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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).

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