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With Friends Like These

Australia, the United States, and
Southeast Asian Détente

❖ **Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones**

The death of former Australian Labor Party (ALP) leader Edward Gough Whitlam in October 2014 offered an opportunity to reassess his political legacy. Most obituaries praised his tenure as prime minister (December 1972–October 1975). For Australian columnist Troy Bramston, Whitlam “was inimitable.”¹ Paul Kelly, the *Australian* newspaper’s editor-at-large, maintained that Whitlam “bequeathed to his successors a series of policy glories to be defended,” including “a more independent national ethos.” Indeed, “he was a rare leader who changed the nation’s direction.”² Summarizing Whitlam’s purported achievements, former Australian prime minister and Labor leader Paul Keating concluded that the election of Whitlam’s Labor Party to office in December 1972 released Australia “from the torpor of the Menzies era.”³ It also rescued Australia from its historic dependence on great and powerful friends. However, those of a more skeptical disposition found Whitlam’s achievements less impressive. Neil Brown, a columnist at the *Spectator Australia* and former Liberal Party deputy leader, thought Whitlam “a charmer, but a loser,” who could not exercise power.⁴ Australian economist Henry Ergas argued that “Whitlam displayed a rigidity, compounded by arrogance. As a result, while placing enormous weight on the role of government, he could never master the political process.”⁵

1. Troy Bramston, “A Truly Remarkable Career,” *The Weekend Australian* (Sydney), 25–26 October 2014, p. 20.

2. Paul Kelly, “The Whitlam Legacy, Hero and Villain,” *The Weekend Australian* (Sydney), 25–26 October 2014, p. 15.

3. Cited in Neil Brown, “Whitlam: My Part in His Downfall,” *The Spectator Australia* (Perth), 25 October 2014, p. vii.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Henry Ergas, “Social Democratic Peers in Europe and Canada Achieved More Than Gough Whitlam,” *The Australian* (Sydney), 27 October 2014, p. 10.

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Even in the field of foreign relations, where a generation of scholars viewed Whitlam's tenure as a "watershed" that had progressively redefined Australia's relations with the United Kingdom, the United States, China, and the developing world, doubts began to surface.⁶ Entering office in the wake of U.S. President Richard Nixon's opening to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in February 1972 and the Antibalistic Missile (ABM) and Strategic Arms Limitation (SALT) treaties concluded with the Soviet Union in May 1972, Whitlam saw détente as offering the opportunity for a more creative and "internationalist" middle-power foreign policy. According to scholars who promulgate the standard historical interpretation of the Whitlam years, the government charted a new course in Australian foreign policy, a course based on a more independent appraisal of Australia's national interests. In the process, Whitlam, who also served as foreign minister for the first eleven months of his tenure, brought to an end two decades of coalition government subservience to Anglo-American initiatives to contain the spread of Communism in Asia.⁷ Moreover, by distancing Australia from a policy of containment that allegedly upset regional neighbors, Labor also initiated a more progressive and constructive regional and international role for Australia based on economic cooperation and closer ties with the developing world, while, at the same time, not significantly impairing the Australia–New Zealand–United States

6. For a standard scholarly interpretation of Whitlam's tenure as a "watershed" in Australian foreign policy, see the influential Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australian Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991). For a characterization of the Whitlam interlude as a significant "break," "shift," or "turning point" in Australian foreign policy, see Meg Gurry, "Identifying Australia's Region: From Evatt to Evans," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (May 1995), pp. 21–28; Nancy Viviani, "The Whitlam Government's Policy toward Asia," in David Lee and Christopher Waters, eds., *Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997), pp. 99–109; Gary Smith, Dave Cox, and Scott Burchill, *Australia in the World: An Introduction to Australian Foreign Policy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 103–104; Gregory Pemberton, "Whitlam and the Labor Tradition," in Lee and Waters, eds., *Evatt to Evans*, pp. 131–162; Graham Freudenberg, "Aspects of Foreign Policy," in Hugh V. Emy, Owen Hughes, and Race Mathews, eds., *Whitlam Revisited: Policy Development, Policies and Outcomes* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1993), pp. 200–209; and Glen St. J. Barclay, "Problems in Australian Foreign Policy, July–December 1974," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (April 1975), pp. 1–10. For more recent interpretations, see, for instance, Gordon Bilney, "Foreign and Defence Policy," in Troy Bramston, ed., *The Whitlam Legacy* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2013), pp. 270–279; and Derek McDougall, "Edward Gough Whitlam, 1916–2014: An Assessment of His Political Significance," *Round Table*, Vol. 104, No. 1 (2015), pp. 31–40. There is, perhaps, no better indication of the enduring resilience of the Whitlam "turning point" myth in Australian foreign policy than the recent assessment given on his legacy by the eminent Australian political commentator Paul Kelly. See Kelly, "The Whitlam Legacy," p. 15.

7. In November 1973, Whitlam allocated the portfolio of foreign affairs to Senator Don Willesee. Whitlam, however, kept a tight grip on key aspects of his government's foreign policy.

Treaty (ANZUS) and Australia's traditional relations with the United States and Great Britain.⁸

This remains the prevailing scholarly consensus. Nevertheless, by the time of Whitlam's death and the release of formerly secret documents that revealed the extent of Australia's troubled relations with the Nixon administration, the legacy of Whitlam's conduct of foreign affairs had undergone some cautious revision. In particular, James Curran contended that "the dramatic deterioration in relations between the United States and Australia in the early 1970s" demonstrated that the depiction of Whitlam as a leader who dexterously redefined Australian foreign policy did not stand up to closer scrutiny.⁹ As Curran observed, the change in Cold War temperature that Nixon's Guam Doctrine occasioned, together with Washington's disengagement from Vietnam, Nixon's policy of d tente toward the USSR, and the opening to China, spurred Australia "much like other close US allies in the region . . . to seek a more independent role for itself in the Asia Pacific." In Whitlam's case, this also meant the rejection of Western forward military deployments in Asia on the assumption that "Australia faced no direct or external threat for the next ten to fifteen years."¹⁰ The "resulting collision" between competing Australian and U.S. visions "of how to approach the region in the wake of Vietnam provided fertile ground for misunderstanding and miscalculation."¹¹

8. Although the prevailing scholarship differs in emphasis and tone, agreement on these propositions is nonetheless considerable. See, for instance, Pemberton, "Whitlam and the Labor Tradition," pp. 136–145; Viviani, "The Whitlam Government's Policy towards Asia," pp. 101–108; Bilney, "Foreign and Defence Policy," pp. 31–40; and McDougall, "Edward Gough Whitlam, 1916–2014," pp. 36–38.

9. James Curran, "The Dilemmas of Divergence: The Crisis in American-Australian Relations, 1972–1975," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (April 2014), p. 377. See also Curran's *Unholy Fury: Nixon and Whitlam at War* (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 2015); and his "Dear Mr. President: What Did Gough Whitlam Say to Upset the President," *The Monthly* (Melbourne), August 2012, pp. 41–45. Curran is not the only scholar who has identified a marked worsening of the U.S.-Australia relationship during the Whitlam years. See, for instance, Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 104–131; and Neville Meaney, "The United States," in W. J. Hudson, ed., *Australia in World Affairs, 1971–75* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1980), pp. 163–208. Bell is critical of Whitlam's handling of the relationship, but Meaney is more sympathetic, seeing the prime minister's approach as part and parcel of a long-overdue process of downplaying the salience of U.S.-Australian relations. The importance of Curran's work is not only that it is the first thorough examination, based on extensive archival research, of the Whitlam government's relations with the Nixon administration in the mid-1970s, but that it is the first to detail the extent to which misunderstandings between the two governments nearly broke the alliance. Although Curran does not reject the proposition that the Whitlam government, by ending Australia's dependency on its great and powerful friends, inaugurated a new course in Australian foreign policy, he casts serious doubt on Whitlam's ability to manage Australia's key relationship effectively.

10. Curran, *Unholy Fury*, p. 193; and Curran, "Dilemmas of Divergence," p. 381.

11. Curran, *Unholy Fury*.

Misunderstandings and miscalculation, however, nearly broke the alliance. Given “just how much Labor got under Nixon’s skin,” Curran concluded, the U.S. president “gave real thought to abandoning ANZUS,” a conclusion that clearly questions the standard historical interpretation.¹²

Nixon’s strategy of détente certainly instigated change in regional relations and prompted Asia-Pacific governments to reassess their foreign policies. The president’s Guam Doctrine “significantly upset the regional balance,” spurring regional actors to plan for, and adapt to, Washington’s military draw-downs in Indochina.¹³ Furthermore, the Guam Doctrine, coupled with the opening to China and the search for “peace with honor” in Vietnam, caused U.S. allies to question both the U.S. government’s commitment to Asian security as well as its continuing role in the region.¹⁴ Increasingly skeptical about the Nixon administration’s willingness to hold a firm line in Asia, non-Communist regional states, in time, thought it prudent to exploit the growing thaw between the United States and the PRC.¹⁵ Somewhat reassured that Beijing was now less dangerous than previously assumed, they began to engage with China.¹⁶

This process, however, was a gradual one and often involved hedging strategies based on a recourse to larger powers such as the United States,

12. Curran, “Mr. President,” p. 45.

13. François Joyaux, *La nouvelle question d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. 2, *L'ère du conflit sino-soviétique, 1959–1978* (Paris, France: Éditions Payot, 1988), p. 297.

14. On 25 July 1969, President Nixon visited the American Pacific territory of Guam as part of a two-week-long tour of Asian and European countries. In a meeting with the press, Nixon discussed the future U.S. role in Asia, arguing that the United States intended to remain a significant player in Asia and uphold its defense commitments there, but expected its regional allies to be more self-reliant and to make a greater contribution to regional defense. Intended as general remarks, these comments were soon referred to by journalists as Nixon’s Guam Doctrine. However, as Jeffrey Kimball has noted, Nixon “came to appreciate the political value of the phrase and publicly began using it himself.” Rightly or wrongly, in due course his Guam remarks came to be interpreted across the region as a sign of his administration’s declining interest in Asia. On Nixon’s Guam Doctrine see, for instance, Jeffrey Kimball, “The Nixon Doctrine: A Saga of Misunderstanding,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (March 2006), pp. 59–74; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “An Elusive Grand Design,” in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969–1977* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 55–56; and Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), pp. 597–603. On the Nixon administration and Vietnam, see, for instance, David F. Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

15. For Southeast Asian responses to the Guam Doctrine, see Ang Cheng Guan, *Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War* (New York: Routledge, 2010), ch. 4.

16. On the administration’s opening to China, see, for instance, Margaret Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007); and Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969–1972* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2012).

India, Japan, and even the USSR to counterbalance Chinese power.¹⁷ It could not have been otherwise. Non-Communist regional states could hardly forget Beijing's support for subversive Communist movements across East Asia.¹⁸ As Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew explained in 1978 to PRC leader Deng Xiaoping in response to the latter's exhortations on Southeast Asian countries to align with China against the USSR,

there were no "overseas Russians" in Southeast Asia leading communist insurgencies supported by the Soviet Union, as there were "overseas Chinese" encouraged and backed by the Communist Chinese Party and government, posing threats to Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia.¹⁹

In 1972, moreover, the echoes of the Cultural Revolution still reverberated through Mao Zedong's China, with moderates and radicals maneuvering to position themselves to succeed the octogenarian chairman. In this context, it was far from certain that Nixon's opening to China would survive the political cross-currents of Mao's complex succession.²⁰ Aware of this risk, the Nixon administration in 1973 still envisaged, in its military planning, the possibility of a robust military response to any PRC-affiliated Communist attack in Northeast or Southeast Asia.²¹ Similarly, even while seeking an accommodation with the PRC, the East and Southeast Asian littoral states still wanted a conspicuous U.S. military presence in the region.²² They had important reasons for this, including concern about the threat that a Vietnam-dominated Indochina might pose to regional stability, the impact a protracted Sino-Soviet

17. For a definition of hedging and its application to Southeast Asia, see Denny Roy, "Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (August 2005), pp. 306–310. For a brief analysis of the behavior of Southeast Asian states in the 1970s regional system, see Mary Turnbull, "Regionalism and Nationalism," in Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 617–642.

18. On China's regional role, see, for instance, Andrea Benvenuti, "The International Relations of East Asia in a Historical Perspective" in Andrew T.H. Tan, ed., *Security and Conflict in East Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 17–18; and John Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), ch. 8.

19. Lee Kuan Yew, cited in Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 359.

20. On Mao's complex succession, see Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750* (New York: Random House, 2009), pp. 370–371.

21. Chen Jian, "Zhou Enlai and China's 'Prolonged Rise,'" in Ramachandra Guha, ed., *The Makers of Asia* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 169.

22. On Asian reactions, see Ang, *Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War*, chs. 4–6.

rivalry might have on the regional balance, and the regional implications of the emergence of a politically and economically assertive Japan.²³

To be sure, détente had reduced Cold War tensions, but it had by no means created a stable or risk-free regional environment. As French historian François Joyaux noted in 1973, the age of détente and East Asia's incipient multipolarity appeared to be characterized, at least in the short and medium terms, by significant volatility and instability.²⁴ Differences and disagreements between the Whitlam government and the Nixon administration should be evaluated against this regional backdrop.

Thus, despite the importance of Curran's corrective to the standard historical interpretation, this article adopts a different perspective on Whitlam's diplomacy. Rather than viewing his handling of Australia's alliance with the United States as part and parcel of an inevitable process of "national soul-searching" and a reasonable "assertion of a new found nationalism" in the wake of the British and U.S. withdrawals from Southeast Asia, it contends that Whitlam's foreign policy resulted from a somewhat idiosyncratic and moralistic reading of the Cold War in the era of détente that reflected his need to "appease" the ALP's radical Left.²⁵ The article shows that Whitlam, in his eagerness to embrace détente, reject containment, and project a more progressive and independent Australia, not only exacerbated tensions with the United States but also caused disquiet among Southeast Asian countries that were aligned with the West.

The problem with Whitlam's policy was that it threatened to undermine the ANZUS alliance and, more fundamentally, sent signals to the region that Western powers were no longer working together and no longer shared a similar understanding of Asian security. As Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser (and later secretary of state), reminded Whitlam's private secretary, Peter Wilenski, in May 1973, Australian withdrawals from Southeast Asia were likely to be interpreted in the region as a "symbolic retreat of Western Power."²⁶ One might be tempted to dismiss Kissinger's view as an

23. François Joyaux, "Un nouvel équilibre en Extrême-Orient," *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (January 1973), pp. 455–463. For Southeast Asian concerns over the future of Indochina, see for instance Joyaux, *Nouvelle question*, pp. 297–316.

24. Joyaux, "Nouvel équilibre," pp. 455–463.

25. Curran, "Dilemmas of Divergence," pp. 383–384. The question of Whitlam's new nationalism in an age of détente is further developed in James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia after Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010), pp. 143–154.

26. Memorandum of Conversation, Henry Kissinger and Peter Wilenski, 2 May 1973, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, Vol. E-12, Doc. 30 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume).

exaggeration. After all, Australia was only a small Western power on the fringes of Asia with limited military and economic influence. Yet, it would be wrong to assume Australia was insignificant. Although some regional leaders recognized that Australia lacked the necessary military capabilities and economic resources to affect the East Asian strategic balance significantly, they nonetheless welcomed a continuing Australian politico-military presence in the region. They did so for two reasons: first, because such a presence provided psychological reassurance against the threat of Communist penetration and helped assuage the mistrust of recently decolonized regional neighbors.²⁷ Second, they saw Canberra’s ANZUS link as “working as a trip-wire bringing in the USA” if Australian defense forces deployed in Malaysia and Singapore were ever to come under attack.²⁸ Lack of strategic coordination among Western powers thus made the smaller East and Southeast Asian states, linked to the West economically and in security terms, doubt the continuing Western commitment to regional security. Hence, this article argues that despite Whitlam’s claim that Nixon’s strategy of d tente and his emphasis on regional self-reliance allowed him to chart a new Australian course in regional affairs, Labor’s “internationalist” approach to regional engagement actually ran counter to Nixon’s Guam vision for a post-Vietnam Asia and, consequently, risked exacerbating, rather than reducing, regional instability and uncertainties.²⁹

To explore the insecurity that Whitlam’s policy engendered regionally, this article first examines the manner in which his government responded to

27. Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones, “Myth and Misrepresentation in Australian Foreign Policy: Menzies and Engagement with Asia,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 2011), pp. 69–70.

28. Bill Hayden, *Hayden: An Autobiography* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1996), p. 387. See also Graeme Dobell, “Lee Kuan Yew, Australia and ‘White Trash,’” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (June 2015), p. 366. However, despite Australia’s repeated attempts throughout the 1950s and 1960s to secure a clear-cut U.S. commitment to provide military assistance if Australian defense forces were to engage in military operations in Malaysia and Singapore, successive U.S. administrations had carefully avoided spelling out under what circumstances and to what extent they would be willing to provide such assistance. See, for instance, 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), pp. 168, 171–172, 280–281; John Subritzky, *Confronting Sukarno: British, American, Australian and New Zealand Diplomacy in the Malaysian-Indonesian Confrontation 1961–5* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2000), p. 83; Matthew Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia 1961–1965: Britain, the United States, Indonesia and the Creation of Malaysia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 218–219; and Antonio Renzi, “Disimpegno, Transizione e Distensione: La Gran Bretagna nel sud est asiatico tra Five Power e Stati Uniti, 1968–1974,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Florence, Italy, 2007, pp. 231–237.

29. On Whitlam’s claim, see, for instance, Canberra to State Department, Dispatch 2922, 25 May 1973, in Central Foreign Policy Files (CFPF) 1973–77, RG 59, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Almost no element of the Nixon administration’s post-Vietnam strategy has escaped significant academic criticism. For one such critical analysis, see Jussi Hanhim ki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

the 1972 Christmas bombing of Hanoi and its impact on U.S.-Australian relations that set the tone for the relationship from 1972 until Nixon's resignation in August 1974 amid the Watergate scandal. It will subsequently examine Whitlam's reappraisal of Australia's regional policy and how this created further disquiet in Washington throughout the early months of 1973. Although Whitlam's visit to Washington in late July 1973 eventually went some way to assuage U.S. concerns about the course of Whitlam's policy and reduce frictions between the two governments, fundamental differences remained between Canberra and Washington even after Nixon relinquished the presidency. By the time Whitlam stepped down in November 1975, the relationship appeared to have lost the closeness it had enjoyed only a decade earlier and required repair.³⁰

December 1972–February 1973: Not So Happy Days

Reporting on the outcome of elections in Australia and New Zealand in early December 1972, *The Washington Post* published an editorial declaring that the victory of Whitlam in Australia and Norman Kirk in New Zealand opened a new era in relations with “these stable, homogeneous island democracies separated by broad expanses of water from the ostensible sources of threat or contamination in or near the Asian mainland.”³¹ Thus, whereas in past Australian and New Zealand elections, a sense of world menace had informed the choice of

parties with a claim to special favour in Washington . . . with the opening to Peking and the winding down of the Vietnam war and the general sense of lightening in East Asia, the link with Washington is no longer the political necessity or even the political asset it used to be.³²

30. On this point, see David Goldsworthy et al., “Reorientation,” 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. 27; and T. B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations since 1788* (Sydney: Australian National University Press, 1991), pp. 406–407. A vast literature exists on Australia's postwar relations with the United States. For an illuminating discussion of the historiography of Australian-U.S. relations, see David McLean, “From British Colony to American Satellite? Australia and the USA during the Cold War,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (March 2006), pp. 64–79.

31. Washington to Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Cablegram 6136, 7 December 1972, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 13, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

32. *Ibid.*

For *The Washington Post*, the shocks Nixon inflicted with “his unilateral Chinese and economic moves were received not only in Japan but down under too.” Consequently, “the two Pacific members may well take a more relaxed view of their own security arrangements and . . . come to define security less in terms of US patronage and more in terms of their association with their Asian neighbors.”³³ Thus, two weeks before the Christmas bombing of Hanoi, elite opinion in Washington seemed reasonably relaxed about the prospect of Labor in power in Canberra. In a memorandum to Kissinger, the State Department’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs observed that, although a Labor government would be “perhaps less well-disposed toward the United States (at least toward its former cold-war policies) than the Liberal-Country coalition has been,” Australia would nonetheless remain “a strong ally.”³⁴

This apparent acceptance of a more independent Australian policy stance was short-lived. In particular, it did not anticipate the Whitlam government’s reaction to the administration’s decision to resume the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong from 18 to 29 December 1972, less than three weeks after Whitlam had formally assumed office. In the context of U.S. disengagement from Southeast Asia, the Nixon administration wanted the North Vietnamese government to accept formally the provisional settlement for the division of the country reached in Paris in October 1972.³⁵ South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu’s reluctance to embrace the draft agreement negotiated in October, together with North Vietnam’s unwillingness to make further concessions, prompted a resumption of the bombing of North Vietnamese installations.³⁶ Operation Linebacker II was intended to communicate U.S. resolve to the Thieu regime in the South as well as prevent the North from abandoning negotiations and seeking total victory instead.³⁷ In strategic terms, the operation was extremely successful, as Thieu subsequently accepted the treaty negotiated in October, allowing the war with the North to end officially on 23 January 1973. For Nixon, this was a peace Washington could sign “with honor.”

33. *Ibid.*

34. Labor Victory in Australia, Memorandum to Henry Kissinger, 2 December 1972, in Box 2106, RG 59, NARA.

35. On the October 1972 tentative agreement between the United States and North Vietnam, see Pierre Asselin, “Revisionism Triumphant: Hanoi’s Diplomatic Strategy in the Nixon Era,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 2011), pp. 127–128.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 128–131; and Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extermination from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), chs. 8–9.

37. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 445; and Schmitz, *Nixon and Vietnam*, p. 141.

The Whitlam government, however, perceived things differently. The critical response of Whitlam and his senior ministers evoked an acerbic U.S. reaction that presaged the dramatic change in U.S.-Australian relations for the rest of the Nixon administration. Leaders of the Australian Labor Left and government ministers Jim Cairns, Tom Uren, and Clyde Cameron forcefully condemned the bombing. Cameron considered the White House full of “maniacs,” and Cairns (who became deputy prime minister in mid-1974) considered Nixon guilty of “the most brutal and indiscriminate slaughter of women and children in living memory.”³⁸ They also supported the decision by Australian maritime unions to boycott U.S. shipping—a move reciprocated in the United States by the International Longshoremen’s Association, which boycotted Australian ships.³⁹ Whitlam himself wrote to Nixon expressing his concern at the resumption of the bombing. Although Whitlam’s note was couched in much milder language than his ministers’ remarks, the prime minister nonetheless rebuked Nixon for the U.S. actions in Vietnam. However, Whitlam’s plan to “approach the heads of government of some of our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific area to join me in addressing a public appeal to both the United States and North Vietnam to return to serious negotiations” for peace failed to impress Nixon.⁴⁰

The Australian government’s rebuke provoked indignation from U.S. officials. On 20 December, Kissinger called the Australian embassy in Washington to register the administration’s displeasure with the criticism. He told Roy Fernandez, the embassy’s chargé d’affaires, that the administration was “not particularly amused [at] being put by an ally on the same level as our enemy.” Nor did he appreciate Whitlam’s attempt to “organize a group of countries to make a joint appeal to us in North Vietnam.” As Kissinger made clear, this was “not the way to start a relationship with us.”⁴¹ In a brief phone conversation with Nixon on 29 December, Kissinger went further, complaining to the president that Whitlam’s letter was a “cheap little maneuver” and that for the Australian leader to make a “grandstand play was very dangerous, and very stupid too.” “It was an absolute outrage,” Kissinger observed, “that an ally of ours was putting Hanoi and us on the exactly same level.” He went on to say

38. Curran, “The Dilemmas of Divergence,” p. 378; and Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War, 1965–1975* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997), p. 323.

39. Edwards, *A Nation at War*, p. 323; and Curran, “Dilemmas of Divergence,” p. 378.

40. Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985), pp. 42–43; and Curran, *Unholy Fury*, pp. 120–121.

41. Telcon, Henry Kissinger and Roy Fernandez, 20 December 1972, in KA09206, Digital National Security Archive (DNSA).

that “the minute the Vietnam War ends, they [the Australians] will need us one hell of a lot more than we need them.” He concluded that if “we freeze him for a few months, he’ll get the message” and “play ball.” Nixon concurred, agreeing with Kissinger’s suggestion to “keep Whitlam dangling a bit.” “He’d better to stay in line,” Nixon said. For the president, Whitlam was “one of the peaceniks,” and his actions were “certainly putting the Australians on a very, very dangerous path.”⁴²

Even before Whitlam sent his note, the administration had shown some signs of apprehension about Whitlam’s foreign policy. On 19 December, U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers had given the Australian ambassador in Washington, Sir James Plimsoll, a thinly veiled warning that any downgrading of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) might affect the standing of ANZUS.⁴³ The administration knew about Whitlam’s lack of interest in SEATO—he had described it as “moribund”—and wished to prevent the Australians from dealing it a fatal blow.⁴⁴ Although U.S. officials themselves had significant doubts about the future viability of the Cold War alliance between the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, France, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan, they continued to see SEATO as an important politico-military guarantee to Thailand, a key Southeast Asian ally.⁴⁵ Plimsoll, who was to return to Australia the following day for consultations with the new Labor government, was asked to communicate to Whitlam and Defense Minister Lance Barnard “the importance we attach to [the] continuation in force of SEATO because of its special importance for Thailand and because in Asian eyes it represents American commitment.” “Its failure,” Rogers warned, “could have a spill over effect on ANZUS.”⁴⁶

On 28 December, having received no response from Nixon, Whitlam asked Plimsoll, now in Australia, “about the state of relations with the United States.” The experienced ambassador replied diplomatically that the relationship was “basically good, but there was of course the problem of Viet Nam.”

42. Tape No. 158, Conversation 15 (12:01 pm–12:08 pm), Telcon, Nixon and Kissinger, 29 December 1973, in *White House Tapes*, Nixon Presidential Library and Museum (NPLM), available at <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/tape158/tape158.php>.

43. U.S. State Department to all East Asian and Pacific diplomatic posts, 2 December 1972, in Box 2009, RG 59, NARA.

44. For Whitlam’s description of SEATO as moribund, see “SEATO Dying, Whitlam Says,” *The Age* (Melbourne), 2 August 1971; and Canberra to State Department, Airgram A-273, 26 August 1972, in Box 2106, RG 59, NARA.

45. Curran, *Unholy Fury*, p. 148.

46. U.S. State Department to all East Asian and Pacific diplomatic posts, 21 December 1972, in Box 2009, RG 59, NARA.

Whitlam told Plimsoll he could not keep “silence . . . on the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong. This activity,” he averred, “was futile from a military standpoint and insupportable and intolerable as far as he was concerned. He could not go along with such activity.” Plimsoll responded that Whitlam could “say he was neutral as between Hanoi and Saigon,” but the prime minister insisted he could “not live any more with that position.”⁴⁷ This was in stark contrast to his initial cautious support for President Lyndon Johnson’s escalation of U.S. military efforts in Vietnam in 1964–1965—a decision he regarded as an unavoidable step toward a negotiated settlement aimed at securing the continuing existence of a free South Vietnam.⁴⁸ After the Tet Offensive in early 1968, however, Whitlam had abandoned this position and become increasingly critical of U.S. involvement in Indochina.⁴⁹ Frustrated by years of opposition to a seemingly never-ending war, Whitlam and his ministers adopted a stance on Southeast Asia that they believed showed both independence and an ethical approach to foreign policy.⁵⁰

Whitlam’s abstract moral approach to Asian security colored not only his view of Nixon and Kissinger but also his attitude toward U.S. Democrats and the alliance that successive U.S. administrations had upheld in the Asia-Pacific since 1950. How dramatic the proposed shift was may be discerned from the fact that prior to the election in 1972 the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) regarded ANZUS as having “indirectly added to our security in Asia helping maintain the morale of non-Communist Asia.” Successive U.S. administrations, it was observed, considered ANZUS “a law of nature” and “essential to our strategy in South East Asia.” Whitlam, however, thought differently.⁵¹ As he observed to Plimsoll and DFA Secretary Keith Waller, “he had started favourable [*sic*] disposed towards the Democrats and Rusk, but had become seriously disillusioned.” Moreover, “he was inclined to take a

47. Record of Conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs on 28 December 1972, in A1838, 250/9/1, pt. 14, NAA.

48. On Labor’s (and Whitlam’s) initial support for Johnson’s decision to deepen U.S. involvement in Indochina in 1964–1965, its divisions over Vietnam, and its emerging opposition to the war in 1965, see Edwards with Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, pp. 312–314, 347–350, 357, 382–383; Edwards, *Nation at War*, pp. 162–163; Ashley Lavelle, “Labor and Vietnam: A Reappraisal,” *Labor History*, No. 90 (May 2006), pp. 121–122; and Peter Edwards, *Australia and the Vietnam War* (Sydney: New South, 2014), pp. 112, 120.

49. Edwards, *Nation at War*, p. 350.

50. On Labor’s growing opposition to the war, see *ibid.*, pp. 350–351; and Curran, *Unholy Fury*, p. 113.

51. Assistant Secretary Perceval to Mr. Hutchens, papers and articles on the case of U.S./Australia alliance, July 1972, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 13, NAA.

simple view of the ANZUS Pact that there was more in the alliance for the United States than for Australia.⁵²

In a conversation with the Australian ambassador to the United Nations, Sir Laurence McIntyre, at Kirribilli House on 2 January 1973, Whitlam clarified his position. Although he considered ANZUS a “natural association,” he was “opposed to SEATO,” and “he thought ASPAC [the Asian and Pacific Council] was absurd. For these reasons he wanted us to withdraw from ASPAC, to cut back the level of attendance at SEATO council meetings, but saw continuing representation in ANZUS worthwhile.”⁵³ In this context, Whitlam saw no reason for Australia to support the continued U.S. military presence in Southeast Asia, “particularly in its recent activity.” “He would not be as blatantly critical as Dr. Cairns, and Mr. Cameron,” but he was “convinced there could not be peace in South East Asia until the United States got out.” He therefore asked McIntyre “if there was anything the Security Council could do if the United States started ‘monsterring’ North Vietnam again.” In response, McIntyre informed Whitlam that the United States “would bitterly resent any actions by Australia which encouraged the Secretary General to act in the Vietnam context.” Undeterred, Whitlam told McIntyre “he was not particularly worried by the U.S. reaction. It could not and should not win in Vietnam.” Whitlam was also concerned about U.S. involvement in Thailand, and this was one of the reasons he was suspicious of Australia’s continuing role in SEATO.⁵⁴ McIntyre and DFA Deputy Secretary Keith Shann, by contrast, thought that Singapore and Indonesia, together with Thailand, “felt more comfortable by having the United States around.” Whitlam again

52. Record of Conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs on 28 December 1972, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 14, NAA.

53. Memorandum of Conversation, Whitlam, Laurence McIntyre, K. C. O. Shann, Dr. Peter Wilenski, and R. S. Laurie, 2 February 1973, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 14, NAA. ASPAC, a diplomatic initiative of Park Chung Hee’s South Korean government, was formally established in 1966 in Seoul to foster dialogue on political and security issues among non-Communist regional countries. It included Australia, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Thailand, and South Vietnam. Laos attended its ministerial meetings as an observer. Although ASPAC struggled to establish itself as viable regional forum and was eventually disbanded in 1975, it nonetheless represented, in the words of C. W. Braddick, “a first step towards the development of an Asian-Pacific regional consciousness.” See C. W. Braddick, “Japan, Australia and ASPAC: The Rise and Fall of an Asian Cooperative Security Framework,” in Brad Williams and Andrew Newman, eds., *Japan, Australia and Asia-Pacific Security* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 30–46. On ASPAC, see also H. S. Lee, “ROK’s East Asian Diplomacy during the Détente: Its Effort to Retain ASPAC and Consequent Failure 1972–1973,” *Korean Social Sciences Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2013), pp. 67–100; and “Asian and Pacific Council,” *International Organization*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Autumn 1966), p. 845.

54. Memorandum of Conversation, Whitlam et al., 2 February 1973.

disagreed. The Indonesian government was “feeling fairly confident,” he said, whereas the Singaporeans were “mischievous and equivocal.”⁵⁵

With Whitlam intent on questioning the U.S. role in Asia and determined to reappraise Australia’s approach to both regional security and the alliance with the United States, Plimsoll’s task was to try to minimize the damage inflicted by Labor ministers’ intemperate comments and Whitlam’s private message to Nixon. Returning to Washington, Plimsoll called on Rogers on 8 January to reassure him that the new Labor government continued to regard ANZUS as “the foundation of its [Australia’s] security” and that Whitlam was “supportive” of the United States despite his “strong opposition” to recent actions in Vietnam. Trying to minimize the import of ministerial criticism, Plimsoll pointed out that the new government was “without experience.” “None of the 26 Cabinet members,” he said, “has ever held public office before. Every minister feels he can shoot off his mouth. They have not yet learned collective Cabinet responsibility.” Rogers remained unimpressed that the administration felt “distressed” that “leaders of friendly countries publicly denounce our actions.” He added, ominously, that “comments made by Whitlam’s Cabinet colleagues would not be easily forgotten.” He observed that “when the going is tough, we look to friends to give us support.” Rogers pointed out that “three Australian Cabinet Ministers had been abusive in their personalized attack on the President.” Plimsoll admitted, diplomatically, “how deeply distressed” he was by recent events, but he felt “certain” that the new government “would soon get itself organized and act in responsible fashion.”

However, when Plimsoll raised the prospect of an ANZUS meeting later in the year, Rogers’s irritation with the Labor government resurfaced. He replied that “perhaps it would be best to hold off any discussions of SEATO and even ANZUS at this time” and that “it is just possible that we may not want to have an ANZUS meeting.” This, he continued, was “up to the President,” but in saying so “he wanted Plimsoll to know the depth of feeling at the highest levels of our Government.”⁵⁶

The administration’s growing frustration with the Whitlam government had been precipitated by the latter’s criticism of the resumption of U.S. bombing in Vietnam, but it was not confined to this issue alone. As Labor’s pre-election statements had presaged and the following months would reveal, U.S. and Australian officials held significantly different views not only on Vietnam

55. *Ibid.*

56. State Department to Canberra, Dispatch 4170, 9 January 1973, in Box 2109, RG 59, NARA.

but on the broader strategic approach to regional security in the age of d tente.

Unlike Nixon, who saw d tente with the USSR and the opening to China as a pragmatic means to reduce the regional security burden without undermining U.S. influence in Asia, Whitlam interpreted these changes as a license to abandon Cold War calculations and adopt a more ethical and international diplomacy as a way of overcoming remaining tensions. Taking his cue from progressive, social democratic governments in Canada, West Germany, and Sweden, Whitlam perceived continuing reliance on alliances as an obstacle to regional stability and progress. Realists like Nixon and Kissinger, by contrast, still considered a U.S. regional presence, alongside increasingly self-reliant allies capable of policing an unstable region, as both a deterrent to, and a balance against, potential Soviet and Chinese expansion.

As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Richard Sneider patiently explained to DFA officials in March 1974, “the Nixon doctrine was clearly seen not as a means of escape from problems in Asia but as a form of continuing commitment.”⁵⁷ As Sneider’s words intimated, Nixon’s regional strategy remained firmly committed to a realist balance of power in Asia, whereas Whitlam’s government, as DFA Deputy Secretary Richard Woolcott observed, “now had a basically different approach to Indo-China than the United States.”⁵⁸ The Labor government assumed that a conflict between the superpowers was no longer likely and that the persistence of a realist Cold War framework was, at best, unhelpful and, at worst, misguided.

Whitlam first outlined the progressive contours of Labor’s regional strategy in a speech delivered at the Australian Institute of Political Science’s summer school in Canberra on 27 January 1973. Calling for a new regional architecture, he rejected the logic of containment. Instead, he contended that Australia refused “to look on South East Asia as a front line in terms of the old clich  of forward defense,” adding that he no longer saw “South East Asia as a frontier where we might fight nameless Asian enemies.” Not only did he fail to detect “any immediate threat of external aggression to the countries of South East Asia,” but he also refused to cast North Vietnam in the role of a “new antagonist as a replacement for China.” Whitlam vowed that Australia would “be charting a new course with less emphasis on military pacts.” To

57. Meeting of Departmental Officers with R. L. Sneider, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and United States Officials, 6 March 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA.

58. *Ibid.* Woolcott was replying to Marshall Green, by then U.S. ambassador to Australia (he had replaced Walter Rice in June 1973), who had asked how Australian policy to Indochina could be defined.

distance himself from what he perceived as his Liberal predecessors' excessive dependence on the Cold War policies of the United States and Britain, he contended that he would seek "to shed old stultifying fears and animosities which have encumbered the national spirit for generations and dominated, often for domestic partisan purposes, the foreign policy of [Australia]." He declared that his government would pursue a new course "based on an independent outlook in foreign affairs" and "directed towards a new regional community geared to the realities of the '70s." What he had in mind was a regional community "without ideological overtones," "free" of "great power rivalries," and insulated "against ideological interference from the great powers." Hence, Australia supported the ASEAN concept of neutralization—an idea originally proposed by the Malaysian government and subsequently endorsed by ASEAN—and would do its best to "encourage other countries involved in the region to endorse the proposition."⁵⁹

Whitlam's new conception of regionalism failed to impress U.S. policymakers. In a memorandum to Kissinger, John Holdridge of the National Security Council staff tartly observed that the Australian Labor leader "persisted in his public debate with us" and that he was apparently "determined to bull ahead with his rather doctrinaire notions." "He seems," Holdridge added, "more driven by his own half-formed ideas than by pressures from his Party's dogmatic left-wing." Holdridge thus concurred with New Zealand Prime Minister Kirk, who considered Whitlam more "concerned with ideological appearances to the neglect of serious pragmatic consequences" and "prone to take black and white approaches."⁶⁰

However, with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords by the U.S. and North Vietnamese governments on 27 January 1973, Washington's response to Labor's public criticism of U.S. policy in Vietnam abated somewhat. Instead, what most irritated Nixon was the criticism leveled by Sweden's Olof Palme and by Canada's Pierre Trudeau (with whom Whitlam associated himself).⁶¹ As Nixon saw it, U.S. military power was continuing to underpin

59. "Opening Address by the Prime Minister, the Hon. E.G. Whitlam," Australia Institute of Political Science Summer School, Canberra, 27 January 1973. On the neutralization concept, see, for instance, Ang, *Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, pp. 93–94; and Michael Leifer, "Regional Order in South-East Asia," *Round Table*, Vol. 64, No. 255 (1974), pp. 309–317.

60. Memorandum from John Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, 1 February 1973, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Volume E-12, Doc 26.

61. See Robert Bothwell, "Thanks for the Fish: Nixon, Kissinger, and Canada," in Logevall and Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World*, p. 407; and Fredrik Logevall, "The Swedish-American Conflict over Vietnam," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (June 1993), pp. 436, 439–444.

Western security, but instead of being grateful, these progressive, social democratic leaders were using détente as license to take cheap shots at U.S. foreign policy.⁶²

By February 1973, Whitlam's government had not only questioned the relevance of SEATO but had even downplayed the importance of ANZUS as "not the overriding factor in our bilateral relationship."⁶³ Australia had also recognized the North Vietnamese government. In early February, Plimsoll sent a series of cables to Canberra warning the government against precipitate decisions on Southeast Asia. On 2 February, he noted "a feeling that the United States thought that there ought to have been some genuine discussion with them before you made your decision (to recognize North Vietnam) such [as] has been conducted by Canada and Japan (the latter of which is likely to defer action)."⁶⁴ Despite Plimsoll's advice, Whitlam in April wrote a cabinet paper extolling the merits of ending strategic export controls to North Vietnam.⁶⁵ Relations with the United States further deteriorated when the Australian government raised the question of the status of and access to U.S. intelligence installations in Australia at Pine Gap, Nurrungar, and North West Cape.⁶⁶ In January, Whitlam had warned the U.S. ambassador in Canberra, Walter Rice, that should the administration "screw us or bounce us" over Vietnam, these installations "would become a matter of contention."⁶⁷

Plimsoll's concerns were by no means unfounded. Whitlam's independent approach to regional security and alliance politics sparked disquiet not only in Washington but among Australia's closest Southeast Asian neighbors. In late February 1973, Whitlam traveled to Indonesia to explain his concept of Australia's future regional role and to sell his latest idea—the creation of an East Asian consultative grouping modeled on the Organization of American States in the Western Hemisphere.⁶⁸ In talks with President Suharto, Whitlam emphasized the need for new forms of regional cooperation that could complement existing arrangements, such as ASEAN, and help solidify regional

62. Memorandum of Conversation, 15 February 1973, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. 35, Doc 6.

63. "The Changing Significance of the Australian-United States Alliance," n.d., in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 15, NAA.

64. Washington to DFA, Cablegram 592, 2 February 1973, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 15, NAA.

65. DFA to Washington, Cablegram 971, 1 March 1973, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 15, NAA.

66. On this question, see, for instance, Peter Edwards, *Arthur Tange: Last of the Mandarins* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2006), pp. 204–206.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 204. Rice served as U.S. ambassador in Canberra from September 1969 to May 1973.

68. On the "Asian Forum" idea, see John Knight, "Australia and Proposals for Regional Consultation and Co-operation in the Asian and Pacific Area," *Australian Outlook*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (December 1974), pp. 259–273.

stability.⁶⁹ Suharto, however, reacted tepidly to Whitlam's *démarche*. Far from welcoming Whitlam's regional concept, he considered it a threat to ASEAN, Jakarta's brainchild and preferred diplomatic tool for promoting Indonesia's political ascendancy in Southeast Asia.⁷⁰

Differences between the two leaders went beyond alternative concepts of regionalism and extended to other regional issues; namely, Washington's post-Vietnam role in Southeast Asia and the threat posed by North Vietnam to regional stability. In this context, Whitlam sought to enlist Suharto's support for his effort to persuade the Thai government to demand an early withdrawal of U.S. troops from Thai soil. Whitlam asserted that a continuing U.S. military presence in Thailand would only serve to provoke North Vietnam and further destabilize Indochina.⁷¹ Whitlam not only failed to convince Suharto, but also misread the Indonesian New Order's understanding of regional resilience, predicated as it was on the rejection of the Communist threat. Suharto politely declined Whitlam's overtures, noting that Hanoi, much like Beijing, "still posed a subversive threat to Southeast Asia" and that "some other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand might very possibly feel a need for US bases until they were able to build sufficient national unity to withstand external pressures."⁷² Equally significant, the Indonesians also informed the Australian delegation that they did not wish to see the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) undermined by a precipitate Australian withdrawal from Singapore.⁷³ Although the Indonesians publicly supported nonalignment and neutralization, New Order pragmatism "saw merit in the FPDA as a reassuring factor in regional politics."⁷⁴

Through the FPDA, Australia had, since 1971, deployed a small military contingent in Malaysia and Singapore as part of a joint Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom (ANZUK) force.⁷⁵ The Australian commitment

69. Prime Minister in Indonesia, M/34, 20 February 1973, available at <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/>; and "Whitlam Is Welcome in Jakarta," *Canberra Times*, 21 February 1973, p. 1.

70. Michael Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 142.

71. Memorandum from John Holdridge of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 1 March 1973, in *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. E-12, Doc. 27.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Douglas-Home to Washington, Telegram 988, 30 April 1973, in FCO 24/1556, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK); 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), p. 56.

74. Benvenuti and Jones, "Engaging Southeast Asia?"

75. On the origins and creation of the FPDA, see Ang Chen Guan, "On the Establishment of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA)," in Ian Storey, Ralf Emmers, and Daljit Singh, eds., *Five Power*

to ANZUK had been made with the view to building mutual trust between Malaysia and Singapore, improving their defense capabilities as well as providing “a psychological deterrent against threats to their security” and ensuring that they “remained friendly to Australian and Western interests.”⁷⁶ More broadly, ANZUK was intended “to offer a security blanket for the development of greater regional cooperation and self-reliance.”⁷⁷ Labor’s plans for a radical contraction of Australia’s contribution to ANZUK also raised concern in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Such ideas, if implemented, these Commonwealth states agreed, would put the FPDA’s continued existence at risk.⁷⁸ In April, Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew complained to U.S. officials that Whitlam’s plans were likely to “have a widespread effect, leaving the impression throughout [Southeast Asia] that the West is on the way out.” For Lee, the FPDA was “a very good arrangement”—one that had “such a stabilizing effect” on the region. In his view, a complete Australian withdrawal was “sheer lunacy.” Lee contended that Whitlam’s plans would “make it very difficult to hope that much will be left after President Nixon finishes his term in office.”⁷⁹ A month later, Lee returned to this issue, informing the U.S. ambassador in Singapore, Edwin Cronk, that although the Australians had made “a considerable contribution to the region” in the past, Whitlam had “thrown it all away by his inept handling of matters since taking office.” Although the FPDA was very much in Lee’s mind, he was also scathing about Whitlam’s plans for a new regional architecture, which he regarded as “an example of his lack of sensitivity and his tendency to talk too much.”⁸⁰

In Malaysia, Tun Razak’s government had gradually moved to reduce Kuala Lumpur’s traditional dependence on the West and had publicly embraced a more nonaligned posture in regional and international affairs.⁸¹ Razak, who had replaced Malaysia’s first postcolonial prime minister, the

Defence Arrangements at Forty (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011), pp. 24–35; and Daniel Wei Boon Chua, “America’s Role in the Five Power Defence Arrangements: Anglo-American Power Transition in South-East Asia, 1967–1971,” *The International History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (August 2017), pp. 615–637.

76. Benvenuti and Jones, “Engaging Southeast Asia?” p. 56.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

79. Memorandum of Conversation, William Rogers and Lee Kuan Yew, 6 April 1973, in Box 938, VIP Visits, NSC Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, NPLM.

80. Memorandum of Conversation, Lee Kuan Yew and Ewin Cronk, 4 May 1973, in Box 2108, RG 59, NARA.

81. Cheah Boon Kheng, “Abdul Razak bin Hussein, Tun (1922–1976),” in Lawrence Goldman, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biographies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), online edition (2009), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/94674>; and Ang, *Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, p. 92.

anglophile Tunku Abdul Rahman, was a Malay nationalist. Yet, for all his officially proclaimed neutrality, which theoretically accorded with Whitlam's new regional posture, Razak was also ill at ease with Australian plans to disengage from the FPDA.⁸² As Razak explained to visiting Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Lance Barnard in May 1973, the Malaysian government, while still "hop[ing] for real progress on neutralization with(in) 3 to 5 years," was nonetheless convinced there were "sufficient uncertainties ahead that made continuation of the FPDA complementary to [its] plans."⁸³ One evident uncertainty was the revival of the Malaysian Communist Party's insurgency along the Thai-Malaysian border and the political support the PRC was lending to it through its Voice of the Malayan Revolution (VMR).⁸⁴ Razak also stressed to the United States the continuing importance of a Western regional presence and distanced himself from the neutralization concept, claiming a "strong guardian position of US forces" in Southeast Asia was "entirely compatible with his own views."⁸⁵

The Indonesians, Singaporeans, and Malaysians were not alone in sharing misgivings about Whitlam's approach to regional security. In early March, Thai Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Chatichai Choonhavan told the New Zealand ambassador in Bangkok that "his ASEAN colleagues were very disappointed that Australia and New Zealand appeared to be withdrawing from the area." In Choonhavan's view, both Canberra and Wellington "should hold on to [their] memberships of SEATO and ASPAC." As he told the New Zealand ambassador, "[y]ou are both members of the region and you have a beachhead on the mainland. Why do you want to withdraw? You have been good friends."⁸⁶ The Thai government's unease about the shift in Australian policy became public a few days later after the mass-circulation *Newsweek* published an interview with Whitlam in which he claimed that a continuing U.S. military presence in Thailand would be destabilizing.⁸⁷ In response, Thai

82. Benvenuti and Jones, "Engaging Southeast Asia?" p. 44.

83. Kuala Lumpur to State Department, Dispatch 4245, 10 May 1973, in CFPF 1973-77, RG 59, NARA. See also, Benvenuti and Jones, "Engaging Southeast Asia?" pp. 49-50.

84. Ang, *Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, p. 92; and Karl Hack, "The Long March to Peace of the Malayan Communist Party in Southern Thailand," in Michael J. Montesano and Patrick Jory, eds., *Thai South and Malay North: Ethnic Interactions on a Plural Peninsula* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), pp. 173-198.

85. Kuala Lumpur to State Department, Dispatch 1585, 17 April 1973, in CFPF 1973-77, RG 59, NARA.

86. Bangkok to New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cablegram 230, 5 March 1973, in A1838, 2004/13/21 pt. 23, NAA.

87. Canberra to State Department, Dispatch 1392, 9 March 1973, in CFPF 1973-77, RG 59, NARA.

Deputy Prime Minister Praphat Charusathian openly criticized the Australian approach to regional security. When asked by a journalist whether a continuing U.S. presence was an obstacle to regional stability, Praphat dismissed Whitlam's views as those of "a *farang*" (foreigner) who did not understand the region.⁸⁸ Non-Communist Southeast Asia's dismay at Whitlam's foreign policy "changes" prompted *The Economist* to observe in June 1973 that Whitlam's lofty declarations sounded "better in Canberra than in Jakarta, Singapore or Bangkok, whose residents may see them as patronising, irrelevant or even dangerous if they imply a reduction of Australia's limited, but in their eyes, useful military role."⁸⁹ In the context of these growing regional misgivings, Whitlam undertook a high-profile tour of Southeast Asia in early 1974 not only to dispel regional concerns that Australia was turning isolationist, but also to reassure the Australian public and media that his government "was taking enough interest" in Southeast Asia.⁹⁰

Mr. Whitlam Goes to Washington (July 1973)

In Washington, Nixon held views identical to those of non-Communist Southeast Asian policymakers. In February, he told British Prime Minister Edward Heath that he had trouble "understand[ing] the Australian position" and believed it was in Canberra's interest to keep the United States engaged in Southeast Asia. He wondered to Heath whether Whitlam was an "isolationist."⁹¹ The Australian ambassador to Japan, Gordon Freeth, reported to Canberra a revealing conversation with Sneider in July 1973. Sneider maintained that the State Department "had had the greatest difficulty in persuading the President to see Mr. Whitlam." Cooling relations, together with Australia's perceived isolationism, had evidently affected the U.S. commitment to ANZUS. The United States, Sneider reported, was "willing to go on with it, but if Australia and/or New Zealand had any doubt about the value of ANZUS (to) them the United States would not make any attempt to continue with it."⁹²

88. Bangkok to State Department, Dispatch 4160, 15 March 1973, in CFPF 1973-77, RG 59, NARA.

89. "Gough Whitlam's Australia: A Survey," *The Economist*, 23 June 1973, p. 48.

90. S. Falle to C. W. Squire, 12 February 1974, in FCO 15/1867, TNAUK.

91. Nixon quoted in Curran, *Unholy Fury*, p. 487.

92. Tokyo to DFA, Memorandum 1033, 23 July 1973, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 15, NAA.

Nixon, despite his antipathy to the Australian leader and his policies, eventually agreed to have a brief meeting with Whitlam in Washington on 31 July. In Australia, the administration's steadfast refusal to issue a formal invitation to Whitlam had generated significant disquiet.⁹³ In June, the recently appointed ambassador to Australia, Marshall Green—a high-ranking State Department official and expert on Asia “who could take a tougher attitude from time to time”—arrived in Australia to oversee this sensitive new phase in American-Australian relations.⁹⁴

Even before Green sent a cable from Canberra to Washington warning that the administration's refusal to issue an invitation could further damage ties with Australia, Nixon and Kissinger had decided to accept a brief, informal discussion with Whitlam.⁹⁵ As Kissinger had explained to the president on 29 May, such a visit could actually help the administration “keep Whitlam in line.” A meeting with Whitlam would not only convey to him “the extent to which we see his Asian policies cutting across our own” but would also serve to remind him of the administration's belief that “the inter-relationship of our two Asian policies is not a question falling completely outside our ANZUS relationship.” In addition, the meeting could also help Whitlam resist the Labor Left's opposition to the continuing presence of U.S. bases on Australian soil.⁹⁶

When Nixon met Whitlam on 31 July, the president sought to persuade his Australian counterpart of the need for a coordinated Western response to regional security. He told Whitlam it was “a question of where we go from here. Do we try to muddle through or do we try to develop a concept of where we are going and how we propose to get there?” The Nixon Doctrine, he reminded Whitlam, was “not designed to wash our hands of international responsibilities.” In criticizing current “liberal thinking” and its defeatist and placatory character, Nixon told Whitlam that “we really have to decide whether we are going to opt out of the world.” Neither the United States nor Australia, he continued, wanted

to appear in a colonialist role, and neither of us may exactly approve of some of the governments in Asia where authoritarianism prevails; but these are forces

93. Curran, *Unholy Fury*, pp. 321–322.

94. Tokyo to DFA, Memorandum 1033, 23 July 1973.

95. Marshall Green to State Department, Dispatch 3304, 16 June 1973, in Box 2105, RG 59, NARA; and Curran, *Unholy Fury*, pp. 321–322. For a brief profile of Green, see Curran, “Dilemmas of Divergence,” pp. 393–394.

96. Kissinger to Nixon, 29 May 1973, in Box 910, VIP Visits, NSC Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, NPLM.

with which we must deal, and we must do so in the closest cooperation—standing together against predators. In this connection, any evidence of our pull-out from Malaysia or other key countries could have tragic consequences.⁹⁷

Nixon said he understood that public opinion was “mov[ing] strongly in the other direction in a world weary of war and beset with economic problems.” But he again stressed the need for the United States and Australia to take “the longer view,” because if the West’s resolve to face regional challenges weakened, the resulting power “vacuum” would “be exploited” by the Soviet Union or China. “Can we afford,” Nixon asked rhetorically, “to create a vacuum which others will fill?” “Our views of the world,” he concluded, “may differ but our goals are the same.”⁹⁸

In response, Whitlam paid tribute to Nixon’s Guam Doctrine for instilling “a greater sense of self-reliance among the developing countries.” He also reassured the president that Australia was “not pulling out of Southeast Asia” and that its air squadron would “remain in Malaysia.” In addition, he stressed that “Australia’s effectiveness in its relations with Asia depend[ed] upon a reputation for good relations with the US.” “This,” he added, “Australia will maintain, just as it will seek to advance its economic ties with the US.”⁹⁹

Nevertheless, Whitlam refrained from endorsing Nixon’s broader strategic vision.¹⁰⁰ If the U.S. intention before the meeting was to persuade Whitlam to subscribe to Nixon’s post-Vietnam strategy for Southeast Asia, it failed. In a speech given to the National Press Club immediately after the meeting, Whitlam clarified where he stood on matters of regional security. Although he considered it “absurd” to describe Australia as “moving into a different ideological orbit” and reiterated his government’s continuing support for close U.S.-Australian ties, he nonetheless remained committed to charting a more independent foreign policy course. Rather than embracing Nixon’s strategic vision, he stated his preference for a region freed from superpower rivalries, claiming it was “time for an ideological holiday.”¹⁰¹

In policy terms, this meant an end to what Whitlam considered to be the West’s misguided Cold War involvement in the region. For twenty years, he declared, he had “been appalled” at the damage the West had done to itself and

97. Nixon and Whitlam, 31 July 1973, in Box 910, VIP Visits, NSC Files, Nixon Presidential Materials, NPLM.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*

101. Prime Minister’s Address to the National Press Club, Washington, 31 July 1973, available at <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/>.

to others by its “Western ideological preoccupations,” and he was determined to ensure that Australia did not repeat those mistakes. Australia was “not a satellite of any country” and possessed “independent interests of our own” that required a new regional role for Australia. Australians would no longer be gripped by “fear of our own environment” and would cease to swing “between ‘fortress Australia’ and over-dependence on one great powerful protector.”¹⁰²

Whitlam’s forceful rhetoric, however, offered only a partial account of the West’s role in Asia since 1950 and Australia’s part therein. In claiming that Australia’s support for the regional containment strategy had negated the country’s true national interest as an independent middle power, Whitlam blithely ignored the intentions of the Soviet Union and Communist China in Southeast Asia and their predilection for hard power. Given Whitlam’s and Nixon’s competing assessments about the continuing necessity of Western power to balance the PRC and USSR in the interest of regional stability, the Washington meeting merely crystallized the differences between the two leaders.

From Washington to Wellington: The ANZUS Meeting of February 1974

Contrary to the advice offered by Nixon and Kissinger, the Whitlam government and the DFA under its recently appointed secretary, Alan Renouf, pursued an “independent” foreign policy stance with ever greater determination after the Washington meeting.¹⁰³ From the U.S. perspective, independence looked more like incipient neutralism, with Canberra positioning itself to adjudicate between the United States and the claims of what it perceived as misrepresented regimes such as North Vietnam, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), and Cuba, or even the Soviet Union’s *de jure* right to the Baltic states.¹⁰⁴

By the time of the ANZUS meeting in February 1974, there was little doubt that U.S.-Australian relations were strained across a range of emerging

102. *Ibid.*

103. Renouf replaced Waller as DFA secretary in 1974.

104. Despite Whitlam’s protestations that Australia remained an “aligned” country, even respected academic observers at the time could not fail to notice that Australian foreign policy under Labor “had seemingly shifted Australia’s alignment from that of one of the most conspicuously Western-aligned nations, to that of one of the least.” See Barclay, “Problems in Australian Foreign Policy,” p. 1.

security issues stretching from North Korea to the Indian Ocean. Exemplifying these burgeoning differences, Whitlam contended in January 1974 that state breakdown in Cambodia was the inexorable fallout from the war in Vietnam, which he termed “President Nixon’s war.” U.S. involvement in Cambodia “ran counter” to Whitlam’s view “that a settlement of Cambodia had to be determined in that country itself not by outsiders.”¹⁰⁵ Max Walsh in the *Australian Financial Review* considered Whitlam’s pronouncement “the first really public break in Australia’s usually automatic alignment with the U.S., Japan and Indonesia on major questions concerning South-East Asia” and a “downgrading of Australia’s relationship with the US.”¹⁰⁶

In a similar vein, Whitlam supported the visit by his most prominent leftwing minister, Cairns, to Pyongyang in December 1973 in order to recognize the DPRK regime on the grounds that “the Labor party believed in applying the principle of universality in the United Nations and to diplomatic recognition.”¹⁰⁷ This not only frustrated the United States but caused serious diplomatic friction with the U.S.-aligned South Korean government.¹⁰⁸ Cairns’s visit to Pyongyang also involved a trip to Hanoi, where he observed that the “Vietnamese had been the victims of one of the greatest injustices ever perpetrated on a nation.”¹⁰⁹

As a consequence, U.S. officials wondered “how dependable the Australian government is as a close ally.”¹¹⁰ Summing up the U.S. perception of Australia’s internationalist posture from 1972 to 1974, Plimsoll observed that the Nixon administration

had had reservations about the speed with which Australia moved to announce the opening of diplomatic relations with North Vietnam; to develop contacts with North Korea; and the Prime Minister’s comments on United States bases

105. Patrick Shaw, Notes on talk with Prime Minister at Kirribilli House on evening of 27 January 1974, Australian-U.S. Relations, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 16, NAA.

106. Max Walsh, “The Greening of Australia Showdown,” *Australian Financial Review* (Melbourne), 21 December 1973, cited in DFA to Washington, Cablegram 6446, 21 December 1973, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 16, NAA.

107. Ibid.

108. Ambassador’s Report on Australia’s Relations with the United States, March 1972–February 1973, 1 February 1973, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 16, NAA; DFA to Washington, Cablegram 6390, 19 December 1973, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 16, NAA; Washington to DFA, Cablegram 7155, 20 December 1973, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 16, NAA; and Washington to DFA, Cablegram 1175, 27 February 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA.

109. DFA to Washington, Cablegram 6390, 19 December 1973.

110. Ibid.

in Thailand . . . each action tended to be scrutinized to see whether it was a straw in the wind.¹¹¹

The straws in the wind that Plimsoll identified pointed in a neutralist and isolationist direction that, from a U.S. strategic perspective, rendered Australian support increasingly uncertain.

Doubts became more acute when Australia, along with nonaligned states such as India, opposed the British and U.S. decision to expand military facilities on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean in late 1973.¹¹² The United States and the United Kingdom took this decision in the wake of the Soviet buildup of forces in the Persian Gulf. Rather than follow Whitlam's international legal principles as a guide to foreign policy, the United States sought to contain what it perceived as the Soviet Union's attempt to escalate its military reach into the Indian Ocean.

The DFA correctly assessed that the United States, with the cooperation of the British, had decided to improve "facilities at Diego Garcia" as a result of "recent developments in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Persian Gulf areas . . . and the clear Soviet intention to deploy that capability in the Indian Ocean and other world oceans." Explaining their governments' motives in February 1974, the U.S. and British missions in Canberra informed the DFA that the choice to "extend the facilities at Diego Garcia was a joint Anglo-American" decision and "a reaction to a Soviet escalation rather than a United States build up."¹¹³ However, the DFA found these reasons for expanding the facilities "disingenuous and inadequate."¹¹⁴ A March 1974 memorandum on relations with the United States noted that "we have already expressed dissatisfaction . . . over the late and insufficient information they gave us before announcing [the] expansion of their Diego Garcia facilities."¹¹⁵ Australia, along with India and the Soviet Union, proposed instead a zone of peace and neutrality in the Indian Ocean similar to the idea put forward by ASEAN for the South China Sea. Australia "urge(d) the Soviets to follow up this signal of interest."¹¹⁶ Here again, Australian resistance to the extension of facilities at

111. Ambassador's Report on Australia's Relations with the United States March 1972-February 1973.

112. See Chen Changwei, "A Diplomatic Tightrope: The Whitlam Government and the Diego Garcia Dilemma," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (December 2015), pp. 530-550.

113. Record of Conversation with Thomas F. Conlon, Counsellor United States Embassy, and B. Barder, Counsellor, British High Commission, 5 February 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA.

114. DFA to Singapore, Cablegram 720, 7 February 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 16, NAA.

115. Relations with the United States, 6 March 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA.

116. *Ibid.*

Diego Garcia differed fundamentally from the view of Western-aligned East and Southeast Asian states. From Japan to Indonesia, anti-Communist Asia supported the Anglo-American stance.¹¹⁷

The Australian reaction in part reflected the fact that it had not been given “advance notice” of the Anglo-American plan.¹¹⁸ This sense of being “out of the loop” was reinforced by the U.S. decision—made without informing the Australian government—to put its Australian facility at North West Cape on DEFCON 3 in late October 1973 as part of a worldwide alert in the wake of a large-scale Soviet airlift to Egypt and Syria.¹¹⁹ Australian initiatives in North Korea and North Vietnam, Anglo-American plans for Diego Garcia, and the question of U.S. bases in Australia all exacerbated diplomatic tensions and led to calls for the closure not only of North West Cape but also the Pine Gap facility, which was crucial to the West’s signals intelligence capacity.¹²⁰

Amid this environment of deteriorating ties, the ANZUS powers eventually met in late February 1974. Kissinger did not attend, and Assistant Secretary Rush took his place. New Zealand Prime Minister Kirk hosted the meeting, and Foreign Minister Donald Willesee represented Australia. DFA Deputy Secretary L. H. Border, with notable understatement, thought the meeting “went quite well.”¹²¹ The communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, however, was remarkably bland. Apart from calling for adherence to the ceasefire in Vietnam and a peaceful resolution of the Cambodian conflict, deploring the world economic situation, and reaffirming the “great value placed on the alliance,” the meeting achieved little.¹²²

Behind the scenes, the U.S. delegation was deeply concerned at the manner in which Australian foreign policy had developed since Whitlam met Nixon in July. Rush told new Australian Ambassador Patrick Shaw before the meeting that the United States “regretted” the Australian decision “to proceed” with normalizing relations with North Korea “at this time” and

117. Meeting of Departmental Officers with R. L. Sneider, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and United States Officials, 6 March 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA; and Washington to DFA, Cablegram 793, 7 February 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA.

118. Meeting of Departmental Officers with R. L. Sneider, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and United States Officials, 6 March 1974.

119. Notes of Discussion Held at the Pentagon between Minister for Defense and the United States Chairman of Chiefs of Staff, 10 January 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 16, NAA.

120. Record of Conversation between the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defense, Lance Barnard, and the United States Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, Washington, 9 January 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 16, NAA.

121. L. H. Border to the Prime Minister, 28 February 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA.

122. Wellington to DFA, Cablegram 382, 27 February 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA.

considered Whitlam's comments in February 1974 about U.S. policy in Cambodia to have "impugned the good faith of America."¹²³ In a similar vein, Sneider told Australian chargé d'affaires Fernandez in Washington that the United States could not understand the Australian decision to ignore South Korea's request to "delay negotiations with the DPRK." As Sneider pointed out, the DPRK had rejected "the principle of universality" that Whitlam supposedly upheld.¹²⁴ That the ANZUS meeting even arrived at a consensus is striking. Later in the year, after the resignation of President Nixon, Robert Roy Macartney, the Melbourne *Age's* U.S. correspondent, observed "a marked deterioration in Australian-US relations," noting that Whitlam conducted foreign policy visits in an "Alice in Wonderland atmosphere."¹²⁵

Conclusion

In recalling Whitlam's first few months in office 30 years later, Whitlam's former foreign policy adviser, Woolcott, described them as a "heady, busy and exciting" time in his diplomatic career—a time in which the new Labor government moved swiftly and decisively "to reshape Australian foreign policy."¹²⁶ As various scholars at the time also pointed out, these months were characterized by significant, almost compulsive, foreign policy activism and highly publicized diplomatic initiatives.¹²⁷ No key policy area was left untouched—from Australia's dealings with the world's major powers to its relations with its Asian neighbors and the developing world. In the government's desire to chart a new course in foreign affairs, however, one area stood out for special attention—the handling of Australia's relations with the United States. As D. J. Murphy noted in 1973, "one of Mr. Whitlam's first tasks" in foreign policy was to free Australia of its traditional "loyalty to the protector' syndrome" and "to reeducate the Australian electorate regarding the American alliance

123. Washington to DFA, Cablegram 1057, 21 February 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 17, NAA. Shaw had replaced Plimsoll in February 1974.

124. *Ibid.*

125. DFA to Washington, Cablegram 5799, 4 October 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 21, NAA.

126. Richard Woolcott, *The Hot Seat: Reflections on Diplomacy from Stalin's Death to the Bali Bombings* (Sydney: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), p. 113.

127. See, for instance, David Goldsworthy, "Foreign Policy Review," *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (March 1974), p. 104; and Owen Harries, "Mr. Whitlam and Australian Foreign Policy," *Quadrant* (Sydney), August 1973, p. 56.

whose importance had been exaggerated out of all proportion” during the preceding 23 years of Liberal-Country Party rule.¹²⁸ Although Whitlam was not “anti-American,” he had the tendency—as Owen Harries contended at the time—to see the United States as “a well meaning, blundering and myopic political animal, that needed to be shown the path to saner relations by smaller and more sophisticated friends,” and he believed he was the one to show it “the error of its ways.”¹²⁹ Given these premises, Whitlam’s attempts to recast the Australia-U.S. relationship in line with his progressive and internationalist preconceptions were all but certain to find an unreceptive audience in Washington.

That said, Nixon’s frustration with Whitlam did not stem exclusively from Labor’s moralizing pronouncements on the Nixon administration’s conduct. Rather, the president’s frustration was largely attributable to the Australian government’s radically different assessment of political developments in contemporary Asia and the role that the Western alliance should (or could) play there after Washington’s détente with the Soviet Union and its opening to China. Although these policies no doubt “helped create conditions in which Mr. Whitlam was readily able to produce an impression of rapid freewheeling change in Australian foreign policy,” his policy, as Coral Bell noted in the 1980s, also “incorporated a sort of détente euphoria, much stronger than it ever was in Washington’s own policies.”¹³⁰ This was hardly surprising. In Australian Labor circles Nixon’s policy toward China and U.S.-Soviet détente were construed as an opportunity to “take an ideological holiday,” burnish Labor internationalist credentials, and downsize the still much needed Western politico-military presence in the region in the belief that such a presence, far from creating the conditions for regional stability, had in fact been a destabilizing factor in the politics of the early Cold War. But, as high-ranking Australian defense official Bill Pritchett told his U.S. counterparts in 1974, Whitlam and

128. D. J. Murphy, “Problems in Australian Foreign Policy, January to June, 1973,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (December 1973), p. 332.

129. Owen Harries cited in Roy Macartney, “Whitlam under an American Delusion,” *The Age* (Melbourne), 4 October 1974. For this Labor tendency, see, for instance, the record of a conversation between Whitlam, then the leader of the opposition and U.S. Secretary of State Rogers in Memorandum of Conversation, Whitlam and William Rogers, 16 July 1970, in Box 2109, RG59, NARA. In what Rogers called a “sermonette,” Whitlam argued that Washington’s reputation “ha[d] been tarnished by U.S. pursuit of certain misguided policies and that [he] would be willing to help us polish this up again.” See also Broadcast on Radio Australia by the Prime Ministers, Mr. Whitlam, Canberra, 22 December 1972, available at <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/>.

130. Bell, *Dependent Ally*, pp. 156–157.

some DFA officials (notably Deputy Secretary Woolcott and Secretary Alan Renouf) were more “concerned with imagery rather than content.”¹³¹

Symbolism is important in international affairs, but it cannot be a substitute for prudent deliberation. The problem with Whitlam’s policy toward the United States and to regional issues was that, in his quest for dramatic departures from the past, he ended up conveying the wrong kind of symbolism: that Western power was no longer necessary to maintain peace and stability in the region.

In this context, Curran’s claim that “Nixon, along with many in the national security community in Washington, was unable to comprehend Australia on its own terms” is somewhat misleading.¹³² Far from misunderstanding Whitlam’s policy vis-à-vis Asia, the Nixon administration understood it all too well and the difficulties it created for the conduct of U.S. grand strategy in the region and beyond. Labor’s rejection of forward defense, military power, and the doctrine of containment was at odds with Nixon’s approach to regional security. The Nixon administration accepted that after 1972 containment required recalibrating to the changing power dynamics in Asia and the realities of U.S. domestic politics. Nevertheless, the Nixon administration also recognized that a credible Western politico-military presence would be central to maintaining the balance crucial to regional stability. The Guam Doctrine and détente, in the administration’s view, never entailed a wholesale departure from Asia and were instead a means of finding a *via media* between abdication and overextension. Neither policy was intended to overcome Cold War rivalries. Détente was principally aimed at better managing relations with the USSR in light of the latter’s immense and growing power, and the Guam Doctrine was an attempt “to define a more balanced role for the United States, one that would allow for more credible and effective leadership,” especially in the developing world, where the Nixon administration anticipated facing continuing competition from the USSR.¹³³ Nixon’s much-praised opening to China has to be seen in this context—that is, as a Cold War strategy intended to “restore US power and face the new, unprecedented challenges to America’s global [and regional] position.”¹³⁴ Given Nixon’s and Kissinger’s realist approach to regional balance, the idea that the Whitlam

131. Canberra to State Department, Dispatch 5477, 20 August 1974, in CFPF 1973–77, RG 59, NARA.

132. Curran, *Unholy Fury*, p. 197.

133. Barbara Zanchetta, *The Transformation of American International Power in the 1970s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 24–28.

134. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

government was turning Australia “neutral . . . (into) a sort of Sweden of the Pacific” upset the Nixon administration’s strategic calculations.¹³⁵

Ultimately, Whitlam, ever mindful that mainstream Australian public opinion would not tolerate a significant rupture in U.S.-Australian relations, modified his position. However, he was fortunate. If Nixon had not been pre-occupied with Watergate in 1974, he might have adopted a more confrontational approach to Australia’s ideological holiday. To be fair to Whitlam, he had to contend with his prominent leftwing ministers, such as Cairns, and the anti-American wing of his party. However, unlike Australian Labor leader and Prime Minister Robert Hawke ten years later, he was not especially successful in reining in the leftwing faction of his party. That is, Whitlam’s independent foreign policy and the ALP Left’s pacifism combined to produce an erratic policy toward both the United States and its traditional regional allies. No wonder that, in this context, the Nixon administration was concerned that Whitlam’s regional policy was undermining the Western regional presence and affording comfort to the USSR and its regional proxies, to the detriment of Western interests.

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135. Carl T. Rowan, *Chicago Daily News*, questioning Whitlam on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, 6 October 1974, cited in Washington to DFA, Cablegram 6133, 7 October 1974, in A1838, 250/9/1 pt. 21, NAA.