

Engaging Southeast Asia?

Labor's Regional Mythology and Australia's
Military Withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia,
1972–1973

❖ Andrea Benvenuti and David Martin Jones

Introduction

The decision in 1973 to withdraw Australian forces from Malaysia and Singapore constitutes a neglected but defining episode in the evolution of Australian postwar diplomacy against the backdrop of the Cold War.¹ A detailed examination of this episode sheds interesting light on Australian foreign policy from 1972 to 1975, the years when Gough Whitlam of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) served as prime minister. The Whitlam government's policy in Southeast Asia was not as much of a watershed as the secondary literature suggests.

The dominant political and academic orthodoxy, which developed when the ALP was in power from 1983 to 1996 and has subsequently retained its grip on Australian academe, holds that the Whitlam government transformed Australian foreign policy and established the basis for Australia's successful engagement with the Asian region. Proponents of this view claim that Whitlam ended his Liberal predecessors' uncritical support for U.S. and British Cold War policies in Southeast Asia and turned Australia into a more credible, reliable, and valuable regional partner.² The foreign policy editor of *The Australia*

1. Little has been written on the Whitlam government's approach to the Five Power Defence Arrangements. See Henry Albinski, *Australian External Policy under Labor: Content, Process and the National Debate* (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1977), pp. 241–245; John Ingleson, "South-East Asia," in W. J. Hudson, ed., *Australia in World Affairs, 1971–75* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1980), pp. 296–299; and Robert O'Neill, "Defence Policy," in Hudson, ed., *Australia in World Affairs*, p. 19.

2. On this point see David Martin Jones and Mike Lawrence Smith, "Misreading Menzies and Whitlam: Reassessing the Ideological Construction of Australian Foreign Policy," *Round Table*, No.

lian, a daily newspaper, recently observed that the history of Australian foreign policy “is written overwhelmingly by people who are constitutionally sympathetic to the Labor party” and that one of “Labor’s great virtues is the creation and maintaining of its own legends.”³ We need to be especially cautious about the notion that Whitlam was the architect of Australia’s engagement with the Asian region.

Somewhat curiously, given the prevailing orthodoxy, the Whitlam government’s most important policy decision in Australia’s relations with Southeast Asia was an act of *disengagement* rather than engagement. In January 1973, Deputy Prime Minister Lance Barnard, who also served as minister of defence, informed Australia’s closest Commonwealth allies that Australia planned to reduce its contribution to the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). The proposed reduction threatened the FPDA’s very existence.

The Australian decision provided Harold Wilson’s British Labour government, elected to power in February 1974, with the pretext it needed to withdraw Britain’s ground contribution to the FPDA. The departure of both British and Australian ground forces from Singapore in the mid-1970s effectively ended any chance the FPDA had to become a framework for regional security.

Why did the ALP government embark on this major change in foreign policy? How did the government promote regional stability? What impact did Australia’s actions have on regional allies and on the subsequent development of Australia’s ties with them?

The recent release of previously classified Australian and British archival material affords an opportunity to reexamine Whitlam’s foreign policy. Focusing on the Labor government’s approach to the FPDA, we show in this article that far from being the adroit and skillful architect of Australian engagement with Asia, Whitlam irritated Australia’s allies and complicated Australia’s relations with its immediate neighbors. We also demonstrate that Australia’s subsequent readjustment to its neighborhood was not quite the success story depicted in Australian diplomatic history, mostly written from the perspective of the Labor “legend.” The article first explores Australia’s military posture in Southeast Asia prior to the Whitlam withdrawal and then

305 (2000), pp. 387–406. See also 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.

3. Greg Sheridan, “Regrets at Giants Passing,” *The Australian*, 5 July 2008, p. 11. A former Liberal foreign minister, Alexander Downer, makes a similar claim about the partisan nature of the historical understanding of Australian foreign policy. See Alexander Downer, “Freedom, the Promotion of Democracy and Contemporary Challenges” (Earle Page College Lecture, University of New England, Armidale, Australia, 2005).

analyzes the much-vaunted Whitlam “watershed” in Australia’s foreign relations.⁴

A Necessary Presence in Southeast Asia

From the early 1950s on, Australia had maintained a small military presence in the Malayan region as part of a British-led Commonwealth effort to preserve stability in an area of strategic importance—an area relatively near Australia that served as a gateway between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.⁵ Japan’s World War II offensive through Southeast Asia had reinforced Australian fears that the Malayan archipelago represented a corridor to, rather than a barrier between, Australia and Asia. The outbreak of Communist insurrection in Malaya in 1948 further alerted the Australian government to the threat the region would pose to national security if it should fall into hostile hands.

In 1950, with this security challenge in mind, Prime Minister Robert Menzies decided to assist the overstretched British colonial authority in its operations against Communist insurgents by committing a squadron of Dakota transport aircraft and Lincoln bombers to the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960).⁶ Subsequently, in 1955, the Liberal–Country Party coalition government increased Australia’s military commitment to the Emergency by dispatching ground forces to Southeast Asia as part of the British-led Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR).⁷ In 1959, following the creation of an independent Federation of Malaya, the Menzies government formalized Australia’s military contribution to the CSR by adhering to the Anglo-Malayan (later Malaysian) Defence Agreement (AMDA).⁸ AMDA authorized Britain

4. Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia’s Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995); Gary Smith, “Australia’s Political Relationship with Asia,” in Mark McGillivray and Gary Smith, eds., *Australia and Asia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 103–104; and Meg Gurry, “Identifying Australia’s Region: From Evatt to Evans,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1995), pp. 21–28.

5. On Australia’s involvement in the Malaysian region in the 1950s, see 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), chs. 6, 10–11; and Peter Gifford, “Cold War across Asia,” in David Goldsworthy, ed., *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia*, Vol. 1: *1901 to the 1970s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), pp. 194–197.

6. See Edwards with Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, pp. 86–102.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 160–181; Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia 1941–1968* (London: Curzon, 2001), pp. 182–184; Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 215–216; and Hiroyuki Umetsu, “The Origins of the British Commonwealth Strategic Reserve: The UK Proposal to Revitalise ANZAM and the Increased Australian Defence Commitment to Malaya,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2004), pp. 522–524.

8. Malaya became independent on 31 August 1957.

and its Commonwealth allies to defend Malaya's security against external aggression.⁹

Despite signing on to AMDA, Australia by 1957 no longer gave highest priority to helping its Malayan and British partners quell the Communist insurgency in Malaya. AMDA forces by that point already had the Communist insurgency under control, although the Emergency remained in effect until 1960. Instead, Menzies increasingly sought to protect the fledgling Malayan state against external threats by supporting the U.S.-inspired South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and by pursuing the West's Cold War strategic aims in the wider region.

Academic commentary on this period has focused on the role Australian military forces played in support of U.S. containment policies in Southeast Asia. Yet, from the early 1960s this role gradually changed. The principal task of Australia's deployments in the Malay Peninsula was to thwart any external threat to the newly created Federation of Malaysia. Established in 1963, the Federation included Malaya, the crown colony of Singapore, and the Borneo (East Malaysian) states of Sabah and Sarawak.¹⁰ Politically, the Menzies government shared Britain's desire to protect the new Federation, thereby facilitating Malaysia's emergence as a viable state friendly to Western interests. In early 1965, after some tergiversation, the Australians agreed to commit a battalion to the British-led Commonwealth military operations against Indonesia during Jakarta's campaign of *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) against the Malaysian Federation (1963–1966).¹¹ Sukarno, the Soviet-backed Indonesian president, launched *Konfrontasi* (a low-intensity conflict mostly confined to the East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah) to undermine the Federation and bring about an *Indonesia Raya* (greater Indonesia). *Konfrontasi* reflected the Manichean *Weltanschauung* of Sukarno and Indonesian Foreign Minister Subandrio, both of whom envisaged a global conflict between the old, established, colonial powers and the newly emerging forces (*nefos*) of the Third World.¹²

With the replacement of Sukarno by Suharto's New Order in 1966, *Konfrontasi* ended, but Australia's regional security challenges only intensified. In August 1965, Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman expelled

9. For an examination of AMDA see Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation*, pp. 223–233.

10. Singapore was expelled from the Federation in 1965

11. See for instance Moreen Dee, *Not a Matter for Negotiation: Australia's Commitment to Malaysia 1961–1966* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2005). See also Moreen Dee, "In Australia's Own Interests: Australian Foreign Policy during Confrontation 1963–1966," Ph.D. Diss., University of New England (Australia), 2000.

12. Andrew T. H. Tan, *Security Perspectives of the Malay Archipelago* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2004), p. 130.

Singapore from the Malaysian Federation. Meanwhile, in 1967 the British government announced its plans to withdraw all British forces from Malaysia and Singapore by the mid-1970s. The British decision raised serious concerns in Canberra.¹³ The impending withdrawal would not only end Australia's traditional reliance on British power as a bulwark against regional threats but could also weaken the West's strategic position in Southeast Asia and undermine the politico-economic viability of Malaysia and Singapore.¹⁴ Hence, the British announcement served to concentrate Australian strategic minds on whether to continue to provide political and military reassurance to Malaysia and Singapore or withdraw from the region altogether.

In December 1967, Harold Holt's Liberal–Country Party coalition government decided to uphold the Menzies doctrine of securing the integrity of Malaysia.¹⁵ Despite the risk that “a continuing military presence could become a military commitment of unpredictable magnitude in the event of an insurgency situation developing in Malaysia or conflict with Indonesia,” the Australian government agreed, in principle, to continue stationing Australian troops in that area (see Table 1). Holt's cabinet concluded that a continuing military presence would “enhance Australia's political standing and its diplomatic influence in the region,” “support confidence and stability in Malaysia and Singapore,” “promote the development of their military capabilities,” and “foster military co-operation between them.” Australian officials also believed that Australia's steadfastness would encourage the United States to remain engaged in Southeast Asia. Holt warned that an Australian withdrawal would send the wrong signal to Washington at a time when U.S. support was “necessary for whatever strategy Australia decided upon.”¹⁶ By preserving Australia's role in Southeast Asia, Australian policymakers sought to bolster regional stability. John Gorton, Holt's successor, formally endorsed this policy a year later.¹⁷

Thus, contrary to the prevailing academic orthodoxy, the period from the declaration of the Malayan Emergency (1948) to the establishment of the FPDA (1971) witnessed the conservative Liberal–Country Party coalition governments forging a policy of engagement with Southeast Asia. This en-

13. On Australia's response to the British withdrawal, see Andrea Benvenuti, *Anglo-Australian Relations and the “Turn to Europe,” 1961–1972* (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), ch. 5.

14. Cabinet Decision 473, 19 July 1967, in A5840/XM1, Vol. 2, National Archives of Australia, Canberra (NAA); Holt to Downer, 27 July 1967, in A1209/80, 1966/7335 pt. 6, NAA; and Cabinet Decision 357 (FAD), 25 May 1967, in A5840/XM1, Vol. 2, NAA.

15. Cabinet Decision 771 (FAD), 11 December 1967, in A5840, Vol. 3, NAA.

16. Cabinet Submission 443, August 1967, in A4940, C4626, NAA; and Cabinet Decision 771 (FAD), 11 December 1967, in A5840, Vol. 3, NAA.

17. Ian Hancock, *John Gorton: I Did It My Way* (Sydney: Hodder Headline, 2002), pp. 226, 234.

Table 1. Australian military presence in Singapore and Malaysia, 1967

<i>Royal Australian Navy (RAN) (based in Singapore)</i>	<i>Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) (based at Terendak, Malaysia)</i>	<i>Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) (based at Butterworth, Malaysia)</i>
2 destroyers or frigates		
1 aircraft carrier (on annual visit of 6 to 8 weeks)	1 infantry battalion	
1 field battery	1 Mirage squadron	
1 field engineer troop sup- porting signal and adminis- trative element	1 Sabre fighter squadron (to be replaced by a sec- ond Mirage squadron)	
	HQ and supporting units	

Source: "Military Reasons for the Retention of 28 Commonwealth Brigade Group in Singapore, Malaysia," May 1967, in A1209, 1967/7334 attachment 2, NAA.

agement required a robust commitment to the security of Malaysia for the wider stability of Southeast Asia. Successive Liberal prime ministers considered this posture central to Australian security. This prudential calculation of engagement with the region subsequently informed Australian thinking on the British-sponsored Five Power Defence Arrangements.

Australia and the FPDA

The election in June 1970 of a Conservative government in the United Kingdom temporarily abated regional concerns about British policy toward Southeast Asia. British Prime Minister Edward Heath adopted a pragmatic approach to British interests East of Suez, partly reversing the stance taken by Harold Wilson's Labour government, which had sought to abandon British interests altogether. Heath's pragmatism, however, did not entail an open-ended commitment to regional security. Instead, the UK proposed replacing AMDA with a new consultative defense framework based on an old Malaysian idea. Heath pledged to maintain a small military presence to lend credibility to the new structure.¹⁸

18. DOP(70) 4th Meeting, 22 July 1970, in CAB 148/101, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK); CM(70) 8th Meeting, 23 July 1970, in CAB 128/47, TNAUK; and Carrington to Heath, 6 August 1970, in FCO 24/646, TNAUK.

The FPDA thus evolved from the British Conservative government's desire to renegotiate AMDA. Australian Prime Minister John Gorton welcomed the British initiative. He saw it not only as a way to share the task of stabilizing the region but also as a means of enhancing defense cooperation between Singapore and Malaysia and assisting the development of their military forces.¹⁹

Under the terms of the FPDA, Australia was to maintain a small military contingent in Malaysia and Singapore as part of a joint Australia–New Zealand–UK (ANZUK) force. The FPDA afforded a mechanism for the five parties to the agreements “to consult each other in the event of external aggression or the threat of such an attack against Singapore or Malaysia.” The FPDA also provided for an Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) for Singapore and Malaysia as “a form of potential deterrence.”²⁰ Although the FPDA identified no potential aggressor, the perceived threat needed no specification. As Singaporean scholar Andrew T. H. Tan observed in 2004, “the FPDA, coming so soon after the events of the Confrontation, was clearly directed at any contingency arising from Indonesia, and continues to this day to be viewed by Indonesia as being targeted at her.”²¹ The FPDA's aim was to deter Indonesia from seeking regional hegemony.

Australia committed military forces to the FPDA to build confidence between Malaysia and Singapore and strengthen their collective defense capabilities. Australian officials saw confidence-building as crucial in the wake of Singapore's expulsion from the Malaysian Federation in August 1965 and the resulting surge of mutual distrust between the two former British colonies. The Australian presence also provided a psychological deterrent against regional threats to the new states and ensured that both Malaysia and Singapore remained friendly to Australian and Western interests in an era of declining, but still real, Cold War tensions. Last but not least, an Australian military contingent stationed alongside British and New Zealand forces provided a security blanket for the development of greater regional cooperation and self-reliance.

Thus, in 1971, despite lingering reservations about the desirability of Australia's “forward defense” posture, Gorton's government agreed to commit Australian military forces in Malaysia and Singapore to the FPDA (see

19. Australian Department of Defence, “Discussions with Lord Carrington: Australian Position Paper,” July 1970, in A5882, CO988, NAA. See also Tim Huxley, “Singapore and Malaysia: A Precarious Balance?” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1991), pp. 204–213.

20. How Soon Khoo, “FPDA—If It Ain't Broke . . .,” *Journal of the Armed Forces of Singapore*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2000), p. 2; and Chin Kin Wah, “The Five Power Defence Arrangements Twenty Years After,” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1991), p. 193. The headquarters of IADS was based at Butterworth under the command of an Australian Air Force vice marshal.

21. Tan, *Security Perspectives of the Malay Archipelago*, p. 13.

Table 2. The Australian Commitment to the FPDA, 1971–1972

<i>Personnel numbers</i>	<i>Type/function</i>	<i>Location</i>
1,500	2 RAAF squadrons	Malaysia
30	Technical assistance personnel	Malaysia
700	Battalion and battery in 28th ANZUK Brigade	Singapore
180	Other troops in brigade (engineers)	Singapore
810	Support, technical, and administrative personnel (including RAAF and RAN shore group)	Singapore

Source: FAD Submission 231, 26 March 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA.

Table 2).²² As Premier Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore explained to Gorton's successor, William McMahon, in June 1972, the arrangements were mutually beneficial: "The defence arrangements of the Commonwealth five have provided continuing stability in an area important to us the people who live in it, and perhaps to you in Australia."²³

Heath's pragmatic advocacy of the FPDA suited Australia's own prudential approach to regional security during the Cold War. The consultative mechanism that evolved for allaying regional anxiety also appealed to the foreign policy calculations of Southeast Asian realists like Lee Kuan Yew, Singaporean Foreign Minister Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, and Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. As early as 1966, Rajaratnam argued that despite periodic tensions he regarded "the survival and well being of Malaysia as essential to the survival of Singapore." Singapore's leaders recognized that in external affairs, Malaysia and Singapore "are really two arms of one politically organic whole."²⁴ In addition, Rajaratnam viewed the FPDA as a useful counterweight to the recently formed Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Singapore and Malaysia were founding members but which Singapore worried might become "a vehicle for Indonesia's regional dominance."²⁵ Moreover, the FPDA was valuable in keeping open the chan-

22. Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965–75* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), pp. 200–201.

23. Ingleson, "South-East Asia," p. 298. Lee's remarks were originally quoted in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1972.

24. S. Rajaratnam, "Speech Given at University of Singapore Society," 30 July 1966, quoted in Barry Desker and Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "S. Rajaratnam and the Making of Singapore's Foreign Policy Singapore," in Chong Guan Kwa, ed., *S. Rajaratnam on Singapore: From Ideas to Reality* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2006), p. 15.

25. Desker and Osman, "S. Rajaratnam," pp. 4–7. The original five signatories of the 1967 Bangkok

nels of communication between Singapore's and Malaysia's armed forces, which had not always easily coexisted.²⁶

The Strange Birth of Labor's Engagement Legend

The FPDA initiative, for all its merits, failed to gain bipartisan support in Australia. The ALP had fought the 1969 federal election on a political platform that included the withdrawal of all Australian forces from Vietnam by June 1970.²⁷ Under pressure from the party's left wing and spurred by opinion polls revealing that a majority of Australians opposed any further involvement in the war, Labor leader Gough Whitlam pledged to bring Australian troops home by June 1970 if the ALP won the election.²⁸ The ALP lost the 1970 election by a narrow margin, but over the next two years its foreign policy stance hardened. This trend reflected the influence that the ALP left exercised over Whitlam's foreign policy calculations. After 1965, the left of the party, which considered all Australian troop deployments on the mainland of Asia a baleful consequence of European colonialism and U.S. imperialism, had vigorously opposed Australia's military involvement in the U.S.-led attempt to curtail the Vietcong insurgency in South Vietnam. Steeped in this anti-imperialist ideology, the ALP equated the Australian forces stationed in Malaysia and Singapore with the deployments in Vietnam.²⁹ Under continued pressure from the left, Whitlam declared that Australian military forces in Asia were not "serving any purpose."³⁰

Whitlam and his deputy, Lance Barnard, followed up on this view when they turned their attention to the Australian contingents in Malaysia and Singapore. Although Whitlam realized that the troop presence in Malaysia and Singapore was far less controversial than the military deployments in Vietnam, he informed British Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home in January 1972 that the ALP was also "against a garrison in Singapore." The choice of the noun "garrison" with its colonial connotations was evidently deliberate and distorted the purpose of the ANZUK

Declaration that established ASEAN as an informal consultative mechanism for economic and cultural cooperation were Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

26. Huxley, "Singapore and Malaysia," p. 207.

27. Hancock, *Gorton*, p. 235.

28. Rick Kuhn, "Laborism and Foreign Policy: The Case of the Vietnam War," in David Lee and Christopher Waters, eds., *From Evatt to Evans: The Labor Tradition in Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997), p. 91. See also Edwards, *Nation at War*, p. 350.

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

30. Memorandum of Conversation (Memcon), Heath and Whitlam, 9 July 1970, in PREM 15/36, TNAUK.

force.³¹ Whitlam claimed to support some form of joint arrangement with Malaysia and Singapore (notably in areas such as training and equipment procurement) but insisted on closing the Singapore “garrison.” Whitlam sounded more amenable to retaining the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) base at Butterworth in North Malaysia, describing it as “a special case.” The RAAF personnel at Butterworth, he said, were helping Malaysia build its air force and could not “pull out immediately.”³² He further informed Douglas-Home that he “did not intend to make the Five Power arrangements a big political issue in Australia.” Actions, however, belied words. Increasingly, Whitlam and Barnard cast doubt on Australia’s role in the FPDA.³³

These misgivings reflected the ALP’s felt need to distance Australia from its British and U.S. allies and to pursue an independent foreign policy. Despite protestations to the contrary, such revisionism reflected a set of anti-Western ideological assumptions. An evolving academic and media critique of Australian dependence “on a powerful protector” facilitated this revisionism. Critics of the Menzies-era forward defense policy, such as Bruce Grant, Ralph Pettman, J. P. Chiddick, and Max Teichmann, claimed that Australia’s dependence on the United States and Britain was morally and politically demeaning.³⁴ This dependence, they insisted, retarded Australia’s political growth and “inhibited the development of a mature role in international affairs.” Bruce Grant argued that “by constantly seeing ourselves in the mirrors of London and Washington, we have come to believe that our contribution to world affairs must be insignificant.”³⁵

To overcome these attachments, and in keeping with this revisionist understanding, Whitlam’s foreign policy sought “to dramatise the need for new departures.”³⁶ These “new departures” entailed not only distancing Australia from British and U.S. interests but also joining forces, as Whitlam explained

31. See O’Neill, “Defence Policy,” p. 19.

32. Memcon, Douglas-Home and Whitlam, 19 January 1972, in FCO 30/1364, TNAUK.

33. See, for instance, Radio Australia News Bulletin, 30 March 1970, in FCO 24/1293, TNAUK; Canberra to Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Telegram 731, 31 May 1972, in FCO 24/1294, TNAUK; Memcon, Douglas-Home and Whitlam, 29 June 1972, in FCO 24/1294, TNAUK; and Whitlam, “It’s Time for Leadership,” 13 November 1972, http://www.australianpolitics.com/elections/1972/72-11-13_it's-time.shtml.

34. See J. P. Chiddick and Max Teichmann, *Australia and the World: A Political Handbook* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 87; Trevor Reese, *Australia, New Zealand and the United States: A Survey of International Relations 1941–68* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 326–328; Bruce Grant, *The Crisis of Loyalty: A Study of Australian Foreign Policy* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), p. 2; and Ralph Pettman, “The Radical Critique and Australian Foreign Policy,” in P. J. Boyce and J. R. Angel, eds., *Independence and Alliance: Australia in World Affairs, 1976–80* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 299.

35. Grant, *Crisis of Loyalty*, p. 3.

36. Alexander MacLeod, “The New Foreign Policy in Australia and New Zealand: The Record of the Labour Governments,” *Round Table*, No. 250 (1974), p. 291.

to parliament in 1973, “with the world’s progressive and enlightened movements towards freedom, disarmament and cooperation . . . no longer enthralled to bogies and obsessions.”³⁷ As T. B. Millar observed, in practice this meant a counter “identification with the causes espoused by the majority of the Afro-Asian world.”³⁸

These ideological considerations, rather than a pragmatic calculation of national interests, shaped ALP thinking about Southeast Asia. Pursuit of a progressive, enlightened, and “creative maturity” in world affairs, which in practice translated into an abstract identification with the Third World, glossed over regional complexities.

Guided by this abstract ideal, ALP foreign policy thinking after 1968 failed to distinguish between the role Australian troops played in South Vietnam and the rationale for keeping an Australian contingent in Malaysia and Singapore.³⁹ Yet the two deployments responded to entirely different strategic logics. The Australian military involvement in Vietnam reflected a long-term foreign policy goal: namely, the perceived need to support the U.S. policy of containment in Asia and thereby reinforce U.S. treaty commitments to Australian security. Australian troops in Indochina served in a combat role.

By 1969, President Richard Nixon’s Guam Doctrine, which called for a policy of “Vietnamization” to facilitate a rapid U.S. military pullout from Southeast Asia, made Australian troop withdrawal from Vietnam inevitable. Ironically, Nixon’s “initiatives” and the fluidity they created in regional politics provided Whitlam with the necessary stage on which to flaunt his diplomatic pretensions.⁴⁰

By contrast, Malaysia and Singapore were not seeking Australian disengagement from the region. The Malaysian and Singaporean governments supported the presence of Australian troops, who served as part of a stabilizing trilateral force (ANZUK) under the FPDA. The troops fulfilled a political, not a combat, role in Malaysia, contributing to regional stability at a time when the postcolonial states of Southeast Asia were trying, in an increasingly uncertain environment, to secure a stable regional order.

In 1967 the five non-Communist Southeast Asian states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines) had established ASEAN to

37. Whitlam’s speech to the House of Representatives, 13 July 1973, quoted in Patrick O’Brien, “Constitutional Conflict in Australia,” *Conflict Studies*, No. 116 (1980), p. 13.

38. T. B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations 1788–1977* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978), p. 412.

39. Gough Whitlam, Address to the National Press Club, Washington, DC, 30 July 1973, available at http://whitlamdismissal.com/speeches/73-07-30_dc-press-club.shtml.

40. *Ibid.* Despite the Guam Doctrine, the U.S. military presence continued via bases in both the Philippines and Japan. The Gorton Liberal government thus began the process of troop withdrawal that Whitlam’s government completed.

foster cooperation in areas of common economic, social, scientific, and cultural concern. Yet, although ASEAN promised to improve interstate relations in Southeast Asia, mutual suspicion remained about how Cold War and postcolonial rivalries might develop in the future. Consequently, the leaders of the ASEAN states believed, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that a Commonwealth political and military presence was essential for regional stability. Thus Malaysia, although increasingly attracted to the idea of a neutral Southeast Asia, still valued the ANZUK presence. Meanwhile, Indonesia, which in 1967 had argued for the inclusion of a clause in the Bangkok Declaration proclaiming all foreign bases in Southeast Asia “temporary,” came to view the FPDA, at least in the short term, as useful for reassuring its ASEAN neighbors about Indonesia’s regional ambitions.⁴¹ The other Southeast Asian countries shared this pragmatic desire to forge consensus both inside and outside the region to balance competing interests.

The ALP’s ideological construction of regional development attached little value to these indigenous complexities. Coral Bell described Labor’s approach to regional politics at the time as driven by “a sort of *détente* euphoria.”⁴² Labor interpreted the evolving *détente* between the two superpowers, together with the historic U.S. rapprochement with the People’s Republic of China in 1972, as having spawned a new strategic environment. ALP activists argued that the worst of the Cold War was over. As Whitlam subsequently explained, “Nixon’s initiatives” had “created a new reality for our region” that enabled Australia to “break out” of what the ALP viewed as Australia’s Cold War “ideological isolationism.”⁴³

As early as March 1972, nine months before Whitlam was elected, the ALP spokesman for Southeast Asian affairs, Willie Morrison, outlined what this “new reality” meant for Australia’s regional relations. In press interviews during a two-week tour of East Asia, Morrison expressed optimism that Nixon’s visit to China in February 1972 meant that Southeast Asia would “not be in the foreseeable future an area either of conflict or [of] confrontation among the big powers.” “I think,” he added, “this is the great change which had taken place and it makes the Five-Powers Defence Arrangements fairly irrelevant.” Morrison further contended, incorrectly, that Australia’s approach to the region had for too long “been premised on military intervention.”⁴⁴ This, Morrison declared, had to change: “I would much rather see a

41. See notes 97–99 *infra*.

42. Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 117.

43. Whitlam, Address to the National Press Club (see note 39 *supra*).

44. Transcript of Morrison’s Interview with ABC in Singapore to Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Cablegram 951, 13 March 1972, in A1838, 696/1/26/1 pt. 1, NAA.

policy for Australia of outward diplomacy—more political and economic activity—largely through strengthening our bilateral ties with each of the countries in the area, rather than getting caught up in so-called security pacts.”⁴⁵

Morrison further claimed that his brief trip had given him the impression that neither Kuala Lumpur nor Singapore would be “overly concerned” about the withdrawal of Australian forces from the region. The Singaporean government, he maintained, had not “want[ed] to see the Australian soldiers in Singapore in the first place,” and the Malaysian authorities regarded the FPDA as only “temporary.” Asked whether the Australian withdrawal would undermine the FPDA’s *raison d’être* by making it difficult for the UK and New Zealand to sustain their presence, Morrison curtly replied that this was “a problem for them [the British and New Zealanders] to decide.”⁴⁶

Morrison’s intemperate comments created diplomatic difficulties for the Singaporean and Malaysian governments, especially because Australian Defence Minister David Fairbairn was scheduled to visit Singapore and Malaysia shortly after. Morrison’s observations irked the two Southeast Asian governments by seeming to imply regional indifference toward the FPDA. In the meetings with Fairbairn, the Malaysian and Singaporean authorities went to considerable lengths to counter Morrison’s assertions. In Kuala Lumpur, Prime Minister Razak informed Fairbairn that it would be “awkward” if Australia “abruptly terminated” its military presence. Razak worried that Australian disengagement would induce Britain and New Zealand to pull out. Stressing the continuing regional need for the FPDA, at least until Southeast Asia became truly neutral, the chief of the Malaysian armed forces, General Ibrahim, told Fairbairn that the presence of Australian and Commonwealth troops lent “credibility to the Arrangements” and therefore was an “advantage” for the region.⁴⁷

In Singapore, Foreign Minister Rajaratnam similarly denied that his government was indifferent to the FPDA. Morrison’s public statements, Rajaratnam informed Fairbairn, had “embarrassed” the Singaporean government. The Labor spokesman had “over-simplified” and “distorted” Singapore’s position. Rajaratnam had merely suggested that, if, for domestic reasons, “Australia wanted, at some stage, to withdraw some part of its forces from the area,” then Singapore “would not be overly concerned, provided that this was done in such a way as not to destroy the Five Power Arrangements.”⁴⁸ The Austra-

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. Kuala Lumpur to DFA, Cablegram 861, 15 March 1972, in A1838, 696/1/26/1 pt. 1, NAA.

48. Singapore to DFA, Cablegram 741, 20 March 1972, in A1838, 696/1/26/1 pt. 1, NAA.

lian record of the Morrison-Rajaratnam conversation supports Rajaratnam's claim that Morrison had distorted Singapore's position.⁴⁹

At the same time, neither the Singaporeans nor the Malaysians wanted to appear overly preoccupied with the ALP's prospective regional policy. For different reasons, both countries mistrusted Australian intentions and sought to avoid giving the impression that they needed an Australian presence. They assumed that if the ALP did not aspire to complete disengagement, they could survive the withdrawal of Australian ground forces from Singapore, secure in the knowledge that a continuing British–New Zealand ground presence and an unchanged Australian RAAF deployment at Butterworth in North Malaysia would sustain the FPDA and Malaysian and Singaporean security. As a result, ALP deputy leader Lance Barnard concluded in May 1972 that Singapore and Malaysia would not be “unduly concerned” about an eventual withdrawal of Australian ground forces.⁵⁰ For their part, Foreign Ministry officials in both Singapore and Malaysia assumed that the ALP proposal to withdraw troops would not trigger a chain reaction leading to a pullout of British and New Zealand forces from ANZUK.

Subsequent developments, however, contravened these assumptions. In New Zealand, Labour leader Norman Kirk declared that if the Labour Party won the November 1972 election, the new government would reassess New Zealand's contribution to ANZUK. Faced with the unseemly prospect that the FPDA could unravel after the forthcoming elections in New Zealand and Australia, Malaysian and Singaporean authorities assumed a more active stance vis-à-vis the ALP's plan.⁵¹

The earlier complacency of Malaysia and Singapore had been understandable in light of uncertainty about the ALP's proposed changes in foreign policy. In 1972, Labor's leaders had tried simultaneously to reassure Australia's allies and to heed demands from the party's left wing for a complete Australian military withdrawal from the Asian mainland. Barnard realized that officials in Singapore and Malaysia assumed that Australia was considering only a reduction, not a complete withdrawal, of its forces in Southeast Asia. In late June 1972 Barnard assured British Foreign Secretary Douglas-Home

49. Memorandum of Conversation, Morrison and Rajaratnam, 10 March 1972, in A1838, 696/1/26/1 pt. 1, NAA. The record also demonstrates that Rajaratnam was somewhat incautious in his choice of words, saying that if a future ALP government withdrew ground forces from the island, this “would give Singapore room to put up more factories.”

50. DFA to Kuala Lumpur, Cablegram 1277, 30 March 1972, in A1838, 696/1/26/1 pt. 1, NAA; Canberra to FCO, Telegram 731, 31 May 1972, in FCO 24/1294, TNAUK; and “Five Power Defence Arrangements: Effects of a Change of Government in Australia,” 21 May 1972, in FCO 24/1303, TNAUK.

51. “Five Power Arrangements and ANZUK Force,” n.d. (c. December 1972), in A1838, 696/1/26/1 pt. 1, NAA.

that if the ALP won the election the new government would retain the RAAF squadron at Butterworth and the naval presence assigned to the FPDA. But Barnard warned that the government would “rotate the land force element, leaving only the instructors and headquarters staff on a permanent garrison basis.”⁵²

Barnard’s attempt to strike a difficult balance between the demands of the ALP left and the expectations of Australia’s FPDA partners sounded increasingly unconvincing. “It is hard to feel reassured,” remarked Patrick Nairne, the UK deputy under-secretary of defence, in his report to Defence Secretary Lord Carrington in July 1972. In Canberra the head of the Defence Department, Arthur Tange, and his deputy, Gordon Blakers, tried to comfort Nairne about the possible repercussions of an ALP electoral victory. Tange and Blakers claimed that Whitlam and Barnard were moving to the “middle ground” and that the Labor Party left was unlikely to “push them off.”

Nairne, however, remained skeptical. He told Lord Carrington that “the *practical* consequences might be handled, if we are lucky, without intolerable damage to the Five Power arrangements.” But “the *political* consequences are more difficult to calculate.” Nairne worried that Whitlam’s and Barnard’s continued criticism of Australia’s military commitment to the FPDA might compel Malaysia and Singapore to rethink their own plans.⁵³

The ALP’s apparent determination to downsize Australia’s military contribution to the FPDA thus posed a diplomatic challenge for Britain. Officials in London sensed that “the Australian withdrawal of land forces from Singapore cannot fail to be interpreted in this country as a definite step of disengagement from the security problems of South East Asia.”⁵⁴ The British envisaged three possible scenarios arising from an ALP victory in 1972. First, if only the Australian battalion and battery in Singapore were withdrawn, the FPDA would undoubtedly survive. From a military viewpoint, an ANZUK brigade without Australian combat units could still function, provided that the Australian government afforded logistic support and rotated a land force element through the region. More serious problems would arise, however, if, in the second scenario, Australia withdrew all support from the ANZUK brigade, forcing the British to replace Australian units with their own. Such an outcome would create an onerous dilemma for the UK. The ongoing violence in Northern Ireland, the downturn in Britain’s economic fortunes, and the burden of force obligations to NATO meant that Britain had no resources to spare for the Southeast Asian theater.

52. Secretary of State’s Meeting with Whitlam, 29 June 1972, in FCO 24/1294, TNAUK.

53. “Visit to Australia,” Report by DUS(P), 3 July 1972, in FCO 24/1294, TNAUK.

54. Thomas to Hickman, 8 June 1972, in FCO, 24/1303, TNAUK.

In the third scenario, the worst case, Whitlam and Barnard would submit to the demands of the ALP left and withdraw all Australian forces from Malaysia and Singapore. British officials feared that if this were to happen the New Zealand government would follow suit and the FPDA would collapse. This scenario seemed increasingly plausible when, on 25 November 1972, a week before the Australian federal election, the New Zealand Labour Party (NZLP) won a large majority in parliamentary elections. The New Zealand party's foreign policy platform closely resembled the ALP's. In both parties, strong left-wing factions insisted on complete disengagement from Southeast Asia.⁵⁵

Thus, by the time of the Australian election in December 1972, the ALP was no longer pursuing engagement with Southeast Asia and instead was seeking a rather untidy disengagement. This reorientation emerged from the ALP's long experience of political opposition, which caused the party to become increasingly hostage to a leftwing revisionist view of international relations. Labor activists assumed that a new era of progressive internationalism would transform the Western system of power politics. ALP leaders eagerly anticipated Australia's emergence as an independent actor on the world stage released from its dependence on powerful, external protectors. Labor's outlook rested on an abstract idea of a postcolonial Asia, forsaking a more nuanced grasp of the political realities of the region. After 1969, moreover, the Nixon administration's initiatives in East and Southeast Asia, and the growing public opposition in Australia to the Vietnam War, gave some limited plausibility to this academically inspired approach to international order. Ironically, the ALP's internationalist approach to regional politics and its corresponding suspicion of realist notions of balancing and alliance that underlay the FPDA stood in marked contrast to the pragmatic approach adopted by the new states of Southeast Asia.

Labor's Regional Illusion

On 2 December 1972 the ALP returned to power after 23 years in the political wilderness. "Impatience, ardour and inexperience," Peter Edwards observed, "made for a turbulent three years" of Labor governance.⁵⁶ On 5 De-

55. On the NZLP's foreign policy, see David McCraw, "From Kirk to Muldoon: Change and Continuity in New Zealand's Foreign-Policy Priorities," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (1982–1983), pp. 640–659. See also Galsworthy to Wilford, 26 May 1972, in FCO 24/1303, TNAUK. On the NZLP's approach to Asia, see Ian McGibbon, "The Defence Dimension," in Anthony Smith, ed., *Southeast Asia and New Zealand: A History of Regional and Bilateral Relations* (Singapore: ISAS, 2005), pp. 224–225.

56. Edwards, *Nation at War*, p. 318.

ember, without waiting for the ALP caucus to endorse ministerial choices, Whitlam formed an interim government with Barnard as his deputy.⁵⁷ The two men divided all ministerial portfolios, holding thirteen each. Over the next fortnight they governed the country as a duumvirate and announced decisions on several important foreign policy and defense issues, including the withdrawal of Australia's remaining forces from Vietnam and recognition of Communist China.⁵⁸

Disengagement from Malaysia and Singapore also was high on the new government's agenda. On 22 December, in a statement broadcast over Radio Australia, Whitlam confirmed his government's intention to reduce the Australian military contribution to the FPDA. "The idea of keeping a permanent garrison in Singapore," he declaimed, "belongs to the past."⁵⁹ Whitlam nevertheless reassured Australia's allies that he would not "run away" from overseas obligations. Somewhat ambivalently, he claimed that the new government was prepared to honor the FDPA in "letter and spirit."

The British set out to modify the ALP's policy. On 9 January 1973 the British Cabinet's Defence and Overseas Policy Committee (OPD) approved Lord Carrington's visit to Australia and New Zealand. In the meantime the British high commissioner in Canberra, Sir Morrice James, tried to ascertain whether the Australian leader might be persuaded to adopt a more positive view of the FPDA. To James's dismay, Whitlam proved intractable. James reported that Whitlam "has got his priorities wrong" and was "still in the stage of regarding the international scene as a convenient backdrop for striking appropriate left-wing attitudes."⁶⁰ This was a pose that experience failed to modify.

Fortunately for British defense planning, Whitlam's grandstanding contrasted dramatically with the more prudent stance adopted by Prime Minister Kirk in New Zealand. In early January, Kirk informed the British high commissioner in Wellington that unless Whitlam "rubbished the whole show," New Zealand would "stay on" in Singapore. Indeed, even if the Australians reduced their military contingent without withdrawing altogether, New Zea-

57. In Australia, the ALP caucus (or the parliamentary wing of the Labor Party) elects MPs to cabinet if the party is in government. In 1972 the caucus elected the full cabinet on 18 December.

58. Edwards, *Nation at War*, p. 320. In 1972 the McMahon government had left 128 members of the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam to help train South Vietnamese and Cambodian forces. On 7 December Whitlam and Barnard ordered the team to return to Australia. On Australia's recognition of the People's Republic of China, see David Goldsworthy, David Dutton, Peter Gifford, and Roderic Pitty, "Reorientation," in Goldsworthy, ed., *Facing North*, p. 336.

59. See "Australian Participation in Combined Military Exercises and Training in Countries of the Southeast Asian and South West Pacific Areas," 22 December 1972, in A7942, F59, NAA.

60. James to Norris, 12 January 1973, in FCO 24/1600, TNAUK.

land would maintain its battalion in Singapore. "Even an [Australian] aeroplane would be enough," Kirk declared.

Kirk considered Whitlam "frothy," but he assumed that the Australian leader realized the wider "consequences of a brash Australian withdrawal." Kirk, further, promised to try to persuade the Australians to maintain a military contribution in Southeast Asia. Kirk told the British High Commissioner that he "was keen to see the present Five Power arrangements continue" as they constituted the best means of "keeping Britain in Asia." Indeed, Kirk thought he would "sleep better at night" if he knew the British were still there.⁶¹

New Zealand, like Singapore and Malaysia, considered a British presence in the area "absolutely essential." With New Zealand's support, the British believed they could sustain the FPDA regardless of Canberra's attitude. British officials said that one British and one New Zealand battalion would be "adequate to maintain political confidence in the Arrangements," provided that Australia retained the capacity to reinforce the ANZUK contingent if necessary and sent "teeth arm units" on a temporary basis to Singapore. Having secured Kirk's backing, the British hoped they could persuade the Australians to remain engaged with the FPDA.⁶²

Malaysia and Singapore watched these developments closely. Initially, both countries, after receiving assurances from New Zealand that it would retain its forces in Singapore, appeared comfortable with Whitlam's plans for the withdrawal of Australian ground forces. So long as Canberra left its naval and air contribution in the region and London and Wellington continued to underwrite the FPDA militarily, the arrangements could survive without an Australian battalion and battery in Singapore.⁶³

Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Razak, who at least publicly promoted a neutralist approach to regional order, evinced indifference to the Australian position. In 1971, Razak had persuaded the ASEAN foreign ministers to declare the region a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). But Malaysian leaders recognized that neutrality would not immediately occur as

61. Wellington to FCO, Telegram 11, 5 January 1973, in FCO 24/1553, TNAUK.

62. "The Consequences for Our Defence Policy of New Governments in Australia and New Zealand," January 1973, in FCO 24/1553, TNAUK. British officials argued that "we must keep in close touch with the New Zealanders." Note of Discussions by DUS(P) in the Australian Department of Defence, 5 February 1973, in FCO 24/1553, TNAUK.

63. Kuala Lumpur to FCO, Telegram 28, 15 January 1973, in FCO 24/1553, TNAUK; Singapore to FCO, Telegram 26, 9 January 1973, FCO 24/1553, TNAUK; Falle to Douglas-Home, 20 February 1973, in FCO, 24/1549, TNAUK; Singapore to FCO, Telegram 144, 11 February 1973, in FCO, 24/1549, TNAUK; and Memcon, Tun Razak and UK Chief of Defence Staff Michael Carver, 13 January 1973, in FCO 24/1561, TNAUK.

a result of this rhetorical gesture.⁶⁴ Razak himself had conceded that “until such a time as the neutralisation of South East Asia is realised, countries in the region are free to enter into defence arrangements with outside powers.”⁶⁵ Only after regional neutralization was accomplished, he implied, should the bases be closed.⁶⁶

By contrast, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew viewed ZOPFAN ambivalently and remained suspicious of both Malaysian and Indonesian intentions. Lee’s pragmatic view of the need for a regional balance of power caused him to favor the continuing presence of British, Australian, and New Zealand forces in Southeast Asia and to regard the FPDA as a vital part of regional stability.⁶⁷

Thus, even though both Singapore and Malaysia had reservations about the Whitlam government’s plans, they were reluctant to challenge the Australian leader openly. The British therefore took the initiative in expressing Commonwealth anxiety about Australia’s plans. Lord Carrington traveled to Australia at the end of January 1973 and met with Whitlam and Barnard. The meetings, he told Heath, were “friendly in tone” but elicited no change in Australia’s position. Both Whitlam and Barnard stressed that the withdrawal of Australian forces from Singapore by early 1974 was “not open to negotiation.” They nonetheless reassured Carrington that they would maintain Australia’s naval and air contribution to the FPDA as well as rotate Australian ground forces through the region. They also promised to leave sufficient personnel in the logistics support group in Singapore “to make it unlikely that any extra manpower contribution will be required.”⁶⁸ Lord Carrington reported to Heath that “the Australian proposals . . . are as satisfactory as we can expect.”

More troubling in the long term, Carrington contended, was Whitlam’s evident readiness to “break away from past associations” and “be more closely linked with ‘third world’ countries.” Carrington considered that Whitlam’s at-

64. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Neutralisation Proposal for Southeast Asia, January 1973, in FCO 24/1553, TNAUK; Ahmand Mokhtar Selat, “New Directions in Malaysia’s Foreign Policy: From Tunku to Abdullah Badawi,” in Ruhanas Harum, ed., *Malaysia’s Foreign Relations: Issues and Challenges* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 2006), p. 16; and Alf Parsons, *Southeast Asian Days* (Brisbane: Griffith University, 1998), p. 111.

65. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Neutralisation Proposal for Southeast Asia, January 1973, in FCO 24/1553, TNAUK.

66. Thus Razak observed in June 1972 (cited in *The Nation*, 19 June 1972, p. 7) “that the bases must be phased out” only after “the concept of neutralization” is accepted.

67. Michael Leifer, *Singapore’s Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 64; and Narayan Ganesan, *Realism and Interdependence in Singapore’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 42.

68. Carrington to Heath, Telegram 2, 2 February 1973, in PREM 15/1299, TNAUK; Carrington to Heath, 19 February 1973, in FCO 15/1554, TNAUK; and Canberra to FCO, Telegram 191, 3 February 1973, in FCO 24/1072, TNAUK.

traction to “the vague objectives of neutralisation” in Southeast Asia demonstrated this peculiarity. Carrington regarded Whitlam’s policy as a curious mixture of posturing and illusion “unrelated to security needs” in the region. “I fear,” Carrington continued, “that we are going to be in for at least a good deal of irritation at the hand of the Australian Government in the months ahead.” “As against this generally discouraging position,” Carrington consoled Heath, “I feel that on defence, Mr Whitlam delegates a large measure of responsibility to Mr Barnard. The latter has shown that he is inclined in practice to temper his Prime Minister’s approach with the maintenance of harder headed practical policies.”⁶⁹

This confidence in Barnard proved misplaced. After Carrington returned to Britain, Australian regional thinking moved in a more radical direction. Whitlam’s statement that the government seriously contemplated retaining servicemen in Singapore for logistical support and rotating a land force element through the region had caused “serious reverberations within the ALP.”⁷⁰ The council of the influential Victorian ALP branch censured Whitlam’s plans. More worrying for Labor unity, James (“Jim”) Cairns, a senior minister who was leader of the party’s leftwing faction and who was an anti-Vietnam War icon, supported the Victorian branch’s resolution.⁷¹

To allay leftwing concerns, Barnard aborted the plan to maintain a ground presence in the region. In late March, he presented to the Australian Cabinet’s Foreign and Defence Committee (FAD) a revised plan for a phased drawdown of Australian forces from Malaysia and Singapore.⁷² The new plan envisaged the complete withdrawal of the Australian battalion and battery from Singapore (880 men). By February 1974, only 600 men would remain in Singapore. These numbers were broadly in line with earlier Australian statements.⁷³

However, Barnard also outlined a more dramatic drawdown timetable, which, if implemented, would undermine the integrity of the FPDA. The Australian presence in Singapore, Barnard proposed, would be further reduced to 450 men by March 1975. After 1975, this number would be reviewed again. Moreover, Australia’s remaining forces in Singapore would assist only in technical aid programs.⁷⁴

69. Carrington to Heath, Telegram 2, 2 February 1973; and Carrington to Heath, 19 February 1973 (see note 68 supra).

70. Albinski, *Australian External Policy*, p. 242.

71. Ibid. In 1973 Jim Cairns held the portfolios of overseas trade and secondary industry.

72. This committee, whose membership was restricted to senior members of Cabinet, was established in late 1963 to handle questions of national security. On this issue, see Edwards with Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, p. 254.

73. FAD Submission 231, 26 March 1973, in A5931, CL28, NAA.

74. Ibid.

Even more radically, Barnard proposed withdrawing the two squadrons of RAAF Mirage aircraft (numbering 1,500 men in total) from Malaysia by 1976, pending a government review in early 1975.⁷⁵ Barnard chose 1976 because an earlier date would have made it difficult for the RAAF to accommodate the returning aircraft satisfactorily.⁷⁶

Barnard further maintained that support for the FPDA did not require Australia to station forces abroad indefinitely. He justified this abrupt shift of policy by claiming that the Southeast Asian countries were seeking neutrality. In this, Barnard obviously misread the intentions of Australia's regional allies and confused long-term aims with short-term realities.

At the same time, Barnard acknowledged rather perfunctorily that the FPDA had brought "confidence and some sense of continuity" to Malaysian-Singaporean relations and prevented the two countries from adopting mutually hostile policies. This evident ambiguity toward the FPDA reflected the government's growing unwillingness to confront the ALP left on the question of stationing troops anywhere in Asia, together with a growing reluctance to participate in what Labor saw as "Western" security arrangements.

After the March 1973 review, the question was no longer whether Australia would honor its FPDA commitments but whether the government wanted "to keep the 5 Power Arrangements alive in terms of defence cooperation."⁷⁷ The outlook was less than propitious. Carrington's hope that Barnard's "hard-headed" approach to defense would moderate ALP policy had been quickly disappointed. Having been warned in mid-March that Australian ministers would soon consider "the possibility of setting a time limit" on Australia's military role in Singapore, the British high commissioner asked Barnard to explain Australia's change of policy.⁷⁸ Barnard maintained that "he had been under pressure from Cabinet colleagues to submit proposals about [the] future of Australian forces in Singapore and Malaysia." Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Tun Ismail's remarks in Canberra in early March that the Malaysian Air Force would require additional space at Butterworth had not helped. The Cabinet interpreted Ismail's comments to mean that there would be neither room nor need for the RAAF squadrons at Butterworth.⁷⁹ Although Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Razak corrected this interpretation of Ismail's statement, Barnard told the British high commissioner that "he had no alternative but to prepare [the] withdrawal plan for [the] Mirage aircraft." The British

75. *Ibid.*

76. K. See to Acting Treasurer, March 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA.

77. Griffith to the Secretary, 27 March 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA.

78. DFA to London, Cablegram 3945, 16 March 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA.

79. Parsons, *Southeast Asian Days*, p. 111.

Table 3. Australia's Planned Withdrawals (1974–1976)

<i>Location</i>	<i>Type/function</i>	<i>Personnel numbers (1972)</i>	<i>Withdrawal timetable</i>
<i>Malaysia</i>	2 RAAF squadrons	1,500	Plan for 1976 withdrawal Review in March 1975 whether partial or total withdrawal is desirable
<i>Malaysia</i>	Technical assistance personnel	30	Continued and increased if warranted
<i>Singapore</i>	Battalion and battery in 28th ANZUK Brigade	700	Withdrawn by Feb. 1974
<i>Singapore</i>	Other troops in brigade (engineers)	180	Withdrawn by Feb. 1974
<i>Singapore</i>	Support, technical, and administrative personnel	810	600 men by Feb. 1974 450 men between Feb. 1974 & March 1975 After March 1975 as required

Source: FAD Submission 231, 26 March 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA.

high commissioner reported that Barnard “expected a pretty tight negotiating position from his ministerial colleagues.”⁸⁰

On 29 March 1973 the FAD agreed in principle to Barnard's revised proposal but asked for further modifications. After April 1975 no more than 150 troops were to remain in Singapore, comprising technical advisers, training and exercise personnel, and their support. Most importantly, the RAAF element (1,500 men) at Butterworth in peninsular Malaysia was to be withdrawn in 1976 except for a small group working on technical assistance programs. Senior ministers instructed Barnard to consult Australia's allies, but the proposals left little room for compromise (see Table 3).⁸¹

The British expressed growing exasperation with the Australian government's intransigence. “The situation is indeed pretty discouraging and the rats certainly seem to have eaten at Mr Barnard's position since Lord Carrington

80. Canberra to FCO, Telegram 509, 27 March 1973, in FCO 24/1611, TNAUK.

81. Decision 392 (FAD), 29 March 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA; and FAD Submission 231, 26 March 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA.

left Canberra,” a British FCO official observed.⁸² The same official later added: “I am afraid that the reasons for the present Australian action [lie] in the determination of the Left Wing of the ALP to dismantle the Five Power Arrangements.”⁸³ David Aiers of the British High Commission in Canberra offered a similarly bleak assessment in April 1973: “The degree of flexibility in the Australian position is now less than ever and I do not think that it is possible to be very sanguine about the chances of getting Australian Ministers to change their minds.”⁸⁴

In late April 1973, British ministers met Whitlam in London. Lord Carrington explained that Australia’s proposed withdrawal from Singapore by 1975 and the removal of the Australian air force from Malaysia by 1976 would pose “difficult implications” for the UK. He argued that even if Canberra ultimately decided to retain its air and naval contribution to ANZUK, the situation would still prove unsatisfactory. An Australian presence with either a very small or no ground element “would put a different complexion on the form of the ANZUK force.” Carrington warned Whitlam that unless Australia retained its logistics support group in Singapore Britain “might find it impossible” to remain in Southeast Asia.⁸⁵

This prospect failed to trouble the Australian prime minister. He proved “evasive or unyielding on virtually all the matters.” Despite the importance of the issue and Whitlam’s pivotal role in foreign policy, he claimed that he was “not much involved” in the FPDA discussions and therefore “did not wish to go into the details.” Barnard, he added, would soon come to London to discuss Australia’s defense policy. Whitlam also maintained that although Australian defense plans were “pretty firm,” the proposals had not yet been confirmed by the cabinet and were “not immutable.”⁸⁶

When Douglas-Home asked Whitlam why he attached such limited importance to the FPDA, Whitlam replied that Australia now was giving higher priority to relations with Jakarta than to those with Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. Indonesia, Whitlam observed, “was not only our closest neighbour, but also the heart and soul of ASEAN.” As for Malaysia and Singapore, the first “was becoming more guarded in its attitude to ANZUK and was attracted to neutralization,” whereas the latter “played a tough line with Australia as with Britain.” An FCO official concluded that Whitlam showed “little sign of movement on matters of importance to us.” The Australian prime minister’s

82. Wilford to Aiers, 10 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK.

83. Wilford to Sykes, 16 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK.

84. Aiers to Wilford, 6 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK.

85. Douglas-Home to Washington, Telegram 988, 30 April 1973, in FCO24/1556, TNAUK.

86. *Ibid.*

reluctance to discuss the FPDA “frankly irritated” Carrington and Douglas-Home. They took particular exception to “the didactic way in which [Whitlam] explained his own general ideas.”⁸⁷

Malaysian, Singaporean, and New Zealand reaction to Australian policy was equally critical. The Kirk government in New Zealand, though unwilling to join Britain's attempt to modify the Australian plan, regretted the ALP's stance. Kirk tried to persuade Barnard of the need for “an Australian contribution however small.”⁸⁸ But British diplomats in Wellington explained to the FCO that even though New Zealand was “very much aware of the resentment incurred in parts of South-East Asia by Australian heavy-handed diplomacy,” they were reluctant to condemn ALP policy in case they damaged their own bilateral ties.⁸⁹ Wellington, therefore, confined itself to warning the Whitlam government that the Australian plan would damage Australia's relations with Southeast Asian countries.⁹⁰

In Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew was more outspoken. After learning about Labor's plans, he dismissed them contemptuously: “Let the cowardly bastards go.”⁹¹ Cooler tempers subsequently prevailed.⁹² When Barnard arrived in Singapore in April 1973, the authorities there reluctantly accepted Australia's decision to withdraw its ground forces from the island. Nevertheless, they emphasized that they still attached strategic importance to the maintenance of the two RAAF squadrons in North Malaysia.⁹³

The Malaysian government also expressed alarm at the revised Australian plans. Malaysian officials reluctantly accepted the removal of Australian units from Singapore but, like their Singaporean counterparts, opposed the withdrawal of the RAAF squadrons.⁹⁴

Even the Indonesian government, which Whitlam had sedulously culti-

87. Douglas-Home to Canberra, Telegram 642, 26 April 1973, in FCO 24/1556, TNAUK; Memcon, Douglas-Home and Whitlam, 24 April 1973, in FCO 24/1614, TNAUK; Memcon, Douglas-Home, Carrington, and Whitlam, 24 April 1973, in FCO 24/1614, TNAUK; Hickman to Aiers, 1 May 1973, in FCO 24/1614, TNAUK; and Memcon (Australian Draft), Whitlam, Carrington, and Douglas-Home, 24 April 1973, in FCO 24/1614, TNAUK.

88. Wellington to FCO, Telegram 234, 11 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK. See also Wellington to London, Telegram 2329 (New Zealand cable), 12 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK; Wellington to FCO, Telegram 260, 2 May 1973, in FCO 24/1556, TNAUK; and Wellington to FCO, Telegram 261, 2 May 1973 in FCO 24/1556, TNAUK.

89. Wellington to FCO, Telegram 211, 28 March 1973, in FCO 24/1554, TNAUK.

90. Cabinet Submission 491, 2 July 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA.

91. Wats to Hickman, 9 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK.

92. Singapore to FCO, Telegram 360, 20 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK; Singapore to FCO, Telegram 337, 12 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK; and Singapore to FCO, Telegram 391, 7 May 1973, in FCO 24/1556, TNAUK.

93. Cabinet Submission 491, 2 July 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA.

94. *Ibid.*; and Kuala Lumpur to FCO, Telegram 191, 21 April 1973, in FCO 24/1555, TNAUK.

vated in order to facilitate what he and the ALP saw as a more multilateral approach to regional diplomacy, opposed any action that would fundamentally undermine the FPDA. Officially, Indonesia supported nonalignment and neutralization, but unofficially it considered the FPDA a stabilizing factor in regional politics.⁹⁵ As early as February 1973, during Whitlam's visit to Jakarta, Indonesian officials informed him they "would like the ANZUK force to continue undisturbed and would not thank Australia for rocking the boat."⁹⁶ Subsequently, in June 1973, Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik discreetly told the Australians that Indonesia would prefer no "change in the arrangements for more than five years."⁹⁷

Regional expressions of concern evidently affected Australian thinking. Returning to Canberra in June 1973, Barnard recommended that Australia stick with the government's initial plan for the withdrawal of Australian forces from Singapore. He also argued that the government should postpone any decision about the timing of the withdrawal of the Australian RAAF squadrons from Butterworth. To justify this concession, Barnard claimed that unlike the forces stationed in Singapore, the Mirage squadrons made "a significant contribution" to the development of the Malaysian air force. A flexible Australian approach to the FPDA, Barnard contended, would be a "big plus" in developing relations with Malaysia. Barnard nevertheless reassured his colleagues that "the year 1976 will have entered into the calculations of our partners." The important point to keep in mind, he averred, was that Australia "had already given notice of our intention not to be committed there [Butterworth] indefinitely."⁹⁸

On the eve of the ALP's Federal Conference at Surfers Paradise in early July, the Australian Cabinet agreed to postpone the precise date of the withdrawal of the Australian squadrons from Butterworth, announcing that it would review the matter again in March 1975.⁹⁹ The Cabinet refused to budge on the ANZUK brigade issue, confirming the FAD's decision to withdraw all Australian ground forces from Singapore after April 1975 apart from a small contingent of 150 or fewer soldiers. The remaining servicemen, moreover, would not be assigned to ANZUK.¹⁰⁰ Despite the Labor left's continued push for a total drawdown, the Cabinet decision stood.¹⁰¹

95. Jakarta to FCO, Telegram 198, 15 February 1973, in FCO, 24/1549, TNAUK.

96. Douglas-Home to Washington, Telegram 988, 30 April 1973, in FCO 24/1556, TNAUK.

97. Jakarta to DFA, Cablegram 2640, 21 June 1973, in A5931, CL285, NAA; and Douglas-Home to Washington, Telegram 988, 30 April 1973, in FCO 24/1556, TNAUK.

98. Cabinet Submission 491, 2 July 1973, in A5915, 231, NAA.

99. Cabinet Decision 823, 2 July 1973, in A5931, CL 285, NAA.

100. *Ibid.*

101. Edwards, *Nation at War*, p. 327.

Labor's promised defense review never occurred. In 1976 the new Liberal–Country Party coalition government of Malcolm Fraser decided to leave the two RAAF squadrons in North Malaysia.¹⁰² In the interim, however, the Labor government had fatally weakened the FPDA. Encouraged by Whitlam's decision to withdraw Australian land forces, Harold Wilson's new Labour government, elected in February 1974, withdrew the British infantry battalion from Singapore.¹⁰³ Only New Zealand maintained its ground presence on the island. As a result, ANZUK was disbanded.¹⁰⁴

The Regional Consequences of ALP Foreign Policy Revisionism

Although the Whitlam government never completely repudiated the FPDA, its temporizing damaged confidence in the arrangements. For Whitlam this was a matter of sublime indifference. Why was he so uninterested in the FPDA, and how did Australia's disengagement affect the foreign and domestic relations of the new states of Southeast Asia?

In a speech to the National Press Club in Washington, DC, in July 1973, Whitlam sought to explain Australia's revisionist foreign policy. "For twenty years," he observed, "I have been appalled at the damage we of the West have done to ourselves and to others by our western ideological preoccupations particularly in South East Asia." To correct this damage and overcome "self defeating fears about Australia's place in the world," Whitlam maintained that his government had taken an "ideological holiday" from Cold War preconceptions and embraced a policy of "diplomatic even handedness" that led to the "establishment of diplomatic relations with a range of governments as diverse as North Vietnam and the Vatican."¹⁰⁵

The most notable casualty of this purported evenhandedness was the FPDA. By downgrading the FPDA and other "Western" arrangements like SEATO, the ALP inadvertently gave a powerful stimulus to ASEAN. In 1973, ASEAN functioned only as a low-level mechanism for cooperation on economic, trade, and scientific issues and had no definable security role. In fact, it rarely met during its first decade. The ASEAN foreign ministers did not

102. The Fraser government decided to rotate an infantry company from Australia every three months. Royal Australian Navy (RAN) destroyers paid frequent calls to Singapore. See Hugh Smith, "Defence Policy," in Boyce and Angel, eds., *Independence and Alliance*, p. 49.

103. Withdrawal of British Forces from Singapore, 30 January 1975, in FCO 24/2038, TNAUK; and Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorised Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1993), p. 159.

104. McCraw, "From Kirk to Muldoon," p. 646.

105. Whitlam, Address to the National Press Club (see note 39 supra).

gather collectively until 1976, when they met in Bali and formulated a regional Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) committing signatories to non-interference in the internal affairs of other member-states. The near-collapse of the FPDA is what spurred ASEAN to assume an embryonic regional security role. Whitlam evidently welcomed this development, viewing it as something that would allow the Southeast Asian countries to take responsibility for their own security and destinies. A subsequent generation of Labor leaders and academic commentators claimed that Whitlam's approach transformed Australia's diplomatic relationship with Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁶

Yet, only after the withdrawal of Commonwealth forces did Singapore and Malaysia come to see neutrality, ASEAN, and the TAC doctrine of non-interference in internal affairs as the exclusive basis of regional order. Until 1973 both Singapore and Malaysia had sought to secure regional order through a plurality of arrangements and alliances.

The elimination of the FPDA as a regional balancing mechanism led to a renewed emphasis by the core ASEAN states—Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore—on what Suharto termed “national resilience” as a prophylactic against external shocks. After 1973, this reorientation stimulated greater emphasis on internal security and the suppression of all forms of dissent.¹⁰⁷ The period after 1975 that saw the emergence of the distinctively non-Western ASEAN way also saw the New Order in Indonesia, the United Malay National Organization in Malaysia, and Lee's People's Action Party in Singapore tighten their authoritarian grip over the domestic politics of the new states. Thus, an unintended consequence of weakening the FPDA and requiring the insecure states of Malaysia and Singapore to rely on their own defense resources was an intensification of single-party rule that, over the next decade, incubated an illiberal regional political culture. Whitlam and the ALP more generally looked on these developments with studied equanimity, even approbation.

Whitlam's policy of regional disengagement also facilitated the rise of Indonesia as *primus inter pares* within ASEAN. Whitlam considered Indonesia “the heart and soul of ASEAN.” In January 1973 he stressed that he fa-

106. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight into ALP foreign policy thinking.

107. Regional scholarship has long observed the distinctive, non-Western, consensual basis of ASEAN diplomacy and its adherence to a norm of non-interference as the basis of a putatively embryonic security community. See, for example, Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in South East Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2002); Amitav Acharya, “ASEAN at 40: Mid-Life Rejuvenation?” *Foreign Affairs*, 15 August 2007, available only at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64249/amitav-acharya/asean-at-40-mid-life-rejuvenation>; and R. C. Severino, *Towards an ASEAN Security Community* (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2004).

vored “new forms of regional cooperation.”¹⁰⁸ Rather than Malaysia and the FPDA, “the central plank” of the ALP’s Southeast Asian policy became “the special relationship with Indonesia.”¹⁰⁹ Even as the Whitlam government downgraded defense ties with Malaysia and Singapore, Australian military and technical assistance to Indonesia increased.¹¹⁰ This preferential treatment of the largest and most unpredictable state in the region hardly appears “even-handed” or evidence of a new “creative maturity” in Australia’s regional dealings.

The Singaporeans quickly grasped the import of ALP revisionism. After Australia announced the withdrawal of its Singapore battalion, the Singaporean government felt compelled to normalize relations with Indonesia. Despite Singapore’s ASEAN membership, Lee Kuan Yew had never been to Jakarta before May 1973. During his trip there, he made a special visit to the Kalibata Military Heroes cemetery and cast petals over the graves of two Indonesian marines. Singapore had executed the marines in 1967 as terrorists who bombed commercial buildings in the city-state during the *Konfrontasi*.¹¹¹ Lee’s gesture of remorse gave a powerful symbolic representation of the new regional power dynamic that Whitlam’s “ideological holiday” had facilitated.¹¹² Although Malaysia and Singapore pragmatically adjusted to the reduced Commonwealth military presence in the region and the FPDA remained in place, the ASEAN leaders were relieved when Whitlam left office in 1975.¹¹³

Whitlam’s sedulous cultivation of Suharto’s New Order did little to improve Australia’s regional profile or to secure regional stability. Australia’s protean courtship of the Third World and commitment to forge a “zone of peace” backfired when Indonesia interpreted Whitlam’s passivity as *carte blanche* to invade East Timor in December 1975. The invasion, shortly after the Australian governor-general dismissed Whitlam’s government in November, stands as an enduring testament to the ineffectiveness of the ALP’s regional adventure.

Ultimately, the ALP’s illusory quest for a postcolonial regional order free

108. Whitlam quoted in Neville Meaney, “The United States,” in Hudson, ed., *Australia in World Affairs*, p. 198.

109. Ingleson, “South-East Asia,” p. 290.

110. See O’Neill, “Defence Policy,” p. 21. Whitlam significantly expanded the three-year program of assistance introduced by Gorton, including, among other things, a gift of two RAN Attack-class patrol boats and six Nomad aircraft.

111. Tan, *Security Perspectives of the Malay Archipelago*, p. 46.

112. See also Owen Harries, “Australia’s Foreign Policy under Whitlam,” *Orbis*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Summer 1975), p. 1091.

113. Kuan Yew Lee, *From Third World to First: the Singapore Story 1965–2000* (Singapore: Times Media, 2000), p. 441.

from Western ideological influence or power politics had countervailing consequences that did little to enhance stability or Australia's place in the region. The downgrading of the FPDA facilitated the emergence of ASEAN. This distinctive and, in 1973, unlikely diplomatic community excluded not only the United States and Britain but also the Australians, who in pursuit of liberation from their putative Cold War dependency had done so much to ensure ASEAN's credibility. Radical rhetoric aside, the only significant achievement of Whitlam's revisionism—the effective emasculation of the FPDA—undermined any possibility of Australian participation in the development of a Western, rules-based, approach to regional security.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Far from engaging Asia successfully, Whitlam's conduct of regional relations and his diplomatic style bolstered ASEAN cooperation at Australia's expense. Whitlam's distinctive and progressively independent stance toward the region and his cultivation of nonaligned Indonesia at the cost of established allies like Malaysia and Singapore persuaded the Malaysians and Singaporeans to pursue a regional order without significant Commonwealth influence. Whitlam's approach drove a protean ASEAN toward an exclusive diplomatic identity increasingly suspicious of Western and, more particularly, Australian engagement. The insecure Southeast Asian states viewed the Whitlam years as a missed opportunity for Australia to deepen its ties with the region. Rather than engaging Southeast Asia, Labor policy from 1972 to 1975 was a case of ideologically driven disengagement.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Labor governments headed by Bob Hawke and Paul Keating claimed to be reviving what they termed the ALP legacy of engagement with Southeast Asia. This characterization had more to do with Labor's myth-making than with a careful appraisal of Whitlam's conduct of foreign policy.

The ALP's retrospective attempt to portray disengagement as engagement was intended to facilitate Labor's bid for multilateral engagement with

114. Although the FPDA remains in place and continues to conduct regular exercises, its role markedly diminished during the *longue durée* of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad's administration. Mahathir's relationship with Australia deteriorated significantly after 1993 when the ALP government's preference for close ties with Indonesia became increasingly explicit. Moreover, in 1998 in the wake of the East Asian financial crisis, Mahathir canceled FPDA exercises. Although the exercises have revived since 2002, the FPDA remains little more than a loose network. See Ganesan, *Realism and Interdependency in Singapore's Foreign Policy*, pp. 68–69; and Diane Mauzy and R. S. Milne, *Singapore Politics under the People's Action Party* (London: Routledge, 2002, p. 177. For an update on the FPDA, see Carlyle Thayer, "The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever," *Security Challenges*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2007), pp. 79–96.

Asia, notably after 1989 with the formation of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the signing of the Australian-Indonesian Security Pact (1995). The myth that the “Whitlam period provided a watershed” that “divided the prolonged obeisance of Menzies to the idea of imperial unity . . . from the emergence of the kind of foreign policy that we now take for granted” legitimated and reinforced the ALP’s *soi-disant* middle-power diplomacy and good regional citizenship of the 1990s. The myth gained widespread acceptance because ALP-affiliated academics, diplomats, and former foreign ministers created it.¹¹⁵ By the 1990s, former Labor advisers and staffers had taken up senior posts in academic and government-led think tanks, and it was rare to find a university international relations department or an Australian Research Council grant application that would question the myth.

The lineaments of this myth date from the anti-Vietnam war movement of the late 1960s when the academic left first promoted the notion of Menzies-era dependence and the need for an independent foreign policy that would accommodate the new, postcolonial possibilities of the region. This ideology distorted the character of the Liberal–Country Party coalition’s foreign policy and in practice achieved little for regional security. The historical record of the policies the ALP pursued, most notably in dealing with the FPDA and key allies in Singapore and Malaysia, undermines the myth of Whitlam’s supposed engagement with new regional realities.

The dubious results of Whitlam’s policies failed to trouble successive generations of Australian academic and media commentators. This is not entirely surprising, considering that Gareth Evans, the former Labor foreign minister who advocated a creative Australian multilateralism, and Bruce Grant, who pioneered the view of Menzies-era dependency, wrote the standard undergraduate foreign relations text of the post–Cold War era, *Australia’s Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s*. The current standard text, cowritten by Paul Keating’s former foreign policy adviser Allan Gyngell, reiterates these myths, maintaining that “the election in 1972 of the Whitlam government . . . introduced a more independent and internationalist foreign policy with a clearer focus on Asia.”¹¹⁶

In reality, the Whitlam government’s foreign policy entailed the pursuit of an abstraction and gleaned not admiration but disdain from the new states of Southeast Asia. Subsequently, both Singapore and Malaysia treated any Australian regional initiative with suspicion and apprehension. Meanwhile, the ostensible cynosure of Whitlamite policy, Suharto’s Indonesia, eluded suc-

115. Evans and Grant, *Australia’s Foreign Relations*, p. 26.

116. Allan Gyngell and Michael Wesley, *Making Australian Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 59.

cessive ALP attempts to embrace it in a special relationship. Indeed, ALP blandishments, as the East Timor invasion of 1975 and the Keating-Evans pursuit of an Australian-Indonesian security treaty in 1995 demonstrated, resulted in misunderstanding rather than a deeper bilateral relationship.

At the same time, the ALP's conspicuous indifference to a continued British presence in the region not only helped propel Britain's full withdrawal from Southeast Asia but also rendered Australia more rather than less dependent on ANZUS and the United States as the ultimate guarantor of regional stability. Despite Labor's purportedly independent approach to the region and the globe, Whitlam introduced an anti-British animus into Labor political culture that, coupled with a suspicion of the Commonwealth, has over time distorted Australia's conduct of foreign policy.

Moreover, rather than being a creative middle power and the regional good citizen that Gareth Evans proclaimed in the 1990s, Australia appeared increasingly exposed as a liberal democracy in an illiberal region. The ALP's abstract pursuit of an illusory Asian community helped to breed this distinctive regional political culture.

Finally and by a curious paradox, trade dependence on Asian markets coupled with political isolation in Southeast Asia rendered Australian diplomacy and Australian security after Whitlam more rather than less dependent on a great and powerful U.S. presence. All of Australia's major initiatives in the region, including APEC (1989), membership in the ASEAN Regional Forum after 1992, and a key role in securing East Timor's independence after 1999, ultimately required the external stability provided by the U.S. Seventh Fleet and the openness of the U.S. market. Countries like Singapore and Thailand, ever conscious of the need for regional balance, had long recognized the crucial role of the United States as an external stabilizer. Without the U.S. commitment, as Prime Minister John Howard's Liberal government clearly recognized in 1999, Australia could not act as a regional power. The ALP government of Kevin Rudd (December 2007–June 2010) continued to pay obeisance to the Whitlam myth. Despite pragmatically recognizing the centrality of the U.S. alliance to Australian and regional security, Rudd and other ALP officials still hankered after the illusion of an Australia "enmeshed" in a Pacific Asian community.¹¹⁷ Whitlam's vision and the myths that sustain it continue to shape the ALP's conduct of foreign policy, albeit in a somewhat modified form.

117. On the importance of the special U.S. relationship, see Kevin Rudd, "The Rise of China and the Strategic Implications for U.S.-Australia Relations," Address to the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 27 April 2007, available at <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2007/0420china.aspx>. On Rudd's vision of building an Asia Pacific "Union" announced in June 2008, see "Asia-Pacific Community Plans 'Going Well': Rudd," *ABC News*, 21 November 2008, www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/21/2425658.htm.