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Menzies and Engagement with Asia

❖ **Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones**

In 1960 the deputy leader of the Australian Labor Party, Gough Whitlam, declared that Australia "has for ten years missed the opportunity to interpret the new nations to the old world and the old world to the new nations."[1] Throughout the 1960s, Labor spokesmen attacked the foreign policy of Sir Robert Menzies's Liberal–Country Party coalition government (1949–1966) for both its dependence on powerful friends and its alleged insensitivity to Asian countries.[2] This criticism of Liberal foreign policy not only persisted in later decades but also became the prevailing academic and media orthodoxy.[3] As we show here, Labor's criticism constitutes the basis of a tenacious political myth that demands critical reevaluation.

Menzies's political opponents and, subsequently, his academic critics have claimed that his attitude toward Asia was permeated by suspicion and condescension. From the 1970s, an inchoate Labor left and academic understanding contended that conservative Anglo-centrism "had placed Australia on the losing side of almost every external engagement from the Suez Crisis to Vietnam."[4] A decade later, analysts writing in the context of the Labor-driven doctrine of "enmeshment" with Asia reinforced this emerging foreign policy or-

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1. Gordon Greenwood and Norman Harper, eds., *Australia in World Affairs 1956–1960* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1963), p. 96.

2. See, for instance, Mads Clausen, "'Falsified by History': Menzies, Asia and Post-Imperial Australia," *History Compass,* Vol. 6, No. 4 (2008), pp. 1018–1019.

3. On this point, see also David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith, "Misreading Menzies and Whitlam: Reassessing the Ideological Construction of Australian Foreign Policy," *Round Table,* Vol. 355, No. 1 (2000), pp. 387–406; and David Martin Jones and Andrea Benvenuti, "Tradition, Myth and the Dilemma of Australian Foreign Policy," *Australian Journal of International Affairs,* Vol. 60, No. 1 (2006), pp. 103–124.

4. Gregory John de Somer, "The Redefinition of Asia: Australian Foreign Policy and the Contemporary Asian Regionalism," Ph.D. Diss., University of New South Wales, 2003, p. 95.

thodoxy. Bruce Grant and Gareth Evans found the Menzies-era doctrine of forward defense especially inimical to good regional relations, and they argued that the imperial link, coupled with Australia's attempts to forge close ties with the United States, negated the national interest because it prevented "Australia [from] shrugging off 'its old attitudes of dependence'" and from discovering "a unique place for itself in a region which it had always before considered alien and even hostile."[5] Echoing this theme, Gregory Pemberton claims that Menzies's foreign policy was "characterised by a colonial mentality" and that Menzies "focused Australian foreign policy, especially in its early years, on imperial rather than regional concerns which more directly affected Australia." Pemberton insists that even when the Menzies government eventually decided to focus on Asia, it "supported imperial paths to decolonisation rather than self-determination." But because Menzies's approach to decolonization supposedly clashed with Asian understandings of self-determination, the prime minister, according to Pemberton, "chose to rely . . . increasingly on military rather than peaceful means." In so doing, he not only failed to consolidate enduring regional links, but also "militarised Australia's relations with Asia."[6] "By the time of Menzies's departure in 1965 [*sic*]," Pemberton avers, "the bankruptcy of his approach to decolonisation was clear."[7]

Recent scholarship largely accepts and expands on this left-Labor perspective. Meg Gurry contends that the "psychological and emotional distance that separated his [Menzies's] Australia from its neighbours was irreducible."[8] In Gurry's view, "imagining a partnership role for Australia in Asia demanded a form of non-British bilateralism which, from Menzies' perspective, would not serve Australia's interests."[9] Engagement with Asia, for Gurry, required the shedding of Australia's close political, economic, and defense ties with Britain.

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5. Bruce Grant, *The Crisis of Loyalty: A Study of Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1972), p. xiv. See also Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), p. 26.

6. Gregory Pemberton, "An Imperial Imagination: Explaining the Post-1945 Foreign Policy of Robert Gordon Menzies," in Frank Cain, ed., *Menzies in War and Peace* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997), p. 159.

7. Ibid., p. 165. Menzies actually retired in 1966, not 1965.

8. Meg Gurry, "Identifying Australia's Region: From Evatt to Evans," *Australian Journal of International Affairs,* Vol. 49, No. 1 (1995), p. 21. The Labor government led by Robert Hawke (1983–1991) was the first to articulate, in the mid-1980s, a doctrine of "enmeshment" with Asia. See James Cotton and John Ravenhill, "Australia's Engagement with Asia," in James Cotton and John Ravenhill, eds., *Seeking Asian Engagement: Australia in World Affairs 1991–1995* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 1–2. But Hawke's successor, Paul Keating (1991–1996), is generally credited with pursuing "enmeshment" with single-minded vigor. On this point, see Nancy Viviani, "Australia and Southeast Asia," in Cotton and Ravenhill, eds., *Seeking Asian Engagement,* pp. 149–169.

9. Gurry, "Identifying Australia's Region," p. 21. For similar views, see Gary Smith, Dave Cox, and Scott Burchill, *Australia in the World: An Introduction to Australian Foreign Policy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press), pp. 78–85; and Stephen Fitzgerald, *Is Australia an Asian Country? Can Australia Survive in an East Asian Future?* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997), pp. 18–19.

Furthermore, Gurry contends, Menzies's support for the West's Cold War strategic aims in Asia antagonized emerging independent regional actors like India and Indonesia. Menzies, however, refused to modify conventional strategic thought. As a result, in the 1950s and 1960s, "Australia developed an unpopular identity in its region which kept it psychologically and diplomatically isolated from its neighbours, and from which, in many ways, it still struggles to emerge."[10]

In a similar vein, Frank Bongiorno maintains that "there was an imaginative and emotional deficiency in Menzies's engagement with Asia." According to Bongiorno, Menzies's career exemplified "a narrowing of Australian liberalism's Asian horizons."[11] Thus, as Gurry explains, whereas by the end of the 1940s the Labor government of Ben Chifley had "positioned Australia well to take diplomatic advantage of its developing links with Asia," the arrival of Menzies in Canberra "no longer promised such fruitful collaboration."[12] Increasingly preoccupied by the emerging confrontation between the West and the rising regional Communist states, the Menzies government initiated a reactionary or backward-looking foreign policy that relied excessively on military alliances and depended too much on powerful allies.[13] In doing so, Menzies's policies not only prevented Australia from engaging meaningfully with its Asian neighbors but also ended up antagonizing them. From this perspective, Menzies's regional policies failed to "create a collaborative partnership" between Australia and Asia.[14]

The arguments put forth by Gurry, Bongiorno, and other left-Labor scholars are widely reflected in the academic literature devoted to the history of Australia's post-1945 international relations. This perspective reinforces what Owen Harries has identified as two distinct traditions in Australian foreign policy: the Evatt tradition that evolved after 1946 and energetically asserted Australian independence and internationalism; and the "Keating tradition" that attends closely to regional concerns. Both of these traditions offer a disparaging view of Menzies-era realism and its suspicion of multilateral, re-

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10. Meg Gurry, "Leadership and Bilateral Relations: Menzies and Nehru, Australia and India, 1949–1964," *Pacific Affairs,* Vol. 65, No. 4 (Winter 1992–93), pp. 511–512.

11. Frank Bongiorno, "The Price of Nostalgia: Menzies, the 'Liberal Tradition' and Australian Foreign Policy," *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* Vol. 51, No. 3 (2005), p. 410.

12. Gurry, "Identifying Australia's Region," pp. 21–22.

13. Ibid. For a critique of this negative view of the Menzies government's Cold War policy, see David McLean, "Australia in the Cold War: A Historiographical Review," *The International History Review,* Vol. 23, No. 2 (2001), pp. 299–321.

14. Gurry, "Identifying Australia's Region," pp. 21–22. "In this sense," Stephen Fiztgerald has curiously argued in *Is Australia an Asian Country?* p. 19, that "Menzies set his face almost totally against Asia. He was a man on a life-support system from a receding world. History, in the longer judgement, will see him as having drugged much of Australia into similar unconsciousness."

gional, and international arrangements—the third tradition that Harries identifies as shaping Australian foreign policy.[15] The Evatt and Keating traditions, reinforced by the prevailing academic consensus, have constructed a powerful myth concerning the character and development of Australian foreign policy.

This myth about Australian foreign policy and its elevation to scholarly orthodoxy raises an important historical question: Did the external policies pursued by Menzies's Liberal–Country Party coalition government separate Australia psychologically, emotionally, and politically from Asia? Or has a partisan Labor viewpoint achieved, over time, the status of academic orthodoxy as a consequence of a selective reading of the historical record? Has an anachronistic treatment of the Menzies government devoid of any context facilitated ideological distortions rather than a balanced appraisal of Menzies's Asia policy?

In this article we argue that the Menzies government did not seek to separate itself from Asia and that the assumptions underlying the left-Labor construction of Menzies's regional policy do not survive close scrutiny. In the process we demonstrate that a felt need to reinforce the Labor regionalist tradition, which considers the Whitlam-era foreign policy realignment after 1972 to be a watershed in Australian political development, permeates the academic analysis of Australia's involvement in Asian affairs. Given the prevalence of this tradition, commentary on Menzies-era diplomacy is vitiated by an anachronistic disregard of the diplomatic dynamics, political challenges, and economic realities of Cold War Asia. To demonstrate this, we evaluate the allegations leveled at the Menzies government's policy toward Asia. These allegations may be subsumed under the following headings: insensitivity to regional consciousness; skepticism toward emerging, non-Western arrangements such as the Nonaligned Movement; a colonialist mentality leading to a misguided and militaristic containment policy; and a failure to engage economically with the region. We begin by examining the Menzies government's awareness of the region it inhabited.

Menzies's Regional Consciousness

Much has been written and said about Menzies's lukewarm attitude, or even outright indifference, to Asia and Asians. W. J. Hudson, for instance, has

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15. Owen Harries, *Benign or Imperial Reflections on American Hegemony* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2004), pp. 77–83.

claimed that "new Ministers had [little] . . . interest in Asia and Menzies seems to have had none at all," and Kevin Perkins, one of Menzies's biographers, contends that the Australian leader "could not treat an Asian as an equal and did not like his Ministers travelling through South East Asia."[16] But although Menzies and most of his ministers did not demonstrate great curiosity about or sensitivity toward Asia, retrospective condemnations of them for what were very common assumptions among Asian as well as Western policymakers in the decades after the Second World War are unfair. Asia, after all, is a continent in which distance and cultural diversity are far more pronounced than in Europe.[17] Asian elites shared few unifying characteristics. Postcolonial Asian leaders knew little about their regional neighbors and seemed untroubled by their ignorance. Asian leaders appeared more concerned about economic development and nation-building than about establishing or deepening ties with their neighbors. Only very gradually, for instance, would the independent countries of Southeast Asia come to see this geographical area as a distinct political region and seek to develop closer links with their immediate neighbors. Moreover, this protean regional awareness evolved largely because Southeast Asian governments came to consider greater regional collaboration as the best way of securing their national interests,[18] not because they necessarily felt any genuine solidarity with their close neighbors.

Given the prevailing attitude of regional elites, sharp criticism of Menzies and his ministers for a lack of empathy toward an abstraction is unreasonable. It is even more unfair to maintain, as David Lowe and Meg Gurry do, that the Menzies government lacked "regional consciousness" and that their regional policy "carried no sense of a *shared membership of a common region.*"[19] Given the context, there is little to suggest that the Menzies government suffered a regional awareness deficit. In fact, the Liberal minister of external affairs, Percy Spender, clearly grasped the emerging political, economic, and strategic importance of the neighboring region for Australia. On the eve of his departure for a meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers at Colombo on 9 Jan-

16. W. J. Hudson, *Casey* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1986), p. 287; and Kevin Perkins, *Menzies: Last of the Queen's Men* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1968), p. 203. See also, Gurry, "Leadership and Bilateral Relations," p. 513.

17. David Goldsworthy, "Introduction," in David Goldsworthy, ed., *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia,* Vol. 1, *1901 to the 1970s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p. 2.

18. Nicholas Tarling, *Southeast Asia: A Modern History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 153.

19. David Lowe, "The Colombo Plan," in David Lowe, ed., *Australia and the End of Empires: The Impact of Decolonisation in Australia's Near North, 1945–65* (Melbourne: Deakin University Press, 1996), p. 107; and Gurry, "Identifying Australia's Region," pp. 21–22; emphasis in original.

uary 1950, he declared that Australia had to "orientate its foreign policy towards Asia." Spender explained:

> Geographically, Australia is next door to Asia and our destiny as a nation is irrevocably conditioned by what takes place in Asia. This means that our future depends to an ever increasing degree upon the political stability of our Asian neighbours, upon the economic well-being of Asian peoples, and upon the development of understanding and friendly relations between Australia and Asia. . . . It is therefore in Asia and the Pacific that Australia should make its primary effort in the field of foreign relations.[20]

Two months later, Spender reminded the Australian House of Representatives of what he had said, and he stressed that this "is an axiom which should be written deep in the mind of every Australian."[21]

Consistent with this perception, the Menzies government played a major role in the negotiations that led to the launch of the Colombo Plan in July 1951. The new coalition government seized on the idea of an aid program for the region—an idea that had been originally proposed by Clement Attlee's British Labour government in 1948.[22] Canberra considered that financial and technical assistance under the Colombo Plan could make an important contribution toward the economic development and political stabilization of non-Communist Asian countries.[23] The Colombo Plan, which afforded economic and technical assistance to Australia's neighbors throughout the Cold War and beyond, soon become an important pillar of the Menzies government's policy toward Asia and served as the basis for Australia's soft-power relations with the region.[24] As David Lowe and Daniel Oakman argue, the plan established "a strong momentum towards stronger and more regular exchanges with Asian nations."[25]

Moreover, although the Colombo Plan was important, it was only one as-

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20. Department of External Affairs (DEA) to Posts, Cablegram 137, 3 January 1950, in A1838, 381/3/1/1 pt. 1, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

21. Australia, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates: Senate and House of Representatives, 19th Parliament, 1st session,* 9 March 1950, p. 628.

22. For a brief examination of the Attlee government's policy toward the Colombo Plan, see Peter Lowe, *Contending with Nationalism and Communism: British Policy towards Southeast Asia, 1945–65* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 73–77. On the origin of the Colombo Plan, see Daniel Oakman, *Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004); and David Lowe and Daniel Oakman, eds., *Australia and the Colombo Plan, 1949–1957: Documents on Australian Foreign Policy* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004).

23. Peter Gifford, "Cold War across Asia," in Goldsworthy, ed., *Facing North,* p. 219.

24. Oakman, *Facing Asia,* p. 3. According to Peter Lowe, "Australian participation in the Plan was vigorous and this reflected determination to pursue an active policy, as the British role declined." See Lowe, *Contending with Nationalism and Communism,* p. 76.

25. Lowe and Oakman, eds., *Australia and the Colombo Plan,* p. xxxv.

pect of an Australian diplomatic soft-power initiative aimed at building neighborly relations with Asian states.[26] From 1949 through 1966 the Menzies government expanded Australian diplomatic representation in Asia, establishing eleven new embassies or high commissions, including eight in Southeast Asia.[27] In the 1950s, Minister of External Affairs Richard Casey actively promoted Australia's regional network.[28] Cultural diplomacy played an important part in Australia's efforts to establish good relations with the region. Under Menzies, educational, media, and other society-to-society contacts began to gain momentum.[29] Trade also contributed to this momentum. Australian trade with the Asian-Pacific region increased significantly during the Menzies years. The claim that Menzies's government lacked regional consciousness can be sustained only by ignoring the government's substantial initiatives to promote Australia's regional engagement.

Regionalism or Anachronism in Cold War Southeast Asia: The Curious Case of Indian Nonalignment

Those who argue that the Menzies government possessed no sense of belonging to a *common* region indulge in anachronistic projections of hypothetical contemporary concerns into the past.[30] In the 1950s, developing Asian elites themselves had little consciousness of belonging to a common regional entity. Another two decades would pass before they could articulate a coherent idea of regionalism.[31] Laurence McIntyre, the head of the Pacific Division of the Department of External Affairs, observed presciently in 1949 that unlike Western Europe, where efforts to increase political and economic cooperation between regional states had gained momentum following the enunciation of the Marshall Plan in 1947, Asia lacked "any tradition of co-operation." Asian countries, he continued,

> can be expected to become emotionally conscious of their racial affinities or of
> their common experience under colonial regimes when it comes to upholding

26. Gifford, "Cold War across Asia," pp. 172, 219; and Alan Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy 1938–1965* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 169.

27. Goldsworthy, ed., *Facing North,* pp. 403–408.

28. Goldsworthy, "Introduction," p. 9.

29. Gifford, "Cold War across Asia," pp. 173–178.

30. For a more general discussion of this fallacy in contemporary scholarship, see Conal Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Offices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

31. See Nicholas Tarling, *Regionalism in Southeast Asia: To Foster the Political Will* (New York: Routledge, 2006), ch. 6.

the rights of one of their number against an outside power—particularly a colonial power. But cooperation for purposes which touch them individually, and which call for mutual sacrifice and compromise, is likely to be more difficult to achieve.[32]

The concept of regionalism as we understand it today had not yet achieved even minimal traction when Menzies came to office in December 1949. Analyzing the breakup of Europe's Asian empires after 1945, Christopher Baylis and Tim Harper identify the novelty of Southeast Asia as a concept, let alone as a well-defined region, at the time.[33] This was hardly surprising in light of the turbulent political and economic conditions that Asia confronted in the years following the end of World War II. Newly independent Asian countries, C. M. Turnbull observes, "often found that pressing internal needs precluded the ability to devise sound foreign policy, so that what policy there was usually stayed in a state of flux, engendering a fluid and complex international situation." In turn, this meant that "regional ties among the newly independent countries were slow to develop."[34]

This was particularly the case with one emerging Asian power, India. Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru (1947–1964), postcolonial India sought to play a central role in regional affairs. Nehru's policy therefore deserves careful assessment in order to judge the prevailing orthodoxy that condemns the Menzies government's "colonialist" attitude toward Asia. In 1947, Nehru had attempted to build a common Asian front against European colonialism. As Charles Heimsath and Surjit Mansingh observe, "Nehru and many other Asian leaders believed that once the 'artificial isolation' imposed by Western colonialism on the states of Asia was removed, Asian peoples would coalesce into mutually beneficial associations."[35] Yet, despite Nehru's pan-Asianism, "hardly any Indian leader had visited Southeast Asia before 1947" or evinced any interest in "travelling in that direction after independence."[36] In the 1950s, moreover, Nehru drastically revised his ambitious foreign policy stance to concentrate on the area of most immediate concern, the Indian subcontinent. His pan-Asian vision thus ultimately proved uto-

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32. "Australia, Asia and the Pacific Pact," 1948, in A1838, 381/3/1/1 pt. 1, NAA.

33. Christopher Baylis and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire,* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 12. See also, Robert McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: the United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 1–2.

34. C. M. Turnbull, "Regionalism and Nationalism," in Nicholas Tarling, ed., *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia,* Vol. 4, *From World War II to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 265.

35. Charles Heimsath and Surjit Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1971), p. 225.

36. Ibid.

pian.[37] Nehru subsequently acknowledged that significant political, historical, and cultural differences existed among Asian countries and that such differences were substantial enough to thwart reconciliation, not to mention association. By the mid-1950s, Nehru had abandoned interest in promoting Asian unity.[38]

Nehru had also discovered that his attempts to promote India as a leading regional power were at odds with the smaller Asian countries reluctant to "come under the thumb of India and rival Asian giant, China."[39] Regional states remained extremely wary of the designs of their Asian neighbors, particularly the larger and more powerful ones. India's efforts to convene the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947 and a conference on Indonesia in January 1949 produced no tangible results. "There was," Turnbull writes, "no support for Nehru's proposal to create a permanent Asian organization, and the communist defeat of the Nationalists in China killed the plan to hold a second conference there in 1949."[40] As Turnbull observes in relation to the India-sponsored 1949 conference on Indonesia, "neither Indonesia nor other Southeast Asian countries wished to pass from Western imperial rule to domination by an Asian neighbour."[41] Thus, India's diplomacy in Asia remained, by and large, "diplomacy by proclamation" rather than anything concrete.[42]

Nehru, nevertheless, continued to maintain, at least rhetorically, a central role in Asian affairs. He tried to establish a niche for India as the leader of the Afro-Asian group of nonaligned countries. Yet, his efforts to place India at the forefront of regional affairs through the policy of nonalignment failed to "create mutually beneficial links between the non-aligned states themselves."[43] Both China and Indonesia contested India's leadership of the purportedly nonaligned grouping. In the early 1960s, Beijing and Jakarta worked together to give Afro-Asianism a distinctively anti-Western flavor and sought to sideline New Delhi.[44] India's smaller neighbor, Pakistan, took part in the Afro-

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37. S. D. Muni, "Nehru's India in Asia: Anatomy of a Blurred Vision," in Surjit Mansingh, ed., *Nehru's Foreign Policy, Fifty Years On* (New Delhi: Mosaic Books, 1998), pp. 111–112.

38. Heimsath and Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India,* p. 225.

39. Turnbull, "Regionalism and Nationalism," p. 268; and Heimsath and Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India,* p. 225.

40. Turnbull, "Regionalism and Nationalism," p. 268; Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia 1941–1968* (London: Curzon Press, 2001), p. 64; and Heimsath and Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History on India,* p. 225.

41. Turnbull, "Regionalism and Nationalism," p. 268. See also, John Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 112.

42. Heimsath and Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India,* p. 226.

43. Ibid., p. 227.

44. See, for instance, Garver, *Protracted Contest,* pp. 121–128; L. P. Singh, "Dynamics of Indian-Indonesian Relations," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 7, No. 9 (1967), pp. 657–665; S. M. Burke and Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 310–311;

Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955 and its preparatory meeting in Bogor, Indonesia, in December 1954 but paid no more than lip service to the principle of nonalignment and Afro-Asian unity. The Pakistanis regarded the Bandung process with concern, viewing it as a Communist-neutralist attempt "to loosen the ties of the smaller African and Asian countries with the West, making the Afro-Asians easier prey to the ambitions of larger non-Western states," such as India.[45] Pakistan had grave doubts about Indian intentions and therefore allied itself with the West in the mid-1950s.[46] Meanwhile, Ceylon, until the nationalist government of Solomon Bandaranaike came to power in 1956, officially maintained a nonaligned stance but remained deeply skeptical of India's diplomatic pretensions, continuing to favor a Western presence in the region.[47] So, too, did Burma, at least until General Ne Win assumed power in 1962 and opted for the increasingly isolationist Burmese road to socialism.[48]

By contrast, other Southeast Asian countries "interpreted Indian policy as one of weakness" in the context of deepening Cold War divisions and, predictably, "formulated their own policies according to the actual power available to themselves, and sometimes through alliances with others."[49] A nonaligned Asia *á la Indienne* was of limited appeal in the region. How anyone could seriously maintain, without anachronism, that Menzies's regional policy lacked a sense of shared membership of a common region is thus difficult to understand. No such shared understanding existed among Australia's Asian neighbors beyond emotive and rhetorical references to an ill-defined idea of Asia.

Moreover, following India's 1962 border war with China and the growing difficulties with Pakistan, the Indian government, too, abandoned wider regional pretensions as its foreign policy became increasingly focused on the subcontinent. This policy reorientation meant that it took almost three decades before New Delhi again looked beyond the narrowing confines of South Asia and sought to deepen its ties with Southeast Asia though its "Look East"

and Frederick Bunnell, "Guided Democracy Foreign Policy: 1960–1965 President Sukarno Moves from Non-Alignment to Confrontation," *Indonesia,* Vol. 2 (1966), pp. 37–76.

45. Burke and Ziring, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy,* pp. 174–181, 310.

46. On Pakistan's increasing alignment with the West in the mid-1950s, see ibid., pp. 147–173; and Robert McMahon, *Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), chs. 4–5.

47. Heimsath and Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India,* pp. 319–320; Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation,* pp. 108–109; and Harish Kapur, *Foreign Policies of India's Prime Ministers* (New Delhi: Lancer, 2009), pp. 53–55.

48. American Consulate-General Singapore to State Department, Telegram 12, 9 July 1956, in 746F.00/7-956, Box 3261, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (NARA); Heimsath and Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India,* pp. 239–243; and Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation,* p. 177.

49. Heimsath and Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India,* p. 227.

policy.[50] If Menzies and his ministers lacked a sense of shared regional membership, they were by no means alone. They shared this consciousness deficit with all their regional neighbors.

Nonalignment and the Ambiguities of Regional Engagement

Analyzing India's regional policy during the Nehru years affords the opportunity to address another common fallacy on the part of scholars who accuse the Menzies government of failing to engage with Asia. This fallacy treats Asia as a seemingly uniform monolith and assumes that any displeasure Australia incurred from an Asian state indicates both policy failure and the insensitivity of the Australian government. Reflecting these prevailing assumptions, Christopher Waters's critical study of Australian foreign policy in the 1950s examines the Menzies government's response to the emergence of the Nonaligned Movement after the 1955 Bandung conference.[51] Waters claims that Menzies's "negative attitude" prevented Australia from developing better relations with the emerging regional states.[52] He further contends that for Menzies and his ministers, security for Australia could not be found in nonalignment and peaceful coexistence. Instead it required a continuing dependence on the United States and Britain, and the traditional practice of military alliance and power politics.[53]

Such a realist calculation of national interest in addressing the region differs vividly from India's advocacy of nonalignment in Waters's depiction. Waters contrasts realist Australia with enlightened postcolonial India and discovers a disturbing pattern of "alignment versus non-alignment, military alliances versus peaceful coexistence, military strength versus confidence building measures, Western nations versus Asian nations."[54] According to Waters, Men-

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50. On India's "Look East" policy, see Prakash Nanda, *Rediscovering Asia: Evolution of India's Look-East Policy* (New Delhi: Lance Publishers, 2003), esp. ch. 5; M. G. G. Pillai, "India and South-East Asia: Search for a Role," *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 30, No. 30 (1995), p. 1911; Raja Mohan, "Look East Policy: Phase Two," *The Hindu,* 9 October 2005, p. 7; Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), p. 237; and Sandy Gordon, "India and Southeast Asia: A Renaissance in Relations?" in Sandy Gordon and Stephen Henningham, eds., *India Looks East: An Emerging Power and Its Asia-Pacific Neighbours* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1995), pp. 231–254.

51. Christopher Waters, "After Decolonization: Australia and the Emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement in Asia, 1954–55," *Diplomacy and Statecraft,* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2001), p. 171.

52. Ibid. For a similar view, see David Walker, "Nervous Outsiders: Australia and the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung," *Australian Historical Studies,* Vol. 36, No. 125 (2005), pp. 58–59.

53. Waters, "After Decolonization," p. 171.

54. Ibid., p. 162.

zies's skeptical view of nonalignment complicated Australia's role in Asia and needlessly antagonized the leaders of pan-Asianism.

One of the problems with Waters's analysis is that India's leadership role in the Nonaligned Movement was not uncontested. More troubling, however, is Waters's uncritical assumption that nonalignment was both morally correct and a more plausible way to address regional concerns about the spread of Communism and the role of China in Cold War Asia. The virtue of nonalignment may be asserted only by deliberately overlooking the weaknesses that undermined it as a regional policy. Waters fails to realize that India's policy of nonalignment was frozen into irrelevance on the snowcapped peaks of the Himalayas when China attacked India in October 1962.[55] Waters conveniently overlooks the fact that during China's offensive through the North East Frontier Agency, Nehru requested and accepted military aid from the United States and Britain in clear breach of his abstract commitment to nonalignment.[56] Nor does Waters seem to care that the Nonaligned Movement, far from initiating a new way of attending to the political and economic problems of the Asian continent, quickly degenerated into a debating society in which anti-Western diatribes were the movement's only unifying trait. Waters is no doubt right to conclude that "different understandings and perceptions of communism, issues of race, issues of political economy, among other factors, all played a role in driving a wedge between the Menzies governments and some of the new Afro/Asian nations."[57] But he is wrong and distorts Cold War Asian history when he contends that Indian and Indonesian criticism of Australia's reliance on Cold War ties with Western powers demonstrates Menzies's failed policy of regional engagement.

Menzies and the Containment of Asian Communism

Another prevailing misconception about the Menzies government's foreign policy is that the onset of the Cold War in Asia was the direct consequence of the containment strategy adopted by the United States and its allies, a strategy that supposedly antagonized not only the Soviet Union and China but also other important regional actors such as India and Indonesia. This view glosses over the role played by Moscow and Beijing in promoting Communism in Asia, and it overlooks the fact that the non-Communist states

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55. On the Sino-Indian border war, see Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972).

56. Michael Brecher, "Non-Alignment under Stress: The West and the India-China Border War," *Pacific Affairs,* Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter 1979–80), pp. 612–630.

57. Waters, "After Decolonization," p. 171.

in Asia welcomed the U.S.-led strategy of containment. They also appreciated the role Australia played in sustaining that strategy with its forward-defense deployments on the mainland of Asia. New, weak, and profoundly insecure states like Pakistan, Thailand, Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Malaya, exposed to the threat of Communist expansion, recognized that containment and a continuing Western military presence in the region served their security needs and facilitated the balancing of competing regional interests.

This fear of Communist expansion, combined with distrust of recently decolonized regional neighbors, guided the pro-Western stance of non-Communist Asian states. Thus, in late 1954, Thailand, Pakistan, and the Philippines acceded to the Manila Treaty, thereby becoming involved in the military planning of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and contributing to the West's forward defense strategy in Asia. In Pakistan's case, fear of India further motivated support for U.S. containment.[58] Analogously, in late 1957, following London's decision to grant independence to Malaya, Malaya welcomed the continuing deployment of British, Australian, and New Zealand defense forces on its soil. In a visit to Australia in late 1959, Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman thanked the Menzies government for stationing Australian troops in his country, acknowledging that their presence was "a source of comfort to us."[59] Similarly, in 1962, the Thai government sought Australian military assistance under SEATO as a form of reassurance against a possible Communist takeover in Laos.[60] In response to the Thai request, the Menzies government deployed a contingent of eight Royal Australian Air Force Sabre aircraft at Ubon.[61] Even Indonesia, which during the Sukarno era had been at the forefront of the Nonaligned Movement and had criticized Australia's forward defense strategy, expressed its disappointment with the Whitlam government's decision to withdraw Australia's ground contribution to the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) in 1973.[62] By the

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58. On this point, see McMahon, *Cold War on the Periphery,* chs. 4–5.

59. Tunku Abdul Rahman quoted in Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts, 1948–1965* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), p. 189.

60. Ibid., pp. 240–244.

61. "The Situation in Laos," n.d., in A1196, 15/501/378, NAA.

62. Douglas-Home to British Embassy Washington, Telegram 988, 30 April 1973, in FCO 24/1556, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK). On the Whitlam government's decision to withdraw the Australian infantry battalion from Singapore, see Andrea Benvenuti and Moreen Dee, "The Five Power Defence Arrangements and the Reappraisal of the British and Australian Policy Interests in Southeast Asia, 1970–75," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* Vol. 41, No. 1 (2010), pp. 119–122; and Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones, "Engaging Southeast Asia? Labor's Regional Mythology and Australia's Military Withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia, 1972–1973," *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 12, No. 4 (Fall 2010), pp. 32–62.

end of the Menzies era, as T. B. Millar observed at the time, "however academic and unreal the 'domino theory' may appear to some Australians, or however exaggerated the fears of Chinese expansion, people living in Southeast Asia have very unacademic apprehensions of what would happen if the Western forces were to pull-out."[63]

The integral part that Australian forces played in supporting the non-Communist governments of Southeast Asia supplied the region not only with practical assistance but, just as important, with reassurance. The "strong requests" from Tunku Abdul Rahman and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in the late 1960s secured a continuing Australian military presence in the region after the British Labour government led by Harold Wilson decided in January 1968 to withdraw all British forces east of Suez (with the exception of Hong Kong and Brunei) by the end of 1971.[64]

In Canberra, Menzies's successors, Harold Holt and John Gorton, were initially reluctant to continue Australia's military commitment to Malaysia and Singapore without a British military presence. They feared that such a deployment could turn into a military commitment of unpredictable duration in the event of either a resumption of the insurgency in Malaysia or a conflict with Indonesia.[65] Nevertheless, the subsequent criticism that both Malaysia's and Singapore's governments directed at the Whitlam administration's decision in 1973 to withdraw Australia's ground contribution to the FPDA demonstrates these Southeast Asian governments' continuing attachment to an Australian military presence in Southeast Asia.[66] Given the regional support for an Australian military presence, Gurry's claim that Menzies-era Australia acquired an unpopular regional identity that contributed to its psychological and diplomatic isolation is hard to fathom.

Nor is it easy to understand why Gregory Pemberton asserts that the Menzies government's Cold War stance "militarised" Australia's relations with Asia. Pemberton's criticism is problematic in several ways. First, it is not at all clear what "militarising" Australia's relations with Asia actually means. Presumably what Pemberton is arguing is that Menzies attached too much importance to the defense aspects of Australia's relations with the region. But how this can be regarded as a misguided policy in a climate of rapidly escalating Cold War tension is hard to understand, especially if we bear in mind that several Asian states actively sought Australian military support. It is even

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63. T. B. Millar, *Australia's Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1968), pp. 99–100.

64. Andrea Benvenuti, *Britain, Australia and the Turn to Europe, 1961–72* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), pp. 87–111.

65. Cabinet Submission 443, August 1967, in A4940, C4626, NAA.

66. Benvenuti and Martin Jones, "Engaging Southeast Asia?"

harder to see how Australia "militarised" its relations with the region if by militarization Pemberton is suggesting that Australia deployed large forces to defend or promote its national interest in Asia. Australian military commitments in the region were often small and unobtrusive (Malaya/Malaysia, Singapore). When they were more significant, they were still not large enough to have an appreciable military impact on the overall conduct of a war (Korea and Vietnam).[67] As for the war in Vietnam, it is worth recalling that South Korea's and Thailand's contributions to the U.S.-led effort against the Vietcong were larger than Australia's.[68]

Menzies and Australia's Neglected Pragmatic Realist Tradition

A close look at Menzies' regional policy shows another important and neglected point: Australia's support for anti-Communist states in Asia was both pragmatic and prudent. This prudential realism helped to establish what Harries terms the third and most effective tradition in Australian foreign policy thinking. The Menzies government never viewed its Cold War response to the threat of Communism in Asia as merely a military problem or in purely military terms. For a country with extremely limited military resources and dependent on its close ties with Britain and the United States, this could not have been otherwise. Instead, Australia's response to Communism in Asia was essentially pragmatic. Officials with the Department of External Affairs explained, in a political assessment prepared for the new Menzies government in the lead-up to the Colombo conference that established the Colombo Plan, that "for Australia the problem is at present political and economic; it calls for sustained and co-ordinated action to encourage and strengthen established governments throughout the area . . . and to help them raise their standards of living and thereby increase their resistance to Communism."[69] The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 and the Chinese intervention in that conflict in November 1950 prompted Australian authorities to revise their assump-

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67. It should also be noted that Canberra's defense spending was significantly lower than that of its major Western allies in Asia. The Menzies government, despite its strong anti-Communist rhetoric, "adopted a more cautious and pragmatic stance towards Asian communism than did the US." See McLean, "Australia in the Cold War," pp. 318–319.

68. Stanley Larsen and James Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 1985), p. 23. South Korea's maximum deployment amounted to 50,000 troops in 1968, and Thailand's reached 11,500 men in 1969. Australia's deployment reached a peak of 7,672 troops in 1969.

69. "Australia's Policy in Southeast Asia: Brief for Cabinet," December 1949, in A1838, 381/3/1/2 pt. 1, NAA.

tion that the Chinese Communists were unlikely to "be able for at least three or four years to pursue an aggressive military policy outside China." Yet even if Australian officials concluded that they had been too optimistic in believing "there is little likelihood of any rapid development of a large scale military threat calling for an active intervention by Australia," the Menzies government's response to the Communist danger in Asia rested on a pragmatic mix of political, economic, and military measures to support threatened anti-Communist Asian governments.[70]

Consequently, Pemberton's caricature of Menzies's foreign policy as having been "characterised by a colonial mentality" that led Australia to support "imperial paths to decolonisation rather than self-determination" egregiously misrepresents the prudential concerns that animated Australian foreign policy during this period. It is, of course, true that as leader of the opposition, Menzies had opposed the end of Britain's empire in the Indian subcontinent in 1947–1949 and was not particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of early Malayan independence or self-government for Singapore.[71] When the British Conservative government of Anthony Eden decided in 1955 to accelerate the pace of Malayan independence and agreed to bring forward the granting of full independence to August 1959 (and subsequently to August 1957), Menzies expressed to Eden his own cabinet's uneasiness about the political uncertainty that Malaya's rapid march toward independence would create.[72] In Menzies's view, it was "most undesirable to discuss with the Malayan leaders a firm or even possible time for the assumption of full sovereignty and independence before efforts have been made to conclude an effective defence agreement [with them]."[73] Australian ministers did not fear decolonization per se but worried that a self-governing or independent Malaya might impose restrictions on British and Commonwealth forces stationed in the country to support U.S.-led SEATO operations in Southeast Asia.

With regard to Singapore, the Menzies government felt Britain and its Commonwealth allies faced an even more complicated challenge. In 1956, roughly three-quarters (more than a million) of the crown colony's population were ethnic Chinese; of these, 200,000 were born outside British territory and retained strong affinities with Chinese culture and traditions.[74] The Menzies government expressed concern that "with the growth of communist influence

70. Ibid.

71. David Goldsworthy, "Australian External Policy and the End of Britain's Empire," *Australian Journal of Politics and History,* Vol. 51, No. 1 (2005), p. 23.

72. DEA to Australian High Commission London, Cablegram 97, 17 January 1956, in A1838, TS383/5/2 pt. 2, NAA.

73. Ibid.

74. Singapore [UK memorandum], December 1957, in A1838, 3024/2/1 pt. 6, NAA.

in the whole Asian area and the emergence of a resurgent nationalism among the Chinese in Singapore there is a real possibility of the formation in Singapore sooner or later of a Chinese-dominated [government] which has decided that the only future for themselves lies in coming to terms with communism."[75] Menzies believed that Britain's continuing colonial presence would help to prevent radical Chinese elements from gaining control in Singapore and would therefore be crucial for Australia's own defense posture in Southeast Asia.[76] Singapore was Britain's largest military establishment in the Far East, and Menzies warned Eden that "it would be contrary to Commonwealth interests to grant complete independence to Singapore at this stage."[77]

Thus, although Menzies "was not one for forcing the pace of colonial change, and certainly not where security interests were involved,"[78] his government's attitude to decolonization was by no means as intransigent as Pemberton implies. The Menzies government, in principle, supported the gradual transfer of power in Malaya and Singapore. It merely sought to ensure that this process would not lead to outcomes contrary to Australian security interests in the region. Moreover, once Malaya became independent in August 1957, the Menzies government developed a particularly close relationship with Tunku Abdul Rahman's government. In 1971 Peter Boyce characterized Australia's relations with the newly independent state in the first eight years of its independence as "something akin to a special relationship."[79]

At the same time, the Menzies government developed political relations with the nationalist but moderate government of Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore.

75. Secretary of External Department to Secretary of Defence Department, 8 March 1956, in A5954, 1403/4, NAA.

76. Menzies was not alone in hoping that Britain would maintain a politico-military presence in Singapore. In December 1956 the British commissioner-general for Southeast Asia, Robert Scott, reported to the Colonial Office that "Pakistanis, Malays, Thais, Laotians, and even Ceylonese, Indians and Indonesians have gone out of their way to volunteer to me their apprehensions lest Singapore emerge as a base and centre of Communist influence. I believe that many of these peoples will welcome . . . full internal self-government [but not independence] plus British troops remaining and British power to suspend the Constitution. . . . They fear Britain less than they fear China." See Robert Scott (UK commissioner-general, Singapore) to Alan Lennox-Boyd (UK colonial secretary), Telegram 138, 5 December 1956, in FO 1091/44, TNAUK. Nehru, for instance, considered the prospect of a Chinese-dominated (and Communist) government in Singapore "distressing" and was therefore in favor of a gradual transfer of power in Singapore. See American Consulate Singapore to State Department, Telegram 8, 5 July 1956, in 746F.00/7-556, BOX 3261, RG 59, NARA; and Memorandum of Conversation, R. K. Tandon (Indian commissioner, Singapore) and William Anderson (American Consulate, Singapore), 28 June 1956, in 746F.00/7-556, BOX 3261, RG 59, NARA.

77. British High Commission Canberra to Commonwealth Relations Office, Telegram 524, 19 April 1956, in PREM 11/1802, TNAUK.

78. Goldsworthy, "Australian External Policy," p. 19.

79. Peter Boyce, "Bonds of Culture and Commonwealth in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1971), p. 71. See also Peter Boyce, "Twenty-One Years of Australian Diplomacy in Malaya," *Journal of Southeast Asian History,* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1963), p. 65.

Moreover, when Singapore left the Malaysian Federation in 1965, Australia established close relations with the city-state too.[80] Nationalist elites in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur considered a British Commonwealth military presence in their region a valuable "counter-weight" to Communism.[81] Despite Gurry's contention that "imagining a partnership role for Australia in Asia demanded a form of non-British bilateralism which, from Menzies's perspective, would not serve Australia's interests," membership in the British Commonwealth remained highly important to both Malaysia and Singapore.[82] Far from antagonizing local nationalist elites, the Menzies government strove to form and maintain close links with them.

Australian Realism and Economic Engagement

Equally misunderstood in the academic treatment of Menzies-era engagement with Asia is Australia's emerging economic engagement with the region. The received orthodoxy is that the coalition government's determination to maintain close economic ties with Britain reflected political myopia. The criticism further implies that the Menzies government overlooked Asia's economic potential.[83] According to this perspective, the Menzies government failed to reorient Australia's trade toward the region until after British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made clear in the early 1960s that Britain would seek membership in the European Economic Community (EEC).[84] Australia under Menzies remained eager to maintain strong economic and trade links with Britain. Nevertheless, it is too quickly forgotten that early postwar Asia was a

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80. Goldsworthy, "Australian External Policy," p. 19.

81. See, for instance, Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation,* p. 248.

82. Gurry, "Identifying Australia's Region," p. 21.

83. For the idea that Australia's imperial connection with Britain posed an obstacle to economic engagement with the Asian region or was detrimental to promising Asian trade, see, for instance, ibid.; and Sandra Tweedie, *Trading Partners: Australia and Asia, 1790–1993* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1994), pp. 8, 193–194. On the propensity in Australian historiography to regard the demise of the British connection in Australia and the latter's economic integration with the neighboring region as signs of a new maturity, see Stuart Ward, "Sentiment and Self-Interest: The Imperial Ideal in Anglo-Australian Commercial Culture," *Australian Historical Studies,* Vol. 32, No. 116 (2001), pp. 96–97.

84. On Macmillan's "turn to Europe," see, for example, Wolfram Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans: Britain and European Integration, 1945–63* (London: Macmillan, 1996), ch. 5; Jacqueline Tratt, *The Macmillan Government and Europe: A Study in the Process of Development* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1996), chs. 4–12; Alan Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), ch. 11; and James Ellison, "Accepting the Inevitable: Britain and European Integration," in Wolfram Kaiser and Gillian Staerck, eds., *Contracting Options: British Foreign Policy, 1955–64* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 178–182.

region devastated by war and bedeviled by poverty.[85] Regional trade links were not obviously viable.

Political instability across the region compounded regional underdevelopment. Civil war in China, nationalist revolt in the Dutch East Indies, and Communist-inspired insurgencies in Malaya, Vietnam, and Burma took their economic toll and made rapid economic development in Asia impossible at this time. Some two decades had to pass before the Asian economies could take off, and in the meantime they offered limited opportunities as potential trading partners.

Moreover, even as decolonization gathered momentum across the region in the late 1940s and early 1950s, trading relationships still reflected the close links between the colonies and European metropolitan powers.[86] Nowhere in Asia at this time did any developed national economies exist.[87] Nor had anything resembling an integrated regional economic and trading system yet emerged. Laurence McIntyre, in a policy assessment prepared in 1948 for Ben Chifley's Labor government, captures the nature of the Asian regional economy. According to McIntyre, Asia "has never had an integrated economy" and "multilateral trade has virtually never existed" there. "The main course of trade," he argued,

> has been between individual countries and Europe, America or Japan, either direct or through such entrepots as Singapore and Hong Kong. Distance and other physical barriers have limited economic, social and cultural intercourse between Asian peoples and countries. The countries themselves have remained backward politically, socially and industrially by Western standards. There is thus no tradition of co-operation on which to build; the foundations still have to be laid down.[88]

Economic engagement with the region, therefore, was a chimera as long as political stability remained elusive and economic conditions remained depressed across the region.[89] Menzies had to contend with these difficult economic and political realities when he took office in December 1949. In this

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85. See, for instance, Norman Owen, "Economic and Social Change" in Tarling, ed., *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia,* Vol. 4, pp. 139–142; and Gordon Greenwood, *Approaches to Asia: Australian Postwar Policies and Attitudes* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 117.

86. See Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 104.

87. Wayne Reynolds, "Imperial Defence after 1945," in Lowe, ed., *Australia and the End of Empires,* p. 120.

88. "Australia, Asia and the Pacific Pact" (see note 38 supra).

89. In referring to the push toward Asia under the Labor governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating, Goldsworthy has aptly pointed out that "had Asia been an economic backwater, the thrust would not have been anywhere near as strong." Goldsworthy, "Introduction," p. 11. For the prevailing

bleak regional economic context, his government had to formulate its political and economic response to the region accordingly. It is not surprising, therefore, that Australia during those years maintained close economic ties with the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. Australia had a clear stake in ensuring that it continued to trade with Britain, which absorbed nearly 30 percent of Australian exports in 1950. Nevertheless, the Menzies government was also aware of the need to contribute to regional economic development and political stabilization, as its participation in the Colombo Plan indicates.

Moreover, despite the grim regional economy of the immediate postwar years, some opportunities existed, and the gradual expansion of Australia's regional economic ties during the Menzies years is no coincidence.[90] Even in 1949, Australian officials observed that Asia was a natural market. However, Australia's main agricultural exports—meat, butter, milk products, and canned fruit—remained "luxury goods" in Asia.[91] Nevertheless, Australian trade with Asia exceeded prewar levels in both volume and value by the end of the 1940s.[92] In particular, the trading relationship with Japan, the only Asian country experiencing rapid economic growth, developed dramatically under Menzies.[93] By the early 1970s, trade had transformed Australia's Second World War foe into its most important economic partner.[94]

The negotiation in 1956–1957 of the Australia-Japan Commerce Agreement casts interesting light on the conduct of Australia's economic diplomacy during the Menzies years. By negotiating a bilateral trade agreement with Tokyo, the Menzies government did not simply intend to place Japan on an equal footing with the other signatories of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Instead, by extending the most-favored nation clause to Japan, the Menzies government also sought new exporting opportunities beyond the still important, yet somewhat constraining, confines of the Anglo-Australian trade relationship.[95] Australia, moreover, signed a trade agreement with newly inde-

economic conditions in Southeast Asia in the 1950s, see Owen, "Economic and Social Change," p. 158.

90. In the 1950s the Menzies government established Australian trade posts in Karachi, Rangoon, Manila, New Delhi, Kuala Lumpur, and Bangkok. From the mid-1950s the government also sought to develop Australia's trade opportunities in Asia by dispatching trade missions to various regional countries. Greenwood, *Approaches to Asia,* p. 119.

91. Carney to J. A. Tonkin, 17 November 1949, in A621, S753, NAA; and Report by Representative of Department of Defence on a Meeting Held by the Department of External Affairs at Canberra on 14 November 1949, in A816, 19/301/1207, NAA.

92. Carney to Tonkin, 17 November 1949 (see note 91 supra).

93. Roderic Pitty, "The Postwar Expansion of Trade with East Asia," in Goldsworthy, ed., *Facing North,* pp. 220–261.

94. Ibid., p. 261.

95. Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Mel-

pendent Malaya in 1958 and with Indonesia in 1959.[96] As economic conditions improved across Asia in the 1960s, Australia was well placed to exploit the new trading opportunities.[97] The decade following the signing of the Commerce Agreement with Japan witnessed a remarkable expansion of Australian trade with the rest of East Asia. At the start of the 1950s only 8 percent of Australia's exports went to Japan and 6 percent to the developing countries in East Asia. By the beginning of the 1970s, Japan and the rest of East Asia absorbed 26 percent and 12 percent of Australia's exports respectively.[98] As Roderic Pitty has pointed out, this shift represented a "fundamental transformation in the direction of Australian trade."[99]

Yet, despite these important initiatives, the prevailing scholarly orthodoxy condemns the Menzies government for neglecting Asia's economic potential in order to cling to irrelevant economic ties with Britain. This simplistic reading of the changing political economy of Europe and Asia after 1949 fails to mention that not only Australia but other Asian members of the British Commonwealth also sought to cultivate trade links with Britain. When Macmillan's Conservative government announced its intention to seek membership in the EEC in 1961, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Singapore raised concerns about the possible trading implications of such a move and expressed their desire to retain access to the British market.[100] In some Asian countries, like Malaysia, the 1960s even witnessed a revival of British economic activity.[101] Like Australia, these Asian members of the Commonwealth

bourne University Press, 2001), p. 38; Alan Rix, *The Australian-Japan Political Alignment: 1952 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 52–61; and Pitty, "The Postwar Expansion of Trade with East Asia," pp. 230–246. The Menzies government also sought to anchor Japan more closely to the Western camp. On this point, see David Welton, "Regional Dialogue in Australia-Japan Relations 1952 to 1965: The Beginnings of a Political Relationship in Regional Affairs," Ph.D. Diss., University of Queensland, 2001, pp. 93–101.

96. Boyce, "Twenty-One Years of Australian Diplomacy in Malaya," p. 90; and Pitty, "The Postwar Expansion of Trade with East Asia," pp. 257–258. In 1965 Canberra also signed bilateral trade agreements with the Philippines and South Korea. See Greenwood, *Approaches to Asia,* p. 119.

97. On the improvement of economic conditions across Southeast Asia in the 1960s, see Owen, "Economic and Social Change," pp. 158–175.

98. Pitty, "The Postwar Expansion of Trade with East Asia," pp. 220, 259.

99. Ibid., p. 259.

100. Because Malaya's main exports (tin and rubber) enjoyed free entry into the Community, it was the only country in the British Asian Commonwealth/Empire that had little concern about the EEC question. India and Hong Kong were the most worried. See Visit to Commonwealth Capitals of Asia: Memorandum by the Minister of Aviation, 18 July 1961, in CAB 129/126, C(61)104, TNAUK; European Economic Questions: Colonial Reactions, July 1961: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18 July 1961, in CAB 129/126, C(61)103, TNAUK; and Alan Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy, 1945–1963* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 360. On Indian attitudes toward Britain's first application to the EEC in 1961, see Heimsath and Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of India,* pp. 47–48.

101. See Nicholas White, "The Survival, Revival and Decline of British Economic Influence in Malaya, 1957–70," *Twentieth Century British History,* Vol. 14, No. 3 (2003), pp. 322–342.

were not ready to jettison the security of the imperial system for the uncertainty of a protean Asian market or to forgo a secure export market. But unlike the Menzies administration, these emerging Asian economies have never been criticized for failing to do more to engage economically with their region.

Conclusion

If Menzies's foreign policy is examined in context on the basis of its primary concerns rather than superimposing fashionable enthusiasms on the evidence, a picture of the coalition government emerges that is very different from what we find in Australian academic orthodoxy. A careful reading of Menzies's engagement with the region in policy areas ranging from education to military and economic development reveals a complex, nuanced, but by no means negative picture. Accounts that fault Menzies for his "colonial mentality" and for supposedly lacking regional consciousness and being indifferent to Asia reflect an anachronistic projection of latter-day practices, orthodoxies, and understandings onto the complicated political geography of the late 1940s. Judging the past via the standards of a different and hostile internationalist tradition only further compounds the problem. Effective, no doubt, for ideological purposes, this approach makes for bad history. Imposing current-day shibboleths on the practice of an earlier era, and then judging its practitioners' conduct of policy accordingly, sets up an entirely false standard of accountability. This skewed way of assessing Menzies's government creates a caricature of postmodern fashioning and glosses over the coalition government's significant achievements in first stabilizing and subsequently economically and politically developing the region. Distorted history reflecting the ideological preferences of the scholars who currently dominate the study of Australian foreign policy adds little to our understanding of this seminal period in Australia's engagement with its region.

Acknowledgments