THE COLLAPSE OF AUSTRALIAN COLD WAR POLICY: JOHN GORTON'S MANAGEMENT OF THE AMERICAN-AUSTRALIAN ALLIANCE IN A TIME OF CRISIS

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This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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Andrew Mason-Jones

This thesis is dedicated to my dad, Nicoll Mason-Jones, who served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968.

Thesis Abstract

Between 1968 and 1971 the Australian government, under the leadership of Prime Minister John Gorton, began to rethink its foreign and defence policy: from one that had as its central tenet a strong relationship with 'great and powerful friends' and fighting communism in Asia, to one that saw Australia withdraw from overseas military action in Vietnam and take on a greater degree of self-reliance. This rethink was thrust on Gorton by British and American announcements to play a lesser role in Southeast Asian affairs, announcements that meant, in effect, the collapse of Australia's Cold War policy. Such changes in relation to British and American intentions to remain engaged in the region prompted a wave of unprecedented national soul-searching in Australia, a key part of which was the task of re-setting the coordinates of Australian defence policy towards a more self-reliant posture.

This thesis examines the way in which Prime Minister Gorton went about re-setting those coordinates. It does this by placing his management of the alliance in the broader context of Australian Cold War policy and foreign relations, and assessing his management of a series of crises that shook the foundations of Australian foreign policy almost immediately after he became prime minister. It is argued that the political and diplomatic situation Gorton inherited in 1968 – and the emphasis that had been placed on the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with America in particular - severely limited his ability to manage the alliance with certainty and clarity in a time of crisis. By analysing Gorton's management of foreign relations and defence policy more closely than has previously been done, the thesis sheds light on Australian foreign and defence policy in the Cold War, and also on the contribution Gorton made to taking the first steps towards the development of a more self-reliant Australian foreign policy.

PROLOGUE

The late 1960s and early 1970s was an unsettling time in Australia: socially, culturally and politically. The staunch conservatism of the Menzies era was drawing to a close, and the notion of Australia being the last bastion of 'Britishness' in a foreign and hostile Asian world, dependent on powerful allies for protection and support, was coming under question. The bipolar rigidity of the Cold War world was in the process of being replaced by a more complex, multi-polar one in which Australia would need to become more self-reliant in its defence and foreign policy. According to the Australian public intellectual Donald Horne, the period from 1966 to 1972 was "the time of critical change in Australian post-war socio-political history,"[1] adding that "one of the major significances of this period is that it was a time of challenge to some of the dominant values and bodies of knowledge in Australia."[2]

This thesis examines developments in Australian foreign policy during this period of change, specifically the way in which American-Australian relations were managed between 1968 and 1971 by Prime Minister John Gorton. The management of the alliance will be assessed within the broader context of Australia's changing relationship with its traditional ally, Britain, and the various attempts to construct a new, more self-sufficient Australian nationalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Horne put it, the seven-year period between Menzies and Whitlam was "when some of the established common sense was being upset."[3] It is the goal of this thesis to examine the changes that took place to American-Australian relations under Gorton.

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[1] Donald Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-72,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1980, pp. 6-7.
[2] Ibid., p. 4.
[3] Ibid.

Australia and the 'New Nationalism'

As the Iron Curtain fell across Europe after World War Two and the world began to separate into two rival blocs – East versus West, capitalism versus communism, democracy versus dictatorship – Australia sought to protect itself by maintaining its relationship with Britain and developing and strengthening a defence alliance with the United States of America. As Bruce Grant argued, loyalty to and dependence on great power protectors was "the central idea of Australian policy."[4] In the context of the Cold War, the perceived threat against which Australia needed protection was the spread of monolithic communism from Moscow, through Maoist China and then throughout Southeast Asia. Indeed, Grant identified the Cold War as a factor that prolonged Australia's "adolescence," as it created "global tensions for which Australia felt it needed powerful allies."[5]

While Britain had long been regarded as Australia's protector and remained so well into the 1950s, America emerged from World War Two as the world's greatest superpower, and shared with Australia not only a common political and economic system, but also a common language and culture. America was a Pacific power well suited to the role of protector, especially after the pivotal role it had played in the war against the Japanese. Accordingly, Australia actively sought to develop a relationship with a "culturally related great power to which Australians looked for protection against a threatening region",[6] particularly as the British presence in the region faded. Indeed, Australia had begun to identify economically and culturally more with the United States than with Britain in the 1960s. Although Australia still imported more from Britain and Europe in gross terms, an increase in American imports between 1948 and 1970 reflected Australia's international realignment. Similarly, by the mid-1960s Australia was increasingly influenced by American culture through television, newspapers, cinema, books

[4] Bruce Grant, *The Crisis of Loyalty, A Study of Australian Foreign Policy,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1972, p. 1.
[5] Ibid., p. 2.
[6] David McLean, "From British Colony to American Satellite? Australia and the USA During the Cold War", *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* Volume 52, Issue 1 (2006), pp. 64-79, p. 73.

and popular music.[7] Indeed, much of the Australian diplomacy of the 1950s and early- to mid-1960s centred around Australian efforts to establish a coherent form of defence co-operation in Southeast Asia with the two powers, so that Australia might feel secure in what was regarded as a foreign and threatening region through its relationship of dependence on Britain and America. The essence, then, of Australia's Cold War policy was to keep the great powers engaged in the region to Australia's north.

The diplomacy of the late 1960s and early 1970s, was characterised by doubt and uncertainty, however, in which, as James Curran and Stuart Ward have argued, "long-nurtured assumptions about Australia's common cause with 'friends and relations' in Britain and the United States were subjected to critical scrutiny, as Australian governments moved to place relations with both of these countries on a new footing."[8] With the onset of European decolonisation in Southeast Asia after World War Two, it was from the mid-1960s that Australians were left to consider the implications of being left alone and isolated in a foreign environment. As Andrea Benvenuti has recently shown, the rise of Asian nationalism challenged Britain's determination to remain in Southeast Asia. This was troubling for policy-makers in Canberra who, "no matter how dispassionately tried to weigh up different scenarios … could not but feel downcast about the island's future."[9]

The British withdrawal was "not just the last but also one of the most stressful of the Anglo-Australian interactions occasioned by the dissolution of Britain's empire."[10] Indeed, the impact of the British retreat from the region was great: according to Country Party member Ian Allen in March 1968, "Australia felt, for

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[7] James Harpur, *War Without End, Conflict in Indochina* (2nd edition), Longman, Melbourne, 1995, p. 101.
[8] James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation, Australia after Empire,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2010, p. 23.
[9] Andrea Benvenuti, *Cold War and Decolonisation, Australia's Policy towards Britain's End of Empire in Southeast Asia,* NUS Press, Singapore, 2017, pp. 6-7.
[10] David Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket: Australia and the End of Britain's Empire,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002, p. 158.

the first time in its history, particularly naked."[11] The emotional ties to Britain were not easily cut and, "while most politicians and commentators emphasised the need to think harder about forging a distinctive Australian civic identity for the lonely years ahead, very few could define precisely what that might mean, except that it should somehow be 'independent' and 'new'."[12]

With the 'mother country' leaving Australia alone in Asia so that it could focus on its involvement in Europe, how would Australians continue to define their national identity, an identity that was intimately linked to Australia's intimacy with Britain? The response to this question of a new form of nationalism was not easily made. Indeed, the "residual power of the British legacy, the lack of any alternative, unifying tradition which could easily replace it, and the failure of nationalism's hold on the public imagination meant that the political and intellectual leaders' response was confused and ambiguous."[13]

When Harold Wilson's Labour government effectively ended Britain's military world role by deciding in 1968 to speed up the withdrawal of British troops from the area east of Suez, it appeared to contemporary observers that "the dismantling of one of the last symbols of the Anglo-Australian connection would inevitably result in the withering of Australia's self-consciously British civic identity."[14] This in turn led to a degree of uncertainty as to what might form the basis of Australian civic identity in the future: as Jeppe Kristensen argued, "although the withdrawal was seen as a crucial and defining moment in the development of Australian nationhood, it was much less clear how the newly emergent nation should be defined." [15] Indeed, the British withdrawal had rendered "the traditional trappings of Australian Britishness increasingly obsolete, yet no home-grown

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[11] Jeppe Kristensen, "In Essence still a British Country: Britain's withdrawal from East of Suez," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*: Volume 51, Number 1, 2005, pp. 40-52, p. 50.
[12] Ibid., p. 52.
[13] James Curran, *The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002, p. 19.
[14] Kristensen, "In Essence still a British Country," op. cit., p. 40.
[15] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

ethno-national myth had emerged as a viable substitute."[16] Having long regarded Australia - and accordingly Australian identity – as intimately bound up with the British Empire, Britain's withdrawal from the region led to Australia being "confronted with the task of re-making their nation in the wake of empire."[17]

Importantly for this thesis, it was in Australia's relations with the outside world where "a new set of post-imperial markers were deemed necessary", especially in relation to "finding a new footing for the conduct of Australia's foreign relations."[18] Indeed, the phenomenon became known as "new nationalism", a term coined by Donald Horne in 1968[19] when he described the political style of John Gorton. For Curran, it was "in the world of diplomacy that Australians were most immediately compelled to adapt to a post-imperial strategic and cultural inheritance. In this new era they faced an uncertain future, in which all their assumptions about the world and the capacity of great-power protectors to provide for their security – including that of America's - were proving to be illusory."[20]

This refashioning of the national image did not represent "the stirring of a more 'authentically' Australian nationalism as a response to the relatively sudden collapse of Britishness."[21] Indeed, according to Curran and Ward, the "urgent problem" of Australian nationalism was addressed only when "older, imperial emblems were deemed redundant" and the "threadbare trappings of Australian nationalism" were exposed.[22] Accordingly, the underlying rationale of the new nationalism was "neither as self-assured, coherent nor universally welcomed as is generally assumed."[23] Indeed, for Curran and Ward, closer examination of the new orientation reveals a "pervasive *disorientation*. Even the most committed

[16] Ibid., p. 49.
[17] Curran and Ward, *The Unknown Nation,* op. cit., p. 5.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., p. 128.
[21] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[22] Ibid., p. 7.
[23] Ibid.

advocates of the new nationalism tended to falter when it came to devising compelling, consensual alternatives to the obsolete civic culture of empire."[24]

James Curran analysed the way in which Australian prime ministers attempted to assert various, and often competing, visions of Australian nationalism in the latter half of the twentieth century. Though Prime Ministers Curtin, Chifley and Menzies defined Australian nationalism within the context of membership of the British Empire, Prime Ministers Holt and Gorton were the first to try to define a new form of nationalism.[25] Curran argues that it was Gorton who was most enthusiastic to develop a new Australian identity: Gorton believed that "the nation seemed on the threshold of greatness" and was impatient "to leave the past behind, and he was certainly not as half-hearted as Holt in embracing the new era."[26] Indeed, Gorton "recognised a problem of identity which Curtin, Chifley and Menzies could never have imagined;"[27] in September 1968 Gorton observed

> *just recently there has been … not a gradual rate of change, but a sudden explosion in this nation, an explosion which has not yet reached its height … Who would have thought that suddenly at this point in this nation's history, all the old conceptions would have to be taken out, have to be re-examined, to be re-assessed because the world had changed and we had changed.*[28]

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Gorton's new nationalism brought a clear break with the foreign policy of the past or that it heralded a new era of self-reliance. Indeed, the period between 1968 and 1971 was characterised chiefly by uncertainty – the legacy of the past clashed with and made the desire for a new approach hard to articulate and realise for the prime minister. The foreign policy reassessment Gorton was charged with was not an easy task, and he seemed to be caught between two worlds, especially in the context of Australia's relations with

[24] Ibid.
[25] Curran, *Power of Speech*, op. cit., pp. 19-57.
[26] Ibid., pp. 46-47.
[27] Ibid., p. 48.
[28] Ibid., p. 52.

and dependence on the great powers. Though he may have appreciated the need to create a new sense of Australian identity that fell outside the confines of the British Empire, that 'old Australia' had not, understandably, "vanished from Gorton's veins. Though he brought a more independent approach to questions of identity and external affairs, he could not bring himself to reject outright all the nostrums of the past."[29]

Indeed, though Gorton may well have been an iconoclastic 'new nationalist' who wanted to introduce a new and more self-reliant foreign and defence policy in Australia, it will be argued that his inability to make a clean and articulate break with the past was due not necessarily to personal deficiencies and poor leadership, but rather due to the fact that he was caught between the legacy of Australian leaders looking to great powers for protection and the emergence of a world in which these great powers were retreating into greater isolation. Thus it will be argued that Gorton cannot be understood simply by analysing his time as prime minister; rather, to develop a proper understanding of Gorton it is necessary to set his management of the alliance against the much broader backdrop of Australian foreign and defence policy from the end of World War Two to the election of the Whitlam government in 1972. It is the intention of this work to conduct such an analysis of Gorton and his management of the Australian-American alliance.

An analysis of Gorton's management of the alliance will contribute to knowledge of and debate surrounding the nature of Australia's relationship with America during the Cold War. It will develop a better understanding of how Australia responded to changing trends in Southeast Asia and moved towards adopting a more self-reliant approach to its place in the region and the world. It will also support the argument that Whitlam, far from being the agent of change when it came to Australia's reliance on America, was in fact reacting to a major shift in diplomacy that took place well before 1972. Both the American and Australian governments were, in this era, moving towards the virtual end of the Cold War in

[29] Ibid., p. 49.

Southeast Asia: on this score alone this work will form another dimension of the study of how each country charted one of the more fluid eras in recent international history.

For Horne, Gorton was an "iconoclastic questioner and destroyer of old ideals who challenged the sacredness of … 'forward defence'[30] … and proclaimed it necessary to … define more confidently an Australian national identity".[31] Surprisingly, however, Gorton's management of Australia's relationship with America during his time as prime minister has not been the subject of an extensive academic analysis. This thesis will be the first such work. It seeks neither to praise nor condemn his management of the alliance; rather, it seeks to set Gorton's management of the alliance properly within its historical context so as to better understand it.

As well as reviewing how historians have treated Gorton's management of American-Australian relations to date, Chapter One examines the historiographical context of Australia's relationship with Britain and America in the Cold War. It demonstrates how Australia became increasingly drawn to America after World War Two, but also increasingly concerned that America would not come to its assistance in the event of a conflict unless the circumstances of that conflict furthered American as well as Australian interests. Chapter Two provides an intellectual history of Gorton. It places his ideas about foreign policy and Australia's place in the world before becoming prime minister in the context of the prevailing beliefs at the time. Taking the historiographical context and Gorton's own ideas and beliefs about foreign policy into account, Chapter Three then provides an analysis of how Gorton responded to several crises during his time as prime minister, as America wrestled with and modified its own policies in

[30] The origins of the strategic posture known as 'forward defence' lay in the Australian government's decision to deploy forces only in Southeast Asia, rather than the regions surrounding the principal Britain-Australia routes through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. They would be deployed in coalitions led by either Britain or America, with those powers providing the greater military strength. See Peter Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War: The Essential History,* New South Publishing, Sydney, 2014, pp. 40-41.
[31] Horne, *Time of Hope,* op. cit., p. 7.

relation to Vietnam, Southeast Asia and the extent to which it was prepared to come to the assistance of its allies.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

The election of Gough Whitlam's Labor government in December 1972 has long been regarded as a watershed moment in American-Australian relations. Indeed, Whitlam has long been viewed as the harbinger of the 'new nationalism' and the Australian leader who introduced a more independent approach to Australia's management of its foreign relations. Indeed, just weeks after the Labor government was elected to power in 1972, Whitlam withdrew the last contingent of Australian troops from Vietnam and moved quickly to distance itself from its American ally. No doubt, 1972 marked an important point in the history of Australia's relationship and alliance with the United States. Indeed, James Curran cited the Whitlam government's harsh and open criticism of Nixon's decision to carry out the 1972 Christmas bombings as "the most pungent manifestation of the divergence" between the Whitlam and Nixon administrations, and stated that "the harmony of aims and interests that characterized the alliance during the Cold War" had come to an abrupt and acrimonious end." [32] Writing soon after Whitlam's election, Russell Ward pronounced December 1972 as "The End of the Ice Age".[33]

Prime minister from 1968 to 1971, Gorton took leadership of a Liberal government that had, only three years earlier, committed Australia to what would become its most controversial military engagement: the Vietnam War. Australia had been involved in the conflict alongside the United States since 1962, when it sent the first group of military advisers to Saigon. In 1965 Menzies committed the first battalion of combat troops to the war. Joint involvement in Vietnam saw the diplomatic relationship between the two nations reach the height of its strength in 1966 and 1967. Indeed, by early 1968 8,300 Australians were fighting with American troops in south Vietnam. Maintaining an American presence on Southeast Asia had been the chief objective of Australian foreign policy since the

[32] James Curran, "The Dilemmas of Divergence: The Crisis in American-Australian Relations, 1972-1975," *Diplomatic History,* Volume 38, Issue 2, 1 April 2014, pp. 377-408, p. 1.
[33] Russell Ward, "The End of the Ice Age", *Meanjin* 32, no. 1 (March 1973).

signing of the Australia New Zealand United States Treaty (ANZUS) in 1951, and at the start of 1968 America was well and truly engaged in the region. This was about to change, however, and it was under Gorton's leadership that these changes would take place.

A number of events occurring between 1968 and 1969 resulted in profound changes to the nature of America's involvement in Vietnam and, accordingly, the alliance. The Tet Offensive in January 1968 shook America's (and Australia's) confidence in the struggle against communism in Vietnam. As a result, American President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who had enjoyed a close working relationship with Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1966 and 1967, chose not to run for a second term as President. In his address to the public on 31 March 1968 Johnson said "so tonight, in the hope that this action will lead to early talks, I am taking the first step to de-escalate the conflict. We are reducing – substantially reducing – the present levels of hostilities. And we are doing so unilaterally at once".[34]

This shift in policy was made without any genuine consultation with Gorton – by that time the prime minister - or the Australian government. Johnson was replaced by Republican candidate Richard Nixon, who became President on 20 January 1969. Rather than aggressively pursuing the war and maintaining an American presence in Vietnam, Nixon moved immediately to seek 'peace with honour' and introduced the policy of 'Vietnamisation', a policy that would see the South Vietnamese army take greater responsibility for the war against communism as America gradually withdrew from the country and the conflict. The 'Vietnamisation' of the war would "enable the United States to pull its combat troops out of Vietnam by transferring responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese".[35]

Alliance dynamics between Australia and the United States were also jolted when in July 1969, Nixon announced the Guam - or Nixon – doctrine, an announcement that signaled the United States' intention never again to become involved in a war

[34] Lyndon Baines Johnson, quoted in Harpur, *War Without End,* op. cit., p. 71.
[35] Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History,* Penguin Books, New York, 1983, p. 593.

on the Asian mainland. As Nixon put it when announcing the doctrine, as far as the problems of internal security and the military defence of Southeast Asian nations was concerned, "except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons, the United States is going to encourage, and has a right to expect that the problem will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by the Asian nations themselves."[36] The Nixon doctrine had serious implications for Australian defence policy, which had for so long made its central tenet a close relationship with – and arguably dependence on – America's presence in Asia. Indeed, "the supreme irony of Australia's dependence on the United States became fully apparent … with the enunciation of the Guam Doctrine in July 1969 … such a redefinition of strategy, however logical from the point of view of the United States, could not be easily absorbed or accommodated by a junior ally, which had for nearly twenty years identified communism, and particularly Maoist China, as the principal threat to Australian security."[37]

This turned the basis of Australian defence policy – a close and strong relationship with the United States – on its head. The Australian government was forced to reassess the meaning of the alliance. It fell on Gorton, in this context of change and uncertainty, to attempt to make this assessment. Gorton was operating in a world that was rapidly changing. The threat of a monolithic form of Asian communism was becoming less relevant. Indeed, the Cold War world was changing. According to Norman Harper, "the moves for disengagement in Vietnam were made in the context of a changing global balance of power; the replacement of a two-superpower balance by an equilibrium involving China and Japan as well as the United States and the Soviet Union. The cold war was thawing, and the apparently monolithic Communist world began to disintegrate with the confrontation between Moscow and Peking."[38] How did Gorton manage the

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[36] Richard Nixon, quoted in Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy,* Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 105.
[37] Joseph Camilleri, *American-Australian Relations: The Web of Dependence,* Macmillan, Sydney, 1980, pp. 15-16.
[38] Norman Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend: A Study of Australian American Relations Between 1900 and 1975,* University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1987, p. 332.

challenges these changes in the geo-political situation posed to Australia's relationship with the United States?

The significance of America's recalibration of its Asia policy for Australia has been noted by historians of the American-Australian alliance. Those historians have not, however, properly taken the true extent to which Gorton's management of the alliance was affected by it into account. Indeed, the difficulties Gorton faced have not been fully appreciated by historians who have assessed his management of the alliance. Instead, they have looked at Gorton in a vacuum, failing to take the challenging context in which he was operating into account. Most works have referred to his ideas about a new, more self-reliant defence policy only briefly, before moving on to the election of Gough Whitlam in 1972 as the pivotal in American-Australian relations. There are good reasons for putting Whitlam as the harbinger of greater self-reliance. Gorton, however - though a transitional figure grappling with old and new worlds - remains a significant subject for scholars of Australian foreign relations, as it was during his time as prime minister that the first steps towards a more self-reliant defence policy were taken.

It has become commonplace for scholars to breeze quickly past the Gorton period. Camilleri stated that America did not reciprocate Australia's faithfulness during the Vietnam War and did not consult with Australia during the troop withdrawal, and that Australia's withdrawal from Vietnam was done with a "clumsy and confused diplomatic subservience" to America.[39] Camilleri then moved on to discuss the Whitlam era as the period in which Australia's relationship with America changed. Neville Meaney argued that Gorton had little choice but to introduce a policy of withdrawal after America's announced a policy of withdrawal,[40] as did TB Millar, who argued that Australia's response to the American withdrawal from Vietnam was nothing more than the blind adoption of American policy by Australia.[41] Similarly to Camilleri, Millar identified Whitlam's

[39] Camilleri, *American-Australian Relations,* op. cit., p. 12.
[40] Neville Meaney, "The United States", in *Australia in World Affairs 1971-1975* (edited by WJ Hudson), George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1980, p. 165.
[41] TB Millar, *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations 1788-1977,* Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978, op. cit., p. 218.

Labor government as the one that was "catch the new wave of détente" after the Nixon Doctrine was announced, noting only that the Australian conservatives were "bewildered".[42] Certainly, the Liberal party was unable to set aside its core assumptions about the world at this time: it was not an easy thing to do when circumstances were changing so quickly when for so long successive Liberal government had regarded reliance on America as the cornerstone of its defence policy.

Philip Bell and Roger Bell drew a similar conclusion: it was not any action of Gorton that led to changes in Australian foreign policy; rather, it was the result of a reluctant acceptance of changes in American policy. As Bell and Bell put it, "however reluctantly, as ANZUS came under unprecedented strain Australian policy did acquire a degree of independence. Indeed, after America's defeat in Vietnam and promulgation of the Nixon Doctrine, Australia grudgingly accepted that it must take greater responsibility for its own defence".[43] Similarly, though Norman Harper recognised that "some" reassessment of Australian-American relations was taking place when he became prime minister, Gorton "recognised the harsh realities of any alliance" and was forced to accept American changes in policy towards Vietnam.[44] Indeed, for Harper, a full reassessment of the alliance only "became possible when the ALP won its first federal election for twenty-three years on 2 December 1972".[45] Though these assessments are not necessarily inaccurate, they fail to pay any really attention to the context in which Gorton was operating, the problems he faced and any developments in Australian foreign policy that did occur during his time as prime minister.

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[42] TB Millar, "Vietnam", in Carl Bridge (eds), *Munich to Vietnam: Australia's Relations with Britain and the United States since the 1930s,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1991, p. 192.
[43] Philip Bell and Roger Bell, *Implicated: The United States in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, p. 153.
[44] Norman Harper, "Australia and the United States", in *Australia in World Affairs, 1966-1970,* edited by Gordon Greenwood and Norman Harper, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1974, pp. 316-317.
[45] Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend*, op cit., p. 335.

For Meaney, Millar and Harper, then, Gorton had no choice but to adopt a more self-reliant approach to Australia's defence policy after 1968. For Millar, Gorton did not even warrant a mention; rather, all that needed to be said about Australia's response to the American withdrawal from Southeast Asia was that "Australia was not quick to see the nature or implications of these changes".[46] Millar had it that Australia simply had no choice but to adopt a more self-reliant approach to the alliance: "with neither of her 'powerful and willing friends' willing to deploy power in her Asian neighbourhood, Australia eventually saw that it had no alternative to adopting a similar policy."[47] Indeed, Gerard Henderson and Paul Hasluck criticised Gorton for lacking any central policy direction. According to Henderson, "the Gorton government's central foreign policy problem was that it did not have an unequivocal position. As prime minister, John Gorton was not sure whether Australian forces should remain in Vietnam or be withdrawn."[48] And Hasluck, writing in 1970, did not think Gorton could be a great prime minister because "he seems to be lacking a clear purpose."[49] There is a measure of truth to these observations. However, it is in the transition that we can divine a deeper significance of the period and of Gorton: though he may not have been the prime minister to break with the past and usher in a new period of Australian foreign policy, Australia had to go through this sorting process under Gorton before the Whitlamite revolution could take place.

There is nothing fundamentally wrong with the assessments made by these historians. However, they haven't spent much time discussing Gorton the man and the context in which he was operating, which is necessary to come to a more complete understanding of his management of the American-Australian alliance. This is precisely what this thesis seeks to do. The purpose of this thesis is not necessarily to 'set straight' those who see Gorton as a ditherer; rather, it is to

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[46] Millar, *Australia in Peace and War*, op. cit., p. 218.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Gerard Henderson, "Sir John Grey Gorton", in *Australian Prime Ministers,* Michelle Grattan (eds), New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd, Sydney, 2000, p. 310.
[49] Paul Hasluck, *The Chance of Politics,* The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1997, p. 179.

understand the impact these profoundly unsettling circumstances had on his management of the alliance and, in doing so, come to a more complete understanding of how he went about trying to understand, resolve and reconcile them.

Some historians have paid more attention to Gorton's management of the alliance. According to Peter Edwards, Gorton was aware of the problems he faced in relation to reliance on America for Australia's national security – he realised there was a need for a strategic rethink. He may not have had the political tools to carry out such a rethink, but he certainly recognised the need for one. For Edwards, Gorton's prime ministership was characterised by uncertainty due to his own background and beliefs, his lack of political skill and authority and the lack of support from his colleagues. As Edwards had it, "Gorton could see the weaknesses in the current policies but did not have the political authority or skill to chart a new course with the support of his colleagues. Uncertainty would remain a principle characteristic of the Australian government's policy for the next five years".[50]

Edwards recognised the difficulties he faced, stating that Gorton suffered from "policy paralysis" and felt trapped by the nature of the commitment of troops to Vietnam by Menzies and Holt, and that he found it impossible to disentangle Australia from Vietnam "because of the incautious way in which the initial commitments had been made and escalated under the Menzies and Holt governments". [51] Gorton tried to maintain a balance between making a commitment to the alliance while at the same time fostering a sense of Australian independence: "Gorton faced a profound dilemma over Vietnam policy, created to a large extent by the open-ended way in which Menzies and Holt had handled the commitment and its escalation." For Edwards, Gorton wanted to find a way out of the commitment but without damaging the alliance relationship with the United States.[52]

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[50] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 196.
[51] Ibid., p. 286.
[52] Ibid., p. 19.

Along with Edwards, Coral Bell, Glen St J Barclay, James Curran, Stuart Ward and Gorton's biographers Ian Hancock and Alan Trengrove[53] are the few who seem to have taken Gorton's management of the alliance seriously. Bell has, to date, provided the most detailed analysis of Gorton's management of the alliance (even if done so without access to the archival record). Rather than passing Gorton off as a ditherer, Bell took the impact of his background and political circumstances in his management of the alliance into account. Gorton's experience as a fighter-pilot in World War Two who narrowly escaped Japanese capture in Singapore may have led to his "apparent ambivalence about the notion of 'forward defence.'" Bell also made mention of Gorton's promotion of 'continental defence', an alternative to forward defence that proposed that Australian forces should be trained, equipped, and deployed primarily to fend off threats to Australia's own shores, and should expect to operate chiefly from Australian bases rather than abroad. [54]

Bell also cited Gorton's own political background and rise to power. Having never held any of the principal Cabinet portfolios and being appointed prime minister directly from the Senate, Gorton did not enjoy party dominance, either within the Cabinet or within the party.[55] She also appreciated the difficult situation in which Gorton was placed after President Johnson's decision to not again contest the presidency, creating a period in which Australia would have to wait "for the incumbent and whatever he could produce in the way of a revised US diplomatic and military strategy." Indeed, "policymakers in Canberra could do nothing about

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[53] One other biography has been written on Gorton: Alan Reid's *The Gorton Experiment* (Shakespeare Head Press, Sydney, 1971). While it provides a running account of the day-to-day domestic events of his time as prime minister and recognises that Gorton inherited a changing world ("the world Menzies and Holt had lived in politically was not the word with which Gorton had to contend as Prime Minister," p. 141), it provides no sustained historical analysis of his management of the American alliance, beyond stating that it was Gorton who, on 2 February 1968, ruled out further Australian troop commitments to Vietnam (p. 332), he preferred a policy of continental as opposed to forward defence (p. 190), and that Gorton's working knowledge of the applicability of ANZUS left much to be desired (p. 57).

[54] Bell, *Dependent Ally,* op. cit., p. 94.

[55] Ibid., p. 96.

this except put as good a face on it as they could manage … It was hardly surprising that they did not manage anything very gracefully or convincingly."[56] It was also simple lack of consultation and failure on the part of America to provide him with adequate warning of departures on policy that led to Gorton's dilemma. For example, Gorton heard of Johnson's March turnabout on a Sunday afternoon only hours before the announcement. Barclay also acknowledged the trying circumstances of Gorton's time as prime minister, stating that "it was not a good time to become prime minister of Australia and leader of the Liberal Party,"[57] and that Gorton "seemed to be contemplating the total breakdown of the Australian-American security relationship."[58]

In analysing American-Australian relations through the lens of new nationalism, Curran and Ward appreciated the difficulties facing Gorton and endeavoured to give reasons for the dither, rather than simply criticising Gorton for it.[59] Recognising that the announcement of the Nixon doctrine "only intensified Australian anxieties" about America's willingness to protect Australia, Curran and Ward noted how the new nationalist Gorton put the impact of the doctrine on Australia bluntly: Gorton stated that "America is going to be less and less interested in this part of the world … We need to be able to defend ourselves."[60] For Curran and Ward, "a new perspective was shaping the American policy prescriptions for dealing with a more assertive, yet more insecure, Australia."[61] Being more assertive yet more insecure was the result of Gorton being caught between two competing interests – that of self-reliance on the one hand and a legacy of dependence on American assistance which for decades had not necessarily been forthcoming.

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[56] Ibid., pp. 101-102.
[57] Glen St J Barclay, *Friends in High Places, Australian-American diplomatic relations since 1945,* Oxford University Press, London, 1985, p. 163.
[58] Ibid., pp. 165-166.
[59] Curran and Ward, *The Unknown Nation,* op. cit., pp. 143-146.
[60] John Gorton, quoted in Ibid., p. 145.
[61] Ibid., p. 145

Ian Hancock also understood that Gorton had inherited a difficult political and diplomatic situation after the Tet Offensive and that he found himself "caught between competing interests and pressures."[62] Whereas most historians have focused on the idea that "contradictions and inconsistencies assailed his policy pronouncements,"[63] Hancock explained this by acknowledging the fact that he found himself in "a situation where he was obliged to pull in different directions".[64] Like Bell, Hancock acknowledged that Gorton "inherited obligations that ran counter to his instincts", and that, due to the pressures of his own party and the DLP he was forced to try to "reconcile the irreconcilable."[65] It was this that led to Gorton being criticised for "failing to develop an unequivocal and decisive approach to defence and foreign policy."[66] Hancock also acknowledged the fluidity and complexity of the period in which Gorton was operating. Whereas "Menzies and Holt had seemed so much easier to understand," for journalists of the day, Gorton, on account of his attempts to adapt to the changes taking place, was difficult to pin down.[67]

According to Hancock, Gorton's actions and pronouncements need to be assessed separately and individually, a task that this thesis takes on with relish. Only then will it be understood that, rather than being inconsistent and unpredictable, Gorton "behaved predictably in individual situations, even if he appeared inconsistent across them collectively."[68] For example, Hancock demonstrated how, in his dealings with America, Gorton oscillated between playing the "ally" who supported the United States in accordance with ANZUS (and sought assurances of reciprocation by America as well as being furious when Australia was not consulted before America announced important policy decisions in relation to Vietnam), and the "nationalist" who sought to do so without intruding

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[62] Ian Hancock, *John Gorton, He Did It His Way,* Hodder Headline Australia Pty Limited, Sydney, 2002, p. 180.
[63] Paul Ham, *Vietnam, The Australian War,* Harper Collins Publishers, Sydney, 2007, p. 436.
[64] Hancock, *John Gorton,* op. cit., p. 180.
[65] Ibid., pp. 156-157.
[66] Ibid., p. 157.
[67] Ibid., pp. 199-200.
[68] Ibid., p. 180.

on Australia's own foreign and defence policy decisions (declaring in a perhaps drunken moment to Geraldine Willesee, the daughter of Senator Don Willesee, that he wanted to withdraw Australian troops from Vietnam but was prevented by party policy from doing so).[69] "A nationalist above all else,"[70] Gorton was keeping his options open so as to be able to further Australian interests, a position which, given the uncertainty about the post-Vietnam period in Asia, "made a great deal of sense."[71]

Journalist Alan Trengrove provided the most positive assessment of Gorton, regarding him as a man who "had no intention of accepting the shibboleths of the past,"[72] and a leader who was trying to keep his options open in uncertain times. According to Trengrove, Gorton took a more balanced approach to what Australian defence policy would look like in the 1970s: rather than simply relying on the principle of forward defence and reliance on superpower allies, "the trend of Gorton's thinking seemed to be that Australia should hasten to build up her industrial and technological strength while trying for as long as possible to keep the Americans committed to defend the country."[73] Thus, Gorton did not oscillate between an independent Australia on the one hand and a subservient ally on the other; rather, Gorton was trying to balance the two options, as both seemed to be in Australia's national interests. As Trengrove put it, "in effect, he staged a delaying action in 1968 in an endeavor to keep his options open. His attitude was that it would be wiser to defer coming to any firm conclusions until the situation was clearer."[74]

Though Edwards, Bell, Curran, Ward, Hancock and Trengrove have gone some way in setting Gorton's management of the American alliance within its historical context and explaining the reasons for the 'dither', more work needs to be done to

[69] Ibid., pp. 176-177.
[70] Ibid., p. 227.
[71] Ibid., p. 177.
[72] Alan Trengrove, *John Grey Gorton: an informal biography,* Cassell Australia, Melbourne, 1969, p. 201.
[73] Ibid., pp. 203-204.
[74] Ibid., p. 206.

ensure his management of American-Australian relations in the period is properly understood. This will be the first study dedicated to doing this. The fact that so many historians have passed over Gorton has created a gap in our understanding of how Australia managed its alliance with America during the Cold War and took its first steps towards a self-reliant foreign and defence policy. It has also reinforced the tendency of historians to view Australian history in somewhat simplistic 'chunks', such as the 'Menzies era' or 'Whitlam era'. This work aims at creating a more multi-dimensional and less fragmented picture of Australian history from 1966 to 1972 than we currently have. It is important to develop a better understanding of the period between these two prime ministers, especially considering that this was, as Horne had put it, the time of critical change.

Accordingly, the question remains: to what extent did changing American policy in Vietnam undermine long-held assumptions about the American alliance? It will be argued throughout this thesis that to properly understand Gorton's management of the alliance during this period, it is necessary to properly understand the broader context within which he was operating. To do this it is necessary to review Australian foreign policy goals and concerns in Southeast Asia in the two decades proceeding the signing of ANZUS.

Australian foreign policy: goals and concerns in Southeast Asia, 1951-1965

The Anglo-Australian defence relationship in Southeast Asia remained extremely close well into the 1950s. The standardisation of equipment and military procedures, for example, between Australia and Britain remained in effect until the late 1950s and the Anglo New Zealand Malaya Australia Agreement provided the framework for defence cooperation between Australia, New Zealand and Britain. In 1955 Australian troops began joint operations with British and New Zealand troops in Malaya, operations that provided the Australian government with some comfort. Not only was Britain engaged in Asia, but it was also working towards preserving a British territory against communist expansion. According to David Goldsworthy, these arrangements served "both to help subdue subversion in a British dependent territory and give substance to the Australian

security doctrine of forward defence."[75] The three Commonwealth nations hoped that America could be linked to their defence planning, however, as Edwards put it, quadripartite planning became "a holy grail for Australian policy-makers for the next decade."[76]

Though the signing of the Australia New Zealand United States Treaty (ANZUS) in 1951 served to provide Australia with the support of another powerful ally in Asia, the problem for Australia was that, as Goldsworthy put it, "British and American strategic plans for Southeast Asia were diverging."[77] Rather than having two superpowers engaged in Southeast Asia with a common objective that benefitted Australian defence interests, American strategy envisioned the greater part of the Southeast Asian region, whereas the British "were determined to commit resources only to the defence of their own colonial territories."[78] When the Menzies government learned in July 1955 that Washington would not tolerate a line of thinking that committed ground forces to the internal defence of one country, namely Malaya, as opposed to one that saw the development of a mobile striking power that could serve to defend Southeast Asia as a whole, Canberra was warned that Australia would be "unlikely to receive American military aid unless it tailored its Southeast Asian strategy to America's."[79]

In fact, the Menzies government had already started thinking about how to strengthen its relationship with America. Indeed, this was well understood by Washington. In April 1950 the US State Department recorded that, though the previous Labor government "tended to neglect United States – Australian relations, or in any case, subordinate them to a foreign policy which found its primary expression in the United Nations", the government of Prime Minister Menzies made "the achievement of close relations with the United States as a cardinal point of Australian foreign policy. Leading members of the government have repeatedly stated that it is essential for Australia to maintain the best

[75] Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket,* op. cit., p. 140.
[76] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 53.
[77] Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket,* op. cit., p. 140.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

possible relations with the United States and, in so far as possible, to initiate and carry out Pacific policies in co-operation with the country".[80] Though Washington may have underestimated the desire of previous Australian governments to develop a strong relationship with America, it certainly did appreciate the Menzies government's desire to do this. According to Goldsworthy, given that Australia's military planners were already moving to the view that the adoption of the American approach would be more likely to develop the depth of Australia's defence and more likely to generate support if Australia came under direct threat, Canberra made its choice and, "by degrees between mid-1955 and early 1957, Australia turned towards the United States for its major strategic alliance in the region."[81]

Though Anglo-Australian defence co-operation was arguably at its peak in the mid-1950s, the tempo of Britain's decolonisation in Asia increased from July 1955 onward, a fact that served to encourage Australia's decision to turn towards the United States. Britain's "now manifest plan" to push for "quick decolonisation" and to conclude a new defence agreement with an independent Malaya was a cause for concern for the Australian government.[82] Also, Britain's move towards a more nuclear-based defence strategy gave rise to Australian concerns about possible cutbacks in British conventional forces in the region east of Suez. For Goldsworthy, "these fears helped to reinforce the movement in Australia's own policy towards strategic association with the United States."[83] As Donald Horne put it, as a strong relationship with the United States became arguably more important than a strong relationship with Britain in the eyes of Australian diplomats, "a new rhetoric of 'alliance' was developed to sustain the new faith".[84] As Menzies would later say of ANZUS in 1964, it was a contract based on "the

[80] US State Department, April 1950, in Harpur, *War Without End*, op. cit., p. 95.
[81] Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket,* op. cit., p. 140.
[82] Ibid., p. 141.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Horne, *Time of Hope*, op. cit., p. 5.

utmost goodwill, the utmost good faith and unqualified friendship. Each of us will stand by it."[85]

Though the new rhetoric of alliance came to the fore in the 1950s and 1960s, America had presented itself as Australia's logical ally since the half-way point of the Second World War: as Percy Spender observed in 1969, after the collapse of Malaya, Burma, Singapore and Indonesia in 1942, the Japanese conquest of the Philippines and their penetration of New Guinea, Australians realised the true nature of their isolation and vulnerability, and that "the destiny of their country was intertwined with that of the U.S.A."[86] Though the ties that bound Australia to Britain were "deep" and "profound" and would remain "close," it was clear that "the future security of Australia was not only bound up with world security; it was dependent upon a close defence arrangement to which both the U.S.A. and Australia were parties."[87]

Even the Anglophile Menzies appreciated the need to develop relations with the United States. After stating on 20 April 1955 that there was "no country in the world more completely British than Australia", and that "we are a proud member of a Crown Commonwealth, and will ever continue to be so," he then went on to claim that, given the United States had become a global power with a vast population and supreme industrial power, and had become "vital to the existence of the free world", it would be strange if "we, the British people, regarded the citizens of the United States as being in a true sense foreigners."[88] Indeed, Menzies appreciated the geo-political shift taking place: "it would be hard to find any Australian of this generation who did not recognise that the friendship and co-operation of the United States are vital to our own safety."[89]

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[85] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 21 April 1964, p. 1280.
[86] Sir Percy Spender, *Exercises in Diplomacy: The ANZUS Treaty and the Colombo Plan,* Sydney University Press, Sydney 1969, p. 24.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Robert Menzies, quoted in Harpur, *War Without End*, op. cit., p 100.
[89] Robert Menzies, quoted in ibid.

Despite his sentimental connection to the British Empire, Menzies took a pragmatic approach to Australian defence policy and in 1959 advocated the American alliance as the foundation for a new defence programme. According to Menzies, it was clear that "in the event of war we will be fighting side by side with the United States. Particularly in the event of a 'global' war, it would be manifestly difficult for the United Kingdom to maintain a line of supply, in South-East Asia, though the United States undoubtedly could. Common sense dictates that under these circumstances, we should pay considerable attention to the logistic aspect of war, and standardise so far as we can with the Americans. Though this is a wholeheartedly British nation this is not a heresy. It merely recognises the facts of war".[90] The fostering of a close relationship with America under the ANZUS Treaty was clearly the primary concern of the Australian government.

Indeed, the Australian government's response to the Laotian crises between 1959 and 1962 demonstrated Australia's increasing shift towards America. With Laos becoming a proxy war between Hanoi and Washington in the 1950s, Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy moved to strengthen the Royal Lao government and its army as it fought for control of the country against the communist supported Pathet Lao. While France had no desire to return to Indochina after the humiliation of Dien Bien Phu and the First Indochina War, Britain sought diplomatic rather than military solution to crises in Indochina, citing its role as co-chairman of the Geneva Conference as a reason for not becoming involved in military planning.[91] Regarding the fate of Laos as being directly linked to Australia's security interests, the Australian Cabinet decided on three separate occasions between 1959 and 1961 that it would be willing to support an American intervention there. Though Cabinet preferred that any intervention should include Britain, it decided that it would be willing to act alongside America even if that condition could not be met.[92] Though the decision to support the United States never had to be implemented, Australia's preparedness to do so "reinforced

[90] Robert Menzies, quoted in ibid.
[91] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 70.
[92] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

the lesson that Australia had become much closer to the United States than Britain on policy towards Southeast Asia".[93]

Australian security: looking to America and ANZUS

Though ANZUS was signed while Menzies was in power, it did not represent a purely Menzian desire to commit America to Australia's defence. Indeed, as McLean stated, the creation of ANZUS should not be interpreted simply in the light of Australian preoccupations in 1950 and 1951, but rather, "ANZUS represented the realization of long-standing hopes by Australian political leaders of drawing the United States into Australia's defence,"[94] including Deakin, Lyons, Chifley and Evatt. Indeed, Meaney has shown that concerns for Australia's regional security played a key role during Chifley's time as prime minister: "the Chifley government, though it made adherence to the United Nations the first principle of their foreign policy, made the protection of Australia … the chief objective of their foreign policy."[95] This objective was seen to be ultimately dependent on "the support of the Western super-power, the United States".[96]

Though the wisdom on ANZUS since the time of its signing until the 1980s had been that a reluctant United States had been drawn into signing the treaty by effective negotiation and diplomacy by Minister for External Affairs Percy Spender, David McLean has shown that this is not necessarily correct.[97] In fact, pointing to events that occurred in the period 1949-1950 such as the Communist victory in China, the Berlin blockade, Russia's acquisition of atomic weapons and the outbreak of the Korean War, McLean demonstrated that America was in fact enthusiastic about the prospect of a Pacific alliance.[98] However, ANZUS still

[93] Ibid., p. 70.
[94] McLean "From British Colony", op. cit., p. 68.
[95] Neville Meaney, "Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War", *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* Volume 38, Issue 3 (1992), pp. 316-333, p. 323.
[96] Ibid., p. 329.
[97] See David McLean, (1990) "Anzus Origins, A Reassessment", *Australian Historical Studies,* 24:94, pp. 64-82.
[98] Ibid., p. 66.

created an alliance the true extent of which was uncertain. For McLean, this was the result not of any reluctance on America's part, but Spender's preconceptions. According to McLean, the fact that Spender and his colleagues "assumed an American reluctance to entertain any form of Pacific alliance says more about Australian preconceptions than American predilections."[99] Indeed, Spender's assumption that the United States would be reluctant to enter into a defence treaty was the product of a mistrust of the great powers that was rooted in the 1930s and 1940s, when London and Washington had repeatedly "failed to consult Canberra on decisions which crucially affected Australia, involving the deployment and command of Australian forces and the post-war settlement."[100] Assumptions of American reluctance reflected "not only the frustrating record of Australian attempts to gain an American security guarantee but, more broadly, the whole experience of relations with its great-power protectors, both the United States and Britain."[101]

As a result of these assumptions, ANZUS had limitations from the outset that would prove to have a major impact on American-Australian relations from 1951 to 1972 and beyond. Certainly, concessions were made by Australia in the negotiation of the treaty, for example, on the question of alliance membership. Canberra would not brook either Philippines or Indonesian membership, for example. Also, in order to persuade Washington that Australia would be a valuable ally, Australia sent troops to Korea and followed the American policy of non-recognition of the People's Republic of China and opposition to its admission to the United Nations Organisation.[102] Accordingly, so went Australian diplomatic thinking after 1951:

[99] Ibid., p. 69.
[100] Ibid., p. 75. Other factors McLean refers to are America's failure to consult during the Korean War, American collusion with Japan at Australia's expense, Anglo-American failure to include Australia in talks on the future of Dutch New Guinea, defence talks in Southeast Asia and defence planning for the Middle East.
[101] Ibid., p. 74.
[102] Ibid., pp. 80-81.

> *if Australia had to make concessions in order to create ANZUS, would it not be just as necessary, after the alliance had been established, for Australia to continue to do so in the hope of gaining American support for Australian policies? And would not these concessions in themselves jeopardise the distinctive Australian interests that the alliance was designed to protect?*[103]

For post-war Australian governments then, confirming the exact nature of America's obligations under ANZUS was fraught with difficulty, frustration and anguish. Indeed, Article IV of the ANZUS Treaty was somewhat ambiguous. While it stated "Each Party recognises that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on any of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes", [104] what acting to meet the common danger exactly meant was ambiguous. As Toohey and Pinwill wrote, ANZUS "committed none of the three partners to the military defence of the others, and even the definition of the area it covered became a subject of argument between Canberra and Washington."[105]

Therefore, due chiefly to the treaty's ambiguity and Australian preconceptions about America's willingness to act in Australia's best interests, ANZUS created an environment in which successive Australian governments would feel the need to ensure circumstances existed whereby America would believe it to be in its best interests to assist Australia. Although Australian leaders saw ANZUS as "a concrete manifestation of a special relationship with the US, for Washington it was merely one component in an alliance structure for the Asia-Pacific region, which was itself only one component in a global alliance structure, in which the South Pacific was a relatively unimportant area",[106] and it would become the mission of

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[103] Ibid., p. 81
[104] Harpur, *War Without End*, op. cit., pp. 96-97.
[105] B Toohey and W Pinwill, *Oyster: The History of the Australian Security Intelligence Service*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1989, p. 33.
[106] Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Policy and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts, 1958-1965*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1992, p. 30.

Australian governments to render the Pacific region an important one for America. Indeed, even before Australia became militarily involved in Vietnam, the Australian Department of External Affairs commissioned a report on American foreign policy and its implications for Australian security in Asia, stating that

> *we must do our best to act as a brake on any withdrawals from Asia of American power. Assuming that the United States would move only cautiously and with careful preparation, there may in fact be occasion when we could influence that manner of any withdrawal in a way to mitigate its disadvantages.*[107]

Indeed, ANZUS would play a central role in Australia's foreign policy outlook in the 1950s and 1960s. It held up American protection as the ultimate goal of Australian foreign policy, and as a result of this ultimate goal, Australian leaders were "not required to ask whether there might be approaches to the region other than dependence on the United States, or to make the intellectual adjustments that might have led to a more sophisticated assessment of what was happening in Asia than that derived from the domino theory."[108] Accordingly, "the problem of how Australia might adjust to the region in the absence of British or American hegemony was merely postponed,"[109] as opposed to being resolved, and arguably, this did not take place until a new Labor government was elected in 1972.

ANZUS Uncertainty: West New Guinea

Events in the late 1950s and early 1960s cast further doubt over the nature of ANZUS, and did little to assure Australia that America would indeed provide the support it was hoping for from its great power ally. In fact, events in Southeast Asia had the opposite effect, and only served to heighten the anxieties felt by politicians like Spender. As Meaney put it, the Australia government found that

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[107] "United States Foreign Policies as They Affect Australia," MR Booker, submitted in response to a request from the Minister for External Affairs dated 23 September 1964, Part 7, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[108] McLean, "Anzus Origins", op. cit., p. 81.
[109] Ibid.

the Americans "did not pay proper attention to Australia's needs, did not fully share Australia's anxieties, and often acted from a different set of geo-political calculations."[110] Australia's fears of Indonesian expansion figured foremost in Australia's motives for seeking a security pact with the United States,[111] and as Peter Phelps had it, America's refusal to come to Australia's aid when the Menzies government rejected Indonesia's annexation of West New Guinea led to Australian officials drawing the conclusion that the superpower would not be prepared to come to Australia's aid in the event of war.[112]

Less than a decade after having signed ANZUS, Australia's major focus of concern in Southeast Asia was Indonesia's campaign to gain control of the western half of the island of New Guinea.[113] West New Guinea had been excluded from Indonesia's territory after securing their independence from the Dutch in 1949, and by the late 1950s President Sukarno insisted they should incorporate this last part of the former Netherlands East Indies into Indonesia. Sukarno had become "increasingly dictatorial", and many Australians became "increasingly troubled by his anti-Western rhetoric and growing links with the Soviet Union and China".[114] Australia had a United Nations mandate to protect the eastern half of the island and policy-makers feared that, if the Indonesian campaign to take possession of West New Guinea was successful, "Australia could find itself sharing an almost indefensible land border with a potentially hostile and pro-communist power in an area crucial to Australia's defence".[115]

The matter was resolved in 1959 when Australian Minister for External Affairs Richard Casey and Indonesian foreign minister Dr Subandrio issued a communiqué that Australia would not oppose a transfer of sovereignty from the

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[110] Meaney, "Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War", op. cit., p. 318.
[111] David McLean, "Australia in the Cold War: A Historiographical Review", *The International History Review,* Volume 23, Issue 2 (2001), pp. 299-321., p. 311.
[112] Peter Phelps, "Australia, International Diplomacy, and the West New Guinea Dispute, 1949-62" (PhD dissertation, Sydney, 1996), pp. 17-28.
[113] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 63.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., pp. 63-64.

Dutch to Indonesia if achieved by political means. However, the crisis had exposed just how ambiguous the obligations provided by ANZUS were. It was America's concern for its own interests in the Pacific region – at the expense of Australia's - that alarmed Australia. The underlying problem for the Australian government was the sympathy shown by the United States to the argument put forward by Subandrio and other non-communist Indonesians – that West New Guinea might, in effect, be the price to pay for keeping Indonesia in friendly, non-communist hands. As Edwards put it, "despite the growing strength of the PKI, the Americans argued that Western interests would be best served by supporting Sukarno and facilitating his takeover of West New Guinea while developing close links with the Indonesian armed forces".[116]

This divergence between American and Australian policies on Indonesia and West New Guinea was "particularly troubling", especially considering that Australia was trying to move closer to the United States in defence matters.[117] The whole episode confirmed Australia's fear that, as America's main concerns were perceived threats from China and Japan, and not Indonesia, it would be reluctant to come to the assistance of Australia in the event of a conflict with Indonesia.[118] However, Australia's response to this dilemma was not to move away from reliance on America and develop a more self-reliant approach to defence policy: a close relationship with America would remain the cornerstone of Australia's foreign policy. In 1959 Australia's Defence Committee submitted a new assessment of strategic policy, referring to the possibility that Australia might have to act independently of its allies in situations such as conflict with Indonesia over West New Guinea while American and other forces were engaged elsewhere. Cabinet rejected the recommendation that Australian forces develop the capacity to act independently. For Cabinet, "Australian defence forces would be designed to act closely with allies, principally the United States, in collective defence arrangements".[119]

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[116] Ibid., p. 64.
[117] Ibid., p. 65.
[118] McLean, "Anzus Origins", op. cit., p. 82.
[119] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 65.

However, episodes like the West New Guinea crisis did not fill the Australian government with confidence when it came to the superpower's willingness to act in favour of Australian interests. The divergent policies of the United States and Australia toward West New Guinea established "a major concern, seldom expressed publicly, for the Australian government. Australian defence policy was based on close cooperation with the United States in Southeast Asia but the Americans were taking a different stance on an area of extreme sensitivity to the Australians." As a result of this, the Australians were determined to do "everything possible both to keep the United States committed to Southeast Asian security in general and to ensure that American policies supported Australian interests and aspirations with respect to both Indonesia and Indochina".[120]

Further Uncertainty: Indonesia's Confrontation of Malaysia

Confrontation was arguably a greater blow to Australian hopes of superpower support in Southeast Asia. Far from demonstrating that Britain, the United States and Australia were united in their approach to security in the region, the hostilities between Indonesia and the newly formed federation of Malayan states that ran from 1963 to 1966 demonstrated that, unsurprisingly, America and Britain did not consider Australian security interests as inextricably linked to their own. For Britain it was the last item of business in their withdrawal from the region; for America it was part of the wider Cold War struggle at a time when they were already getting more deeply involved in Vietnam.

Britain supported the creation of Malaysia in 1963, seeing the new federation as "the means by which Britain could end its remaining colonial responsibilities and costly defence obligations in the region, with a good chance of leaving behind a stable and friendly government".[121] Sukarno opposed the federation and claimed it was the product of neo-colonialism - "a neo-colonialist plot by the British"[122] –

[120] Ibid., pp. 65-66.
[121] Ibid., pp. 81-82.
[122] Ibid., p. 82.

and adopted a policy of Confrontation. As "a principal aim of forward defence strategy was to encourage Britain, as well as the United States, to remain committed to the security of Southeast Asia,"[123] Australia supported the British position and was happy to see the great power supporting the creation of what was hoped to be a stable federation that would bring Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak into a form of political and economic cooperation which would, amongst other things, limit the influence the communism in the region. Indeed, "Indonesia's Confrontation policy brought about the 'quadripartite talks' between the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand for which the Australian government had long hoped".[124]

However, even Confrontation and the four-power talks failed to provide the Australian government with the sense of security it so hoped for. The quadripartite talks "provided little comfort to policy-makers in Canberra" and, indeed, made it clear that "the United States and Britain had conflicting priorities in their Southeast Asian policies".[125] Though Britain favoured the creation of Malaysia and therefore wanted to take a hard-line approach to Indonesian President Sukarno's campaign of Confrontation, the United States wanted to maintain long-term relations with Indonesia and not push it toward the communist bloc. To this end, the United States government even continued to provide aid to Indonesia, much to the displeasure of Britain.[126] Accordingly, though America would support the creation of Malaysia, it saw Confrontation as a matter "primarily for Britain and secondarily for Australia and New Zealand" and refused to pledge military support.[127]

Already facing what the Kennedy administration regarded as the two major threats to the United States' interests in the region – Communist China's perceived

[123] Ibid., p. 83.
[124] Ibid., pp. 84-85.
[125] Ibid., p. 85.
[126] John Subritzky, *Confronting Sukarno: British, American, Australian and New Zealand Diplomacy in the Malaysian-Indonesian Confrontation, 1961-5*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 2000, p. 78.
[127] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 84.

drive for domination in Asia and the poverty, backwardness, disunity and emerging nationalism associated with developing countries in Asia – Kennedy feared the consequences of taking a hard-line approach towards Indonesia.[128] The United States government anticipated that escalation of Confrontation would oblige American involvement, either to bail out the British or due to Australian demands for military assistance under ANZUS.[129] Kennedy wanted to avoid being drawn into another Southeast Asian conflict while also supporting South Vietnam so as to avoid being stretched economically and militarily, and also because of domestic political concerns; indeed, the President sought to avoid the politically damaging situation in the lead up to the following year's elections.[130]

John Subritzky has shown how, in the latter half of 1963, ANZUS was interpreted and negotiated by the American government in such a way that "severely limited the circumstances under which Washington would offer its assistance" so as to avoid American involvement in Confrontation.[131] Menzies was disappointed after his visits to Washington to seek assurances regarding the application of ANZUS to Confrontation. In early July President Kennedy refused to confirm that American assistance would be forthcoming in the event that Australian forces were attacked by Indonesia,[132] and further talks between Minister for External Affairs Garfield Barwick and Kennedy in October were one-sided, confirming that, though America conceded that ANZUS did cover Australian forces in Malaysia, limited the extent of any future intervention by American forces: American assistance would be limited to air and sea forces and the provision of logistical support, and the use of ground forces was expressly excluded. Furthermore, American military intervention would only be available if there was an overt attack, and even then it would be conditional on Congressional approval.[133]

[128] Subritzky, *Confronting Sukarno*, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
[129] Ibid., p. 77.
[130] Ibid., pp. 77-78.
[131] Ibid., p. 74.
[132] Ibid., p. 81.
[133] Ibid., p. 83.

Confrontation therefore provided neither a coherent policy nor clarity for Australia in relation to America's understanding of its ANZUS obligations. Nor did it assuage Australian fears of being left alone and isolated in Southeast Asia. This led to "a nagging uncertainty among some (Australian) policy makers as to how full-blooded the American commitment to support Australia under ANZUS actually was."[134] It was, indeed, all too easy to imagine how Australia might seem remote and even expendable from the perspective of Washington in any situation not directly involving the security of the United States itself."[135] Indeed, in 1964 the Department of External Affairs reported to Hasluck that "in spite of all our efforts to keep abreast of American thinking we are still sometimes taken by surprise… the American government has developed the protective habit of keeping even from its friends advance notice of policy changes which they have reason to believe will be unwelcome." [136] The concern about the level of consultation that would exist in fact between Australia and America would plague the Menzies, Holt and Gorton governments and lead to a sense of deep insecurity as to the real closeness of the two countries under the ANZUS Treaty.

Even with both allies engaged in Asia, then, "the longstanding Australian hope that Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand could coordinate their military and political efforts in the region continued to be frustrated". [137] Operations were not coordinated: Britain focussed on Confrontation in Malaysia; the United States focussed on Vietnam and did not offer equivocal support to Australia. Indeed, discussions with Washington were "frustrating, as the Australians received vague, confused and often contradictory responses to their questions about American policy".[138]

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[134] Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket,* op. cit., p. 150.
[135] Ibid., pp. 168-169.
[136] "United States Foreign Policies as They Affect Australia," MR Booker, submitted in response to a request from the Minister for External Affairs dated 23 September 1964, Part 7, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[137] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 104.
[138] Ibid., p. 105.

Australian faith in ANZUS was so shaken that the Defence Committee continued to press the government that, in a crisis with Indonesia, "Australia might find that the United States was exercising its diplomatic influence in Indonesia's favour. Australia therefore needed to boost its independent military capacity, rather than to rely on American help under the SEATO and ANZUS treaties".[139] Indeed, Confrontation demonstrated effectively that America was involved in Southeast Asia for its own reasons and that, even with ANZUS and SEATO, Australia could not rely on the superpower completely. Still, the Defence Committee's recommendations were not taken up. Rather than boosting Australia's independent military capacity, it became even more imperative in the eyes of the government to create a set of circumstances in Southeast Asia which brought American and Australian security interests in line with each other.

The end of Confrontation in 1966 did not allay Australian fears of Indonesia; rather, Australian authorities continued to watch events in Indonesia carefully, and "long retained the fear that Indonesia might revert to the aggressive policies" of 'Konfrontasi'.[140] Though much of the motivation for Australia's involvement in Vietnam – that of keeping America engaged in Southeast Asia so it could assist Australia if Confrontation became a major conflict – had therefore come to an end by 1966, the nature of the coup and counter-coup that had taken place in Indonesia to end the conflict only underlined the "unpredictability and danger of politics in South and Southeast Asia". In that environment, "Australia continued to seek the closest possible relations with its ultimate protector, the United States".[141]

ANZUS Uncertainty Compounded: The British Withdrawal

Australian fears of being left isolated and without superpower support in Southeast Asia were compounded by Britain's strategic withdrawal from the region. As well as being uncertain about the exact nature of its relationship with

[139] Ibid., p. 85.
[140] Ibid., p. 133.
[141] Ibid.

America, Australia was unsure as to whether Britain's presence in the region would continue. These fears were confirmed when Britain announced its withdrawal from the region. Britain in the 1960s made a "major effort to reconstruct its world role … in matters of empire and Commonwealth, and the weakening of various links with Australia was essentially one of the by-products of this process."[142] If the ambiguity surrounding ANZUS frustrated and worried the Australian government, the British decision to quit East of Suez and focus on its role in Europe did nothing do ease the government's concerns. Indeed, as Coral Bell put it, "the late 1960s constituted almost as traumatic a period for Australia's strategic policymakers as the early 1940s had done."[143]

The first cause of Australian anxiety came in 1961 when Britain declared its intention to explore the possibility of joining the European Economic Community. As a result of this declaration Australia's Department of External Affairs was charged with preparing an appreciation of the political implications for Australia. The essence of the Department's analysis was that Britain would likely feel obliged to prove itself to be a good European state and, accordingly, its entry into Europe would accelerate tendencies "towards the transformation of the United Kingdom into a European rather than a world power and towards a decline in its commitments beyond Suez; and towards the transformation of the Commonwealth into a looser group."[144] Interpreted in a Cold War context, this acceleration "could reduce the prospects for Australia of getting effective action against the various forms of Communist expansion, and Chinese or Indonesian aggression, in Australia's North."[145]

The second cause of anxiety came from Britain's military withdrawal from Southeast Asia.[146] Britain had been "extremely reluctant to become involved in any military commitment in Southeast Asia other than in direct defence of its own

[142] Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket,* op. cit., p. 104.
[143] Bell, *Dependent Ally,* op. cit., p. 87.
[144] Ibid., p. 123.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Kristensen, "In Essence still a British Country", op. cit., p. 43.

interests in Malaya and Borneo"[147] during the 1950s, and ever since Britain pledged its support in October 1961 to Malayan president Tunku Abdul Rahman's proposed Malaysian federation, the Australian government had started to suspect Britain's withdrawal from the region. Indeed, Bell has argued that "the British decision to quit East of Suez went through its crucial phase in Holt's brief term in office."[148] According to Bell, though Britain had considered keeping a stand-by base in north-west Australia to conduct a study into the nature of their presence in Singapore in 1966, Holt had done little to encourage this chiefly due to the fact that the period of his prime ministership was consumed by an increasing commitment to and escalation of involvement in Vietnam and was the period of peak dependence on America. Also, Holt believed any British study undertaken would speed up their decision to withdraw, not encourage them to stay.[149]

According to Goldsworthy, "large-scale British withdrawal was not yet under discussion, but the Australians already had their suspicions about British long-term intentions".[150] British officials were not ignorant of this suspicion. As the British High Commissioner reported in April 1963, the Australians "suspect that in the long term we will withdraw from South-East Asia and leave them, with New Zealand, to hold the baby."[151] The increasing probability of the separation of Singapore from Malaysia cast further doubts on the future of the British defence establishments in Singapore, and Singapore's eventual eviction from Malaysia in August 1965 – despite vigorous efforts by British and Australian diplomats – struck a blow to one of the fundamental aims of forward defence.[152]

As Goldsworthy has shown, the election of a Labour government in Britain in October 1964 and a series of financial and economic crises – and not least the devaluation crisis of November 1967 - as well as heavy domestic pressure from the pro-Europeans, the Labour left and spending ministries and the ending of

[147] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 71.
[148] Bell, *Dependent Ally*, op. cit., p. 88.
[149] Ibid, p. 93.
[150] Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket,* op. cit., pp. 143-144.
[151] Ibid., p. 144.
[152] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., pp. 130-131.

Confrontation in 1966, led to the acceleration of the British withdrawal from East of Suez.[153] Between late 1964 and 1968 it became "cruelly apparent that, far from being able to afford to relinquish its world role, Britain could not afford to maintain it."[154] In January 1968 the plan for withdrawal that had been devised only six months earlier, which had provided for a 50 per cent reduction in British forces in Singapore and Malaysia by 1971 and complete withdrawal by the mid-1970s, was brought forward: Britain would withdraw completely by 1971.

Vietnam

As David McLean has shown in his historiographical review of Australia in the Cold War, the major scholarly debate surrounding the signing of ANZUS and the American alliance in the Cold War was whether the erosion of traditional ties to Britain after 1945 led to a new "national self-reliance and a distinctive Australian voice in the world", or whether it was followed by "a new dependence on the USA."[155] This debate has been most prominent in relation to Australia's entry into the Vietnam War.

As McLean had it, the first scholarly interpretations of the alliance were borne out of political divisions at the time. There was the left wing - or 'radical nationalist' - view that, prior to 1951, Labor governments had followed an independent Australian foreign policy and that it was Menzies' Liberal government and the signing of ANZUS that saw Australia become a servant to the United States. Then there were the conservative writers, whose views were similar to that of Menzies' governmental view: Australia depended on powerful friends for security, and skilful diplomacy was needed to persuade the United States to protect Australia.[156] Australia had not become a servant to America; rather Australia used dependence on the United States to further its own interests. Accordingly, there emerged two dominant perspectives on the alliance: the 'radical nationalists' believed that

[153] Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket,* op. cit., p. 161.
[154] Ibid.
[155] McLean, "From British Colony", op. cit., p. 65.
[156] McLean, "Australia in the Cold War", op. cit., pp. 300-302.

Australia had jeopardised its national interests by going out of its way to be loyal to the United States and America would not necessarily honour its ANZUS obligations, whereas the conservatives believed more optimistically that, as a result of ANZUS, the United States would feel obliged to act in Australia's interests out of a sense of loyalty to Australia.[157]

The radical nationalists - those historians who claim that central dynamic in Australian history is the teleological progression from 'colony' to 'nation' - claimed that Australia was merely a subservient ally of America's, and that Australian foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s was the result of an uncritical absorption of American perceptions of the threat of communism in Asia. They argued that, as a result of this subservience, a true and more authentically independent or self-sufficient Australian nationalism was 'thwarted'. According to Philip and Roger Bell, "much less nationalist and reformist than its predecessors, the Menzies government substituted an uncritical dependence on its so-called 'great and powerful friends' for the assertive independence in international affairs that Labor had pursued, however successfully, from 1941 to 1949." They also stated "the new Australian government became increasingly receptive to American definitions of international threat, as it did to American interpretations of security issues and international politics more generally".[158] For LG Churchward Australia became "an American satellite" [159] in the Menzies years, and for Humphrey McQueen, Australia "switched from British sycophant to American lickspittle".[160] For Joseph Camilleri, ANZUS and the American alliance demonstrated the "readiness of Australian governments to comply with American policies and perceptions, often with little or no thought to their consequences for Australia or the region".[161]

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[157] Ibid.
[158] Bell and Bell, *Implicated,* op. cit., pp. 134 and 135.
[159] LG Churchward, *Australia and America 1788-1972: An Alternative History*, Sydney, 1979, p. 165.
[160] Humphrey McQueen, *Gallipoli to Petrov: Arguing with Australian History*, Sydney 1984, p. 174.
[161] Camilleri, *American-Australian Relations,* op. cit., p. 10.

As has been shown, much of the diplomacy that took place after 1951 centred around ensuring the United States would indeed honour its ANZUS obligations. After the disappointments of the West New Guinea crisis and Confrontation, Vietnam, a war that saw America and Australia take joint military action in Southeast Asia, provided Australia with the opportunity to do just this. If America and Australia were jointly involved in fighting against a common enemy on the Asian mainland, it followed that America would regard Australia's security as intimately linked to its own, and would therefore be willing to come to Australia's aid if and when required. Indeed, on 3 September 1964, eight months before Australia committed combat troops to South Vietnam, Paul Hasluck, the Minister for External Affairs, stated the government's attitude towards South Vietnam:

> *our plain national interest is to have a Government in South Viet Nam that will continue to fight Viet Cong, to oppose North Viet Nam and to give some prospect of eventually unifying the country behind a stable and non-Communist and preferably anti-Communist Government which will still provide the local circumstances to enable the United States to keep a foothold in South-East Asia.*[162]

Clearly, Australia's chief concern regarding involvement in Vietnam for Australia was creating the circumstances that would guarantee the continued presence of America in Asia.

For the radical nationalists, Australia's involvement in Vietnam was another example of subservience: Australia was blindly and obediently following its ally to war. On the other hand, some historians argued that, after signing ANZUS, the Australian government felt obliged to pay 'insurance premiums' to America in return for the promise of protection. For these historians, Australia sought to achieve such a habitual closeness with America that, in its time of need, America would have no option but to come to Australia's aid. Accordingly, Australian involvement in Vietnam was the unavoidable result of international and regional

[162] Cable: Hasluck to all Australian Embassies, 3 September 1964, in Harpur, *War Without End*, op. cit., p. 105.

circumstances in the 1950s and 1960s. For Norman Harper, Australian political leaders and diplomats regarded Australian military involvement in Vietnam as "an insurance premium for the defence of Australia in the event of attack."[163] This was born out of "a feeling of obligation to the United States and a belief that the preservation of an American presence in South-East Asia was an important insurance policy, especially in view of the British threat to withdraw from east of Suez."[164]

TB Millar had it that the main reason for Australian involvement in Vietnam was "to show the United States that Australia was a willing ally, one that stood up to be counted and thus deserved to be stood up for if necessary." For Millar, Australia "paid its overseas premiums to the American insurance policy" in Vietnam,[165] and in return gained the intangible benefit of a "sense of assurance of help in future danger".[166] Gregory Pemberton wrote that Australia's involvement in Vietnam "was the necessary price to secure a large US commitment to Southeast Asia".[167] Peter Edwards took a similar approach, arguing that, "conscious of its own military weakness after years of severely constrained expenditure on defence, Australia had to demonstrate that it was willing to do everything it could to ensure that the United States would continue to commit its military and diplomatic power to ensuring the security of non-communist regimes in Southeast Asia".[168] Less extreme in their approach than the radical nationalists, these historians still believed the American alliance left Australia with little room for flexibility in forming its own foreign policy.

McMahon Ball, who was sceptical of the optimistic assumption that America would come to Australia's aid in its hour of need, made the point in 1968 that any goodwill earned by Australia in Vietnam might count for nothing if the Johnson

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[163] Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend,* op. cit., p. 325.
[164] Ibid., p. 324.
[165] Millar, *Australia in Peace and War*, pp. 216-217.
[166]McLean, "Australia in the Cold War", op. cit., p. 303.
[167] Gregory Pemberton, *All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam,* Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, p. 333.
[168] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War*, op. cit., p. 71.

administration was replaced by another that changed American policy towards Vietnam and withdrew its military presence from Asia.[169] The prospect of American failure in Vietnam was real, and one that had been raised well before 1968. In 1964 Under Secretary of State George Ball, who opposed sending ground forces to Vietnam, advised Johnson "a long, protracted war in Vietnam would demonstrate the weakness, not the strength, of the United States".[170] Ball sent a prescient memorandum to Johnson on 1 July:

> *no one can assure you that we can beat the Viet Cong or even force them to the conference table on our terms no matter how many hundred thousand white foreign (US) troops we deploy … Once large numbers of US troops are committed to direct combat they will begin to take heavy casualties in a war they are ill-equipped to fight in a non-cooperative if downright hostile countryside. Once we suffer large casualties we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot – without national humiliation – stop short of achieving our objectives. Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives – even after we have paid terrible costs.*[171]

Indeed, this is precisely what happened, and the impact of this on American-Australian relations is precisely the focus of this thesis.

More recent scholarship in the field has challenged the notion of 'subservience'. These historians, especially Neville Meaney and David McLean, have argued that Australia, far from being a mere 'satellite' that blindly followed America into Vietnam, or a nation paying its insurance premiums for the promise of protection, used the alliance to serve its own national security interests in Southeast Asia. According to McLean, decisions made by the Australian government were not the

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[169] McLean, "Australia in the Cold War", op. cit., p. 302.
[170] Dennis E Showlater and John G Albert, *An American Dilemma: Vietnam, 1964-1973*, Imprint Publications, Chicago, 1993, p. 25.
[171] Ibid., p. 26.

result of blind obedience or the unavoidable reaction to events; "rather, they arose from the interaction of circumstances with attitudes and beliefs which in part reflected generally accepted Western views of Communism's threat to the free world, but also owed much to Australians' understanding of their nation's past".[172] McLean went further, stating that "dependence on the United States was not the result of 'colonial mentality' or 'national immaturity', and did not take the form of docile subservience; rather, Australia tried to persuade, cajole or shame Britain and America into throwing their weight behind Australia's regional interests".[173]

Michael Sexton argued that Australian diplomats in Washington and Canberra, far from being dragged into the Vietnam War, actively encouraged America to escalate its involvement in Vietnam to further Australia's own national security interests. According to Sexton, it was put forward as the Department of External Affairs' "central proposition that locking the Americans into the Vietnam conflict could keep them in South-East Asia and maximise their role as Australia's protector". [174] If America was supported by Australia in its fight against communism in Vietnam, it followed that the superpower would feel obliged to assist Australia "should it be threatened from any source in or out of the South-East Asian region".[175]

Glen St J Barclay went as far as saying Americans might not have been in Vietnam "if the Australians had not been there too."[176] Barclay argued that "Australian pressure was exercised in pursuit of a wholly independent perception of Australian national interests, arrived at by the Australian government without the benefit of advice from anybody else," and that "there was no question of Australia obsequiously following the guidance of great and powerful friends". [177] For

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[172] McLean, "Australia in the Cold War", op. cit., p. 321.
[173] McLean, "From British Colony", op. cit., p. 78.
[174] Michael Sexton, *War for the Asking: Australia's Vietnam Secrets,* Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1981, p. 120.
[175] Ibid., p. 2.
[176] Glen St J Barclay, *A Very Small Insurance Policy: The Politics of Australian Involvement in Vietnam, 1954-1967,* University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1988, p. 165.
[177] Ibid., p. 167.

Barclay, ensuring the engagement of America in Vietnam was "a purely Australian solution to an Australian problem based on Australian perceptions".[178] For McLean, Australia did not just respond to American intervention in Vietnam in 1965, rather, it egged the United States on into making a military commitment and then risked the displeasure of America by the "half-hearted" nature of its own contribution.[179] Casting doubt on the validity of the insurance premium argument, McLean correctly observed that Australia's 'half-hearted' contribution to Vietnam was "a curious way of securing US gratitude".[180]

As Coral Bell summised, "it is clearly misleading, on the evidence, to represent the Vietnam episode as one in which a minor power was dragooned into reluctant participation in war against its better judgment by an overbearing great-power ally."[181] For Bell, this was an interpretation originally popular in circles "looking for a case against the American alliance."[182] Neither was Australia's involvement in Vietnam an episode in which "reactionary militarists involved the country for their own bad reasons, until forced to desist by the pressures of morally enlightened mass protest."[183] Australia's involvement in Vietnam was not the result of subservience or 'reactionary militarists,' rather, it was a key factor in Australia's national security and defence policy – a decision designed to keep the United States engaged in Asia and close to Australia.

With Australia and America committed to a joint military effort in Vietnam, it is arguable that the period in which the Australian government felt most secure in its relationship with the United States was between 1965 and 1967. The United States was engaged in Southeast Asia through its involvement in the Vietnam War. The relationship between Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt and American president Lyndon Johnson was at its strongest, seen most visibly in Johnson's 1966 visit to Australia. Indeed, "following President Lyndon Johnson's highly

[178] Ibid., p. 169.
[179] McLean, "Australia in the Cold War", op. cit., p. 313.
[180] Ibid., p. 313.
[181] Bell, *Dependent Ally,* op. cit., p. 79.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.

successful visit to Australia in October 1966, widely regarded as the high point of alliance intimacy to that time, the American Embassy in Canberra saw Australia's rock-solid support for Washington's role in South East Asia as evidence of 'what almost amounts to a bi-national US-Australian foreign policy in Asia' and a 'reaffirmed and nearly total commitment to the alliance'".[184] Indeed, for Barclay, even Holt's statement that Australia would go 'all the way with LBJ' in Vietnam was not in any sense a declaration of subservience. Rather, it was a recognition of the fact that LBJ's administration was going exactly where the Australian government wanted it to go. As Barclay put it, a "shield of United States military power had been interposed between Australia and any possible threat from the north. The ultimate national security goal of Australian governments since federation seemed to have been attained. Harold Holt could feel that he had achieved what Alfred Deakin had sought without success."[185]

As Sexton has shown, however, the Australian commitment to Vietnam was somewhat open-ended. The long-term consequences of military involvement had not been fully considered. In the case of Vietnam it appears that the Department of External Affairs failed to consider the "long-term consequences of the American military effort in Vietnam." [186] Indeed, there was "no evidence that the Department raised the possibility of military failure by the American and South Vietnamese forces, with the result that the United States might withdraw its land forces altogether from South-East Asia and suffer a serious loss of global influence."[187] By 1967 Australia's key diplomatic goal since 1951 – to strengthen its relationship with the United States and keep the superpower engaged in Southeast Asia - had been achieved. How did the Australian government react, then, when America began to withdraw its troops from Vietnam and scale back its military involvement in the region the following year?

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[184] United States Annual Policy Assessment: Australia, January 20, 1967, in Curran, "The Dilemmas of Divergence", op. cit., p. 3.
[185] Barclay, *A Very Small Insurance Policy,* op. cit., p. 167.
[186] Sexton, *War for the Asking,* op. cit., p. 120.
[187] Ibid.

The Nixon Doctrine: Recalibration of American policy in Asia

1968 saw the beginning of the end of a period of close defence co-operation between America and Australia. More than a decade before, in 1954, it had been put to Cabinet in 'A Strategic Basis of Defence Policy' that "Indo-China is the key to the defence of South-East Asia" and "the danger of the US withdrawing to isolationism should not be discounted."[188] This was now precisely what was happening. Indeed, the American and British withdrawal from Asia "meant, in effect, the collapse of Australia's Cold War policy – the desire to keep the Americans and the British engaged in the region to Australia's north."[189] This collapse brought with it much consternation within the Liberal government, due to the fact that it required the re-setting of Australian foreign and defence policy in a new and uncertain era. Whereas previously Australia had been able to look to its powerful friends for protection, it now appeared that both Britain and America were less likely to come to Australia's aid in a time of crisis. Accordingly, a new formulation of defence policy was required.

George Ball's earlier predictions about US humiliation in Vietnam – and McMahon Ball's earlier fears about Australia's reliance on America – had been prophetic. Five years after Johnson 'Americanised' the war, Nixon now planned to 'Vietnamise' it: to end the war by strengthening the South Vietnamese forces while American forces were gradually withdrawn. By 31 December, US troop numbers had reached a maximum of 536,100. Throughout 1969 Nixon announced the gradual withdrawal of 105,000 troops and a similar number the following year, so that by 1970, 335,000 soldiers remained. The withdrawal program continued, so that by December 1972, 27,000 troops remained and on 29 March 1973 the last US troops left Vietnam.[190]

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[188] A Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy (1952), Submission no. 626, 'For Cabinet: Indo-China', Submitted to Cabinet, 4 June 1954, in Harpur, *War Without End*, op. cit., p. 98.
[189] Curran, "The Dilemmas of Divergence", op. cit., pp. 7-8.
[190] Harpur, *War Without End*, op. cit., p. 73.

The Nixon doctrine, according to Peter Edwards, created considerable nervousness in the capitals of America's allies, not least Saigon and Canberra".[191] This nervousness was no doubt exacerbated by the shock of America's defeat in and withdrawal from Vietnam. As Coral Bell put it, "to argue that the USA, then undoubtedly the predominant military power of the world, might not prevail in combat with a small Asian society of peasant subsistence-farmers seemed like an exercise in fantasy to many well-informed analysts until 1968."[192] America's withdrawal from Vietnam would see its status as a prestigious world power questioned. Indeed, on 28 January 1973, journalist M. Marder of the *Washington Post* wrote "the credibility of the US government was progressively crippled as the rationale for the war shifted from checkmating world Communism to 'self-determination' for South Vietnam, to protecting American commitments to saving American prestige, to averting 'humiliation', to defending the presidency, to rescuing prisoners. Ultimately, ending the war became the objective of the war itself".[193] The basis of Australian foreign and defence policy for more than twenty years was falling apart.

Not surprisingly, the collapse of Cold War policy forced many in Australia to question long standing beliefs and assumptions about the alliance and its importance for Australia's defence policy. Far from going to show the intimacy of the American-Australian relationship, America's withdrawal from Vietnam without any real consultation with Australia went to show how fragile it now was. According to Curran, "all major decisions relating to the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam and its efforts to reach terms with the enemy were carried out without any prior discussions with the Australians. It provoked yet another round of introspection in Canberra as to the meaning of the alliance".[194] In April 1968, when Johnson decided to scale down America's involvement in the war, Peter Howson stated, "to my mind it's the first step of the Americans moving out of South East Asia … within a few years, there'll be no white faces on the Asian mainland …

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[191] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 197.
[192] Bell, *Dependent Ally,* op. cit., p. 87.
[193] *Washington Post*, quoted in Harpur, *War Without End*, op. cit., p. 73.
[194] Curran, "The Dilemmas of Divergence", op. cit., p. 9.

from now on, and to a much greater extent, we shall be isolated and on our own".[195] The question was asked in *The Economist:* "the desire of most Australians to keep America actively involved in Asia is strong. But … who stays in the posse when the marshal decides to get out of town?"[196]

Keith Waller, Ambassador to the United States from 1964-1970, wrote a "sombre report" on the implications of the Nixon doctrine: the United States had downgraded the threat of communist inspired expansion in Asia and, as a consequence, military and economic involvement in the region would be downgraded. The "US retreat from Asia", meant not only the withdrawal from Vietnam, but a "major withdrawal from the whole area west of Hawaii".[197] The phrase 'west of Hawaii' echoed the phrase 'East of Suez', a phrase that, in January 1968, had filled Gorton and his colleagues with "anxiety and dismay."[198] As Millar put it, the Nixon doctrine was far more than a withdrawal from Vietnam - it was "the end of the attempt to contain by military means communist-nationalist forces in South-east Asia".[199] What the Nixon doctrine symbolized above all else was that the US was abandoning the world wide struggle against Communism, and more particularly that it could no longer play the role of global policeman.

America's call on its allies to take on greater responsibility for their own defence called for Australia to make a major adjustment in its approach to foreign policy and its relationship with the United States. This was an adjustment that would not be made easily. According to McLean, "the intellectual adjustment necessary for a clear view of the alternative to ANZUS as the cornerstone of Australia's defence and foreign policy was forced on Australians by the US and British withdrawal from mainland to Asia in the late 1960s and early 1970s".[200] The Nixon doctrine wound the developments that had been made in defence policy during the 1960s

[195] Ibid., p 10.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] John Gorton to British Commonwealth Secretary, George Thomson, in Kristensen, "In Essence still a British Country", op. cit., p. 49.
[199] Millar, *Australia in Peace and War,* op. cit., p. 218.
[200] McLean, "Australia in the Cold War", op. cit., p. 320.

back several years: the effect of it was to revive long-standing fears about the American commitment to the defence of the region, and whether the United States would stand by its ANZUS obligations.

Indeed, the Nixon doctrine was "all the more alarming to Australian leaders because without the presence of US troops on the ground in Southeast Asia, Australia was back to where it had been prior to the Vietnam war: Namely profoundly uncertain about what kind of protection ANZUS afforded it".[201] A host of Australian politicians responded to the crisis by seeking assurances from their ally, just as they had done during Confrontation. Indeed, as Curran had it, "the lingering doubts about future American policy in Asia took shape not in a declaration of greater Australian independence from the alliance or concerted effort to build up its own defense, but in the continual seeking of yet more American reassurances about its ANZUS obligations."[202]

It also revived fears that America would – after Australia had for years sought a habitual closeness to the power – fail to consult Australia in its Southeast Asian policy-making. According to McLean, the most important part of the ANZUS Treaty was not Article 4, under which each party was obliged to respond to armed attack on either of the others, but the provision for a council of foreign ministers or their deputies. Australian leaders hoped this would "provide the means for effective consultation on a continuing basis, military as well as political."[203] The importance of consultative machinery lay "in the promise of a direct Australian voice in Washington, more adequate information on United States policies affecting Australia, and Australian influence on the making of those policies."[204] The announcement of the Nixon doctrine without prior consultation with Australia showed how this policy objective had completely failed. Indeed, America's failure to consult its Australian ally over the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine and the course of the Vietnam War in general "rocked Australia's

[201] Curran, "The Dilemmas of Divergence", op. cit., p. 5.
[202] Ibid., p. 10.
[203] McLean, "Anzus Origins", op. cit., p. 80.
[204] Ibid.

confidence in the alliance. These decisions, seemingly taken without any consideration of what it might mean for one of America's most loyal allies in the war in Vietnam, only added to the pressing need for a new assessment of the relationship."[205]

[205] Curran and Ward, *The Unknown Nation,* op. cit., p. 146.

CHAPTER TWO: JOHN GORTON – AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

It fell on Gorton then, to make this new assessment of the relationship. This chapter seeks to understand how John Gorton's ideas about foreign policy and Australia's place in the world took shape before he became prime minister. It will outline his ideas and beliefs about Australia's role in the world, his understanding of international relations and his perspective on the major foreign policy questions of his time, and set them against the backdrop of the major contemporary themes in Australian political history. Though Ian Hancock provided an overview of Gorton's worldview in his biography, a thorough intellectual history that places Gorton properly within his historical context has not yet been written. Doing so will ground the analysis of his actions and decision-making as prime minister properly within the context of the central ideas and beliefs that underpinned them.

Gorton and his generation lived through a period that saw the emergence and impact of extremist political parties on the rest of the world. Having lived through the hardships of the Depression, Gorton and his contemporaries lived in a world that saw the rise of militant nationalism in Europe and Asia, most notably under Adolf Hitler in Germany and Emperor Hirohito in Japan. Both nations pursued aggressive and expansionist foreign policies in the 1930s that led to the outbreak of World War Two. As had many other post-war parliamentarians, Gorton served in World War Two, most notably as an air force pilot in Singapore, where he was forced to make a crash landing in the South China Sea in January 1942, just days before the fall of Singapore. As a result of his evacuation after the crash he narrowly escaped capture by the Japanese, the fate of many of his contemporaries who were not evacuated. This, along with the legacy of totalitarianism and the failure of appeasement in the 1930s, had a major influence on Gorton's ideas and beliefs as the Cold War developed after World War Two. Accordingly, Gorton's ideas did not demonstrate or give voice to a distinctive view on foreign policy and international relations in the 1950s and 1960s; rather, they reflected views that were common at the time. The historian will search in vain, therefore, for anything resembling a coherent Gorton 'doctrine' or set of beliefs about world affairs.

World War Two: The Legacy of Appeasement and Great Power Relations

The Legacy of Appeasement

Gorton had been profoundly shaped by his observations of Hitler's rise to power and own war time experience. Both were extremely influential in forming his beliefs about foreign affairs and defence policy. As a student at Oxford, Gorton had been exposed to the rise Nazism in Germany. Though Hitler "hadn't quite started on the Jews and things," he "had the brown shirts out and I was very much against what he was doing."[206] For Gorton, seeing the rise of totalitarianism in Germany in the 1930s while at Oxford was "the main … political experience that I had there."[207]

Gorton's own war time service – as well as the legacy of the Australian nation's - left with him a strong resolve to urge his fellow citizens to protect the freedoms fought for in that conflict. As a member of the Kerang Shire Council he made an emotive appeal to the people of Mystic Park at a welcome home dinner for returned servicemen on 3 April 1946. In a tribute to Bob Davey, a resident who had not returned from the war, Gorton asked the people to

> *call on your imaginations. I want you to forget it is I who am standing here. And I want you to see instead Bob Davey. And behind him I want you to see an army; regiment on regiment of young men, dead. They say to you, 'Burning in tanks and aeroplanes, drowning in submarines, shattered and broken by high explosive shells, we gave the last full measure of devotion. We bought your freedom with our lives. So take this freedom. Guard it as we have guarded it, use it as we can no longer*

[206] John Gorton, Oral History with Mel Pratt, 15 July 1977, Gorton Papers, Box 1 MS 7984, NLA.
[207] Ibid.

use it, and with it as a foundation, build. Build a world in which meanness and poverty, tyranny and hate, have no existence.[208]

This approach was typical of Gorton's generation. Ernest May has shown how the legacy of World War Two influenced the formation of Cold War policy in America. According to May, the Truman administration came to see early Soviet expansion as analogous to the events of the 1930s. It was generally thought as the Cold War developed that "the American government had been wrong to regard the Fascists and Nazi actions as not affecting the security of the United States."[209] Indeed, World War Two had been made inevitable, ran the conventional wisdom, because the Western democracies "had not recognised early enough the menace to them of the expansionist drive of Fascism and had not resisted its initial manifestations."[210] This 'lesson' of appeasement led to Truman adopting a more aggressive Cold War policy: "once Truman and the men around him perceived developments of the 1940s as parallel to those of the 1930s, they applied this moral and hence resolved to behave towards the Soviet Union as they believed their predecessors should have behaved toward the expansionist states of their time."[211]

This was also the case in Australia. Paul Twomey has shown that, though many Australian politicians, including Richard Casey who was at the time a member of the Lyons government, had favoured the appeasement of Hitler,[212] this came to an end after the Munich agreement: "with German demands for Danzig and the Polish corridor becoming more insistent, there was an appreciation in Menzies's new government (Lyons died in April) that there should be no more Munich-style

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[208] Transcript of Mystic Park speech, 3 April 1946, Gorton Papers, Box 1 MS 7984, NLA.
[209] Ernest May, *Lessons of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 32.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Paul Twomey, "Munich", in Carl Bridge (eds), *Munich to Vietnam: Australia's Relations with Britain and the United States Since the 1930s*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1991, pp. 23-31. It should be noted that the Labor Party also advocated following a policy of appeasement.

agreements."[213] This appreciation flowed into the foreign policy outlook of conservative Australian governments in the 1950s and 1960s.[214] The ministers making up Menzies' first cabinet were likely to respond to a crisis with reference to the Second World War: ten of Menzies' seventeen colleagues in his first cabinet had held ministerial positions between 1939 and 1941, and three had served in the armed forces.[215] Menzies himself insisted on the "rubric of war, and, more than most, he conceptualised the Cold War by reflecting on Australia's involvement in the Second World War."[216] As American historian Allan Bullock put it, "this was a generation for whom war and occupation were not remote hypotheses but recent and terrible experiences".[217]

After being elected to the Senate in 1950, Gorton encouraged Australia to be ready to mobilise against communism. In his maiden speech on 1 March 1950 he warned Australia of the danger of finding itself in a position by which it was unprepared to meet a communist threat from China. Labelling Labor's attitude to Australian defence as "extremely dangerous",[218] he went on to state that "having served in the last war, I say that we cannot be sure that the conditions which obtained then would be repeated in the event of another war."[219]

Referring directly to the spread of communism into Asia, he stated that "it may well be that the ominous shadow which is now creeping down through China, threatening Malaya and Indonesia and coming closer to the near north of this country, will reach us without warning."[220] The legacy of World War Two and Australia's undoubted unpreparedness for that conflict was fresh in Gorton's

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[213] Ibid., p. 34.
[214] According to David Lowe, "imagining another world war was something Liberal and Country Party members were much more inclined to do than were their Labor counterparts." David Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle: Australia's Cold War, 1948-1954*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1999, p. 21.
[215] Ibid., p. 49.
[216] Ibid., p. 73.
[217] Ibid., p. 7.
[218] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 1 March 1950, pp. 180-181.
[219] Ibid., p. 205.
[220] Ibid.

mind. Likely as a direct result of his own experience of the fall of Singapore in 1942, Gorton also foresaw Britain's inability (or unwillingness) to come to Australia's aid in a future conflict, stating that "we shall not have those months of preparation which last time were bought for us by the suffering and sacrifices of our kinsfolk in Britain."[221]

Great Power Relations

To achieve the ultimate foreign policy goal of securing a peaceful world, or at least one in which there was no actual armed conflict, Gorton acknowledged that "one of the fundamental factors to which Australia clings in seeking that result is its firm, irrevocable and eternal position as part of the British Commonwealth of Nations."[222] Indeed, when discussing Australia's involvement in Malaya on 28 April 1955, he referred to the happy situation in which both Australia and Great Britain were working to achieve their joint interests in Southeast Asia: the defeat of communist forces there and the preservation of a non-communist government. According to Gorton, "that is what the United Kingdom is working for, and that is what Australia will be working for, if it assists the United Kingdom."[223] For Gorton, the only way to prevent communist nations from "putting their beliefs to the test is to build up our strength by alliances and by military power."[224]

Still, Gorton regarded it as essential for Australia to have the ability to make diverging policy when required. Australia was part of the Commonwealth, "but it is a part of that British Commonwealth situated in Asia and in the Pacific. Because Australia is so situated, it will inevitably have to follow its own policy from time to time. That policy may differ from that followed by the United Kingdom."[225] Britain could play a role in strengthening Australian security, but Australia could not rely on this relationship alone for this, and indeed had to be prepared and ready to act in a self-reliant fashion to achieve this if necessary. This is a point of view that no

[221] Ibid.
[222] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 7 October 1953, p. 402.
[223] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 28 April 1955, p. 128.
[224] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 27 June 1951, pp. 475-476.
[225] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 7 October 1953, p. 402.

doubt developed as a result of Britain's perceived failure to act as Australia's protector in the Pacific in World War Two. Indeed, the Fall of Singapore developed in Gorton a great mistrust of placing too great an emphasis on superpower allies. As Hancock put it, his cynicism and suspicion of other nations "flourished after he had seen at first hand the wartime collapse of Singapore, the disintegration of a whole defence concept based on an erroneous premise."[226]

According to Gorton, Britain had three spheres of interest: Europe primarily, the Mediterranean and the Middle East secondarily, and then India. Speaking to the legacy of World War Two, it was "only after all those matters have been dealt with" that Britain was able to "give its interest to the Pacific and the Far East."[227] Australia's key sphere of interest after World War Two for Gorton was Southeast Asia. Though Great Britain understandably had to act according to its three key spheres of interest, Gorton claimed that "we do not. Our urgent and immediate interests lie in the Pacific and the countries of Asia that are contiguous to us."[228] Accordingly, it was only natural for Gorton that Australia should have policies that differed from those of Great Britain's: "from time to time there must be a difference between Australia and the United Kingdom on matters of policy, emphasis on policy or priority of policy."[229]

Gorton grasped the reality of a changing post-war world, and especially Britain's decreasing influence as a global power and Australia's need to rely increasingly on itself and America to protect its interests in Southeast Asia. On 11 August 1954 he said, after noting the decreasing influence of Britain and the British navy, that "American power can help to restore the balance."[230] Indeed, on 27 June 1951 he stated that a Pacific Pact with America was the best way of ensuring Australian security. In the context of preventing Japanese rearmament, Gorton declared that Australia had found "the best method in that Pacific Pact which has grown out of

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[226] Trengrove, *John Grey Gorton,* op. cit. p.11.
[227] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 7 October 1953, pp. 402-403.
[228] Ibid, p. 403.
[229] Ibid.
[230] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 11 August 1954, p. 150.

the projected peace treaty."[231] It had been America, and not Britain, that had 'saved' Australia in World War Two, and Gorton took this lesson with him, as did other conservatives, into the Cold War.[232]

The identification of the Pacific region as fundamental to Australian security interests was not new to Australian diplomacy. Neither was the desire to look to America and the formation of a Pacific Pact to achieve this. In 1911 Alfred Deakin had asserted that, due to "British indifference" Australia must have a Pacific policy of its own.[233] According to Meaney, Australians turned to America in the early twentieth century to "shield them against the 'Yellow Peril,'" and then in the Cold War years America took its place alongside Britain "as one of Australia's 'great and powerful friends.'"[234] In 1939, on the eve of a another European war, Menzies informed the British that his government would appoint its own diplomatic representatives to the major Pacific powers because Australia ran the prime risks and bore the major responsibilities for the British Empire in that area;[235] indeed, as Menzies put it, "what Great Britain calls the Far East is to us the near North."[236] And at the end of 1941, as Japan entered the war and it became clear that the British base in Singapore would not hold against Japanese advances, Labor Prime Minister John Curtin stated that "free from any pangs as to our traditional links or

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[231] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 27 June 1951, p. 474.
[232] Gorton viewed the alliance through a lens of what best served Australia's own national interests and was particularly enthusiastic about standardising military equipment with America. On 8 May 1957 he voiced his pleasure with Menzies' indications to standardise with the United States in respect of "small arms, aircraft, gun howitzers and the ammunition they will use." Referring to Menzies' comments, Gorton stated that "I have advocated such steps in the Senate for two or three years, because it seems to be plain that our commitments under the ANZUS Pact, and under the SEATO Pact, if we are called upon to fulfill them, will find us side by side either with Americans or with the troops of other nations who are equipped entirely with American equipment." *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 8 May 1957, p. 608.
[233] Meaney, "Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War", op. cit., p. 318.
[234] Neville Meaney, *Under New Heavens, Cultural Transmission and the Making of Australia,* Heinemann Educational Australia, Melbourne, 1989, p. 382.
[235] Meaney, "Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War", op. cit., pp. 318-319.
[236] Menzies' first speech as Prime Minister, in Meaney, *Under New Heavens*, op. cit., p. 417.

kinship with the United Kingdom," Australia would look to the United States for help."[237] Though this statement never amounted to a wholesale shift in Australian foreign policy,[238] reliance on the British by this stage was "no longer seen as an adequate basis for Australian security."[239]

The focus on the Pacific and turn to America continued to develop after the Second World War, the very period in which Gorton began to play a role in federal politics. As the Cold War took shape in 1948 and 1949, the need for a Pacific-focussed arrangement with America developed in urgency.[240] Spender had been enthusiastic about a Pacific Pact with the United States since the late 1930s, and in February 1949 stated that the security of the Pacific rested "almost solely with the United States", calling for "a Pacific Pact similar to the Atlantic Pact."[241] The election of Menzies and developments in the 1950s brought the focus on Southeast Asia and reliance on alliances to the forefront of Australian diplomacy and security: the "logic of history and inherited ideas about the nature of Australian foreign policy" were restored to their rightful prominence, namely from a dual focus on the Middle East and the local region, to a more exclusive concentration on Southeast Asia, but all was encompassed within the norms of alliance patterns."[242]

It was in this context that Gorton operated in the Senate in the 1950s. Accordingly, Gorton was no doubt heavily influenced by discussions about Australia's status as a middle power and the importance of a strong alliance with America. The part America had played in the Pacific during World War Two had demonstrated it was

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[237] Meaney, "Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War", op. cit., p. 319.
[238] See Curran, James, *Curtin's Empire,* Cambridge University Press, New York, 2011.
[239] Meaney, "Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War", op. cit., p. 319.
[240] Ibid., p. 329.
[241] Meaney, *Under New Heavens*, op. cit., p. 426.
[242] David Lowe, "Divining a Labor Line: Conservative Construction of Labor's Foreign Policy, 1944-49", in David Lee and Christopher Walters (eds), *Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy,* Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, p. 73.

the only power that had the capacity to defend Australia. Gorton called on the Senate to "remember that during World War Two the United States of America gave to the Pacific the precedence and importance equal at least to that given to Europe and greater than that which any other country could give to it."[243] Gorton described America as "the greatest power in the world today,"[244] and regarded its support as "the most effective guarantee for a Pacific power against attack from the north."[245]

This did not mean, however, that he sought security by blindly following or was prepared to be beholden to either of them. Indeed, though he saw the benefits of a relationship with such powers, he also appreciated Australia's need to be able to act independently of them if Australia's own unique interests required it to do so. He was concerned that the forward defence posture made Australia appear too subservient to Britain and America, a favourite theme of the Labor Party, especially its left wing. Gorton did not approve of the practice of stationing Australian forces in Southeast Asia, preferring to have forces based in Australia that would be equipped and prepared to fight in Southeast Asia, if necessary.[246] According to Gorton, "we must, as Australians, because we do live here, decide what we think is best for us in this part of the world, and, no matter with whom we are in agreement or disagreements, put our views, not brashly or noisily, but firmly to the great powers under whose protection we live, the United States of America and Great Britain."[247]

Indeed, Australia's relationship with America in itself was not the primary goal of Australian foreign policy for Gorton. As he had said in the Senate on 11 August 1954, "we must try to assess the position of Australia in the world today in an endeavor to foresee what may happen that will affect this country. We must then try to decide what we can do, or try to do, if we are so affected."[248] Gorton still

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[243] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 7 October 1953, p. 403.
[244] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 27 June 1951, pp. 474-475.
[245]Ibid., p. 475.
[246] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War*, op. cit., p. 193.
[247] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 11 August 1954, p. 150.
[248] Ibid., pp. 149-150.

wanted Australia to be able to put its views, 'not brashly or noisily, but firmly' to its American ally. If it did this, as Gorton wanted it to do, there would be no question for Gorton of "falling under the domination of the United States of America, as some critics outside the Parliament say."[249]

Accordingly, though Gorton regarded America as "the greatest ally we have in this part of the world,"[250] he did not want the relationship with America to become one characterised by Australian subservience. Indeed, he did not see why the mere fact Australian and American interests and therefore policy might be in unison at times should lead to allegations of subservience. For Gorton, as Australia was primarily interested in what happened in Asia and as America also had interests in that area, it was only natural that there would be occasions "when our policy will run concurrently with that of the United States of America."[251] He was "sorry to think that when that happens some people will say that we are being dragged at the heels of the United States of America," and called on those who might say so to "produce the proof."[252] He reiterated that "the fact that our policies run concurrently on occasions is not in itself proof that either one or the other is leading in any way at all."[253]

The Coming of the Cold War and Communism in Asia

The Coming of the Cold War

Menzies' preference for alliances with great powers over liberal internationalism shaped Cold War politics in Australia for the two decades after Menzies' election in 1949. As Meaney put it, "the Liberal-Country party coalition which governed Australia from 1950 to 1972 found it relatively easy to adapt to this new world. British and American definitions of the Cold War as the defence of 'Western

[249] Ibid.
[250] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 16 September 1954, p. 376.
[251] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 7 October 1953, p. 403.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.

Civilisation' or 'The Free World' against Communist imperialism resonated throughout Australian political life."[254]

Sitting comfortably with the conservative approach to Cold War loyalties and international relations, Gorton preferred alliances with great powers to liberal internationalism. Expressing views in his early speeches that were popular with the anti-communists on the right-wing of the Liberal Party, Gorton saw communism as a monolithic revolutionary movement, headquartered in Moscow, that had as its goal world domination. This was a widely held view in Canberra, especially by 1951, a year which saw the portrayal of the Soviets as "ideologically driven, remorseless, ruthless, patient and cunning in the extreme in their long-term quest to impose communism on the rest of the world."[255] The United Nations was not the appropriate entity to stop such a threat. For Gorton, the United Nations had "not been able to live up to the hopes one had placed in it", and therefore the international community could not trust it with the important task of preventing the spread of communism.[256]

A reliance on great powers as opposed to liberal internationalism was a common tenet of conservative thought in the early decades of the Cold War. Indeed, the conservative mistrust of the United Nations was indicative of the bipolar Cold War world in which Menzies' Liberal government was operating: in March 1949 Spender stated that "it must never be forgotten that as (United Nations) membership includes representatives of all the groups of the world, it may contain those who are working to disrupt the order we believe in."[257] Even Evatt had acknowledged that the United Nations offered "no absolute guarantees against armed conflict and aggression", and that a nation would have to "fall back on

[254] Meaney, *Under New Heavens,* op. cit., p. 425.
[255] Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle,* op. cit., p. 75. Indeed, Spender, Casey, Barwick and Hasluck believed "very firmly that the Communist bloc was the disturber of world peace and a menace to Western society." Meaney, *Under New Heavens*, op. cit., p. 426.
[256] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 6 May 1965, p. 667.
[257] Percy Spender in Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle*, op. cit., p. 45.

regional arrangements and ultimately upon its own defence forces and those of its allies" if collective security was found wanting.[258]

Seeking to resolve international disputes by means other than international cooperation and negotiation was not necessarily peculiar to the Liberal government. In the context of the Cold War, Labor too was prepared to use the great powers if it served their interests to do so. Meaney has shown that, despite Chifley and Evatt's ideals and promotion of liberal internationalism, even they were unable to escape the great power politics of the Cold War as it developed in the late 1940s. Responding to the escalation of Cold War tensions in 1948 and 1949, "Evatt allowed that in these new circumstances the principles of justice upon which the United Nations was based might have to give way to the demands of expediency."[259] Lowe suggested the point at which "Australian officialdom began to speak the language of Cold War polarisation and abandon its liberal internationalism"[260] may have been when Australia provided 40 Royal Australian Air Force air crew to fly supply runs to blockaded Berlin. At this point Evatt "seemed to shift ground on the European and global scene."[261] Accordingly, though the conservatives were more explicit in their preference for great power relations as opposed to liberal internationalism, looking to nations like Britain to bolster the protection of Australia was a feature of the Australian outlook across the political spectrum.

It was Menzies' new government though that "saw restoration of good relations with its major allies, Britain and the United States, as crucial."[262] Indeed, Spender stated that the preservation of peace was best pursued through "co-operation with, in his ordering, Britain, the United States, the nations of the British commonwealth, and the United Nations."[263] Menzies' other External Affairs

[258] HV Evatt in Meaney, "Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War", op. cit., p. 323.
[259] Ibid., p. 327.
[260] Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle*, op. cit., p. 30.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid., p. 70.
[263] Nicholas Brown, *Governing Prosperity: Social Change and Social Analysis in Australia in the 1950s,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 33-34.

ministers (Casey, Barwick and Hasluck) all questioned the wisdom of Evatt's devotion to the United Nations too, often "stressing its 'experimental' status, and by lumping it with other intangibles in a 'theory' versus 'reality' dichotomy in world affairs,"[264] and Nicholas Brown has shown that Spender gave external affairs "a distinctive realist stamp" as compared to Evatt.[265]

Communism in Asia

The year 1950 is often seen as marking the spread of the Cold War into Asia. Stalin signed a 30-year treaty of friendship, alliance and mutual aid with the People's Republic of China in February, pro-independence forces had for some time been launching violent attacks in Malaya, Vietnam and the Philippines, and communist North Korean troops attacked South Korea in June. These events brought the tensions of the bipolar European Cold War to the Asia-Pacific region: "with the success of the Communist Revolution in China and the outbreak of hostilities in Korea the Cold War was extended to Asia."[266] Gorton believed the developing Southeast Asian region to be most threatened by communist expansion, and the part of the world most relevant to Australia's interests. On 28 April 1955 he referred to Asia, "fluid and in ferment," as the place "where we can expect Communist expansion to take place."[267] Part of Southeast Asia and far from Britain, "the centre of gravity of world affairs has moved closer to us than it has ever been in our history, and the decisions which we take here may well have an effect on the future of this country greater than that of any decisions ever taken before."[268]

Gorton called for Australia to have a united policy with America and Great Britain in response to China's expansion into Formosa and the Pescadores, one that

[264] Lowe, "Divining a Labor Line", op. cit., p. 67. See also Meaney, *Under New Heavens*, op. cit. p. 426.
[265] Brown, *Governing Prosperity*, op. cit., p. 33.
[266] Meaney, *Under New Heavens*, op. cit., p. 425.
[267] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 28 April 1955, p. 125.
[268] Ibid.

involved saying "so far and no further" to China.[269] Adopting such an approach was necessary to avoid the mistakes made in the lead up to World War Two and to preserve peace. According to Gorton, if Australia went on as it went on when he was a young man, "when the democracies conceded the Rhineland, conceded Austria, and conceded Czechoslovakia, we shall again have to fight for survival under the worst possible conditions."[270] To spare another war, Gorton believed it necessary to stop communism before it had a chance to develop momentum in its advance into the Pacific.

China

With the spread of the Cold War into Asia Gorton argued against diplomatic recognition of communist China, asking rhetorically, "what advantage in the cause of world peace can we hope to get from recognition of red China?"[271] He did not see any advantages coming from the recognition or acceptance of China:

> *if we look at the world today we will see focal point after focal point of danger and of quarrelling, and in almost all these points – indeed, in all but one of them – we will see that trouble, the danger of war and collision are arising because dissension has been deliberately stirred up by one or other of the great Communist countries.*[272]

He concluded that to recognise China could cause "grave disadvantages to the free world."[273] The consequences of such recognition for the functioning of the United Nations and therefore world peace could be dire. Though the United Nations Charter provided that a country that was involved in a dispute should not use its power of veto in relation to that dispute, Gorton had concerns about the implications of China being admitted to the Security Council: "if Russia were involved in a dispute in Europe, how handy it would be for it if China vetoed action

[269] Ibid., p. 129.
[270] Ibid.
[271] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 7 October 1953, p. 404.
[272] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 1 May 1957, p. 524.
[273] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 7 October 1953, p. 404.

proposed to be taken to counter Russian aggression. And how handy it would be for China, if Russia vetoed action proposed to be taken against Chinese aggression in Asia."[274]

In discussing the 'advantages' and 'disadvantages' that diplomatic recognition of China brought with it, Gorton was using language that reflected the accord between his own thoughts and the thoughts of Menzies and his government. Indeed, the main reason for Menzies and Spender deciding to not follow the British cabinet's lead in recognising China in December 1949 was that Australia was "not convinced that recognition would offer Australia any compensating advantages for what appeared to be certain disadvantages."[275] Sandra Penrose has argued that, in the case of the first Menzies ministry, it was "a question of circumstances delaying recognition of the People's Republic of China, rather than ideological hostility or dependence preventing it."[276] Menzies believed that, since the Chinese communists had not given any indication they would respect international law when dealing with other nations, recognition would not encourage China to comply with international law, that recognition would not stop China from making trouble in neighbouring Asia given their evident determination to do so, and that recognition would mark a withdrawal of support from Chinese Nationalist forces Australia had been allied with during World War Two. Also, he did not want to be quick to recognise a government that not only would increase representation of communist states in the Security Council and other United Nations bodies, but also vote with the Soviet bloc.[277]

The Domino Theory

The acceptance of the domino theory, a term coined by American President Eisenhower in April 1954 to describe the threat of Asian nations falling like

[274] Ibid, pp. 404-405.
[275] Sandra Penrose, "Recognising the People's Republic of China: A Reappraisal of Australian Foreign Policy During the First Menzies Ministry 1950-51," *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* Volume 44, Number 2, 1998, pp. 209-24, p. 211.
[276] Ibid., p. 223.
[277] Ibid., pp. 211-212.

dominoes to communism, coloured the conservative Australian government's outlook on Australia's role in Asia in the 1950s and 1960s. After Mao Zedong's communist revolution in China in 1949 and in the context of decolonisation in Southeast Asia, Menzies' government came to view Southeast Asia as the battleground for democracy. As Twomey has shown, Spender's enunciation of a kind of 'domino' theory - a judgement that was also held by Casey, his successor as Minister for External Affairs – was endorsed by Menzies' cabinet in 1954.[278] The impact of the apparently inexorable spread of communism to Asian nations was clear for Gorton:

> *we have seen state after state throughout the world fall under Communist domination. Does not this happen every time? That state becomes militarised; that state becomes sealed from the truth or from any free discussion that seeks to find out the truth; that state – this is what concerns us – always becomes a base for further expansion, or a base for exerting pressure on neighbouring countries if the risk of further expansion seems too great.*[279]

The consequences of this expansion were great for Australia, perhaps greater than the threat of Japanese militarism during World War Two. If, according to Gorton, Asian nations "did become Communist nations, we should be in a position analogous to that in which we would have been in the last war if all these countries had been allied to, friendly with, and co-operating with, Japan."[280] Considering Gorton's background and the conservative understanding of communism as a monolithic force, it is not surprising that Gorton held such views.

The ready acceptance of the domino theory was born of a misunderstanding of the exact nature of revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia. Many politicians did not fully appreciate the nationalistic elements of revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia and, as Murphy has shown, the amalgamation of nationalism and

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[278] Twomey, "Munich", op. cit., p. 185.
[279] Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Senate, 11 August 1954, p. 151.
[280] Ibid.

communism in the context of decolonisation in Vietnam was poorly understood in Australia in the 1950s, especially by conservative groups.[281] In relation to the situation in Vietnam, Menzies' focus on Cold War discourse did away with the recognition of any nationalist element of such movements and instead focussed on the perceived insidious influence of Communism.[282] Accordingly the conservatives, including Gorton, were "locked into a conceptual framework which drew a haze over historical reflection, and within which it was difficult enough to accord legitimacy to a nationalist social movement, and harder still to distinguish the unique intertwining of nationalist, patriotic and revolutionary sentiments in Vietnamese decolonisation."[283] Conservatives argued that the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese had been "captured and manipulated by external influences; revolution was an alien import reflecting Soviet expansion and subversion rather than the dynamics of colonial rule and decolonisation."[284]

This narrow interpretation applied to the whole of Southeast Asia and other conflicts in the region, such as the Malayan Emergency and Confrontation. As Murphy put it, "the political configuration of the Cold War was far from conducive to reasoned debate on issues of Southeast Asian decolonisation and the role of nationalist and communist movement … and the heavy overlay of the domestic Cold War meant that public discourse on Asia was preoccupied with threats, fears and protestations of loyalty."[285] As Meaney stated, "the Australian policy makers saw in these developments what Menzies called 'the southward thrust of China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans'. The whole region appeared to be caught up in a pattern of communist and communist-inspired aggression and subversion."[286]

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[281] John Murphy, *Harvest of Fear, A History of Australia's Vietnam War*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p. 40.
[282] Ibid., p. 44.
[283] Ibid., p. 49.
[284] Ibid., p. 46.
[285] Ibid., p. 60.
[286] Meaney, *Under New Heavens*, op. cit., p. 431.

In line with conservative thinking, Gorton regarded the Malayan Emergency not simply as an example of ethnic Chinese fighting against the oppression of colonialism, but rather, the result of communist aggressors seeking to overthrow the government. On 28 April 1955 he observed that, though it was "about seven years ago that the Communists in Malaya took to the jungle" to embark on a campaign of "ambush and killing, with the intention of disrupting the rubber and tin industries of Malaya, and finally, by destroying the economy and by pouring the blood, not of the English only, but of the English and Malays onto the floor of Malaya," by 1955 they had failed to obtain popular support from the Malayan people.[287] Therefore the insurgency did not qualify as a nationalistic movement. The communists in Malaya did not represent the people but, rather, worked for "their masters in China."[288]

The fact that the Chinese insurgents had had to resort to force against the local population on several occasions demonstrated to Gorton how little popular support the communists had. He concluded that, "if, from the native population, there can be raised a force resistant to insurrection of this kind, the indication is that the insurrection does not have the support of the people in that country."[289] In an article published in *The Age* on 8 March 1955 entitled 'Australia's Responsibility in Malaya,' Gorton wrote that it was wrong to suggest that the bulk of the local population supported the guerrillas and that, on the contrary, the people of Malaya realised that "Communist resort to force would have to be resisted by force."[290] Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that Gorton, an anti-communist who wanted to stop the spread of communism by maintaining the independence of Southeast Asian nations, believed that "it would be completely wrong for us to refuse to defend that country against small bands of people who have taken to the jungle with tommy guns."[291]

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[287] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 28 April 1955, p. 126.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Trengrove, *John Grey Gorton*, op. cit., p. 126.
[291] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 28 April 1955, p. 128.

Gorton's personal experience of narrowly escaping Japanese capture in 1942 instilled in him a desire, however, to guard against a situation in which Australian soldiers might be left stranded on foreign shores. As Coral Bell suggested, Gorton's experience of being evacuated from Singapore after many others had been captured by the Japanese left him with a deep seated desire to never again leave Australian soldiers isolated.[292] As Bell put it, Gorton's personal history "created in him … a more than average sensitivity to the fact that 'forward defence' could mean young Australians felt hopelessly exposed at the ends of vulnerable lines of communication."[293] Though Gorton's opposition to communist expansion and resolve to not repeat the mistakes made in diplomacy in the 1930s led to this willingness to send Australian troops abroad, it was tempered with a strong desire to protect Australian servicemen while overseas.

Threats to Australia: Confrontation and Vietnam

Just as it coloured the conservative interpretation of the spread of communism into Asia, so did the memory of World War Two shape the approach Gorton and the Menzies government belied Australia should take towards the two major conflicts that threatened to destabilise Southeast Asia in the 1960s: Confrontation and Vietnam.

Confrontation

Gorton believed Australia should play a role in protecting the newly created Malaysian federation during Confrontation, especially considering that, in his opinion, though the United Nations would most likely play a role in doing this, the international community could not afford to wait for it to do so. Though he

[292] Indeed, his own facial injuries incurred after the dog fight while stationed in Singapore (and the inability to properly repair them) had a lasting effect on Gorton – when Ted Mattner, president of the Senate from 1951-1953 told Gorton he needed to look up more when delivering speeches, he replied by saying "that's very good, but I don't suppose anyone else here is wearing as much of his backside on his face as I am!" Trengrove, *John Grey Gorton,* op. cit., p. 115.
[293] Bell, *Dependent Ally*, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

believed that an attack on Malaysia or the constituent states of Malaysia would be referred to the UN and that it would support Malaysia, he asked, "what is going to happen in the meantime, while the attack is being brought to the attention of the United Nations and discussed by the United Nations?"[294] Gorton answered his question by stating that an incursion would be made over the boundaries of the new nation, by use of force, and that Australia would accordingly have to decide whether it is "proper and right" to add its military assistance in resisting the invading force.[295]

Something other than the United Nations was needed to preserve the peace and security that had been fought for in World War Two: "if it is necessary that aggression should be stopped, should not be permitted and should not be seen to be successful, and if the United Nations alone cannot stop aggression, other means of doing it must be found and accepted."[296] With reference to the failure of appeasement, Gorton believed that Australia would have to be prepared to send troops to defend Malaysia.[297] Gorton saw the present-day issue in Southeast Asia through the lens of Europe's failure to stop Hitler in the 1930s and, once again, advocated Australian involvement in stopping the spread of communism in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam

Vietnam elicited a response from America and Australia that clearly demonstrated the impact the appeasement of Hitler had on conservative American and Australian politicians in the 1950s and 1960s. As Under Secretary George Ball had it,

> *we have … come to realise from the experience of the past years that aggression must be dealt with wherever it occurs and no matter what*

[294] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 26 September 1963, p. 862.
[295] Ibid.
[296] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates,* Senate, 6 May 1965, p. 667.
[297] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 26 September 1963, p. 862.

> *mask it may wear … In the 1930s Manchuria seemed a long way away … Ethiopia seemed a long way away. The rearmament of the Rhineland was regarded as regrettable but not worth a shooting war. Yet after that came Austria, and after Austria, Czechoslovakia. Then Poland. Then the Second World War. The central issue we face in South Viet-Nam ... is whether a small state on the periphery of Communist power should be permitted to maintain its freedom. And that is an issue of vital importance to small states everywhere.*[298]

Referring directly to his own experiences, Gorton used similar language in describing the nature of the conflict in Vietnam and the way in which the Australian government should respond to it. Gorton stated that

> *in my own lifetime we have seen a situation arise in which it was necessary to choose between a world in which there were Belsens, Ravensbrucks, genocide and hangmen operating without the rule of law – all the things we saw put into gruesome effect in Europe – and a world of freedom. I believe that we were right then to choose war rather than to live in that kind of world.*[299]

Sending troops to Vietnam for Gorton fell within the gambit of Australia's duty to fight against aggressive communist expansion: "whatever the judgment of history may be on this move … I will be glad to think there was in this country at this time a government which believes in this step to prevent this aggression."[300]

Even before America and Australia became militarily involved in Vietnam, Gorton advocated supporting South Vietnam in its fight against what he regarded as aggressive communist expansion from the North. On 1 May 1957 he stated that "the people of South Viet Nam are under threat by a completely ruthless power

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[298] *State Department Bulletin,* LI, June 7, 1965, in May, *Lessons of the Past*, op. cit., p. 113.
[299] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 6 May 1965, p. 666.
[300] Ibid, p. 670.

with large divisions and arms and well-known intentions."[301] The consequences of the spread of communism in Indochina were dire: a year before the Battle of Dien Bien Phu he had warned that, if Indochina were to fall, "the consequent accretion of strength to the Communist bloc would probably be of decisive importance not only in Asia but also throughout the world."[302]

Unsurprisingly, Gorton publicly supported Australian military intervention in Vietnam. Though noting that he did not suppose that "when all history is written and finality is reached anybody will be shown to have been irrefutably right or wrong on this matter," he declared to the Senate on 6 May 1965 that, in the case of Vietnam, "it is in Australia's interests that we send our troops abroad."[303] In Gorton's mind it was far better to stop the spread of aggression in Vietnam before it led to a global conflict. What was lacking from Gorton's pronouncements on Australian involvement in Vietnam, then, was a proper consideration of the specific nature of that conflict. Even if his statements on Vietnam were far from unequivocal, the memory of Munich in the Cold War world influenced Gorton in such a way that any perceived aggression was best to be met with military combat to stop it from developing further and threatening the world order.

Gorton continued, speaking generally about Vietnam in the context of Australia's need to play a role in the protection of Southeast Asia. After discussing the need to resist aggression generally, he stated that "though this departs a little from the examination of whether this decision by Australia is right, from the point of view of a small country such as Australia it is not only right but it is also utterly expedient that it should be seen that a country, no matter how small, will not be left to be invaded and to have imposed upon it the will of another country."[304] Gorton may have danced to some extent around the issue of whether the specific decision was right or wrong but, clearly, his world view led him to support Australian involvement in Vietnam.

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[301] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 1 May 1957, p. 526.
[302] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 7 October 1953, p. 404.
[303] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 6 May 1965, p. 664.
[304] Ibid., p. 667.

This way of thinking was consistent with the Liberal Party approach, which regarded Vietnam not as a local civil war but one "designed by Communist China and North Vietnam to destroy the freedom of a neighbouring State," as "the first phase of a larger attack on free States in South-East Asia and part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans," and that South Vietnam must be protected because "modern history has shown us that security cannot be obtained by throwing a small State to the wolves."[305] Indeed, as conditions deteriorated in South Vietnam in the late 1950s, the Australian government believed – or at least declared – that the war in Indochina "was inspired and aided by China; that North Vietnam was seeking to conquer and take over the South by guerrilla warfare and terrorist actions against civilians, and that the fall of South Vietnam would lead to the conquest of Cambodia, Laos and potentially the rest of South-East Asia."[306] Gorton's approach to Vietnam again demonstrated that he was a creature of conservative political culture.

Gorton did, however, question the escalation of Australia's involvement in Vietnam by Prime Minister Holt, chiefly because he did not necessarily regard an increase in troop numbers as being in Australia's interests. Gorton sent a letter to Harold Holt not long after his election in December 1966, in which he spelt out his opposition to further increases to the troop commitment. He accepted that Australia should make *a* contribution to the war effort in order to keep hostilities away from Australian shores. He refused to accept, however, that Australia needed to make a greater sacrifice. While he acknowledged that "*a* presence" gave "comfort and assistance" to the United States, the size of the presence, so long as it was not "contemptible", was not relevant. According to Gorton it was "absurd" to suggest that an extra few thousand men would affect the decision-making of the present or a future American administration.[307] It followed that, if the number of Australian troops in Vietnam was not going to affect American decision-making, it

[305] Liberal Party Memorandum to All Members of the Federal Parliamentary Liberal Party, copied to Senator the Hon. J Gorton, 30 June 1965, Gorton Papers, Box 25 MS 7984, NLA.
[306] TB Millar, "Vietnam", in Bridge (eds), *Munich to Vietnam*, op. cit., p. 185.
[307] Gorton to Holt, 16 December 1966, Holt Papers, NAA: M2684/130.

would be better to apply Australian resources in ways that "will be of far greater benefit to the progress, safety, and stability of our country."[308] As Hancock wrote, "publicly, John Gorton strongly supported the increasing Australian involvement in the Vietnam War. Privately, he was not so sure."[309]

Doubts such as these were not uncommon in Australia; according to Murphy, "in private, some officials and ministers could be more skeptical, but chose not to share such complications with the public."[310] Indeed, Gorton stated in an interview with Melanie Pratt in 1977 that, while he opposed Holt's decision to send a third battalion to Vietnam in 1967 and asked for that to be noted in the minutes of the Cabinet meeting, "I then went along with the thing."[311] It is understandable why Gorton may have had private doubts about Australia's involvement in Vietnam. Firstly, it is likely that Gorton's own personal fears about leaving Australian servicemen stranded in Southeast Asia played a role in his opposition to the escalation of Australian involvement in Vietnam. Gorton felt compelled to stop the spread of communism as a result of the Australian experience of World War Two but, likely as a result of his own experiences in Singapore, did not want to leave Australian soldiers abandoned on foreign shores.

Secondly, it is likely that Gorton's support for Australian involvement was the product of a somewhat limited understanding of the nature of the conflict there. Murphy has shown how a relatively simplistic approach to the conflict in Vietnam took shape in the conservative political outlook in the 1960s. According to Murphy, between 1954 and 1962 Vietnam "virtually disappeared from Australian public view" and "became a matter of some indifference", meaning that "Vietnam was unintelligible when the balance swung back to the (National Liberation Front) in 1963 and 1964."[312] Even when more detailed reports from Australian personnel in Saigon came out from South Vietnam's capital in 1964 and 1965 they

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[308] Ibid.
[309] Hancock, *John Gorton,* op. cit., p.101.
[310] Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, op. cit., p. 102.
[311] John Gorton, Oral History with Mel Pratt, 15 July 1977, Gorton Papers, Box 1 MS 7984, NLA.
[312] Murphy, *Harvest of Fear,* op. cit., p. 99.

were not dissected thoroughly. According to Murphy, more often than not the subtleties and complicating nuances of the situation in Vietnam were "lost amongst the traditional Cold War metaphors."[313] Indeed, Murphy stated that there was, by the early to mid-1960s, a sense in which the nuances of the views from Saigon became largely irrelevant to Australian planning: "Australia's Vietnam policy was a policy less about Vietnam than about broader regional strategy and the perceived need to secure American involvement in the region. This meant that the chief quality of knowledge about Vietnam was not so much that it was inaccessible but that it was unwelcome."[314]

True to the so-called 'lessons' of appeasement and his general opposition to totalitarianism, Gorton used these Cold War metaphors in relation to Vietnam, stating in the Senate only three months before becoming prime minister that Australia's "immediate pre-occupation is in Vietnam," and that "this is the most urgent of our current external problems, and it is basic to all our aspirations for security in Asia."[315] Combined with Gorton's loathing of communist aggression and his belief in Australia's need to fight against it, the simplistic conservative understanding of the conflict in Vietnam led him to support Australia's involvement there. Gorton, a man who felt strongly the sacrifices Australians had made to stop totalitarian expansion in World War Two – and who had, indeed, made sacrifices himself – saw (at least some) Australian involvement in Vietnam along with America as necessary to protecting Southeast Asia and Australian interests in the region. This was not least because it saw close defence cooperation between Australia and America, a goal to which the Liberal party had dedicated itself since the signing of ANZUS in 1951. But – perhaps also as a result of his own experience of war – he also had misgivings about the extent to which Australian soldiers should be on the ground there, and the value to be gained from sending more.

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[313] Ibid., p. 102.
[314] Ibid., p. 103.
[315] *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 17 October 1967, p. 134.

On 17 December 1967 Prime Minister Harold Holt went missing after skin diving in rough seas off Cheviot Beach in Portsea, Victoria. Two days later the government made an official announcement that he was thought to be dead. Holt's presumed successor was Liberal deputy leader William McMahon, but on 18 December the Country Party leader and Deputy Prime Minister John McEwen announced that he and his party would not serve under McMahon. Gorton was elected party leader over Hasluck on 9 January 1968, and on 10 January was appointed prime minister. Though he had been a member of the Senate since 1950, Gorton had only been in Cabinet for two years, which meant that he had not been part of the group of senior ministers shaping policies towards Indonesia and Indochina. His vehemently anti-communist views were more consistent with the right wing of the Liberal Party than Menzies and the other senior ministers, and was concerned that Australia's forward defence posture made it appear to be too subservient to America and Britain, a view that resonated more with the Labor Party than his own party.[316]

Gorton, therefore, was "hardly the most obvious replacement for Harold Holt."[317] The fact that Gorton had not held any principal Cabinet portfolios – or even been a member of the House of Representatives – did little to strengthen his authority as leader of the Liberal Party. Indeed, the uncertainty surrounding Gorton the man and the anticipated nature of his prime-ministership was the subject of much speculation. In an article appearing in *Nation* on 25 May 1968, Australian academic Sol Encel wrote that, since his assumption of office, his stance as prime minister had been "ambiguous and a source of puzzlement to many political observers."[318] Encel attributed this chiefly due to his succession, "with a larrikin background" to Menzies and Holt - two men "so utterly different from him."[319]

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[316] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War*, op. cit., p. 193.
[317] Barclay, *Friends in High Places*, op. cit., p. 163.
[318] Solomon Encel, "The Larrikin Leaders", *Nation,* 25 May 1968, p. 9. I am grateful to James Curran for providing this document.
[319] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

According to Coral Bell, Gorton never enjoyed a degree of dominance equal to that of Menzies or Fraser, and as a result "was not in a position intransigently to resist determined pressures either from his Cabinet and party colleagues, or from powerful electoral influences such as the Democratic Labor Party."[320] As Edwards had it, "Gorton's sudden elevation therefore thrust him into responsibility for policies he had little part in shaping and, especially, for a war about which he had long held major reservations."[321] This would play a significant role in defining the nature of Gorton's leadership: the unlikely Prime Minister Gorton would be called on to manage a number of crises that severely undermined long-held Australian assumptions about the American alliance, and brought with them the virtual collapse of Australian Cold War defence policy.

[320] Bell, *Dependent Ally*, op. cit., pp. 96-97.
[321] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War*, op. cit., p. 194.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ALLIANCE UNDER STRAIN – GORTON'S RESPONSE TO AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Almost immediately after Gorton became prime minister in January 1968, Australia's Southeast Asian defence policy was rocked by a series of crises. Britain announced its intention to accelerate its withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia only hours after Gorton assumed the prime-ministership, and then just weeks later the Tet Offensive brought about the eventual end of Johnson's presidency and a complete turn-around in American policy towards Vietnam. Accordingly, Australia's Cold War defence policy seemed to be on the verge of collapse: Britain's eventual withdrawal from the region was confirmed and hastened, and uncertainly now surrounded America's ongoing commitment to Vietnam and the wider region. Gorton, a new and untried prime minister with no real distinctive ideas about foreign relations or the world beyond conservative Cold War cliché, found himself in the middle of this time of uncertainty and strategic flux.

Broader social changes and the development of the anti-war movement were also impacting the way in which Australians viewed their country's relationship with America. Indeed, an article appearing in *The Bulletin* in July 1969 referred to 1968 as the year when "troublesome tensions began to develop" between America and Australia.[322] Paul Strangio argued that "change, not stability, was becoming the leitmotif of the times,"[323] in Australian society, and that this made it hard for prime ministers following Menzies – and especially Gorton – to maintain a degree of stability in politics. Indeed, Strangio argued that the generation gap between the baby-boomers and their elders led to an "alliance between a progressive component of the middle class, student radicals and elements of the traditional left" in the late 1960s, and that it was these groups that were responsible for "a resurgence of left politics following the long post-war conservative

[322] "The Alliance," *The Bulletin,* 12 July 1969, p. 35. I am grateful to James Curran for providing this document.
[323] Paul Strangio, "Instability, 1966-82," in *The Cambridge History of Australia,* vol. 2 (edited by Alison Bashford and Stuart MacIntyre), Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2013, p. 135.

ascendancy."[324] Gorton had to manage the end of that post-war conservative ascendancy and try to transition Australia into a new period of foreign policy.

It was in this context that Nixon's announcement of the Guam Doctrine in July 1969 heralded a recalibration of the American posture in Southeast Asia. Gorton, therefore, was required to steer the Australian government through an unsettling period that would see the traditional basis of Australian foreign policy – a strong relationship with great powers who were engaged in Southeast Asia – come to an end. Navigating this period was no easy task. Influenced by the legacy of previous Liberal governments' foreign policy and his own background and Cold War diet, Gorton predictably fell back on the practices of the past and sought to maintain a close relationship with America during this period, even as its commitment to Southeast Asia and Australia seemed to become less certain than it had been for Holt and Menzies.

This was demonstrated most notably by his willingness to rely on the rhetoric of the security that ANZUS provided to Australia, and his continuation of the seemingly endless search for guarantees from Washington as to the applicability of the treaty. At the same time, however, Gorton was forced to consider and attempt to articulate a more self-reliant defence posture for Australia as its traditional Cold War foreign policy fell apart. He may not have been able to do so with much aplomb as prime minister, but he did at least begin the process of articulating and forming a new foreign policy that sought to balance dependence on America with a greater degree of Australian self-reliance.

The Tet Offensive and its aftermath

On 30 January 1968 the North Vietnamese army and Viet Cong launched a series of co-ordinated attacks across 100 towns and cities in South Vietnam. Though the attacks failed in that they were quickly repulsed by the American and South Vietnamese forces, media footage of the Tet Offensive – especially of the storming

[324] Ibid. p. 140.

of the American Embassy in Saigon and General Loan's summary execution of a Viet Cong soldier – was broadcast across the world and had the effect of dividing the White House and American public on the issue of American involvement in Vietnam. As John Murphy has shown, editorial reaction to the Tet Offensive was "dramatic," and "abruptly punctured confident assurances that the war against the NLF was being won."[325] Demoralised by the seeming ease at which communist forces had been able to rise up after having been assured by American military leaders in Vietnam that the end of the conflict was near, Johnson decided to take the first steps to de-escalate the conflict: in his 31 March speech he stated that he had ordered the American air-force and navy to not make attacks on North Vietnam (except for areas where the build-up of troops directly threatened allied forward positions), in an attempt to bring about peace talks to end the war.[326]

Of greater importance and concern to Gorton's new Australian government, however, was Johnson's subsequent announcement that he would neither seek nor accept his party's nomination to run for a second term. The announcement marked the end of the high point of alliance intimacy between America and Australia, as Australia could no longer rely with any certainty on America's commitment to Vietnam. Coming just under a year before the next presidential election, it also meant that the Australian government would be forced to carry out its foreign policy when the future of American foreign policy was, for that period of time at least, "anything but clear."[327]

This posed a great challenge for Gorton, given that the fundamental basis of Australian foreign policy depended on having a solid understanding of America's intentions in relation to Southeast Asia: as Hasluck had stated in 1964, "what the United States Government does at any time now or in the future is going to be of such profound importance to Australia that we must try to see the prospects as clearly and exactly as is humanly possible."[328] The problem now for Gorton was

[325] Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, op. cit., p 198.
[326] Lyndon Bairnes Johnson, quoted in Harpur, *War Without End,* op. cit., p. 71.
[327] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 197.
[328] Communication to MR Booker by the Minister for External Affairs, 23 September 1964, Part 7, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

that he could see the future of American policy neither clearly nor exactly. Quite unlike his predecessor Holt, who had had the advantage of an ally that was adopting a hawkish approach to Vietnam, Gorton would now have to manage the issue of how to formulate and carry out Australian foreign policy in the context of great uncertainty as to America's intentions. Indeed, determining the exact nature of future American foreign policy was now something of an exercise in guess work. As Bell had it, "the long 'lame-duck' period of the Johnson presidency, almost a year from the March speech to the inauguration of President Nixon in January 1969, was for all the USA's South-East Asian allies a period of living amid those ruins, waiting for the new incumbent and whatever he could produce in the way of a revised US diplomatic and military strategy."[329]

Johnson's decision to halt the bombing of North Vietnam and not run for a second term caught Gorton by complete surprise and embarrassed the new prime minister by demonstrating the lack of real consultation that existed between America and Australia. The Australian government had not been consulted or made aware of Johnson's bombing policy about-turn before it was announced. The Americans were yet again notifying their allies of key strategic decisions only after the decisions had been made. Indeed, Hasluck had gone as far as to publically support the continued of bombing of North Vietnam only a week before Johnson's speech: "'what impression of resolution and determination would the allies give to the embattled, war-torn, suffering people of South Vietnam', he asked the House of Representatives on 26 March 1968, 'if the controlled and selective bombing of North Vietnam were to be terminated'?"[330]

The prospect of major shifts in American policy towards Vietnam signalled in Johnson's 31 March speech did not lead to Gorton marking any immediate plans for major changes to Australian foreign policy. Rather, given the sudden about-turn in America's approach to its involvement in Vietnam, Gorton had little option in the circumstances but to try to maintain a close relationship with America and prepare for an uncertain future. Gorton continued to employ the rhetoric of close

[329] Bell, *Dependent Ally,* op. cit., p. 102.
[330] Hasluck in Barclay, *Friends in High Places,* op. cit., p. 164.

defence co-operation under the ANZUS Treaty and an American-Australian alliance that would be characterised by close consultation and communication throughout the ensuing peace talks,[331] even though this close consultation had been shown to be non-existent. There was little else Gorton could do. Armed with no real alternative to the objective of forging a strong relationship with America in order to safeguard Australia, Gorton had neither the experience nor standing in the Liberal party to respond astutely and articulately to Johnson's announcement.

The American president may have been willing to act on the realisation that the Americanisation of the war had been, as the *Washington Post* had it, "the great mistake that will have to be corrected,"[332] but the Australian prime minister was not. Here lay Gorton's dilemma in 1968: on the one hand he felt the need to continue the close relationship that Menzies and Holt had developed with their American ally during the height of America's involvement in Vietnam; on the other, he faced the real problem of forming a new and clear Australian foreign policy in the face of American withdrawal. This led to both general statements about the importance of ANZUS guarantees and close consultation with America that indeed appeared to be more rhetorical than anything of great substance, and equally general statements about the inability to make clear policy announcements in the context of such uncertainty. Indeed, Gorton would continue to do what past Liberal governments had done since 1951: hold the treaty up as the basis of Australia's defence in the region while pressing for guarantees as to its applicability from Washington.

Johnson's announcement had embarrassed the Australian government and enraged Gorton. According to Gorton, this was "no way to treat an ally."[333] Publically, however, Gorton played down Johnson's bombing halt as a logical

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[331] Report on Gorton's visit to Washington from the Australian Embassy in Washington, 28 May 1968, received by the Department of External Affairs on 29 May 1968, Part 9, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[332] Walter Lippmann, "The Case for U.S. Pullback to Australia," *Washington Post,* 22 October 1967, Part 9, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[333] Memorandum, Rusk to Rostow, 2 May 1968, in James Curran, *Unholy Fury, Whitlam and Nixon at War,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2015, p. 89.

manifestation of American Vietnam policy, stating to the Parliamentary Press Gallery on 1 April 1968 that the bombing halt had been foreshadowed in Johnson's San Antonio speech on 29 September 1967, and that his 31 March speech was simply a "further step" in what had been referred to in the San Antonio speech as America's long term goal of achieving a genuine peace in Vietnam.[334] He also played down the apparent lack of American consultation with Australia, arguing that Australia had not been consulted on the issue of bombing because it was "not anything which in any way requires any increased contributions from Australia" and that, if it had, "I have no doubt whatever that full consultations would take place."[335]

Gorton continued to operate as though little had changed during his first visit to Washington in May 1968. Addressing Johnson, Gorton explained how the protection ANZUS afforded Australia would allow it to strengthen its own defences. Referring to ANZUS as Australia's "major shield," he stated that "behind that, and because of that, we can the sooner grow to that stature we shall reach, we shall the sooner reach a position to repulse any attack the future may hold from any quarter, and by any means." Gorton continued:

> *because of your assistance, because of the ANZUS Treaty and what it implies, we can divert to building a future strength, resources which would otherwise be now diverted to defence, to the future detriment of defence, and to the future detriment of our ability to render as much help to the region as we wish. This is to us the virtue of the ANZUS Pact. And allied to it is the sure knowledge that you – while providing that shield – recognise that behind it we, as we build our country, are free to make and will make our own foreign policy decisions subject only to our treaty obligations.*[336]

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[334] Briefing for Heads of Bureaux, Parliamentary Press Gallery, Canberra, 1 April 1968, Gorton Papers, Box 9, MS 7984, NLA.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Copy of the White House Transcript of the Exchange of Remarks between Gorton and Johnson, 27 May 1968, received by the Department of External Affairs on 28 May 1968, Part 9, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

Gorton was well aware, however, of the uncertain future of the American administration and the likelihood of future foreign policy changes that would impact Australia. As well as affirming the ANZUS and the alliance, Gorton used his first visit to Washington as an opportunity to visit a number of candidates for the presidency, including Vice President Humphrey, Governor Rockefeller and Nixon. Though he was only able to have "brief conversations" with these candidates,[337] when he returned to Australia he claimed that the visit had helped him get the background information that would help the government form its own decisions as to what it could and should do in the region in the future, "for our security in the future is bound up with, and cannot be disentangled from, the security and stability of the whole of the region in which we live."[338]

Nonetheless, Gorton declared to the House of Representatives on 4 June 1968 that "after these contacts, my own assessment … is that I do not believe, should any of these candidates be successful, that there would be any basic change in the interest of the United States in this region. I do not believe that there would be any retreat to isolationism, and if this assessment is true it is an important factor on which Australia's future decisions should be based."[339] It was, of course, unlikely that any of these candidates would have highlighted their ideas for radical shifts in American policy towards Vietnam to a visiting Australian prime minister, before the presidential election: Gorton clearly did not have a firm basis on which to discuss Australian foreign policy and, at least publically, stated that Australia's approach to its relationship with America and involvement would for the moment proceed as it had done previously.

Though Gorton may have wanted Australia to be able to form its own foreign and defence policy, he understood and acknowledged that this depended on the nature of American policy: "it is necessary for us … to make our own decisions as to what

[337] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 197.
[338] Prime Minister's Visit Abroad: Ministerial Statement, from the 'Parliamentary Debates', 4 June 1968, Gorton Papers, Box 5, MS 7984, NLA.
[339] Ibid.

we can do to bring about security and stability in the region; but in making those decisions we cannot but be affected by judgment as to what others will do for the same purposes in the same area." [340] This was perfectly reasonable in the circumstances: the uncertainty surrounding the nature of future American foreign policy restricted Gorton's ability to make clear policy announcements beyond reiterating the standard approach of maintaining good relations with America. As Gorton himself put it, the exact nature and details of future Australian foreign policy "cannot be projected into the future yet for the future is as yet too unknown."[341] Indeed, in a speech he later made to the National Press Club in Canberra, Gorton stated that, given that recent events had "so radically altered", the assessments on which Australian foreign policy had been based for more than two decades, it would be "irresponsible" to settle long range military planning.[342]

As far as Gorton was concerned, his primary goal was to keep his options open so as to be able to move according to future developments in American foreign policy, all the while maintaining publically that Australia still had a strong alliance with America, and that this would guarantee Australian security. Indeed, though he declared in Parliament on his return that he did not believe "that there would be any basic change in the interest of the United States in this region," or that "any retreat to isolationism," [343] he then ordered a complete review of Australian defence policy. Accordingly, though Gorton tried to assure the Parliament that nothing had really changed, "within the bureaucratic recesses of government, efforts were at this time put in hand to adapt the Australian stance to the changes in American policies."[344]

Following the review, the 1968 Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy advocated allowing for flexibility in the circumstances:

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[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid 5.
[342] Speech by the Prime Minister at the National Press Club, Hotel Canberra Rex, Canberra, 20 June 1968, Gorton Papers, Box 5, MS 7984, NLA.
[343] Prime Minister's Visit Abroad: Ministerial Statement, from the 'Parliamentary Debates', 4 June, 1968, Gorton Papers, Box 5, MS 7984, NLA.
[344] Bell, *Dependent Ally,* op. cit., p. 103.

> *if Australia's best interests are to be served, they do not lie in our taking up any extreme position. The choices surely are not between a continuing military presence in Asia … and no such presence under any circumstances. Rather does it seem we should be aiming, subject to the limits that SEATO imposes, to achieve a situation which will allow us the maximum of strategic flexibility, a situation in which we would be able to make our judgments from time to time, against all relevant circumstances, as to the directions, political, economic or military, in which we would be involved.*[345]

Cabinet endorsed the recommendation, referring to it as "central" to the future of defence policy.[346]

As the policy recommendations suggested, Gorton had little choice but to act in such a manner that would allow for the greatest degree of flexibility. And though the review envisaged a situation whereby Australia would not necessarily have forces overseas continuously but instead be "prepared to have available forces that could, if needs be, be deployed to South-East Asia when required,"[347] Point 181 advised that in the short-term Australia had "little option but to continue to present the forward defence posture." This was due to the fact that Australia was so heavily committed in Vietnam and also to the stationing of forces in Malaysia and Singapore.[348]

This prevented him from acting in a more decisive fashion in his first year as prime minister. For the rest of 1968 Gorton's attempt to not take any extreme position

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[345] The Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy, 1968, Report by Defence Committee, Canberra, 22 August 1968, 306/1968, in *Australia and the United Kingdom, 1960-1975,* edited by SR Ashton, Carl Bridge and Stuart Ward, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, p. 287.
[346] Submission No. 306 – The Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy, 1968, Cabinet Decision No. 762, Canberra, 19 November and 4 December 1968, in ibid., p. 291.
[347] The Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy, 1968, op. cit., p. 287.
[348] Ibid.

manifested itself in continued support of Johnson's de-escalation of the Vietnam conflict, even if he was not being consulted on it, while he considered what a more self-reliant foreign policy might look like in practice. There was arguably very little he could do in 1968 other than employ the Liberal party rhetoric of the past in relation to ANZUS and the American alliance, continue to support America in its military engagement in Vietnam – whatever developments took place there - and hope that those future developments, along with the certainty of knowing who would succeed Johnson as President, might provide a more certain foundation on which he could formulate and articulate a more concrete Australian foreign policy.

Gorton failed to do this convincingly, however, and in failing to do so demonstrated the lack of clarity surrounding ANZUS. When pressed as to the applicability of the treaty to Australian troops stationed in Malaysia-Singapore at a press conference outside Blair House in May 1968, Gorton only managed the following response: "I think it applies in certain defined areas. But I would want to check this with the External Affairs people before I was sure that that was correct. But by and large, I think it has been, what shall I say – I cannot think of the exact words – a matter – never spelled out whether it applied in Malaysia and Singapore area or not."[349] Whitlam seized the opportunity to criticise Gorton with an assertion that reflected the truth of the situation: the government had been "thrown into disarray by the sudden and spectacular collapse of policies and slogans which have been their stock in trade for a decade."[350]

Gorton continued to support Johnson in November of that year, even after he announced the complete cessation of bombing without consulting with or informing the Australian government. In a somewhat vague statement to the Parliament on 5 November 1968, Gorton stated that the Americans had shared information with the Australian government that gave him confidence that America was correct in forming its judgment that North Vietnam was sufficiently reducing its military activity as a result of the reduction in American bombing, and noted that he sincerely hoped that America would be "proved right by future

[349] Gorton in Curran, *Unholy Fury,* op. cit., p. 94.
[350] Canberra Times, 5 June 1968 in ibid., p. 95.

events."[351] Gorton's statement illustrated the extent to which he was bound by the legacy of previous Australian Liberal governments regarding America and ANZUS as being the basis of Australian Cold War defence policy. Though he personally may have wanted to steer Australia on a more self-reliant course, for now he had little option but to continue to try to convince the public that America was consulting Australia on important defence policy in Southeast Asia, and hope – somewhat vaguely – future developments in Vietnam would favour America and its allies.

The limits of forward defence: Australia's commitment to Malaysia and Singapore

Uncertainty over the future of American involvement in Southeast Asia compounded the already significant problem of Britain's decision to accelerate and complete its withdrawal East of Suez by 1971. The problem for Gorton was twofold: firstly, Australia would now be without the protection of Britain in Southeast Asia from 1971 onward, much sooner than previous Australian governments had anticipated; secondly, in the aftermath of Johnson's 31 March announcements, the Australian government would have to confirm whether it would maintain its forward defence posture by keeping troops in Malaysia and Singapore, knowing full well that Britain was about to withdraw from the region and that America's commitment to remain was at best uncertain and at worst unlikely. This would leave Australian troops far from Australian shores in Southeast Asia and without the support of Australia's powerful friends, a situation Gorton was loath to accept. Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew articulated Gorton's problem: "Australia, he said, had been prepared to take on the role of 'Deputy Sheriff' where either the USA or Britain operated as Sheriff. But when Britain and the United States had retreated from Asia to their own respective bailiwicks, would Australia care to be promoted to the responsibilities of Sheriff?"[352]

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[351] Vietnam: Ministerial Statement, from the 'Parliamentary Debates', 5 November 1968, Gorton Papers, Box 5, MS 7984, NLA.
[352] Bell, *Dependent Ally,* op. cit., p. 87.

Even before Britain announced its accelerated withdrawal the decision as to whether Australia should maintain troops in Malaysia and Singapore had been a vexed one. In October 1967 Hasluck had communicated to Washington that the government was "still examining questions that will arise if any proposal is made for a defence arrangement with us" in relation to maintaining a presence in Malaysia and Singapore, and that a key consideration for Australia was the need to "keep open our options for the future." [353] And in conversations he had had with Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, Hasluck had stated that the key question was whether the ANZUS commitment would apply to Australian troops stationed in Malaysia and Singapore after the British had withdrawn. Any such confirmation of ANZUS applicability was not forthcoming from McNamara.[354]

Gorton inherited this problem and found himself in a position in which he had to make a major policy decision in the context of even greater uncertainty. Adding to the uncertainty surrounding to America's continuing commitment to the region was that, as Peter Edwards has shown, by 1968 many of the potential 'dominoes' of the early 1960s such as Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore had become more secure and, from Washington's perspective, the replacement of Sukarno by Suharto as president of Indonesia, the end to Confrontation and the elimination of the Indonesian Communist Party meant a transformation in regional politics.[355] Such a shift made it less likely that America would commit to the region and the ANZUS Treaty. Defence Minister Fairhall admitted that "the United States position is quite vital to any consideration of what

[353] Memorandum on the Defence of Malaysia by the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Washington, October 9, 1967, attached to Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Warnke) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler), Document Number I36036/67, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* Johnson Administration, 1964-1968, Volume XXVII, Mainland Southeast Asia; Regional Affairs; Australia, New Zealand, the United States: ANZUS and the Defence of Southeast Asia, pp. 363-364.

[354] Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara**,** Washington, November 8, 1967, Document Number JCSM-614-67, ibid., pp. 368-371.

[355] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 191.

we are likely to do and what we should do in the South Pacific area," and as Barclay had it, "the Government quite obviously did not know what the United States position was going to be. Nor was it apparently capable of adopting a definite stance in the absence of such knowledge."[356]

This was the crux of the issue for Gorton: not wanting to leave Australian troops stranded in Southeast Asia as they had been when Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942, Gorton wanted a guarantee from America that ANZUS applied to Australian troops in the region and that America would come to Australia's assistance in a crisis. But with America slowly withdrawing from the region and calling on its allies to take over more of the burden of regional defence – especially after the enunciation of the Nixon Doctrine - such guarantees would not be forthcoming. Indeed, though Johnson had been made aware of Gorton's reluctance to make a commitment to Malaysia-Singapore without guarantees before the prime minister's visit to Washington in 1968, he had been advised to adhere to the American government's previous line that "we think a continued Australian military presence would be a valuable stabilising factor; we realise questions about the application of ANZUS might arise in connection with such deployments; we would like to stay in close consultation about the matter; but we cannot give a blanket guarantee."[357]

Not surprisingly, the issue dominated talks between Gorton and Johnson during their meeting on 27 May 1968, with Gorton demonstrating a reluctance to make a firm commitment beyond 1971. As it had been in meetings between Australian prime ministers and American presidents since 1951, the crucial ANZUS guarantee was on the forefront of Gorton's mind and drove his discussions with Johnson: caught between the desire to maintain a relationship with America as a powerful ally on the one hand and the reality of the limits of what Australia could provide without any great certainty as to the protection that America would in fact

[356] Barclay, *Friends in High Places*, op. cit., p. 168.
[357] Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Subject: Visit of Australian Prime Minister Gorton May 27-28, Washington, 25 May 1968, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* Johnson Administration, 1964-1968, op. cit., p. 398.

provide, Gorton agonised over the decision as to whether commit to Malaysia and Singapore after the British withdrawal. Gorton's primary concern was the open-endedness of any commitment he might make to keep Australian troops in Malaysia and Singapore, especially without a concrete guarantee from Washington that ANZUS would apply. According to the Memorandum of Conversation, Gorton "wondered if in the event of a serious contingency, such as 'Indonesia going round the bend again,' Australian ground units might not be 'out on a limb' without United States backing under ANZUS such as was worked out in 1963 during confrontation with Indonesia."[358]

Though Gorton "foresaw no great difficulty in maintaining Australian forces to 1971," he questioned the role a modest Australian ground contingent would perform, pointing to the fact that Australian ground units could be deployed to the SEATO area from Australia in about the same time as Malaysia and Singapore.[359] It was also the 'more if needed' aspect that was part of the problem that faced Gorton. Also referred to in the Memorandum of Conversation was the fact that Gorton "said that the U.K. has manned much of the logistic network in the region and that if Australia is to contribute significantly more to logistic arrangements after 1971, many more Australian troops will be needed to maintain a continuing level of operational effectiveness."[360] Gorton did not want Australia to be called on to increase its commitment, and "wondered why Malaysia/Singapore couldn't assume greater responsibility for the logistics."[361]

Despite Gorton's misgivings, America remained firm in its call for Australia to maintain a presence in Malaysia and Singapore after 1971, especially considering 1968 was an election year and the Johnson administration feared the domestic implications of Australia not committing to the region. In a meeting between Gorton and American Secretary of Defence Clark Clifford on 29 May 1968, Clifford said that while the American public had been willing to support the current level

[358] Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: Future Australian Role in Malaysia/Singapore Security, Washington, 27 May 1968, ibid., pp.405-406.
[359] Ibid., p. 405.
[360] Ibid., p. 410
[361] Ibid.

of American involvement in Vietnam, it would not accept "broadening our responsibility in the area. In particular, it would be very difficult for the American public to understand a withdrawal from the area – such as a pullback from Malaysia and Singapore by any of our allies – who actually are closer to the area than we are."[362] Clifford feared that "they would ask: If Southeast Asia is not important to our allies, why should it be to us?"[363] America was leaning on Australia to contribute more to a joint presence in Southeast Asia as it would enable the Johnson administration to maintain public support for America's presence in the region. As Clifford stated, "the presence of some Australian forces in this area is significant in U.S. public willingness to remain in Southeast Asia."[364] Accordingly, Gorton faced the challenge of not overcommitting Australian troops to Malaysia-Singapore while satisfying an ally that would not give guarantees as to its intention to protect those troops in a time of crisis.

Gorton eventually agreed to America's requests that Australia maintain ground troops in Malaysia-Singapore after the British withdrawal. After a lengthy address to the House of Representatives on 25 February 1969 about the implications of Britain's withdrawal from Singapore and the fact that "an era had ended,"[365] Gorton announced that the government was "prepared to maintain and (is) planning to maintain forces of all arms in that area after the British withdrawal – without setting any specific terminal date."[366] Though undoubtedly hesitant to make such a commitment, Gorton struggled to come up with any alternative. Instead, at least publically, he fell back on the rhetoric of the American alliance and defence co-operation. Rejecting any consideration of a complete Australian withdrawal along with the British, Gorton stated that such a move would be "contrary to our historical actions in Korea, in Vietnam and in the region of which

[362] Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: Visit of Australian Prime Minister, John G. Gorton, Washington, 29 May 1968, Document Number I-22926/68, ibid., p. 416.
[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid., p. 420.
[365] Defence: Ministerial Statement, from the 'Parliamentary Debates', 25 February 1969, Gorton Papers, Box 6, MS 7984, NLA.
[366] Ibid.

I speak," as well as being "contrary to our future interests."[367] And though such an approach may have been more in line with his own way of thinking, he also rejected the possibility of withdrawing Australian forces but providing Malaysia-Singapore an assurance that Australia retained an interest in their military security, stating that the action of maintaining some ground presence in the area would speak louder than a general assurance: "it is much easier to despatch ground forces to an area if, in that area, there is a securely held base … And of course, it is much easier for a country which is to be assisted to believe that it will be assisted if forces from the country which may provide such help are there and are visible."[368]

In an attempt to make the commitment more palatable to himself and the Australian public, Gorton made it clear that, though he was committing Australian troops to Malaysia-Singapore, he was not relinquishing any governmental control over the way in which they were deployed. Indeed, the latter half of Gorton's 25 February speech outlined the conditions under which Australian forces would remain and the exact nature of the role they would play: they would remain in the region only so long as their presence was actively desired by the governments of the countries in which they were stationed and were not to be used for the maintenance of internal civil law and order. Also, their presence and military cooperation with Malaysia-Singapore was not intended to be directed against any other country in the region; rather, "by helping to strengthen the defence of one part of the region it is hoped that they will indirectly contribute to the stability of the whole."[369]

Gorton also made it clear that troops would not be stationed in the region to replace the indigenous forces or to take over their defence responsibility. Instead, the value of the Australian presence would be in "helping to build the indigenous defence capability of both Malaysia and Singapore" and providing additional security "while that indigenous defence capacity is built up", and making it "more

[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid.

possible for Malaysian troops to be assigned to other parts of Malaysia should the Malaysian Government so desire."[370]

Gorton tried to define the nature of the conflict he envisaged Australian troops being used to combat, namely externally promoted Southeast Asian insurgency that would ultimately expose the region to the threat of communism, and which was beyond the capacity of the forces of Malaysia and Singapore to handle.[371] He was careful, however, to not commit Australia to taking on full responsibility for combatting such threats. Indeed, Gorton envisaged and provided for the possibility of future circumstances in which Australia would have to call on the support of allies outside the region. As Gorton put it to the House of Representatives,

> *at some time in the future it could be possible that a situation might arise when the scale of such subversion and infiltration from outside – or some other organised threat to the region at present unforeseen – could be such that Australian resources alone would be insufficient to support successfully the forces of Malaysia and Singapore. If such a situation should arise we would have to look to the support of allies outside the region and the scale of Australia's continued effort would in that case have to be decided in the light of all the circumstances that then prevail.*[372]

In sum, Gorton chose to commit troops to Malaysia-Singapore in response to the pressure placed on Australia by its American ally to maintain a presence in Southeast Asia and in exchange for the elusive ANZUS guarantees, but did so in a manner that might allow him to, as he put it, create a situation whereby the decision to use Australian troops would be "always a matter for … the Australian Government," and one that would be "made in light of our judgment of all the

[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Ibid.

circumstances at any given time."[373] Indeed, as he said on 30 June 1969, "we are not giving blank cheques for the use of Australian youth for others. Our forces must be under our control."[374] Notwithstanding Gorton's attempts to control the circumstances in which Australian troops in Malaysia-Singapore might be deployed, however, his decision to commit them to the region signified Gorton's inability to break away from the traditional belief in the need to make concessions so as to ensure American protection in Southeast Asia. It was the price Gorton believed he needed to pay to ensure such protection for Australia from its great and powerful friend.

This was most clearly evident when, having committed Australian troops to Malaysia-Singapore, Gorton fell back yet again on the practice of seeking the usual security guarantees from new American president Richard Nixon during his May 1969 visit to Washington. Such guarantees were not forthcoming: though Gorton may have reported to Parliament that any grounds for questioning the certainty of ANZUS should "surely now be removed" after his meetings with the president, and that Nixon and the new Administration had "strongly underlined the importance and significance which they attach to the treaty," [375] no specific assurances had been given, and Nixon had not in fact removed any grounds for questioning the certainty of its application. The difficulties Gorton would have in getting a firm guarantee from the new president had been foreshadowed by Keith Waller who, as ambassador to America, had advised the Australian government on 20 March 1969 that Nixon had not yet "sketched out any new outlines of American policy," and that, after two months in office, "both the man and his policies still have a somewhat enigmatic quality."[376] Indeed, the memorandum provided to Nixon in preparation for Gorton's visit advised him to "assure him that, as Australia's principal ally in the Pacific, we would of course stand ready to

[373] Ibid.
[374] Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton, Great Synagogue Luncheon, Sydney, NSW, 30 June 1969, Gorton Papers, Box 6, MS 7984, NLA.
[375] Prime Minister's Visit to the United States of America: Ministerial Statement, from the 'Parliamentary Debates', 15 May 1969, Gorton Papers, Box 6, MS 7984, NLA.
[376] Waller, Extract from Washington Telegram 1606 of 20 March 1969, Part 10, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

consult fully and promptly on what support we might give," but also to tell him that "we cannot know what those circumstances might be and, therefore, cannot now make precise decisions."[377] On the very topic of ANZUS applicability, Nixon was advised to "avoid raising the question of the specific applicability of ANZUS to Australian forces in Malaysia/Singapore."[378]

Gorton's reassurances to the Australian public on his return that American assistance would be "forthcoming either under the ANZUS Treaty or in some other way"[379] and that Australia and America's approach to Vietnam and Southeast Asia was proceeding as it had in the past were "rudely contradicted" only three weeks later when Nixon announced the first unilateral withdrawal of 25,000 troops.[380] As Murphy has demonstrated, "informed opinion was that the government had been caught unaware again, unable to recognise the American shift from escalation to de-escalation."[381] As Bruce Grant commented in *The Age,* "the government maintains the public position that nothing has changed, a position so fanciful that it is impossible to contest seriously."[382]

Gorton did, however, at least suggest that there might be scope for change in approach for foreign policy the future. He explained any uncertainty as to the application of ANZUS by referring generally to the general uncertainty of the future, and in relation to the application of the treaty to Australian troops stationed in Malaysia-Singapore, simply stated that "it would be misleading of me to say that this was so in all the variety of hypothetical situations which might arise, for while the Treaty is quite specific as to certain areas it is not specific about

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[377] Memorandum for the President, Subject: Your Meeting with the Prime Minister of Australia, 29 April 1969, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, VIP Visits, Box 910. I am grateful to James Curran for providing this document.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Prime Minister's Visit to the United States of America: Ministerial Statement, from the 'Parliamentary Debates', 15 May 1969, Gorton Papers, Box 6, MS 7984, NLA.
[380] Murphy, *Harvest of Fear,* op. cit., p. 205.
[381] Ibid., p. 206.
[382] Bruce Grant in *The Age,* 10 June 1969, ibid.

those of which I now speak."[383] Charting Australia's foreign policy movements in the context of change and uncertainty was not an easy task. Indeed, in his report to the House of Representatives on his May 1969 visit to Washington, Gorton placed particular emphasis on the fact that he and Nixon had made an arrangement for direct communication in what he referred to as "matters of concern to both our countries during the formative stages of policy and prior to major policy announcements."[384] Gorton's reference to both countries being in the 'formative' stages of policy and the fact he envisaged both countries might be making 'major policy announcements' demonstrates the extent to which Gorton was dealing with a new set of circumstances in 1969.

Gorton's troop commitment to Malaysia-Singapore and subsequent efforts to seek further ANZUS guarantees did not demonstrate any sort of clean break with past foreign policy or clear articulation of new policy in light of the major geopolitical changes in the region. Though he may well have wanted to, the Malaysia-Singapore commitment demonstrated Gorton's inability to break away from the forward defence stance that previous Liberal governments had adhered to as one of the key features of Australian defence policy. Trying to reconcile the perhaps irreconcilable, Gorton was caught between a number of competing interests. Personally, he was unwilling to create a commitment that might see Australian soldiers isolated on foreign shores at some point in the future, a fear that was exacerbated by Britain's impending withdrawal from the region. But the legacy of previous Liberal governments and their almost obsessive adherence to the policy of forward defence and great power relations, along with his own beliefs in the value of such relations after his experiences in the World War Two era, prevented Gorton from refusing American overtures to contribute to Southeast Asian security by way of committing troops to Malaysia-Singapore and start to chart Australian foreign policy on a new course.

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[383] Prime Minister's Visit to the United States of America: Ministerial Statement, from the 'Parliamentary Debates', 15 May 1969, Gorton Papers, Box 6, MS 7984, NLA.
[384] Ibid.

The Nixon Doctrine and the articulation of a new Australian defence policy

Though Gorton's decision to maintain a ground force in Malaysia-Singapore pleased the Nixon administration and set relations between the prime minister and president on a positive course, Australia's Cold War defence policy of maintaining a close relationship with an America that was fully engaged in Southeast Asia was dealt a major blow when Nixon announced the Guam Doctrine in July 1969. As Curran put it, the announcement of America's departure not long after Britain's created a "gaping defence void" that looked "all the more perilous. A sense of double desertion rocked the foreign policy firmament."[385] As well as signalling his intention to avoid direct involvement in Southeast Asian conflicts, Nixon also called on its allies in the region to take on a greater degree of responsibility for their own defence. As Nixon stated in his report to Congress in February 1970, in cases involving aggression (other than nuclear), "we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defence."[386]

Nixon's announcement meant that America was now even less likely to honour ANZUS: Nixon stated that "we will view new commitments in the light of a careful assessment of our own national interests,"[387] and that, "while we have established general guidelines on American responses to Asian conflicts, in practice the specific circumstances of each case require careful study. Even with careful planning, we will always have to consider a basic and delicate choice."[388] Nixon's announcement caught Australia by surprise: only months before Nixon's July speech in Guam, Gorton had returned from Washington giving the view that the Nixon administration had rejected isolationism and that Australia could expect no major changes in American policy in Southeast Asia.[389] Accordingly, "the

[385] Curran, *Unholy Fury*, op. cit., p 107.
[386] Richard Nixon, *US Foreign Policy for the 1970s: A New Strategy for Peace:* A Report to Congress, 18 February 1970, in Harper, "Australia and the United States," op. cit., pp. 240.
[387] Ibid., p. 239.
[388] Ibid., p. 242.
[389] This is understandable considering that Nixon had reassured Gorton that America would stand by its ANZUS obligations in the future: as recorded in

bluntness of Mr Nixon's tour speeches has come as a surprise to Australian newspapers."[390] This created another crisis for Gorton, who – having just committed Australian troops to Malaysia-Singapore - was left to begin the process of reassessing ANZUS, the likelihood of American support and, indeed, the very basis and future of Australia's defence policy.

Gorton's reassessment of the American alliance after the enunciation of the Nixon Doctrine resulted neither in the abandonment of ANZUS as the basis for Australian foreign policy nor the strict adherence to it. Rather, Gorton sought to chart a middle course between the two extremes: while his personal and political background had instilled in him a sense of the benefits to be gained by maintaining a strong relationship with great power allies, he also appreciated that America's new approach to its involvement in the Pacific would require Australia to take on more responsibility for its own foreign and defence policy. In a speech made in Adelaide in 14 October 1969 Gorton stated that "we do need, now that Britain is withdrawing from our North, now that the United States is taking more economic and less military interest in areas such as Malaysia/Singapore to our North, we do need in that situation to help ourselves above all."[391] Gorton's task was to now clearly articulate how this was to be done in practice.

The central focus of governmental discussion surrounding future Australian foreign policy centred around the need to maintain relations with America, and much of the discussion focussed on how this could be done by trying to demonstrate that Australia was indeed following the Nixon Doctrine and taking on a greater level of responsibility for its own defence. In his address to the

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Australian government notes on Gorton's meetings with Nixon dated 5 July 1969 (author unknown), "ANZUS, with its provisions for mutual aid in developing our individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack, Mr. Nixon said, is of great importance to both our countries. He pointed out that no (repeat) no potential aggressor should be under the illusion that any member of ANZUS stands alone in the Pacific area." ("Nixon-Gorton Talks Produce 'Close Understanding,'" Government Notes, Part 10, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.)

[390] Inward Cablegram from Australian Embassy, Washington, "President's Tour of Asia, 29 July 1969, Part 10, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

[391] Public Meeting, Town Hall, Adelaide SA, Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton, 14 October 1969, Gorton Papers, Box 6, MS 7984, NLA.

American-Association in New York in September 1969, newly appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs Gordon Freeth outlined the role Australia was playing in Asia and stated that "we fully agree with President Nixon's view that a valuable contribution can be made to the progress of the region by co-operation and mutual help among the countries in it."[392] Freeth continued, stating that Australians had "no quarrel" with the fact that Nixon had emphasised that "the security of countries in the region must primarily be a matter for themselves," and that "in order to avoid having American troops fighting in future wars in Asia it may well be necessary to intensify our current effort towards developing the self-reliance of the countries in the region."[393]

Such an approach lacked substance in that it simply acknowledged Australia's acceptance of the Nixon Doctrine, rather than outlining what assuming greater responsibility might look like in practice, and was criticised in the media. On 5 March 1970 *The Age* suggested that Cabinet had adopted the view that "foreign policy is best ignored for as long as possible," and that, surrounded by "imponderables" Cabinet had made the decision to "sit tight and wait for things to sort themselves out."[394] As stated in an editorial appearing in *The Australian* on 19 June 1969, the Nixon Doctrine was "the most scathing indictment of Australian foreign policy in recent times, as it illustrated "the simple, sad truth" that "Australia lacks any real concept of an independent role in international affairs and is unable to talk frankly and freely even with her closest friends."[395] Indeed, Freeth stated in the same address that, while he hoped that neither America nor Australia would be drawn into conflicts like Vietnam in the future, "we have not ourselves believed however that any of us can entirely rule out the possibility that

[392] "Address to American-Australian Association, New York, on 18th September, 1969, By the Minister for External Affairs, Mr Gordon Freeth, MP," Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 19 September 1969, Part 10, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Author unknown, "Foreign Policy in Suspense," published on 5 March 1970 in *The Age*, Part 11, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[395] Author Unknown, "Double talk reaches a Dead End", published in *The Australian* on 19 June 1969, Part 10, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

we may in future have to give military help; and our commitment to maintain forces in Malaysia and Singapore demonstrates this."[396]

Then Minister for External Affairs, William McMahon, articulated an even less imaginative approach to the issue of how Australia should respond to the Nixon Doctrine. Demonstrating an unwillingness or inability to deviate from the accepted truths of the Cold War view of the world, at an ASPAC meeting on 18 June 1970, McMahon stated that divisions amongst the American public in relation to America's involvement in Vietnam and foreign policy were "a passing phase," that the United States' strategic interest in Asia was permanent, and that the competition and ideological difference between the United States, the Soviet Union, and Communist China "cannot be wished away."[397] As had Freeth had, McMahon advocated continued involvement in Asia as the best means of preventing America from withdrawing from the region, stating at the ASPAC meeting that Australia should do all it can to avoid America retreating into isolationism. According to McMahon, "one way we can do this is to emphasise the direct and practical implication of the Nixon Doctrine; in particular the emphasis given by the United States to the need for 'the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defence.'"[398] What the Gorton government failed to articulate was a more concrete plan for how Australia would actually take on more responsibility for its own foreign and defence policy.

In the case of Vietnam, Gorton was unable to extricate Australian forces from the most pressing issue of the time: America's inevitable withdrawal from Vietnam. More than anything, this issue demonstrated the difficulty Gorton and his government faced in having to transition away from a foreign policy that had relied so heavily on ANZUS and America's ongoing commitment to Vietnam.

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[396] Address to American-Australian Association, New York, on 18th September, 1969, by the Minister for External Affairs, Mr Gordon Freeth, Part 10, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[397] Address to ASPAC on 18 June 1970, Inward Savingram No, 13/70, Department of External Affairs, Part 11, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[398] Ibid.

Gorton initially insisted that any withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam would have to be phased into a planned American withdrawal, as there was "nothing more calculated to damage Australia's future security" [399] than withdrawing one battalion at a time, but also refused to consider any unilateral withdrawal, stating that this would amount to a betrayal of Australia's allies. As Gorton asked rhetorically in a speech during the 1969 Federal election, "what kind of effect do you think this would have on the United States and on the ANZUS alliance?"[400] Even after America had signalled its intention to take a step back from Southeast Asia and withdraw its troops from Vietnam, the fear of upsetting a great power ally loomed large in Gorton's mind.

Here lay the basis of another problem that frustrated Gorton's ability to manoeuvre freely in relation to the American alliance. Though those in the Labor Party, including its new leader Whitlam, could denounce the Liberal government's vacillations and divisions while saying little about the policies of a future Labor government, Gorton could not. He may have wanted to find a way out of the Australian commitment to Vietnam, but – given the manner in which he had succeeded Holt and become prime minister – did not enjoy the support or authority to announce such radical shifts in policy. This was especially the case given that for so long to Liberal government had held ANZUS and the American-alliance as the fundamental basis of Australian foreign policy, and had expended so much time and energy to create a set of circumstances that would ensure that Washington honoured the treaty. According to Murphy, one legacy of the stability of conservative foreign policy over the last two decades – stability that Gorton now did not have – had been "was that there was no mechanism within the Liberal Party for rethinking policy. Decisions had been centralised in a few hands and reflected by the indolent consensus amongst the conservatives."[401]

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[399] Address to American-Australian Association, New York, on 18th September, 1969, by the Minister for External Affairs, Mr Gordon Freeth, Part 10, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[400] Ibid.
[401] Murphy, Harvest of Fear, op. cit., p. 203.

At the same time Gorton did not want to damage the alliance relationship with America or lose electoral preferences from the Democratic Labour Party, a party that, from its inception in 1955, had been staunchly anti-communist. The Democratic Labour Party had influenced Liberal policy on domestic and foreign affairs throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, especially on matters that could be interpreted as weakness towards communism, and this was particularly the case after the 1969 election in which a 7.1 per cent swing in voting to Labor saw the Liberal government gain less than 50 per cent of the two-party preferred vote and have its majority reduced from 39 to seven seats.[402] The Liberal party was effectively saved by Democratic Labour Party preferences, meaning that the government's freedom of manoeuvre was constrained by a party with about 10 per cent of the vote.[403] There were no real winners from the 1969 election, and the collapse in government support "left Gorton prey to mutinous forces within the Liberal Party."[404] This had the effect of further restricting his ability to introduce concrete foreign policy changes, especially given the fact that he had already been regarded as most unlikely candidate for the prime ministership, and had not enjoyed a strong level of support since replacing Holt. Indeed, he only "survived uneasily"[405] as prime minister from the 1969 election until 1971 when he was replaced by McMahon.

Another problem Gorton faced was the declining support in Australia for the war in Vietnam. In August 1969, a public opinion poll indicated that, for the first time, more Australians wanted the government to withdraw troops from Vietnam than wanted them to remain.[406] While sections of the anti-war movement become more radical and violent, moderate protesters began to direct their attention to the war itself. Protesters continued to denounce the use of napalm specifically, and the media contingent in Vietnam devoted a great deal of attention to real and alleged atrocities.[407] The number of Australian casualties caused by mines from

[402] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 216.
[403] Ibid., pp. 216-217.
[404] Strangio, "Instability, 1966-82," op. cit., p. 143.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War,* op. cit., p. 191.
[407] Ibid., p. 200.

the ill-conceived Dat Do minefield turned many against the war too, and many were concerned to hear that Australians were being used in American-led operations outside the Phuoc Tuy province.

The issue of conscription was arguably the greatest source of dissent, especially as the impact of the National Service Act became more widespread. A number of objectors were turned into heroes by anti-conscription groups, including John Zarb, who served ten months in Pentridge Prison in Melbourne and Simon Townsend, who was sentenced by a court-martial to detention, and then solitary confinement at Holsworthy army base in Sydney. His treatment – being restricted to a diet of bread and water, deprived of a mattress, and woken at half-hourly intervals during the night – was widely publicised and denounced.[408] The breaking of the My-Lai massacre story in November 1969, other news reports about the true extent of America's incursions into supposedly neutral Laos and Cambodia and the American sponsored coup against the Cambodian government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in May 1970 culminated in violent protests on several university campuses in America, including Kent State in Ohio, where National Guardsmen opened fire on a student protest without orders and without warning, killing four demonstrators.

Such events increased the intensity of anti-war protests and led to the American and Australian governments losing the middle ground of political opinion.[409] The decline in support for the war and emergence of greater dissent from wider sections of the community also made it hard for the Liberal government to take a firm stance on foreign policy, increasing the public perception of policy paralysis and dither. According to Murphy, politicians were reluctant to speak on the war at public meetings, and that "the enthusiasm to publically argue the case, evident in 1965 and 1966, had evaporated by the late 1960s."[410] Gorton was caught in the middle of this: though he may have wanted to challenge the strict adherence to

[408] Ibid., pp. 200-201.
[409] Ibid., p. 224.
[410] Murphy, *Harvest of Fear,* op. cit., p. 204.

forward defence as a foreign policy, he was prevented from doing so with any great authority given his own lack of standing within his own party.

Indeed, Gorton remained incapable of making any firm announcements about an Australian withdrawal. In a response to a question from Labor's Jim Cairns about any planned Australian withdrawals from Vietnam on 12 August 1969, Gorton stated

> *I do not believe that there is any long term precise or firm programme for the disengagement of Australian troops, of United States troops, but that will depend on circumstances in the future … I believe that unless and until there is continued withdrawal of United States troops and a programme for that which depends upon the working out of these other conditions, then it is premature to talk in terms of Australian troops. What will be necessary, of course, is that if – and this is a big 'if' – there is to be on the part of the United States a specific, definite and drawn-out plan for withdrawal, then Australian troops would need to be phased into that plan.*[411]

Making such general statements about remaining in Vietnam as long as America did little to suggest to the public that Gorton had a clear and practical plan for a new and more self-reliant foreign policy in the wake of the Nixon Doctrine.

There was little that Gorton could do. As had been the case in relation to Gorton's management of the alliance while Johnson was president, it the uncertainty of the new situation Gorton had to manage and the internal pressures he faced that thwarted his ability to lay down a clear plan as to how Australia might adopt a more self-reliant foreign policy. As Gorton admitted to Parliament on 22 April 1970,

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[411] Text of Reply Given by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton, to Question Asked in the House of Representatives by Dr J. F. Cairns, 12 August 1969, Gorton Papers, Box 6, MS 7984, NLA.

> *should the progress of pacification and Vietnamisation succeed as the President hopes and believes that it will, then at some stage during the 12-month period, we will consider phasing additional troops into the planned withdrawal. But the future situation is so uncertain and the future strategical situation so unpredictable that it is impossible to be any more definite than this.*[412]

The fact that Gorton was never consulted about being phased into any American withdrawal and eventually decided to withdraw troops not as part of but in response to the American withdrawal demonstrated the extent to which Australia's involvement in Vietnam had failed to bring about the kind of consultation that Australia sought. Indeed, the task of orchestrating a withdrawal from Vietnam was not made any easier by Nixon's refusal to share information with many of his closest advisers, let alone Gorton and the Australian government. Even during the presidential election campaign in 1968, Nixon had played his card close to his chest: in October 1968 he stated that "as long as the (peace) negotiations in Paris hold out any reasonable hope of success, I will not indicate what I might do if those negotiations fail because that will ensure that they do fail."[413]

As academic Frank Knopfelmacher noted in his article "Why America is Not Capable of Defending Anyone", published on 5 May 1971, "Nixon has, deliberately, adopted a policy of calculated unpredictability. Everybody is kept guessing what the giant will do."[414] This placed severe restrictions on what Gorton could do as prime minister in the realm of foreign policy, and continued to do so throughout the withdrawal process. Gorton had little option but to react to Nixon's announcements as they were made, and as a result appeared to be entirely

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[412] Vietnam (Ministerial Statement), *From the 'Parliamentary Debates,'* 22 April 1970, Gorton Papers, Box 6, MS 7984, NLA.
[413] Richard Nixon, quoted in Harper, "Australia and the United States," op. cit., p. 301.
[414] Frank Knopfelmacher, "Why America is Not Capable of Defending Anyone," published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 5 May 1971, Part 12, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

beholden to Washington and lacking in any proactive action in relation to the withdrawal of Australian troops.

Forward Defence, Fortress Australia, or Forward Fortress?

The impact of Gorton's lack of authority in his position as prime minister was most evident in the debate surrounding continental versus forward defence. As prime minister, Gorton articulated neither a clear plan for an Australian withdrawal from Vietnam nor a detailed blueprint for Australian foreign and defence policy in the context of the Nixon Doctrine. His position as leader of a government that for so long had regarded a close relationship with America as the cornerstone of Australian foreign policy and the domestic pressures he faced prevented him from doing so, even if privately he had wanted to. He did in truth appreciate the limits of ANZUS and the American alliance and desire a more self-reliant foreign policy. Indeed, Gorton was moving towards a policy of 'fortress Australia,' which envisaged troops being posted overseas only for specific purposes, rather than permanently stationed in accordance with the policy of forward defence.[415]

When he had tried to voice concerns about the validity of forward defence and the need for a new foreign policy, his views were "bitterly opposed" by "influential ministers" such as Hasluck and Fairhall, who were strong public advocates of forward defence and resistant to change, and MacMahon, whose "manifest ambition … guaranteed that he opposed Gorton on this, as well as almost everything else."[416] This had been the case since early 1968 when Gorton became prime minister. In May of that year there were reports of the distress that had been caused when Gorton challenged forward defence as a government policy; and during a party debate on foreign policy in August, the result was a split between fortress Australia and forward defence views.[417] This did not mean that, as Party member Peter Howson noted in his diary at the time, "there is no policy

[415] Murphy, *Harvest of Fear,* op. cit., p. 203.
[416] Ibid., pp. 203-204.
[417] Ibid.

on external affairs at present;"[418] rather, it demonstrated the transition the party was going through in formulating a new foreign policy in response to a new set of circumstances, and the difficulty Gorton and his government was having in forming a consensus as the government's long-held-on-to Cold War foreign policy was falling apart.

After losing the prime ministership on 10 March 1971 and becoming Minister for Defence, Gorton set about discussing how he envisaged Australian foreign policy in the future. It would be a foreign policy for an Australia that would find itself in a new and more complex world in which Australia's relationships with other nations would no longer be defined by traditional Cold War allegiances and the politics of alliances, and in which established norms such as the validity of 'forward defence' would no longer be valid. In a speech made at the Imperial Services Club on 18 June 1971 Gorton discussed the term 'Fortress Australia', and in doing so began to articulate the basis of a more self-reliant foreign policy. Responding to claims that Fortress Australia was nothing but a retreat into isolationism, Gorton stated that, rather than simply advocating "retiring behind the moat of the oceans which surround us: there to wash our hands of responsibility for what happens outside our continental limits," it was the "realisation that any operations in areas outside Australia require that Australia itself should be a secure base, firmly defended, from which such operations can be mounted and sustained."[419]

Comparing Australia to Great Britain, which had been able to play a role in overthrowing European dictators Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler from a secure island base, Gorton called for a more multi-faceted approach to the defence of Australia, including maintaining an alliance with America, stationing troops abroad where necessary, and also bolstering Australia's own national security forces.[420] As Gorton wrote in an article appearing in *The Age* on 26 July 1971,

[418] Ibid., p. 204.
[419] Speech by the Minister for Defence, The Right Honourable J. G. Gorton, at the Annual Dinner of the Imperial Services Club, Sydney, 18 June 1971, Gorton Papers, Box 7, MS 7984, NLA.
[420] Ibid.

"increasingly we shall be required to take our own independent initiatives, to protect our interests and advance our security by our own actions." [421] Recognising that "Australia's position is changing in the world," Gorton highlighted the importance of making the implications of this clear to Australians and write that, "in seeking security, we need to look more to our own resources, our own energies, our own knowledge and judgment about the course of future events, and our own policies to meet new and developing situations."[422]

In making such comments Gorton demonstrated a realistic appreciation of the implications of the Nixon Doctrine for Australia's relationship with America and its broader impact on Australia's foreign policy. Though he did not officially call for it, the formation of such a foreign policy would necessitate a reassessment of the ANZUS Treaty, and the extent to which Australia could rely on America. Having lost the position as Minister of Defence in August 1971, Gorton began to reveal his real beliefs about the limitations of ANZUS. Though he acknowledged the important role America could play in the defence of Australia, and that "it is well and good to look at the ANZUS treaty and to say that this is important to Australia and America is a great ally"[423] he also stated that "it is equally necessary to say America is going to be less and less interested in this part of the world."[424] And during a speech to the American Association on 26 November 1971 he drew attention to the treaty's shortcomings, especially the fact that it applied only to attacks in the Pacific, required countries to act in accordance with their constitutional processes before acting on the terms of the treaty, and that it depended on the willingness of countries to honour it, something that might change over time.[425] Accordingly, ANZUS provided an important shield but, as he put it, "if we sit down behind that shield and do nothing then someday that shield

[421] John Gorton, "Defence," published in *The Age* on 26 July 1971, Gorton Papers Box 13 MS 7984, NLA.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Speech at the Deakin Electorate Committee by the Right Honourable J. G. Gorton, 20 Oct 1971, Gorton Papers, Box 7, MS 7984, NLA.
[424] Ibid.
[425] Mr Gorton, Guest Speaker at the Australia-American Association Dinner, 26 November 1971, Gorton Papers, Box 7, MS 7984, NLA.

may go – indeed we would be contributing to its going – and we would be left defenceless and ripe for the plucking."[426]

Realising that "if turmoil develops in the region to our north we should assume that there will be no United States involvement in that area,"[427] Gorton called for a new approach to formulating defence policy. In a speech on 2 September 1971 he acknowledged that for too long the Australian government had avoided assessing how it could best meet the new situation, and that for too long "we have been having arguments … as to our Defence Policy which have been based, upon the one hand somebody using the slogan saying 'we should have forward defence,' and on the other hand somebody using the slogan saying 'no we should have Fortress Australia.'"[428] Gorton now was advocating a middle ground between the two extremes. As he put it, "both of these concepts as put forward are quite wrong, I suggest to you, and quite ridiculous because there cannot be in the defence of any country any real division between the concept of keeping hostilities as far away as possible from our shores and the concept of having in our shores a base from which we can defend ourselves."[429]

Gorton continued, articulating the basis of a new foreign policy: one that blended a traditional forward defence posture with a greater emphasis on developing Australia's own defence capacity. As Gorton put it, "what we need is a base in Australia, as Britain was a base when Europe was twice overrun, a base in Australia able to be defended from Australia and able to mount forward action against any enemy in the region to which we belong." Gorton hoped that this would be "the basis of future defence discussions rather than sterile discussions of 'we must have Forward Defence.'" And defined real defence policy as creating the situation where Australia had "the capacity to look after our own continent

[426] Ibid.
[427] Speech at the Deakin Electorate Committee by the Right Honourable J. G. Gorton, 20 Oct 1971, Gorton Papers, Box 7, MS 7984, NLA.
[428] Transcript of Speech Given by RT. Hon. J. G. Gorton at the Lecture Evening of the Lodge Humanitas No 840 at the Masonic Centre of Victoria, 2 September 1971, Gorton Papers, Box 7, MS 7984, NLA.
[429] Ibid.

and a realization of the necessity to move beyond the bounds of our own continent to help those with whom we may be associated in this area."[430]

In this sense Gorton was responding to the implications of the Nixon Doctrine and in a more sophisticated sense than many of his colleagues, and laying the foundations of a future Australian defence policy. As Strangio put it, "Gorton had been more receptive to the quickening times."[431] In doing so he demonstrated a better understanding of what was needed in the future. Though the period between 1968 and 1971 was certainly characterised by ambivalences, doubts and hesitations, it was during this period that changes in the approach to the alliance were first made. Though the revolution may have occurred under Whitlam, it was during Gorton's time as prime minister that "the 'watershed' in policy was crossed, and the choice of future direction implicitly made, to be confirmed in Whitlam's time."[432] The foundations were being laid – even if somewhat inarticulately – for the revolution to take place.

Gorton's pronouncements on the limitations of ANZUS and Australia's need to adopt a more self-reliant foreign policy demonstrated two things. Firstly, they demonstrated the extent to which Gorton believed Australian could rely on America after the enunciation of the Nixon Doctrine. For Gorton, a relationship with America carried obvious benefits, but it was no substitute for Australia's own self-reliance. Indeed, it was a "bonus rather than a life insurance," as had been argued by Australian academic Frank Knopfelmacher.[433] Secondly, they demonstrated the extent to which Gorton's historical context undermined his ability to set Australian foreign policy on a path more in line with his own beliefs when prime minister. Though he may well have wanted to have set Australia on a more self-reliant path, he was not able to break away from the practice of looking to ANZUS and the American alliance that had been established by the actions of previous government since the signing of the treaty in 1951.

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[430] Ibid.
[431] Strangio, "Instability, 1966-82," op. cit., p. 142.
[432] Bell, *Dependent Ally,* op. cit., p. 88.
[433] Frank Knopfelmacher, "Why America is Not Capable of Defending Anyone," published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 5 May 1971, Part 12, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

Though a lack of decisiveness in the formation of Australian foreign policy can indeed be seen during Gorton's time as prime minister, this thesis has explained the reasons for it by properly placing his time as prime minister in the broader context of the Cold War and American-Australian relations. In this sense it has demonstrated that much previous scholarship [434] on the period has been somewhat narrow in its approach to Gorton's management of the alliance. Moreover, though the thesis has not denied Gorton's inability to decisively set Australian foreign policy on a new path, it has suggested that it was in fact during this period that the first steps towards the articulation and formulation of a more self-reliant foreign policy were taken. In this sense it has picked up on the arguments of Donald Horne, who saw the time between Menzies and Whitlam as more than just an interregnum, and built on the world of those historians and biographers [435] who have paid more attention to the nature of Gorton's management of the American alliance.

Since signing ANZUS in 1951, successive Liberal governments had placed having a strong relationship with America at the heart of Australian foreign policy. Fearing that America might disregard the treaty and ignore Australia in its time of need, those governments worked tirelessly to achieve a sense of alliance intimacy and cooperation between the two countries. Having been brought up on this diet of Cold War great power politics, Gorton was unable to completely break free from the habit of seeking assurances and guarantees as to ANZUS applicability during his time as prime minister, even as these guarantees appeared less and less likely to be forthcoming. Even though he may well have wanted to break free from reliance on great powers and follow a foreign policy that was more in keeping with his so-called 'new nationalism', his lack of standing in the conservative hierarchy and domestic political pressures prevented him from doing do.

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[434] Especially Camilleri, Millar, Philip Bell and Roger Bell and Harper, as referred to in Chapter One.

[435] Especially Edwards, Coral Bell, Barclay, Curran, Ward, Trengrove and Hancock, as referred to in Chapter One.

Notwithstanding this, the thesis has also demonstrated that Gorton was not a mere sycophant of America's and, to some extent at least, took the first steps to chart Australian foreign policy on a new and more self-reliant course. He may not have been able to translate his desire for greater independence into a concrete policy when he was prime minister, but he did appreciate the implications of the Nixon Doctrine and signalled the need for Australia to take on a more self-reliant foreign policy going forward. As Robert Duffield wrote in *The Australian* on 22 June 1971, four days after Gorton's address to the Imperial Services Club in which he had outlined his own understanding of the term Fortress Australia, "we have a new defence philosophy for Australia – a Forward Fortress policy."[436] Duffield recognised that Gorton might have only commenced the bringing about of a new defence posture for Australia, and noted that "'Forward Fortress' may never become a national catch-cry;" but he also recognised that Gorton had, "in planning now for a defence posture at least 10 years off," begun to base future foreign policy discussions on the premise that "we cannot and must not count on America or anyone else as a great protector."[437] Treating America's saving presence in an emergency as a bonus rather than a life insurance, Gorton recommended continuing the alliance with America, but avoided what Knopfelmacher described in as "wholly contemptible in its stupidity:" complete reliance on America as the basis of Australian foreign and defence policy.[438]

In properly analysing Gorton and his management of the alliance, the thesis has also provided an insight into the nature and consequences of Australia's relationship with America during the Cold War. The predicament in which Gorton and the Liberal party found itself from early 1968 to 1971 – the inability to form and announce foreign policy and project a future course for Australian foreign policy - was the price Australia paid for relying on a superpower for its own

[436] Robert Duffield, "Gorton's defence blueprint for a forward fortress," published on 22 June 1971 in *The Australian,* Gorton Papers, Box 13, MS 7984, NLA.
[437] Ibid.
[438] Frank Knopfelmacher, "Why America is Not Capable of Defending Anyone," published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 5 May 1971, Part 12, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

national security. Regardless of the fact that recent scholarship[439] has shown that, far from being reluctantly dragged into Vietnam by Washington, Australia played an active role in involving itself in the conflict to further its own foreign policy goals, the Australian government's problems began when Washington took steps to extricate itself from the conflict. Officials in Canberra had placed Australia alongside America in Vietnam in an attempt to strengthen the relationship between the two countries; now, Washington was withdrawing those American troops and Canberra was left to consider the implications for the future of Australian foreign policy.

As this thesis has shown, changing American policy in Vietnam significantly undermined long-held assumptions about the American alliance and the role it would play in the protection of Australia during the Cold War. Though a middle power like Australia may sit comfortably when it and its great power protector's interests are aligned, there is little the middle power can do when the superpower's interests and goals are unaligned and unclear. As Knopfelmacher put it in *The Daily Telegraph*, "when one power is very much bigger than the other, it means a unidirectional chain of command and flow of decisions in matters of foreign policy, military planning and intelligence, with a steadily shrinking area of independence from the client State."[440]

It was Gorton who felt this shrinking area of independence most keenly, and it came to characterise his role in foreign affairs from 1968 to 1971. Journalist Sam Lipski expressed this point in a more colloquial sense in *The Australian* in 1969. For Lipski, it was the Americans' sense of mateship that was the source of Australia's troubles. Referring to comments made by former US Consul-General Frank Hopkins, Lipski wrote that Americans, not being rooted in the same traditions of loyalty and support as Australians, "do not quite understand the Australian expectation that mates who have worked together, played together, or fought together will always put their loyalty to one another ahead of other

[439] Especially Meaney, McLean, Sexton and Barclay, as referred to in Chapter One.
[440] Frank Knopfelmacher, "Why America is Not Capable of Defending Anyone," published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 5 May 1971, Part 12, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.

relationships."[441] Quoting Hopkins, Lipski argued that the logical consequence of this was that American policy, was "not oriented towards special relationships with other nations, even when they share our language and ancestral descent … However much individual Americans may come to prefer Aussies to their other friends and relatives, Washington policies are conducted with a certain cosmic impartiality."[442] It was Gorton who took the first steps in setting the path of Australian foreign policy on a course characterised by its own impartiality.

[441] Sam Lipski, "Americans just can't fathom our 'mateship' philosophy," published on 31 January 1969 in *The Age,* Part 10, A1838, 250/9/1, NAA.
[442] Ibid.

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