

Both Australia and New Zealand had already made some military supplies available to the French forces in Indochina.<sup>33</sup> What Dulles was proposing, however, was intervention in Indochina, specifically to relieve the beleaguered French garrison at Dien Bien Phu, in northern Vietnam. The French there had concentrated their strength in one position in an attempt to provoke a pitched battle with the Vietminh, which would be decided by what was thought to be superior French firepower. But the Vietminh surrounded Dien Bien Phu and—having placed artillery on high ground that the French had believed inaccessible—proceeded to bombard the French. The desperate French appealed to the United States for increased military aid, and it was in this context that Dulles's statement was made.

It is maintained by some that, during the same period, the use of tactical nuclear weapons on the Vietminh positions around Dien Bien Phu was recommended by senior American military planners.<sup>34</sup> That there was no nuclear attack may have been chiefly because the Vietminh positions were so close to those of the French that detonating such weapons would have obliterated both sides. By various accounts, including that of the Australian journalist Denis Warner, British pressure on the United States was also a factor in the decision against using nuclear weapons. The same British policy indirectly cost Warner his job with the London *Daily Telegraph*. Warner had been getting front-page display treatment for his stories about how the French were losing the battle for Dien Bien Phu and thus the war, until without warning his dispatches ceased to appear. The *Daily Telegraph* and other British newspapers, he was told later, had imposed voluntary self-censorship at the request of their government, toning down or omitting altogether the bad news from Indochina as part of the British effort to calm perceived US bellicosity, having particularly in mind the rumoured threat that the United States might resort to nuclear weapons. Warner for his part believed this story; he resigned in protest over the censorship.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile Dulles had sought congressional authority for American land and sea forces to intervene in Indochina; if the granting of such authority proved insufficient to deter the Vietminh, he argued, then actual intervention should take place. Congress, however, decided that it would approve US intervention only if the United States' allies were also involved. This was in effect an endorsement of Dulles's call for 'joint action', but it also precluded any chance of an immediate US air strike on Vietminh positions outside Dien Bien Phu.

On 4 April 1954 Dulles held talks with representatives of Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and the three Indochinese states. The British, while keen that the French armed forces remain in Indochina as a bulwark against communism, were against international intervention. Their argument was that intervention would not work, and might lead to escalation if China were provoked into entering the war, Dien Bien Phu being no great distance from the Chinese border. In the British view, the risk of creating a situation similar to that in Korea was particularly dangerous since there were no guarantees that war in Indochina after intervention would remain a limited war. In any case there seemed little

point in intervene both the Korea: their part, the ment for them the interventio: sidiary importa could have no

For Austra now Ambassa formed the o against the en had emphasise cance that the hear any Aust at this time th that the Unite was not gener intervention i *Morning Herald* any newspape understood u tations in Ge assumed that of the risk of attitude was maintained in that foreign r in the absenc The Depart action' to enc aid from cou should await should be sa the interest c genuine inde he tell Dulle would be ga

Not sur plan was to tion was du result in the long-term : should not l

point in intervening when a conference in Geneva to negotiate a possible end to both the Korean and Indochinese wars was due to convene in just a few weeks. For their part, the French disagreed with Dulles's plan because it included a requirement for them to grant immediate independence to the Indochinese states, even if the intervention was militarily successful. The participation of Thailand was of subsidiary importance. That of the Indochinese states was not in doubt, but these states could have no effect militarily.<sup>36</sup>

For Australia, however, the idea of intervention created a dilemma. Spender, now Ambassador in Washington, had spoken to Dulles on 26 March, and had formed the opinion that Dulles was more concerned with holding Indochina against the encroachment of communism than with seeking a settlement. Dulles had emphasised that Britain in particular did not seem to appreciate the full significance that the fall of Indochina would have, and he seemed genuinely anxious to hear any Australian suggestions.<sup>37</sup> The US administration seems to have assumed at this time that it would be supported by Australia and New Zealand provided that the United States 'bore the major military burden'.<sup>38</sup> In Australia, however, it was not generally understood that the US administration was considering military intervention in Indochina even before the Geneva conference started. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, which was as strongly opposed to communism in Southeast Asia as any newspaper in Australia, took it that joint or united action in a military sense, as understood under ANZUS treaty obligations, would be required only if the negotiations in Geneva were to fail. Other newspapers, including the *Melbourne Herald*, assumed that Dulles could not have been advocating military intervention because of the risk of provoking China and hence all-out war.<sup>39</sup> As for External Affairs, its attitude was virtually the opposite of what Dulles had presumed; the Department maintained in a provisional assessment submitted to Casey and passed on to Spender that foreign military intervention would achieve little, would provoke China and, in the absence of UN endorsement, would lead to bad relations with Asian nations. The Department recommended instead a programme of 'concerted diplomatic action' to encourage the French to keep fighting, with further financial and material aid from countries, including Australia. Any decision on the use of foreign forces should await developments at Geneva, and if intervention were agreed upon then it should be sanctioned by the UN itself or a body acting under the UN Charter. In the interest of gaining Asian support, the French should also be persuaded to grant genuine independence to the Indochinese states. It was suggested to Spender that he tell Dulles, with whom he had a good personal relationship, that UN support would be gained only by endorsing such a programme.<sup>40</sup>

Not surprisingly, Spender's response when urged by Dulles to support the US plan was to press for time. Spender was able to point to the fact that a federal election was due shortly in Australia, raising the issue at this stage, he suggested, 'might result in the election of a government whose policies would be contrary to our long-term aims'. Dulles's reply, however, was effectively that the United States should not be 'taken for granted forever' in its desire to help defend Southeast Asia;

if the danger was not recognised by the British Commonwealth, 'we will find it hard to move in the matter but we may write it off'.<sup>41</sup> In Spender's view, Dulles's main aim in speaking thus was to encourage Australia and New Zealand to put pressure on Britain. To this, both the Australian and New Zealand governments reacted cautiously. While noting the US concerns, they noted also that the United States was not calling on either country officially to meet obligations under the ANZUS treaty. The Australian Cabinet was disposed in any case to postpone public discussion of the matter until after the election, in which a tight result seemed likely.<sup>42</sup> Casey's first major statement to Parliament on the Indochina crisis, on 7 April, closely reflected the caution shown by Cabinet.

Casey left Australia for Geneva on 12 April, having sought information from all the relevant diplomatic posts on the latest military and political developments. It was clear to him by then that the threat in Indochina came from the Vietminh, not China. In his view, the only people who could beat the Vietminh were the non-communist Vietnamese, but to do so they required 'real independence' from France. Decolonisation by France would also be important in terms of maintaining the support of noncommunist Asian nations. Casey thought it 'an exaggeration for Dulles to say that the Communist Chinese are "mighty close" to open aggression'.<sup>43</sup> The substance of Casey's objections to the US position, however, was not conveyed to Washington. The United States was told instead that, while Australia favoured the idea of a collective defence organisation, it preferred otherwise to act in concert with Britain. At Geneva Casey stated the Australian position to Dulles, Eden and the other negotiators thus: 'intervention would be wrong for the following reasons—it would not have the backing of the United Nations—it would be unacceptable to world opinion, particularly in Asia—it would wreck the Geneva conference—and it was in any case unlikely to save Dien Bien Phu'.<sup>44</sup>

On the last point, General Giap was of the same view. His Vietminh forces launched an all-out assault on the Dien Bien Phu perimeters while the conference was convening, and the fortress fell on 7 May—the day before discussions on Indochina were to begin. Since it was now clear that the French cause in Indochina was finished, the Australian government decided that the only realistic course was to secure a settlement on the best terms possible. In the meantime, however, the United States expressed considerable resentment over the British role in the crisis, and Australia came in for its share of criticism for alleged backsliding. US President Dwight Eisenhower and the State Department had apparently thought that Australia was in favour of the Dulles initiative until late April, and that Australia 'bitterly resented' the British veto. The Australian attitude was seen as being at odds with 'the ANZUS spirit of solidarity about which so much has been said in the past few weeks'. More active support would be sought from the Liberal–Country Party coalition if it were re-elected on 29 May.<sup>45</sup> Some have suggested that the US misunderstanding of the Australian position may have arisen partly because of the manifestly pro-American sympathies of Spender (in Washington) and Watt (leader of the Australian observer delegation in Geneva).<sup>46</sup>

Dulles tried partly in the belief that the forthcoming telegram sent unprincipally, reason military operations had to be given tactical aims of interpose it, which Chinese intervention time, that Australian statement of Australia under the Secret United States, probably had at last lost it

Australia's position by the divergent the crisis had not primarily to avoid risk that nuclear particular, had stirred bring about a United described by Taylor the sovereignty, deserve government was it to obfuscate to finally made clear: Dien Bien Phu turn that the Au

The Geneva the problems of there, ended in was, in Casey's view circumstances'.<sup>47</sup> titution of Vietnam the withdrawal of States, however, for the communist to upset the agreement of the aforesaid national peace



Dulles tried to revive the idea of 'united action' during May, apparently at least partly in the belief that the Australian government was still hesitating because of the forthcoming election. This continuing misapprehension was addressed in a telegram sent under Tange's name to all relevant missions just three days before the election. According to this message, the election was not the only, nor even the principal, reason why Australia had not agreed to become part of international military operations in Indochina. The major reasons were that the Geneva conference had to be given a genuine chance to reach a settlement, the military and political aims of international action were unclear, and most Asian governments would oppose it, which meant it would not gain UN backing. There was the risk also of Chinese intervention leading to world war. The telegram stated as well, for the first time, that Australia was prepared to accept the partition of Vietnam.<sup>47</sup> This clear statement of Australian policy may have been authorised by Casey, although sent under the Secretary's name. On this occasion there was no reaction from the United States, probably because by this time—late May—the idea of 'united action' had at last lost its force.

Australia's policies had survived a rigorous test in Southeast Asia, exacerbated by the divergent attitudes of its two main allies, the United States and Britain. But the crisis had not just been a matter of choosing between allies. Australia wanted primarily to avert conflict between the United States and China with its attendant risk that nuclear weapons might be used. While the government, and Casey in particular, had strong reservations about Dulles's tactics, it certainly did not want to bring about a US withdrawal from Southeast Asia. Menzies' ultimate objective, as described by Tange, was to found 'a defensive coalition on the principle of defending the sovereignty and integrity of [Asian] States which have established independence, deserve to be protected, and would want intervention'.<sup>48</sup> The Menzies government was probably fortunate in the end that the impending election enabled it to obfuscate to some extent; when Australian objections to Dulles's policy were finally made clear by the Tange telegram on the eve of the election, the battle for Dien Bien Phu was over and 'united action' had lost its rationale, which meant in turn that the Australian government would escape US censure.

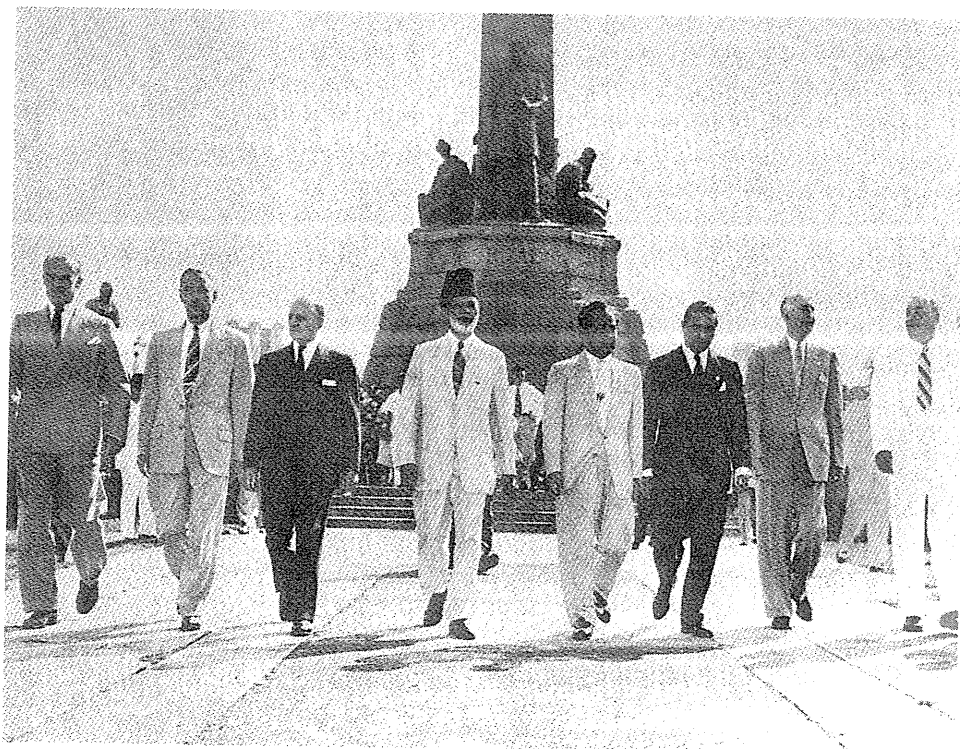
The Geneva conference concluded in July 1954, after lengthy consideration of the problems of both Korea and Indochina. Its deliberations on Korea, like the war there, ended in stalemate. As for the Indochinese crisis, the conference outcome was, in Casey's view, 'probably the best . . . that could have been obtained in all the circumstances'.<sup>49</sup> There were agreements for an end to fighting, the temporary partition of Vietnam at the 17th parallel, an international supervisory commission and the withdrawal of French forces (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7). The United States, however, was none too impressed with this outcome, seeing it as a net gain for the communists; it declared that it would refrain from the threat or use of force to upset the agreements, but 'would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern as seriously threatening international peace and security'.<sup>50</sup> Menzies made a similar statement after Cabinet



had reviewed the Geneva settlement,<sup>51</sup> and the Australian government then began working towards the international security agreement that appeared necessary if the Geneva result was indeed to be anything more than a stage on the way to communist control of Indochina.

## SEATO

As far as the Australian government was concerned, achieving an agreement of this kind was the purpose of the conference at Manila in September 1954 that led to the South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty (better known as the Manila or SEATO Treaty). There were eight signatories: Australia, New Zealand, France, Britain, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and the United States. Each of the Asian nations had its own reasons for joining. Pakistan decided to attend the Manila conference after India, its rival in seeking control of Kashmir, declined to attend, along with several Southeast Asian states including Indonesia. Thailand, an ally of Japan in the Pacific war, was in the process of being rehabilitated in the perceptions of many Americans and Australians through willingness to demonstrate opposition to



*The Australian Minister for External Affairs, R. G. Casey (extreme left), with other delegates in Manila in September 1954 for discussions leading to the establishment of the South East Asia Treaty Organization. The US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, is on the extreme right.*

communism, with  
colony. An India  
alliance minus S  
pines were the c

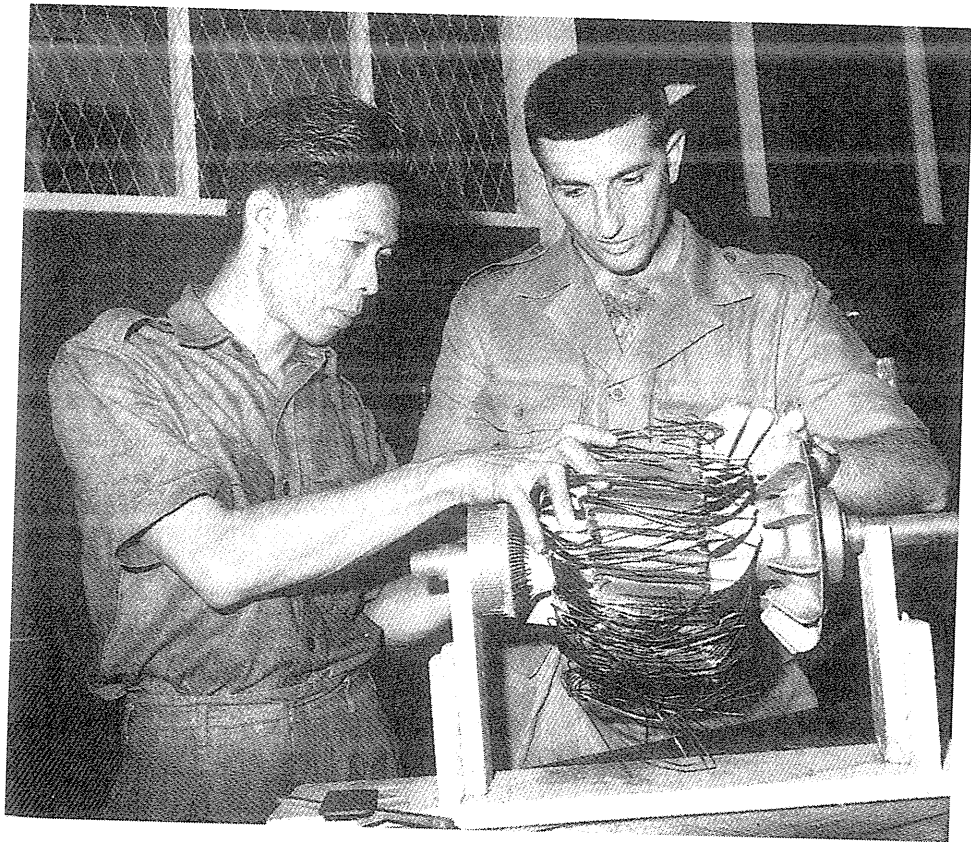
The US in  
specifically and  
bership for non  
arising from thi  
were aware that  
only the United  
want SEATO in  
'communist ag  
needless offence  
interested in jo  
ference was for  
United States t



*Warrant Officer  
SEATO militar*

communism, while US influence was still strong in the Philippines, a former US colony. An Indian observer later commented that SEATO was 'a South-East Asian alliance minus South-East Asia'.<sup>52</sup> This was almost true; Thailand and the Philippines were the only Southeast Asian countries to join SEATO.

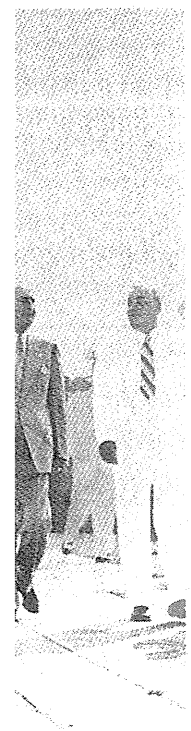
The US insistence for domestic political reasons that the treaty be directed specifically and exclusively against communist aggression in fact precluded membership for non-aligned countries including India and Indonesia, and a dilemma arising from this US position almost cost Casey his portfolio. While all the parties were aware that the treaty was intended as a defence against communist aggression, only the United States wanted it to state this specifically. Most signatories did not want SEATO invoked, for example, to defend Pakistan against India, but specifying 'communist aggression' rather than 'aggression' in general seemed likely to cause needless offence to a number of Asian countries which might otherwise have been interested in joining the new pact. The solution arrived at during the Manila conference was for the word 'communist' to be omitted from the treaty and for the United States to attach to it a unilateral statement limiting their commitment to



*Warrant Officer Class 2 Roy Felstead (right) shows a Thai student how to wind an armature at the SEATO military technical training school in Bangkok, Thailand, 1962.*

nt then began  
ed necessary if  
e way to com-

reement of this  
954 that led to  
the Manila or  
eland, France,  
ch of the Asian  
ie Manila con-  
o attend, along  
n ally of Japan  
perceptions of  
e opposition to



*delegates in  
East Asia Treaty*

cases of communist aggression. But the Australian government saw this as implying that Australia was accepting a broader commitment than the United States, and insisted to Casey in Manila that he enter a reservation similar to that of the Americans so that potential criticism within Australia could be averted. Under great duress from Dulles, Casey ignored his instructions and signed the treaty without reservation, maintaining then and later that the conference would have been wrecked had he done otherwise. He was probably fortunate that his schedule included visits to various other Asian, European and North American capitals; by the time he returned to Australia in late October Menzies had calmed down, and Casey's reasons for disobeying his orders were accepted.<sup>53</sup>

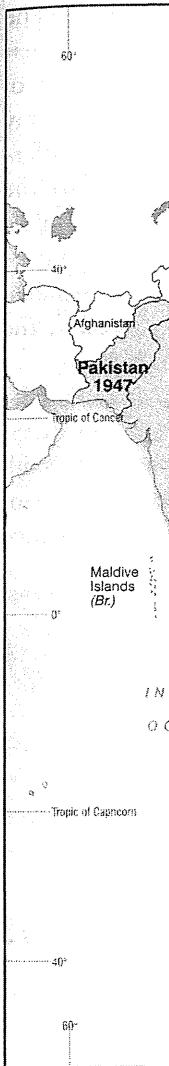
What in fact occurred in Manila was that Australia, with the assistance of other nations both more and less powerful, succeeded in harnessing American pressure for 'united action' into an apparently workable form—a military security pact, wider in scope than ANZUS, designed to deter communist aggression in Southeast Asia. The treaty did not specify that joint military planning would occur, although it provided for consultations on the subject. Contingency planning did take place after SEATO headquarters was established in Bangkok in 1956, but was never particularly effective, partly because the level of security of information was too low to permit planning. The United States was not prepared to commit its forces to SEATO in advance of a specific requirement, and community of interest among the eight member nations steadily declined.<sup>54</sup>

### India and the Non-aligned Movement

The emergence of a non-aligned movement of nations in Asia, Africa and the Middle East had its origins in the wave of decolonisation that followed the end of World War II. In Asia leadership of the movement was quickly assumed by the most populous of the newly independent nations, India, which was determined from the beginning to maintain relations with both communist and noncommunist powers and to accept aid from either side provided there were no political strings attached. This was made clear in March 1947 by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. In his inaugural address to the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, he told delegates that Asia—after a long period of quiescence—had suddenly become important again in world terms:

Far too long have we of Asia been petitioners in Western courts and chancelleries. That story must now belong to the past. We propose to stand on our own legs and to co-operate with all others who are prepared to co-operate with us . . . The countries of Asia can no longer be used as pawns by others; they are bound to have their own policies in world affairs.<sup>55</sup>

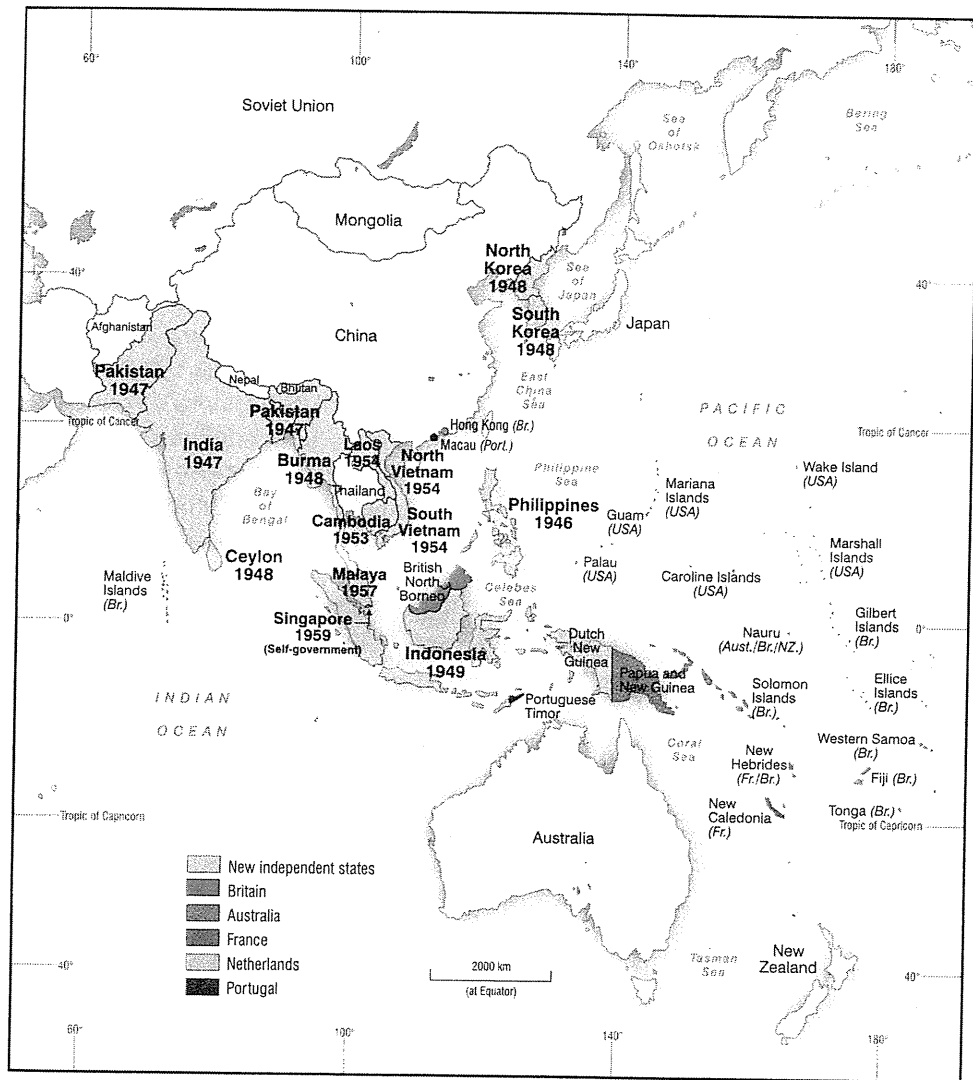
Nehru attempted to maintain these principles throughout the 1950s, and consistently criticised policies of Western powers with which he disagreed, and to a lesser extent those of communist nations until India's border war with China in 1962.



Decolonisation in

As far as Labor govern the process o asked in return Kashmir, but ideas of Chifley Colombo Plan which were in relationship b





*Decolonisation in Asia 1961*

As far as Australia was concerned, Nehru enjoyed good relations with the Labor government of the late 1940s and with Chifley personally. Chifley assisted in the process of India becoming a republic within the Commonwealth, and was asked in return to mediate in 1950 in the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, but declined.<sup>56</sup> Australia's support for Indonesian independence, and the ideas of Chifley, Evatt and Burton that were later developed for incorporation in the Colombo Plan, also met with approval in New Delhi and among other Asian states which were inclined towards a non-aligned stance in world affairs. By contrast the relationship between Menzies and Nehru began badly, with Menzies arguing as

is as implying  
ed States, and  
of the Ameri-  
er great duress  
without reser-  
been wrecked  
included visits  
e time he re-  
Casey's reasons

tance of other  
rican pressure  
security pact,  
n in Southeast  
ccur, although  
did take place  
was never par-  
n was too low  
it its forces to  
interest among

Africa and the  
wed the end of  
assumed by the  
was determined  
and noncom-  
ere no political  
Prime Minister,  
Conference in  
uiescence—had

hancelleries.  
own legs and  
1 us ... The  
re bound to

1950s, and con-  
sagreed, and to  
war with China

Opposition leader in 1947 that India was not yet ready for independence.<sup>57</sup> The relationship between Menzies and Nehru did not improve much throughout their virtually concurrent terms as national leaders. This was not just a matter of 'Menzies' lack of interest in India and his failure to develop a relationship of any substance with . . . Nehru<sup>58</sup> at a personal level. There were also significant differences on policy. What Meg Gurry has described as Menzies' commitment to 'the demands of bipolarity and United States containment policy'<sup>59</sup> stood in complete contrast to Nehru's stance of non-alignment. Nehru did not support Spender's initiatives leading towards what became the ANZUS pact, and the Australian government in turn disputed India's view that the Korean war was linked to the question of the admission of the Chinese communist regime to the UN.<sup>60</sup>

India was even less well disposed towards SEATO than towards ANZUS. The Manila treaty in Nehru's view was 'inclined dangerously in the direction of spheres of influence to be exercised by powerful countries'; it had contributed, he said, 'definitely to the tensions and fears of the [Indochina] situation'.<sup>61</sup> The treaty went against Indian foreign policy in several respects. It was a defensive military alliance against communism, including possible aggression by the People's Republic of China, with which India was attempting at the time to co-exist peacefully. Membership of a military alliance by three Asian countries—Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines—was inconsistent with acceptance by these countries of the principles of non-alignment; Pakistan, it was predicted correctly, would become more intransigent in pursuing an anti-Indian line on the subject of Kashmir in particular. India was not happy either with American membership of SEATO, preferring Asian problems to be settled in accordance with Asian interests.

The Indian government accepted Australia's assurance that it would not be drawn by its membership of SEATO into taking military action against any other member of the Commonwealth, and that Pakistan had been informed of this. Nevertheless, despite preliminary overtures from India, Australia and New Zealand were not officially invited to the conference of Afro-Asian non-aligned nations at Bandung in Indonesia in 1955, while the People's Republic of China, for example, was. The only Australian to receive honoured-guest status at the conference was Burton, whose internationalist record during the late 1940s had met with Indian approval and who, since leaving government service in 1951, had become a prominent critic of Australian foreign policy. But Nehru did attempt to strike a conciliatory note at the end of the Bandung conference by sending greetings to Australia and New Zealand: 'They are next to us and I should like Australia and New Zealand to come nearer to Asia. I would welcome them because I do not want what we say or do to be based on racial prejudices'.<sup>62</sup>

Within External Affairs Tange took a close interest in the attitudes of the major non-aligned Asian countries, and especially their perceptions of Australia. In a candid review of Australian policy that he submitted to Casey in June 1955, a few weeks after the Bandung conference, Tange observed:

We start our g  
SEATO: whic  
ANZUS: whi  
Chiang Kai-sl  
We conflict w  
where we ve  
determination  
conflict with  
against streng  
speech by an  
Geneva Agree  
spend a millio  
Geneva Agree  
An occasiona  
Agreement w  
nesia. What w



R. G. Casey, *Austre  
Commissioner to In  
July 1965.*

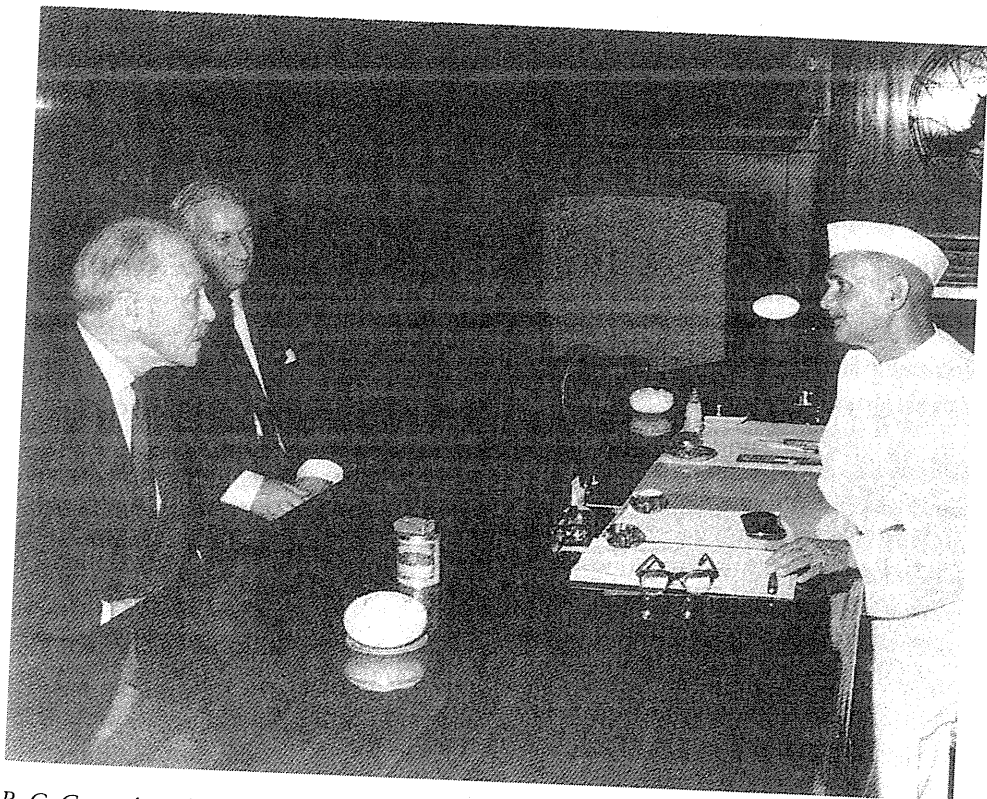
dence.<sup>57</sup> The  
oughout their  
a matter of  
onship of any  
ificant differ-  
tment to 'the  
l in complete  
ort Spender's  
re Australian  
linked to the  
JN.<sup>60</sup>

ANZUS. The  
on of spheres  
ted, he said,  
e treaty went  
itary alliance  
Republic of  
efully. Mem-  
iland and the  
he principles  
more intrans-  
-ticular. India  
erring Asian

ould not be  
st any other  
med of this.  
New Zealand  
ed nations at  
for example,  
ference was  
with Indian  
me a promi-  
ke a concili-  
to Australia  
ia and New  
do not want

udes of the  
Australia. In  
1955, a few

We start our good neighbour policy with two handicaps:  
SEATO: which connotes intervention in the affairs of Asia and 'provocation';  
ANZUS: which connotes accord with U.S. foreign policy in Asia towards Peking,  
Chiang Kai-shek, the Geneva Agreement.  
We conflict with Asia on a great many matters, particularly in the United Nations  
where we very frequently vote against them on subjects ranging from 'self-  
determination' (colonialism) to the liberal spending of money for their benefit. We  
conflict with a great many of them in our policy of joining military alliances  
against strength. Much of this is unavoidable . . . [But] I think it possible that one  
speech by an Australian Government spokesman decrying efforts to carry out the  
Geneva Agreement in Vietnam could undo in India the value of a year's effort to  
spend a million pounds on them under the Colombo Plan. Even silence on the  
Geneva Agreement implies disapproval and tends to put us in the American camp.  
An occasional expression of support for a selection of the basic *principles* of the  
Agreement would take us closer to three Asian Countries—India, Burma, Indo-  
nesia. What we say is usually more important than what we do.<sup>63</sup>



R. G. Casey, Australian Governor-General (left), and Sir Arthur Tange, Australian High  
Commissioner to India (centre), with Indian Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri in New Delhi,  
July 1965.



As it turned out, the Bandung conference was the international high point of the non-aligned movement. Its driving force had always been Nehru. Effectively, when Nehru died in 1964 the non-aligned movement died with him. Meanwhile, following the India–China frontier war of 1962 Australian–Indian relations improved to a degree as both governments now took the view that China was the major threat to peace in Asia. In 1965 the Australian government signalled its wish to strengthen the relationship by appointing External Affairs' most senior official, Tange himself, to the High Commissionership in New Delhi—a post he would hold for the unusually long term of five years.

## Laos

A further test of Australian policy arose over the issue of Laos. In the years after Geneva, the neutrality of this landlocked Indochinese kingdom was subverted. The factors involved were the Geneva Agreement's de facto division of Laos between the communist Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao government, the unwillingness of both the United States and China to allow a genuinely neutral Laotian government, and the entanglement of Laos in the war in neighbouring Vietnam. Australia's initial sympathy with the objective of Lao neutrality gave way over time to acquiescence in US policy, which subordinated the stability, unity and neutrality of Laos to the overriding objective of preventing the Indochinese states, and particularly southern Vietnam, from falling to communism.<sup>64</sup>

In 1959, following a period of complex political manoeuvring, open warfare broke out between the Royal Lao Army, funded since 1955 by the United States, and the fighting units of the Pathet Lao, supplied by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) (Hanoi). As Martin Stuart-Fox observed, Laos became the only country in the world 'where the armed forces on both sides of a civil conflict were entirely financed by foreign powers'.<sup>65</sup>

The Australian government initially supported the continued neutrality of Laos. This, stated the acting External Affairs Minister, Garfield Barwick, in 1959, would be 'consistent with the intentions of the Geneva settlement, and with the need to avoid giving the powerful Communist States on its borders any opportunities for provocative activities, and thus with the best interests of Laos itself'.<sup>66</sup> Australia recommended that Laos use all available peaceful means, including recourse to the UN, before invoking Western military intervention through SEATO. At that time SEATO had a military contingency plan, Plan 5, to counter communist subversion within Laos. The Australian government nonetheless became disturbed by the differences that developed between Britain and the United States over possible SEATO military action in Laos. In September 1959 Australia informed the United States of its willingness to join a SEATO military force in the event of the failure of the UN to resolve the conflict in Laos. Britain, however, regarded SEATO military intervention in Laos as the wrong option, and sought to distance

itself from Plan 5. The Geneva settlement would not invoke the aid of SEATO in 1960—the first time. Thai support, in the event, was for the Royal Lao and neutralist governments.

In early 1960 the United States urged Laos to President Kennedy. The British would not join. Harold Macmillan's intervention in Laos was a bloody and chaotic administration. Another international view, which Macmillan took in March 1961, was that rather than an international representation, the failure of SEATO to press ahead in an international forum urged that, if relations were restricted, Laos were joined by SEATO. Laos was an irreconcilable foe of SEATO for the United States.

Alarmed by SEATO action by SEATO in 1961.<sup>69</sup> In April 1961, Macmillan attempted was a cease-fire in Laos. Macmillan and

We have a different view of view of strengthening well weak which either Asian would be

In the event which would

itself from Plan 5, which it regarded as inconsistent with its obligations under the Geneva settlement. In the event there was a lull in hostilities, and Laos did not invoke the aid of SEATO in 1959. But in the wake of a coup and counter-coup in 1960—the first coup setting up a neutralist government, the second, with US and Thai support, installing a conservative one—civil war broke out again, with Pathet Lao and neutralist forces on one side and pro-Western forces on the other.

In early 1961 US President Eisenhower recommended SEATO intervention in Laos to President-elect John F. Kennedy, but warned that both the French and the British would be reluctant to fulfil their obligations under the SEATO treaty. Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, feared that active Western intervention in Laos would provoke counterintervention from the communist bloc and a bloody and costly stalemate. Hence the British sought to steer the Kennedy administration away from a military solution to the conflict in Laos, and pressed for another international conference to settle the problem. At this stage Australia's view, which Menzies put to Macmillan before the latter's meeting with Kennedy in March 1961, was that 'We think it would be better to have a SEATO operation rather than an individual United States effort, but this means a worthwhile SEATO representation, not one which would . . . have as its principal effect to reveal the failure of SEATO'.<sup>67</sup> Macmillan, however, persuaded Kennedy to let the British press ahead in asking the Soviet Union to agree to a cease-fire in Laos, followed by an international conference aimed at producing a neutral Laos. Macmillan also urged that, if military intervention were to take place, it should be a limited operation restricted to American and British troops only.<sup>68</sup> Within SEATO, the British were joined by the French and the New Zealanders in arguing that the situation in Laos was an internal civil war that should not qualify for collective security action by SEATO forces.

Alarmed by the fissures in SEATO, Menzies argued strongly for collective action by SEATO during the SEATO Council meeting in Bangkok in March 1961.<sup>69</sup> In April Macmillan cabled Menzies that the military intervention contemplated was much more limited than Plan 5, and was directed only at securing a cease-fire and negotiations.<sup>70</sup> Menzies by now was thoroughly irritated at Macmillan and British policy on Laos:

We have considerable hope of the ultimate effectiveness of SEATO from the point of view of the resistance of the Communist advance and, at the end of the line, of strengthening our own defence. Any apparent inaction on the part of SEATO may well weaken the whole structure. It is of vital importance that any operations which either now or hereafter may be undertaken should be operations employing Asian forces as well as those of White Powers. The psychological effect of what would be regarded as an American incursion could easily be disastrous.<sup>71</sup>

In the event, the Kennedy administration declined to take the military option, which would have involved the partition of Laos and putting a screen of mainly