australia policy. Rather than standing in the way of genuine engagement with Asia, the dynamics of decolonisation and the Cold War were its structural conditions. When these eroded from the late 1960s, Australia was progressively distanced from the region in a political sense. The book argues that the 'deepest' points of Australia's political engagement with Asia are to be found in the immediate postwar decades, with the most intense phase being between 1966 and 1968. This integration is evident in that Australia saw itself as being an important part of the Southeast Asian region, and that it was a core member of East Asian security arrangements and regional organisations. The recognition by Asian states and remaining colonial dependencies that Australia was part of the region tended to be ambivalent in the 1940s but became firmer with the onset of the Cold War. From 1949 until the consolidation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (1967) in the early 1970s, Australia was a core member of all 'Asian' regional meetings and groupings.

9 Edwards, with Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, 376–77.

From 1966 into the early 1970s, the conditions for this deep Australian engagement with its region were progressively eroded by a series of compounding, and mainly external, factors. The first of these was the consolidation of the anti-communist Suharto regime in Indonesia in 1966. The new regime in Jakarta quickly put an end to Sukarno's *Konfrontasi* ('Confrontation') (1963–66) of newly formed Malaysia, thus bringing British decolonisation in Southeast Asia to a close. This allowed for Britain's planned withdrawal from east of Suez to be brought forward to 1971, a decision formally announced by Harold Wilson's Labour Government in January 1968. This removed the first foundation of Australia's deep postwar engagement with Asia. A change of outlook from regional responsibilities to the British Commonwealth to a narrower conception of Australia's national interest is particularly evident in the policy discourse of the Gorton Coalition Government (1968–71) in negotiations for the 1971 Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) between Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom.

The other major factors stem from the easing of Cold War pressures in East Asia, thus eroding the other key structural condition for Australia's deep engagement. These were President Johnson's de-escalation of the Vietnam War after the 1968 Tet offensive and subsequent gradual withdrawal of US forces; the 1969 Nixon Doctrine that Washington's Asia-Pacific allies would have to take up more of the burden of providing for their own security; and Washington's rapprochement with communist China in 1972. These profound structural changes mark the start of Australia's political distancing from the region during the 1970s, despite the intentions, efforts and policies of Australian governments from Whitlam onwards to foster deeper engagement.

This argument is supported by the two major themes of the book. The first is that the narrative of Australia's engagement with Asia fails to recognise adequately that the epochal process of decolonisation, both politically and intellectually, is as important as the Cold War, and deserves greater emphasis in understanding Australia's pattern of postwar regional relations. David Reynolds, for example, considers that the 'end of empire has been the most important externality shaping Australian foreign policy since the Second World War', with decolonisation a particularly 'ambiguous' process for Australia 'as both colonised and coloniser'.¹⁰

10 David Reynolds, 'Empire, Region, World: The International Context of Australian Foreign Policy since 1939', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 3 (2005): 349.

Rather than the rigid Cold War boundaries often assumed in the literature on this period, Andrew Phillips draws attention to the ‘immense fluidity’ of the international system in the 1950s, where ‘imperial reinvention, subaltern visions of transnational and pan-national solidarity, and more conventional anti-colonial nationalism jostled for supremacy’.¹¹ With the benefit of hindsight we may now observe that, while at times very acute, the Cold War dynamics of the period were transient, adding a ‘particular strategic insecurity’ to the more fundamental historical process of decolonisation.¹²

The documentary record shows that Australia’s postwar engagement with Asia, under both ALP and Coalition governments from 1944 until the late 1960s, was based on a sense of responsibility to Britain and its Southeast Asian colonies as they navigated a turbulent independence into the Commonwealth, which retained a high level of significance to Australia’s policymakers.¹³ Australia’s assumption of greater Commonwealth responsibilities in the region, partly because of Britain’s postwar resource constraints, led to a deep involvement in Southeast Asian decolonisation. For a country with Australia’s history and institutions, it was organic ties with the British Commonwealth that provided the intellectual and practical framework for Australia’s attitude towards Asian decolonisation, rather than the more radical, rights-based notions of self-determination represented at the 1955 Bandung Conference. This was the case under both the ALP during the 1940s and the subsequent Menzies Coalition Government during the 1950s and 1960s. Frank Bongiorno makes the point that in ‘the 1940s, Evatt was attached to a narrative of empire in which the progress of dependent colonies to self-governing dominions within the British Empire/Commonwealth was the central fact’.¹⁴ The responsibility felt by Australian political elites to assist in the orderly decolonisation of the Straits Settlements, Malayan Peninsula and British Borneo territories—and the Malayan archipelago more broadly—cannot be fully understood within a Cold War ideological framework of anti-communism. However paternalistic the views of policy elites may have been at the time, the evidence suggests that in its approach to Southeast

11 Andrew Phillips, ‘Beyond Bandung: The 1955 Asian-African Conference and its Legacies for International Order’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 70, no. 4 (2016): 332, 334.

12 Reynolds, ‘Empire, Region, World’, 349.

13 Frank Bongiorno, ‘The Price of Nostalgia: Menzies, the “Liberal” Tradition and Australian Foreign Policy’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 3 (2005): 414.

14 Frank Bongiorno, ‘“British to the Bootstraps?” H.V. Evatt, J.B. Chifley and Australian Policy on Indian Membership of the Commonwealth, 1947–49’, *Australian Historical Studies* 125 (2005): 21.

Asian decolonisation, Australia was driven as much by normative sentiments of responsibility to the British Commonwealth as it was by calculations of Cold War strategic interest.

The second major theme of the book is to emphasise the agency that non-communist Asian states exercised in their relationships with Australia during the Cold War.¹⁵ In this it marks an important shift in focus from previous work. Academic and journalistic treatments of Australia's historic engagement with Asia concentrate almost entirely on Canberra's initiatives in the region and their perceived successes and failures. Beyond India, Indonesia and Japan, the foreign and defence policies of the non-aligned and non-communist Asian countries barely rate a mention. Rarely is it recognised that the non-communist Asian states also had agency: like Australia, their fortunes were involved in the strategic game of the Cold War. Like Australia, many were aligned with extra-regional great powers. They were not passively used or acted upon by Australia's forward defence strategy, which was well understood in Canberra at the time. It is of course true that Australia's security was sought *from* communist China and North Vietnam, but these countries were not representative of 'Asia'. Indeed, Australia was hardly isolated in this—nearly all the countries of Asia, whether non-aligned or anti-communist, sought security from China at the time. Whatever its merits, forward defence meant that Australia was a core member of Asian political and security arrangements. As the book will show, most of the non-communist states of East Asia, whether allied with Washington or not, welcomed Australia's military deployments as part of the containment of China.¹⁶

The circumstances of the Cold War provided for a mutual sense of solidarity with the non-communist states of East Asia, with which Australia for the most part enjoyed close relationships. I argue in the book that these relationships transcended the narrow security interest of forward defence, being grounded also in shared non-communist values and identity. These relationships were institutionalised through the South Korean–instigated Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC) (1966–75). In the study of Australia's regional relations, ASPAC is either totally omitted or quickly

15 See also Daniel Wei Boon Chua, *US–Singapore Relations, 1967–1975: Strategic Non-Alignment in the Cold War* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 8–9.

16 On this point, see also David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith, 'Misreading Menzies and Whitlam: Reassessing the Ideological Construction of Australian Foreign Policy', *The Round Table* 89, no. 355 (2000): 395; Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones, 'Myth and Misrepresentation in Australian Foreign Policy: Menzies and Engagement with Asia', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 4 (2011): 68–69.

dismissed as an instrument of Cold War policy. This is inadequate when the documentary record indicates that in the mid-to-late 1960s, it was considered by Australia as the premier vehicle for East Asian regionalism. Noteworthy also is that ASPAC was a fully Asian initiative that did not involve extra-regional great powers and remains the only Asian regional organisation in which Australia and New Zealand have *ever* been included as core members. This alone was considered of great importance by the Australian Government.¹⁷

The claim in the orthodox narrative of Australia's engagement with Asia that there was no common regional sensibility between Australia and its neighbours during this period is thus highly disputable.¹⁸ There was a close Commonwealth identification with the former British dependencies in Southeast Asia, which Menzies's 'imperial imagination' could readily accommodate.¹⁹ As the book shows, there was also a moral solidarity with the non-communist states of East Asia more broadly, which was expressed by Australia and also by representatives of Asian countries in a language of 'regional consciousness'. This regional consciousness was grounded institutionally in ASPAC, and further with Thailand and the Philippines in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) (1954). The book demonstrates that Australia's engagement with Asia during this period was not based on Cold War strategic interests alone, but also in part on strong normative concerns shared with a range of Asian states.

As David Walker has pointed out, it is important to remember that during the 1950s and 1960s, Australia's strategic and economic weight relative to the developing countries of Asia made it a much more significant player in regional affairs than it is today.²⁰ Australia's forward

17 See, for example, 'Asian and Pacific Council—Second Ministerial Meeting: Report by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, M.P.', July 1967, National Archives of Australia (NAA) A1838/541/1/1, Part 2; 'Australia and South-East Asia', Address by the High Commissioner in India, Sir Arthur Tange, Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Madras State, 9 October 1967, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 8; 'Briefing on ASPAC and ASEAN', Prepared by LR McIntyre, Department of External Affairs (DEA), for Lord Casey, Governor-General, 15 November 1968, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 8.

18 For example, Meg Gurry makes the claim that linkages developed in the 1950s and 1960s by Coalition governments 'certainly carried ... no sense of *shared membership of a common region*'; see Gurry, 'Identifying Australia's "Region": From Evatt to Evans', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 49, no. 1 (1995): 22, emphasis in original.

19 Bongiorno, 'The Price of Nostalgia', 414.

20 Cited in Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), 'Should ASEAN be Australia's Priority?', *Big Ideas*, broadcast 9 September 2015, available at: www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/should-asean-be-australiae28099s-priority3f/6678584.

defence strategy placed it directly *in* the region. Forward defence meant that Australia's outlook up until the early 1970s was of necessity from a postcolonial Southeast Asian perspective, not from an isolated continental one. The conflicts of the forward defence era—the Malayan Emergency, Indonesian Confrontation and Vietnam War—were not a case of Australia being involved in 'other people's wars'. They were Australia's wars in its own region, in support of regional neighbours who were *also* allied with Western great powers. And while the Republic of Vietnam may have been a US-client state of dubious legitimacy, this did not characterise Australia's relationships elsewhere in East Asia. Australia was not isolated from its region during the Cold War; quite the opposite. Its security was clearly defined at the time as being *in*, not *from*, Asia.²¹ Forward defence required that Canberra view the world from a Southeast Asian standpoint, rather than the South Pacific perspective it has been forced to adopt from the 1970s to the present.

In contrast to the 1950s and 1960s, Australia's current mode of engagement has been described as transactional.²² It is broad but shallow, involves a range of societal actors, and is centred on the functional issues of economics and business, education, sport and tourism, and transnational security. The book concludes that Australia's engagement with Asia in the postwar period up until the late 1960s was narrow and elite-driven, but it was deeper than it has ever been since. Engagement during this earlier historical period was 'deeper' because it impinged on fundamental issues of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, whereas transactional engagement does not. The historical trajectory uncovered in the book accounts for the increase in recent decades of Australia's bilateral economic relationships, and people-to-people contacts in Asia, at the same time that Canberra has been distanced in political terms.

The period of the Hawke and Keating ALP governments is generally considered the time when Australia's engagement with Asia came of age. Emblematic of this new era in Australian foreign policy was Canberra's role in creating the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum in partnership with Japan, and the establishment in 1993 by the Keating Government of annual leaders' meetings. A number of accounts identify

21 See 'Extract from Statement by Mr. Paul Hasluck, Minister for External Affairs in Parliament', 17 August 1967, NAA A4359/221/4/31, Part 1.

22 For example, Michael Wesley, 'Howard's Way: Northerly Neighbours and Western Friends', *Griffith Review* 9 (2005): 39–50; Ramesh Thakur, 'Australia's Engagement with Asia: Strategic or Transactional?' *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 69 (2013): 335–50.

the Howard Government's 'practical regionalism' as the decisive shift to a more transactional form of engagement,²³ which the Rudd and Gillard (2007–13) ALP governments again sought to deepen. This book very clearly demonstrates, however, that this broader but shallower transactional form of engagement evolved much earlier, during the critical 1968 to 1972 period of profound changes to Australia's regional environment. It is fully evident by 1974 during the tenure of the Whitlam Government.

The book begins by exploring Australia's place in the shifting regional definitions of Southeast Asia from 1944 in the unsettled period after the tide had turned against Japan in the Pacific War. Chapter 2 shows that, compared with the Menzies Government that followed, in the 1940s the wartime ALP governments were ambivalent about whether Australia was, or should be, a part of Asia. Newly independent India, for example, was quite accommodating toward Australia in the late 1940s, but the Chifley Government resisted Nehru's proposals for regional organisation. In the immediate postwar period, the ALP Government privileged the role of the new UN organisation and was wary of regional bodies detracting from its work or duplicating its functions. In the war's unsettled aftermath, the ALP also tended to see insular Southeast Asia as part of Australia's region for security purposes, rather than Australia being a part of 'Asia'.

Based on this strategic outlook, Chapter 3 demonstrates that it was the Chifley ALP Government, typically labelled as 'internationalist', that established the policy theme of Australia carrying a special responsibility for insular Southeast Asia on behalf of the British Empire and Commonwealth. This responsibility was given policy expression primarily under the umbrella of the Australia–New Zealand–Malaya (ANZAM) Agreement, the origins of which can be traced to 1946. ANZAM denotes the postwar Commonwealth zone of defence in Asia, in which Australia carried planning responsibility from 1950. Chapter 3 then examines the period from the change of government in 1949 until the end of Indonesia's Confrontation of Malaysia in 1966. It shows that under the Menzies Government, Australia was intimately involved in Southeast Asian decolonisation and nation-building processes

23 Anthony Milner, 'The Rhetoric of Asia', in *Seeking Asian Engagement: Australia in World Affairs 1991–1995*, ed. James Cotton and John Ravenhill (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44; Michael Wesley, *The Howard Paradox: Australian Diplomacy in Asia 1996–2006* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2007); James Cotton, 'Asian Regionalism and the Australian Policy Response in the Howard Era', *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2008): 115–34; Martin Griffiths and Michael Wesley, 'Taking Asia Seriously', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 1 (2010): 25.

in the Malayan peninsula and archipelago. It demonstrates through the examples of the Colombo Plan, ANZAM initiatives and Australia's military commitments to Malaya (1955) and Malaysian Borneo (1965) as a part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR) that during this period of the Cold War, responsibility to the British Commonwealth remained an important driver of Australian policy in Asia.

Chapter 4 turns directly to the Cold War dynamics of the period and analyses Australia's relationships of solidarity with the non-communist states of East Asia and Canberra's central place in regional organisations of the 1950s and 1960s. This chapter shows that rather than distancing Australia from Asia, the Cold War drew Australia deeply into the region. The circumstances of the Cold War provided for a mutual sense of solidarity with the non-communist states of East Asia, with which Australia enjoyed close relationships. Chapter 4 demonstrates that these relationships transcended the narrow security interest of forward defence, being grounded also in shared values and non-communist identity.

Chapter 5 then traces how the changing structural conditions from 1966 into the early 1970s—the end of British decolonisation in Southeast Asia and the easing of Cold War pressures—began to erode Australia's formerly deep engagement, thus serving to politically distance Canberra from Asia. The results of these changes were profound. By 1974, Australia's political position was transformed from being an integral part of Southeast Asia's decolonisation process, and a core non-communist Asian state, into one of the South Pacific periphery.

Chapter 6 demonstrates that despite the intentions and efforts of the Whitlam Government, by 1974 Australia was outside the political margins of Asia, with its engagement premised on a broadening but shallower transactional basis, rather than the deeper normative ties of responsibility and solidarity evident from 1944 through to the late 1960s. This chapter also shows that Whitlam's much-lauded diplomatic recognition of the PRC on taking office in December 1972 may have been consistent with global trends, but it alienated Australia's Southeast Asian neighbours, particularly Indonesia. This was a major factor in Australia's political exclusion from the region in the early 1970s, along with Whitlam's insensitive and unwanted advocacy for a new 'Asia Pacific Forum' that was to include the PRC and North Vietnam.

Chapter 7 assesses the implications of the historical trajectory advanced in the book for Australia's foreign policy 'traditions' and makes some concluding analysis and observations about the prospects for deeper Australian engagement with Asia in the 21st century. It suggests that recent trends, including a more assertive and nationalistic China, India's emergence as a great power, overt Sino-Japanese strategic rivalry and competing maritime claims among a number of states in the East and South China Seas, indicate that conditions may again be developing to support deeper Australian political and security engagement in Asia.

2

Region and regionalism in the immediate postwar period

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) Government of Prime Minister Ben Chifley (1945–49) is credited with founding the internationalist, ‘middle power’ tradition in Australian foreign policy.¹ Internationalism is particularly associated with the role of External Affairs Minister HV (Doc) Evatt (1941–49) in the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. The internationalist treatment of the history of Australia’s foreign policy was developed during the Hawke (1983–91) and Keating (1991–96) period of ALP Government, along with the discourse of Australia’s ‘engagement’ with Asia.

Internationalism is typically contrasted with the realist, power and interest-based ‘great and powerful friends’ tradition characteristic of Coalition governments.² It emphasises an outward-looking, activist foreign policy agenda, with cooperative policies grounded in ‘Australia’s identity as an *independent*, medium-sized power located *in* the Asia-Pacific region’.³ In recent decades, internationalism has privileged

1 See David Lee and Christopher Waters, eds, *Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997); Allan Patience, *Australian Foreign Policy in Asia: Middle Power or Awkward Partner?* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 53–54, 59–61.

2 See Josh Frydenberg, John Langmore and Melissa Parke, ‘The Liberal/Labor Tradition’, in *Australian Foreign Policy: Controversies and Debates*, ed. Daniel Baldino, Andrew Carr and Anthony J Langlois (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19–38; Michael Wesley and Tony Warren, ‘Wild Colonial Plays? Currents of Thought in Australian Foreign Policy’, *Australian Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 1 (2000): 9–26; and Owen Harries, *Benign or Imperial? Reflections on American Hegemony* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2004), 78–83.

3 Meg Gurry, ‘Identifying Australia’s “Region”: From Evatt to Evans’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 49, no. 1 (1995): 17, emphasis in original.

multilateralism and Australia being a ‘good international citizen’ through constructive participation in international organisations and a rules-based international order. By contrast, the conservative tradition is held to focus on bilateralism and alliance diplomacy with the United States (US) as furthering Australia’s national interests. The dependence and fear of abandonment commonly associated with the ‘great and powerful friends’ tradition has been the subject of sustained criticism since the Vietnam War era.⁴ In my view, the internationalist treatment of the history of Australia’s foreign policy has tended to overemphasise intentions rather than consequences. For example, initiatives undertaken by ALP governments, such as Whitlam’s ‘representative’, ‘reformist and optimistic’ 1973 proposal for a ‘new regional community’, have been taken as evidence of genuine engagement with Asia,⁵ even when they failed in practice, because of their ‘better’ motivations and vision for Australia as compared with Coalition governments at the height of the Cold War.

This chapter re-examines the nature and drivers of Australian foreign policymaking, and conceptions of Australia’s place in the world, in the final turbulent years of the Pacific War (1941–45) and in its immediate aftermath. It shows that during the late 1940s, the ALP Government was ambivalent about whether Australia was, or should be, a part of Asia. The newly independent countries of the region, particularly India, were quite accommodating toward Australia, but Canberra’s reciprocation was only half-hearted. For example, the Chifley Government never once sent a minister to an Asian regional meeting, preferring instead to send observers or departmental officials. It was only under the Menzies Coalition Government (1949–66) that Cabinet ministers represented the Australian Government in Asia.

On the surface, the Australian Government’s ambivalence toward Asia is partly accounted for by Evatt’s preoccupation in the postwar years with the UN and his role as President of the General Assembly from 1948 to 1949. The ALP’s steadfast privileging of the UN and its agencies, and resistance to any perceived duplication of its functions, was a barrier in the 1940s to Australian membership of any specifically Asian regional organisation. Dedication to the UN organisation was, however, tempered by British

4 On the theme of abandonment and dependence, see Allan Gyngell, *Fear of Abandonment: Australia in the World Since 1942* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2017); Bruce Grant, *The Crisis of Loyalty: A Study of Australian Foreign Policy* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1972); and Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988).

5 Gurry, ‘Identifying Australia’s “Region”’, 25–26.

Empire loyalty, uncertainty about Washington's postwar intentions in the Western Pacific, and concerns for stability in Australia's 'near north'. In the immediate postwar years, Australia's commitment to Indonesian independence was as much about security and stability in its region, and adherence to UN principles of dispute resolution, as it was motivated by solidarity for the Indonesian nationalist cause. For these reasons, Canberra also sought a British Commonwealth sphere of influence across the Malayan archipelago and islands of the Southwest Pacific in which Australia would predominate. This was believed to be consistent with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter on regional arrangements. The coming of the Cold War to East Asia with the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949 also accounts for the greater emphasis given to Asia by the subsequent Menzies Government. It is only after 1950 that Canberra unequivocally sees Australia as geographically and politically a part of Southeast Asia.

At a deeper level, this chapter shows that two perspectives deriving from the shock of the Pacific War permeate the Chifley Government's foreign and security policy outlook. The first is a backward-looking preoccupation in preventing the last war with Japan, or a similar pattern of invasion threat from Asia. Deriving from this, the second is a dogmatic unwillingness, particularly on the part of Evatt, to see the world from a standpoint other than that of Australia's. These perspectives informed the Chifley Government's ambivalence toward the Asian region and its failure to recognise the emerging Cold War dynamics of the late 1940s. Rather than Australia seeking to become part of the Asian region, the Chifley Government's security outlook brought insular Southeast Asia into what it considered to be *Australia's region*.

This was supported intellectually by a paternalistic vision of Australia carrying a special responsibility for this area on behalf of the British Commonwealth and Western civilisation. These dynamics provided the conditions for the Australia–New Zealand–Malaya (ANZAM) Agreement, the Commonwealth defence planning arrangement in Southeast Asia and Australia's Cold War policy of forward defence in the decolonising countries of the region. The origins of ANZAM date from 1946 and Australia assumed primary responsibility for defence planning in the area in 1950.⁶ Under the Menzies Government, Australian military deployments

6 Alastair Cooper, 'At the Crossroads: Anglo–Australian Naval Relations, 1945–1971', *The Journal of Military History* 58, no. 4 (1994): 700–01.

to the Malayan Emergency (1955) and Indonesian Confrontation (1965) were undertaken under ANZAM auspices as part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR).

From the Asian side, the ALP's tentative engagement during the 1940s was seriously qualified by its strong postwar commitment to the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* or 'White Australia' policy.⁷ Neighbouring countries particularly resented the rigid and insensitive application of the policy in the late 1940s by ALP Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell.⁸ Under the subsequent Coalition Government, the bipartisan policy was administered in a lower key and more discretionary manner.⁹ The White Australia policy ceased to be a significant barrier to Australia's regional integration as intensifying Cold War pressures from 1950 drove the non-communist countries of East Asia into much closer political and security relationships. However, it remained a major stumbling block in Australia's generally poor relations with India in the 1950s.¹⁰

This chapter first examines the nature of Australian foreign policymaking in the immediate postwar period, with a particular focus on Evatt as principal decision-maker. It evaluates the internationalism of Evatt and his senior departmental officials, and how this clashed with the outlook of the Defence establishment, and also at times with London and Washington, especially as the Cold War began to solidify from 1947. The chapter then turns specifically to Asia. It examines the shifting regional definitions of the period and how Australia saw itself in relation to Asia. The first important statement of this is in the January 1944 Australia–New Zealand, or ANZAC, Agreement. The provisions of the ANZAC Agreement and their further development at the November 1944 Wellington Conference provide a crucial insight into the concerns and preoccupations of the ALP

7 Christopher Waters, 'War, Decolonisation and Postwar Security', in *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia, Volume 1: 1901 to the 1970s*, ed. David Goldsworthy (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press; and Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)), 128–31; Christopher Waters, 'Creating a Tradition: The Foreign Policy of the Curtin and Chifley Labor Governments', in Lee and Waters, *Evatt to Evans*, 46.

8 See, for example, Department of External Affairs (DEA) files: 'South East Asia: Australian Migration Policy, 1945–1949', National Archives of Australia (NAA) A1838/3004/11/3, Parts 1 and 2.

9 Gwenda Tavan, 'The Limits of Discretion: The Role of the Liberal Party in the Dismantling of the White Australia Policy', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 3 (2005): 418–28.

10 See Eric Meadows, "'He No Doubt Felt Insulted": The White Australia Policy and Australia's Relations with India, 1944–1964', in *Australia and the World: A Festschrift for Neville Meaney*, ed. Joan Beaumont and Matthew Jordan (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2013), 81–98.

Government that endured throughout its tenure in office. These concerns informed Australia's ambivalent attitude in the 1940s to nascent Indian initiatives toward Asian regionalism.

Evatt, internationalism and the Cold War

Australia's foreign policymaking during the period of the Curtin and Chifley ALP governments is dominated by the mercurial figure of Herbert Vere (Doc) Evatt, Minister for External Affairs from 1941 to 1949. Apart from occasionally decisive interventions from Prime Minister Chifley, Australia's foreign policy in the postwar years was essentially Evatt's policy.¹¹ One of the key exceptions to this, as David Fetting has illustrated, was Chifley's personal sympathy for the Indonesian nationalist cause, and his 'pronounced and direct' role in Australia's support for independence from Dutch colonial rule.¹² Chifley's more radical position can be contrasted with Evatt's evolutionary approach to decolonisation through UN processes and trusteeship arrangements. Similar to the ill-fated French Union in Indochina, Evatt preferred autonomy for an Indonesian Republic within a Netherlands Union or Commonwealth, where Dutch control of external policy would be maintained.¹³

11 Neville Meaney, 'Dr HV Evatt and the United Nations: The Problem of Collective Security and Liberal Internationalism', in *Australia and the United Nations*, ed. James Cotton and David Lee (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), 37; Alan Renouf, *Let Justice be Done: The Foreign Policy of Dr H.V. Evatt* (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1983), 4; Peter Crockett, *Evatt: A Life* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 185; Alan Watt, *Australian Diplomat: Memoirs of Sir Alan Watt* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), 81; Peter Edwards, *Prime Ministers and Diplomats: The Making of Australian Foreign Policy 1901–1949* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983), 171–72; Joan Beaumont, Christopher Waters, David Lowe, with Garry Woodard, *Ministers, Mandarins and Diplomats: Australian Foreign Policy Making 1941–1969* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 57. This was also recognised by other countries. For example, the US Embassy in Australia wrote to the State Department on 13 May 1949 that Evatt 'makes the country's immediate foreign policy almost single-handed'; The Chargé in Australia (Foster) to the Secretary of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1949, Vol. VII, Part 2, The Far East and Australasia, doc. 77.

12 David Fetting, 'J.B. Chifley and the Indonesian Revolution, 1945–1949', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 59, no. 4 (2013): 520; see also Fetting, 'An Australian Response to Asian Decolonisation: Jawaharlal Nehru, John Burton and the New Delhi Conference of Non-Western Nations', *Australian Historical Studies* 45, no. 2 (2014): 202–19.

13 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 11, Wednesday, 13 March 1946, 17th Parliament, 3rd Session, 2nd Period, 201; House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 46, Friday, 15 November 1946, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 1st Period, 339; see also David Lee, 'Indonesia's Independence', in *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia, Volume 1: 1901 to the 1970s*, ed. David Goldsworthy (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press; and Canberra: DFAT, 2001), 148–52.

Evatt was supported by a small coterie of public servants in the new Department of External Affairs (DEA), most notably by his key adviser and personal secretary, John Burton, who became Secretary of the Department from 1947 to 1950. The public servants that worked with Evatt attest to the minister's erratic, disorganised and unprofessional operating style, and consequently very difficult working relationships.¹⁴ All agree, however, that Evatt's energy and commitment in asserting the claims of small to medium powers in the writing of the UN Charter was very influential and placed Australia on the world stage at a critical historical juncture.¹⁵ Most agree that Evatt was also instrumental in the forging of an active and independent Australian foreign policy, one that privileged Australia's national interests rather than those of the British Empire.¹⁶ Evatt was not reticent about promoting this.¹⁷ For example, in March 1946, Evatt told Parliament that since VJ (Victory over Japan) Day, Australia's 'status and prestige' in 'international affairs' had 'dramatically increased'.¹⁸

The principles of Evatt's postwar foreign policy gave primacy to the UN and the collective security mechanism of the Security Council. This was to be supported under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter by British Commonwealth regional security arrangements in Australia's near north, in which Canberra would take a leading role.¹⁹ Evatt's postwar priorities for Australia were not entirely consistent with those stated by

14 Carl Bridge, 'Diplomat', in *Paul Hasluck in Australian History: Civic Personality and Public Life*, ed. Tom Stannage, Kay Saunders and Richard Nile (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1998), 135, 140; Paul Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness: Australian Foreign Affairs, 1941–1947* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980), 14–16, 29; Edwards, *Prime Ministers and Diplomats*, 141, 160; Jeremy Hearder, *Jim Plim Ambassador Extraordinary: A Biography of Sir James Plimssoll* (Ballarat: Connor Court Publishing, 2015), 41, 59–60; Ken Buckley, Barbara Dale and Wayne Reynolds, *Doc Evatt: Patriot, Internationalist, Fighter and Scholar* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1994), x, 183.

15 Geoffrey Bolton, *Paul Hasluck: A Life* (Perth: UWA Press, 2014), 148–49, 161; Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, 195, 207, 214; William J Hudson, *Australia and the New World Order: Evatt and San Francisco, 1945* (Canberra: Australian Foreign Policy Publication Programme, ANU, 1993), 158; Renouf, *Let Justice be Done*, 235; Buckley, Dale and Reynolds, *Doc Evatt*, 415–16.

16 Christopher Waters, 'Conflict with Britain in the 1940s', in *Australia and the End of Empires: The Impact of Decolonisation in Australia's Near North, 1945–65*, ed. David Lowe (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1996), 69–70; Edwards, *Prime Ministers and Diplomats*, 140; Keith Waller, *A Diplomatic Life: Some Memories*, Australians in Asia Series No. 6 (Brisbane: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University, 1990), 6.

17 Hudson, *Australia and the New World Order*, 123.

18 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 11, Wednesday, 13 March 1946, 17th Parliament, 3rd Session, 2nd Period, 187.

19 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 46, Friday, 15 November 1946, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 1st Period, 346–47.

Prime Minister Curtin during the war.²⁰ During the war Curtin was also Defence Minister and his views were more in line with those of the Defence Committee than the more idealistic vision of a postwar liberal international order held by Evatt and elements of the DEA. In January 1944, Curtin specified Australia's priorities as first 'national defence', then British Empire cooperation and, lastly, a worldwide or regional collective security mechanism.²¹ The Defence Committee argued in 1944 that 'total reliance should not be placed on any system of collective security'. Neither could Australia's defence rely solely on the assistance of a foreign ally. Nor would the UN render military alliances obsolete: any new world organisation would not 'preclude the collaboration of individual countries with a view to ensuring peace in a particular region or safeguarding some special mutual interest'.²²

The February 1946 *Appreciation of the Strategical Position of Australia* remained sceptical of the 'fragile' structure of the UN and prioritised close British Commonwealth coordination. Unlike the last war, this was to 'be a continuing process and not a mere ad hoc arrangement in the face of a desperate situation'.²³ The 1947 *Appreciation* was even more doubtful about the UN. It stated that collective security through the UN 'may be effective in dealing with minor powers only'. Therefore, it was considered 'unlikely' that the Security Council would 'function effectively' and 'no great reliance' should be placed on it. During the 1940s, the Defence Chiefs of Staff always placed greater emphasis on Commonwealth defence cooperation than collective security through the UN Security Council.²⁴

A theme that emerges in re-evaluating the substantial literature on the Evatt era is a conflation between his 'progressive' internationalist ideology on the one hand, and the assumption that his outlook on the world was 'forward-looking' in a historical sense, on the other. It is evident from the archival record and literature on the period that Evatt's outlook in

20 'Australia–New Zealand Conference: The Defence of the Southwest Pacific Region', Statement by The Rt. Hon. J Curtin, MP, Prime Minister of Australia, Canberra, 18 January 1944, NAA A816/104/301/1.

21 Ibid.

22 'World Organization: Post-Hostilities Planning and Australian–New Zealand Agreement', Review of Appreciation–Future of Southwest Pacific Region, January 1944, NAA A816/104/301/1.

23 'An Appreciation of the Strategical Position of Australia', February 1946, in Stephan Frühling, ed. *A History of Australian Strategic Policy since 1945* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 69–71.

24 'An Appreciation by The Chiefs of Staff of the Strategical Position of Australia', September 1947, NAA A5954/1628/3.

the second half of the 1940s was primarily focused toward the inter-war period and circumstances leading to the war. In his work on the UN Charter, Evatt was trying to fix the problems of the League of Nations.²⁵ Evatt's postwar security policies in Australia's near north understandably sought to prevent a resurgence of Japanese militarism or guard against any similar pattern of invasion threat from Asia.²⁶

Evatt's ideas appear to have been heavily influenced by the assumptions of Gladstonian and Wilsonian liberal internationalism, although according to Neville Meaney, there is little evidence that Evatt thought systematically about this until becoming Minister for External Affairs during the war.²⁷ His liberal internationalism is particularly evident in his Wilsonian appeals to 'world public opinion' during his Presidency of the UN General Assembly.²⁸ Evatt did not seem to be aware of the critiques of inter-war idealism exemplified by EH Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.²⁹ Other authors note that Evatt's idealism was also mirrored in his obsession with the proposed text of the UN Charter.³⁰ This reflected his background as a constitutional lawyer, but resulted in a mentality that viewed achievements with respect to the text, or procedures of the UN, as real-world achievements in international peace and security. The US Embassy in Canberra noted in May 1949 that Evatt, similar to later observations about ALP Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972–75), 'follows a highly academic approach to international problems'.³¹

Evatt was determined to assert the rights of smaller states in the new world organisation, and limit as far as possible the veto provision of the great powers on the UN Security Council.³² It was only at critical points in the

25 David Lee, 'The Curtin and Chifley Governments, Liberal Internationalism and World Organisation', in Lee and Waters, *Evatt to Evans*, 52; Crockett, *Evatt*, 232.

26 Neville Meaney, 'Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 3 (1992): 324; Crockett, *Evatt*, 234.

27 Neville Meaney, 'Dr HV Evatt and the United Nations', 35; Hasluck also notes that while Evatt 'must have read a good deal on international law', he had very little knowledge about modern history or international political affairs, *Diplomatic Witness*, 26.

28 Christopher Waters, 'Anglo-Australian Conflict Over the Cold War: H.V. Evatt as President of the UN General Assembly, 1948–49', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22, no. 2 (1994): 301–02.

29 Meaney, 'Dr HV Evatt and the United Nations', 36.

30 Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, 184, 186, 194, 214.

31 The Chargé in Australia (Foster) to the Secretary of State, *FRUS*, 1949 Vol. VII, Part 2, The Far East and Australasia, doc. 77.

32 'Conference of Australian and New Zealand Ministers, Held at Wellington, November, 1944: Record of Proceedings, First Meeting, First Day–1st November, 1944', NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/17.

negotiations that Evatt appeared to have been brought to the realisation that the UN could only exist and function at the agreement of the victorious great powers of the Grand Alliance.³³ Power politics and great power prerogative were ultimately the foundation of the UN organisation despite its liberal international veneer. An acceptable formula was needed through which the great powers would participate effectively to remedy the failures of the League of Nations in maintaining international peace and security. A comprehensive veto power was therefore required so that the vital interests of the great powers as providers of security could be insulated from serious challenge by the activities of the organisation.³⁴ All states were not equal. Evatt was never able to completely accept this. For example, on 15 November 1946, Evatt said in Parliament:

it is impossible to mix a policy based on power politics with any enthusiastic or effective support of the United Nations Charter, which is based on entirely different principles.³⁵

Alan Renouf suggests that Evatt ‘could not accept the fact that Australia did not command the amount of attention he felt it deserved, because it did not have enough power’.³⁶

Evatt’s obsession about rectifying the problems of the recent past made him somewhat blind to the realities of the postwar world. The emergence from the war of two continental-sized superpowers with massive military strength, industrial resources and global influence meant that the postwar world would continue to be defined by the competitive dynamics of power politics—even more so. During his period as External Affairs Minister, Evatt never reconciled with this and continued to privilege the role and efficacy of the UN even as the Security Council became dysfunctional because of frequent Soviet use of the veto.³⁷ For example, in March 1946, Evatt argued in Parliament that Russia’s intention in seeking to expand its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe was not necessarily for ‘political domination’, but ‘merely to protect Russia against any repetition of the *cordon sanitaire* which united all reactionary influences in Europe against

33 Hudson, *Australia and the New World Order*, 81–82.

34 Kenneth Anderson, ‘United Nations Collective Security and the United States Security Guarantee in an Age of Rising Multipolarity: The Security Council as the Talking Shop of the Nations’, *Chicago Journal of International Law* 10, no. 5, (2009): 59–61.

35 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 46, Friday, 15 November 1946, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 1st Period, 346; see also Waters, ‘Anglo–Australian Conflict Over the Cold War’, 294–316.

36 Renouf, *Let Justice be Done*, 285.

37 Bridge, ‘Diplomat’, 138–39.

it' in the inter-war period.³⁸ Evatt remained deeply concerned after the war about a resurgence of fascism. In his view, the deepening pessimism in the West regarding Soviet intentions was unjustified.³⁹

But the beginnings of Australia's engagement with Asia are, ironically, to be found in Evatt's focus on preventing the last war with Japan, and consequent efforts to bolster Australia's regional security. A number of observers that worked with Evatt commented on his inability immediately after the war to view the world from perspectives other than that of Australia.⁴⁰ Evatt's vision of engagement with the near north was quite different in conception if not in effect from the subsequent Coalition Government's Cold War approach to the region. For security purposes, Evatt brought the near north—insular Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific—into what he considered Australia's region. In contrast, for Coalition External Affairs ministers in the 1950s, Percy Spender (1949–51) and Richard Casey (1951–60), Cold War geopolitics drew a peripheral Australia into the Asian region, which necessitated closer political and security relations. Evatt's Australia-centric security assumptions laid the groundwork for ANZAM and Australia's deep engagement with the decolonisation process in the Malayan archipelago in the 1950s and 1960s.

Evatt's focus on the past, his continued fixation on Japan, and his actions as President of the UN General Assembly frustrated London and Washington. US officials considered Evatt's attitude toward communism and that of his 'high ranking officials' as suspect and a possible security risk.⁴¹ At a meeting of US State Department officials and British Embassy staff in Washington on 27 May 1948, Undersecretary of State Robert A Lovett noted:

[the] quixotic attitudes of the Australian representatives on the Good Offices Committee in Indonesia and on the United Nations Temporary Commission in Korea ... certainly could not be described as directed towards fostering the purposes of security in the Pacific.⁴²

38 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 11, Wednesday, 13 March 1946, 17th Parliament, 3rd Session, 2nd Period, 204.

39 *Ibid.*, 205; see also Buckley, Dale and Reynolds, *Doc Evatt*, 307.

40 For example, Renouf, *Let Justice be Done*, 283–84.

41 Bridge, 'Diplomat', 138; Waters, 'Anglo-Australian Conflict Over the Cold War', 312–13.

42 'Memorandum of Conversation, by the Undersecretary of State (Lovett), Washington', 27 May 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. VI, The Far East and Australasia, doc. 550.

ME Dening, Assistant Undersecretary at the British Foreign Office, said he had:

found the high ranking officials in Mr. Evatt's Ministry and Mr. Evatt himself somewhat unrealistic as regards Communist designs and methods and although he was prepared to attest to the soundness of the view of the Prime Minister, he could give no assurance regarding the security of the Australian Government as a whole.⁴³

The Americans thought more highly of the ALP Government's efficacy in UN affairs. The State Department suggested:

Dr. Evatt's egotism can, with skill, be turned into constructive channels and when we are satisfied that the Australians will follow our line of thinking he, as Australia's spokesman, should be encouraged to take the initiative.⁴⁴

Evatt's continued obsession about a resurgence of Japanese militarism in the late 1940s and dedication to securing a harsh peace treaty were inconsistent with the view developing in Washington. By early 1948, reports from the US were arguing that the changing world situation 'arising from the steady deterioration of China, deterioration of [the] Korean situation, and Russian expansionism has already outdated initial United States' post-surrender policy' in Asia.⁴⁵ The US was firmly established in Japan and Tokyo's former League of Nations' mandated territories in the Pacific, and in 1947 considered that the 'importance of [a] regional defence arrangement covering [the] South Pacific' had 'diminished'.⁴⁶ British and US officials regarded the 'Anzac Powers' continued fear of Japan as 'pathological'.⁴⁷

By contrast to Evatt and the DEA, the emerging Cold War situation was by 1947 the focus of the Australian defence and intelligence communities. In the September 1947 *Appreciation of the Strategic Position of Australia*, the Defence Chiefs of Staff stated that 'the possibility of war with U.S.S.R.

43 Ibid.

44 'Policy Statement of the Department of State', 18 August 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. VI, The Far East and Australasia, doc. 1.

45 Australian Embassy Washington to DEA Canberra, 23 March 1948, NAA A1838/515/2, Part 1.

46 Australian Consul-General New York to DEA Canberra, 19 November 1947, NAA A1838/TS382/8/2/1, Part 3.

47 'Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Marshall Green of the Division of Northeast Asian Affairs, Washington', 28 May 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. VI, The Far East and Australasia, doc. 552.

does exist' at the global level but was unlikely before 1950 or 1951.⁴⁸ The Joint Intelligence Committee's report on the *Appreciation* in February 1949 was more direct:

A state of 'war' at present exists between the U.S.S.R. and the Western Powers although it does not involve the employment of orthodox hostilities ... It is best described as a 'cold war' in which Soviet aggression is characterised by the exploitation of minorities and disaffected elements in foreign countries, and the manipulation of international organisations in her own interests with the ultimate objective of communising the world.⁴⁹

By March 1948, the term 'Cold War' had started to appear in Australian DEA despatches, mirroring the discourse emerging in Washington and from the Defence establishment.⁵⁰

Evatt remained unconvinced. In an article published in *The New York Times* on 4 April 1948, Evatt continued to emphasise his same postwar themes while failing to address the emerging Cold War dynamics: 'Australia and New Zealand', as 'young democracies rapidly growing in power and influence', had proved 'to be valiant and indispensable allies' in 'redressing the world balance in favour of liberty against international fascism'.⁵¹ Communism is not mentioned in the article, which is almost entirely focused on Japan. Decolonisation, however, is addressed, but it is a conservative vision. Evatt recognised the legitimate desire for self-government in the region, but also wrote:

[w]e should not allow our sympathy for the dependent peoples to blind us to the real achievements of the colonial powers ... In very many cases the present desire for freedom is itself a product of the Western tradition, thought and teaching.⁵²

Evatt argued that for the Netherlands Indies and French Indochina, the appropriate solution would be 'complete or considerable self-government' while permitting 'continued Dutch and French participation

48 'An Appreciation by The Chiefs of Staff of the Strategic Position of Australia', September 1947, NAA A5954/1628/3.

49 'Defence Committee Agendum: The Strategic Position of Australia—Appreciation by the Joint Intelligence Committee', 14 February 1949, NAA A816/14/301/352.

50 Australian Embassy Washington to DEA Canberra, 5 March 1948, NAA A1838/515/2, Part 1.

51 'There is the Pacific also', Text of article published in *The New York Times*, 4 April 1948, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 3.

52 Ibid.

in the political and economic development of these regions'. Evatt continued that independence does not equal democracy and made the point that nationalist movements sometimes contained 'Fascist and totalitarian elements'.⁵³

Evatt remained fixated on Japan as late in his term of office as November 1949, even after the drastically altered regional circumstances with the communist victory in the Chinese civil war and declaration of the People's Republic on 1 October 1949. In a press release on 11 November, Evatt made the familiar statement that he was 'strongly opposed to any procedure which would preclude Australia from being regarded as a party principal in all matters arising out of war with Japan'.⁵⁴ Evatt continued these themes in Parliament, with his speeches dominated by a focus on the Second World War and the value of the UN. With respect to Indonesia, Evatt also made the point that his and the government's interest in referring the matter to the UN Security Council was one of 'general principle' as 'a loyal member of the United Nations' rather than any particular sympathy for the Indonesian nationalist cause above others.⁵⁵ By the end of his ministerial tenure in 1949, Evatt was criticised by the Opposition 'for his unswerving loyalty and devotion to the United Nations', rather than to Australia.⁵⁶

The main themes of the Chifley Government's foreign policy may be summarised as an obsessive and enduring fear of Japan and its pattern of wartime aggression in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, dedication to the UN as a world organisation and rigid adherence to its principles, and a conservative, evolutionary view of decolonisation within the framework of the European empires. The Australian Government's view of the country's place in the world and its ambivalent postwar relations with Asia can only be understood through these lenses. For the ALP governments of the 1940s, the war with Japan had drastically altered Australia's sense of security and its place in the world, and the Southwest Pacific war theatre continued to provide a frame of reference for Australia's idea of region.

53 Ibid.

54 'Statement by the Minister for External Affairs, The Right Hon. H. V. Evatt', 11 November 1949, NAA A1838/381/3/1/2, Part 1.

55 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 6, Wednesday, 9 February 1949, 18th Parliament, 2nd Session, 2nd Period, 76, 80–82.

56 Senate, *Official Hansard*, No. 9, Wednesday, 2 March 1949, 18th Parliament, 2nd Session, 2nd Period, 824.

The Southwest Pacific war theatre

The archival record shows that from the Second World War until the consolidation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (1967) in the early 1970s, Australia, under both ALP and Coalition governments, saw itself, and was viewed by its neighbours, as a part of what we now term Southeast Asia. The Chifley Government's outlook was different to the Coalition to the extent that it viewed insular Southeast Asia as part of Australia's region. In either case, Australia's place in the Asia-Pacific region was not an innovation of the Whitlam or Hawke-Keating periods.

In March 1942, President Roosevelt (1933–45) proposed that with the exception of Russia, the world be divided into three war theatres: the Atlantic under joint British and American responsibility; an Indian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean area under British responsibility; and the Pacific area, including China, under US operational responsibility.⁵⁷ Directives were issued on 18 April 1942 establishing these areas. The Pacific theatre was further subdivided into the Southwest Pacific area under the command of General Douglas MacArthur in Australia, and three further North, South and Eastern Pacific sectors to be commanded directly from Washington by Admiral Ernest King. New Zealand was placed in the Southern Pacific area and therefore separated from Australia in the Southwest Pacific. The dividing line between the two theatre sectors ran through present-day Solomon Islands, thus excluding much of Melanesia and Western Polynesia from Australia's area. This was met by protests from Evatt, presumably because he wanted Australia associated with the largest possible strategic expanse of Pacific islands, but Washington overruled him on the understanding that there would be a high level of coordination and interoperability between the two areas.⁵⁸

MacArthur was responsible for 'all the United Nations' Forces in Australia, New Guinea and the islands northwards of Australia'.⁵⁹ It is interesting to note in this context that the 'United Nations' was initially understood as the military alliance fighting against the Axis powers, and

57 'History of Establishment of Southwest Pacific Area', Department of Defence Co-ordination, 24 November 1942, NAA A5954/569/4.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

which would be the basis for the postwar international organisation.⁶⁰ The UN was not initially conceived as a neutral and pluralist international body, and the idea that it should be a continuation of the wartime Grand Alliance persisted among the Coalition parties in Australia well into the 1950s. The majority of King's Pacific theatre command was under the operational responsibility of Admiral Chester W Nimitz covering also 'army installations and troops in the Aleutians, Hawaii, Fiji Islands, Solomons, New Hebrides, New Caledonia and New Zealand'.⁶¹

The Second World War theatre sector of the Southwest Pacific included the Australian continent, eastern Indian Ocean and what is now recognised as insular Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Timor-Leste and the Philippines), in addition to New Guinea in Melanesia.⁶² Australia's defence region during the war was thus geographically focused north and westwards and identified with what we now term Southeast Asia. This understanding of Australia's region continued in various guises in the immediate postwar years and endured until the late 1960s when the formation of ASEAN in 1967 signalled the beginnings of a cultural understanding of postcolonial Southeast Asian identity that excluded Australia.

The Australia–New Zealand Agreement

After the tide had turned against Japan in 1943, Australia confirmed this understanding of its region in the January 1944 Australia–New Zealand Agreement, sometimes termed the ANZAC or Canberra Pact. In the literature on the period, this initiative by the Curtin Government is viewed essentially as a riposte from Evatt to the great powers for Australia's exclusion from consultation on the Moscow Declaration of October

60 See, for example, Australian Legation Washington to DEA Canberra (for the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs), 17 September 1944, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/8; 'Conference of Australian and New Zealand Ministers, Held at Wellington, November, 1944: Record of Proceedings, First Meeting, First Day—1st November, 1944', NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/17; and Hudson, *Australia and the New World Order*, 72.

61 'History of Establishment of Southwest Pacific Area', Department of Defence Co-ordination, 24 November 1942, NAA A5954/569/4.

62 'Directive to the Supreme Commander in the Southwest Pacific Area', Appendix A in 'History of Establishment of Southwest Pacific Area', Department of Defence Co-ordination, 24 November 1942, NAA A5954/569/4.

1943 on international organisation, the 1943 Cairo talks on the postwar settlement in Asia and the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks talks on establishing the UN.⁶³

This remains a convincing interpretation. It was stated publicly by Evatt on a number of occasions,⁶⁴ and is reflected in the text of the ANZAC Agreement. It is also demonstrated in Evatt's statement on the Agreement's signing, that in 'substance', Australia and New Zealand had declared a 'Pacific Charter' presumably comparable to the August 1941 'Atlantic Charter'.⁶⁵ Evatt wrote to US Secretary of State, Cordell Hull (1933–44), on 24 February 1944:

We feel strongly that Australia and New Zealand are entitled to the fullest degree of preliminary consultation, especially in relation to Pacific matters. At the recent Cairo Conference decisions affecting the future of certain portions of the Pacific, and vitally affecting both Australia and New Zealand, were not only made but publicly announced without any prior reference either to Australia or New Zealand.⁶⁶

Evatt worried that the British dominions would have 'less real say in the peace settlements than under Lloyd George in 1919'.⁶⁷

An article from *The Times*' correspondent at the Canberra Conference captured the mood:

The proceedings of the conference were pervaded by the sense that ... Australia and New Zealand, by their links with the Imperial Commonwealth, by their constancy to the ideals for

63 Meaney, 'Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War', 320; Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, 110; Hudson, *Australia and the New World Order*, 19; Renouf, *Let Justice be Done*, 102–03; Alan Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy, 1938–1965* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 73; Gary Woodard, *Evatt's Manifesto: The ANZAC Pact* (Sydney: Evatt Foundation, 1987); Buckley, Dale and Reynolds, *Doc Evatt*, 233–34.

64 For example, 'For the Press: Reply by Dr. Evatt in Debate in House of Representatives on Australian-New Zealand Agreement', 30 March 1944, NAA CP13/1/19; House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 11, Wednesday, 13 March 1946, 17th Parliament, 3rd Session, 2nd Period, 187.

65 'The Australian–New Zealand Charter', Department of Information, Australia House London, 21 January 1944, NAA A2937/160/28/2/44.

66 'Telegram Received from External Canberra, by External Affairs Office, London', 28 February 1944, NAA A2937/160/28/2/44; see also W MacMahon Ball, 'Australia as a Pacific Power', September 1944 (Prepared for the Institute of Pacific Relations Conference, 1945), NAA A1838/381/3/1/1.

67 'Conference of Australian and New Zealand Ministers, Held at Wellington, November, 1944: Record of Proceedings, First Meeting, First Day–1st November, 1944', NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/17.

which the war is being fought, and by their immunity from invasion, are qualified to bear the highest responsibility for the common security and welfare.⁶⁸

The two governments asserted their claims to representation 'at the highest level on all armistice planning and executive bodies'.⁶⁹ They also emphasised that it was 'a matter of cardinal importance' for Australia and New Zealand to 'be associated, not only in the membership, but also in the planning and establishment, of the general international organization referred to in the Moscow Declaration of October, 1943'.⁷⁰ The signatories staked their claim to 'full responsibility for policing or sharing in policing' after the cessation of hostilities in the Southwest and South Pacific, before making the controversial statement seemingly directed at the US that bases and installations constructed during the war did not afford any territorial claims to sovereignty in peacetime.⁷¹ The signatories were at pains to point out that the Agreement was not directed against any other countries but rather invited other states to adhere to these principles.⁷²

The initial British response to the ANZAC Agreement was generally supportive, although muted on the status of former enemy territories and possible changes of sovereignty in the Southwest and South Pacific areas. Australia's views on this were simply 'noted'.⁷³ The Dominions Secretary later wrote to the War Cabinet that public statements from Australian leaders regarding the Agreement were 'unexceptional', but it was deemed unlikely that independent resort to such an arrangement by Australia and New Zealand would 'help them in achieving their object'.⁷⁴ Evatt's proposals for an international meeting regarding the Pacific settlement and a South Seas Commission, or Regional Council, were regarded by Britain as premature and subordinate to the formation of a world organisation.⁷⁵

68 'The Canberra Conference', *The Times*, 22 January 1944, in NAA A2937/160/28/2/44.

69 'Australian–New Zealand Agreement', 21 January 1944, New Zealand Treaty Series 1944, No. 1, New Zealand (NZ) DEA, Wellington, in NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/16.

70 *Ibid.*

71 *Ibid.*; see also Renouf, *Let Justice be Done*, 127–30.

72 'Statement to Parliament, 10 February, 1944 on the Australia–New Zealand Agreement by the Rt. Hon. Dr. H.V. Evatt, Minister for External Affairs', NAA A1066/P145/183.

73 Dominions Office to Australian and New Zealand Governments, 12 February 1944, NAA A2937/160/28/2/44.

74 'New Zealand–Australia Conference: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs', 10 November 1944, The National Archives (TNA) UK, Prime Minister's Office Records (PREM) 4/50/13.

75 Dominions Office to Australian and New Zealand Governments, 12 February 1944, NAA A2937/160/28/2/44.

In November 1944, ministers from Australia and New Zealand met at Wellington under the auspices of the Pact to discuss a prospective peace settlement and coordinate policy on postwar international organisation and regional security. After the content of the ANZAC Agreement and associated issues were fleshed out at the Wellington Conference, British criticism became more pointed. The criticisms revolved around two issues. The first was Australia's proposal that after the war colonial administration should be accountable to international supervision in the form of an International Colonial Commission.⁷⁶ The Commission would be an agency of the new world organisation and comprised of both colonial and non-colonial powers. All colonies would be subject to supervision, not just former League of Nations' Mandates, or dependent territories of the defeated powers.⁷⁷ The War Cabinet in London was vehemently opposed to this, arguing that Australia's inconsistent position on this prejudiced the position of the British Empire in discussions with Washington over the future of colonial policy after the war.⁷⁸

The second criticism from London was that Australia and New Zealand had 'issued without consultation with us or with the other Commonwealth Governments' a public 'declaration of policy on matters affecting us all'.⁷⁹ This criticism must have been particular galling for Evatt considering one of the primary motivations for the ANZAC Agreement was a feeling that Australia was being disregarded in postwar planning, particularly in the Asia-Pacific. Australia was expected to consult the United Kingdom (UK) about its postwar plans, while the deliberations of the big three—the US, Soviet Union and Britain—were not subject to Australia's input. Nor was the UK interested in Australian proposals regarding colonial trusteeship. There was some apparent Australian backpedalling on colonial policy after the British criticisms. For example, the Australian Government communicated to the Dominions Office on 19 November 1944 that supervision of colonies by any international or regional body was not

76 'Colonial Policy and Future of Mandate System', Australian–New Zealand Conference, Wellington, October 1944, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/16.

77 'Colonial Policy–Mandates', Australian–New Zealand Conference, Wellington, October 1944, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/16.

78 Dominions Office, London to New Zealand and Australian Governments, 14 November 1944, TNA PREM 4/50/13.

79 'New Zealand–Australia Conference: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs', 10 November 1944, TNA PREM 4/50/13.

intended to interfere with the sovereignty or control of the colonial power. It would be more of an expert body that might make 'positive suggestions' for promoting the welfare of non-self-governing peoples.⁸⁰

The first criticisms of the Australia–New Zealand Agreement from the US Government similarly revolved around its premature nature given the war was a long way from over, and that formal discussion of a postwar settlement might prompt divisions among the allies.⁸¹ Despite this, in a lengthy reply to Cordell Hull via the American Minister in Canberra, Evatt rejected most of the American concerns while complaining that 'matters of tremendous consequence to Australia and New Zealand postwar arrangements are under consideration by the United States Government', without any consultation with Canberra and Wellington.⁸²

According to W MacMahon Ball, writing in September 1944, the Australian public showed little interest in the ANZAC Agreement. The 'general feeling', similar to the overseas criticism, was that such a pact was 'subordinate ... to the course of the war and the decisions taken overseas'.⁸³ The most favourable response came from General Charles de Gaulle's Free French Government, which shared Australia's views on changes to sovereignty and territorial claims in the region, and welcomed the formation of any regional organisation or commission in which it would be a member.⁸⁴ In Australia, the Opposition argued that the Agreement was amateurish and premature, an 'act of those who are more preoccupied about the peace for which we all yearn than about a victorious war without which no lasting peace can be obtained'.⁸⁵ According to the Menzies Opposition, annoying the US with an unnecessary initiative, parts of which Washington was sure to oppose, was not the best way of securing their assistance and cooperation after the war.⁸⁶

80 Commonwealth Government of Australia to Dominions Office, London, 19 November 1944, in 'New Zealand–Australia Conference: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs', 10 November 1944, TNA PREM 4/50/13; see also DEA Canberra to Fraser (NZ Prime Minister), 6 December 1944, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/22.

81 'Telegram Received from External Canberra, by External Affairs Office, London', 28 February 1944, NAA A2937/160/28/2/44.

82 Ibid.

83 Ball, 'Australia as a Pacific Power'.

84 'Translation of a Communication from the French Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, Algiers, to the French Embassy, London, enclosed with External Affairs Letter of 19th September 1944', in 'Relations with Pacific Powers: Exchange of Views, French Position in the Pacific', Australian–New Zealand Conference, Wellington, October 1944, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/16.

85 Senate, *Official Hansard*, No. 11, Wednesday, 15 March 1944, 17th Parliament, 1st Session, 2nd Period, 1308. There was no discussion of the Agreement in the House of Representatives.

86 Ibid., 1309–10.

Evatt conceded at the Wellington Conference in November 1944 ‘that America does not appear to seek changes in sovereignty south of the Equator’, although he and New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser (1940–49) claimed credit for this as the effect of the Australia–New Zealand Agreement. US control would ‘be limited to ex-Japanese Mandated Islands’.⁸⁷ This assumption was not entirely accurate. After the war, the US Navy did seek the continued use of its large base at Manus Island in the Admiralties. Manus was part of the Australian mandated territory of New Guinea, but outside the zone designated to British Commonwealth responsibility after the dissolution of the Southwest Pacific theatre on 2 September 1945.⁸⁸ Postwar negotiations over the granting of base rights faltered over a number of problems such as reciprocal base rights for Australian forces on US territory, how the base would fit in with wider regional security arrangements, and questions over access to the base in the event that one party remained neutral in any conflict relevant to the area.⁸⁹ The US decision to leave Manus Island was made in September 1946 and the US Navy vacated the base at the end of 1947.⁹⁰ Evatt never publicly acknowledged that the ANZAC Agreement caused significant consternation in Washington, although Fraser noted its ‘temporarily adverse effect’.⁹¹ The only successful practical initiative from the ANZAC Pact was the creation of the South Pacific Commission, a grouping of the six sovereign powers controlling Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.⁹²

The Melbourne *Herald* suggested that since the Americans had just ‘saved life, home, and land’, a ‘thankful and comradely resolution might have been expected’, rather than Evatt’s ‘direct affronts’ to Washington.

87 ‘Conference of Australian and New Zealand Ministers, Held at Wellington, November, 1944: Record of Proceedings, First Meeting, First Day–1st November, 1944’, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/17.

88 Australian Legation Washington to DEA Canberra, 6 September 1945, NAA A5954/569/11; ‘U.S. Seeks 10 Pacific Bases’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 September 1945, in NAA A5954/569/11; ‘America Wants Pacific Bases’, *The Herald*, Melbourne, 20 September 1945, in NAA A5954/569/11; ‘Admiralty Islands’, File Note, 29 October 1945, NAA A5954/569/11.

89 Amry Vandenbosch and Mary Belle Vandenbosch, *Australia Faces Southeast Asia: The Emergence of a Foreign Policy* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 27–32; House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 11, Wednesday, 13 March 1946, 17th Parliament, 3rd Session, 2nd Period, 200–201; ‘Dr. Evatt’s Statement in the House of Reprs. 8.11.46’, NAA A1838/380/1/9; Renouf, *Let Justice be Done*, 146–47.

90 ‘Sad Story of the Base at Manus Island’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 1950, 2.

91 ‘Conference of Australian and New Zealand Ministers, Held at Wellington, November, 1944: Record of Proceedings, First Meeting, First Day–1st November, 1944’, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/17.

92 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 9, Wednesday, 26 February 1947, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 2nd Period, 163.

According to *The Herald*, the ALP Government was ‘putting up claims for Australia that depend[ed] first upon other Powers’ [sic] winning the war for us’, but we were then ‘indifferent to the interests and claims of these Powers’.⁹³

There is truth in these criticisms. The ‘optics’ of the Agreement could only have looked very bad from the standpoint of Australia’s allies. Now that the worst of the danger to Australia had passed, the ALP Government was opportunistically moving toward an advantageous postwar settlement in its region, while its great power allies remained fully engaged in defeating the Axis powers. Evatt even appeared to be claiming leadership among the UN alliance. On 30 January 1944, in response to criticisms of the Agreement, Evatt made the presumptuous statement:

that the Australian and New Zealand Governments decided to make a start now, with a view to the clarification of the United Nations’ objectives in the Pacific both in war and peace.⁹⁴

W MacMahon Ball explained:

Australia’s experiences in this war, and particularly the closeness of the Japanese threat to the Australian mainland, together with the magnitude of her war effort in many overseas theatres, has produced in Australia a new sense of the dangers, the rights and the obligations of nationhood ... The Australian government has repeatedly insisted that our achievements in war gives us the right and the obligation to play an active and important part in the planning of the post-war world.⁹⁵

This theme is a constant in the documentary record from 1944 into the postwar years.⁹⁶ It impresses upon the reader the unprecedented sense of the threat perceived to Australia and acute recognition of the immense resources committed and military effort expended in the war effort. In February 1947, for example, Evatt again ‘demanded full participation at the highest level in the final settlement with Japan’. He said Australia’s claim to this was ‘unassailable’, because of its ‘all-out effort in the Pacific

93 Quoted in Ball, ‘Australia as a Pacific Power’; Alan Watt makes a similar point; see *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy*, 76.

94 ‘For the Press: Reply by Dr. Evatt in Debate in House of Representatives on Australian–New Zealand Agreement’, 30 March 1944, NAA CP13/1/19.

95 Ball, ‘Australia as a Pacific Power’.

96 For example, ‘Conference of Australian and New Zealand Ministers, Held at Wellington, November, 1944: Record of Proceedings, First Meeting, First Day–1st November, 1944’, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/17.

war'.⁹⁷ While understandable, the ALP Government's attitude in this respect was myopic and unlikely to gain any traction among the great powers. All the major protagonists of the war had mobilised massive resources and made great sacrifices on a scale vastly exceeding that of Australia.⁹⁸

Ball interpreted that much of the shrillness and impetuosity of the Australian Government around the ANZAC Pact was that in the past Australians had always thought of war as an expedition. But 'in 1942, with a sense of sudden shock, we thought of war for the first time as invasion'. That explained 'why, in the Australia–New Zealand Pact, and other official statements', Australia placed 'such emphasis on plans for regional defence and development'.⁹⁹ The government felt that the prewar apathy of northern hemisphere powers 'about South Pacific needs, and a consequent neglect in providing for the security of this area' were the reasons for its acute vulnerability.¹⁰⁰ This apathy had been shared by Australia, but the ANZAC Agreement showed that the signatories were now committed to undertake new and heavy responsibilities for the defence and development of this region of the world.¹⁰¹

Region and regionalism in the postwar world

The ANZAC Pact contains an explicit definition by the Australian Government of its region and place in the world. The Treaty stated:

within the framework of a general system of world security, a regional zone of defence comprising the wartime South West and South Pacific areas shall be established and that this zone should be based on Australia and New Zealand, stretching through the arc of islands north and northeast of Australia, to Western Samoa and the Cook Islands.¹⁰²

97 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 9, Wednesday, 26 February 1947, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 2nd Period, 169.

98 Crockett, *Evatt*, 224.

99 Ball, 'Australia as a Pacific Power'.

100 *Ibid.*; see also House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 46, Friday, 15 November 1946, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 1st Period, 342.

101 Ball, 'Australia as a Pacific Power'.

102 'Australian–New Zealand Agreement', 21 January 1944, New Zealand Treaty Series 1944, No. 1, NZ DEA, Wellington, in NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/16.

The geographical area designated in the Treaty thus included insular Southeast Asia, Melanesia and Western Polynesia. The US later privately labelled this 'an Anzac Monroe Doctrine for the Southwest Pacific'.¹⁰³ It was never intended that Australia would defend this area unaided, but it needed to be kept from the control of any potentially hostile power and its defence would require permanent Australian bases and installations in the islands to the north of the continent.¹⁰⁴ Australian advocacy for decolonisation or trusteeship was always 'secondary to the needs of defence and regional security'.¹⁰⁵ Establishing Australian bases in the 'island screen' to the north was a theme Evatt continued to pursue in the immediate aftermath of the war,¹⁰⁶ but was thwarted by the resumption of Dutch control over the East Indies and Portuguese sovereignty in East Timor. The experience of the war and Australia's more independent security outlook meant that it would have to engage much more deeply with whatever political entities emerged in Southeast Asia.

The Southwest Pacific war theatre was dissolved on 2 September 1945 and control of Australian forces was transferred from MacArthur's command back to the Australian Government. Postwar responsibility for this area except for the Philippines passed to British Commonwealth control.¹⁰⁷ The British Southeast Asia Command was allocated control of the Netherlands East Indies, except 'for Borneo and the islands to the

103 'Policy Statement of the Department of State', 18 August 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. VI, The Far East and Australasia, doc. 1.

104 'Australia–New Zealand Conference: The Defence of the Southwest Pacific Region, Statement by The Rt. Hon. J. Curtin, M.P., Prime Minister of Australia, Canberra, 18 January 1944', NAA A816/104/301/1; 'Defence in the Pacific', *The Times*, 19 January 1944, in NAA A2937/160/28/2/44; 'Australian and New Zealand Interests in World Organisation', Australian–New Zealand Conference, Wellington, October 1944, NAA A989/1944/630/5/1/11/16.

105 Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, 123.

106 Renouf, *Let Justice be Done*, 144–46; Wayne Reynolds, 'Dr H.V. Evatt: Foreign Minister for a Small Power', in *Brave New World: Dr H.V. Evatt and Australian Foreign Policy 1941–1949*, ed. David Day (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1996), 153–54; Buckley, Dale and Reynolds, *Doc Evatt*, 226, 232.

107 Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs London to DEA Canberra, 13 August 1945, NAA A5954/569/11; Commander-in-Chief, Southwest Pacific Area (MacArthur) to Allied Land Forces, Allied Naval Forces, Allied Air Forces, Forland, First Australian Army, First Australian Corps, SEAC, C-in-C., Pac., Adv. C-in-C., POF, Prime Minister Australia, Prime Minister New Zealand, Lieut. Governor-General Netherlands Indies (Melbourne) Warcos, 29 August 1945, NAA A5954/569/11; Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs London to DEA Canberra, Prime Minister of New Zealand, Australian Legation Washington, 31 August 1945, NAA A5954/569/11; 'Statement by the Minister for Defence (Mr. Beasley), House of Representatives, Sept. 7, 1945: Re-organisation of South-West Pacific Area', 7 September 1945, NAA A5954/569/11.

east thereof', which were to be Australia's responsibility.¹⁰⁸ The Australian occupation of these areas would be progressively phased out and eventually limited only to New Guinea and the Australian mandated territories.¹⁰⁹ Despite the claims made by Curtin and Evatt during the war, no attempt was made by the Chifley Government to remain in occupation of any forward military bases on foreign territory.¹¹⁰

From the late 1940s until early 1960s, policymakers applied the geographical label 'Southeast Asia' variously depending on the context. For example, the countries of French Indochina, Burma, Siam, Malaya, a putative Indonesian Republic and Portuguese Timor were canvassed by Australia in 1947 as the basis for a potential Southeast Asian regional organisation under UN auspices.¹¹¹ But the term was sometimes also applied to the area from New Zealand to the Indian subcontinent to include the Commonwealth countries of Ceylon, India and Pakistan.¹¹² In the immediate postwar era, the geographical designation 'Asia' also tended to be focused westward (somewhat akin to the present Indo-Pacific concept), rather than the dominant East Asian emphasis of recent decades, with countries from the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia included in regional meetings such as the 1947 Asian Relations Conference in India and the 1949 New Delhi Conference on Indonesia.¹¹³ Australian

108 Department of Defence Memorandum for the Secretaries, Departments of Navy, Army, Air, Supply and Shipping, External Territories, Treasury—Treasury (Defence Division), 1 September 1945, NAA A5954/1891/5; 'Copy of a Minute (C.O.S. 62/6) to the Prime Minister', Annex 1 in 'Occupational Commitments—Memorandum for Canadian Ministers', 23 January 1946, TNA PREM 8/176.

109 'Statement by the Minister for Defence (Mr. Beasley), House of Representatives, Sept. 7, 1945: Re-organisation of South-West Pacific Area', 7 September 1945, NAA A5954/569/11.

110 Renouf, *Let Justice be Done*, 163–64.

111 'Regional Plans in South East Asia', 5 March 1947, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 2; 'Australia Feeler for Regional Pact with S.E. Asia', *The Canberra Times*, 28 February 1947, in NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 2.

112 DEA Canberra to Australian Political Representative Singapore (Officer), 5 March 1946, NAA A1838/382/8/3/1, Part 1; Australian Commission for Malaya (Massey) to Secretary DEA, 22 August 1946, NAA A1838/411/1/1/1, Part 2; 'Press Release: New Delhi Conference on Indonesia', 20 January 1949, NAA A1838/380/1/9; Chifley to Fraser (NZ Prime Minister), 10 March 1949, NAA A1838/851/18/3; LR McIntyre (DEA) to Lt. Colonel DS Bedi (Indian High Commissioner Canberra), 17 March 1949, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1/1, Part 4; and 'Indian Approach to Australian—South East Asian Relations', in Australian High Commission New Delhi (Stuart) to DEA Canberra, 28 August 1950, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 1.

113 Julie Suares, 'Engaging with Asia: The Chifley Government and the New Delhi Conferences of 1947 and 1949', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 57, no. 4 (2011): 495–510; 'Letter from the Prime Minister of India to the President of the Security Council', 22 January 1949, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 4.

defence planning continued to focus on the former Southwest Pacific war theatre, which with some revision would become the ANZAM region.¹¹⁴ However understood, Australia defined itself as part of Southeast Asia.

This was explicitly acknowledged in Australian policy documents and in Australian and Asian public discourse at the time. For example, in February 1947, the *Canberra Times* wrote ‘Australia will look to countries in the South East Asia area for her future peace and prosperity ... Australia realises that her whole future is bound up with this area’.¹¹⁵ From Singapore, it was reported in April 1947 that ‘the local press has shown an awareness of Australia’s emergence ... as an influential nation with a particularly vital interest in the affairs of South East Asia’ and “‘destined to play a role undreamt of a generation ago’”.¹¹⁶ On 30 September 1948, a DEA political appreciation for the prime minister addressed ‘the position of Australia, as a South-East Asian country, in the event of a conflict between one or more of the Western powers and one or more of the Eastern European countries’.¹¹⁷ Even the post-independence Indian press, while criticising the White Australia policy in May 1948, recognised that Australia was ‘part and parcel of Asia geographically and economically’.¹¹⁸

With emerging Indian initiatives toward regional organisation in the late 1940s, Australia’s recognition by postcolonial Asian leaders as being part of the region tended to be variable depending on the purpose of the meetings. Australian inclusion was justified on geographic and economic grounds, but exclusion on political and cultural grounds was also in evidence. Despite Nehru’s view that Australia and New Zealand were part of Asia,¹¹⁹ Canberra was excluded from invitation as an official participant in the 1947 Asian Relations Conference convened in New Delhi by the Indian Council of World Affairs, as a “‘non-Asian country’”,¹²⁰ but the Australian Institute for International Affairs was invited to send two

114 ‘Report by the Joint Planning Committee at Meeting Held on Friday, 25th June, 1948, Report No. 28/1948—The Zone Vital to the Security of Australia’, 25 June 1948, NAA A5954/1628/3.

115 ‘Australian Feeler for Regional Pact with S.E. Asia’, *The Canberra Times*, 28 February 1947, in NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 2.

116 Cited in C Massey (Australian Commissioner Singapore) to DEA Canberra, 10 April 1947, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 2.

117 ‘Political Appreciation’, 30 September 1948, NAA A1838/TS381/3/3/1/1, Part 1.

118 ‘Australia’s Reputation’, DEA transcript of article from *The Indian Daily Mail*, 22 May 1948, NAA A1838/381/3/1/1, Part 1.

119 See Vineet Thakur, ‘An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947’, *The International History Review* 41, no. 3 (2018):673–695.

120 Report of Conference Proceedings, cited in Soares, ‘Engaging with Asia’, 498.

non-government observers.¹²¹ Similar to the later Bandung Conference in 1955, this partial exclusion was on postcolonial political, rather than geographical, grounds, as the ‘most important issue’ for the Conference ‘was how to end the foreign domination of Asia, both politically and economically’.¹²² Reflecting this, the Australian High Commissioner at New Delhi, IG Mackay, reported to Canberra that ‘[o]ur observers sense anti-European feeling’, but were ‘visited privately by members’ of some of the delegations.¹²³

Australia was, however, officially invited to the 1949 New Delhi Conference on Indonesia on geographical grounds—as a part of the region.¹²⁴ This was met, according to Julie Soares, with a ‘favourable yet mixed response’ by the Chifley Government. Soares argues that this response was due to concerns over the perception that Australia might be seen to be siding with the ‘extremist agendas’ of Asian countries against Europeans, but, most importantly, that the ‘conference would seek to override the Security Council when the government’s long-standing position was that all disputes should be settled within the framework of the United Nations’.¹²⁵ This latter point is strongly supported by the archival evidence, especially on the part of Evatt who did not see the New Delhi Conference as brokering a solution to the conflict in Indonesia independently of the UN.

Canberra’s support for Indonesia’s independence from 1947, and the 1948 MacMahon Ball mission to Asia, are often considered as indications of how Australia might have forged a more independent foreign policy in the region during the Cold War had the ALP been returned to office in 1949.¹²⁶ But it is important to remember that while Ball may have had strong connections with Burton and the more liberal international elements within External Affairs,¹²⁷ the DEA was not the Australian

121 Australian High Commissioner New Delhi (Mackay) to DEA Canberra, 24 March 1947, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 2; ‘Note on Asian Regionalism’, 23 May 1949, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 4.

122 Soares, ‘Engaging with Asia’, 498.

123 Australian High Commissioner New Delhi (Mackay) to DEA Canberra, 26 March 1947, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 2.

124 Australian High Commissioner New Delhi (Gollan) to DEA Canberra, 7 January 1949, NAA A1838/381/3/2.

125 Soares, ‘Engaging with Asia’, 503.

126 Gareth Evans, ‘The Labor Tradition: A View from the 1990s’, in Lee and Waters, *Evatt to Evans*, 13.

127 Christopher Waters, ‘The MacMahon Ball Mission to East Asia 1948’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 40, no. 3 (1994): 351–63.

Government, nor did it represent the influential views of the Defence Department. Despite Chifley's and the Australian labour movement's distaste for Dutch colonialism and sympathy for the Indonesian nationalist cause,¹²⁸ the Australian Government's support for Indonesian decolonisation in the late 1940s was driven as much by security fears over instability in a region of Australia's vital interest,¹²⁹ as it was by any principled commitment to the self-determination of colonial peoples. As Fetling notes, even Burton held the view that an Indonesian settlement was to serve Australia's primary interest of maintaining 'security and stability', and 'preventing violence and disorder in Australia's immediate environs'.¹³⁰

Suares's conclusion, that the 'two New Delhi conferences lends weight to the view that the government's post-war foreign policy towards Asia was radical and innovative' is difficult to sustain when a broader focus is taken into account.¹³¹ Indeed, in Commonwealth defence planning in the late 1940s, and later in ANZAM, there was little to no regard for Indonesian sovereignty, thus calling into question the Chifley Government's dedication to internationalism and Asian engagement in practice. Interestingly in this respect, in its early phases, ANZAM was referred to as 'ANZIM', with the 'I' designating Indonesia. The letter 'I' was changed in the title 'because of the potential of conflict of intent in relation to foreign territory', but no actual difference was made to the ANZAM area or to Commonwealth defence planning within it.¹³² Indeed, ANZAM delivered to the Australian Government the 'neo-imperialist' island defence screen Evatt had wanted throughout the 1940s.¹³³

Rather than a minister, Australia sent two senior External Affairs officials to the New Delhi Conference, Secretary John Burton and CW Moodie, whose 'main objective' was 'to explore means by which the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, can assist in bringing about in Indonesia, a speedy, just and lasting settlement to the present

128 Fetling, 'J.B. Chifley and the Indonesian Revolution', 517–31.

129 See DEA Canberra to Australian High Commissioner London, 27 December 1948, NAA A1838/382/8/1; and 'An Appreciation by The Chiefs of Staff of the Strategical Position of Australia', September 1947, NAA A5954/1628/3.

130 Fetling, 'An Australian Response to Asian Decolonisation', 205–06.

131 Suares, 'Engaging with Asia', 510.

132 See Department of Defence, *ANZIM to ANZUK—An Historical Outline of ANZAM*, Historical Monograph No. 96 (Canberra: Department of Defence, 1992).

133 Wayne Reynolds, *Australia's Bid for the Atomic Bomb* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 87, 214.

dispute'.¹³⁴ It seemed very important for the Australian Government that the 'conference does not conflict in any way with the powers or the jurisdiction of the Security Council'.¹³⁵ Unlike the Menzies Coalition Government that followed, the Chifley ALP Government did not want to be part of any exclusively Asian meetings or organisation, along with its concern that the Conference might circumvent UN Security Council processes. For example, Burton wrote to Evatt on 18 January 1949 that 'care must be taken at this Conference to ensure that continuing Committee or any such arrangement does not by degrees form into regional group'.¹³⁶

The Conference Resolution condemned the Dutch military actions launched on 18 December 1948 as 'a flagrant breach of the Charter of the United Nations'. It made a number of recommendations to achieve a settlement, on which it requested the UN Security Council report progress to the General Assembly in its April 1949 session.¹³⁷ Burton's report on the Conference made the point that there was a strong desire for a regional organisation that did not include colonial or other outside powers, and that Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947–64) intended to pursue this. According to Burton, the Conference was more important to Australia than its strict relevance to the Indonesian issue, however: 'It has shown that we can work with this group and that they are willing and anxious to work with us and in accord with the Charter'. Burton regarded it as important that in future Australia be represented at ministerial level and treat the deliberations with the importance afforded to any other international conference.¹³⁸ This recommendation was put into practice by the Menzies Government.

134 DEA Canberra to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations London, Australian Embassy Washington, Prime Minister of New Zealand, Wellington, 5 January 1949, NAA A1838/381/3/2.

135 'Press Release: New Delhi Conference on Indonesia', 20 January 1949, NAA A1838/380/1/9; also 'Memorandum for the Minister: Asian Conference on Indonesia', 26 January 1949, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 4.

136 Australian High Commissioner New Delhi to DEA Canberra, 18 January 1949, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 4.

137 'Letter from the Prime Minister of India to the President of the Security Council', 22 January 1949, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 4.

138 'Memorandum for the Minister: Asian Conference on Indonesia', 26 January 1949, NAA A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 4.

After the meeting, India suggested a framework for continuing contact between the countries of the Conference with a view to a future regional organisation as Burton had anticipated.¹³⁹ This was opposed by the Chifley Government on the basis 'that a regional organization should not stretch in an unwieldy fashion from the Philippines right across to Egypt'.¹⁴⁰ The DEA was also very concerned that any new regional organisations were within the framework of the UN. Considering the many functional UN agencies established by that time, the 'duplication' from another organisation 'would be appalling'.¹⁴¹ It is clear from the documents that the Chifley Government saw regional organisation as technical and functional, rather than for the more intangible purpose of building regional consciousness and solidarity as it became later with the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC) (1966–75) during the Cold War. Whereas for the Chifley Government the handling of Indonesian decolonisation was a technical and procedural matter for the UN Security Council, this did not apply to British decolonisation in Southeast Asia, which remained the responsibility of the Commonwealth, and to which the next chapter turns.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that there were significant tensions in ALP Government foreign and defence policy between its staunch commitment to internationalism at the global level, its ambivalence toward regionalism with independent Asian states, and its paternalistic attitude towards decolonisation in Southeast Asia. Indeed, the evidence suggests that during the late 1940s the Australian Government was not prepared to deal with newly independent Asian states on the basis of sovereign equality. There were no ministerial visits to Asia, with Australia represented by DEA officials or observers. It was the Menzies Government that forged Australia's bilateral and multilateral relations with the non-communist and non-aligned states of Asia.

139 Ibid.

140 Australian High Commissioner New Delhi to DEA Canberra, 2 February 1949, NAA A1838/381/3/2.

141 'Asian Consultative Machinery', DEA Brief for the Secretary, 10 February 1949, A1838/383/1/2/1, Part 4; also 'Regional Arrangement in South East Asia', 25 March 1949, NAA A1068/DL47/5/6.

It thus seems anachronistic or misplaced to apply the internationalist, 'middle power' label, and the discourse of Asian engagement as it developed in the 1990s, to the Chifley Government. It seems relatively clear from the documentary record that the ALP of the 1940s did not seek to 'engage' with a decolonising Asia outside UN processes. Indeed, it did not need to: the most strategically relevant parts of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, were considered to be in Australia's region and within the British Commonwealth sphere of influence after the war. In addition, the more realist outlook of the defence and intelligence establishments always balanced the internationalist tendencies of Evatt and the DEA. Evatt's paternalistic and evolutionary view of decolonisation in Asia within the framework of the European empires is also hardly consistent with liberal international notions of self-determination. In this there is much more continuity between the Chifley and Menzies governments than the internationalist narrative of Australia's foreign policy suggests.

3

Decolonisation and Commonwealth responsibility

Most studies of Australia's postwar foreign and security policies posit a sharp break between the Chifley and Menzies governments.¹ A fresh reading of the archival sources reveals, however, a major continuity between the two governments. Both governments repeatedly expressed a similar notion of responsibility to the British Empire and Commonwealth in their regional policies toward Asia, suggesting less divergence than the literature maintains. As a part of this, Australia assumed significant responsibilities for the decolonisation of former British dependencies in Asia, whether directly in a security sense as in Malaya, and later Malaysia, or with the provision of aid and technical assistance through the Colombo Plan.

This continuity between the two governments derived from Evatt's security focus on preventing the pattern of Japan's wartime advance toward Australia. Evatt's obsessive concern for postwar security in Australia's 'near north' was a strong driver for the development of a robust Commonwealth sphere of influence across insular Southeast Asia and the South Pacific in which Australia would seek to play a leading role. In this, Evatt's security outlook and that of the defence establishment converged, although for different reasons. The Defence Department was more attuned to securing Australia's approaches in the context of emerging Cold War dynamics in East Asia. Evatt, who continued to worry about a resurgence of Japanese militarism, denied these dynamics until the end of his tenure in office

1 For example, David Lee, *Search for Security: The Political Economy of Australia's Postwar Foreign and Defence Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 107.

in 1949. Nonetheless, Evatt's continued focus on Japan after the war laid the foundations for ANZAM (the Australia–New Zealand–Malaya Agreement), under the umbrella of which Australia's Cold War forward defence deployments to Malaya and Borneo were undertaken during the 1950s and 1960s.

My argument in this chapter is that the motive of Commonwealth responsibility has not been given sufficient explanatory weight in interpreting Australia's engagement with Asia under both Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Coalition governments during the early decades of the Cold War from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s. Australia's assumption of greater Commonwealth responsibilities in the region, partly because of Britain's postwar resource constraints, led to a deep involvement in Southeast Asian decolonisation, which transcended Cold War security interests. The responsibility felt by Australian political elites to assist in the orderly decolonisation of the Straits Settlements, Malayan Peninsula and British Borneo Territories cannot be adequately understood within a Cold War ideological framework of anti-communism. Nor can it be fully explained by the instrumental logic of forward defence. The evidence suggests that in its approach to Southeast Asian decolonisation, Australia was driven as much by normative sentiments of responsibility to the British Commonwealth as it was by calculations of Cold War strategic interest.

This sense of Commonwealth responsibility began to decline in the 1960s, and markedly from 1966 with the advent of the Suharto regime in Indonesia and the ending of Sukarno's Confrontation policy against Malaysia, which largely concluded the British decolonisation process in Southeast Asia. As Gregory Pemberton points out, the 'end of Confrontation' had the 'important effect' of reducing 'the basis for close co-operation with Britain, which had always acted as a brake on Australia's closer accommodation with America. It allowed Australia to concentrate more on helping the US in Vietnam'.² Gary Woodard notes similarly, the 'British relationship remained far more important than is generally conceded right up to the time an Australian battalion joined the Vietnam war alongside the Americans, but without the British'.³

2 Gregory Pemberton, *All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 332.

3 Gary Woodard, *Asian Alternatives: Australia's Vietnam Decision and Lessons on Going to War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 2. A similar point is made by Derek McDougall, 'The Malayan Emergency and Confrontation', in *Munich to Vietnam: Australia's Relations with Britain and the United States Since the 1930s*, ed. Carl Bridge (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991), 139.

This chapter also challenges the assumptions of Australia's foreign policy traditions in a number of ways. Conceptually, the internationalist tradition foregrounds a set of broadly liberal norms through which Australia's interests are pursued, while the 'great and powerful friends' tradition emphasises the pursuit of security interests that reflect the strategic concerns of Australia's great power allies, particularly the United States (US). The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that, at least in Australian approaches to decolonisation in Southeast Asia, the reverse was the case. For the Chifley ALP Government, perceptions of its security interests in Australia's near north informed and structured its Commonwealth responsibilities. For the Menzies Coalition Government, its British Commonwealth responsibilities sometimes took precedence over US conceptions of strategic interest in Southeast Asia until the mid-1960s.

Empirically, the chapter locates the origins of Australia's Commonwealth responsibilities and, consequently, its forward defence policy in the late 1940s period of the Chifley ALP Government. The stated principles of the ALP Government's postwar foreign and security policy gave primacy to the United Nations (UN) and the collective security mechanism of the Security Council. However, this was to be supported under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter by British Commonwealth regional security arrangements in Australia's near north, in which Canberra would take a leading role.⁴ As the previous chapter has shown, the Chifley Government's postwar policies in Australia's region sought to prevent a resurgence of Japanese aggression or guard against any similar pattern of invasion threat from Asia.⁵ The internationalist narrative of the history of Australia's foreign policy privileges the former of these principles. The evidence suggests that the latter should be given much greater emphasis.

The primary vehicle for maintaining security in Australia's near north was the ANZAM Agreement (1950–71), the British Commonwealth defence planning arrangement in Southeast Asia. The formal origins of ANZAM date from mid-1947, after the concept was developed at the 1946 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London. Australia assumed primary responsibility for planning in the ANZAM

4 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 46, Friday, 15 November 1946, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 1st Period, 346–47.

5 Neville Meaney, 'Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 3 (1992): 324.

area in 1950.⁶ Under the Menzies Coalition Government, Australia's military deployments to the Malayan Emergency (1955) and Indonesian Confrontation (1965) were undertaken under ANZAM auspices as part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR). Australia's forward defence policy was not due to subservience to US Cold War priorities in Southeast Asia.⁷ As this chapter demonstrates, the US never agreed with the ANZAM concept and saw little value in it. To Washington it was a relic of Empire, the Pacific War and the Chifley Government's enduring fear of Japan. But as a Commonwealth initiative, ANZAM allowed the Menzies Government to engage with a decolonising Southeast Asia during the Cold War within a familiar British Commonwealth normative and practical framework. There was a close Commonwealth identification with the decolonising British dependencies in Southeast Asia, which Menzies' oft-cited 'imperial imagination' could readily accommodate.⁸

The chapter first briefly provides the conceptual underpinnings of the relationship between interests and norms, before introducing responsibility as an under-theorised motive in foreign policy analysis. It then establishes the grounds for responsibility within the British Commonwealth during the immediate postwar period. The third section shows that despite his 'internationalism', it was Evatt, not Menzies, who initiated the paternalistic theme that the Australia Government carried a special responsibility for a decolonising Southeast Asia on behalf of the British Empire and Western civilisation. Section four examines the Menzies era of the 1950s. It demonstrates through the examples of ANZAM and Australia's military commitments to Malaya and Borneo that during this early period of the Cold War, responsibility to the Commonwealth remained an important driver of policy, independent of the US relationship.

6 'Submission No. 407—Pacific Defence Arrangements—Memorandum by Ministers for External Affairs and Defence', Cabinet Minute, Decision No. 683, 24 March 1953, National Archives of Australia (NAA) A1838/TS687/1, Part 3; Department of Defence, *ANZIM to ANZUK—An Historical Outline of ANZAM*, Historical Monograph No. 96 (Canberra: Department of Defence, 1992); see also Alastair Cooper, 'At the Crossroads: Anglo-Australian Naval Relations, 1945–1971', *The Journal of Military History* 58, no. 4 (1994): 699–718. The military organisation was known as the ANZAM Chiefs of Staff, consisting of the Australian chiefs of staff and representatives from the UK and New Zealand, but 'acting through the Australian Higher Defence Machinery'; see 'The ANZAM Region', UK Commonwealth Relations Office, 29 November 1951, in NAA A1838/TS687/1, Part 1.

7 Wayne Reynolds, *Australia's Bid for the Atomic Bomb* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 152.

8 Frank Bongiorno, 'The Price of Nostalgia: Menzies, the "Liberal" Tradition and Australian Foreign Policy', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 3 (2005): 414; see also PJ Boyce, 'The Bonds of Culture and Commonwealth in Southeast Asia', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 2, no. 1 (1971): 71–72.

Norms, responsibility and the British Commonwealth

Norms for behaviour can be defined as the principles, standards and rules, both substantive and procedural, which prescribe or proscribe social action in situations of choice, by carrying a moral obligation that they ought to be followed.⁹ Norms reflect intersubjective consensus about appropriate behaviour for a given identity in particular social contexts.¹⁰ The conceptual separation between self-interest and norms rests on their instrumental and non-instrumental characters. Instrumental actions are contingent, future-oriented and concerned with the achievement of outcomes. Normative behaviour, by contrast, is relatively rigid, process-oriented and non-instrumental,¹¹ in that the anticipated consequences of normative action are not reducible to utility or means-ends consistency. These logics of action have been dichotomised in the International Relations literature as 'logics of expected consequences' versus 'logics of appropriateness', with the former traditionally dominating the latter as an explanatory device in foreign policy analysis.¹²

While conceptually distinct, the two logics are not mutually exclusive in practice.¹³ That there is always an element of self-interest in state behaviour does not preclude that a normative element can also inhere in such behaviour.¹⁴ March and Olsen advance four interpretations of the relationships between the two logics of action: that the logic holding

9 Andrew Hurrell, 'Norms and Ethics in International Relations', in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A Simmons (London: Sage, 2002), 143.

10 Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 22; Vaughn P Shannon, 'Norms are What States Make of Them: The Political Psychology of Norm Violation', *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (2000): 300; and Ronald L Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter J Katzenstein, 'Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security', in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 54.

11 Jon Elster, *The Cement of Society: A Study of Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 98–99.

12 James G March and Johan P Olsen, 'The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders', *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 949–54.

13 Shannon, 'Norms are What States Make of Them', 298.

14 Chris Brown, 'Ethics, Interests and Foreign Policy', in *Ethics and Foreign Policy*, ed. Karen E Smith and Margot Light (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22–23; Gregory A Raymond, 'Problems and Prospects in the Study of International Norms', *Mershon International Studies Review* 41, no. 2 (1997): 218; Richard K Herrmann and Vaughn P Shannon, 'Defending International Norms: The Role of Obligation, Material Interest, and Perception in Decision Making', *International Organization* 55, no. 3 (2001): 621–23.

greater clarity, or precision, in situational context will dominate decision-making; that the weaker of the logics refines decision-making based on the stronger; that the relationship between the two logics is developmental in that instrumental action will become rule-based over time; and that the logics are sequential, in that one structures the field of action of the other.¹⁵ The last of these perhaps holds the greatest salience in the period under consideration here. But the purpose of this chapter is not to systematically identify the balance between, or the sequencing of, norms and interests in Australia's foreign policy decision-making. Rather, it is to demonstrate that norms, which carry moral obligations, held greater significance during this period than is generally afforded in the literature.

Responsibility is a normative concept, defined as 'the obligation to fulfill certain duties, to assume certain burdens, to carry out certain commitments'.¹⁶ Or, put another way, obligation 'is the owing of a duty; and behind it, claiming the performance of that duty, is responsibility'.¹⁷ As a political concept, responsibility is a duty owed to someone or some organisation, and as AC Ewing writes, a 'political organization is indeed largely a system of responsibilities'.¹⁸ The term responsibility is relatively recent historically and surprisingly under-theorised as a political concept. It dates from the late 18th century and the development of parliamentary and republican systems of 'responsible government'.¹⁹

The grounds of political responsibility lie in 'cultural responsibility', in that the 'political responsibilities of nations reflect and protect the cultural values of societies'. This cultural responsibility 'provides the connection by which political and moral responsibility influence each other'.²⁰ According to Richard McKeon, a 'responsible community reflects a tradition of responsibility based on the character of the community' and is 'responsive to the requirements of common values and of the common good'.²¹ Responsibility is thus normative rather than self-interested as it

15 March and Olsen, 'The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders', 952–54.

16 Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 12.

17 Clyde Eagleton, *The Responsibility of States in International Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1928), 3.

18 AC Ewing, 'Responsibility Toward Oneself and Others', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 11, no. 39 (1957): 51.

19 Richard McKeon, 'The Development and Significance of the Concept of Responsibility', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 11, no. 39 (1957): 23–24.

20 McKeon, 'The Development and Significance of the Concept of Responsibility', 25.

21 *Ibid.*

is dedicated to the *common* good defined according to a set of cultural values. Applied to communities in the plural, the notion of responsibility implies interdependence, 'where independent communities assume responsibilities with respect to each other', and 'constitute a kind of inclusive community'. Responsibility within this broader inclusive community is based on common values and a common rationality.²² For the self-governing Dominions, the organic, intangible bonds of the British Commonwealth were an independent community of values with a common rationality, to which responsibility was felt to be owed.

The 1931 Statute of Westminster established the Commonwealth of the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the Irish Free State and Newfoundland within the British Empire. Their 'free association' and 'unity' was symbolised 'by a common allegiance to the Crown'.²³ In 1948, the British Government likened the Commonwealth to:

a living organism, within which the members are able to develop in their own way. It has no fixed constitution, no central legislature or executive authority; the only formal link is the Crown ... The States Members of the British Commonwealth are entirely self-governing; different parties are in power in each according to the will of their people expressed at general elections. Geographical position and particular problems influence and modify the external policy of each, though common interests and traditions lead by and large to common foreign policies.²⁴

With Indian independence in 1947 and establishment of the Republic of India in 1950, the 'British' label was omitted in favour of the term Commonwealth of Nations, although there was never any formal, constitutional title for the British Empire or Commonwealth.²⁵ But the bond between the British settler Dominions and the UK, particularly Australia and New Zealand as the most 'British' of the self-governing Dominions, remained very strong. In 1955, H Duncan Hall argued that 'the New Zealander or the Australian often feels he is more

22 Ibid., 26.

23 *Statute of Westminster*, 1931.

24 'Themes of Publicity about the Commonwealth and Empire', 1948, The National Archives (TNA) UK, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records (FCO) 141/2062.

25 James ES Fawcett, *The British Commonwealth in International Law* (London: Steven & Sons, 1963), 1.

Commonwealth-minded and more British than the British'.²⁶ Unlike India and other non-British member states, Australia and New Zealand felt 'obliged to make common cause with Britain'.²⁷

Writing in 1961, Ivor Jennings likened the British Commonwealth to 'a mutual protection society',²⁸ while Hedley Bull later described it as 'a transnational community'.²⁹ Hall used the metaphor of a 'family' with 'unity of spirit and identity of purpose' to describe the loyalty of the members of the Commonwealth to one another, and 'their solidarity in vital matters of common concern'.³⁰ There were no formal alliance obligations in the Commonwealth, with responsibilities 'imposed not by one nation on another, but by each nation on itself'. Nor were the obligations necessarily mutual. They existed partly in a member's 'own interest, but partly also because sentiment would insist on it'.³¹ Hall states that the 'feeling of responsibility was not merely for the good government of the local territory, or country; it extended to the whole family of the Commonwealth'.³²

In a 1950 speech, Menzies argued that despite the membership of India as a republic, the 'Australian relationship to the United Kingdom, to Canada, to New Zealand, to most of the British Commonwealth countries, is structural or organic'.³³ Among the 'British peoples' of the Commonwealth, there was 'an instinctive unity of feeling' that 'displays itself instantly in times of trial'.³⁴ Menzies emphasised sentiment over interests, in reiterating the Commonwealth association as one of 'common duty and common instinct'.³⁵ Stuart Ward summarises that 'these sentiments underlined Menzies' sense of the innate, organic and inviolable nature of the bonds uniting the British world'.³⁶

26 H Duncan Hall, 'The British Commonwealth', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 99, no. 4 (1955): 253.

27 JDB Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World*, 3rd edn (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1965), 54.

28 Ivor Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1961), 89.

29 Hedley Bull, 'Britain and Australia in Foreign Policy', in *Australians and British: Social and Political Connections*, ed. JDB Miller (Sydney: Methuen Australia, 1987), 103.

30 Hall, 'The British Commonwealth', 251.

31 Jennings, *British Commonwealth of Nations*, 94.

32 Hall, 'The British Commonwealth', 253.

33 Robert Menzies, 'The British Commonwealth of Nations in International Affairs', Roy Milne Memorial Lecture, Adelaide, 26 June (Sydney: Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1950), 4.

34 Menzies, 'The British Commonwealth of Nations in International Affairs', 15.

35 *Ibid.*, 25.

36 Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 21.

The interplay between interest and sentiment in Menzies' foreign policy outlook is a theme canvassed in the literature.³⁷ However, the more diffuse notion of sentiment has not been theorised as a norm of responsibility and systematically analysed against the evidence as it is here. And while ALP leaders Chifley and Evatt did not speak of the British Empire and Commonwealth in the same sentimental idiom as Menzies, their statements examined below carry similar normative connotations. The following section analyses the Chifley Government's claims of responsibility in Southeast Asia on behalf of the British Commonwealth.

Australia and Commonwealth responsibility in Southeast Asia

The Menzies Opposition criticised the Chifley Government, and Evatt in particular, for ignoring Australia's region for a preoccupation with the new UN organisation.³⁸ On my reading, this criticism was largely overstated. Christine de Matos makes the point that Evatt's policy outlook was characterised by a deep tension between his 'long-term suspicion and fear of Japan' on the one hand, which kept him focused on the Asia-Pacific, and his 'international liberalism' and 'dedication to the United Nations' on the other.³⁹ In the immediate postwar years, the Chifley Government's dedication to the UN was tempered by British Empire loyalty, uncertainty about Washington's intentions in the Western Pacific, and a visceral concern for security and stability in the region to Australia's immediate north. For these reasons, Evatt sought a British Commonwealth sphere of influence across the Malayan archipelago and islands of the Southwest Pacific in which Australia would predominate, which De Matos labels 'vaguely neo-imperialist'.⁴⁰

37 See Bongiorno, 'The Price of Nostalgia', 400–17; Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace*; and David McLean, 'From British Colony to American Satellite? Australia and the USA during the Cold War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 52, no. 1 (2006): 72–73.

38 See, for example, Senate, *Official Hansard*, No. 9, Wednesday, 2 March 1949, 18th Parliament, 2nd Session, 2nd Period, 798–831. On this theme, see David Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle': Australia's Cold War 1948–1954* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999), 20–21; and Lowe, 'Divining a Labor Line: Conservative Constructions of Labor's Foreign Policy, 1944–49', in *Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy*, ed. David Lee and Christopher Waters (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997), 62–74.

39 Christine De Matos, *Imposing Peace & Prosperity: Australia, Social Justice and Labour Reform in Occupied Japan* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008), 5, 28–29.

40 De Matos, *Imposing Peace & Prosperity*, 23.

This chapter also resonates with the work of Wayne Reynolds, who argues that the dominant perspectives on this period place too much emphasis on the turn to the US in December 1941, the fall of Singapore in February 1942 and steady decline of the Anglo-Australian relationship thereafter, culminating in ‘all the way with LBJ’ and the Vietnam War. In this view, the onset of the Menzies era marked a sharp reversal from the progressive liberal internationalism of the Chifley Government. For example, David Lee argues that ‘sweeping changes’ were ushered in with ‘the change of government in December 1949 ... above all, this meant greater defence preparations and a readiness to fit into Anglo-American strategic plans’.⁴¹ Along with his growing sycophancy toward Washington, the Anglophile Menzies sought to revive the British Empire relationship in the 1950s, best demonstrated by the aberration of allowing British nuclear testing at Woomera and his support for London in the 1956 Suez Crisis.⁴²

Reynolds demonstrates, however, that rather than championing the rights of small states in the UN as the internationalist interpretation holds, Evatt actually sought the special status for Australia of a ‘security power’ in postwar arrangements. In this, the British ‘Fourth Empire’ after the war was crucial to Australia.⁴³ Christopher Waters recognises the enduring value of the British Empire to Evatt and Chifley, but argues that they were nationalists first, ‘determined that Australia would have the freedom to act ... in the postwar world’ independently of British interests or Commonwealth unity. I agree with Waters that Evatt and Chifley overestimated British power after the war,⁴⁴ but it is perhaps more accurate to interpret that the Chifley Government sought to further Australia’s security interests, especially in the Asia-Pacific, through the material, institutional and political resources of the British Commonwealth, rather than in opposition to it, or independently of it.

Despite his later mythologising as an internationalist, it was Evatt who initiated the theme between 1944 and 1946 that Australia and New Zealand ‘as the main centres of civilisation’ carried a ‘special responsibility’ for the security and welfare of the Southwest Pacific and

41 Lee, *Search for Security*, 107–08.

42 Reynolds, *Australia’s Bid for the Atomic Bomb*, 6.

43 Ibid., 25, 31–32.

44 Christopher Waters, *The Empire Fractures: Anglo-Australian Conflict in the 1940s* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 1995), 18–19.

South Pacific areas on behalf of the British Commonwealth.⁴⁵ It was the ‘two British Pacific Dominions’ that ‘must uphold Western civilisation in this part of the world’. Their ‘responsibility’ could not ‘be abdicated’.⁴⁶ Chifley said, similarly:

Australia today has become the great bastion of the British-speaking south of the Equator. Strategically and economically our country has assumed a position in the Pacific on behalf of the British Commonwealth of Nations.⁴⁷

Bongiorno makes the point that in his regional foreign policy approaches ‘Evatt drew on a narrative of empire in which he had a large emotional and intellectual investment’.⁴⁸ In this he was consistent with the ALP prime ministers John Curtin (1941–45) and Ben Chifley.⁴⁹

Both Britain and Australia recognised that Australia and New Zealand would carry a much greater and immediate responsibility for Commonwealth political affairs and security interests in Asia and the Pacific, due to the UK being weakened by the war.⁵⁰ This was understood as responsibility for the ‘formulation and control’ of strategic policy on behalf of the Commonwealth in line with broader Commonwealth policy.⁵¹ The September 1947 *Appreciation of the Strategical Position of Australia* stated that the ‘recent war has reduced the military and economic strength of the United Kingdom considerably’. It was necessary that:

45 ‘Statement to Parliament 10th February, 1944 on the Australia–New Zealand Agreement by the Rt. Hon. Dr. H.V. Evatt, Minister for External Affairs’, 10 February 1944, NAA A1066/P145/183; and ‘Dr. Evatt’s Statement in House of Reps. 8.11.46.’, 8 November 1946, NAA A1838/380/1/9.

46 ‘For the Press: Reply by Dr. Evatt in Debate in House of Representatives on Australian–New Zealand Agreement’, 30 March 1944, NAA CP13/1/19.

47 Quoted in Reynolds, *Australia’s Bid for The Atomic Bomb*, 46–47.

48 Frank Bongiorno, “British to the Bootstraps?” H.V. Evatt, J.B. Chifley and Australian Policy on Indian Membership of the Commonwealth, 1947–49’, *Australian Historical Studies* 125 (2005): 20.

49 James Curran, *The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 28, 35–36.

50 See excerpt from article in *Sunday News*, Singapore, 7 July 1947, in NAA A1838/TS382/8/2/1, Part 2; ‘Appreciation of the Strategical Position of Australia, September, 1947’, NAA A816/14/301/352; ‘The Strategic Position of Australia—Review by the Chiefs of Staff Committee: Conclusions of the Council of Defence’, 20 April 1948, NAA A816/14/301/352; ‘Australia and Singapore’, *The Straits Times*, Singapore, 21 March 1947, in NAA A1838/TS382/8/2/1, Part 2; and ‘Dr. Evatt’s Statement in House of Reps., 6.6.47’, 6 June 1947, NAA A1838/380/1/9.

51 ‘The Strategic Position of Australia—Review by the Chiefs of Staff Committee: Conclusions of the Council of Defence’, 20 April 1948, NAA A816/14/301/352.

Australia should make greater efforts for self-sufficiency and also contribute to the military and economic strength of the British Commonwealth than in the past. By virtue of her geographical position, Australia should assume increased responsibilities in British Commonwealth matters in the Indian Ocean, South East Asia and the Pacific.⁵²

In August 1948, the US State Department confirmed, 'Australia sees herself as spokesman for the British Commonwealth and senior member of the Anzac partnership in all matters relating to the Pacific area'.⁵³

By March 1946, the Empire defence concept that gave rise to ANZAM had been instigated. This was further developed at the 1946 conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers held in London in April and May.⁵⁴ In advance of the conference, Evatt told the Australian Parliament 'that an entirely new concept in British Commonwealth relations' was now emerging, which reconciled 'full dominion autonomy with full British Commonwealth co-operation'. It involved the 'possibility of a dominion acting in certain regions or for certain purposes on behalf of the other members of the British Commonwealth, including the United Kingdom itself'. It was nearly at a stage where 'a common policy can be carried out through a chosen dominion instrumentality in an area or in relation to a subject-matter which is of primary concern to that dominion'.⁵⁵ According to Reynolds, this was 'a blueprint for the Fourth Empire', to which Evatt and the Chifley Government were fully committed.⁵⁶

The Chifley ALP Government expressly conceived Australia's increased Commonwealth responsibilities in Asia in the context of emerging decolonisation. Referring to the imminent independence of India and Burma, Evatt made the point in February 1947, that as 'Britain relinquishes its special responsibilities in those areas, the degree of Australia's initiative and responsibility must be substantially increased'.⁵⁷ The origins of the ANZAM Agreement, Australia's close engagement with Southeast Asian

52 'An Appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff of the Strategic Position of Australia', September 1947, NAA A5954/1628/3.

53 'Policy Statement of the Department of State', 18 August 1948, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1948, Vol. VI, The Far East and Australasia, doc. 1.

54 Department of Defence, *ANZIM to ANZUK*.

55 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 11, Wednesday, 13 March 1946, 17th Parliament, 3rd Session, 2nd Period, 191.

56 Reynolds, *Australia's Bid for the Atomic Bomb*, 40.

57 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 9, Wednesday, 26 February 1947, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 2nd Period, 173.

decolonisation during the Cold War, and the conditions for Australia's forward defence deployments to Malaya and Borneo are located in the Chifley Government's view, derived from its wartime experience, of Southeast Asia as Australia's region and Commonwealth responsibility.

Decolonisation and Commonwealth responsibility in the Cold War

For the Menzies Coalition Government, elected on 19 December 1949, it was the Cold War in Asia that drove regional policy rather than the ALP Government's enduring fear of Japan. Reflecting this, the new External Affairs Minister Percy Spender's (1949–51) rhetoric on taking office was different in tone and content from that of Evatt. It was projected outwards into the region, in contrast to Evatt's customary attitude of defensiveness vis-à-vis a resurgent Japan. For example, on 3 January 1950 Spender said:

Australia, which with New Zealand, has the greatest direct interest in Asia of all Western peoples, must develop a dynamic policy towards neighbouring Asian countries. We should give leadership to developments in that area.⁵⁸

Leadership in Asia was given policy expression through two initiatives, the Colombo Plan and ANZAM Agreement. The Colombo Plan was a Commonwealth development initiative originally offered to former British colonies in South Asia and to the remaining colonial dependencies of Malaya, the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore) and the British Borneo territories. It was subsequently extended to include all South and Southeast Asian states throughout the 1950s. The Plan was drafted at a meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers held at Colombo from 9 to 14 January 1950, the first such meeting to include the newly independent Asian states of India, Pakistan and Ceylon.⁵⁹ Spender remarked on 3 January prior to attending the Conference that “Commonwealth relations strikingly manifest the movement of the world's centre towards the East. The location of the Conference at Colombo reflects the importance attached to this area”.⁶⁰ The Plan

58 Quoted in 'Australia's Role in S.E. Asia', *The Age*, 3 January 1950, in NAA A1838/381/3/1/1, Part 1.

59 Daniel Oakman, *Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 33.

60 Quoted in 'Australia's Role in S.E. Asia', *The Age*, 3 January 1950, in NAA A1838/381/3/1/1, Part 1.

was an umbrella scheme to assess development needs identified by the recipients and to provide technical assistance, education and training. Aid funding and delivery were then arranged bilaterally between the donors (Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and recipients.⁶¹

Spender was instrumental in providing the political impetus for formulating and implementing the Plan, which was launched in July 1951,⁶² although its intellectual contours lay in the final years of the previous ALP Government.⁶³ Australia's motives for taking a leading role in the Plan involved both normative commitments and longer-range strategic interests. Raising living standards in South and Southeast Asia was viewed as an obligation by the Australian Government,⁶⁴ with Canberra's political objectives for the Plan defined as attaining 'Commonwealth solidarity and Asian-Western friendship'.⁶⁵ Indian Finance Minister, Chintaman Deshmukh, in commenting on Australia's contribution to the Colombo Plan in 1952, said "the significance of such friendly assistance far transcends its material value".⁶⁶ Socio-economic development in the region would in turn lessen the attractiveness of socialist ideology and protect against communist subversion.⁶⁷ By demonstrating Australia's commitment to Southeast Asia in this way, Spender also sought to attract greater US involvement. This came to fruition when Washington's aid program in Southeast Asia was associated with the Colombo Plan in late 1950 and the US formally entered the Plan as a donor country in 1951.⁶⁸

61 David Lowe and Daniel Oakman, 'Introduction', in *Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949–1957*, ed. David Lowe and Daniel Oakman (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004), xxv; BR Tomlinson, "'The Weapons of the Weakened': British Power, Sterling Balances, and the Origins of the Colombo Plan", in *The Transformation of the International Order of Asia: Decolonization, the Cold War, and the Colombo Plan*, ed. Shigeru Akita, Gerold Krozewski and Shoichi Watanabe (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 34–35.

62 See David Lowe, 'Percy Spender and the Colombo Plan', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 40, no. 2 (1994): 162–76; and Lowe, 'Canberra's Colombo Plan: Public Images of Australia's Relations with Post-Colonial South and Southeast Asia in the 1950s', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 25, no. 2 (2002): 185–88.

63 See Lowe and Oakman, 'Introduction', xxvii–iii.

64 House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 23, Wednesday, 4 June 1952, 20th Parliament, 1st Session, 4th Period, 1370.

65 'Political Objectives of the Colombo Plan', 19 March 1952, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 1.

66 Quoted in House of Representatives, *Official Hansard*, No. 23, Wednesday, 4 June 1952, 20th Parliament, 1st Session, 4th Period, 1371.

67 Oakman, *Facing Asia*, 36–42.

68 Lowe, 'Percy Spender and the Colombo Plan'.

Australia's responsibilities for Commonwealth security in Southeast Asia, which is the main focus of the chapter, were discharged primarily under the umbrella of the ANZAM Agreement. ANZAM denoted the Commonwealth zone of defence in Asia, in which Australia carried planning responsibility from 1950.⁶⁹ ANZAM covered a wider sweep of geography than is suggested by its title. It was defined as:

an area of the South West Pacific and Indian Oceans including Malaya, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, New Guinea and Australia and New Zealand. It does not include Burma, Siam, Indo-China, the Philippines or countries north of these.⁷⁰

The Malayan area thus included the Indian Ocean from the East Pakistan–Burma border to the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia and all of insular Southeast Asia, and the surrounding waters of the South China Sea, including the Gulf of Thailand except for the Philippine Islands. The Agreement gave British recognition to the areas of responsibility claimed and delineated earlier by Australia in the 1944 Australia–New Zealand Agreement (the ANZAC Pact).

In March 1951, the ANZAM area of responsibility was recognised by the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), Admiral Radford, on behalf of the US, although with the proviso that Washington would not necessarily treat this as a separate region in a war situation, but as a sub-area of CINCPAC in which the ANZAM command would be subject to US direction.⁷¹ The 1951 Radford–Collins Agreement was revised in 1957 and remains in effect today. Boundaries between ANZAM and US spheres of responsibility were designated, and command and control coordinated.⁷² That the Agreement was entered into by Australia under Rear Admiral Collins, rather than a Royal Navy representative, shows that Australia's Commonwealth defence responsibilities for Southeast Asia and the Pacific were considered by Britain to be primary. According to

69 Cooper, 'At the Crossroads', 700–01; 'The Future of ANZAM', Memorandum by the UK Chiefs of Staff, 22 December 1952, in NAA A5954/1424/3; 'Pacific Defence Arrangements: Memorandum by Ministers for External Affairs and Defence', Cabinet Submission, NAA A1838/TS687/1, Part 3.

70 'The ANZAM Region', UK Commonwealth Relations Office, 29 November 1951, in NAA A1838/TS687/1, Part 1; also 'The Future of ANZAM', Memorandum by the UK Chiefs of Staff Committee, 22 December 1952, in NAA A5954/1424/3.

71 'Recognition of the States of the ANZAM Region as a Possible Theatre of War', Annex 4 to Defence Committee Minute no. 249/1952, NAA A5954/1421/4.

72 'Boundaries of the ANZAM Region', Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Radford–Collins Conference, 14 June 1951, NAA A816/14/301/437; 'ANZAM Planning for the Defence of Malaya and South East Asia', March 1955, NAA A5954/1459/1.

FA Mediansky, the Radford-Collins Agreement is seen by Washington 'as constituting an Australian obligation' under the Australia–New Zealand–United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty.⁷³

Australia's 'special role' in Southeast Asia through ANZAM was reiterated throughout the first half of the 1950s, along with the recurring theme of its Commonwealth responsibilities. In March 1953, the Menzies Government stated quite explicitly that the purpose of the ANZAM arrangement was to recognise Australia's 'special role'.⁷⁴ The British Commonwealth connection and ANZAM responsibilities in Southeast Asia remained of high importance to Australia independently of its Cold War security interests and relationship with the US. This can be seen in that Washington always remained unconvinced of the strategic value of ANZAM because any overt aggression from communist China would need to be halted much further north. If the Malayan Peninsula were being threatened by a Chinese land invasion, this would mean an unlikely last-ditch stand by Commonwealth forces at the Songkhla Position on the thin Kra Isthmus in southern Thailand, effectively signifying the collapse of the 'free world' position in mainland East Asia.⁷⁵ The report from the June 1956 ANZAM Staff Meeting in Singapore explicitly stated that there 'is little chance of ANZAM alone being able to fulfil its strategic function in war, because the United States does not agree with the present ANZAM concept'.⁷⁶

Also, by the mid-1950s, Cold War tensions in Southeast Asia had become focused on internal communist subversion. Lacking naval capacity, defence planners did not consider an external invasion of the Malayan area by communist forces realistic. In a Cold War strategic sense, ANZAM's traditional defence planning focus was largely redundant compared with the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) (1954–77), which dealt

73 FA Mediansky, 'The Defence of Australia and the American Alliance', *Australian Outlook* 41, no. 3 (1987): 157.

74 'Australia's Special Role in the ANZAM Region', Memorandum of Australian Government's Observations of United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff Memorandum C.O.S. (52) 685, Attachment to 'Future of ANZAM', Memo from PA McBride (Defence Minister) to Menzies, 18 March 1953, NAA A1209/1957/5670.

75 See 'Defence of Malaya, Summary View of Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (Admiral Radford) during Discussion with Australian Prime Minister (Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies) on March 18th, 1955', 18 March 1955, NAA A5954/1563/1; 'Annex A: Relationship between ANZAM and SEATO', in 'Report on the ANZAM Staff Meeting, Singapore, June 1956', NAA A816/53/11/301/1051; and 'ANZAM', 23 May 1957, NAA A1209/1957/5682.

76 'Annex A: Relationship between ANZAM and SEATO' in 'Report on the ANZAM Staff Meeting, Singapore, June 1956', NAA A816/53/11/301/1051.

with both overt aggression and subversion, covered all the countries directly concerned and, most importantly, also included the US.⁷⁷ Washington considered ANZAM ‘misdirected and ill-intentioned’, with a practical lack of capability to carry out its plans, and consequently with an implicit and unwelcome reliance on US assistance in ‘forces and materiel’.⁷⁸

David Lee notes that Washington was interested in defence planning in this area only under the umbrella of SEATO and, more generally, ANZUS.⁷⁹ The Eisenhower administration’s (1953–61) policy was that, in the event of war in East Asia, holding operations would be conducted in such peripheral areas as Malaya, while ‘a massive counter stroke’ was taken directly against the Chinese mainland—in all likelihood nuclear, and therefore only subject to planning in a very general sense.⁸⁰ Lee argues that this devaluing of the ANZAM concept was the origin of the Australia’s ‘turn’ to the US.⁸¹ My point here is to emphasise that rather than contributing meaningfully to US Cold War strategy, Australia’s security responsibilities to the Commonwealth through ANZAM served to foster a deep Australian involvement in the British decolonisation process across the Malayan Peninsula and archipelago.⁸²

In the context of decolonisation in Asia, scholars have made the implausible argument that in the mid-1950s Australia was faced with a sharp choice ‘between joining an emerging pan-Asian regional solidarity that gained expression at Bandung in 1955, and fitting into the rigid, hub-and-spokes security architecture centred on the United States and containing communism’.⁸³ Yet, attendance at the April 1955 Bandung Conference, which instigated the non-aligned movement, was not the Australian Government’s choice to make, despite criticisms at the time by the former secretary of the External Affairs Department, John Burton (1947–50).⁸⁴ The idea for a conference of Afro-Asian nations was

77 Ibid.

78 Department of Defence, *ANZIM to ANZUK*.

79 Lee, *Search for Security*, 132.

80 Department of Defence, *ANZIM to ANZUK*.

81 Lee, *Search for Security*, 133–34.

82 For a detailed account of Australia’s diplomatic and security role in the decolonisation of Malaysia and Singapore, see Andrea Benvenuti, *Cold War and Decolonisation: Australia’s Policy towards Britain’s End of Empire in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017).

83 Martin Griffiths and Michael Wesley, ‘Taking Asia Seriously’, *Australian Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 1 (2010): 15; see also Alison Broinowski, *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2003).

84 Australian Embassy Djakarta to Department of External Affairs (DEA) Canberra, 15 April 1955, NAA A1838/3002/1, Part 4.

announced in December 1954 by Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. Of these, only Indonesia resolutely opposed inviting Australia, ostensibly because of Canberra's support for the continuing colonial status of West Irian and its position in East New Guinea.⁸⁵

Had Australia pushed for an invitation, the archival records indicate this would have been supported diplomatically by India, although it is doubtful whether this would have overcome a veto by Jakarta.⁸⁶ While not explicitly anti-colonial or anti-'white', the common denominator binding the 30 participants from Asia, the Middle East and North Africa was deemed by Canberra to be

a common feeling, shared in varying degree, of being dispossessed, of having a smaller share of the world's wealth and privileges than they were entitled to, on a basis of population, need, or merit.⁸⁷

The pros and cons of pressing for inclusion at this and any similar future meetings were debated within the Australian Government.⁸⁸ But a country with Australia's history and institutions was not a natural fit for a meeting based on this rationale, despite its Commonwealth connections and close relationships with a number of participating non-communist regional states.⁸⁹ There was also very little 'pan-Asian solidarity' at Bandung as the primary sources show, rather a number of mutually suspicious camps: Indonesia and the 'non-aligned' countries; the People's Republic of China (PRC) and communist states; and the non-communist states of Asia,

85 'Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, 1955: Volume II – Agenda Papers', December 1954–January 1955, NAA A1838/3002/1, Part 2; 'The Bogor Meeting', JCG Kevin (Australian Ambassador Djakarta) to Sir Richard Casey (Minister for External Affairs), 6 January 1955, NAA A1838/3002/1, Part 2; 'A Report on the Asian-African Conference at Bandung', Professor GP Fitzgerald, Australian National University, 20 June 1955, NAA A1838/3002/1, Part 7.

86 'Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, 1955: Volume II – Agenda Papers', December 1954–January 1955, NAA A1838/3002/1, Part 2; *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 April 1955, in NAA A1838/3002/1/1, Part 2; Christopher Waters, 'After Decolonization: Australia and the Emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement in Asia, 1954–55', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12, no. 2 (2001): 165–66; David Walker, 'Nervous Outsiders: Australia and the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung', *Australian Historical Studies* 36, no. 125 (2005): 44–45.

87 'Asian-African Conference Bandung 18th–24th April, 1955', Cabinet Submission: Casey's Report on Conference, 30 April 1955, NAA A1838/3002/1, Part 7.

88 *Ibid.*

89 Menzies is quoted as saying that 'Australia has never contemplated being present ourselves in view of the origins and general nature of the conference'; in Australian High Commission London to DEA Canberra, 5 February 1955, NAA A5954/1454/5.

some Western-aligned, some not.⁹⁰ As Finnane points out, ‘some of those countries were at war with each other within a few years of agreeing at Bandung to the principle of “coexisting peacefully”’.⁹¹

Commonwealth responsibility: Emergency and confrontation

In the 1950s, it was responsibility to the British Commonwealth that provided the normative framework for Australia’s involvement with Asian decolonisation and nation-building, rather than anti-colonial, rights-based notions of self-determination. Reflecting this, Casey said in 1952 that ‘[w]e are on our own feet, an autonomous British nation, with internal responsibilities to our own people, and with external responsibilities to the British Commonwealth and to the democratic world’.⁹² Canberra’s military deployments to the Malayan Emergency and to Borneo in the *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) between Indonesia and Malaysia were also taken somewhat reluctantly and belatedly,⁹³ suggesting duty or obligation to Britain and the Commonwealth were important motivating factors, rather than direct threats to Australia’s Cold War security interests.

The decision in 1955 by Australia and New Zealand to commit ground forces alongside Britain against the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), and its Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA) guerrillas during the Emergency (1948–60), was undertaken under ANZAM auspices and as part of the SEATO area.⁹⁴ Australian air assets had been involved since 1950.⁹⁵ During the Pacific War, members of Malaya’s large Chinese minority were most effective in resistance to the Japanese occupation and

90 Australian Embassy Djakarta to DEA Canberra, 23 April 1955, NAA A1838/3002/1, Part 5.

91 Antonia Finnane, ‘Bandung as History’, in *Bandung 1955: Little Histories*, ed. Antonia Finnane and Derek McDougall (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2010), 1.

92 ‘Text of Report to the Australian Parliament, on International Affairs, by the Rt. Hon. R.G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs’, 4 June 1952, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 1.

93 See McDougall, ‘The Malayan Emergency and Confrontation’, 130–39; Benvenuti, *Cold War and Decolonisation*, 26.

94 ‘Statement by the Prime Minister’, DEA Canberra to Washington, London, Singapore, Bangkok, Manila, Karachi, New Delhi and Djakarta, 1 April 1955, NAA A5954/1459/1.

95 For detailed accounts of Australia’s involvement in the Malayan Emergency and Confrontation, see Peter Edwards, with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia’s Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992); and Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, *Emergency and Confrontation: Australian Military Operations in Malaya and Borneo 1950–1966* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

had remained loyal to Britain. In January 1946, the British proposed a Malayan Union to create a unitary state with citizenship and equal rights for Malays and non-Malays alike. All persons born in the proposed Union or in Singapore would be entitled to citizenship, in addition to those who had resided there for a period of 15 years before 1942. Other residents or immigrants could apply for citizenship after five years. The Union proposal aroused political consciousness among Malays and was opposed by large sections of ethnic Malay society. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)—which was to dominate politics and government for many decades—was formed in March 1946 under Dato Onn bin Jafaar as a reaction to this. Plans for a Malayan Union were subsequently dropped by London in favour of a Federation of Malaya, which was promulgated on 1 February 1948 as the final constitutional step before full independence from the UK. This was generally considered a victory for conservative Malay opinion. The Malay Sultans retained sovereignty, Malays were afforded special privileges, and eligibility for citizenship by non-Malays was tightened considerably. The Chinese community was left with a sense of betrayal over these developments and many joined the MCP.⁹⁶

In the immediate postwar years, the MCP adopted a peaceful strategy of political agitation. The shift to an armed struggle was prompted by a reduction in rubber prices on world commodity markets and a concomitant decrease in the wages of Chinese workers in Malaya. A series of strikes resulted in employers seeking harsher government measures against strikers and communist political agitators. The colonial government responded with a strengthening of existing laws introduced in 1940 that declared strikes illegal and allowed for union leaders to be arrested or deported. In conjunction with these developments, Chin Peng took leadership of the MCP and decided that the time was right to seize power by force of arms. European plantation and estate managers were targeted for assassination in an attempt to disrupt the tin and rubber industries. After the murder of five Europeans on 16 June 1947, a state of emergency was declared by the government and the MCP was made illegal.⁹⁷ Between 1948 and 1955, some 83,000 communist sympathisers were detained (most were later released) and 28,000 were deported to

96 See Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 264–69; J Kennedy, *A History of Malaya*, 2nd edn (London: MacMillan, 1970), 265–269; Benvenuti, *Cold War and Decolonisation*, 30–32.

97 Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 269–74; Kennedy, *A History of Malaya*, 271–72.

China or to their country of origin.⁹⁸ The MCP retained the capacity to strike at mining installations and plantations in the countryside, but the larger popular uprising envisaged by Peng did not eventuate.⁹⁹

It was estimated by the British that 90 per cent of MNLA forces were ethnic Chinese.¹⁰⁰ Thus, in addition to direct military countermeasures, Commonwealth security forces moved Chinese squatter communities into 'new villages' to sever the ties between the guerrillas and their social and material bases of support known as the Min Yuen ('masses movement'). 'White areas' free of communist forces were then rewarded with the relaxing of food rationing and lifting of curfews. This forced the communist 'bandits', as they were described by the British security forces, to make raids on Indian labour settlements and on Malay communities, which were generally hostile to them and more heavily policed. The movement lost momentum with a series of amnesties and as Malaya moved closer to full independence, and a new political party, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) (1949), formed an alliance with UMNO in 1952.¹⁰¹ By the time of Malayan independence in 1957, the insurgency had been reduced to a low level of intensity. The Malayan Emergency was finally declared over in 1960, although communist guerrillas continued to operate on a small scale until the 1980s.

On 4 January 1955, Casey wrote to Menzies that 'it was indisputable that Australia should make a direct contribution to the defence of Malaya', because it was an area of primary Commonwealth responsibility. In Menzies' official announcement of Australia's contribution, the prime minister made the point that Commonwealth forces in Malaya would not be 'massive' but would prevent communist interference with Malaya's 'present orderly progress towards democratic self-government, a progress which enjoys the deeply sympathetic interest of Australia'.¹⁰²

98 'Federation of Malaya: Detention, Deportation and Rehabilitation Policy', High Commission for the Federation of Malaya to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 June 1955, The National Archives (TNA) UK, Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office Records (DO) 35/6270.

99 Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 269–74.

100 'Federation of Malaya: Detention, Deportation and Rehabilitation Policy', High Commission for the Federation of Malaya to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 June 1955, TNA DO 35/6270.

101 Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 269–74; Kennedy, *A History of Malaya*, 272–77; Benvenuti, *Cold War and Decolonisation*, 34–35.

102 'Statement by the Prime Minister', DEA Canberra to Washington, London, Singapore, Bangkok, Manila, Karachi, New Delhi and Jakarta, 1 April 1955, NAA A5954/1459/1.

Evatt, then ALP Opposition leader, criticised the government's military commitment to Malaya 'as an affront to local nationalist opinion and therefore not in line with Australia's "good neighbour policy" towards South East Asian countries'.¹⁰³ The deployment of the CSR was met with some protest by the small Labour Party of Malaya, and more importantly by some UMNO branches, particularly in Singapore, on the grounds that it was unnecessary because there was an amnesty in place for members of the communist insurgency, and that the presence of foreign forces would retard plans for *Merdeka* (independence).¹⁰⁴ However, Malay leaders and local newspaper opinion generally welcomed Australia's military involvement. Leader of UMNO and the post-independence Prime Minister of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, defended the Commonwealth assistance publicly on a number of occasions, most notably in a 45-minute speech in Singapore in October 1955.¹⁰⁵ The Australian Government assessed that there was no serious opposition to its troop deployment from local sources or other Asian countries. Alan Watt, at that time Australia's Commissioner to Singapore, argued that there was 'a great fund of goodwill towards Australia' because of the 'friendly reception' and good treatment of hundreds of Malays and Chinese in the Australian education system as part of the Colombo Plan. The point was also made in relation to the White Australia policy that the ethnic Malay sections of the British Territories Southeast Asia could readily understand Australia's restrictive immigration policy given their attitude toward the region's Indian and Chinese minorities.¹⁰⁶ Australia's Asian partners in SEATO—Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand—also provided 'a noteworthy degree of support'.¹⁰⁷

103 See 'Australian and New Zealand Position in Malaya', Note for the Colonial Secretary's Visit to Malaya, Commonwealth Relations Office, 19 July 1955, TNA DO 35/6270.

104 See 'Australian Troops for Malaya: Malayan Press Reaction', Australian Commission Singapore to DEA Canberra, 5 October 1955, NAA A5954/1402/2; Hamilton (Office of the Australian Commissioner for Malaya, Singapore) to DEA Canberra, 4 October 1955, 8 October 1955, NAA A5954/1402/2; Australian Commission Singapore to DEA Canberra, 14 November 1955, NAA A5954/1402/2; 'Australian Troops—Local Criticism', HM Loveday (Assistant Commissioner Kuala Lumpur) to DEA Canberra, 16 November 1955, NAA A5954/1402/2; and 'Malaya and Australian Forces', DEA Canberra to All Posts, 22 November 1955, NAA A5954/1402/2.

105 'Australian Troops for Malaya: Malayan Press Reaction', Australian Commission Singapore to DEA Canberra, 5 October 1955, NAA A5954/1402/2; and 'Speech by Tunku Abdul Rahman at U.M.N.O.', Australian Commissioner's Office Kuala Lumpur to DEA Canberra, 12 January 1956, NAA A5954/1402/3.

106 'Record of a Discussion at "Mallaig" 17 January 1955', Attachment to a Personal Letter from Watt to Tange, 26 March 1955, NAA A1838/3022/10/4, Part 1.

107 'Australian Forces for Malaya', DEA Savingram to all Posts, 13 April 1955, NAA A5954/1456/9.

The continued deployment of the CSR in the independent Federation of Malaya in 1957 required that Australia be formally associated through an exchange of letters accompanying the Anglo–Malayan Defence Agreement (AMDA). This was renewed in 1963 as the Anglo–Malaysian Defence Agreement to cover the expanded territory of the new Federation of Malaysia with the incorporation of Singapore, and the Borneo territories of Sarawak and Sabah in the face of Indonesian and Filipino opposition.¹⁰⁸ According to defence planners, Canberra’s ‘association’ with AMDA did not constitute a formal Treaty obligation to Kuala Lumpur, rather it registered Australia’s ‘direct concern in the security of Malaysia’.¹⁰⁹ Chin Kin Wah makes the point that AMDA and the later Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) were ‘not so overtly identified with the system of Cold War alliances that centred on the American security role’. Rather, they ‘are more readily identified with the process of colonial disengagement’.¹¹⁰ These defence agreements recognised the direct and shared security responsibilities of the British Commonwealth countries, primarily the UK, Australia and New Zealand, with postcolonial Malaysia.¹¹¹ This is not to suggest that Australia viewed the problems of Malaysian decolonisation in isolation from the regional Cold War context; indeed, ‘public justification for the dispatch of Australian ground forces ... tended to emphasize the regional threat from communism’.¹¹²

Australia’s intensifying involvement in the security of the decolonising Southeast Asian states in the late 1950s reflected the recognition, at least in elite policy circles, that while Australia had considered itself geographically as part of Asia during and since the war, these ties were becoming deeper. Australia still considered itself a ‘Western’ country, but ‘aware that in the long run’ its ‘future is more intimately bound up with Asia than with Western Europe’.¹¹³ In a June 1958 *Sydney Morning*

108 Chinese-majority Singapore subsequently seceded from the Malaysian Federation in 1965.

109 ‘Report by the Joint Planning Committee at Meetings Concluding on 19 September 1963’, 20 September 1963, NAA A5799/50/1963.

110 Chin Kin Wah, ‘The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Twenty Years After’, *The Pacific Review* 4, no. 3 (1991): 194.

111 ‘Report by the Joint Planning Committee at Meetings Concluding on 19 September, 1963’, 20 September 1963, NAA A5799/50/1963.

112 Chin Kin Wah, ‘The Five Power Defence Arrangements and AMDA’, *Occasional Paper No. 23*, July (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1974), 11–12; see also Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore: The Transformation of a Security System 1957–1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13.

113 ‘Conference on Co-operation in Information Activities in South East Asia’, 13 May 1958, NAA A1838/2020/9/2.

Herald article, the Coalition Minister for External Affairs Richard Casey (1951–60) wrote that geographically ‘Australia is an Asian country’. This geographical position gave rise to political ramifications in a decolonising region:

we have to develop policies which take full account of our desire to maintain friendly relations with our Asian neighbours. We can no longer take the passive attitude towards them that we took when their affairs were guided by our European allies.¹¹⁴

A large portion of this task was undertaken under Commonwealth auspices, with the mutual understanding that Britain expected Australia and New Zealand ‘to accept an increasing role and responsibility in South East Asia’.¹¹⁵

This Commonwealth responsibility was again evident in Australia’s direct security role in opposing Indonesia’s *Konfrontasi* of the formation of Malaysia. Between 1963 and 1966, Indonesia sought to destabilise the new, expanded Malaysian Federation, with a view to breaking it up and absorbing the Borneo territories of Sarawak and Sabah. Infiltration and cross-border raids by ‘volunteers’ began in early 1963. Indonesian regular forces joined them in 1964. This was regarded by Canberra as a disturbing and ‘important situation’ developing in Australia’s ‘area of primary strategic interest’.¹¹⁶ In January 1965, the first Australian combat forces were introduced in the form of an infantry battalion and SAS squadron, again as part of the CSR, and authorised to conduct cross-border, hot-pursuit operations into Indonesian territory.¹¹⁷

On 25 September 1963, Menzies had announced to Parliament Australia’s in-principle commitment to support the new Malaysia’s ‘territorial integrity and political independence’ from ‘armed invasion or subversive activity’. This was justified according to the Commonwealth values of ‘mutual confidence and a golden rule of mutual obligation’.¹¹⁸ Menzies stated:

114 RG Casey, ‘Australia’s Place in the World’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June 1958, in NAA A1838/3004/1, Part 2.

115 ‘United Kingdom “Study of Future Policy”, Brook Committee: Draft Observations by Department of External Affairs’, 30 June 1960, NAA A1838/TS691/3, Part 6.

116 ‘Report by the Joint Planning Committee at Meetings Concluding on 19 September 1963’, 20 September 1963, NAA A5799/50/1963.

117 DEA Canberra to Australian Embassy Washington, 29 January 1965, NAA A1838/TS696/6/4/1, Part 5.

118 ‘Speech by Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies, K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P. on Malaysia Defence’, 25 September 1963, NAA A1209/1963/6630.

Malaysia the new nation is here. The processes of its creation have been democratic ... We have publicly and unambiguously said that we support Malaysia which is, never let it be forgotten, a Commonwealth country, just as our own is.¹¹⁹

Because the Federation Government could not defend the larger area of the offshore Borneo territories on its own, there was anticipated to be little Malayan public feeling against the deepening of Commonwealth military involvement in 1963.¹²⁰ Despite Menzies' statement above, reluctance to become involved in Borneo was much more evident on the part of Australian decision-makers than any resistance to the idea in Kuala Lumpur.¹²¹ Canberra recognised that with the waning of UK interests in the area, deeper involvement by Australia might antagonise Jakarta and could possibly lead to similar infiltration and conflict in New Guinea.¹²²

David Goldsworthy argues that for Australian policymakers, 'there was the felt obligation to help Britain defend its post-colonial construct Malaysia against Indonesia's Confrontation',¹²³ where British policy was in tension with the US Cold War strategy in the region of not 'unduly antagonising Sukarno and pushing him further into the hands of the Indonesia Communist Party'.¹²⁴ In this case, Australia's Commonwealth responsibilities overrode its relationship with Indonesia and Washington's Cold War priorities.¹²⁵ On 18 January 1965, Acting Prime Minister John McEwen 'expressed disappointment' that Indonesia was 'persisting in this policy of military "confrontation"'. But he said that the Australian

119 Ibid.

120 T Critchley (Australian High Commissioner Kuala Lumpur) to DEA Canberra, 23 January 1963, NAA A1838/3027/9/5.

121 Peter Edwards, 'Singapore and Malaysia, 1965', in *Australia and the End of Empires: The Impact of Decolonisation in Australia's Near North, 1945–65*, ed. David Lowe (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1996), 188–89.

122 'Australia's Strategic Position—Report by the Defence Committee', 4 February 1963, in *A History of Australian Strategic Policy since 1945*, ed. Stephan Frühling (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), 303–34.

123 David Goldsworthy, 'Australian External Policy and the End of Britain's Empire', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 1 (2005): 28.

124 Peter Edwards, *Learning from History: Some Strategic Lessons from the 'Forward Defence' Era* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2015), 15.

125 British sources also suggest that External Affairs Minister Garfield Barwick (1961–64) returned from the SEATO Council meeting held in Manila in April 1964 with US assurances that the ANZUS Treaty would cover any Australian force deployment to Borneo; see 'Australia and South and South-East Asia in Recent Years', UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Research Department Memorandum, 30 March 1970, TNA FCO 51/160.

Government 'is quite clear as to its obligations to Malaysia, a free and independent nation and a fellow member of the Commonwealth, and ... firm in respect of its responsibilities'.¹²⁶

The mildness, or lack, of reaction in Jakarta to Australia's involvement was somewhat perplexing to officials at the time. Australia's Ambassador to Indonesia, KCO Shann, wrote to Menzies on 12 May 1965 that the Indonesian Government continued to treat Australia with 'calmness and even friendliness'.¹²⁷ While noting that the Sukarno regime by 1965 was a 'madhouse', Shann surmised that it must:

be useful for Indonesians to be able to show they can get on with some of their neighbours, particularly if one of them is white and anti-Communist. It is still just possible that they continue to think of us as somehow different from Britain and Europe, that we have an equalitarian democratic identity of our own, and that we want to come to terms with the region in which we live. Or expressed in other words, the Indonesians have not yet made up their minds whether it is our support for their independence struggle or our present opposition to their international policies which is the aberration.¹²⁸

Shann advised that Canberra should continue Australia's Colombo Plan aid in Indonesia and practical assistance in New Guinea.¹²⁹

Konfrontasi was ended in August 1966 by the new Suharto regime. External Affairs Minister Paul Hasluck (1964–69) wrote that the 'friendliness and respect' shown toward Australia by the new Indonesian Government seemed 'genuine'. There were no matters of further dispute and, indeed, Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik expressed that there was 'a large measure of common interest'.¹³⁰ Hasluck was conscious that the Australian Government should move quickly to 'build on the improved opportunities we have with Indonesia'.¹³¹ It was noted by a range of archival sources after Confrontation was formally ended that

126 'South East Asia: Statement by the Acting Prime Minister', 18 January 1965, NAA A1838/TS696/6/4/1, Part 5.

127 KCO Shann (Ambassador Djakarta) to Menzies (Acting Minister for External Affairs), 12 May 1965, NAA A4231/1965/South East Asia/South Asia/East Asia.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 DEA to Washington, London, Wellington, repeated UN New York, Ottawa, 11 August 1966, NAA A1838/3004/13/17, Part 5.

131 Hasluck to Plimsoll, 14 December 1966, NAA A1838/541/4/4, Part 1.

Australian–Indonesian bilateral relations continued unabated during the crisis. Lines of communication had been kept open, Indonesian students continued to attend Australian universities, development aid programs continued to be provided, and negotiations over the border demarcation of West Irian were successfully completed.¹³² This demonstrates the Menzies Government’s deep and nuanced engagement with its region up until the mid-1960s and the complexities of managing—relatively successfully it should be emphasised—the competing postcolonial claims and relationships in the Malayan archipelago.¹³³

Conclusion

An analysis of the motive of Commonwealth responsibility in Australian postwar approaches to decolonisation in Southeast Asia reveals that the foreign policy traditions typically used as interpretative frames for this period are flawed. The Chifley ALP Government sought to protect Australia’s security interests in Southeast Asia through claiming a British Commonwealth responsibility for the region. On the other hand, for the Menzies Coalition Government, British Commonwealth responsibilities structured its conception of regional interests, which were sometimes in tension with US Cold War strategic priorities. For both governments, the norm of Commonwealth responsibility was an important motivating factor.

From the immediate postwar period until the mid-1960s, Australia’s engagement with the decolonisation process in Southeast Asia was driven not only by Cold War security interests, but also by strong normative sentiments of Commonwealth responsibility. This is evident in the Colombo Plan, ANZAM defence planning arrangement and Australia’s participation in the CSR in Malaya and Borneo. The origins of the ANZAM Agreement, Australia’s close engagement with Southeast Asian

132 See ‘Australia and South-East Asia’, Address by the High Commissioner in India, Sir Arthur Tange, to the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Madras State, 9th October 1967, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 8; ‘Text of Prime Ministers Speech at President Soeharto’s Banquet on 13th June 1968’, Australian Embassy Djakarta to DEA Canberra, 13 June 1968, NAA A1838/3004/11/48, Part 2; ‘Australia and South and South-East Asia in Recent Years’, UK FCO Research Department Memorandum, 30 March 1970, TNA FCO 51/160.

133 See also Edwards, ‘Singapore and Malaysia, 1965’, 187; and Garry Woodard, ‘Best Practice in Australia’s Foreign Policy: “Konfrontasi” (1963–1966)’, *Australian Journal of Political Science* 33, no. 1 (1998): 85–99.

decolonisation during the Cold War, and the conditions for Australia's early forward defence deployments are located in the Chifley Government's view, derived from its wartime experience, of insular Southeast Asia as Australia's region and Commonwealth responsibility.

It was Evatt, associated with the internationalist tradition of the ALP, who asserted Australia's responsibilities for the region on behalf of the British Empire and Commonwealth in the immediate aftermath of the war. This was continued by the Menzies Coalition Government, which, along with its familiar Cold War rhetoric, consistently emphasised in the 1950s and 1960s Australia's Commonwealth responsibilities in Southeast Asia. This demonstrates that there is much more continuity between the foreign and defence policies of the two governments than is typically portrayed in the literature on Australia's foreign policy traditions. Under Menzies, Australia's commitment to ANZAM and Malaya in the face of US scepticism and military deployment to Borneo in tension with Washington's Cold War strategy, and at the risk of open conflict with Indonesia, are not consistent with instrumental calculations of strategic interest or subservience to US priorities.

The following chapter turns directly to the Cold War dynamics of the period and analyses Australia's relationships of solidarity with the non-communist states of East Asia and its central place in regional organisations of the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to Australia's involvement with decolonisation across the Malayan Peninsula and archipelago, Chapter 4 shows that rather than distancing Australia from Asia, the Cold War drew Australia deeply into the region. The circumstances of the Cold War provided for a mutual sense of solidarity with the non-communist states of East Asia, with which Australia mostly enjoyed close relationships.

4

The Cold War and non-communist solidarity in East Asia

Australia's self-conscious and sometimes awkward attempts to define itself into the 'Asia-Pacific' during the 1980s, and the reluctance of East Asian states to accept Canberra into core regional forums, is an important critical strand of the debate on Asian engagement.¹ Allan Patience argues in this vein that Australia's 'dependent' middle power status makes it an 'awkward partner' in East Asia. This dependence refers to Australia's historic reliance on its 'great and powerful friends'.² Because of this, Australian governments have been relegated to second-tier 'dialogue partners' or excluded from core East Asian organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEAN+3 (which includes the additional nations of China, Japan and South Korea). The only organisations in which Canberra is a member, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit, also involve a wide range of extra-regional states.

1 For example, Michael Wesley, 'The Politics of Exclusion: Australia, Turkey and Definitions of Regionalism', *The Pacific Review* 10, no. 4 (1997): 523–55; Richard Higgot and Kim Richard Nossal, 'The International Politics of Liminality: Relocating Australia in the Asia Pacific', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 2 (1997): 169–85; Richard Higgot and Kim Richard Nossal, 'Odd Man in, Odd Man Out: Australia's Liminal Position in Asia Revisited—A Reply to Ann Capling', *The Pacific Review* 21, no. 5 (2008): 623–34; and Mark Beeson and Hidetaka Yoshimatsu, 'Asia's Odd Men Out: Australia, Japan and the Politics of Regionalism', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7 (2007): 227–50.

2 See Allan Patience, *Australian Foreign Policy in Asia: Middle Power or Awkward Partner?* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

By contrast, during the Cold War, Australia's membership of a number of collective security agreements and political organisations established the country as integral to the politics and security of East Asia. These were the Commonwealth defence planning arrangement known as ANZAM (Australia, New Zealand and Malaya) (1950); the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) (1954); Australia's formal association with the Anglo–Malayan Defence Agreements (AMDA) (1957, 1963); the Asian and Pacific Council (1966); and the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) (Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and Britain) (1971). Australia was also deeply involved in the Korean War (1950–53), Malayan Emergency (1948–60), Indonesia's Confrontation of the formation of Malaysia (1963–66) and in South Vietnam (1962–73). Whether one agrees with these policies or not, it is clear that Australia was a core member of East Asian political and security arrangements during the Cold War, and, as will be shown, Asian leaders welcomed Canberra's presence. Rather than inhibiting Australia's engagement with East Asia, forward defence during the Cold War was the crucial factor enabling it.

The dynamics of decolonisation intertwined with the Cold War led to two main policy orientations in Asia for the Australian Government. As the previous chapter has shown, the first was to discharge Australia's responsibilities and further its interests in the Asia-Pacific through the residual material, institutional and political resources of the British Commonwealth. The second orientation was for Canberra to seek closer security ties with the United States (US), which were formalised in 1951 with the Australia–New Zealand–United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty. As is well known, the conclusion of the ANZUS Treaty allowed for a 'soft' peace settlement with Japan to be acceptable in Australia and New Zealand.³ Australia's increasingly closer association with Washington during the period of the Cold War leading up to Vietnam is well-covered in the literature.⁴ Less emphasised, however, is that the circumstances of the Cold War also provided the conditions for a mutual sense of solidarity with the non-communist states of East Asia, with which Australia mostly enjoyed close relationships. Solidarity is a normative concept that may be

3 Alan Watt, 'Australia's Reaction to Growing Japanese Influence in the Far East: An Uncertain Future', in *Selected Readings in Australian Foreign Policy*, 2nd edn, ed. David Pettit (Melbourne: Sorrett Publishing, 1975), 287.

4 See, for example, Gregory Pemberton, *All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987); and Peter Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing; and Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 2014).

defined as a sense of fellowship deriving from common responsibilities, interests and purposes. These relationships of solidarity were characterised by more caution and fragility than the Commonwealth bonds examined in the previous chapter, but they nonetheless transcended Australia's narrow security interests, being grounded also in non-communist identity and a nascent Asia-Pacific consciousness.

Counter to the thesis advanced here, critics might point to the series of bilateral 'strategic partnerships' announced in recent years with Japan (2007), South Korea (2009), India (2009, upgraded 2014), Indonesia (2012) and China (2013) as indicating deeper engagement with East Asia. These differ in title and form, and while the partnerships with Japan and South Korea imply more substance in defence intelligence and military cooperation than the India, Indonesia and China agreements, they all read as soft undertakings to consult, share information and cooperate on transnational security issues, humanitarian aid and disaster relief. None are listed in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Treaty Database,⁵ and none feature alliance-like provisions or binding obligations in their texts. With the short-lived exception of Indonesia (1995–99), Australia has not been a party to any security treaties in East Asia that do not derive from the period of decolonisation and Cold War. And, indeed, the often fraught and uneven relationship with Indonesia during the Sukarno period (1949–65), which improved markedly under the Suharto regime (1966–98), appears to have revived again after his fall and Indonesia's democratisation. This has been evident across Australian governments of both political persuasions and on a range of issues, including East Timorese independence, refugees and asylum seekers, live cattle exports, espionage and capital punishment.

This chapter argues that rather than serving to distance Australia from East Asia, the dynamics of the Cold War drew Australia into close relationships with a range of Asian states. It begins in 1950 with the Menzies Government assessment of the Cold War environment Australia now faced in East Asia and how this contrasted with the outlook of the previous Chifley Government. Within this environment, the chapter first examines the re-establishment of relations with Japan in the early 1950s with a focus on Canberra's sponsorship of Tokyo into the Colombo Plan as a donor country in 1954. The chapter then moves to the regional

5 See Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *The Australian Treaties Database*, 2018, available at: www.info.dfat.gov.au/TREATIES.

context in Southeast Asia after the Geneva Accords and French withdrawal from Indochina in 1954. It examines the formation of SEATO and the development during the 1950s of a non-communist identity and sense of solidarity with regional states. The final section focuses on the mid-to-late 1960s and argues that the strongest indication of this solidarity was Australia's inclusion as a founding member of the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC). The chapter concludes that the years 1966 to 1968 were the 'deepest' for Australia's engagement with Asia, with Canberra and a range of East Asian states describing their interrelationships in terms of a shared identity and regional consciousness.

Australia and the Cold War in East Asia

For the Menzies Coalition Government elected on 19 December 1949, it was the Cold War in East Asia that drove regional policy rather than the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Government's enduring fear of Japan. Canberra's response in the early 1950s to the 'challenge' of a 'rising and menacing tide of Communism in the East' drew Australia politically closer to East Asia.⁶ With Japan, Menzies Government policy was that an early peace settlement was desirable, and that it was in Australia's 'interest to develop and maintain relations with Japan such as normally exist between two countries at peace'.⁷

In a brief for the new Coalition Government in January 1950, the Department of External Affairs (DEA) made an assessment of the strategic situation in Asia. The point was first made that the situation had 'been confused since 1945' and was 'only now approaching clarification with the failure of the United Nations experiment ... and the entry of China into the Communist bloc'. The discernible features of Australia's strategic environment were: the transition from a multipolar to bipolar world in which China had joined the 'communist camp'; where the Soviet Union was 'determined upon the submission' of the US; reduced British influence in the area; and 'a looser Commonwealth with an internal redistribution of power'. Southeast Asia had moved from being a colonial preserve to 'a region of weak independent Asian states', characterised politically by

6 Percy Spender quoted in 'Australia's Role in S.E. Asia', *The Age*, 3 January 1950, in National Archives of Australia (NAA) A1838/381/3/1/1, Part 1.

7 'Statement by the Minister for External Affairs in the House of Representatives', 28 November 1950, NAA A1838/383/4/1A, Part 1.

a demanding and self-conscious nationalism. The brief concluded that Australia could 'no longer assure its security and prosperity solely within the framework of the British Commonwealth'.⁸ The Cold War in East Asia dramatically intensified when North Korean forces invaded the Republic of Korea (ROK) in June 1950, marking the beginning of the three-year Korean War.⁹

The archival record shows that *all* Australian postwar governments located the country *in* the Asia-Pacific region. It was not an innovation of the 1980s and 1990s Hawke–Keating period. After Spender was appointed Australia's Ambassador to Washington in April 1951, the new External Affairs Minister Richard Casey (1951–60) made his first overseas visits as Minister to Japan and Southeast Asia. His report of August 1951 on these visits noted that despite some resentment towards Australia's immigration policy, 'the various countries ... showed considerable appreciation of the fact that Australia was showing a positive interest in the area'.¹⁰ By June 1952, Australia had established diplomatic posts in all Southeast Asian states and remaining colonial dependencies.¹¹ Casey argued in Parliament that the 'facts of geography link the fortunes of Australia with those of the countries of South and South East Asia'. Australia may have been slow to understand this in the past, 'but we have realised it now'.¹² By September 1955, the bulk of Australia's diplomatic efforts were recognised as being located in Asia.¹³ In the early 1950s, it was repeatedly stated in foreign policy discourse that Australia's 'metropolitan territory forms geographically a part of Asia',¹⁴ with Casey declaring that the 'Australian people had a special responsibility for the countries of south and south-east Asia, and should know them intimately'.¹⁵

8 'Australian External Policy', Minute by Department of External Affairs (DEA), January 1950, NAA A1838/381/3/1/1, Part 1.

9 See Robert Jervis, 'The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24, no. 4 (1980): 563–92.

10 'Draft Report to Cabinet on Visit to South-East Asia by Minister for External Affairs', 24 August 1951, NAA A1838/3004/11/28, Part 1.

11 'Text of Report to the Australian Parliament, on International Affairs, by The Rt. Hon. R.G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs', 4 June 1952, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 1.

12 *Ibid.*

13 See 'Discussions between Australian Ministers and Mr. MacMillan', DEA Brief, September 1955, NAA A1838/3004/11/6.

14 For example, 'South-East Asia: General Review', 31 March 1952, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 1.

15 Quoted in 'Australia's New Role', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 April 1952, in NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 1.

The Australian Government recognised that Washington carried a heavy Cold War obligation in the defence of the Pacific, traversing the 'great arc of islands from the Aleutians in the north, through Japan and the Ryukus, to the Philippines in the south'. But there, sole US responsibility ended, and it was understood 'that Australia must shoulder the major share of the burden entailed in maintaining the southern sector of the democratic front in the Pacific'.¹⁶ This was initially discharged under the Commonwealth auspices of the ANZAM defence area, as examined in the previous chapter.

In a global war with the communist bloc, Australia was to assume direct responsibility for the Malayan area covered by ANZAM, as it was understood the main British war effort would be employed in Europe and the Middle East. The Menzies Government has been criticised for its undertaking in the early 1950s to commit Australian forces to the Middle East in support of British and American, rather than Australian, interests and objectives.¹⁷ The archival record indicates, however, that possible Australian military deployments to the Middle East were always contingent on the prospects for the Malayan area, suggesting this was at least an equal if not higher priority for Canberra. Indeed, Commonwealth defence 'planning was only authorised on the dual basis that Australia's major effort might be made either in the Middle East or in the ANZAM area', which was clearly recognised by London.¹⁸

In the event of war, it was believed that Beijing would make an attempt to control at least mainland Southeast Asia, thereby posing a serious risk to the ANZAM area and Australia's northern approaches.¹⁹ Menzies wrote to the United Kingdom (UK) Government in June 1951 that Australia's defence planning provided concurrently for deployments of a first contingent to either the Middle East or Malaya depending on the situation. The Australian viewpoint was to take a 'dual approach' because the 'military position in Indo-China and Malaya ... would exercise a powerful influence on Australian public opinion regarding the strengths

16 'Australia's Responsibility in Pacific Defence', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial, 4 February 1950, in NAA A1838/381/3/3/1.

17 See David Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle': Australia's Cold War, 1948-1954* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999), for a sustained treatment of this theme.

18 'The ANZAM Region', Paper by UK Commonwealth Relations Office, 29 November 1951, in NAA A1838/TS687/1, Part 1.

19 'Meeting of Commonwealth Defence Ministers, London, 21st to 26th June, 1951, Defence Policy and Global Strategy-South East Asia', Cabinet Submission (Philip McBride, Defence Minister), 31 July 1951, NAA A5954/2317/3.

of forces that could be dispatched to the Middle East'.²⁰ Canberra and Wellington announced publicly in 1955 that 'in the event of war', they would 'commit their forces to the defence of South East Asia (instead of the Middle East as in previous wars)'.²¹ The archival record therefore casts doubt on the idea that in the early 1950s, Australia's Cold War defence policy committed forces to the Middle East at the expense of Southeast Asia. Rather, Cold War imperatives in Australia's region meant that Canberra had to develop close political relationships with a range of East Asian states. Of these, Japan was the most important.

Australia and Japan

The Treaty of Peace with Japan was signed at San Francisco on 8 September 1951 and entered into force in April 1952. By this time the Australian Government had developed a more clearly articulated Cold War policy framework. Australia's political objectives in East Asia were defined as ensuring 'that China does not become inseparably linked' with the Soviet Union, and that in the longer run 'it is detached from the Soviet orbit'; that 'Japan remains peaceful and aligned with the Western world', progressively becoming a 'reliable member of the Western group'; and 'that the countries of South East Asia retain their independence', in time developing into 'fully independent states aligned with the Western world'.²²

20 Quoted in *ibid.* Lowe's analysis suggests that a tacit understanding existed with British defence planners that the Middle East would actually receive Canberra's priority because of Menzies' desire for a Commonwealth role in global defence in light of Australia's similar deployments in the two World Wars. Because the People's Republic of China (PRC) lacked naval capacity, a Chinese territorial advance into Indochina would not immediately threaten the ANZAM region. In early December 1951, after the ANZUS Treaty had 'bolted the back door', the Australian Cabinet agreed to the Middle East first strategy, although the logic for this unravelled in early 1953 and it was never confirmed with Whitehall. See Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, Chapters 2 and 3. Clinton Fernandes similarly argues that Spender's negotiation of the ANZUS Treaty in 1951 was 'political cover' for the deployment of Australian forces to the Middle East in the event of a global war; see Fernandes, *Island off the Coast of Asia: Instruments of Statecraft in Australian Foreign Policy* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2018), 40.

21 'Australian and New Zealand Position in Malaya', Note for the Colonial Secretary's Visit to Malaya, Commonwealth Relations Office, 19 July 1955, The National Archives (TNA) UK, Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office Records (DO) 35/6270.

22 'Note on Australian Political Objectives and Methods in Asia', Note by DEA, August 1952, in *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy: Australia and the Colombo Plan 1949–1957*, ed. David Lowe and Daniel Oakman (Canberra: DFAT, 2004), 483.

What is striking about this framework is Canberra's proactive policy toward Japan only seven years after the end of the war and in opposition to domestic public opinion. The DEA argued:

[the] conclusion of a Peace Treaty with Japan will mark a new stage in Australian-Japanese relations. There will undoubtedly be a tendency on the part of the Australian public to limit contacts with Japan and some resistance to any positive programme of cultivated close relations with Japan. Yet if Japan is to be aligned with the Western world, it is essential that the attitude of Australia should not be one not of grudging concessions, or reluctant dealings with a former enemy, but of positive co-operation.²³

Diplomatic relations with Japan were to be 'established promptly' with 'no barrier' to reciprocal arrangements. Normal trade relations were to be resumed, including visits by Japanese nationals to Australia in connection with this. Japanese shipping would be allowed to return to Australian ports and there would be no barriers to the export of materials needed for Japan's reconstruction.²⁴

Most studies examine the 1957 Australia–Japan Agreement on Commerce, and the political conditions that made this possible, as marking the beginnings of the postwar bilateral relationship. However, the first concrete initiative by Australia toward closer relations was Canberra's sponsorship of Japan into the Colombo Plan as a donor country in 1954. Chapter 3 introduced the Colombo Plan as a Commonwealth development initiative in which the Menzies Government took a leading role. However, the original Commonwealth donor countries moved quickly to seek the participation of other developed states.²⁵ The possibility of Japanese participation was first raised by Britain in advance of the March 1952 meeting of the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee in Karachi, Pakistan.²⁶

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Australia's initial opposition and then sponsorship of Japan's entry into the Colombo Plan has received some attention within larger works on Australia–Japan relations, and Australia and the Colombo Plan. See, respectively, Alan Rix, *The Australia–Japan Political Alignment: 1952 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 119–20; and Daniel Oakman, *Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 99–111. There is only one standalone study of this episode: Ai Kobayashi, 'Australia and Japan's Admission to the Colombo Plan', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 60, no. 4 (2014): 518–33.

26 'Japanese Participation in the Colombo Plan', Annex to Cabinet Submission, 28 July 1954, in Lowe and Oakman, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, 589.

Despite the enabling Cold War policy framework outlined above, Australian officials remained ambivalent about Japanese membership of the Plan for a number of reasons until August 1954, when Casey took personal carriage of the issue and came down on the side of supporting Japanese membership. It was recognised by Australia from the outset that the Japanese had 'the technical knowledge and experience needed by the underdeveloped Asian countries', in addition to 'the industrial capacity to provide the technical equipment and capital goods needed throughout South and South-East Asia'. But with Japan's fragile balance-of-payments position in the early 1950s, it was deemed unlikely that Tokyo 'would be able to make substantial financial contributions', at least initially. There was also a recognition in Canberra from 1952 that Japan would see political and commercial advantages to being part of the Plan, and therefore it was likely that Tokyo would make increasing efforts to join.²⁷

The Australian Government perceived that there remained international political barriers to Japanese membership, although I would suggest that these are not particularly convincing, and that the main reason for Australia's initial opposition was the Menzies Government's sensitivity to domestic public opinion in the lead up to the tightly contested federal election held in May 1954.²⁸ The DEA stated that current Australian policy was 'to oppose or at least delay Japanese participation' because there was a case for French participation before that of Japan; and that 'there might be justifiable protests from the Philippines and Indonesia at any move to encourage Japanese aid to other Asian countries' while their wartime reparations claims remained unsettled.²⁹ By the end of 1953, all donor states but Australia, and most recipients, with the exception of Indonesia, favoured Japan's membership.

The inconsistency of the Australian Government's position on this issue with its stated policy on Japan was noted by the DEA. In a 'General Appraisal of the Colombo Plan' in August 1952, the DEA argued that 'leaving aside' continued public hostility in Australia, Japan was 'nearer to the category of an ally than that of an enemy' in the context of the 'communist threat', and considering the conclusion of the Treaty of

27 'A General Appraisal of the Colombo Plan', Memorandum by DEA, August 1952, in Lowe and Oakman, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, 500.

28 Kobayashi, 'Australia and Japan's Admission to the Colombo Plan', 529. The election result was very close. The ALP won both the popular and two-party preferred vote, but not enough seats to form government.

29 'A General Appraisal of the Colombo Plan', 501.

Peace, the ANZUS Treaty and the US–Japan Security Treaty. The point was made that ‘to exclude Japan from co-operative political relations with the area closest to her would ... operate directly against Australian policy to encourage Japan to become a useful and trusted member of the non-communist world’.³⁰

Japan made informal and formal representations to India, Canada and the US about gaining membership throughout 1953 and 1954. Japan’s motivations for this were, according to Ai Kobayashi, ‘its interests in good neighbourliness and economic co-operation with Southeast Asia, as well as to gain status in international organisations and co-operation with western democracies’.³¹ During this time, support for Japan from Washington and London also became firmer. By July 1954, the Australian Government was becoming concerned about its isolation among the Plan’s donor countries in continuing to oppose Japanese membership, and thus modified its position to one of acquiescence should a majority of member states support Japan’s entry, and none of the Asian recipients oppose it.³² Washington increased the pressure on Australia in August 1954 ahead of the Consultative Committee meeting in Ottawa in October. The Australian Embassy in Washington wrote to Casey that the ‘Americans thought Japanese association “in some feasible manner” should now be considered’. The exclusion of Japan constituted a “logical inconsistency” against [the] background of generous policies pursued towards her by [the] United States and Commonwealth and also prevented practical co-operation between Japan and South East Asia’.³³

Japan apparently did nothing in particular to ‘smooth the Australian attitude’ on membership,³⁴ and it is unclear whether Canberra’s change of heart was directly attributable to prompting from Washington. But the Australian position shifted decisively on 16 August 1954, when Casey sought to reconcile Tokyo’s proposed Colombo Plan membership with Australia’s Cold War strategic objectives. Casey wrote to Arthur Tange,

30 Ibid., 502.

31 Kobayashi, ‘Australia and Japan’s Admission to the Colombo Plan’, 520.

32 ‘Japanese Participation in the Colombo Plan’, 589–90.

33 ‘Japan and the Colombo Plan’, DEA Canberra to Australian Embassy Washington, 12 August 1954, in Lowe and Oakman, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, 593.

34 Kobayashi, ‘Australia and Japan’s Admission to the Colombo Plan’, 526.

then Secretary of the DEA, that assuming Cabinet agrees, 'I think that this subject of their joining the Colombo Plan ... might be the first thing that we might do to implement this new attitude towards Japan'.³⁵ Further:

If we want to get any political capital out of our being willing to allow Japan into the Colombo Plan—then I think we should even consider whether we might even go as far as making the proposal—or at least making a warm response to such a proposal made by someone else ... I suggest that Japan's wish to get into the Colombo Plan may be a rather heaven sent opportunity on which we might base our 'new deal' towards Japan.³⁶

By 18 August 1954, Australia's sponsorship of Japan's membership had gained the approval of Menzies and the Cabinet.³⁷ The new position was laid out in a DEA cable to all posts on 28 August. Australia was now in full support for Japan's membership on the basis of the 'technical knowledge and experience in training facilities and industrial capacity' that Tokyo can provide to recipient states, and the 'advantage of Japanese interests being directed towards South East Asia as an alternative ... [to] China and more generally of [a] need to encourage Japanese orientation towards [the] Western democracies'.³⁸

Japan was admitted to the Colombo Plan as a full member on 5 October 1954 without opposition. The Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, Katsuo Okazaki (1952–54), commented at the time 'that "it is understandable that her neighbours cannot readily forget recent history but we must realize that the past is the past and it is the future to which we must

35 Minute from Casey to Tange, 16 August 1954, in Lowe and Oakman, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, 594.

36 Ibid.

37 Letter from Casey to Menzies, 18 August 1954, in Lowe and Oakman, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, 595. On a broader note, Alan Rix points out that it was only in the mid-1950s when residual wartime matters had been 'cleared away' that Australia, from a domestic political point of view, could pursue 'more constructive dealings with Japan'; Rix, *The Australia–Japan Political Alignment*, 3.

38 'Japan's Association with the Colombo Plan', DEA Canberra to all Posts, 28 August 1954, in Lowe and Oakman, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, 598. In a letter to Lester Pearson, Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, on 1 September 1954, Casey explained Australia's change of policy: 'As you know there has been some discreet inquiry on the part of the Japanese over a year ago and again lately, as to whether they might not be allowed to join the Colombo Plan. A year ago was, from our point of view, too early as public opinion would not have been ready for that sort of thing at that time. However time has marched on and we are now of a different mind on the subject. I suggested to our Cabinet lately that we might show more tolerance towards Japan—and that ... we should cease to drag our feet with regard to their joining the Colombo Plan—which was agreed'; Letter from Casey to Lester Pearson (Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs), 1 September 1954, in Lowe and Oakman, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, 599.

look”'.³⁹ According to Kobayashi, the ‘dramatic shift in Australia’s position was recognised by the Japanese Government as the first initiative that Australia took to improve the bilateral relationship since the resumption of diplomatic relations in April 1952’.⁴⁰

This early episode in the Coalition Government’s postwar engagement with Asia shows how the logic of Cold War dynamics could override the anti-Japanese feeling prevalent in Australian society in the 1950s. Due mainly to the constraints of public opinion perceived by the Menzies Government until mid-1954, the positive policy toward Japan that was articulated in 1952 after the Peace Treaty came into force remained largely rhetorical until pressure from the UK and especially the US was brought to bear on Australia to change its opposition to Japan’s membership of the Colombo Plan. For Australia, supporting Japanese membership was an important step in reintegrating the country back into the international community in a cooperative way, solidifying Tokyo’s alignment with the West in the Cold War, and orienting Japan’s development and trade interests towards Southeast Asia rather than China.

Australia and Southeast Asia

In the early years of the Cold War, Australia’s engagement with Southeast Asia was mainly undertaken in the Malayan area under the British Commonwealth umbrella of the ANZAM Agreement. However, with the French withdrawal from Cambodia and Laos in 1953, and from Vietnam in 1954, Australia turned its attention further north to mainland Indochina. The Geneva Conference held from 26 April to 20 July 1954 did not produce a peace settlement to the Korean War, but it was able to reach a tenuous agreement on the situation in Vietnam. The French military position vis-à-vis the Vietminh had deteriorated drastically during the Conference, with the decisive defeat of French expeditionary forces at Dien Bien Phu in the northwest of the country on 7 May, thus increasing the pressure on France in the core Red River Delta area of Hanoi-Haiphong. The subsequent withdrawal of France from Southeast Asia, the partition of Vietnam, and establishment of the Democratic

39 Record of Conversation between Patrick Shaw (Assistant Secretary, UN Division, DEA) and Haruhiko Nishi (Japanese Ambassador to Canberra), 16 September 1954, in Lowe and Oakman, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, 603.

40 Kobayashi, ‘Australia and Japan’s Admission to the Colombo Plan’, 518, also 527.

Republic of Vietnam in the north of the country was perceived by the West as a significant victory for Chinese communism.⁴¹ In response, the US, France, UK, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines negotiated the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, or Manila Pact, in September 1954, creating SEATO.

SEATO was the culmination of a number of proposals and meetings in the early 1950s on the possibility of a collective security arrangement in East Asia on the model of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). With the formation of NATO in April 1949, the Philippines' President Elpidio Quirino (1948–53) pursued the idea of an equivalent 'Pacific Pact' or 'Pacific Union'.⁴² The perceived need for some form of security arrangement in East Asia was heightened by the outbreak of the Korean War. However, at the time, these proposals were generally met with a cool reception in Canberra. Washington's position on such a Pact remained unclear in the early 1950s. The DEA argued that any mutual assistance clause in such a Treaty could only mean that developed states like Australia would have to come to the aid of Southeast Asian members in any security emergency, as regional states lacked the capacity to defend themselves or reciprocate effectively.⁴³

By 1954, however, Washington was committed to containing the further spread of communism in East Asia, but judged that it could not defeat 'Chinese military forces and Chinese-backed insurgents in countries directly bordering the PRC [People's Republic of China]' without escalation to a wider war.⁴⁴ Casey later summarised the regional environment in which the Manila Treaty was negotiated as 'against the background of the menacing situation prevailing after the cease-fire agreements in Indo-China' where the 'frontiers of Communism had been

41 See 'Australia and S.E.A.T.O. Report by R.G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs', February 1957, NAA A1838/563/10/5.

42 'Recent Proposals for a Conference of South-East Asian Countries to Form a Regional Organisation', DEA Paper for the Minister, 21 December 1949, NAA A1838/383/1/2/8, Part 2; and 'Pacific Pact', DEA Pacific Division Brief for Prime Minister, 7 July 1950, NAA A1838/383/1/2/8.

43 'For the Minister', DEA minute, 28 February 1950, NAA A1838/383/1/2/8, Part 2; 'Pacific Pact', DEA Pacific Division Brief for Prime Minister, 7 July 1950, NAA A1838/383/1/2/8.

44 Carey Fraser, 'Decolonization and the Cold War', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 473.

dramatically advanced by force of arms'.⁴⁵ In this environment SEATO was conceived as a collective defence arrangement consistent with the United Nations (UN) Charter. According to Casey:

Australia has long held that security must be sought through a sound system of collective defence. When, after the Second World War, the United Nations proved inadequate for the task of ensuring world security, a number of mutual defence associations were formed among countries of the free world in pursuance of the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter. There are NATO, the Rio Pact machinery, ANZUS and other bilateral agreements with the United States. A gap, however, remained in South-East Asia until the urgency of the problem was brought home to the countries of the free world by the striking incursions made there by Communist aggression ... This gap in the free world's defences closed on 8th September, 1954, when the South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty (SEATO) was signed at Manila ...⁴⁶

A US protocol also included the newly independent Indochinese states of Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam in the Treaty area, effectively circumventing the neutrality of Indochina provided for in the Geneva Agreement.⁴⁷ The Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya was also brought into formal association with the SEATO area.⁴⁸

SEATO brought Australia into close political relationships with Thailand and the Philippines, the latter of which had been consistently well-disposed toward Australia since the end of the Pacific War. For Thailand, which lacked other formal defence arrangements, the US commitment to SEATO remained the cornerstone of its Cold War security policy into the early 1970s and the main reason for the Treaty's longevity after its strategic relevance diminished from 1968. From Australia's perspective, the Treaty remained valuable because it continued to provide a formal link and close ties with Thailand and the Philippines.⁴⁹ In 1966, for example, Thai Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn (1963–73) expressly made the

45 'Australia and S.E.A.T.O. Report by R.G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs', February 1957, NAA A1838/563/10/5.

46 Ibid.

47 Matthew Jones, *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945–1965* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 225–26.

48 'Australian Forces for Malaya', DEA Savingram to all Posts, 13 April 1955, NAA A5954/1456/9.

49 See 'Notes by the Departments of External Affairs and of Defence', April 1969, NAA A1209/1969/9019/ATTACHMENT.

point that Thailand regarded Australia as a welcome member of the same 'region'.⁵⁰ A British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) research memorandum noted that 'relations between Australia and Thailand, as fellow members of SEATO are close'.⁵¹

On 5 August 1954, Menzies gave a major speech to Parliament about the Geneva Conference and developments in Indochina. In the literature on the Menzies period, the 'high rhetoric' of this speech is prefaced as disingenuous in either justifying increased defence expenditure,⁵² or playing on the communist threat for domestic purposes by 'marrying' it 'to traditional popular Australian fears' about Asia.⁵³ As a consummate and highly successful politician in the 1950s, there is no doubt that Menzies always had an eye to the Coalition's electoral fortunes. But through her influential study of Menzies's political rhetoric, Judith Brett identifies a number of aspects of the communist challenge—its threat to the fabric of capitalist social order and its perceived duplicitous methods, for example—that were indeed a moral affront to Australia's longest-serving prime minister.⁵⁴

I suggest Menzies's moral opposition to communism was able to bridge his cultural Anglocentrism to provide the common values needed to form a shared identity with the non-communist states of East Asia.⁵⁵ Frank Bongiorno points out that Menzies 'was personally peripheral to many of his government's landmarks in foreign and defence policy'.⁵⁶ It was the more Asia-literate External Affairs ministers from Spender through Casey, Sir Garfield Barwick (1961–64) and, to a lesser extent, Paul Hasluck (1964–69), and their leading departmental officials, that drove

50 Cited in 'Australia and South and South-East Asia in Recent Years', UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Research Department Memorandum, The National Archives (UK) (TNA) FCO 51/160.

51 Ibid.

52 Allan W Martin, *Robert Menzies: A Life, Volume 2 1944–1978* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999), 272–73.

53 Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, 170–71.

54 Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007).

55 On Menzies's Anglocentrism, see, for example, James Curran, *The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 43; Frank Bongiorno, 'The Price of Nostalgia: Menzies, the "Liberal" Tradition and Australian Foreign Policy', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 3 (2005): 409–10; and Andrea Benvenuti, 'Difficult Partners: Indo–Australian Relations at the Height of the Cold War, 1949–1964', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 57, no. 1 (2011): 54–55.

56 Bongiorno, 'The Price of Nostalgia', 401.

regional policy.⁵⁷ While I agree with this, Menzies did, however, make a number of points in the August 1954 speech, which are not emphasised in the secondary literature, that demonstrated a nuanced understanding of postcolonial Southeast Asian sensitivities. Australia's Cold War sense of solidarity with these countries, at least for Menzies, was based on moral sentiment, not just on material defence interests.

The prime minister noted that Australia had friendly contacts and increasing ties with its closest neighbours, 'free nations ... on or off the mainland of Asia, which have gained their independence within the last 10 years'.⁵⁸ These relationships were not always easy. The postcolonial nations 'are justly proud of their independence and zealous to maintain their national character, traditions, and integrity'. They bore 'the spiritual marks of their past struggles, and are apprehensive lest any new foreign association should become a new form of foreign influence'.⁵⁹ But at the same time, they did not want to come under communist rule or domination.

The Australian Government sympathised 'with their desires and at all times' sought 'to understand their fears'.⁶⁰ Menzies linked the independence that 'our Asian friends' now enjoyed to 'the rights and spiritual dignity of man which inhere in the genuinely held religions of the world, and which feed those noble aspirations which have led to democracy and national freedom'. For Menzies, Australia's close relations with the non-communist countries of Asia was not simply to use them as bases or remote battlefields for Australia's 'forward defence'.⁶¹ It was fostered by a sense of moral solidarity:

[it was] foolish, superficial, and dangerous to speak of the conflict in the world as a contest between two economic systems, capitalism and communism. Nor can the cynics dispose of it as an old-fashioned struggle for military or physical power, with territory and resources as the prizes of victory. It is desperately important that the world should be seen as a moral contest;

57 See also David Goldsworthy, 'Introduction', in *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia, Volume 1: 1901 to the 1970s*, ed. David Goldsworthy (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press; and Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 2001), 9; and Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, 83–84.

58 'South-East Asia—Australian Policy, Statement to the House Representatives by the Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies, C.H., Q.C., M.P. 5 August 1954', NAA A5954/1667/49.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

a battle for the spirit of man. There can be no easy or enduring compromise between people who affirm the existence of a divine authority and the compulsion of a spiritual law and those others who see nothing beyond atheistic materialism.⁶²

Casey followed on 10 August 1954 by saying that Australia worked closely with and gave ‘great consideration to the views of the free countries of South and South-East Asia’. This was not just a policy imperative: ‘I have lived and worked in a position of responsibility amongst these people of Asia, and I have a respect and liking for them’.⁶³

The idea that Australian policy elites were ‘blind to Asia’ during the Cold War is not borne out in the documentary record. Canberra was deeply and fundamentally interested in East Asian political and security concerns because they were shared with Australia. Authors critical of Menzies-era foreign and defence policies, such as Meg Gurry, argue that the small states of Southeast Asia were simply used by Canberra as part of the larger Cold War game in which Australia was fundamentally interested.⁶⁴ Claims such as this fail to recognise that the postcolonial Asian states had agency: like Australia, their fortunes were involved in the strategic game of the Cold War. Like Australia, many were aligned with extra-regional great powers. They were not passively used or ‘acted upon’ by Australia’s forward defence strategy, which was well understood in Canberra.⁶⁵

In 1955, Casey could report that he and leading departmental officials had:

made a visit to South East Asia each year for the last four years—in an effort to get to know personally something about the area and the leaders of the governments of the area. I now have the feeling of being quite reasonably at home in all of these countries—and that my Department and the government are in good contact with what is going on there.⁶⁶

62 Ibid.

63 ‘The Situation in South-East Asia, Statement to Parliament by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. R.G. Casey, C.H., D.S.O., M.C., M.P., 10 August 1954’, NAA A5954/1667/52.

64 Meg Gurry, ‘Whose History? The Struggle over Authorship of Australia’s Asia Policies’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 52, no. 1 (1998): 80.

65 See, for example, ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to Asia’, Hansard Excerpt, 12 April 1967, in NAA A1209/1967/7288.

66 ‘Text of a Broadcast over the A.B.C. by Mr. R.G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs, Thursday Evening, 10th March, 1955’, in DEA inward teleprinter message Marshall to Plimsoll, 10 March 1955, NAA A1838/3004/1, Part 7.

From Canberra's perspective, Asian states welcomed Australia—albeit cautiously—as a non-colonial power without territorial ambitions; one which 'expressed sympathy for the aspirations of peoples in Asia for independence and self-determination' and supported 'constitutional progress in this direction'.⁶⁷ In a January 1955 conversation in the Indian High Commissioner's Office in Canberra, James Plimsoll, then an Assistant Secretary of the DEA, said that Australians

regarded ourselves as having a common interest with Asian countries in very many matters. I thought that in some things we had an identity of interest with the Asian countries rather than the European countries.⁶⁸

Australia's identity of interest was given political expression through the stationing and commitment of forces in Southeast Asia: during the Malayan Emergency in 1955 as part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR), then in Malaysian Borneo in 1965 and in South Vietnam from August 1965. In addition to its forward defence aspect, this demonstrated Australia was an important part of the region in security terms and willing to accept costly regional obligations in partnership with its non-communist neighbours. The DEA assessed in 1966 that the Asian members of SEATO and AMDA, 'most of whom now have a great deal of experience, have some feeling of basic partnership with their Western allies'.⁶⁹ External Affairs Minister Hasluck elaborated this theme further in 1967:

Australia's forward defence strategy is not to be looked at only in the selfish terms of trying to ensure that any fighting is as far away from Australian soil as possible. A major part of its purpose is to give the independent countries of the region the assurance and confidence they want while they are developing their economies, evolving their political institutions and building co-operative arrangements with one another.⁷⁰

67 'Conference on Co-operation in Information Activities in South East Asia', 13 May 1958, NAA A1838/2020/9/2.

68 Record of Conversation between Mr P Ratnam, Official Secretary, Indian High Commissioner's Office and J Plimsoll, Assistant Secretary (Geographical Regions), DEA Canberra, 11 January 1955, NAA A1838/3002/1, Part 2.

69 'How the Western Presence in Asia Can be Made More Acceptable', September 1966, DEA Brief, NAA A1838/3004/13/17, Part 5.

70 'Extract from Statement by Mr. Paul Hasluck, Minister for External Affairs in Parliament', 17 August 1967, in NAA A4359/221/4/31, Part 1.

Indeed, in the 1960s, the theme that Australia must seek its security 'in' Asia, not 'from' Asia, was repeatedly emphasised by policy elites: for Hasluck, for example, Australia's 'security and welfare' was indivisible from the 'security and welfare of the region'.⁷¹

Non-communist solidarity and ASPAC

After the retirement of Menzies, Harold Holt's short tenure as prime minister from January 1966 until his disappearance and presumed drowning in December 1967 is often caricatured by his careless 'all the way with LBJ' remark on the White House lawn in July 1966. And while much of Holt's policy direction was considered derivative of his predecessor, DJ Wyatt of the British High Commission at Canberra reported on 26 June 1967 to the Commonwealth Office, that '[h]aving made a rough list of recurring themes in Mr. Holt's public pronouncements ... I was struck by the fact that they all refer to South East Asia'.⁷² Holt's tenure was marked by the first significant relaxation of the White Australia policy in March 1966 and several extensive regional visits.⁷³ The new prime minister noted that Japan was now the largest destination for Australian exports and that since the Second World War, Asia was the only part of the world where Australian troops had been deployed.⁷⁴ Holt's position was that 'geographically we are part of Asia, and increasingly we have become aware of our involvement in the affairs of Asia'.⁷⁵ The intensification of the Coalition Government's focus on East Asia during the 1960s is interpreted negatively through the prism of the Vietnam War in the orthodox narrative of Australia's engagement with Asia. For example, in acknowledging Australia's 'greater orientation towards non-communist Asia', Garry Woodard asserts that this was only one part of an 'unholy alliance' along with Canberra's 'sycophancy towards the US'.⁷⁶

71 Ibid.

72 UK High Commission Canberra to Far East and Pacific Department, Commonwealth Office (CO) London, 26 June 1967, TNA FCO 24/192.

73 IR Hancock, 'Holt, Harold Edward (1908–1967)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1996, available at: adb.anu.edu.au/biography/holt-harold-edward-10530.

74 'Prime Minister's Visit to Asia', Hansard Excerpt, 12 April 1967, in NAA A1209/1967/7288.

75 Ibid.

76 Garry Woodard, *Asian Alternatives: Australia's Vietnam Decision and Lessons on Going to War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 283.

But rather than the crude caricatures often painted of the Coalition's approach to Asia during the Vietnam War era, Holt's statements show nuanced understanding of the region's complexity. For example, the prime minister said in Parliament in April 1967 that 'a basic tenet of our national policy' is to:

live in friendship and understanding with our Asian neighbours, but the very word 'Asia', while a convenient general description, is itself misleading. There are greater diversities of race, religion, tradition, appearance and national economic development to be found in Asia than in any other region on earth. These differences establish the importance of better knowledge of those amongst whom we live and the value of our friendship with them.⁷⁷

Australia's 'place in Asia' was 'no new discovery, but its significance has become heightened for us over recent years'.⁷⁸ With respect to Australia's military deployments to South Vietnam, Holt argued:

Australia is not—as is sometimes alleged by the critics of my government—damaging its image in Asia because of our actions in respect of Vietnam. Many countries in the region publicly support our position. Others have expressed, in private, understanding of our reasons for our participation in Vietnam. To speak of Asian opinion in this context as though there were a general view prevailing throughout Asia is totally misleading ... Each country in Asia has its own identity, its own policies, and its own views on Australia's actions in Vietnam ...⁷⁹

There is no doubt that the Menzies and Holt governments sought and welcomed US military intervention in Indochina as part of the containment of communist China. However, I argue that this brought Australia closer to the countries of East Asia, not the reverse, as fear of the PRC was shared with nearly all Asian states, whether non-aligned or non-communist.

One of the firmest indications of Australia's close political relationships with the non-communist Asian states during the Cold War was South Korea's invitation to Canberra in June 1966 to membership of ASPAC. In the study of Australia's regional relations, ASPAC is either totally

77 'Prime Minister's Visit to Asia', Hansard Excerpt, 12 April 1967, in NAA A1209/1967/7288.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

omitted or quickly dismissed as an instrument of Cold War policy. It remains one of the most misunderstood organisations in the history of Australia's foreign policy.⁸⁰ Australia and Japan, among others, repeatedly pointed out that ASPAC was not a security organisation. Unfortunately for ASPAC's legacy, it operated at the time when Western opinion turned irrevocably against the Vietnam War after the Tet Offensive in January 1968. It became, and remains, tainted by the anti-communist colouration of its membership, which consisted of South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, South Vietnam, Australia and New Zealand, with Laos as an observer. There can be no denying that only 'Cold War logic' could have provided 'a thread to pull this disparate group of countries together' at this time.⁸¹ The view that it was an anti-communist grouping became entrenched, when in a 1967 article in *Foreign Affairs*, and in the 1968 US Presidential campaign, Richard Nixon called on the organisation to take on a security role to reduce Washington's Cold War responsibilities.⁸² Despite Nixon's campaign rhetoric, Washington was not involved in the establishment of ASPAC, nor did it seek to influence its operations.⁸³

The dismissal of ASPAC on this basis is inadequate, however, when the documentary record demonstrates that in the mid-to-late 1960s the organisation was considered by Australia as the premier vehicle for Asian regionalism. ASPAC was also a fully East Asian initiative that did not involve any extra-regional great powers. It remains the only Asian organisation in which Australia and New Zealand have ever been included as core members. This alone was considered of great importance by the Australian Government at the time.⁸⁴ According to Canberra, 'the long term stability and economic progress of the countries of the

80 In the only standalone piece written on the subject and published in 2006, it is treated as a failed 'co-operative security' organisation. See CW Braddick, 'Japan, Australia and ASPAC: The Rise and Fall of an Asia-Pacific Co-Operative Security Framework', in *Japan, Australia and Asia-Pacific Security*, ed. Brad Williams and Andrew Newman (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 30–46.

81 Braddick, 'Japan, Australia and ASPAC', 32.

82 'Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC)', Brief for Prime Minister's Visit to USA, March/April 1969, NAA A1838/541/1/1, Part 2; Braddick, 'Japan, Australia and ASPAC', 34.

83 'U.S./Japan Consultations', Australian Embassy Tokyo to DEA Canberra, 2 October 1968, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 8.

84 See, for example, 'Asian and Pacific Council—Second Ministerial Meeting: Report by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, M.P.', July 1967, NAA A1838/541/1/1, Part 2; also 'Briefing on ASPAC and ASEAN', Prepared by LR McIntyre, DEA, for Lord Casey, Governor-General, 15 November 1968, A1838/3004/13/21, Part 8.

region will require greater self-reliance on the part of Asian countries'.⁸⁵ The overarching aim of Australia's participation in this respect was to 'foster a sense of regional consciousness among the governments of Asia and a common approach to the problems of the region'.⁸⁶ ASPAC was considered 'the most promising' organisation 'through which a regional consciousness' could 'be developed'.⁸⁷ More specifically, ASPAC helped to relieve the relative diplomatic isolation of South Korea, Taiwan and South Vietnam; but, more importantly, the Australian Government believed its 'association with Japan in ASPAC strengthens relations between the two countries and increases our influence with Japan in regard to its policies in Asia'.⁸⁸

After a preparatory meeting in May 1966, ASPAC was constituted at a Foreign Ministers' meeting in Seoul on 16 June 1966. The ministerial communiqué stated that participation in ASPAC was on the basis of 'forging better international understanding, promoting closer and more fruitful regional co-operation and further strengthening Asian and Pacific solidarity'. The ASPAC member states 'emphasised that every encouragement should be given to other free countries in the Asian and Pacific region to participate in future consultations'.⁸⁹

The 'main aim' of ASPAC was 'the development of regional cooperation itself, rather than for some specific functional purpose'.⁹⁰ Hasluck's report from the Second Ministerial Meeting on 7 July 1967 emphasised the crucial importance of this organisation to Australia:

ASPAC is an Asian organisation which includes Australia (and New Zealand) as full members but not the major Western powers so that our membership associates Australia with Asian countries on a basis of equality and associates us with the region in a unique way.⁹¹

85 Cited in 'Regional Cooperation in Asia', New Zealand (NZ) Foreign Ministry, 25 May 1972, in NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 15.

86 Ibid.

87 'Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC)', Brief for Prime Minister's Visit to USA, March/April 1969, NAA A1838/541/1/1 Part 2.

88 Ibid.

89 'First Ministerial Meeting of the Asian and Pacific Council, Seoul, 14-16 June 1966', 16 June 1966, NAA A10730, Box 1.

90 'Regional Cooperation in Asia', NZ Foreign Ministry, 25 May 1972, in NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 15.

91 'Asian and Pacific Council—Second Ministerial Meeting: Report by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, M.P.', July 1967, NAA A1838/541/1/1, Part 2.

One of Australia's most longstanding and influential diplomats and public servants, Sir Arthur Tange, then High Commissioner to India, considered ASPAC as particularly significant, in 'that none of the major Western or Communist powers are members—these are the beginnings of true regional collaboration'.⁹²

ASPAC was recognised as formalising, 'with the exceptions of Indonesia and Singapore', all the countries of Asia 'with which we have the closest political relationships'.⁹³ And while the hardline anti-communist members, the Republic of China, the ROK and Republic of Vietnam periodically called for ASPAC to take on a more security-based role,⁹⁴ they were counterbalanced by Japan and 'non-aligned' Malaysia, which were opposed to overtly anti-communist discussions, preferring a focus on development cooperation. Malaysia was the member initially most wary of the organisation's possible direction,⁹⁵ but by September 1967 was reportedly pleased with ASPAC 'and believed it now had a respectful character and could have a worthwhile future'.⁹⁶ Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines forged a middle path. Contrary to claims that in the Vietnam War era, Australia failed to consult its regional neighbours,⁹⁷ the archival records show that in practice ASPAC meetings regularly and openly discussed the various countries' political and economic situations in addition to security issues.

Japan's involvement in ASPAC was, however, considered somewhat lukewarm by Australia until 1968, when the purposes and operation of the organisation became clearer and more acceptable to Tokyo. Australian representatives were quite frustrated by the reserved Japanese attitude at early ASPAC meetings. For example, the Australian Ambassador at Bangkok reported to the DEA in July 1967 that the 'Japanese delegation have taken ASPAC meetings very quietly. They have been obviously

92 'Australia and South-East Asia', Address by the High Commissioner in India, Sir Arthur Tange, Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Madras State, 9 October 1967, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 8. Tange served as Secretary of the Department of External Affairs from 1954 to 1965 and Secretary of the Defence Department from 1970 to 1979.

93 'Asian and Pacific Council: Proposal to Establish an Economic Co-operation Centre', Cabinet Submission No. 571, 13 May 1969, NAA A5882/CO310.

94 'Briefing on ASPAC and ASEAN', Prepared by LR McIntyre, DEA, for Lord Casey, Governor-General, 15 November 1968, A1838/3004/13/21, Part 8.

95 See, for example, Australian High Commission Kuala Lumpur (GR Bentley, Third Secretary) to Secretary, DEA Canberra, 18 May 1966, NAA A1838/541/6/2, Part 1.

96 'Brief on Malaysia and ASPAC', DEA Canberra, 29 September 1967, NAA A1838/541/6/2, Part 1.

97 For example, Woodard, *Asian Alternatives*, 297.

under instructions not to take the lead, and have several times failed to speak when a contribution from them would have been helpful to us'.⁹⁸ The behaviour of Japanese officials in ASPAC meetings was deemed inconsistent with the much more positive tone of ministerial talks between the two countries. For example, in March 1967, the two foreign ministers Paul Hasluck and Takeo Miki (1966–68):

recognised the rapid growth of a sense of solidarity and of a forward-looking spirit in the Asia-Pacific region. The ministers spoke of the importance of dealing with common problems in an Asia-Pacific scale and recognised the close relationship between economic progress and political stability.⁹⁹

Japan's early misgivings about ASPAC revolved around two main issues. In response to proposals by developing member states for specific projects and technical assistance, Japan was concerned that ASPAC did not duplicate the activities of other development organisations such as the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, the Colombo Plan or the newly constituted Asian Development Bank (ADB). On the political side, Japan and Malaysia were both concerned that ASPAC meetings and procedures did not produce binding communiqués reflecting an anti-communist stance, or that the anti-communist members would regard silence on certain issues as acquiescence with their viewpoints. By the time of the 1968 ASPAC Ministerial Meeting in Canberra, Japanese concerns had been dispelled, and its participation had improved from Australia's point of view.¹⁰⁰ Concrete ASPAC projects were kept modest and all members agreed to the issuing of communiqués without binding opinions or commitments.¹⁰¹ Discussions became more open and Japanese representatives were willing to canvass political and security matters. At the Canberra Ministerial Meeting on 30 July 1968, Foreign Minister Miki explained Japan's position:

98 'Report on A.S.P.A.C. Activities in Bangkok by the Australian Ambassador in Bangkok', 15 June 1967, NAA A1838/541/3/1, Part 2.

99 'Japan Australian Ministerial Talks', Australian Embassy Tokyo to DEA Canberra, 30 March 1967, NAA A1838/541/1/1, Part 2.

100 'Asian and Pacific Council—Third Ministerial Meeting, 30 July–1 August 1968', Report by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, MP, Cabinet Submission No. 266, NAA A5882/CO310; DEA Canberra to Australian Embassy Washington, 2 August 1968, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 7.

101 'Japanese Paper on ASPAC', Attachment to 'Attitudes to ASPAC of Individual Member Governments', July 1967, NAA A1838/541/6.

Many of us live close to a Communist power, and from that point of view alone the question of security must be of great concern to us. When I speak of security I am using the word in the very broad sense. The concept of security includes the military aspect ... But I do not think this is the forum for us to discuss the military aspects of security, although I do not deny that the military aspects are important. However, I must emphasise that we must try to achieve political, social and economic security if we are to obtain overall security.¹⁰²

The DEA reported after the 1968 meeting that whereas ‘a year ago the Japanese were trying to avoid political discussions in ASPAC they now accept it and Miki himself participated in the discussion on political matters’. The Japanese remained, however, ‘the most reluctant of all ASPAC members to take public positions particularly on questions relating to Communist China, North Korea and North Viet-Nam’.¹⁰³

Notwithstanding some reticence on the part of Malaysia and Japan, there was great optimism from Canberra about the progress of regional organisation during 1967 and 1968. On 1 January 1967, a despatch from the Australia Embassy in Manila, entitled ‘Regional Co-operation in Asia’, reported there ‘has been a marked increase in activity directed towards regional co-operation in East and South-East Asia during the past twelve months’.¹⁰⁴ This was attributed to the end of Confrontation and exchanges of visits between Malaysian and Indonesian officials, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Malaysia, and revived interest in the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA—the forerunner to ASEAN created in 1961, but stalled because of Malaysia–Philippines tension over disputed territory in Sabah). It was also manifest in the creation of the Manila-headquartered ADB in 1966. The Australian Embassy in Manila noted that, ‘[a]lmost invariably the Filipinos seem to take it for granted that Australia and New Zealand should be invited to these regional meetings as “Asian countries”’.¹⁰⁵

102 ‘Verbatim Record of the First Session (Public Session)’, Third Ministerial Meeting of the Asian and Pacific Council, Canberra, 30 July–1 August 1968, 30 July 1968, NAA A10730, Box 1.

103 Miki explained ‘this primarily in terms of the difficulties the Japanese Government has with its domestic public opinion’, but the DEA argued that ‘no doubt the Japanese also wish to maintain the maximum flexibility for the future in relation to the communist countries’; see DEA Canberra to Australian Embassy Washington, 2 August 1968, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 7.

104 Australian Embassy Manila to DEA Canberra, 1 January 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/17, Part 5.

105 *Ibid.*

The joint communiqué from Holt's visit to South Korea in April 1967 'stressed the historic significance of the growth of regional solidarity among the free nations of the region, including their two countries'.¹⁰⁶ The development of a 'regional consciousness' was also mentioned frequently in Australia's diplomatic discourse in 1967, alongside the perceived success of ASPAC.¹⁰⁷ In addressing the ASPAC Ministerial Meeting on 7 July, Hasluck said:

[u]ntil now the histories of our countries have followed different courses, and the cultures of our peoples are diverse. The promotion among us of a sense of regional consciousness, a promotion of a feeling that we do enjoy a common destiny, and the promotion, above all, of the habit of working together may not be easy nor will they be accomplished overnight. It is sensible, in our view, to begin with groupings such as ASPAC, composed of like-minded countries.¹⁰⁸

Hasluck wrote in his later report for Parliament that fostering a sense of regional consciousness was essential to deal with the problems of the area. For Australia, ASPAC was 'the most promising organisation through which this objective can be pursued'.¹⁰⁹ In 1968, Prime Minister Gorton (1968–71) emphasised:

ASPAC includes a representative group of significant countries in the area and we in Australia are proud to be members of it. As a regional organisation, ASPAC has some unique characteristics. It includes countries from North Asia, South-East Asia and the South Pacific, but it does not include countries from outside the region.¹¹⁰

106 'Joint Communiqué by Prime Minister Il Kwon Chung of the Republic of Korea and Prime Minister Harold Holt of the Commonwealth of Australia', 9 April 1967, NAA A1838/558/4/31.

107 'Statement at the Opening Public Session by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, M.P.', Asian and Pacific Council: Second Ministerial Meeting, Bangkok, 5–7 July 1967, 5 July 1967, NAA A10730, Box 1; and 'Asian and Pacific Council—Second Ministerial Meeting: Report by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, M.P.', July 1967, NAA A1838/541/1/1, Part 2.

108 'Statement at the Opening Public Session by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, M.P.', Asian and Pacific Council: Second Ministerial Meeting, Bangkok, 5–7 July 1967, 5 July 1967, NAA A10730, Box 1.

109 'Asian and Pacific Council—Second Ministerial Meeting: Report by the Minister for External Affairs, The Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, M.P.', July 1967, NAA A1838/541/1/1, Part 2.

110 'Third Meeting of the Asian and Pacific Council, Opening Speech by the Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. J.G. Gorton, MP, Canberra', 30 July 1968, NAA A1838/541/1/1, Part 2.

It was an outward-looking grouping 'seeking to establish a close comradeship and a practical working co-operation in the political, economic, cultural and social fields', and happy to welcome additional members.¹¹¹

Gorton also explicitly made the point on 30 July 1968 that rather than Australia remaining fearful and distant, the decolonisation process, intertwined with Cold War geopolitics, had drawn Australia deeply into Asia. Gorton said:

Australia today, more than at any other time in her history, is more closely linked with Asia and more aware of the inescapable imperatives of geopolitics and economics that bind her to her Asian neighbours. And more, today we all have come to the realisation that for this region to progress ... it must be led out of the fragmentation and decay of the colonial era into the mainstream of the 20th century. In this task, regional co-operation is an imperative necessity and in the process, Australia must play a leading role.¹¹²

These sentiments were reciprocated 'in' the region, with Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman stating, for example, that 'Mr Gorton has declared in no uncertain terms that Australia belongs to this part of the world or belongs to Asia and that her future is tied up with Asia'. It was therefore 'not just the questions of defence that occupies our attention but the whole range of subjects forming inter-relationship between our two countries'.¹¹³

The year 1968 provides the greatest endorsements for ASPAC from its Southeast Asian members. Malaysia confirmed its 'strong support of the objectives of ASPAC—to promote solidarity among countries in Asia and the Pacific region through regional co-operation in matters of common interest'.¹¹⁴ Thailand emphasised the value of the organisation in providing a regular forum for the countries of the region to 'exchange views, to compare notes, and in many small or large ways to forge an Asian and Pacific solidarity and to arouse an Asian and Pacific consciousness'.¹¹⁵ The Philippines' delegate explicitly made the point that:

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 'Visit to South-East Asia, 1968, Kuala Lumpur, Address of Welcome in the Malaysian Parliament, 12 June 1968', 12 June 1968, NAA A1209/1968/8679.

114 'Extracts from Proceedings of Opening Public Session', Third Ministerial Meeting Asian and Pacific Council, Canberra, 30 July–1 August 1968, NAA A10730, Box 1.

115 Ibid.

Australia today, more than at any other time in her history, is more closely linked with Asia and more aware of the inescapable imperatives of geopolitics and economics that bind her to her Asian neighbours.¹¹⁶

ASPAC also served valuable purposes for the growing Australia–Japan relationship. First, ASPAC, with its annual Ministerial Meetings and more frequent Standing Committee consultations, provided a regular, institutionalised forum for Australia–Japan relations. Second, without the presence of Washington, it allowed for greater development of an independent relationship between Canberra and Tokyo than would otherwise have been possible.¹¹⁷ Third, along with other Japanese initiatives in this era toward greater cooperation around the Pacific basin,¹¹⁸ ASPAC also represented an attempt at developing an ‘Asia-Pacific’ regional consciousness, an identity that both Canberra and Tokyo sought to foster.

In hindsight, the years from 1966 to 1968 appear to mark the deepest points of Australia’s engagement with Asia. Australia’s trajectory of engagement with Asia leading up to this was summarised by Gorton in August 1968:

Our interest in Asia is not new, but it took on practical forms when our first diplomatic missions were set up in India, China and Japan just over a quarter of a century ago ... Two significant decisions in later years further enlarged our horizons. The first was in 1951 when Australia took the initiative in forming the Colombo Plan to help the less developed countries of Asia. The other was in 1963 when Australia became a regional member of the Economic Commission for East Asia and the Far East ... Since then we have actively pursued the development of regional co-operation. Among other things, we have become a foundation member of the Asian Development Bank and of the Asian and Pacific Council. Our membership of the SEATO and ANZUS pacts and of ANZAM is also evidence that we have accepted responsibilities for sharing in regional defence and security arrangements.¹¹⁹

116 Ibid.

117 Braddick, ‘Japan, Australia and ASPAC’, 43.

118 See Takashi Terada, ‘The Origins of Japan’s APEC Policy: Foreign Minister Takeo Miki’s Asia-Pacific Policy and Current Implications’, *The Pacific Review* 11, no. 3 (1998): 337–63.

119 ‘Australia’s Role in Asia by the Prime Minister of Australia, The Rt. Hon. J.G. Gorton, M.P.’, August 1968, NAA A1209/1969/9036, Part 9.

British observations during this period confirm that by 1968, Australia saw itself in relation to East Asia similar to the position of Britain vis-à-vis continental Europe: on the fringe and somewhat different, but still an integral part of the region.¹²⁰ Gorton had made clear to London that Australia's 'region was very definitely priority number one—or, at least, that Australia's relationships elsewhere, e.g. with the Commonwealth or the U.N., would be essentially a function of their usefulness to her in terms of her regional interests and responsibilities'.¹²¹

But despite Gorton's statements, and the disposition of his and subsequent Australian governments, the political distance that began to build between Australia and East Asia in the 1970s was conditioned by a range of external factors evolving from 1966, which were largely beyond Australia's capacity to control or influence: the end of Confrontation and Britain's withdrawal from east of Suez; the formation of ASEAN in 1967 and its consolidation in the 1970s as the outcome of a more coherent postcolonial Southeast Asian identity; the US de-escalation and gradual withdrawal from Vietnam after March 1968; the 1969 Nixon Doctrine and its flow-on effects; and the US rapprochement with China in 1972. Whereas Australia had proactively claimed primary areas of responsibility in Asia and actively sought regional development and security arrangements in the late 1940s and 1950s,¹²² residual Commonwealth arrangements, such as the post-AMDA Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), were negotiated and undertaken reluctantly by the Gorton and McMahon Coalition governments. They were immediately scaled back, with all but a token Australian contribution to the CSR withdrawn after the Whitlam ALP Government swept to power in December 1972.

Conclusion

Rather than Cold War dynamics distancing Australia from Asia, this chapter has shown that the opposite was the case. The Cold War logic of the 1950s and 1960s drew a peripheral Australia deeply into the political and security architecture of the East Asian region. This was initially reflected in the ANZAM area and Australia's involvement in

120 'Letter from 10 Downing St to D.J.D. Maitland, Foreign and Commonwealth Office', 22 January 1969, TNA FCO 24/384.

121 *Ibid.*

122 For a useful summary, see, 'Australian Policy in Asia', DFA Canberra Policy Planning Paper, 30 June 1971, NAA A1838/3006/9/1, Part 6.

Malayan decolonisation, participation in the Korean War, and the rapid normalisation of postwar relations with Japan. After the armistice in Korea in 1953 and French withdrawal from Indochina in 1954, the Cold War regional environment meant that Australia had to engage deeply with many of the new postcolonial states of Southeast Asia. These relationships were conceived within a shared non-communist identity and sense of solidarity. The main multilateral initiative in this direction in the 1950s was Australia's membership of SEATO, which brought Canberra into close association with Thailand and the Philippines, both of whom were consistently well-disposed toward Australia during this period. The final section of the chapter analysed the post-Menzies era of the mid-to-late 1960s with a focus on ASPAC. This analysis demonstrated that ASPAC was viewed by its members as a valuable forum for cooperation, information-sharing and the building of a regional consciousness and Asia-Pacific identity. Rather than Australia being isolated from its region during the Cold War, the chapter has shown that Australia was central to regional organisation and security arrangements, with its presence welcomed by Asian states.

The chapter concludes that the deepest and most intense phase of Australia's engagement with Asia may be located in the years 1966 to 1968, during the Vietnam War. Those opposed to the Vietnam War excoriated conservative governments from Menzies to McMahon for their perceived uncritical support for US Cold War objectives in Asia and valorised the Whitlam Government's approach of recognising the PRC immediately on taking office and completing Australia's military withdrawal from Vietnam. It is understandable that with the benefit of hindsight, and considering China's exponential economic growth over recent decades, Whitlam's China policy is now seen as a masterstroke. It is worth remembering, however, that in the late 1960s, after the disasters of the Great Leap Forward and during the Cultural Revolution, China was economically impoverished and hardly a lucrative market. But perhaps what is more interesting is that this anachronistic economic logic has obscured the more normatively desirable result: that Australia under the Coalition backed the political 'winners' of the Cold War from a liberal perspective. Japan, South Korea and Taiwan would all become liberal democracies, while in the terminology of John Rawls, Malaysia,

Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines may be regarded as having evolved into 'decent non-liberal' societies.¹²³ China and Vietnam, on the other hand, remain repressive Leninist one-party states.

The mythologising of the 1971 Whitlam visit to China as parliamentary Opposition leader reveals both the entrenched nature of the dominant discourse of Asian engagement and its transactional emphasis on economics. The following chapter examines the major factors that coalesced in the late 1960s and early 1970s to erode Australia's deep involvement with Asia. These factors—British withdrawal from east of Suez, the formation and consolidation of ASEAN, de-escalation of the Vietnam War, the Nixon Doctrine and rapprochement with China—served to distance Australia politically from Asia, while shifting its mode of engagement from the political to the transactional.

123 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).

5

The winds of change

This chapter traces the changing external conditions evolving from the second half of the 1960s that politically distanced Australia from its close engagement with Asia, which was at its deepest in the years 1966 to 1968. The contextual factors occasioning this shift were the British withdrawal from east of Suez; the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 and its consolidation in the early 1970s as the leading regional organisation; the de-escalation and gradual American withdrawal from Vietnam signalled by President Johnson in March 1968; the Nixon Doctrine of 1969 that United States (US) allies in Asia must take up more of the burden of providing for their own security; and the US rapprochement with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1972. These external factors, which were largely beyond Canberra's capacity to control or influence, carried a range of implications for Australia's position in the world.

The results of these changes, which were felt throughout the 1970s and 1980s, were profound. From being an integral part of Southeast Asia's decolonisation process and a core non-communist East Asian country, Australia's position was transformed into a peripheral South Pacific state, looking 'in' at Asia, with its engagement premised increasingly on a transactional economic basis, rather than the deeper political and normative ties of responsibility and solidarity evident from 1944 through to the late 1960s. This historical trajectory explains Canberra's periodic strategies and initiatives since the 1980s to again 'deepen' Australia's engagement with Asia.

British withdrawal from east of Suez

The withdrawal by 1971 of most British military forces and concomitant strategic influence from Asia was the logical outcome of the postwar decolonisation process. It marked Britain's diminution from global empire to a European power. The British decision to withdraw from east of Suez followed a series of defence expenditure reviews and was prompted by the sterling crisis of 1966–67.¹ Formally announced by the first Wilson Labour Government (1964–70) in 1967, the withdrawal decision was the result of Britain's deteriorating financial situation and a major Defence Expenditure Review undertaken in 1965. An Australian assessment of Britain's strategic position in December of that year noted that the 'problem stems primarily from the economic position of the country'. The British Government was 'determined to limit Defence expenditure' and 'this has brought about a conflict of requirements'.² These tensions were played out between the United Kingdom (UK) Chiefs of Staff, who believed British forces were overcommitted around the world and wished 'to avoid overseas commitments with insufficient resources to implement them effectively'; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, who were resolved to limit defence expenditure unconditionally to a figure determined on fiscal rather than on strategic grounds.³ There was 'little doubt in the UK that the only area in which [defence] savings of a substantial nature are likely to accrue lies in the area East of Suez', with a relinquishing of the Singapore base forecast for 1970.⁴

The conclusions of Britain's 1965 Defence Expenditure Review were alarming for Australia. For Canberra, the retention of British forces in Southeast Asia was important for both Cold War reasons and for internal stability in the ANZAM (Australia–New Zealand–Malaya Agreement) area. In briefing notes prepared for the visit of Averell Harriman,

1 See Jeffrey Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal from East of Suez: The Politics of Retrenchment* (Basingstoke, UK: MacMillan; and New York: St Martin's Press, 1998); Christopher J Bartlett, *The Long Retreat: A Short History of British Defence Policy, 1945–1970* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1972); David McCourt, 'What was Britain's "East of Suez Role"? Reassessing the Withdrawal, 1964–1968', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 20, no. 3 (2009): 453–72.

2 Covering letter to 'United Kingdom Review of Defence Policy: Implications for Australia', from Air Vice Marshal GC Hartnell to Sir Edwin Hicks, Secretary, Department of Defence, dated 23 December 1965, National Archives of Australia (NAA) A1838/682/4, Part 7.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

the Johnson administration's Ambassador at Large, the Department of External Affairs (DEA) argued in January 1966 that maintaining the British presence was essential because a

United Kingdom withdrawal in the foreseeable future would be a blow to American and Australian concepts that a substantial Western presence in Asia is needed to provide counter-vailing power and sustain the national independence of the South East Asian countries against China.⁵

Further, that:

In our view the British and Commonwealth presence in its current form—bases, forces, commerce, diplomacy—is a great stabilising influence in the Malaysia and Singaporean area. This presence is a cementing force in a delicate communal structure and we believe the main racial groupings accept it and want it. The weakening or disappearance of this presence could bring unrest, uncertainty and even new orientations. The Malays could look to Indonesia for protection against the Chinese. The Chinese throughout the region (Malaya, Sarawak, Sabah) could look to Singapore, which, in turn, could look towards Peking.⁶

The initial Cabinet decision made by the Wilson Government in April 1967 was less dramatic than the assessment and recommendations made in the 1965 Defence Expenditure Review. The intention was to reduce British forces in Malaysia and Singapore by half by 1971 and then to progressively withdraw all forces from Asia (except for Hong Kong), by 1975 or 1976. Despite the slight softening of its withdrawal plans, London was acutely aware of the dismay this would cause in Washington and among the non-communist Asian states, but particularly the severe blow this would be to Australia: that 'we are already planning for a virtually total withdrawal from South East Asia' while the Australians 'are still heavily engaged in Vietnam'.⁷

5 'Talks with Governor Harriman: Background Notes for use by Ministers in Presenting Australia's Position in Relation to the Security Problems of the Region', 9 January 1966, NAA A1838/TS691/3, Part 6.

6 Ibid.; see also 'Strategic Basis of Australia Defence Policy—1971', 19 May 1971, NAA A1209/1971/9495.

7 'Defence Expenditure Studies', Brief for Prime Minister, 3 April 1967, The National Archives, UK (TNA) Prime Minister's Office Records (PREM) 13/1384.

As soon as the British Cabinet decision was clear, Australia mobilised its diplomatic resources to oppose or at least slow down the UK withdrawal from Southeast Asia. This was based on the rationale that British forces should be retained because of the need to ‘maintain stability in the region’; to ‘discourage foreign but particularly Indonesian aggression against the Malaysian area’; to ‘maintain the existing basis for [the] Australian and New Zealand forward defence posture’; to ‘assist in maintaining the outward credibility of SEATO [South East Asia Treaty Organization]’; and to continue to ‘provide visible support of the United States political and military policies in South East Asia’.⁸ Prime Minister Holt was soon in London. In a meeting with Wilson on 13 June 1967, the Australian prime minister gave an account of the Cold War strategic context in East Asia. Holt said:

Australia’s real concern was the long-term implications for the future security pattern of the region. Taking an arc round the mainland from Japan, through Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, round to Malaysia and Singapore, and including Australia and New Zealand, they were bound to note that the only part of the arc where there no American military commitment was in Malaysia and Singapore. The United States Government had always regarded this as a Commonwealth—and indeed primarily a British—responsibility.⁹

Any unequivocal statement of British withdrawal by the mid-1970s ‘would have a shattering effect on Commonwealth relations in the area, on Australia and New Zealand in particular and generally throughout the Far East’.¹⁰ However, the economic imperatives for a British withdrawal only intensified with the Wilson Government’s weak fiscal position, budget and trade deficits, and the sterling crisis.

Despite strong representations by Canberra and Washington, on what became known as ‘Black Tuesday’ in the British Ministry of Defence, 16 January 1968, the timetable for complete British withdrawal from Asia (with the exception of Hong Kong) was brought forward

8 ‘Britain East of Suez’, Department of Defence Brief, May 1967, NAA A4940/C4279.

9 ‘Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Australia at 10 Downing Street at 10.45 a.m. on Tuesday, June 13, 1967’, 13 June 1967, TNA Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 46/56.

10 Ibid.

to 31 March 1971.¹¹ This latest British position also abandoned an undertaking made in the July 1967 UK Defence White Paper that an unspecified ‘special military capability’ would be maintained in Asia, but ‘no provision for the area was now in mind other than some possible drawing upon a general capability located in Europe’.¹² In visiting Australia on 12 January 1968 to explain the change of policy, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs George Thomson met with Gorton, Hasluck and other senior Australian ministers.¹³ Thomson was unequivocal: ‘what he was saying was registering the end of an era and the end of British power on a decisive global scale’.¹⁴ The UK record of the meeting indicates that Gorton and Hasluck ‘expressed great dismay’; with Gorton saying that Australia could not accept the decision, while recognising that ‘the British Government had to do what was dictated by British interests’.¹⁵ It was not only Australia that felt the gravity of the decision. The retrenchment of British global power was announced by Prime Minister Harold Wilson on 17 January to a mostly sombre House of Commons punctuated by a few ‘cheers from the Labour left wing’ and ‘countered by indignant shouts from the Conservative benches’.¹⁶

What is striking about Australian policy discourse around the accelerated British withdrawal decision in 1968 is the lack of confidence expressed that Canberra could or should take over residual British responsibilities in the ANZAM area. This is in stark contrast to earlier Australian claims in the late 1940s and 1950s of a special responsibility for the postwar Southwest Pacific area on behalf of the British Commonwealth, and that Australia should take on an important, even leading, role in Southeast Asian affairs. For example, on 7 February 1968, Hasluck said to the Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik at a meeting in Jakarta ‘that Australia could not possibly take over the place of the British; we did

11 ‘Cabinet Minute, Canberra, 11th January, 1968, Decision No. 4, Without Memorandum—British Defence Policy’, 11 January 1968, NAA A5871, Vol. 1; Pickering, *Britain’s Withdrawal from East of Suez*, 174; Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947–1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 325.

12 ‘Cabinet Minute, Canberra, 11th January, 1968, Decision No. 4, Without Memorandum—British Defence Policy’, 11 January 1968, NAA A5871, Vol. 1.

13 The UK Minister of State for Foreign Affairs is a junior ministerial position under the Cabinet-level Foreign Secretary.

14 ‘Defence in the Far East, Record of Discussions between [UK] Secretary of State [Mr George Thomson] and Australian Ministers in Canberra on 12 January, 1968’, TNA FCO 24/91.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Australian High Commissioner London (Downer) to Department of External Affairs (DEA) Canberra (for Gorton), 17 January 1968, NAA A1209/1969/9036, Part 2.

not have Britain's special historical relationship with or obligations to Malaysia and Singapore; nor was it within our capacity'.¹⁷ Along similar lines, Defence Minister Allen Fairhall said in Parliament on 2 May that '[n]obody imagines that Australia could, or should, take over the present British role or commitments in Malaysia/Singapore. These grew out of Britain's position as a colonial power'.¹⁸

This change of Australian attitude—from Commonwealth responsibility to a more limited conception of the national interest—in the wake of the British withdrawal decision was quickly noted in Malaysia and Singapore. The Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur reported that the previous 'sentimental view that Australia would be ready on [the] basis of past association, to accept unilateral commitment to [the] "automatic" defence of Malaysia' had been replaced by the understanding that 'Australia's future defence undertakings will be based on calculations of national interest in light of requirements of regional situation'.¹⁹ From Singapore, it was reported that while 'Lee and his Ministers said categorically that they want Australia to stay in Singapore and Malaysia', they also

understand that Australia cannot be expected to come in to fill the place left by the British, but they consider that our continued presence and co-operation will in itself help to discourage undesirable elements from trying to fill the vacuum. The confidence engendered by some Australian presence is in Lee Kuan Yew's view a major contribution to maintaining the economic stability and progress of Singapore. If confidence is lost, he said, people will take capital out of Singapore and will not invest in the new industry.²⁰

Lee also thought that a weak Malaysia and Singapore might also tempt Indonesia to try and expand its influence, and thus it was desirable that some foreign military presence be maintained.²¹

17 'Record of Discussion between Mr Malik (Indonesian Foreign Minister) and Mr Hasluck, Djakarta, 7th February, 1968', NAA A4359/221/4/31, Part 1.

18 'Statement on Defence by The Hon. Allen Fairhall, M.P., Minister for Defence, House of Representatives – 2nd May 1968', in NAA A1209/1968/8364.

19 Australian High Commission Kuala Lumpur to DEA Canberra, 21 February 1968, NAA A1209/1969/9036, Part 3.

20 Australian High Commission Singapore (from Hasluck) to DEA Canberra, 3 February 1968, NAA A1209/1969/9036, Part 3.

21 Ibid.

These statements from Malaysia and Singapore provide a strong indication of the evolution during the late 1960s of Australia's changing attitude towards the Commonwealth countries of Southeast Asia, from the claims of responsibility evident in the Chifley and Menzies eras, to a narrower, more interest-based outlook. This was reinforced by the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, discussed in the following section, which signalled a postcolonial and more cultural definition of region that excluded Australia. This form of regional consciousness had been developing throughout the 1960s, and by late in the decade had become more salient for Malaysia than Commonwealth sentiments.

Gorton reinforced this change in Australia's disposition in a meeting with Wilson at 10 Downing Street on 7 January 1969. Gorton said that he

believed most Australians were disinterested in the Commonwealth as such. They were far from disinterested in Britain, to which the attitude of Australians would long—he believed for always—be unique in quality. The same was to some extent true of the other 'old' Commonwealth countries. But in regard to the 'new' Commonwealth Australia's attitude was essentially bilateral and regional.²²

Gorton's statements here reflect the 'new' Australian nationalism attributed to him by commentators of the time.²³ Britain's efforts throughout the 1960s to join the European Economic Community (EEC) at the expense of the imperial preference system, in combination with postwar changes to the demographic composition of Australian society, had eroded the traditional view of the country as a 'loyal outpost of British culture and British civilisation'.²⁴ International norms of anti-racism and postcolonial nationalism that accompanied the rapid decolonisation of the 1950s and 1960s also exerted 'moral pressure on the White Australia policy',²⁵ which was completely dismantled in the early 1970s. These economic, social and normative changes ushered in a more independent sense of Australian national identity.

22 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Australia at Luncheon at No. 10 Downing Street at 1.15 p.m. on Tuesday, January 7, 1969', TNA FCO 24/384.

23 Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 256–57.

24 Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace*, 2.

25 James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010), 15.

This moving away from a special relationship with the Commonwealth is also pointedly evident in negotiations between Australia, Singapore and Malaysia over the 1971 Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). In these talks, Australia was concerned to demonstrate that its approach was now part of a balanced regional strategy rather than a Commonwealth responsibility.²⁶ Australia's language and position in negotiating the FPDA are markedly different to its earlier claims of Commonwealth responsibility surrounding the 1955 deployment of forces to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya. Any Australian force deployments related to the FPDA would now be 'a contribution to wider regional security in relation to communist pressures'.²⁷ Australian forces based in Malaysia and Singapore would also be available in support of SEATO obligations to Thailand.²⁸

Similar to the troop commitment to Borneo during Confrontation, Australian deployments under the FPDA were also tacitly backed by the ANZUS (Australia–New Zealand–United States) Treaty, with private assurances reportedly given to Gorton by President Nixon in this regard.²⁹ This assurance did not apply, however, to any internal security contingency stemming from interethnic tensions in Malaysia or Singapore. In this regard, Daniel Chua notes Australia's increasing reluctance to move forward with post-AMDA (Anglo–Malayan Defence Agreement) arrangements after the 'May 13 incident', in which approximately 200 people were killed in Sino-Malay race riots in Kuala Lumpur after the 1969 general election.³⁰ Additionally, Australian deployments could not appear to be directed against other powers, particularly the Philippines (over the disputed territory in Sabah) and Indonesia. Canberra made it clear that it was

26 'Anglo/Malaysian Defence Agreement: Australian Association', April 1969, NAA A1838/TS696/1, Part 18; see also Andrea Benvenuti and Moreen Dee, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements and the Reappraisal of the British and Australian Policy Interests in Southeast Asia, 1970–75', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 103, 111.

27 'Five Power Conference—June 1969', Cabinet Submission No. 622, 11 June 1969, NAA A5868/622.

28 DEA Canberra to Australian Embassy Washington, DC, 19 February 1968, NAA A4359/221/4/31, Part 1.

29 'Australian Prime Minister's Visit to Washington', UK High Commission Canberra to FCO London, 16 May 1969, TNA FCO 24/398.

30 Daniel Wei Boon Chua, *US–Singapore Relations, 1967–1975: Strategic Non-Alignment in the Cold War* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 200.

not stepping into British shoes and Australian forces will not fill the role played in the past by British forces. With the British departure the primary and direct responsibility for the defence of Malaysia and Singapore will rest not with any outside forces but with the two Governments concerned.³¹

The FPDA entered into effect on 1 November 1971 as an undertaking to consult in the event “of any form of armed attack externally organised or supported, or the threat of such attack against Malaysia or Singapore”.³²

The ANZAM arrangement was still technically in place at the close of the 1960s. The effect of the British withdrawal was its replacement in 1971 by a looser ‘tripartite agreement’ between the UK, Australia and New Zealand ‘to be known informally as ANZUK’. ANZUK would be ‘almost exclusively consultative’ and, unlike ANZAM, it would not have an integral role in the defence planning of the countries concerned.³³ The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) summarised in 1971 the causes of the decline in the Anglo–Australian ‘special relationship’ in four factors: ‘a natural divergence of interests, Australia turning to South East Asia and the Pacific, and the United Kingdom turning inward and to Europe’; the ‘now almost certain British entry into the EEC on terms that did not appear to take Australia as fully into account as it might have done’; that the colonial ‘son has grown up and become somewhat assertive; and the mother a little resentful at her diminished responsibility and authority’; and finally, and most relevant for the argument advanced here, ‘the diminished significance of the Commonwealth, at least as a political entity, and the deathpangs of Britain’s imperial heyday’.³⁴ The end of British decolonisation in the Southeast Asian region removed a central tenet of Australia’s responsibilities in Southeast Asia, clearing the way for a more instrumental conception of Australia’s regional interests from the late 1960s.

31 ‘Five Power Conference—June 1969’, Cabinet Submission No. 622, 11 June 1969, NAA A5868/622.

32 Cited in ‘Statement by the Minister for Defence (the Honourable David Fairbairn, D.F.C., M.P.)’, 1 November 1971, NAA A1209/1969/9036, Part 34.

33 ‘British Relations with Australia and New Zealand after 1971’, FCO Planning Committee, 8 June 1970, TNA FCO 24/621.

34 ‘Anglo–Australian Relations: Prospects and Initiatives’, Policy Planning Paper, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Canberra, 3 December 1971, in TNA FCO 24/1047.

ASEAN and Southeast Asian regional identity

The formation of ASEAN in 1967, excluding Australia and New Zealand, and its subsequent consolidation as the leading regional organisation, surpassing the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC), is another crucial factor in Australia's political distancing from Asia. The Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines inaugurated ASEAN at Bangsaen, near Bangkok, on 8 August 1967.³⁵ ASEAN was partially the fruition of earlier, stillborn attempts at regional organisation in the form of the 1961 Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) (Thailand, the Philippines and Malaya) and the 1963 pan-Malay Maphilindo or Greater Malayan Confederation (comprised of Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia).

Each of these organisations carried fatal flaws in the regional context of the early 1960s. With two countries as members of SEATO and a third with British Commonwealth forces on its territory, ASA was unpalatable to Sukarno's Indonesia and neutralist Burma, Cambodia and Laos. The fledgling organisation was then rendered inoperable in 1963, when the Philippines broke off relations with newly formed Malaysia over the Sabah territorial dispute in north Borneo.³⁶ The cause of pan-Malay solidarity was even shorter lived with Indonesia's 1963–66 *Konfrontasi* of the expansion of the Federation of Malaya to the north Borneo territories. The rationale for Maphilindo was also clearly unpalatable to Chinese-majority Singapore and raised concerns for Thailand's hold over its Muslim and ethnically Malay southern provinces.³⁷ What these initiatives do indicate, however, are pressures building throughout the 1960s toward a postcolonial regional identity based on cultural expressions of 'Asianness' to overcome other divisions and antipathies. By the end of the 1960s, this form of regional consciousness had become more salient for Southeast Asian countries than Commonwealth sentiment in the cases of Malaysia and Singapore, and the non-communist solidarity of ASPAC, both of which more naturally included Australia.

35 'Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)', DEA Canberra to All Posts, 5 September 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 3.

36 'Association of South-East Asia (ASA)', 1964, NAA A1838/3004/13/17, Part 4; Australian High Commission Wellington to DEA Canberra, 25 March 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 15.

37 'Regionalism in South-East Asia', 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/17, Part 5; Australian High Commission Wellington to DFA Canberra, 25 March 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 15.

By early 1967, regional conditions in Southeast Asia were becoming favourable for a more cohesive regional organisation. Australia's DEA attributed this to the removal of the Sukarno regime in Indonesia and the end of Confrontation; the realisation that the US commitment to Indochina 'offers the rest of South-East Asia an alternative to eventual Chinese domination, provided a degree of regional unity can be forged'; the establishment of the Manila-headquartered Asian Development Bank in 1966; and the successful example of ASPAC, which had stimulated further thinking on regionalism more specifically in Southeast Asia.³⁸ Political elites in Bangkok, Manila and Kuala Lumpur were also acutely aware of the need to bring Indonesia into an inclusive regional system, while understanding that Jakarta would only do so on the basis that it would be 'primus inter pares in any organisation'.³⁹ For its part, the new Suharto regime did not think ASA, Maphilindo or ASPAC were suitable candidates to advance regional organisation with Indonesia's involvement. Australia assessed that Indonesia would want to be seen as initiating any new organisation, 'which would replace, and combine some of the features of, both Maphilindo and ASA'.⁴⁰

Soundings were made by Indonesia in April 1967 'to hold a conference of South-East Asian nations on regional cooperation in the "socio-economic and cultural field" within three months'.⁴¹ What is interesting in terms of the historical trajectory traced in this book is that Australia's decision not to actively seek membership in ASEAN was based largely on transactional grounds, which were deemed to outweigh the considerable political benefits of membership. Canberra initially assessed that it could count on the support of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines should it choose to press for ASEAN membership. Politically, such membership would allow for a closer association with Indonesia and ensure that the expansion of Jakarta's influence 'takes place in an orderly and peaceful fashion'. It was also argued that 'Australian participation in ASEAN would enable' Canberra to exert 'a discreet moderating role and provide scope for trying to ensure that the initiatives and energies of ASEAN are directed into positive and progressive channels'.⁴²

38 'Regionalism in South-East Asia', 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/17, Part 5.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 'South-East Asian Regional Cooperation', New Zealand (NZ) Legation Djakarta to Secretary External Affairs Wellington, 2 May 1967, in NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 1.

42 DEA Memorandum (Joseph to Osborn), 10 August 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 3.

The balance between a political and economic focus for the new organisation remained unclear in 1967, however. Australian policymakers were also concerned that if ASEAN moved in the direction of a common market, customs union or free trade area, this would be a challenge to Australia's agricultural and industry protection and unacceptable to the departments of Treasury and Trade. Doubts were raised as to how genuine Australia's participation could be under these circumstances. Then if Australia 'failed to pull its weight' or tried to avoid commitments other members had entered into, it 'would rapidly become un-Asian' and its membership in ASEAN would be an irritant rather than a benefit in Canberra's regional relations.⁴³ Policy debates in Australia over the wisdom of seeking ASEAN membership were largely academic, as it turned out. Indonesia was firm as to the core membership of the organisation, which would consist only of Southeast Asian states of similar economic development. This was not intended to rule Australia out specifically, but to also exclude Japan and India—indeed, any larger players that might challenge Indonesian influence in the new organisation.⁴⁴

From the perspective of its original members, potential expansion of ASEAN membership was thus limited only to Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. This suggests a coherent vision of regional identity that now excluded Australia had begun to be formed by Southeast Asian political elites. In October 1967, Pablo Pena, the Philippines' Assistant Secretary for Foreign Affairs, said to the Australian Ambassador to Manila that 'there was a very important difference between ASEAN and ASPAC'. Whereas ASPAC was a looser organisation that did not require participation of all members in all undertakings, ASEAN was conceived as 'a smaller, more homogenous grouping' requiring unanimous decisions and participation.⁴⁵ In response to calls in 1968 by Whitlam from Opposition that Australia should join ASEAN, Adam Malik, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, said that 'Australia and New Zealand could indeed not be made into Asian nations'.⁴⁶ Other states with interests in the area such

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.; also 'Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)', DEA Canberra to All Posts, 5 September 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 3; 'Membership of ASEAN' (text of telegram from NZ High Commissioner Singapore to Wellington regarding ASEAN membership), in DFA Canberra to Kuala Lumpur, Djakarta, Singapore, Manila and Bangkok, 27 September 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 18.

45 'F.R. Dalrymple, Australian Embassy, Manila, Record of Conversation with Ambassador Pablo Pena, Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs', 11 October 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 4.

46 Australian Embassy Djakarta to DEA Canberra, 9 January 1968, NAA A1838/541/1/6.

as Pakistan, India and Ceylon, Japan and South Korea, and Australia and New Zealand, might be added later as an outer tier after the nucleus of the organisation had proven itself viable.⁴⁷ In the short term, however, Malik stated that Jakarta ‘was primarily interested in co-operation with Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines’. For other countries, there was ‘no need or opportunity for anything but good bilateral relationships’.⁴⁸

In December 1969, Malik said again that ‘Indonesia would like to see all countries in South East Asia join ASEAN’, but it ‘was unlikely that ASEAN would be extended to include Australia and New Zealand’.⁴⁹ While not ‘banning’ Australia and New Zealand from ever becoming members, Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman made the point also in December 1969 that ASEAN was now the vehicle for ‘solidarity for the region’.⁵⁰ It is clear by the end of the 1960s that the previous forms of solidarity that had integrated Australia with the region—Commonwealth responsibilities and non-communist ties—had eroded or been superseded, pushing Australia to the margins of regional organisation. A consequence of this, as noted by Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman in December 1967, was that, for its members, ASEAN was likely to become the premier regional organisation and ‘the degree of attention’ given ‘to the work of ASPAC’ would necessarily be diminished.⁵¹

The implications of the formation of ASEAN do not appear to have been well understood by Canberra until 1972, however. For example, in May 1969 the short-lived Coalition Minister for External Affairs, Gordon Freeth, wrote that the Sabah dispute greatly weakened the potential of ASEAN, while ASPAC has continued to grow in importance.⁵² In a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kuala Lumpur in February 1970, Australian officials seemed perplexed that stronger indications of Canberra’s acceptability to join ASEAN had not been received, especially from Malaysia and Thailand. Zainal Sulong, Acting

47 ‘South East Asian Regional Co-operation’, Australian Embassy Djakarta to Secretary DEA Canberra, 13 May 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 1.

48 DEA Memorandum (Joseph to Osborn), 10 August 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 3.

49 ‘ASEAN’, Australian High Commission Kuala Lumpur to DEA Canberra, 16 December 1969, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 11.

50 ‘ASEAN Membership—Australia and New Zealand’, Australian High Commission Kuala Lumpur to DEA Canberra, 29 December 1969, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 11.

51 Australian Embassy Bangkok to DEA Canberra, 14 December 1967, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 3.

52 ‘Proposal to Establish an Economic Co-operation Centre’, Cabinet Submission no. 571, 13 May 1969, NAA A5882/CO310.

Secretary-General of the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, suggested that Australia would need to demonstrate its Southeast Asian character before membership could be considered.⁵³ The following year, Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tun Ismail categorically ruled out Australian membership, stating that Australia and New Zealand were not in the region: “Burma, the two Vietnams, Lao and Cambodia yes, but no one else”.⁵⁴

In December 1971, Canberra’s Ambassador to Thailand reiterated to Foreign Minister Khoman Australia’s claims to regional membership based on ‘our geographical position, our security interests’, and ‘our active participation in the region’ over many years. Statements such as this had little effect with regard to ASEAN.⁵⁵ Despite the closeness of Canberra’s political and security relationships with Malaysia and Thailand, it is evident with references to Southeast Asian ‘character’ and ‘temperament’ that Australia, which had previously been considered part of the region by many Asian leaders, was, by the early 1970s, being ruled out on cultural grounds. Southeast Asian opinion wrote of the ‘intangible psychological bonds’ drawing together the ASEAN countries, ‘the development of an ASEAN consciousness and of the habit of thinking as a region’, with the organisation primarily ‘an affair of the heart, not of the head’.⁵⁶

By 1972, this exclusion and its rationale, seem to have been assimilated and accepted by Australian policy elites. For example, on 16 December 1971, a DFA policy planning paper stated:

[w]e must accept that we are simply not regarded as part of the region. It is not contested by the nations of the region that we have firm interests in the area ... but by temperament we are seen as being on the periphery—as are the Japanese.⁵⁷

53 ‘Record of a Conversation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuala Lumpur’, 24 February 1970, NAA A1838/3006/9/1, Part 4.

54 Cited in ‘ASEAN’, NZ High Commissioner Kuala Lumpur to DEA Wellington, 27 April 1971, in NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 12; see also ‘Neutralisation of South East Asia’, DFA Policy Planning Paper, 16 December 1971, NAA A1838/625/14/3.

55 ‘ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting at Kuala Lumpur’, Australian Embassy Bangkok to DFA Canberra, 10 December 1971, NAA A1838/250/10/7, Part 9.

56 ‘Attitudes of Member Countries to ASEAN’, DFA Canberra to Djakarta, Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Seoul, Bangkok, New Delhi, Manila, London, Rangoon, Washington, Phnom Penh, Wellington, Vientiane, Paris, Saigon and Moscow, 26 September 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 18.

57 ‘Neutralisation of South East Asia’, DFA Policy Planning Paper, 16 December 1971, NAA A1838/625/14/3, Part 2.

On 27 April 1972, a DFA memorandum argued that:

Quite apart from the fact that the present members don't want us, or anybody else, as members, the central point is that the attractions and value of ASEAN stem from its smallness, the geographical proximity of member countries, their more or less community of interests and outlooks, and their 'Asian-ness'. Australia does not fit into this pattern, and I don't see that it ever will.⁵⁸

It may be observed that on gaining office in December 1972, Whitlam's push toward a broader definition of regional community that included Australia, Japan and possibly the PRC was diametrically opposed to the direction of thinking about regional solidarity in ASEAN states, which, as demonstrated here, was also recognised in the Australian foreign policy bureaucracy.

De-escalation in Vietnam and the Nixon Doctrine

The US de-escalation and withdrawal from Vietnam that began on 31 March 1968 did not bring Australia closer to the region despite the claims of the Whitlam Government and later myth of Asian engagement. Rather, the waning of the US commitment to South Vietnam, and the Nixon Doctrine that the non-communist countries of East Asia must take up more of the burden of providing for their own security, eroded one of the essential pillars of Australia's deep integration with the region: non-communist solidarity. Albeit with deep concerns expressed by Thailand and Singapore, the impending US withdrawal of its direct military presence in Southeast Asia prompted ASEAN members to turn inward and consolidate the organisation as a bulwark against Chinese influence, canvassing Malaysian-led proposals for 'neutralisation' that would exclude all great powers and their close allies from the area.⁵⁹

58 'Australia and Asia', DFA Memorandum, KI Gates (Malaysia-Singapore Section) to Mr Nutter, 27 April 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 14; see also 'Prime Minister's Visit', Australian High Commission Singapore to Canberra, Kuala Lumpur, Djakarta, 11 June 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 15.

59 See, for example, 'Neutralisation of South East Asia', DFA Policy Paper, 14 January 1971, NAA A1838/625/14/3, Part 1; 'Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy—1971', 19 May 1971, NAA A1209/1971/9495; 'Neutralisation', Australian High Commission Kuala Lumpur (Rowland) to DFA Canberra, 27 July 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 16.

The idea of a neutral Southeast Asia had been advanced by Kuala Lumpur in various forms since 1965. However, with the changes to the regional environment in the late 1960s analysed in this chapter, Malaysian advocacy for neutralisation became more sustained. In a radio speech on 31 January 1968, Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman proposed—as a first step—non-aggression pacts between Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Burma and Thailand. This would be augmented by a neutrality agreement, where ASEAN members would ensure they remained neutral in the event of war or military conflict in Asia. The final step of the proposal was that the neutrality of the ASEAN area as a whole would be guaranteed by the United States, the Soviet Union and China, who would respect the independence of Southeast Asian states.⁶⁰

Subsequent Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak (1970–76) strongly advocated for the neutralisation proposal in the early 1970s on the basis of continued communist subversive activity in the ASEAN area, the reduction of US forces in Indochina as part of the Nixon Doctrine, the impending British withdrawal from the ANZAM area (and uncertainty about Australia's and New Zealand's willingness to fill this role in a substantial way for more than a few years), and a general sentiment on the part of ASEAN members that foreign powers should no longer have a military role in Southeast Asia. These Malaysian proposals were judged by Australia's DFA to be generally in line with the thinking in Jakarta, Rangoon, Phnom Penh and Vientiane, although less so in Bangkok and Singapore.⁶¹ A great power guarantee of this neutrality was never practicable, but other aspects of the Malaysian neutralisation proposal were formally adopted in November 1971 with the Declaration of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality in Southeast Asia.⁶² This initiative led to the later Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (1976), which became possible after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, and to which new ASEAN members have to accede upon entry to the organisation.

60 'Malaysia: Attitudes Towards Regional Defence', 25 February 1968, NAA A1209/1969/9036, Part 3.

61 'Neutralisation of South East Asia', DFA Policy Paper, 14 January 1971, NAA A1838/625/14/3, Part 1.

62 'Neutralisation of South East Asia', DFA Canberra, Policy Planning Paper, 16 December 1971, NAA A1838/625/14/3, Part 2.

President Johnson's statement on 31 March 1968 of a limiting of US operations in Vietnam and his decision not to seek re-election was met with 'shock' by 'the non-aligned countries' and by 'America's allies'.⁶³ As is well known, the Australian Government, as 'a fighting ally' in Vietnam, was deeply disturbed and embarrassed by the lack of prior consultation about Johnson's statement.⁶⁴ Prime Minister Gorton wrote to Keith Waller, Australia's Ambassador in Washington:

I should like you to make sure ... that the President and his senior aides are made aware of our disappointment and great embarrassment that one of America's closest allies should have been given so little opportunity to address itself properly to the President's proposals and no opportunity to be ready to make informed comments on them immediately on their being made public.⁶⁵

Australia's disengagement from its 1965 commitment to South Vietnam began on 17 November 1970 with the withdrawal of the 8th Australian army battalion.⁶⁶ On 18 August 1971, Prime Minister William McMahon (1971–72) announced 'that the combat role which Australia took up over six years ago in Vietnam is soon to be completed'. While allowing time for the South Vietnamese to adjust their force dispositions, the government had 'decided to withdraw all remaining Australian combat forces from Vietnam' by Christmas 1971. Stores, equipment and other infrastructure would follow in 1972.⁶⁷

The Nixon administration (1969–74) came to office convinced that the US must extricate itself from Johnson's disastrous Vietnam intervention. In addition, the deep divisions evident in the communist world with the Sino–Soviet split, the trend 'of USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] policy towards peaceful co-existence and stabilization of the

63 'Press Reaction to President Johnson's Statement', UK High Commission Canberra to Commonwealth Office (CO) London, 2 April 1968, TNA FCO 24/132.

64 Australian Embassy Washington to DEA Canberra (for the Prime Minister from Waller), 2 April 1968, NAA A1209/1968/8615.

65 DEA Canberra to Australian Embassy Washington (for Waller from Prime Minister), 2 April 1968, NAA A1209/1968/8615; see also UK High Commission Canberra to CO (also Washington, Wellington and POLAD Singapore), 8 April 1968, TNA FCO/24/132.

66 Report by UK High Commission Canberra to FCO South West Pacific Dept., 17 November 1970, TNA FCO 24/692.

67 'Statement in the House of Representatives by the Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon. William McMahon, Future of Australian Forces in Vietnam, 18 August 1971', in TNA FCO 24/1061; see also UK High Commission Canberra (PM Vereker) to FCO South West Pacific Dept. (RD Wall), 24 August 1971, TNA FCO 24/1061.

international order⁶⁸ and the consolidation of the Suharto regime in Indonesia indicated a more benign global situation and less threatening regional environment. Australia remained uneasy, however, as the Nixon administration took office in early 1969. On 26 February, Gorton confirmed that Australia would retain its existing forces in Malaysia and Singapore after Britain's withdrawal,⁶⁹ but strategic planning documents also recognised that the 'forward defence policy' could not continue without the US presence.⁷⁰ A marked change in Canberra's rhetoric about Vietnam can be observed at this time. This change of tone paralleled Canberra's backing away from its prior claims to a special Commonwealth responsibility in Southeast Asia. For example, on 14 January 1970 in a meeting with Nixon's Vice President Spiro Agnew in Canberra, the Australian position was that Vietnam 'was not a war which could be justified, as World War I and II could be justified, by demonstrating a situation of proximate danger to the Australian community'.⁷¹ Statements such as these were starkly at odds with Menzies' alarmist rhetoric about the threat of Chinese communist expansion into Southeast Asia, justifying the initial Australian commitment to South Vietnam.⁷²

Later termed the Nixon or Guam doctrine, the US administration's 'new approach in East Asia' explicitly recognised that 'the Republic of China on Taiwan and Communist China on the mainland' were both 'facts of life'. Washington would now 'encourage Asian countries to take the initiative in terms of improving their own internal situation and that of the region'. Aid priority would be given to those countries that 'do most to help themselves and cooperate with their neighbors'.⁷³ Canberra's assessment of this was that SEATO was now moribund and Washington's security role in Asia would be 'severely curtailed'. It was further forecast that the 'extent of U.S. economic and political involvement' would be reduced, and that the 'countries of the region will be expected to develop their own security arrangements to counter all but a nuclear threat'. Finally, 'by omission rather than affirmation', the Guam doctrine suggested that

68 'Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy 1968', 19 August 1968, NAA M3787/44.

69 'Press Reaction to Gorton Defence Statement', 26 February 1969, TNA FCO 24/355.

70 See 'Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy 1968', 19 August 1968, NAA M3787/44.

71 'Decision No. 64, Without Submission—Discussions with Mr. Spiro T. Agnew, Vice-President of the United States', Cabinet Minute, 14 January 1970, NAA A5882/CO795.

72 See, for example, Garry Woodard, *Asian Alternatives: Australia's Vietnam Decision and Lessons on Going to War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 285; and Paul Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2008), 119–20.

73 Australian Embassy Washington to DEA Canberra, 8 October 1969, NAA A1838/541/1/13, Part 2.

‘in the Nixon Administration’s view, Southeast Asia ... is not vital to the American interest’.⁷⁴ The Nixon Doctrine brought an end to Australia’s Cold War military posture of forward defence in Southeast Asia.

Whatever its merits, Australia’s forward defence strategy in the 1950s and 1960s, with its background condition of reliance on ‘great and powerful friends’, had unequivocally placed it in the region. It required the forging and balancing of relations in a complex and sometimes delicate regional setting and required Canberra to view the world from a Southeast Asian standpoint, rather than the South Pacific perspective it was forced to adopt during the 1970s. The winding down of Australia’s forward defence strategy in parallel with both British and American withdrawal from direct involvement in Southeast Asia was a disengagement from its previously deep regional integration, not the beginning of ‘genuine’ engagement as is often claimed.

Sino–US rapprochement and the breakdown of ASPAC

The final major external factor identified here that pushed Australia outside the margins of the region is the 15 July 1971 announcement of Nixon’s impending visit to Beijing and US rapprochement with communist China. In conjunction with these developments and a more conciliatory Chinese disposition, some East Asian states were prompted, albeit reluctantly, to move to accommodate Beijing. This meant cutting ties with Taiwan and further downgrading ASPAC, which had already been superseded by ASEAN, to the point of insignificance. Thus, Australia’s primary vehicle for inclusion in regional organisation, grounded in non-communist Asian solidarity, evaporated in the early 1970s.

Whitlam’s visit to China from 4 to 9 July 1971 as leader of the Australian parliamentary opposition—almost coinciding with Henry Kissinger’s secret visit from 9 to 11 July—is generally seen as a political masterstroke. It should be noted, however, that while Whitlam’s visit was able to garner maximum publicity, the Coalition Government was already moving, albeit more cautiously, in the same direction. The documentary record shows that as Foreign Minister in October 1970, McMahon had instigated

74 Australian Embassy Washington to DEA Canberra, 24 February 1970, NAA M3787/40.

a China study with a view to normalising relations. Subsequently, Australian diplomats had at least two secret meetings in Paris on 27 May and 2 July 1971 to open a dialogue with PRC officials, in addition to informal contacts via the countries' respective embassies in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.⁷⁵ These developments preceded the Whitlam and Kissinger visits to China and demonstrated that the Coalition Government's policy was converging with both the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Opposition and the Nixon administration. For example, Prime Minister McMahon said in May 1972 that 'we would not oppose China's representation and admission to the United Nations', and 'that it was inevitable and right that China should be a member of the United Nations General Assembly and should hold the permanent seat in the Security Council'.⁷⁶ However, unaware of Kissinger's preparations, and due to the nature of diplomacy, formal Australian Government initiatives could not be publicised. Thus, for domestic political consumption, the McMahon Government was publicly critical of the Whitlam visit to China and then looked inept when the Nixon visit was made public shortly thereafter.

Moves by the McMahon Government to normalise relations with the PRC seem to have stalled, however, by early 1972.⁷⁷ The Chinese were no longer responding to approaches from Alan Renouf, Australia's Ambassador in Paris. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) believed the Chinese were 'no doubt waiting to see if an ALP government' was returned in Australia, 'in which case diplomatic recognition is a certainty'.⁷⁸ From the Australian side, the lack of movement was also partly due to domestic political dynamics in the need for the Coalition Government in its dying days to placate the staunchly anti-communist Democratic Labor Party,

75 UK High Commission Canberra to Sir Alec Douglas-Home (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs), 11 June 1971, TNA FCO 24/1043; 'For Press, Relations with the People's Republic of China, Statement by the Prime Minister', 18 July 1971, NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 1; 'Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. William McMahon, Victorian Division State Council of the Liberal Party of Australia, Melbourne', 28 July 1971, NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 2; 'Visit of the Australian Prime Minister to the United Kingdom, 7–13 November 1971', FCO Brief, 3 November 1971, TNA Cabinet Office Records (CAB) 133/401.

76 'Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. William McMahon, Victorian Division State Council of the Liberal Party of Australia, Melbourne', 28 July 1971, NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 2; see also Owen Harries, 'Australia's Foreign Policy under Whitlam', *Orbis: Journal of World Affairs* 19, no. 3 (1975): 1096, as to how the changing circumstances of the late 1960s and early 1970s 'would have forced *any* Australian government some way along the path taken by the Labor government' (emphasis in original).

77 'President Nixon's Visit to China: Mr. Marshall Green's Briefing of the Australians', UK High Commission Canberra (W Peters) to FCO South West Pacific Dept (JK Hickman), 21 March 1972, TNA FCO 24/1334.

78 UK High Commission Canberra to FCO London, 29 February 1972, TNA FCO 24/1337.

but also reportedly due to pressure from Indonesia's President Suharto, who opposed diplomatic recognition of Beijing.⁷⁹ Japan was in advance of Australia in this respect, recognising Beijing and normalising its relations with the PRC on 29 September 1972. This was sought by Beijing as much as by Tokyo. The DFA assessed that the Chinese would see Sino–Japanese normalisation as preventing closer Soviet–Japanese relations, while also signalling a further loss of legitimacy and international support for Taiwan, thereby encouraging other countries to follow Tokyo's example.⁸⁰ The Australian Government considered the normalisation of Sino–Japanese diplomatic relations to be a positive development, but believed it was unlikely to portend a closer political relationship between the two. The DFA assessment presciently added that 'China and Japan will find themselves vying, over the longer term, for political and economic influence in the Asia/Pacific region'.⁸¹

Similar to the March 1968 Johnson statement on Vietnam, Canberra was not consulted in advance about the announcement of Nixon's visit to China. Along with other Asian Treaty allies Taiwan, Japan and the Philippines, the Australian Government received around 20 minutes' notice of Nixon's statement on 15 July 1971 accepting the invitation to visit the PRC 'to seek the normalization of relations between the two countries and also to exchange views on questions of concern to the two sides'.⁸² McMahon wrote to Nixon on 18 July endorsing the US initiative on China as consistent with his 'own policy seeking to normalise relations between Australia and China'. However, the Australian Government was 'placed in a quandary' by the 'lack of any foreknowledge' of this dramatic step. While stating his understanding that Kissinger's visit required the maintenance of secrecy, McMahon noted that Canberra's:

79 Ibid.; see also 'Extract from DFA Policy Planning Paper No. 45 of 5.10.72', 5 October 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 19.

80 'Assessment of PRC/Japan Normalisation Agreement', DFA Canberra to All Posts, 9 October 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 19.

81 Ibid.

82 United States Information Service Official Text, 15 July 1971, in NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 1; see also Australian Embassy Washington (Plimsoll) to DEA Canberra for PM, Minister and Secretary DFA, 15 July 1971, NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 1; Australian Embassy Washington to DFA Canberra, 16 July 1971, NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 1; DFA Canberra to Australian Embassy Tokyo (for Prime Minister Sato from Mr McMahon), 18 July 1971, NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 1; 'Decision No. 262, Without Submission—President Nixon—Visit to China', Cabinet Minute, 20 July 1971, NAA A5882/CO1241.

relations with The People's Republic of China have in recent weeks been a matter of deep public controversy in Australia following a visit to Peking by members of the Australian Labor Party, including the leader of the opposition Mr Whitlam.⁸³

The Coalition Government had:

felt obliged to criticise many of the things which Mr Whitlam said and did in Peking including some quite gratuitous attacks and criticism of our friends and allies including the United States and indeed his reference to the need for you yourself to change your policies or get defeated.

The government's criticisms may 'have been cast differently had we been given an indication of changes in American policy'.⁸⁴

Australia was not unique in this respect. In addition to the obvious case of Taiwan, all US-aligned countries in the region were 'irritated by the American failure to consult them', especially since the abrupt change of policy reversed positions that they had been publicly supporting. A brief from the UK FCO reported that '[t]he Philippines, like the Japanese, have been irritated to find themselves identified with an American policy which the Americans themselves subsequently abandoned without warning—and without any early attempt to explain the implications to their allies'.⁸⁵ The historic Nixon visit duly took place from 21 to 28 February 1972 with general undertakings of eventually withdrawing all US forces from Southeast Asia and Taiwan, that Taiwan was an integral part of China, and that settlement of the Taiwan question was a matter for the Chinese people.⁸⁶

It is also interesting to note that, rather than the Sino–US rapprochement being an initiative of Nixon and Kissinger, the approach originated from Beijing. In a meeting with McMahon and other senior ministers, the US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and later Ambassador to Australia, Marshall Green, revealed that the:

83 DFA Canberra to Australian Embassy Washington (to President Nixon from McMahon), 18 July 1971, NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 1.

84 Ibid.

85 'Visit of the Australian Prime Minister to the United Kingdom, 7–13 November 1971', FCO Brief, 3 November 1971, TNA CAB 133/401.

86 'Press Cuttings Nixon Visit China', 29 February 1972, NAA A1209/1969/9054, Part 2.

initiative for President Nixon's visit came from the Chinese themselves to the President. It was the Chinese who had wanted a joint communique. It was the Chinese who had wanted the approach to the United States to go forward. For this ... they had paid a considerable price including in terms of their own dogma.⁸⁷

According to Washington, the motivations behind Beijing's more conciliatory attitude was fear of the Soviet Union, which had 41 divisions massed on China's northern frontier including a tactical nuclear capability. Mongolia was an armed Soviet satellite state. The Chinese were also wary of Japan's economic success and that this might translate into a return to militarist behaviour. These concerns now outweighed Beijing's wariness about US policy in the area. Consequently, it was also likely that the PRC would be less likely to support subversive communist movements in Southeast Asia. The Americans noted that in the talks Beijing backed away from long-held positions such as abrogation of Washington's Mutual Defence Treaty with Taiwan and the immediate withdrawal of all US forces from Thailand and the Philippines.⁸⁸

For Australia's engagement with East Asia, one of the most significant consequences of the US rapprochement with the PRC was the breakdown of ASPAC. Of the ASPAC members, Japan and Malaysia were the two most concerned to engage and accommodate Beijing. This meant the generally anti-communist 'aura' of the organisation and any formal association with the Republic of China was no longer palatable.⁸⁹ Australia assessed that there was no prospect of Taipei withdrawing voluntarily, but 'that ASPAC's credibility as a representative forum would be seriously damaged by the withdrawal of either Malaysia or Japan'.⁹⁰ Malaysia, which had always been ASPAC's most reluctant member, ceased to participate from 1971.⁹¹ New Prime Minister Razak was more determined than his predecessor to emphasise Malaysia's non-aligned status.⁹² Thailand felt

87 'Record of Conversation between the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Mr Marshall Green in Sydney on 14 March 1972', in TNA FCO 24/1334.

88 Ibid.

89 Australian High Commission Wellington (AJ Melhuish) to Secretary DFA Canberra, (covering letter for a NZ Foreign Ministry brief on regional cooperation in Asia), 25 May 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 15.

90 'DFA Submission to Minister on China Policy, Final', 4 November 1971, NAA A1838/541/1/3.

91 DFA (DG Nutter, Assistant Secretary South East Asia Branch) to Australian Embassy Seoul, 16 December 1971, NAA A1838/541/4, Part 3.

92 Australian Embassy Seoul (MGM Boucher, Ambassador) to Secretary DFA Canberra, 14 January 1972, NAA A1838/541/1/3.

that without Malaysia, it was unlikely to participate any further as well.⁹³ The Japanese approach was quieter in de-emphasising its membership and letting ASPAC gradually wind down. This mirrored Canberra's position, which was that it did

not want to see the collapse of the only regional political association of which we are a member, particularly as there is at present no foreseeable prospect of the setting-up of any alternative grouping.⁹⁴

The same dynamics applied to SEATO, which, although of enduring value to Thailand, had been effectively moribund for some time, with no meaningful participation by Pakistan or France.⁹⁵ The Whitlam Opposition had advocated for the immediate elimination of both organisations, but on attaining power, decided to take a lower profile approach.⁹⁶ In March 1973, directives were sent that Australia's participation in ASPAC political activities and technical centres should be wound up.⁹⁷ Planning for the dissolution of SEATO was instigated by Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines in August 1975.⁹⁸ ASPAC and SEATO were quietly dissolved in 1975 and 1977 respectively, thereby formally ending Australia's role as a core member of East Asian regional organisations.

ASEAN states acknowledged that US rapprochement with China and Japan's normalisation of relations required them to come to a greater accommodation with Beijing—ASPAC being one of the casualties of this. Malaysia was reportedly most keen in this respect. Kuala Lumpur was encouraged by references in the joint Japan–PRC communiqué

93 DFA (DG Nutter, Assistant Secretary South East Asia Branch) to Australian Embassy Seoul, 16 December 1971, NAA A1838/541/4, Part 3.

94 'DFA Submission to Minister on China Policy, Final', 4 November 1971, NAA A1838/541/1/3; see also Australian High Commission Wellington (AJ Melhuish) to Secretary DFA, Canberra, (covering letter for a NZ Foreign Ministry brief on regional cooperation in Asia), 25 May 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 15.

95 'Record of Seventeenth Meeting of the Council of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) Held in Canberra on 27–28 June', UK Embassy Bangkok to Sir Douglas-Home (Foreign Secretary), 11 July 1972, TNA FCO 15/1663; 'SEATO', DFA Brief, NAA A1838/686/1, Part 10.

96 UK High Commissioner Canberra to FCO (Personal for Prime Minister Heath from Defence Secretary Carrington), 21 February 1973, TNA FCO 24/1596; 'ASEAN, Neutralisation, Regional Organisations', DFA Brief for Visit of Tun Dr. Ismail (Deputy Prime Minister, Malaysia), 11–18 March 1973, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 23.

97 DFA Policy Information Report (from Deputy Secretary to Heads of Mission), March 1973, NAA A1838/2036/30/1, Part 1; 'ASEAN, Neutralisation, Regional Organisations', DFA Brief for Visit of Tun Dr. Ismail (Deputy Prime Minister, Malaysia), 11–18 March 1973, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 23.

98 FCO London to British Embassy Bangkok (copy to Canberra, Manila, Washington, Wellington and UKMIS New York), 28 August 1975, TNA FCO 24/2061.

on normalisation that both sides would refrain from ‘any efforts to establish ‘hegemony’ in the Asian Pacific region’, which was consistent with Malaysia’s ‘concept of neutralization in South-East Asia’.⁹⁹ For the other ASEAN members, especially Indonesia, there remained significant suspicion of Beijing and no prospect of diplomatic recognition for the foreseeable future. In a visit by Japanese Foreign Minister Kiichi Aichi (1968–71) to Jakarta to explain Tokyo’s position on normalisation, the Australian Embassy reported that President Suharto:

had offered no comment on [the] normalisation of relations [between Japan and China]. He had reiterated very firmly Indonesia’s own conditions for normalisation. He had spelled out very emphatically the traumatic Indonesian experience of 1965 and went on to state that the Chinese had given no signs of abating its propaganda or subversion activities. He gave no indication of any intention on the part of the Indonesian Government to review its policy at a future time.¹⁰⁰

Indonesia’s relations with China were suspended, while Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore had no formal relations with the PRC.¹⁰¹ It was not until 1975 that the ASEAN states granted diplomatic recognition to Beijing.

The DFA assessed that there was no prospect of the Suharto regime seeking to re-establish relations at the time and, indeed, was likely to strongly discourage other ASEAN members from moving in that direction. In response to Japan’s initiative, Thailand publicly stated it would not follow suit because of continuing Chinese-sponsored insurgency on their territory and strong economic links with Taiwan. Singapore stated it would move slowly on the issue and ‘would regard Indonesia as the pace-setter with the ASEAN group’.¹⁰² In the Philippines, President Ferdinand Marcos (1965–86) was combatting an internal communist insurgency, so was deemed by Canberra unlikely to support normalisation of relations. The Chinese business community in the Philippines also reportedly opposed opening relations with the PRC.¹⁰³ The DFA noted that Australia:

99 ‘Extract from DFA Policy Planning Paper No. 45 of 5.10.72’, 5 October 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 19.

100 Australian Embassy Jakarta to DFA Canberra, 18 October 1972, NAA A1838/541/1/3.

101 ‘Extract from DFA Policy Planning Paper No. 45 of 5.10.72’, 5 October 1972, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 19.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

cannot hope, however, to have much influence on their policies on this issue, which will be based almost exclusively on their own assessment of where their particular interests lie. Indonesia would, no doubt, be unhappy if we moved too quickly on recognition of the PRC, but must expect us to do so in time.¹⁰⁴

What this suggests, is that while the much-lauded Whitlam Government recognition of the PRC on 21 December 1972 may have been consistent with Japanese policy and broader global trends, it was out of step with Australia's Southeast Asian neighbours. As ASEAN turned inward to consolidate, Whitlam's diplomatic recognition of the PRC further served to politically isolate Australia from its immediate region of Southeast Asia. This is an important theme taken up in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the changing structural conditions from 1966 into the early 1970s—the end of British decolonisation in Southeast Asia and the easing of Cold War pressures—that gradually eroded Australia's formerly deep engagement, serving to politically distance Canberra from East Asia. The results of these changes were profound. As the following chapter will show, Australia's political position was transformed from being an integral part of Southeast Asia's decolonisation process, and a core non-communist Asian state, into one of the South Pacific periphery.

Australia's sense of Commonwealth responsibility, which the evidence suggests had become increasingly reluctant by the mid-1960s, faded with the end of Indonesia's Confrontation of Malaysia in 1966 and the retrenchment of British global power with the commitment to withdraw from east of Suez. The acceleration of Britain's withdrawal from Southeast Asia announced in January 1968 and the ongoing war in Vietnam ushered in a more instrumental and narrowly interest-based regional outlook on the part of Australian policymakers. This change of outlook is particularly evident in the policy discourse of the Gorton Government compared with its predecessors, and in negotiations for the FPDA that superseded Australia's association with the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreements (1957–71). The end of British decolonisation in the ANZAM area

104 Ibid.

removed the central tenet of Australia's normative responsibilities in Southeast Asia, clearing the way for a more instrumental conception of Australia's regional interests from the late 1960s.

The US de-escalation and gradual withdrawal from Vietnam that began in 1968 did not bring Australia closer to the region despite the claims of the Whitlam Government and later myth of Asian engagement. Rather, the waning of the US commitment to South Vietnam and the Nixon Doctrine seriously eroded the second essential pillar of Australia's deep integration with the region during this period: non-communist solidarity. By the early 1970s, the previous forms of solidarity that had integrated Australia with the region—Commonwealth responsibilities in the ANZAM area and non-communist identity via ASPAC and SEATO—had also disintegrated or been superseded by ASEAN, pushing Australia to the margins of regional organisation. Finally, Whitlam's much-lauded diplomatic recognition of the PRC on taking office in December 1972 may have been consistent with the Japanese position at the time, but as the following chapter shows, it further isolated Australia from its Southeast Asian neighbours, particularly Indonesia.

6

Outside the margins

The orthodox narrative of Australia's engagement with Asia identifies the post-Menzies period from 1967 up until the watershed election of the Whitlam Australian Labor Party (ALP) Government in December 1972 as a crucial turning point, where Australia's external circumstances and internal socio-political dynamics changed markedly, thus allowing for greater opening to Asia.¹ According to this interpretation, these changing circumstances had been presciently analysed by Whitlam as Opposition leader, who then capitalised on them to forge a more independent and dynamic Australian foreign policy. As James Curran has recounted, this resulted in a sharp deterioration in relations with Washington lasting until the mid-1970s after senior ALP ministers publicly and bitterly denounced the Nixon administration's 1972 'Christmas bombing' campaign against population centres in North Vietnam.² Other scholars, such as Roderic Pitty, place the transformation of Australia's engagement with the region a little later with the 'early end' of the Cold War in Asia, around the time of the death of Mao Zedong in 1976.³ All claim, however, that these changes in the late 1960s and 1970s allowed for Australia to embark on

1 See, for example, JLS Girling, 'Australia and Southeast Asia in the Global Balance: A Critique of the "Fraser Doctrine"', *Australian Outlook* 31, no. 1 (1977): 5–8; Ian McAllister and John Ravenhill, 'Australian Attitudes Towards Closer Engagement with Asia', *The Pacific Review* 11, no. 1 (1998): 121; and David Reynolds, 'Empire, Region, World: The International Context of Australian Foreign Policy since 1939', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 3 (2005): 354–57.

2 See James Curran, 'The Dilemmas of Divergence: The Crisis in American–Australian Relations, 1972–1975', *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 377–408; James Curran, *Unholy Fury: Whitlam and Nixon at War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015).

3 Roderic Pitty, 'Strategic Engagement', in *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia, Volume 2: 1970s to 2000*, ed. Peter Edwards and David Goldsworthy (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 61–63.

closer relations with the region, which were realised in the 1980s and 1990s under the Hawke–Keating ALP governments. Michael Connors explicitly makes the claim that a major ‘factor pushing Australia closer to the region was the gradual withdrawal of United States (US) troops from Vietnam in the light of the Nixon Doctrine of 1969’.⁴

This chapter shows, however, that despite the new Whitlam Government’s intention to bring Australia closer to the region, the consequences of the external factors analysed in the previous chapter—British withdrawal from east of Suez, the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), de-escalation of the Vietnam War, the Nixon Doctrine and Washington’s rapprochement with Beijing—instead pushed Australia outside the margins of Asia. This trend was exacerbated by Whitlam’s activist foreign policy approach, which was unwelcome in Southeast Asian capitals. In addition to his immediate diplomatic recognition of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) upon taking office, Whitlam further antagonised Australia’s Southeast Asian neighbours with his advocacy for a new, broad-based regional organisation that was to include Beijing and Hanoi.

Canberra’s political distancing from Asia in the 1970s is especially ironic for the Whitlam ALP in the sense that it had considered the above changes highly positive and beneficial for Australia in forging closer regional relations. With the benefit of hindsight, however, the regional consequences of these factors, which were obscured in Australian public discourse at the time by the euphoria over Whitlam’s victory and progressive agenda, put the new Australian Government’s regional priorities out of step with ASEAN states. Along with Japan, this was where most of Australia’s deepest regional relationships had evolved over the postwar decades underpinned by the norms of Commonwealth responsibility and non-communist solidarity.

This chapter first examines how Canberra’s relationship in the early 1970s with Beijing could only be superficial in a political sense and focused primarily on commercial issues. It then shows how Whitlam’s diplomatic recognition of the PRC damaged Australia’s relationships with its nearest neighbours in Southeast Asia. The Whitlam Government’s focus on China at the expense of Australia’s other Asian relationships accelerated the shift

4 Michael K Connors, ‘Australia in the Asia Pacific’, in *The New Global Politics of the Asia Pacific*, ed. Michael Connors, Rémy Davison and Jörn Dosch (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 91.

to a shallower, transactional form of engagement. The second section shows how Whitlam's advocacy for a new regional organisation that he hoped would include China and North Vietnam antagonised ASEAN states, thus contributing further to Canberra's political distancing from the region. The third section analyses the Whitlam Government's active disengagement from Southeast Asia in its rapid drawing-down of Australian forces in Malaysia and Singapore deployed in support of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). The final section demonstrates that by 1974, Australia's position had been transformed from one of centrality in East Asian affairs to one of exile on the South Pacific periphery. The only Asian regional organisations in which Canberra retained membership were economic in nature, with Australia's engagement with Asia conducted on a broadening but shallower transactional basis.

Recognition of the PRC and the ASEAN response

Australia's diplomatic recognition of the PRC took place at 9.00 pm on 21 December 1972 in Paris (22 December Canberra time).⁵ Whitlam's press release stated:

It has long been the objective of the Australian Labour Party to establish diplomatic relations between Australia and the People's Republic of China. It accordingly gives me great satisfaction to announce that this important step has now been taken. While it has long been recognised that Australia's geographical position gives it special interests in the Asian region, up until now we have not come to terms with one of the central facts of that region, the People's Republic of China. This serious distortion in our foreign policy has now been corrected. Our diplomatic relations with Taiwan came to an end with the signing of the Communiqué in Paris. It is consequently necessary that Australian official representation in Taipei, and Taiwan's official representation in Australia, be withdrawn.⁶

5 'Press Statement, Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with China', 21 December 1972, in The National Archives UK (TNA) Foreign and Commonwealth Office Records (FCO) 24/1337.

6 Ibid.

Very similar to Japan, however, Australia's relationship with the party-state in Beijing could only be superficial in a political sense and necessarily focused on transactional issues. A United Kingdom (UK) assessment in April 1973 of Australia's diplomatic recognition of the PRC supports this:

Contacts between the two countries have hitherto been almost exclusively commercial. Trade is largely made up of sales of Australian wheat to China, which is of considerable importance to the Australian farming community. There is relatively little scope for the development of political relations in any depth.⁷

By September 1974, this sentiment was reflected in Australia's own policy discourse. In a meeting at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Alan Renouf, then Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), said:

Australia was trying to build up her relations with China but found it hard to conduct a meaningful political dialogue with her. Australia's importance for China had been the lead which she had given to other countries in the region in establishing diplomatic relations with China. Now that China's purpose was served the Chinese were happy for trade and cultural relations to develop but were not interested in political discussions. They were content for Australian Ministers to visit China but Chinese Ministers seldom visited Australia. Dr Fitzgerald, the Australian Ambassador to Peking, was perhaps better qualified than anyone else to open a dialogue with the Chinese but found it almost impossible.⁸

The Whitlam Government's focus on China, at the expense of Southeast Asian political sensitivities, meant that the trajectory of Australia's engagement with Asia became shallower and increasingly transactional.

In the wake of Labor's victory in the 1972 election, press comment by supporters of Whitlam, such as Ross Terrill, erroneously argued that with Australian recognition of PRC imminent, Indonesia would be encouraged to move in the same direction.⁹ Whitlam had indeed advised

7 'Mr Whitlam's Visit to London, April 1973', Omnibus Brief for Secretary of State, 16 April 1973, TNA Prime Minister's Office Records (PREM) 15/1299.

8 'Record of Conversation between the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Secretary of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, Held at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Tuesday 17 September 1974 at 11am', 17 September 1974, TNA FCO 15/1859.

9 Australian Embassy Washington to Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Canberra (reporting on article in *The Christian Science Monitor*), 4 December 1972, NAA A1838/3006/9/1, Part 7.

President Suharto in advance of Australia's diplomatic recognition of the PRC.¹⁰ But Terrill's comments here betray the Whitlam Government's overestimation of Australia's importance in Southeast Asian eyes by December 1972, along with the false projection of its own activist disposition and outlook onto regional capitals. Contrary to Whitlam's advocacy for change, ASEAN states were not anticipating further major developments in the region and were dedicated to inward-focused consolidation and evolutionary growth in the organisation's membership. Australia's recognition of communist China, following the US rapprochement with the PRC and Japan's normalisation of relations, was unwelcome in Southeast Asia. However, the international trend toward diplomatic recognition of Beijing had been established for some time, so developments under the Whitlam Government were not of a similar ground-breaking importance in Southeast Asian capitals as they were in Australia. Indeed, reviewing the archival documents on the early period of the Whitlam Government's foreign policy reveals a similarly Australia-centric view of the world as that held by Evatt in the late 1940s, and a concomitant insensitivity to the concerns and outlook of Canberra's neighbours.

Press opinion from Southeast Asia was resolutely negative about the Whitlam Government's initial forays in the region. From Singapore, it was reported:

in Jakarta ... there is concern that its close neighbour Australia may under Mr Whitlam adopt an over-friendly attitude to Peking. Indonesia has been suspicious of China since the abortive communist coup in 1965, which led ultimately to the fall of President Sukarno.¹¹

Whitlam's first soundings in January 1973 about an Asia Pacific 'Community' or 'Forum' that might include the PRC and North Vietnam were met with derision. An editorial in Bangkok's *The Nation*, entitled 'Playing the Big Brother', observed:

Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam ... must be a tyro in Asian affairs because he goes and proposed to Indonesia the creation of new regional grouping which would include China, Japan and Australia. Maybe he thought Indonesia is another of

10 DFA Canberra to Australian Embassy Jakarta, 6 December 1972, NAA A1838/3006/9/1, Part 7.

11 'AAP Reports', 5 December 1972, in NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 20.

those countries like his which are now caught up with the craze of climbing on the Peking-bound bandwagon. Possibly he was even surprised that Indonesia gave his suggestion a cool reception.¹²

The Big Brother theme is an important one in Southeast Asian attitudes toward the Whitlam Government. Despite its mythologisation in Australian political history, the new ALP Government's independent and activist foreign policy agenda, and Whitlam's imperious style, were not welcome in ASEAN capitals. Max Walsh commented in the *Australian Financial Review* in this respect, that 'we have now ... a Prime Minister who wants to be a Willy Brandt but looks uncomfortably like a Charles de Gaulle'.¹³

The ALP Government's attitudes and direction were also inconsistent with the assessments made by the professional foreign policy bureaucracy in Australia and Britain. For example, a DFA brief for the minister in early March 1973 wrote that ASEAN 'has at present a certain anti-Chinese flavour, because all its member countries are apprehensive about China and value the United States military presence in the region'.¹⁴ A British assessment made in April stated similarly:

Many of the Governments in the area remain suspicious and even hostile to China because of her support for insurgent movements in their countries and her open aid to the North Vietnamese, Vietcong, Pathet Lao and Khmer Rouge. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution China has tried to allay suspicions by publicly disassociating herself from the Overseas Chinese communities; she does not however refrain from giving support—even if only moral—to revolutionary movements. Thailand, the Khmer Republic, South Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines do not at present have diplomatic relations with China. Some of these countries have recently begun to show signs of a willingness

12 'Thailand: Press Comment on Australia', Australian Embassy Bangkok to DFA Canberra, 23 February 1973, NAA A1838/686/1, Part 9.

13 Cited in 'Statement on International Affairs by Australian Prime Minister', UK High Commission Canberra (W Peters) to JK Hickman, South West Pacific Dept, FCO London, 25 May 1973, TNA FCO 24/1596.

14 'Indonesia and ASEAN', General Review of International Relations (DFA Ministerial Talking Points), March 1973, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 23; British assessments were also similar; see, for example, 'Mr Whitlam's Visit to London, April 1973', Omnibus Brief for Secretary of State, 16 April 1973, TNA PREM 15/1299.

to develop formal relations with Peking. But until the situation in South Vietnam and the Khmer Republic is more settled it seems unlikely that they will be in a hurry to finalise arrangements.¹⁵

In January 1974, Prime Minister Whitlam was again advised by the DFA:

Of the ASEAN nations, Malaysia and Thailand have moved towards détente with China but residual suspicions of China's general intentions towards the area and its attitude towards national liberation movements and Overseas Chinese communities continue to inhibit progress towards the establishment of diplomatic relations. For these reasons, and for fear of involvement in the Sino-Soviet dispute, regional members would be wary of China's inclusion in a new regional political arrangement.¹⁶

Despite the plethora of indications such as these that any proposal for a new broad-based regional organisation would not be well received in Southeast Asia, Whitlam nonetheless assertively pursued his Asia Pacific Forum idea throughout 1973.

Failed regionalism: The Asia Pacific Forum proposal

Upon taking office, Whitlam instructed the DFA to canvass options for a comprehensive regional organisation premised on the 'new situation in the Asian and Pacific region, in which the war in Indo-China has been ended and in which an outward-looking China is playing an increasingly important role'. Australia's policy should be one of 'continuing and constructive involvement in the region'.¹⁷ Several options were presented in a memorandum on 8 January 1973, which noted that Japan and New Zealand were also interested in such initiatives.¹⁸ The document suggested that the 'ideal solution would be to create a new [and] genuinely representative regional political organisation' for East Asia, which would

15 'Indonesia and ASEAN', General Review of International Relations (DFA Ministerial Talking Points), March 1973, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 23.

16 'The Outlook in South-East Asia', Official Brief for Prime Minister's Visit to Southeast Asia, 10 January 1974, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 11.

17 'Australia: Regional Political Organisations', DFA Brief for Foreign Minister (Whitlam), 8 January 1973, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 15.

18 Japan had made several proposals during the 1960s to create Asia-Pacific or 'Pacific Rim' international organisations. See Takashi Terada, 'The Origins of Japan's APEC Policy: Foreign Minister Takeo Miki's Asia-Pacific Policy and Current Implications', *The Pacific Review* 11, no. 3 (1998): 337–63.

be 'more likely to promote a spirit of regional cooperation between communist and non-communist countries than an already existing one which would have cold war connotations'.¹⁹ There was never a detailed blueprint for the proposed organisation, but the assumption was that it would be a relatively unstructured forum to discuss issues of mutual interest without binding commitments, similar to the Organization of American States.²⁰ If this was not feasible, a smaller variant of such an organisation might be the ASEAN membership expanded to include the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Australia and New Zealand.

However, the memorandum also set out the 'formidable difficulties' involved in any such proposal. It would be difficult diplomatically for Australia to propose the smaller variant of the organisation that would exclude its other important relationships in Asia, such as with Japan. If Japan were included, Australia would then have to 'work actively to include Chinese participation'.²¹ Additionally, the Indochina conflict had yet to be ended, so the status of the two Vietnams remained unclear; neither could a larger organisation be established until ASEAN states had normalised their relations with China. The ASEAN members were also likely to have significant reservations about Japan, and certainly India, being involved. Erroneously, the document suggested that, even

if in the worst eventuality our efforts are not successful no harm will have been done to our regional relations provided we avoid associating ourselves with a restrictive group, and bring other regional countries into our thinking as soon as practicable.²²

The relative optimism of the brief seems pitched to appeal to the sensibilities of the new ALP Government. Diplomatic reporting from the region and statements by ASEAN leaders since 1967 had repeatedly made clear that any organisation such as Whitlam's proposed Asia Pacific Forum was a non-starter.

19 'Australia: Regional Political Organisations', DFA Brief for Foreign Minister (Whitlam), 8 January 1973, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 15.

20 Henry S Albinski, *Australian External Policy under Labor: Content, Process and the National Debate* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1977), 92; see also Curran, *Unholy Fury*, 240.

21 'Australia: Regional Political Organisations', DFA Brief for Foreign Minister (Whitlam), 8 January 1973, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 15.

22 Ibid.

Despite being aware of the challenges of creating a new organisation, Whitlam wrote to New Zealand Prime Minister Norman Kirk (1972–74) that he was ‘not deterred by these difficulties’, although ‘patient and careful groundwork’ and ‘lengthy consultations’ would be necessary.²³ Whitlam’s approach would be to first discuss the proposal with President Suharto, as Indonesian membership of any configuration was considered essential by Canberra, while at the same time taking care not to give the impression that the proposed organisation would be a competitor to ASEAN.²⁴ However, as will be shown, the Whitlam Government’s advocacy of this proposal was an irritation to Suharto and other Southeast Asian leaders because Whitlam either failed to understand, or insensitively disregarded, the delicate business of building regional consciousness and solidarity through ASEAN.²⁵ The new Australian Government also vastly underestimated the deep residual antipathy in Southeast Asia toward China.

Rather than handling the issue slowly and delicately, Whitlam publicly announced on 22 February 1973 in a speech to the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (Indonesian Parliament) that Australia and New Zealand would seek a new broad-based regional organisation.²⁶ Whitlam prefaced his comments (on his first overseas visit as prime minister) by noting that his visit came ‘at a time of great change in my own nation and of great change in our region’.²⁷ Changes were therefore needed in existing regional arrangements. Whitlam said that he and New Zealand Prime Minister Kirk saw:

great merit in an organisation genuinely representative of the region without ideological overtones, conceived as an initiative to help free the region of the great power rivalries which have bedevilled

23 ‘Asian Regional Organisation’, DFA Canberra to Australian High Commission Wellington, 7 December 1973, NAA A1838/696/1/5/4, Part 1.

24 Ibid.

25 See, for example, ‘ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting’, Australian High Commission Kuala Lumpur to DFA Canberra, 16 February 1973, NAA A1838/696/1/5/4, Part 1, where Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore Thailand emphasised the ‘sense of identity and regional cohesion engendered through ASEAN co-operation ...’.

26 DJ Murphy, ‘Problems in Australian Foreign Policy, January to June, 1973’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 19, no. 3 (1973): 339.

27 ‘Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon. E.G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., to the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia (Indonesian Parliament) in Jakarta, Thursday 22 February 1973’, in TNA FCO 24/1600. In 1975, Owen Harries wrote of Whitlam’s foreign policy approach that the ‘patience, tact and diplomacy’ required in dealings with Australia’s regional neighbours had been ‘conspicuous by their absence’; ‘Australia’s Foreign Policy under Whitlam’, *Orbis: Journal of World Affairs* 19, no. 3 (1975): 1093.

its progress for so long, and which would be designed to insulate the region against ideological interference from the great powers. I must emphasise that such an objective is one which would take time and careful consultation with all of our neighbours.²⁸

Whitlam elaborated that the rationale for the organisation was that, with the Vietnam War moving towards a settlement, Canberra's involvement in the region on a security basis and its military deployments were 'no longer relevant to the contemporary needs of Australia or the region in which we live'. Australia's new attitude would be 'based less on irrational fears for our security' and 'directed more to peaceful political initiatives for the welfare and progress of our neighbours'.²⁹ While Whitlam was correct to point out that the threat of Chinese communism to Australia during the early decades of the Cold War was exaggerated by Menzies, this was not the case for Canberra's Southeast Asian neighbours, all of which had experienced some level of communist political agitation or armed insurgency.³⁰

In response to a journalist's question after the speech, Whitlam said he expected the formation of a comprehensive new international organisation 'before a couple of years', because 'there is a general realisation that the existing regional associations to which Australia belongs are inappropriate because they are transitory or because they're anachronistic or because they are losing members'.³¹ In a report to the UK Government about Whitlam's first overseas visit as prime minister, the FCO wrote that the agenda brought by Whitlam was far from what the Indonesians wanted, which was a 'certain staunchness, more aid, and more alertness to the dangers they see of communist subversion'.³² The British Ambassador to Jakarta doubted 'whether the Indonesians will attach much importance to Australia's new readiness to follow the Afro-Asian line at the United Nations'.³³ On this point, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew

28 'Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon. E.G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., to the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia (Indonesian Parliament) in Jakarta, Thursday 22 February 1973', in TNA FCO 24/1600.

29 Ibid.

30 On this point, see Denis Warner, 'The Whitlam Approach to Asia', *Asian Affairs* 1, no. 2 (1973): 60.

31 'Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon. E.G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., to the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia (Indonesian Parliament) in Jakarta, Thursday 22 February 1973', in TNA FCO 24/1600.

32 'Mr Whitlam's Visit to Indonesia—20–23 February', FCO Report for Mr Wilford and Sir E Norris by JK Hickman, South West Pacific Department, 20 March 1973, TNA FCO 24/1600.

33 Ibid.

labelled Whitlam a ‘sham Afro-Asian’ over his unwillingness to accept Vietnamese refugees.³⁴ With regional organisation, the Indonesians regarded ‘themselves as better judges of what is needed, and when, than the Australians’.³⁵ The FCO report concluded:

we have probably not heard the last of Mr Whitlam’s ideas about a new regional organisation. They are shared to some extent by the New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr Kirk, and there is an evident need to develop new methods and habits of consultation to meet the new situation in East Asia. But it is by no means clear that Australia (or New Zealand) can play a forward role in promoting this. Mr Whitlam’s visit to Indonesia may have taught him that his proposals are not practical politics for Australia at present.³⁶

By driving such an unwanted proposal in the region without adequate consultation—and by placing Australia’s concerns transparently at the centre of it—the Whitlam Government came across as arrogant and insensitive in its disregard for Southeast Asian sensibilities. By contrast, under previous Coalition governments, Australia had regular, institutionalised consultations with its regional neighbours in the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC), with Thailand and the Philippines in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and with Singapore and Malaysia under Commonwealth arrangements.

According to some accounts, Suharto rejected Whitlam’s proposal out of hand,³⁷ while others suggested that the Indonesian president recognised the potential value of such an organisation, but only as a longer-term proposition.³⁸ An FCO brief for British Prime Minister Ted Heath (1970–74) in preparation for Whitlam’s April 1973 visit to the UK noted that Asian countries were markedly unenthusiastic about the Australian proposal for a regional community. This document alludes to Whitlam’s intractability and insensitivity to Asian concerns by stating:

³⁴ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965–2000* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 395.

³⁵ ‘Mr Whitlam’s Visit to Indonesia—20–23 February’, FCO Report for Mr Wilford and Sir E Norris by JK Hickman, South West Pacific Department, 20 March 1973, TNA FCO 24/1600.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ ‘Record of Conversation between H.E. Mr A.P. Rajah, High Commissioner for Singapore and Mr H.D. Anderson, Regional Organisation’, DFA Canberra, 22 February 1973, NAA A1838/696/1/5/4, Part 1.

³⁸ ‘Australian Prime Minister’s Visit’, UK Embassy Jakarta to FCO London, 24 February 1973, TNA FCO 24/1600.

Mr Whitlam probably thinks that this initial [negative] reaction is due simply to the slowness of Australia's Asian neighbours to understand the new situation created by the end of the Vietnam war, the disengagement of the United States from the Asian mainland and the emergence of China from isolation.³⁹

The brief went on to suggest that, with regard to regional community-building, it might be useful for the prime minister to point out to Mr Whitlam 'the differences between our situation in Europe and Australia's situation in Asia'. Britain shared with its 'European partners a cultural and political past which Australia does not share with her Asian neighbours. Without this historical affinity the foundation for the Europe we are now trying to build would not exist'. There were no such cultural and institutional foundations for Mr Whitlam's 'ideas about new forms of regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific'.⁴⁰ The prime minister might also question:

Mr Whitlam about the likely reaction of other countries to these regional ideas. The ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines), for example, do not want Australia as a member and are worried that Mr Whitlam's ideas might undermine their own more limited endeavours. Mr Whitlam would like to bring in China and Japan but both, for different reasons, are viewed with suspicion by the ASEAN countries.⁴¹

This was indeed the case. Singapore's High Commissioner to Canberra, AP Rajah, explained in February 1973:

Australia was placing too much importance on the position and role of China, and paying too little regard to the fears and apprehensions of South-East Asian countries with regard to China. He implied that Singapore would like at least five years before it had to accept a Chinese embassy.⁴²

39 'Mr Whitlam's Visit to London, April 1973', UK FCO Steering Brief, 16 April 1973, TNA FCO 24/1613.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*

42 'Record of Conversation between H.E. Mr A.P. Rajah, High Commissioner for Singapore and Mr H.D. Anderson, Regional Organisation', DFA Canberra, 22 February 1973, NAA A1838/696/1/5/4, Part 1.

He further mentioned that Southeast Asians were:

not yet ready to sit down with China. They were also suspicious of Japan and wary of anything that smacked of the war-time Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Nor did they want to get entangled with India and bogged down with the problems of the Sub-continent.⁴³

Rajah did, however, share Australia's concern that any prospective regional organisation that included Japan but not China would be regarded by Beijing as hostile.⁴⁴

Malaysia's Prime Minister Razak said it was better for Southeast Asian countries 'to concentrate on ASEAN rather than an enlarged regional organisation to include China, Japan and Australia. He said he shared President Soeharto's views on this'. Australia and New Zealand had the backing of the US and therefore 'could look after themselves'.⁴⁵ A spokesperson for the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs added that a wider grouping was not acceptable because Malaysia did not want ASEAN members to have a subordinate role in an organisation that dealt with Southeast Asian affairs. He also pointed out that Whitlam's inclusion of China in his Asia Pacific Forum proposal 'was a tactical mistake since it would make him appear as an intermediary for China and his suggestion was therefore bound to be greeted with suspicion'.⁴⁶

In a meeting with Whitlam's Minister of State, Senator Don Willesee, the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tun Ismail said:

the success of ASEAN was based on the fact that it was an association of like-minded states. Most of them were ex-colonies and all had a prime interest in economic development. All of them were 'scared' of China.

The Sino-Soviet dispute was also a problem for Whitlam's Asia Pacific Forum. Ismail continued by pointing out that any wider grouping in which the PRC was a member would prompt the Soviet Union to insist on membership, because Moscow 'would not agree to any course of

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 'Australian Suggestion for Wider Regional Groupings', UK High Commission Kuala Lumpur to FCO London, Jakarta, 26 February 1973, TNA FCO 24/1596.

46 Ibid.

action which might encourage Chinese domination of the area'.⁴⁷ While the PRC may have come to terms with the US, the Sino–Soviet split was still playing out in the 1970s. It was heavily implicated in the Third Indochina War (c. 1975–91) where Beijing supported the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia and Moscow backed the unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1975) in its intervention against Democratic Kampuchea (DK) (1975–89), in turn prompting the punitive Chinese invasion of northern Vietnam in 1979. While the Cold War in East Asia may have concluded for Whitlam, it was still a long way from over for Southeast Asian countries. Ismail added that since Australia had not discussed the issue seriously with the Chinese Government yet, the proposal was premature in any case.⁴⁸

Press opinion from Southeast Asia was less diplomatic. For example, from Bangkok, an editorial in *The Nation* wrote:

What Mr Whitlam is up to is beyond our ken. He was personally responsible for killing ASPAC and there he is in Jakarta proposing a new one ... The liberal-country coalition Government, after decades and decades of being tied to the apron strings of Britain, saw that her interests lay in Asia and not in Britain. So it opened up greater contacts with Asian countries much to Australia's advantage and the present Labour Government is trying to improve on it ... Unfortunately in trying to accomplish this Mr Whitlam starts to play big brother in Southeast Asia. He does not realise that we are at this time suffering from a plethora of big brothers and one more will be anathema to us.⁴⁹

The Thai Government also 'reacted angrily when Mr. Whitlam suggested that he saw his idea for a regional grouping as one means of preventing Thailand becoming "a second Viet-Nam"'.⁵⁰ Given the Australian Government's stated priorities, Whitlam's insensitivity to Indonesian, Thai, Singaporean and Malaysian concerns about China, and the implications of the Sino–Soviet dispute for Southeast Asia and regional organisation, appears quite inept.

47 'DFA Record of Conversation between Tun Dr Ismail, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia and Minister of State, Senator D. Willesee', 12 March 1973, NAA A1838/696/1/5/4, Part 1.

48 Ibid.

49 'Thailand: Press Comment on Australia', Australian Embassy Bangkok to DFA Canberra, 23 February 1973, NAA A1838/686/1, Part 9.

50 'The Australian Labour [sic] Party Government (2)', FCO Diplomatic Report No. 269/73 by Morrice James, UK High Commissioner Canberra for the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 5 April 1973, TNA FCO 24/1596.

The British assessment of the early months of the ALP Government was that, while Whitlam was undoubtedly genuine in his rejection of intolerance and discrimination, and in his ‘real sympathy for the people of the developing countries’, he ‘adopts an unduly simplistic view of his task’.⁵¹ Whitlam came to government having

thought a great deal about foreign affairs (though in a distinctly theoretical way). He is fascinated by this whole subject. Because of this personal predilection (and the resulting belief that he himself already knows most of the answers) he is not particularly responsive to the advice he gets from his senior officials ... he seems to feel that world affairs are a stage on which all he has to do is to write a fat part for himself.⁵²

In this, Whitlam’s approach to foreign policy very much reflected that of Evatt, and set the tone for later ALP Foreign Ministers Gareth Evans (1988–96) and Kevin Rudd (2010–12), the latter of who proposed a similarly unsuccessful Asia-Pacific Community as Prime Minister in 2008.⁵³ Whitlam failed to perceive that ‘gestures in areas where Australia is not involved can be irrelevant and ... make the achievement of Australia’s aspirations more difficult’.⁵⁴ According to the British High Commissioner in Canberra, Whitlam had yet to

acquire the discernment needed to distinguish between Australia’s essential requirements, among which a close relationship with its neighbours must clearly be included, and the areas in which gratuitous activity may in the end prove to be counter-productive ... All in all, an uncomfortably large number of the foreign policy attitudes so far struck by the new Government lack realism and could lead Australia into unforeseen and unintended trouble.⁵⁵

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Avery Poole, ‘The East Asia Summit: Navigating ASEAN Multilateralism’, in *The Australia–ASEAN Dialogue: Tracing 40 Years of Partnership*, ed. Sally Percival Wood, Baogang He and Michael Leifer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 54–55.

54 ‘The Australian Labour [sic] Party Government (2)’, FCO Diplomatic Report No. 269/73 by Morrice James, UK High Commissioner Canberra for the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 5 April 1973, TNA FCO 24/1596.

55 Ibid.

A DFA survey in July 1973 of regional attitudes concluded that the general picture in the region was one of caution. Any change would be slow and consensus-based.⁵⁶ Southeast Asian sensibilities were not aligned with Whitlam's attitude to government, activist foreign policy style and pace of reform initiatives.⁵⁷

The DFA made a comprehensive assessment of the prospects for the Asia Pacific Forum a few months later in September 1973 now that most of the proposed members had been consulted. The outcome of this survey was 'a widespread feeling' among Asian countries that, 'although new regional arrangements may well develop in time, the region is still too potentially unstable and vulnerable to Great Power interference for new regional ventures to be other than longer term'.⁵⁸ Specifically, among the ASEAN nations, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand emphasised 'the need for security and continuing United States involvement in the region'. Singapore was the most 'unsympathetic' to the proposal and 'variously suggested that Australia should build on its relations with existing organisations or develop its bilateral economic relations with ASEAN countries'.⁵⁹ Malaysia was 'moving towards opening diplomatic relations with China', having 'already recognised North Viet-Nam and North Korea'. Kuala Lumpur continued to advocate for the neutralisation of the area. Indonesia's attitude had become more positive since the start of the year toward the concept of a larger regional organisation but viewed it as a longer-term aspiration. Messages from Manila were contradictory. President Marcos reportedly favoured some form of broader organisation for the purpose of the 'peaceful settlement of disputes among Asian countries'.⁶⁰ However, the Philippines' Foreign Secretary emphasised 'that the Philippines was opposed to the development of any new association and wanted to use ASEAN as the basis of regional cooperation'. Burma was 'still only tentatively emerging from its isolationist attitudes'.⁶¹

56 'Regionalism', Background Brief for Prime Minister's Visit to US, July 1973, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 10.

57 'Whitlam's Mission', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial, 26 January 1974, in NAA A1209/1974/6181.

58 'Australian Foreign Policy: New Regional Political Arrangements', DFA Canberra to Tokyo, Bangkok, Manila, Singapore, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Peking, Seoul, Saigon, Vientiane, Phnom Penh, Rangoon, New Delhi, Wellington, London, Washington, Moscow, Paris, Bonn, Ottawa, Port Moresby, Suva, Secret: For Heads of Mission, 10 September 1973, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 11.

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Ibid.*

Of the large Asian powers, Tokyo remained 'very cautious and considered initiatives for a regional forum must come from other states' because of residual suspicion of Japanese intentions.⁶² Based on conversations with the Chinese Deputy Director of the Americas and Oceania Department in the Foreign Ministry, and with Beijing's Ambassador to Australia, the DFA assessed that the PRC Government

could support a general approach to the establishment of a new framework for regional cooperation which regarded it as something for the future and probably possible only after an effective settlement had been achieved in Indo-China when rights of representation regarding Korea, Cambodia and Viet-Nam had been resolved, when most of the countries of the region had composed their differences with China and after the emergence of a fairly wide consensus. China would oppose Soviet participation in any new regional organisation.⁶³

The position of India was also a complicating factor in the Australian proposals for a broader regional community. The DFA noted that 'India no doubt feels that it has at least as great a claim to be a party to arrangements covering South East and East Asia as does Australia'.⁶⁴ New Delhi had been 're-assessing its role in South East Asia as a large Asian power in its own right'. The DFA assessed that 'India would probably wish to participate in any new regional arrangement of the type we have in mind; and it could be expected to urge USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] membership as well'. However, Soviet membership was unacceptable to China and India's inclusion was opposed by most ASEAN countries. For example, both Suharto and Tun Razak had indicated 'that they do not want India in any new Asian regional organisations'.⁶⁵ The assessment concluded that the inclusion of India would 'needlessly introduce into the region the problems and conflicts of the sub-continent'; it would increase pressure for the inclusion of the Soviet Union, and hence constitute a focus for Sino-Soviet rivalry; and therefore would be unacceptable to nearly all the countries the Australian Government would like to see included.⁶⁶

It may be observed from this DFA analysis that in his strategic outlook toward the region, Whitlam placed far too much emphasis on the US withdrawal from East Asia with the Nixon Doctrine and Vietnam

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

settlement. Unlike the ASEAN members, Whitlam did not seem to recognise the extent to which other Cold War dynamics, particularly the Sino–Soviet dispute, had yet to play out. Additionally, the newly independent states of Southeast Asia were extremely wary of any possible new form of domination or excessive influence from any of the large Asian powers—Japan, China and India. By December 1973, the message was beginning to be recognised within the Whitlam Government ‘that the time is not yet ripe for the establishment of such a forum’. And in ‘any discussion’ of ‘alternative proposals it might be desirable for Australia to avoid taking the lead’.⁶⁷ Newspaper opinion in early 1974 noted that the prime minister had a great ‘deal of fence-mending ahead of him’,⁶⁸ while academic assessments of the first year of the Whitlam Government’s foreign policy suggested it had ‘yielded more publicity than concrete results’.⁶⁹ The dissonance created by Whitlam’s ‘grandiose plan for a large Asian and Pacific grouping’ further distanced Australia from its now marginal position in regional political organisation.⁷⁰

Of Australia’s closest relationships, the Thai Government, in particular, appeared quite perplexed by Australia’s behaviour under Whitlam. Canberra was pushing to create a new, larger organisation when ASEAN states were still weighing up whether further expansion to the other Indochinese countries would be at the expense of the organisation’s current solidarity. Thailand’s Deputy Foreign Minister (and later prime minister from 1988 to 1991), Chatchai Choonhavan, said that he and his ASEAN colleagues were disappointed that at the same time Australia desired closer relations, it was actually ‘withdrawing from the area’.⁷¹ He said in a meeting with the New Zealand Ambassador in Bangkok that Australia and New Zealand should hold on to their ‘memberships of SEATO and ASPAC’. He concluded: ‘I cannot understand you. You are both members of the region and you have a beachhead on the mainland. Why do you

67 ‘Australia and Regional Co-operation Submission to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dated 10 December, 1973’, For Prime Minister’s Southeast Asia Visit, Official Brief, Annex A, 10 December 1973, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 11.

68 ‘Whitlam’s Mission’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial, 26 January 1974, in NAA A1209/1974/6181.

69 Alexander Macleod, ‘The New Foreign Policy in Australia and New Zealand’, *The Round Table* 64, no. 255 (1974): 294.

70 ‘Whitlam’s Mission’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial, 26 January 1974, in NAA A1209/1974/6181.

71 New Zealand Embassy Bangkok to DFA Wellington, 5 March 1973, in NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 23.

want to withdraw? You have been very good friends'.⁷² Likewise, there was concern in Washington 'that Australia is isolating itself or losing influence' with countries in the region.⁷³ These sentiments point to one of the paradoxes of the orthodox narrative of Australia's engagement with Asia, that 'disengagement' from Asia under the Whitlam Government somehow indicates genuine 'engagement' with the region.⁷⁴

The Whitlam Government's disengagement from Southeast Asia

This theme is most evident in the Whitlam Government's withdrawal from Malaysia and Singapore by 1975 of most Australian forces stationed there under the FPDA. This rapid drawing-down of the Australian military contingent and infrastructure was a disengagement from Canberra's previously deep involvement in postcolonial nation-building in Southeast Asia. In one of his pre-election pledges, Whitlam had promised to bring home all Australian troops from Asia during 1973.⁷⁵ The British High Commission in Canberra reported to the FCO:

on the Five Power Arrangement and ANZUK [the Australia–New Zealand–United Kingdom Agreement], Mr Whitlam said that as a long-term scheme the stationing of military forces from one country in the territory of another struck him as anachronistic and outmoded. He conceded that as of now a continuing ANZUK presence was of value as a means of maintaining confidence in the Five Power Arrangement and (he added) of keeping Malaysia and Singapore in a state of reasonable equilibrium with each other. But he saw no point in keeping Australian troops permanently in Singapore where they had little to do, and considered that the need to underpin the Five Power Arrangement could be adequately met by sending Australian soldiers there in rotation for training.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 'US and South-East Asian Reactions to Australian Policies', DFA Canberra to Australian Embassy Washington, 16 April 1973, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 10.

⁷⁴ On this theme, see also Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones, 'Engaging Southeast Asia? Labor's Regional Mythology and Australia's Military Withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia, 1972–1973', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 4 (2010): 32–62.

⁷⁵ 'Australian Election: Five Power Defence', UK High Commission Canberra to FCO London, 4 December 1972, TNA FCO 68/391; 'AAP Reports', 5 December 1972, in NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 20.

⁷⁶ 'Australian Election: Five Power Defence', UK High Commission Canberra to FCO London, 4 December 1972, TNA FCO 68/391.

In February 1973, after initial talks with the new Australian Government, UK Defence Secretary Lord Carrington wrote to Prime Minister Heath confirming that, while Australia would withdraw its ground forces from the area, it would retain ships, Mirage fighter jets and a training company and logistics personnel sufficient to maintain the FPDA.⁷⁷ Carrington elaborated:

Mr Whitlam's thinking is overlaid with his personal political philosophy which favours the support of neutralist objectives and an alignment of Australian external policies, wherever possible, with those of third world countries. This came through loud and clear when I spoke to him at length privately ... I fear that we are going to be in for at least a good deal of irritation at the hands of the Australian Government in the months ahead ...⁷⁸

Reflecting these fears, by April—during the frenetic early months of the Whitlam Government—a new policy line had developed in Canberra. The UK assessment of this was that due to ‘pressure from the left-wing of the Australian Labor Party’, the Whitlam Government now intended to complete the withdrawal of Australian personnel in support of the ANZUK force by April 1975, leaving only a very small number to service aid and technical assistance programs and the requirements of Australian forces visiting the area. By the end of 1976, Australia's squadron of Mirage fighter jets, based at the former British base of Butterworth, adjacent to Penang in the northwest of the Malayan Peninsula, and at Tengah in Singapore, would also be withdrawn.⁷⁹

Australia's Minister for Defence, Lance Barnard (1972–75), explained to Carrington in June 1973 that the ALP Government had been committed to maintaining the Mirage fighter deployment until Malaysia and Singapore established their own air defence capability; however, Tun Ismail had predicted there would be overcrowding at the base by 1976. Canberra was thus planning to withdraw its permanent presence from around this date. Carrington said the British Government ‘did not like or welcome’ this withdrawal ‘or even think it a good idea, but it accepted it’.

77 UK High Commission Canberra to FCO London (Personal for Prime Minister Heath from Defence Secretary Carrington), 21 February 1973, TNA FCO 24/1596.

78 Ibid.

79 ‘Mr Whitlam's Visit to London, April 1973’, Brief for the Prime Minister, 16 April 1973, TNA FCO 24/1555; see also ‘Record of Meeting between the Australian Minister for Defence, The Hon. Mr Lance Barnard, MP, and the British Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt. Hon. Lord Carrington’, 18 June 1973, TNA FCO 24/1559; Australian High Commission London (J Armstrong) to Carrington, 3 July 1973, TNA FCO 24/1558.

Carrington elaborated that ‘the Mirages were the only evidence of Five Power in Malaysia. If they did disappear in the short term this would have a big effect on Malaysian thinking’.⁸⁰ Barnard refused to be drawn on the matter that Whitlam had originally pledged to maintain Australia’s 600 military personnel in Singapore, but that this would now to be run down to 150 by April 1975. Carrington commented that the troop withdrawal ‘was very unwelcome indeed’ and ‘even worse than expected’.⁸¹ Barnard concluded ‘that the Australian Government saw it as important to be seen to be supporting the Five Power Arrangements and wanted the defence relationships with Britain to continue’. However, it ‘did not regard the stationing of forces in the area as essential’, although ‘would continue to accept some responsibility’.⁸²

This disengagement from the region was not well received by Singapore, where most of Australia’s ground and naval forces were based. Press reports suggested that there were ‘fears in some Southeast Asian capitals that Australia will abandon the region’. This fear was most keenly felt in Singapore where Lee Kuan Yew and Foreign Minister Sinnathamby Rajaratnam had often said that ‘a break-up of the Five-Power Defence Arrangement could lead to a big-power struggle to fill the resultant security vacuum in the region’.⁸³

The withdrawal of Australian forces from Malaysia and Singapore was also seen at the time as ‘disengagement’ in some quarters of the Australian press. An editorial in Melbourne’s *The Herald* labelled it a ‘cut and run’ and noted that the ‘Indonesians do not want us to leave. The troops themselves do not want to surrender the posting. Australian public opinion has not demanded their return’.⁸⁴ The Whitlam Government had thrown ‘away the substance of a modest, working, *wanted* agreement made with South-East Asian nations, where our good influence has been welcomed for decades’ in order to reach ‘for a grandiose “regional association” which Asians have rejected’.⁸⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald* described the withdrawal as ‘shabby’ and ‘discreditable’:

80 ‘Record of Meeting between the Australian Minister for Defence, The Hon. Mr Lance Barnard, MP, and the British Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt. Hon. Lord Carrington’, 18 June 1973, TNA FCO 24/1559.

81 *Ibid.*

82 *Ibid.*

83 ‘AAP Reports’, 5 December 1972, in NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 20.

84 ‘We Wreck, then Cut and Run’, *The Herald*, Melbourne, editorial, 5 July 1973, in TNA FCO 24/1559.

85 *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

The Five-Power Arrangement was contingent on Australia's pledged active participation; without such participation it is emasculated. Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand and Britain all regard the decision as effectively a breach of the agreement. Indonesia wishes Australian troops to remain in Singapore. The erosion of Australia's credit and credibility as an ally and regional partner is a high price to pay for not rocking the boat at the ALP conference.⁸⁶

When questioned on the motivations for this change in policy, Whitlam said to the British Commonwealth Secretary Sir Douglas-Home on 24 April 1973, 'that Australia now attached high priority to Indonesia, which was much more important in terms of resources and population than Singapore and Malaysia'.⁸⁷ At a press conference the following month, Barnard gave a different rationale for the Whitlam Government's position on the FPDA:

I think the Five Power arrangement, if it is continues, ought to be continued on the basis of providing co-operation between the countries in this area in a way that would permit and indeed encourage the long-term view of neutralisation of the area, that is to provide for a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality, and as that becomes effective well then the Five-Power arrangement would be phased out.⁸⁸

Whatever the reasoning behind Canberra's withdrawal from the FPDA, the Whitlam Government's focus on Indonesia at the expense of Australia's other regional relationships was strongly resented, according to Singapore's High Commissioner in Canberra.⁸⁹ Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines felt that they had been ignored or downgraded by the Whitlam Government. Richard Woolcott, then Head of the DFA Policy Research Branch in Canberra, said in February 1974 that:

86 'A Shameful Affair', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 1973, in TNA FCO 24/1559.

87 'Record of a Meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary [Douglas-Home] and the Australian Prime Minister held at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Tuesday 24 April at 10.30 am', 30 April 1973, NAA A1838/686/1, Part 9.

88 'Replies Given to Press Questions by Mr. L. H. Barnard, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Following Return from Visit to Singapore/Kuala Lumpur, May 10, 1973', in TNA FCO 24/1557.

89 'DFA Record of Conversation, His Excellency Mr A.P. Rajah, High Commissioner for Singapore and Senator D. Willesee, Minister for State', 26 February 1973, NAA A1838/696/1/5/4, Part 1.

if one looked at the pattern of the Prime Minister's previous visits—to Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, China, Japan, Ottawa, USA and the United Kingdom, there is an obvious gap, which was in effect the area of our traditional interest (South East Asia). The Prime Minister has been conscious of this and of the feeling in some countries that Australia was downgrading or losing interest in the area. There had been a number of factors that could be used to show we had begun to adopt a negative attitude—the decisions in respect of the ending of war in Vietnam, the cessation of military arms to Cambodia, the ending of our support for the Cambodian Support Fund, [and] the removal of our combat forces from Singapore ...⁹⁰

According to Woolcott, regional audiences

knew in a negative way what Australia's foreign policy goals were, but were uncertain as to what more positive values and objectives Australia sought. The Prime Minister had therefore decided to make a visit to Singapore, Malaysia, Laos, Philippines, Thailand and Burma to re-assure them that we maintained and would increase our interest in South East Asia.⁹¹

The emphasis on Indonesia by the Whitlam Government at the expense of Australia's close relationships with Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines is another example of how the previously strong normative ties of Commonwealth responsibility and Cold War solidarity, forged through the Australia–New Zealand–Malaya Agreement (ANZAM), SEATO and ASPAC, and shared commitment and sacrifice in the Malayan Emergency, Indonesian Confrontation and Vietnam War, had given way to a more transactional, interest-based outlook toward the region. The UK High Commission in Canberra confirmed to the British Government on 2 December 1974 that Australia had withdrawn its ground forces from ANZUK while reaffirming only 'its commitment to the consultative provisions of the FPDA'.⁹²

90 'Note of Meeting, First Meeting of the Heads of Mission of Member States of the European Community in Canberra in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra', 27 February 1974, in TNA FCO 24/1897.

91 *Ibid.*

92 'Mr Whitlam's Discussions in London: 19–20 December 1974. Part I: Political', UK High Commission Canberra (M James) to Callaghan (Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary), 2 December 1974, TNA FCO 24/1911.

Transactional engagement from the periphery

By 1974, Southeast Asian leaders no longer considered Australia part of the region as they had done from the 1940s through to the late 1960s. For example, in meetings with the Australian Minister of State, Don Willesee (1973–75), Singapore's High Commissioner at Canberra said that ASEAN governments now considered Australia a South Pacific country, like Fiji, not a part of Southeast Asia. He noted that Australia's claims to be part of Asia were now as similarly peripheral as Russia's. In his view, the most fruitful form of cooperation in the foreseeable future for Australia would be a formal association between the South Pacific Forum and ASEAN. This would give Australia the Asian relationship that it sought.⁹³

Even though it is often now presented as evidence of the success of Asian engagement, Australia's formal association with ASEAN (later renamed dialogue partner) negotiated between January and April 1974 was very much a consolation prize for the Whitlam Government.⁹⁴ It established the current pattern of Australia's engagement as a second-tier player in Asia-Pacific international relations, with the national perspective of looking in at East Asia from the South Pacific periphery, and included in 'Asia-Pacific' organisations only with other extra-regional powers. Australia's peripheral situation in 1974 was thus a long way from its central position in Asian political and security affairs from 1944 to the late 1960s. Australia's regional security integration, maintained since 1944, was finished, with the press now touting Whitlam's isolationist 'fortress defence' policy.⁹⁵ The only functioning regional organisations in which Australia remained a member were transactional: the Ministerial Conference for the Economic Development of South-East Asia; the Colombo Plan, which was still in

93 'Record of Conversation between H.E. Mr A.P. Rajah, High Commissioner for Singapore and Mr H.D. Anderson, Regional Organisation', DFA Canberra, 22 February 1973, NAA A1838/696/1/5/4, Part 1; 'Record of Conversation, His Excellency Mr A.P. Rajah, High Commissioner for Singapore and Senator D. Willesee, Minister for State', DFA Canberra, 26 February 1973, NAA A1838/696/1/5/4, Part 1.

94 'ASEAN/Australian Co-operation', Australian Embassy Bangkok to DFA Canberra, 12 January 1974, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 11; 'Talks with the FCO, ASEAN', DFA Brief, 1974, NAA A1838/3004/13/21, Part 28.

95 'Bringing the Troops Home', *Financial Times*, London, 22 May 1973, in TNA FCO 24/1557; see also 'Statement on International Affairs by Australian Prime Minister', UK High Commission Canberra (W Peters) to JK Hickman, South West Pacific Dept., FCO London, 25 May 1973, TNA FCO 24/1596; 'Prime Minister's Visit', Australian Embassy Washington to DFA Canberra, 30 July 1973, NAA A1838/686/1, Part 9.

operation; the United Nations (UN) Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East; and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).⁹⁶ The UK FCO assessment of Whitlam's foreign policy supports this: the Whitlam ALP Government 'wishes to establish more enduring and broad-based relations with regional countries on the foundation of long-term common interest such as trade, development co-operation and cultural links'.⁹⁷

In an editorial in January 1974 assessing the first year of Whitlam's foreign policy, *The Sydney Morning Herald* opined:

It is not secret that in South-East Asia there are considerable reservations, if not always about the substance and intentions of initiatives identified closely with Mr Whitlam's personal philosophy, then certainly about Labor's style. It has been unsettling to nations accustomed to take for granted Australia's commitment to stability to note Canberra's new habit of criticising its old friends while refusing to criticise very new ones. It has been particularly unsettling when one of these new friends is China ... and when each of our South-East Asian friends has what seem to them all very good and obvious reason to be exceedingly suspicious of China. South-East Asian reservations have already found one uninhibited spokesman in Mr Lee Kuan Yew who, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting at Ottawa, publicly rejected Mr Whitlam's thesis that détente among the great powers will contribute to regional stability.⁹⁸

In this Lee was chillingly accurate, with Indochina plunged into genocidal bloodshed with the Khmer Rouge seizing power in Cambodia in 1975, followed by internecine conflict among the communist states from December 1978. Rather than the US withdrawal from Vietnam and subsequent communist victories in Indochina stabilising the region as Whitlam predicted, quite the opposite occurred, with new power struggles and historical grievances being unleashed. It seems clear that Whitlam failed to understand the stabilising effects of the Western military presence in Southeast Asia during the postwar decades, which, as the previous chapters have shown, had been valued by many regional states.

96 'Regional Co-operation', For Prime Minister's Southeast Asia Visit, Official Brief, 7 January 1974, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 11; 'Australia's Outlook on South East Asia', DFA Report, 21 March 1975, NAA A1838/3004/11, Part 12.

97 'Australia's Relations with Indonesia', UK FCO Report, 3 September 1973, TNA FCO 15/1867.

98 'Whitlam's Mission', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial, 26 January 1974, in NAA A1209/1974/6181.

In refuting the charges of isolationism in early 1974, Whitlam did, however, confirm that Australia's pattern of Asian engagement was by then primarily transactional. He argued that Australia's emphasis had shifted from involvement with Asia on an ideological or defence basis to:

one based increasingly on developing trade with the countries of the region, on promoting progress through constructive aid programs, on encouraging security through regional co-operation, on a positive response to the recent proposals that we should consider financial assistance to agreed ASEAN projects, and on the development of cultural contacts through the negotiations of cultural agreements with the countries of South East Asia.⁹⁹

This evolution to a broader-based but shallower transactional pattern of engagement was primarily a result of the momentous changes in the regional strategic environment occurring in the late 1960s that eroded the conditions for Australia's deep political and security integration with Asia. However, it was accelerated by Whitlam's foreign policy approach and activist style, which, as this chapter has shown, was unwelcome in Southeast Asia, where most of Australia's closest regional relationships had developed in the postwar decades.

Conclusion

By 1974, Australia looked in at East Asia from Oceania with its engagement premised on a broadening but shallower transactional basis, rather than on the deeper political and normative ties of Commonwealth responsibility and Cold War solidarity evident through to 1968. British decolonisation within the ANZAM defence area and direct US military involvement in the region were the background conditions for Australia's deep engagement with Asia in the postwar decades. The erosion of these factors did not inaugurate closer regional relations as Whitlam intended—rather, their dissolution in the early 1970s distanced Australia politically from East Asia. As this chapter has shown, this trend was accelerated by the Whitlam Government's focus on China and advocacy for

⁹⁹ 'Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia the Honourable E.G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., at a Banquet in his Honour Given by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, 29 January, 1974', in TNA FCO 15/1867; see also Michelle Grattan, 'No Turning Back Now in Asia: PM', *The Age*, Melbourne, 15 February 1974, in NAA A1209/1974/6181; 'Note of Meeting, First Meeting of the Heads of Mission of Member States of the European Community in Canberra in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra, 27 February 1974', in TNA FCO 24/1897.

a comprehensive Asia-Pacific organisation crossing Cold War ideological lines, which alienated Australia's Southeast Asian neighbours. Within the ASEAN grouping, Whitlam's emphasis on Indonesia and disengagement from the FPDA led to perceptions in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines that they had been downgraded or ignored. These were the countries most well-disposed toward Canberra in the postwar decades and where its deepest relationships had been fostered by previous Australian governments.

Whitlam vastly overestimated Australia's importance in the region in the early 1970s. He held the view that Australia's association with its 'great and powerful friends' in the postwar decades had diminished rather than enhanced its status in Asia. For example, in December 1974, Whitlam said that by the time of his election in 1972, 'the external environment and Australia's Government had changed. Our perceptions of Australia's place and role in international affairs had changed. We never were small and insignificant'.¹⁰⁰ However, as Chapters 3 and 4 of this book have demonstrated, postwar Australian governments never considered the country small and insignificant. Both the Chifley and Menzies governments saw Australia playing an important, even leading role in regional affairs. The momentous changes in regional dynamics from the late 1960s made Australia less, not more, significant than it had been from the 1940s up until then. Australia's strategic weight relative to the developing states of Asia had diminished over this time. This loss of influence and relative importance is implicated in the enduring calls by the foreign policy community that Australia must deepen its engagement with Asia. The concluding chapter assesses the implications of the historical trajectory advanced in the book for Australia's foreign policy 'traditions' and makes some concluding observations and analysis about the prospects for deeper Australian engagement with Asia in the 21st century.

100 'Speech by the Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon. E.G. Whitlam, Q.C., M.P., at the Mansion House, London, Thursday 19 December 1974', Australian Information Service, Canberra House, London, Media Release, 19 December 1974, in TNA FCO 24/1912.

7

Conclusion

The notion that genuine and substantive Australian engagement with Asia began only with Whitlam's 1972 recognition of communist China and came to full expression with the Hawke and Keating governments from 1983 into the 1990s is not borne out by the postwar historical record. Indeed, close attention to that record supports the proposition that decolonisation in Southeast Asia, and Cold War strategic imperatives across the region more broadly, drew Australia into deep and genuine political relationships with many Asian states, based on shared normative as well as security concerns.

An analysis of the motive of Commonwealth responsibility in Australian postwar approaches to decolonisation in Southeast Asia reveals that the foreign policy traditions typically used as interpretative frames for this period are flawed. This study has shown that the 'internationalist' Chifley Government sought to protect Australia's security interests in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, through claiming a British Commonwealth responsibility for the region. On the other hand, for the Menzies Government, its Commonwealth responsibilities structured its conception of regional interests, which were sometimes in tension with United States (US) Cold War strategic priorities. For both governments, the norm of Commonwealth responsibility was an important motivating factor.

From the immediate postwar years of the late 1940s until the mid-1960s, Australia's engagement with the decolonisation process in Southeast Asia was driven not only by Cold War security interests, but also by strong normative sentiments of Commonwealth responsibility. This is evident in the Colombo Plan, the Australia–New Zealand–Malaya (ANZAM) Agreement defence planning arrangement, and Australia's participation

in the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR) in Malaya and Borneo. The origins of the ANZAM Agreement, Australia's deep engagement with Southeast Asian decolonisation during the Cold War, and the conditions for Australia's early forward defence deployments are located in the Chifley Government's view, derived from its wartime experience, of insular Southeast Asia as Australia's region and a British Commonwealth responsibility.

It was Evatt, associated with the internationalist tradition of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), who asserted Australia's responsibilities for the region on behalf of the British Empire and Commonwealth in the immediate aftermath of the war. This was continued by the Menzies Coalition Government, which, along with its familiar Cold War rhetoric, consistently emphasised in the 1950s and 1960s Australia's Commonwealth responsibilities in Southeast Asia. This demonstrates that there is much more continuity between the foreign and defence policies of the two governments than is typically portrayed in the literature on Australia's foreign policy traditions. Under Menzies, Australia's commitment to ANZAM and Malaya in the face of Washington's scepticism and military deployment to Borneo in tension with US Cold War strategy, and at the risk of open conflict with Indonesia, are not consistent with instrumental calculations of strategic interest or subservience to US priorities.

Australia's sense of Commonwealth responsibility, which had become increasingly reluctant by the mid-1960s, faded away relatively quickly with the end of Indonesia's Confrontation of Malaysia in 1966 and Britain's subsequent commitment to withdraw from east of Suez. Australia's policy discourse features a more instrumental focus on its independent national interests after this time, along with explicit denials of any residual Commonwealth responsibilities in Southeast Asia. This is especially evident from 1968 in the rhetoric of the Gorton Coalition Government in negotiations with Malaysia and Singapore leading up to the signing of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) in 1971, which superseded the previous Anglo-Malaysian defence agreements (1957-71).

With East Asia more broadly, the non-communist solidarity of the Cold War provided the conditions for Australia's political and security engagement from 1950 to 1971, which was perhaps at its deepest from 1966 to 1968. In the aftermath of the war in the late 1940s, the Chifley ALP Government had viewed insular Southeast Asia as Australia's

region for security purposes. By 1950, however, the Menzies Coalition Government was more attuned to the solidifying Cold War dynamics in the region. For Spender and Casey, the Cold War drew a peripheral Australia deeply into East Asian affairs. However, this basis for Canberra's political and security engagement was eroded from 1966 to 1972 by a series of compounding external factors that were mostly beyond Australia's capacity to influence, but which served to distance Australia politically from region: the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 and the development by the early 1970s of a cultural understanding of regional consciousness that excluded Australia; an easing of Cold War pressures from March 1968 with US de-escalation and withdrawal from Vietnam; the 1969 Nixon Doctrine; and Washington's rapprochement with China in 1972. These changes removed the material conditions, and, importantly, also the normative and institutional underpinnings, for Australia's deep political and security engagement with East Asia.

By the time the Whitlam Government took office in December 1972, the trajectory toward transactional engagement was established. This was intensified by the Whitlam Government's recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its policies in Southeast Asia, which may have been consistent with Japanese policy and trends at the global level but created dissonance among Australia's immediate regional neighbours. By 1974, Australia looked in at East Asia from the South Pacific with its engagement premised on a broadening but shallower transactional basis.

When viewed through the lenses of International Relations theory, Coalition governments are typically described as holding a realist orientation, while ALP governments are usually labelled as liberal internationalist (although tempered by realist assumptions regarding the Australia–New Zealand–United States Security Treaty, or ANZUS, alliance). However, the analysis of the 1944 to 1974 period undertaken in this book reveals major inconsistencies with these theoretical labels. As this study has shown, Coalition governments during this time consistently demonstrated normative motivations such as responsibility, solidarity and building a shared regional 'consciousness' in their foreign policy approaches. They also placed great emphasis on the regime type and identity of states as communist, non-communist or non-aligned. In this, a constructivist interpretation that emphasises norms and identity is more appropriate as an explanatory device than realism, while a concern for

regime type is resonant of liberal internationalism. It could be argued that neo-classical realism allows for a focus on domestic politics and intangible motives in foreign policymaking; however, these are supplementary to its primary structuring principle of the distribution of capabilities. Australia's reliance on its 'great and powerful friends' is the reason for the application of the realist label. However, it is extremely important to note that Britain and the US are culturally, politically and institutionally similar great powers. Australia has never identified itself, or aligned itself in peacetime, with a culturally dissimilar authoritarian great power, such as China, nor is it likely to do so in the foreseeable future.

By contrast, the Chifley and Whitlam ALP governments pursued highly instrumental policies toward Asia, often more consistent with structural realism than liberal internationalism. For example, the Chifley Government sought to use residual British Commonwealth power to exert an Australian sphere of influence over insular Southeast Asia and the South Pacific in the immediate postwar years. It sought to dominate what it regarded as its region of the world. The Chifley Government also regarded international organisation as functional, technical and therefore instrumental, rather than for the less tangible purposes of encouraging cooperation, exchanging information and building shared understandings, all of which are regarded by liberal internationalism as important for fostering international peace, prosperity and security.

Similarly, the Whitlam Government's priority of redirecting Australia's relationships away from smaller regional players toward the large countries of China and Indonesia, while continuing the emphasis on Japan, is also reflective of a realist approach. Whitlam's realism is further evidenced by his non-interventionist attitude toward conflict in neighbouring countries, his consequent reorientation of Canberra's strategic policy from forward defence to defence of the Australian continent, and his economic focus on resource nationalism. It is worth remembering here that in the lead-up to the US ground combat intervention in South Vietnam from July 1965, the main internal critic within the Johnson administration (1963–69) was Undersecretary of State, George Ball, who criticised the deployment of US ground troops on the realist ground of prudence. Ball argued at the time that most available evidence suggested the Republic of Vietnam was a lost cause. The outcome of the proposals for intervention would be 'a protracted war involving an open-ended commitment of US

forces, mounting US casualties, no assurance of a satisfactory solution, and a serious danger of escalation'. Ball stressed the urgency of coming to a compromise solution in mid-1965 without a US ground intervention.¹

On the other hand, Evatt's role in the formation of the United Nations (UN) and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Chifley Government's adherence to UN Security Council principles of dispute resolution, Whitlam's advocacy for the Asia Pacific Forum, and his strong identification with human rights, anti-racism and non-discrimination are consistent with a progressive liberal internationalism. In addition to emphasising the importance of normative motivations in foreign policy analysis, my point here is that the theoretical labels typically assigned in discussions of Australia's foreign policy traditions do not adequately explain, or do justice, to the complexity of the international environment that the country faced, or to the foreign policy approaches and positions taken by Australian governments of both political persuasions during this period.

A concluding observation from this study is that policy approaches from Australia can only be successful in Asian engagement if aligned with larger regional trends or forces. Australia does not carry enough strategic weight to independently shape the regional environment. The Pacific War and its aftermath, the circumstances of British decolonisation and the onset of the Cold War drew Australian governments deeply into the Asian region politically and militarily. The later Gorton and McMahon Coalition governments from 1968 to 1972 were subject to a series of profoundly destabilising changes to the regional environment, which undermined the existing bases of engagement premised on Commonwealth responsibility and Cold War solidarity.

Whitlam overestimated Australia's influence, misinterpreting the significance of these changes for regional diplomacy, especially in Southeast Asia, and by 1974 was reduced to signalling a transactional basis for Australia's future engagement. Rather than the start of genuine engagement, Australia's political exclusion from Asia during the 1970s is evident in the Hawke–Keating (1983–96) era policies of 'enmeshment' and 'comprehensive engagement', and in the intense activism of Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in trying to re-establish Australia's place in the

1 See 'Paper by Ball', undated, sent to McGeorge Bundy, 1 July 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1964–68, Vol. III, Vietnam: June–December 1965, doc. 40.

region. The end of the Cold War and globalisation process from the late 1980s ensured that the transactional basis for Asian engagement in trade, tourism and international education would remain entrenched. Efforts in the early 2000s to again deepen Australia's engagement beyond the transactional have largely failed, with Kevin Rudd's 2008 Asia Pacific Community proposal exemplifying this.

However, recent trends indicating a more assertive and nationalistic China, the US 'pivot' back to Asia under the Obama administration (2009–17), India's Act East policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2014–present), overt Sino–Japanese strategic rivalry and competing maritime claims among a number of states in the East and South China Seas suggest the conditions may again be developing to support deeper Australian political and security engagement in Asia. Over the last decade, a number of governments—notably Japan, Australia, India and the US—have adopted the term 'Indo-Pacific' for their conceptualisation of Asian regionalism and security arrangements. For Canberra, this shift marks a return to the regional outlook of the late 1940s and early 1950s, where the concept of Asia was located north and westward of the Australian continent, rather than the dominant 'East Asian' and 'Asia-Pacific' focus of more recent decades. This modified strategic outlook—from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific—recognises that an increasing number of political, strategic and economic 'interactions and interdependencies between governments now either link or span across these two formerly separate regions'.² Jeffrey D Wilson argues that one of the most important developments related to the Indo-Pacific concept is a return to the traditional separation between economics and security in foreign policymaking.³

This evolving Indo-Pacific strategic framework has given rise to a number of 'minilateral' security initiatives between Japan, India, Australia and the US. These include various trilateral configurations among the four, and an informal and undeveloped 'quadrilateral' grouping introduced in 2007 and revived from 2017. Japan has been the leader in promoting the quadrilateral initiative under the prime ministerships of Shinzo Abe (2006–07, 2012–present) in the face of Beijing's opposition. The Indo-Pacific concept explicitly dilutes an 'East Asia' regional construct centred

2 Jeffrey D Wilson, 'Rescaling to the Indo-Pacific: From Economic to Security-Driven Regionalism in Asia', *East Asia* 35, no. 2 (2018): 177–78.

3 *Ibid.*, 182.

on China, while elevating India's status to that of a key strategic partner. These developments have been met with a highly negative response from Beijing, which argues that they display a Cold War mentality and NATO-like (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) alliance framework designed to contain or encircle China.⁴

There are a number of similarities in these emerging strategic dynamics compared with those of the early Cold War period. The first is the centrality of an assertive and ideologically driven PRC. Whereas in the early Cold War, this was characterised by Maoist communism, Beijing is now driven by a self-conscious nationalism that seeks to reverse China's 'century of humiliation'. The second are strategic rivalries and disputes that again impinge on fundamental issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity—whether in the South and East China Seas, or in Kashmir (where China's Belt and Road Initiative is encroaching)—and with a range of Asian states involved. The third pattern is that of some regional states more firmly aligning with China or, alternatively, with the democratic world and 'rules-based international order', which, since the Second World War, has been underwritten by US strategic preponderance. Finally, much like the early years of the Cold War in Asia, there is some doubt over Washington's ongoing commitment to regional security and stability in the Indo-Pacific under the Trump administration (2016–present), although this may be a relatively transient phenomenon.

Considering the historical trajectory advanced in this book, these contemporary dynamics suggest that the structural conditions may again be developing in the 21st century to support a deeper Australian engagement with Asia. For a country on the geographical margins of Asia with a liberal political culture and governing institutions, the perceived risk of an authoritarian great power—like China—seeking to dominate the broader region may be the shared common denominator required between Australia and its Asian neighbours for 'deeper' engagement.

4 David Brewster, 'The Australia–India Security Declaration: The Quadrilateral Redux?' *Security Challenges* 6, no. 1 (2010): 3; Emma Chanlett-Avery and Bruce Vaughn, *Emerging Trends in the Security Architecture in Asia: Bilateral and Multilateral Ties among the United States, Japan, Australia and India*, CRS Report for Congress, 7 January (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 4, 14; Lavina Lee, 'Abe's Democratic Security Diamond and New Quadrilateral Initiative: An Australian Perspective', *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2016): 4.

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CP13/1 Miscellaneous files maintained by Professor D.B. Copland, economic adviser to the Prime Minister (1940–45)

M3787 Gorton Files: Prime Minister (1968–71); Minister of Defence (1971–72)

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