

DEFENCE AND
DECOLONISATION
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Britain, Malaya and Singapore 1941-1968

Karl Hack

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Preface

Since this book focuses on Britain's interaction with Malaya and Singapore, the spelling used in British documents has been preferred. Hence Chou En-Lai not Zhou Enlai, Ceylon not Sri Lanka. Tonkin, however, has been preferred to Tongking. Indochina is used to denote the area covered by Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, and Malaya for the area covered by the Malayan Federation of 1948–63. That is, for the Malayan peninsula excluding Singapore. Southeast Asia is assumed to lie east of India but west of Hainan, south of China but north of Australia. Excluding Burma, this forms an unruly crescent shape, arcing from Tonkin to Papua New Guinea.

Except where otherwise labelled, archival material is from the Public Records Office at Kew Gardens, London. Crown copyright material is reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office. I have also received invaluable assistance at the National Libraries of Scotland and Australia, Durham University, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore), the Australian archives in Canberra, the Oxford libraries of Rhodes House, Queen Elizabeth House and 'Room 132' of the Bodleian, and at Singapore's National Institute of Education and National University libraries.

Equally, a project of this size would be impossible without the help of many individuals. First and foremost, I owe an inestimable debt to Dr Peter Carey and Dr John Darwin. Their expertise illuminated Southeast Asia and British imperialism. Their sense of style turned a stodgy dumpling into something more readable. Most of the merits of this project originate with them, the defects with me.

In Singapore, I need to thank the Defence Section of the British High Commission. In Australia, Gregory Pemberton, Peter Dennis, Chris Waters, and David Lowe provided stimulation, as did A.J. Stockwell and Ralph Smith's Southeast Asia seminar in London. I should also mention Professor Mary Turnbull, Richard Aldrich, W.J. Stockton, Leon Comber, the late Guy Madoc, Mr Lee Liang Hye, and Mr Toh Boon Kwan. My colleague, Kam Tin Seong provided a map of Malaya. Cheah Boon Kheng and Brian Farrell kindly commented on drafts, and I owe Chin Peng thanks for allowing historians to interrogate him. Most importantly, my wife, Vanessa, edited and suffered. I hope this work offers recompense to everyone, though I take responsibility for the views and mistakes herein.

Parts of the sections on the Emergency and Decolonisation in chapter four appeared in "'Iron Claws on Malaya": The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency', in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 30, 1 (1999). I am grateful to the editors for permission to reproduce the relevant sections here.

Key and Glossary

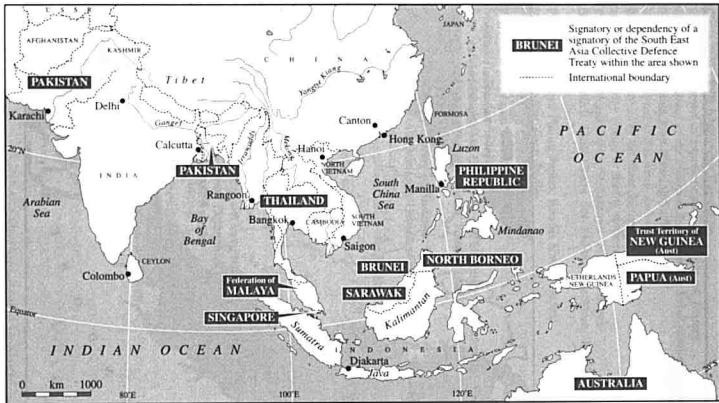
AIR	Air Ministry.
AHS	(Australian) <i>Historical Studies</i> .
AJPH	<i>Australian Journal of Political History</i> .
ANZAM	Australian, New Zealand and Malayan Area. An area for which the Australian defence machinery was to coordinate Commonwealth war plans.
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand and United States agreement.
BDCC(FE)	British Defence Coordinating Committee (Far East).
CAB	Cabinet.
CIC(s)	Commander(s)-in-Chief.
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the army's professional head and representative on the Chiefs of Staff Committee.
CIO	Central Office of Information (UK Government)
CO	Colonial Office.
COS	British Chiefs of Staff/Chief of Staff.
CRA	Commonwealth Records Archives, Canberra, Australia.
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office, London.
DEA	Australian Department of External Affairs.
DEFE	Ministry of Defence documents.
DO	Dominions Office/Dominions Office documents.
DOO	Director of Operations (Malaya). In charge of coordinating the police and service operations, but without executive authority over them, or over the civilian administration.
FE	Far East.
FO	Foreign Office.
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i> , official published volumes on American foreign relations.
IA	<i>International Affairs</i> .
IHR	<i>International History Review</i> .
INS	<i>Intelligence and National Security</i>
ISEAS	<i>Institute of South East Studies, Singapore</i>
JCCP	<i>Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics</i> .
JCS	United States Joint Chiefs of Staff.

JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee.
JICH	<i>Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History.</i>
JMBRAS	<i>Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.</i>
JPS	British Joint Planning Staff.
JSEAS	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies.</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of the Siam Society.</i>
<i>kampong</i>	Malay village or fishing settlement.
KP	Killearn Papers, St Antony's College, Oxford.
LHCMA	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.
LPP	Lloyd Philips Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford.
MAS	<i>Modern Asian Studies.</i>
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
<i>Merdeka</i>	Freedom/independence.
MMP	Malcolm MacDonald Papers, University of Durham.
MSS, PIJ	Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journals (Rhodes House, Oxford).
NLA	National Library of Australia, Canberra.
OAG	Officer-Administering-Government.
PAP	People's Action Party.
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia – the Indonesian Communist Party.
PM	Prime Minister.
PREM	Prime Ministerial documents.
RHO	Rhodes House, Oxford.
RUSI	Royal United Services Institution.
SAC	St Antony's College, Oxford.
SBWU	Singapore Bus Workers Union
SEA	Southeast Asia(n).
SEAC	Southeast Asia Command.
SEACDT	Southeast Asia Defence Treaty, later called SEATO.
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation.
SEP	Surrendered Enemy Personnel
<i>Ulama</i>	Religious Scholars
WO	War Office/War Office documents.
VCAS	Vice-Chief of the Air Staff.
VCIGS	Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Maps



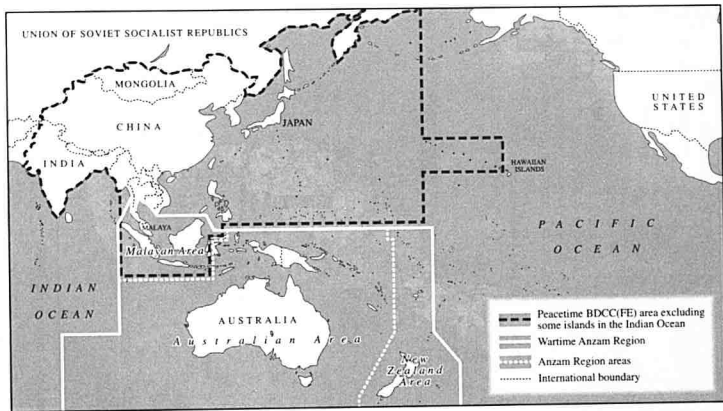
Territorial Divisions in Peninsular Malaya



South and Southeast Asia in 1956



The Songkhla Position in the 1950s



The BDCC and ANZAM areas in the early 1950s

Introduction

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Debates on British defence in the age of decolonisation have focused on the cost of maintaining great power status. It has been argued that hubris led to over-extension, to 'imperial overstretch'. Britain paid dearly for the trappings of power: the maintenance of sterling as a reserve currency, high defence costs, aloofness from European integration, and the pursuit of nuclear status.¹

So dearly that Britain's imperium East of Suez ended not in dignified withdrawal but humiliating scuttles. In June 1965, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson declared Britain's frontiers lay in the Himalayas. As late as October 1967 the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf were assured Britain would honour its commitments there. Yet in January 1968 the Wilson government sealed two years of reluctant defence cuts by deciding Britain's East of Suez role, excepting Hong Kong and Brunei, would end in 1971. Britain was at long last ready to leave its Singapore base, and retrench most of its regional role in Southeast Asia.²

'East of Suez' has thus been portrayed as the epitome of British failure to abandon an 'emotional and romantic' view of its interests for a 'coldly rational and cost-effective' one.³ Only when imperial overstretch left Britain trailing in the wake of European growth, and Labour unable to fulfil its domestic pledges, did the political will fail. Defence policy supposedly followed a pattern of paring down resources under financial pressure, rather than of planned withdrawal. It took economic crises to force actual commitments to be cut, in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean in 1947, and East of Suez in 1966-68. Chalmers even concludes that, 'Withdrawal East of Suez could have been completed two decades before it was eventually forced upon the government by later economic crises'.⁴

In those two decades the East of Suez role provided a comfort blanket, easing the sense of loss as African decolonisation accelerated after 1960. The empire of continents gave way to an empire of points, with military reserves held in the United Kingdom, Kenya, Aden and Singapore. The 1963-66 'Confrontation' with Indonesia saw over 60,000 military personnel and much of the surface fleet committed to defending the new Malaysian Federation (inaugurated on 16

2 Introduction

September 1963). British presence in the area became worth political points in Washington as American involvement in Vietnam deepened in the mid-1960s. The image of Britain as a great power and the value of an East of Suez policy remained embedded in British self-identity.⁵

Darby and Chalmers have projected this theme of great power illusion back to 15 August 1947, when India was finally set loose. Most of the East of Suez empire had been acquired as part of an Indian system, in which Aden and Singapore constituted the gatehouses to the Indian Ocean. Indian trade justified the system and Indian troops sustained it, serving as far apart as Hong Kong and the Sudan. Independence for Pakistan and India, with no defence treaty and with relations between the two hostile, removed any realistic chance of enlisting their help in regional defence. With the hub removed the spokes fell unsupported.

The underlying assumptions of Darby, Chalmers and Darwin are that planning was inadequate and forces inappropriate, that defence planning lagged behind decolonisation. This leads to a search for culprits. The political elite's determination to play on regional and world stages tops the bill. The Whitehall system's inability to review beliefs ingrained in the bureaucracy and services is cast in a supporting role.⁶ Several elements supposedly combined to cause sclerosis: competing services, without adequate powers for the Minister of Defence to coordinate views; the tendency for departments to compromise; and Britain's 'pragmatic' mode of government, managing day-to-day events rather than crystal-ball gazing. According to Darby the opportunity to fashion a new system, based not on regional paramountcy but on the protection of particular territories, was missed.⁷

Against this, Britain emerged from World War Two a great power relative to all but the United States and the Soviet Union. As late as 1950 Britain produced nearly a third of the industrial output of non-communist Europe and more weapons than the other European NATO partners combined. Only in the 1960s did economic sluggishness begin to look long-term, only then did trade tilt decisively in favour of Europe and away from empire.

As a former hegemonic power, it could be argued Britain could not simply abandon its role in world security and trade overnight. Hyam has argued that: 'The whole process of decolonization is best interpreted within the geopolitical context of the Cold War. The long-term aim with respect to future relations with Afro-Asian countries was to ensure their alignment with the West, thus containing communism ...'.⁸ According to Tarling, Britain saw its function as managing the orderly emergence of a post-colonial 'Third World' of sovereign, democratic and free-trading nation-states.⁹ It seemed to Britain that American resources were needed in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, if decolonisation was not to leave a vacuum for communism to fill.¹⁰ Yet Congress was reluctant to take up the burden unless America's allies organised themselves first, and shared the costs. Thus, while Britain's imperium over one-quarter of the globe is sometimes said to have been acquired 'in a fit of absence of mind', and on the cheap, drawing in the tentacles was to prove a more self-conscious and expensive process.

There is, therefore, a second and very different approach to that of the 'overstretch' school. This views British strategies from a strategic and Cold War perspective, as aimed at holding Southeast Asia as an important region in the global battle against communism. It focuses on Britain's response to the period 1948–50, which saw communist victory in China, the outbreak of the Korean War, and revolts of communist complexion in Burma, Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia.¹¹ Before this period British officials could talk of reducing 'white troops' East of India to a minimum; afterwards they were forced to despatch reinforcements to patrol Hong Kong's streets and Malaya's jungles.

From this perspective, Britain's defence planning appears to have involved a gradual acceptance that Southeast Asia had to be actively defended, at least with political and internal security policies, against the rising tide of communism. This makes 'overstretch' arguments look naïve, in as much as they assume early withdrawal was an option, yet fail to address the Cold War and local costs of losing conflicts such as the Malayan Emergency. Even after America had committed itself to the battle against advancing communism in Asia, by the early 1950s, potential flash-points in Vietnam, Korea and Taiwan still seemed to make it important for Britain to maintain its presence. Now Britain wanted to act as a restraining influence on American impetuosity.

However, neither 'overstretch' nor 'Cold War' paradigms have gone unchallenged. 'Radical' interpretations – such as those of Stenson, Caldwell, Furedi, and Curtis – stand in direct contradiction.¹² First, they see colonial territories, and especially Malaya, as highly profitable – as indeed do colonial and business historians of a less anti-establishment hue.¹³ There is increasing agreement that Malaya was easily Britain's most valuable, indeed indispensable, colonial possession from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s. Its dollar-earning rubber and tin exports were crucial in sustaining the sterling area and making up for Britain's own dollar deficit.

Secondly, they argue British interventions were used not primarily to crusade against global communism, but to prevent radical Asian nationalists from disrupting British interests. They see Britain as using force and declaring emergencies in order to 'manage' nationalism, to remove 'radical' nationalists. Stenson, for instance, maintains Britain's labour regulations, deportations of communists and the closing down of political space virtually forced Malayan communists to revolt in 1948. British policy, Stenson implies, had the unintended effect of producing large-scale insurgency.¹⁴ Radical narratives thus imply Britain sought out or accepted so-called moderates, regardless of whether these were democratic or feudal, provided it was clear they would leave British businessmen on Malaya's rubber plantations, Malayan dollars in the sterling pool, and Royal Navy ships berthed in Singapore.¹⁵ In this interpretation, heavy defence burdens can be seen as the cost of Britain's exploitative colonial policies and neo-colonial ambitions: its attempts to manoeuvre conservative and pliant elites into place preparatory to decolonisation.¹⁶

A fourth set of histories are also relevant, works on Malaya by historians such as Short, Stubbs and Stockwell. These focus on British colonial politics, or on

the Malayan Emergency as an example of counter-insurgency. They provide an essential colonial perspective, outline chronologies, and detail, but often address historiographical fissures obliquely rather than directly.¹⁷ More importantly, they are only marginally concerned with how the colonial and military developments they document affected the disposition of British forces, and the shape of overall British strategy. They are also open to the accusation of writing 'Colonial Records' history, which portrays outcomes and events too narrowly in relation to 'British policy', neglecting the equal shaping role of international and Asian forces.¹⁸

The links between these Asian forces and local conditions and metropolitan defence policy, and the interconnections between the four approaches, are precisely what must be studied if Britain's defence posture is to be understood. Yet existing works pay little attention to these problems. Neither Darby, nor Pickering's, *Britain's Withdrawal from East of Suez: The Politics of Retrenchment* (London: Macmillan, 1998) give adequate weight to regional events and constraints. Neither tackle the Malayan Emergency – Britain's biggest eastern commitment in the 1950s. Nor do they address the Gurkhas – its main manpower pool. Despite not addressing these themes – a case of making bricks without straw – they assume 1950–60s policy was atavistic and withdrawal unnecessarily delayed.

Individually, then, each of the above approaches can provide only a partial picture of Britain's defence stance. Darby and the 'overstretch' school fail to address the impact which colonial politics had on defence plans. The Cold War approach concentrates on perceptions of the communist threat, neglecting the question of how far Cold War rhetoric translated into a peculiarly Cold War force posture. By contrast, radical works take a reductionist view of British motivation as economic, discounting Singapore's perceived value as a strategic base. Works on colonial politics and counter-insurgency, meanwhile, pay little attention to the way these interacted with overall defence plans. They fail to show how important the Malayan Emergency and local defence needs were in shaping so-called 'East of Suez' policy. Thus the particular theme of this work – defence posture in the era of decolonisation – can only be investigated by looking at the interaction between at least four areas, namely: imperial defence, the Cold War, economic considerations, and colonial policy.

The focus on defence posture – on what military forces Britain put into place – rather than on British planning *per se*, dictates this book's particular concern with the way regional conditions facilitated and frustrated British plans. For one of the central puzzles about this period cannot be answered by focusing narrowly on British policy-making. This puzzle is that Britain planned and hoped for the minimisation of white troops East of India, and yet ended up maintaining large forces there into the 1960s. Britain did not plan to have a Malayan Emergency (1948–60), or an Indonesian Confrontation (1963–66). Yet these and other Asian forces and events had a vital bearing on military posture.

What needs to be explained, then, is the gap between British hopes and British force-levels. To understand this, it is necessary to give as much attention

to context in Asia as to intentions in London. Once Britain's basic aims had started to emerge, policy tended to become as reactive to local circumstances as creative of them, sometimes almost incidental to events on the ground. There is, therefore, a danger that studies which focus too narrowly on the metropolis will exaggerate Britain's powers of decision, whether to influence the region for good, or to withdraw earlier and without serious consequences.¹⁹

While the London archives can shed light on British motives, this means it is also necessary to draw widely on Asian-based or Asia-focused sources and authors. Authors such as Loh Kok Wah, Cheah Boon Kheng and T.N Harper. Harper in particular argues that forms and tactics which Britain hoped would forge a cross-communal 'Malayan' identity were hijacked. Entrenched identities and wartime ferment meant that papers attacked Britain, unions became politicised, politics communalised, and a colonial Emergency emerged from 'elemental forces from below: a spiral of violence'. In short, 'both sides were reacting to events'.²⁰ All these authors stress the autonomy and power of local communal and social patterns, which may help to explain how policy outcomes came to contradict policy aims. In order to further address the puzzles and interactions mentioned above, this book also asks a number of guiding questions.

QUESTIONS

The historiographical tensions noted above, and the lack of dialogue between the 'overstretch', Cold War, radical and colonial approaches, leave at least four sets of questions unanswered. First, what was the relationship between the Cold War and British planning? Secondly, which policies did Britain back with resources? Thirdly, how far can Darby's 'East of Suez' model be applied to Southeast Asia? Fourthly, what was the relationship between defence plans, including Britain's overall world power, and decolonisation?

The first set of questions concerns the relationship between the Asian Cold War and Britain's pre-existing policies. Britain's Asian and decolonisation policies cannot have been simply Cold War policies, since Britain had well-established plans before the Cold War developed. With Singapore's fall in 1942 exposing the fragility of empire, and South Asia headed for independence in the near future, Britain envisaged itself posing as a progressive colonial – and decolonising – power. In Southeast Asia, this was intended to help Britain emerge as the coordinator of regional defence, development and an orderly move to Asian 'self-government' in partnership with former colonial powers. How satisfactory, therefore, is it for 'Cold War' accounts to begin their analysis of British strategy with the commencement of the Asian Cold War in 1948?²¹ Or for the Cold War to be portrayed as the mainspring of British decolonisation, to the detriment both of the impact of the Second World War and the influence of local elites and social forces.²² What was the precise relationship between the Cold War, regional and colonial policy, and – above all – force posture? In order to answer these questions, about the impact and relative significance of the Cold War on the defence of Malaya and Singapore, this work will trace events from

6 Introduction

the fall of Singapore in 1942, which marks the starting point for serious British thinking about decolonisation.²³

The second set of questions concerns Britain's allocation of resources. It is not enough to know Britain's policies and aims. We must ask: which policies did Britain actually back with resources?²⁴ Did Britain back its regional anti-communist policies, and its 'great power illusions' – the desire to maintain influence over Asian countries, Australia and America – with military resources? Or did it provide only the minimum forces required to defend its own territories? This question is important, because how resources are allocated *in extremis* may tell us a great deal about Britain's order of priorities.

We must also ask a third set of questions, about regional perceptions. How did Britain view Malaya and Singapore's relationship to their regional context? For the title of this work reflects the way Britain perceived Malaya's defence not just as a local matter, but as interconnected with the whole Southeast Asian region. Hence British attempts to buffer Malaya, by assuagement of China, neutralisation of Indochina, and regional strategies.

The main work in the defence field, Darby's *British Defence Policy East of Suez* (London, 1973) suggests an even wider focus. Darby leaves the impression Britain conceptualised Malaya and Singapore as part of a wider 'East of Suez' area. Yet it was only after the 1956 Suez crisis produced then threat of a Middle East air and sea barrier that the 'East of Suez' concept emerged, reuniting areas once subsumed in the Indian system of defence. This book, therefore, suggests Southeast Asia was seen as a discrete strategic area in its own right in the years 1942–57, and it takes this as its core period. This demarcation of Southeast Asia was given formal recognition by the establishment of the wartime, Southeast Asia Command (SEAC – 1943–46), but its roots predated this. They stretched back to the realisation – in the late 1930s – that Singapore's defence intertwined with that of Thailand's ports and Indochina's airfields and rice supplies. By the 1950s Southeast Asia loomed still larger in British thoughts, after the withdrawals from South Asia and East Asia left the region isolated. Squeezed on both sides by the inexorable advance of Asian nationalism, it became the central focus of British presence in the East.

Can the models Darby applied to what he called an 'East of Suez' region, which re-emerged only after 1957, explain this smaller area and distinct period? Or do Darby and Pickering demonstrate a wider tendency to conflate contrasting periods, namely: 1941–57, when planning was based on 'Southeast Asia'; 1957–65, an 'East of Suez' era of mobile forces; and 1965–68, which was characterised by withdrawal. Such compression of time and the neglect of the Emergency suggest historians have not seriously considered what forces were deployed for in earlier periods, preferring to read history backwards. Yet 1945–68 covers two decades of breath-taking technological, economic and political transformation. We should not assume too readily that the level of withdrawal appropriate by the mid-1960s was desirable earlier.

A fourth set of questions concern a relationship central to this work, that of defence to decolonisation. One of Darby's claims is that, 'Britain's military role as

it was in fact perceived was inconsistent with the policy of decolonisation'.²⁵ The long time-frame of this study will reveal how far British military and colonial strategies for Southeast Asia emerged from the Second World War already entangled. It will show that by 1945 military and colonial planners shared a vision of gradual decolonisation, and an ultimate aim of creating a large, self-sustaining and communally harmonious 'Dominion of Southeast Asia'.

It then asks, what happened when decolonisation accelerated, and so eventually clashed with these aims, and with military requirements? Did British defence imperatives delay decolonisation, or Cold War concerns accelerate it? How did Britain's wider concerns as a world power affect its management of decolonisation? What international aims, such as constructing a British-led new Commonwealth, or trying to court communist China, coloured British policy towards Southeast Asia? John Darwin has suggested that, if there is any pattern to decolonisation, it lay here, in Britain's attempt to maintain itself as a world power. He argues that: 'The pragmatic ingenious adaptation of British policy was geared, above all, to the preservation of British world power in increasingly adverse circumstances.'²⁶ For any general model of decolonisation to work, it must be consistent with the 'Southeast Asian' and East of Suez stories which, in defence terms, were more significant than Africa, and no less taxing than the Mediterranean and Middle East.

This relationship between defence planning and decolonisation also embraces a more regional puzzle: Malaya and Singapore's different paths to independence. Why was Malaya given *Merdeka* ('freedom') on a 'Gold Plate' in 1957, while Singapore and its naval base inched painfully towards full independence in 1965? Was the difference due mainly to the unchallenging nature of Malayan nationalism, which did not attack core British economic and strategic interests? Or was it due mainly to Singapore's more pivotal position in supporting British world defence and power?

Answering these questions should establish how adequately British defence posture can be described by existing interpretations. Whether Britain's military stance really was a necessary 'Cold War' defence of the 'Third World' against communism and anarchy. Whether, as the 'imperial overstretch' paradigm suggests, it was a wasteful drain on an already enervated metropolis, or a richly rewarded tool for preserving British economic interests from the threat of Asian nationalism. For surely British defence posture in Southeast Asia cannot be *both* an example of overstretch and of exploitation; *both* motivated by honourable resistance to communism and by urges to protect British interests regardless of cost to Asians? Or can it?

METHODOLOGY

In order to address such wide-ranging questions, this study concentrates on the interplay between the highest level of British aims and decision-making, and operating conditions in the region. The result is an account very different from forensic investigations of British planning and threat assessments.

This work thus makes no claim to offer a comprehensive account of Britain's Southeast Asian strategies *per se*, nor of any of the individual areas (such as colonial or foreign policy) which interacted to produce defence posture. Its aim is to provide an overview of defence, and especially concrete defence effort, in the era of Malayan decolonisation. It is based on the premise that, while such a survey must necessarily be deficient in detail, a new framework is needed. For Malaya and Singapore, and the wider Southeast Asian and East of Suez areas in which they are embedded, are vital parts of the overall story of decolonisation.

Malaya and Singapore are so important because Britain increased its focus on them after India's independence, and despite the rising tide of Asian nationalism. In addition, Britain retained strong economic and military interests here until the very last stages of decolonisation, and it was only here that Britain fought a large-scale communist insurgency. In economic terms alone, Britain's postwar attempt to maintain first the Sterling Area, and then sterling's role as a major international currency, rested to a large extent on Malaya's dollar earnings. The decolonisation story cannot be adequately understood without a satisfactory survey of Malaya and Singapore.

Despite the region's importance, only three authors have attempted overviews in closely related fields and covering all the period 1941–68, namely: Darby, Tarling and Pickering. Darby's useful, but now dated, *British Defence Policy East of Suez* neglects the 'decolonisation' side of the 'defence and decolonisation' equation. It scarcely discusses Malaya's economic value or the Malayan Emergency. It hardly mentions Britain's main source of troops in the region, the Gurkhas. Tarling's *The Fall of Imperial Britain in Southeast Asia*, meanwhile, covers such a long period – the nineteenth century to the 1960s – that it provides only the barest outline of decolonisation, and says very little on defence. Pickering's *Britain's Withdrawal from East of Suez*, by contrast, is a political science treatise. Strong on domestic politics, it shares Darby's weaknesses, and sees 1942–57 in relation to the final act of withdrawal in 1965–68, rather than on its own terms. It was also written before the release of British archives on 1965–68, which have been drawn on for this book. None of these works makes extensive use of archives. So the time is ripe for a synthesis of the specialist works in this area – and the historiography on British defence and decolonisation in general – with British, Singaporean and Australian archives.²⁷

For these purposes, decolonisation is seen as encompassing Britain's declining world power and the rise of colonial nationalism, and British planning in the face of these changes. It is thus seen as the interface between a process over which Britain had limited control, and Britain's response to that process.

In so far as British policies and forces are traced, they are those which were intended to achieve the defence of Malaya and Singapore: territories where Britain's military and colonial interests overlapped. The words 'Southeast Asia' in the title reflect the inextricable intertwining of the defence of these territories – in British eyes – with the wider region. It is not possible to deal with Malayan and Singaporean defence without covering their Southeast Asian aspect, not to

mention Australian and American involvement, and related Middle Eastern strategy. The title does not indicate ambitions to cover British regional or foreign policies for their own sake. That would require another book.²⁸

With these constraints in mind, Indonesia is relatively neglected in early chapters. This is because it had little effect on Britain's force posture from 1946–57, despite fears that developments there might, *in extremis*, radicalise Malay nationalists.²⁹ The Epilogue – covering the period up to 1968 – deals more explicitly with Indonesia's late rise to become the number one threat. Southeast Asia Command (1943–46) and Britain's reoccupation of Southeast Asia in 1945–46 also receive summary rather than full coverage. This is partly because they form important interludes in their own right, partly because they are covered by specialist works of their own, but also because of the limits of time and space.³⁰ There was, after all, never any doubt that the forces maintained in these periods were exceptional, necessary, and related as much to global conflict as to decolonisation. By contrast, the fall of Singapore in 1942 is covered in more detail, both because it had a longer term impact on defence ideas and posture, and because it marked the origins of serious British thinking about decolonisation.

In short, this work adds to the historiography by investigating one particular theme, defence in an era of decolonisation, and the relationships this encompassed: between internal and external defence, between military and colonial affairs, and between local, regional and global events.

Notes

- 1 Malcolm Chalmers, *Paying for Defence: Military Spending and British Decline* (London, 1985), makes the case for military overstretch. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (London, 1988), pp. xvi–xvii, xxv–xxvi, 687–92, 697–98, makes the case for 'imperial overstretch'.
- 2 The 1970–74 government entered 'Five Power Defence Agreements' with Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore in 1971, allowing loose cooperation. Britain provided up to 6 frigates, a battalion group, maritime aircraft and helicopters. Labour finalised withdrawal by 1976, the Five Power arrangements persisting. Chin Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore* (Cambridge, 1983).
- 3 John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (London, 1988), p. 294.
- 4 John Baylis, "'Greenwoodery' and British Defence Policy' *IA*, 62, 3 (1986), 443–57. David Reynolds *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1991), pp. 163–69, 227–30. For the quotation, see Chalmers, *Paying for Defence*, p. 40.
- 5 The figures normally include RAF, Royal Navy and supporting units. Robert Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness: Britain and the World Role, 1900–1970* (London, 1991), pp. 329–33, argues abandoning the East of Suez role was hazardous, a break from the 'great power, one nation' consensus in domestic politics. J. Darwin, 'British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?', *JICH*, 12, 1 (1984), 206, emphasises the erosion of 'foothold after foothold', Britain clinging to a system of world influence; David Goldsworthy, 'Keeping Change within Bounds: Aspects of Colonial Policy During the Churchill and Eden Governments', *JICH*, 18, 1 (1990), 81–108, an 'empire of points'.

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- 6 Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947–1968* (London, 1973), pp. 10, 15–17, 21, 327–31; Holland, *Pursuit of Greatness*, pp. 339–42; Reynolds, *Britannia*, p. 56.
- 7 Reynolds, *Britannia*, pp. 54–55; Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 9, 11, 15.
- 8 Ronald Hyam, 'The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763–1963', in *JICH* 27, 2 (1999), p. 45. Even without the Cold War, however, Britain aimed at fostering good relations between successor elites and itself, rather than the West in general. It remained ambivalent about American interest in British colonies, including Malaya.
- 9 Nicholas Tarling, *The Fall of Imperial Britain in South-East Asia* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 1–2, 197–207. His *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War, 1945–1950* (Cambridge, 1998) assembles 400 pages of description, mainly from Foreign Office documents, as evidence of the same.
- 10 Reynolds, *Britannia*, pp. 173–74, 298–304; Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, pp. 304–07.
- 11 These revolts broke out in 1948. Ovendale presents UK policy as driven by the Asian Cold War: Ritchie Ovendale, *The English-Speaking Alliance: Britain, the United States, the Dominions and the Cold War, 1945–51* (London, 1985), pp. 145–84; and 'Britain and the Cold War in Asia', in Ovendale (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945–1951* (1984), pp. 121–48. See also Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War* (2 vols, Canberra, 1981, 1985). Peter Lowe, *Containing the Cold War in East Asia: British Policies Towards Japan, China and Korea, 1948–53* (Manchester, 1997) does a similar job for East Asia.
- 12 See Mark Curtis, *The Ambiguities of Power: British Foreign Policy Since 1945* (London: 1995), pp. 1–50, 56–65; Malcolm Caldwell and M. Amin (eds.), *Malaya: The Making of a Neo-Colony* (Nottingham, 1977); Frank Furedi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994); and M.R. Stenson, 'The Malayan Union and the Historians', *JSEAH*, 10, 2 (1969), 344–54. John Newsinger, 'The Military Memoir in British Culture: The Case of Malaya', *Race and Class* 35, 3 (1994), 47–62, plays on the ironies of Labour supporting feudal Sultans, and using working class National Service conscripts so Malaya could be 'ruthlessly exploited'. Greg Poulgrain, *The Genesis of Konfrontasi: Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia 1945–1965* (London: Hurst, 1998), argues British Petroleum Malaya (a Shell subsidiary) helped shape policy in favour of a compliant Sultan, and against the less reliable *Parti Rakyat Brunei*. For a Marxist account, see Donald Nonini, *British Colonial Rule and the Resistance of the Malay Peasantry, 1900–1957* (Yale, 1992).
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- 15 For instance: Britain accepted Malay domination rather than racial equality in Malaya; supported 'feudal' rulers in the Gulf States; balked at forcing Brunei's Sultan to democratise his country; overthrew the elected Progressive People's Party in British Guiana in October 1953 in the absence of violent disorder; and undermined Iraq's government in response to that country's oil nationalisation.

- 16 Britain could be considered neo-colonial in the way it fostered elites amenable to post-colonial links. 65 per cent of foreign capital in Malaya was still British in 1970. 21 per cent of Malayan imports were British in 1963, down from 25 per cent in 1958. The transition from neo-colonialism could be dated to 1969–82, when Malaysia adopted a 'New Economic Policy' (to increase ethnic Malay economic power), looked East for investment and bought out British companies from 1976. Finally, Mahathir's arrival as Prime Minister signalled the arrival of a new, less Anglophile elite, Mahathir being a Malayan-trained doctor. Stockwell, by contrast, rejects neo-colonial charges, noting Britain's declining interests and control. A.J. Stockwell, 'Malaya: The Making of a Neo-Colony', in Peter Burroughs and A.J. Stockwell, *Managing the Business of Empire* (London, 1999); Nonini, *Colonial Rule*, pp. 143–65; T.N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 363.
- 17 Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948–60* (London, 1975); Anthony Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics During the Malayan Union Experiment* (Kuala Lumpur, 1979); Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960* (Oxford, 1989).
- 18 A. C. Milner, 'Colonial Records History: British Malaya', *Kajian Malaysia*, 4, 2 (Dec. 1986), 1–18; Yeo Kim Wah, 'The Milner Version of History – A Rider', *Kajian Malaysia*, 5, 1 (June 1987), 1–28. For a restatement of the periphery against the 'Official Mind', see D. Throup, 'The Historiography of Decolonization', Institute of Commonwealth Studies Paper (Jan. 1991), pp. 3, 4, 17–18.
- 19 Left-wing historians – who suggest Britain could have withdrawn earlier – and Cold War analysts – who insist Britain retained substantial regional influence – share one tendency. They see Britain as influential, whether over Asian politicians or Western allies, and as having a wide degree of choice.
- 20 T. N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 142–43.
- 21 The regional policy, which the Asian Cold War accelerated, originated in 1942–45. Tilman Remme, *Britain and Regional Cooperation in South-East Asia, 1945–49* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 9–26.
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- 25 Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 331.
- 26 Darwin, 'British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?' Darwin also mentions 'Whig', 'Collapse', 'Nationalist' and 'Mandarin' decolonisation models. The 'collapse' model overlaps with the 'overstretch' school of thought, and the 'Mandarin' and 'Whig' models with Tarling's idea of Britain planning to create post-colonial world of free-trading nation-states.
- 27 For Darby, *British Defence Policy*, and Tarling, *The Fall of Imperial Britain*, see the above notes. There is also a useful survey aimed at the wider, less academic audience. This is John Keay, *The Last Post: The End of Empire in the East* (London, 1997).
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- Verlag Stuttgart, 1994 – a 1994 Zurich University Ph.D thesis); and Tarling's detailed *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War, 1945–1950*.
- 29 For British surprise that Indonesian events had not had a more concrete impact on Malaya, see the minute on MacDonald's views by H.T. Bourdillon, 23 Jan. 1948, in Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, p. 373. Indirectly, this fear made Britain more anxious to appease Malay opinion in Malaya.
- 30 There are also specialist works on this theme: Peter Dennis, *Troubled Days of Peace: Mountbatten and SEAC, 1945–1946* (Manchester, 1987); and F.S.V. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943–1946* (London: HMSO, 1946), which is an official history.

Frameworks

POLICY MAKING CONTEXTS

The global strategies and metropolitan constraints within which Malayan, and more generally Southeast Asian, policy was worked out must be traced. What was the economic context? What were Britain's global strategic priorities? Which people and institutions did, or according to Darby did not, plan and coordinate British strategies?

A single Southeast Asian defence question might involve Foreign Office attitudes to China, Australian concern for Singapore, Colonial Office worries over political repercussions, Treasury grumbling over cost and military inputs from Singapore and London. Some writers follow Darby in arguing Britain's system of government was incapable of challenging attitudes entrenched by generations of imperial thinking. It allegedly led to fudged compromises and inhibited radical solutions.¹

The Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry each had its own minister, all enjoying access to the Prime Minister. In January 1947 the Ministry of Defence was set up as a regular department, with its own Minister of Defence, but his powers were those of coordination and his staff small.² A Defence Committee provided a forum for political consideration of strategy. Chaired by the Prime Minister, its core was the Minister of Defence, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord President of the Council, Service ministers, Minister of Supply and the Chief of Staff of each service. Other ministers attended as necessary. Often, however, the reports which it considered had already been well-cooked by the COS and departments.

The COS often came to lowest common denominator bargains in their own COS committee before putting their case in the Defence Committee. Political power over the military was concentrated on decisions of war and peace, the overall defence budget, and in areas with domestic or diplomatic implications. The Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer did provide constraints, but for the most part only when pushing for cuts in the total defence budget, or through questioning capital expenditure on items such as new aircraft or permanent bases.³ Domestic political constraints thus seemed to have worked mainly through sustained pressure for reductions in the military burden, heightened at times of economic crisis, such as

after the Suez debacle of late 1956. Even then, how far the Sandys review of 1957 sprung from ongoing deliberations, how far from the Conservative government's reaction to financial and political crisis, remains unclear.⁴

A Minister of Defence, usually enjoying brief tenure, sometimes ended up being merely another minister to defend the services' combined interests. At other times he found it difficult to exert influence over three experienced Chiefs of Staff on detailed questions of strategy. From 1955 a chairman of the COS was introduced, but his staff was small. It was 1964 before this chairman was made 'Chief of Defence Staff' responsible for advising the Minister of Defence, rather than a *primus inter pares*. In January 1957 Duncan Sandys's position as Minister of Defence was also strengthened by a directive from the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan (1957–63), instructing him to achieve 'substantial' reductions. He also received Cabinet authority to decide, 'all questions on the size, shape, organisation and dispositions of forces ...'. Even Sandys, however, ended up strengthening the 'East of Suez' role.⁵

Current historiography, therefore, sees entrenched service interests duplicating equipment and logistic demands, and fossilising policy. Meanwhile, a weak Defence Committee and the irregular use of official and ministerial committees meant that, 'At the political level there was no clear conception of defence contraction as an integral part of the process of decolonization', and little forward planning. Consequently, commitments and missions remained while resources were eaten away, until at crucial junctures (1947, 1957 and 1967) economic crises forced fundamental re-evaluations.⁶

Did this system of competitive bureaucracy intensify or mitigate the effects of imperial atavism and vested interests? Was there really no effective politico-military planning for decolonisation, or would the more structured, long-term planning Darby favours have been ineffectual crystal-ball gazing? The answer lies as much in Singapore, where the detail of Southeast Asian strategy was formulated, as in London, where the parameters were set.

According to one Admiral, Singapore became 'a sort of Political-Service madhouse', threatening to escalate into 'a Whitehall at Singapore'. As early as 1948 there were committees to cover everything from 'the Parish pumps in Malaya and Singapore' to surveying 'mankind from China almost to Peru'.⁷ At the core of this system, in location though not always in influence, were the British Defence Coordinating Committee (Far East) and the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia. The latter was an amalgamation of the posts of the Governor-General of British territories in Southeast Asia (1946–48), and the Special Commissioner, the Foreign Office's regional representative (1946–48). The Commissioner-General was responsible to both the Colonial Office and Foreign Office, and could report direct to the Prime Minister. His Phoenix Park offices in Singapore dealt with the regional implications of subjects as various as information, shipping, food and strategy.

Malcolm MacDonald, previously Governor-General, became the first occupant of the new post from May 1948 to 1955. He took a particular interest in promoting progress towards uniting Malaya and Singapore. In this area he had an advisory and

coordinating brief as opposed to executive power. Initially, however, his Labour Party background gave him political weight. His advice could be influential when London and local representatives, or local military and political representatives, differed.

MacDonald thus played a central role in some key decisions. In 1946, while Governor-General, he supported Sir Edward Gent's call (the Governor of the Malayan Union) to abandon the Malayan Union scheme. It is doubtful, however, whether London, or any other plenipotentiary, would have persisted with a scheme which threatened to stoke up the fires of Malay communalism. With communism and Malay sympathies for unison with Indonesia simultaneously perceived as threats, officials were ill-disposed to take risks with security.* Despite considerable reluctance to reverse such an important policy, the maintenance of control at a reasonable cost proved to be the ultimate priority in London and Singapore alike.

We might look for MacDonald's significance not so much in individual decisions, as in his approach to Asian leaders, and the way his post reflected Foreign Office commitment to taking the regional view over the parochial. He conducted regional tours and held yearly conferences of British representatives from as far afield as India and Japan, called the 'Bukit Serene', 'Mallaig' and 'Eden Hall' conferences, after their venues.

The wide range of MacDonald's roles, however, produced friction with local service chiefs and Governors. His coordinating rather than executive brief also led some to dub him a waffler. By 1951 his influence was waning. In that year, a new Conservative Government replaced a Labour one with which he had strong links. Then the failure of men he had backed, notably Malay politician Dato Onn¹ and Indochinese Head of State Bao Dai,² made officials in London wary of his judgement. With initial hopes of far-reaching British influence in the region disappointed, there were suggestions in the 1950s that his post might be too expensive. MacDonald's openness and informality, however, were still appreciated by Asian politicians. For some time this gave his home at one of the Sultan of Johore's palaces, 'Bukit Serene'³ – which looked back to Singapore across the Johore Straits – a continuing political significance.⁴

The second Commissioner-General, Sir Robert Scott (September 1955 to 1959),⁵ arrived just as the South East Asia Treaty Organisation and

* Malcolm MacDonald: son of the Labour and National Government PM, Ramsay MacDonald; Colonial and Dominions Secretary at various points between 1935–38; High Commissioner to Canada, 1941–46.

¹ Dato Onn Jaafar: *Mentri Besar* of Johore, 1946–50; founder and President of UMNO, 1946–51; founder of the non-communal Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), 1951; founder *Parti Negara*, 1954–62.

² Bao Dai: Emperor of Annam (central Vietnam) under the French and Japanese; resigned after the republican revolution of August 1945; returned as Head of State of the French-protected, non-communist 'State of Vietnam', 1949–55.

³ Han Suyin describes Bukit Serene as 'a Walt Disney fantasy castle' with a tower, green tiles, pink walls, Chinese porcelain, and 'wonderful view across the straits from the verandah'. MacDonald played host in shirt-sleeves, a stark contrast to previous imperial formality. According to Han Suyin again, he 'turned somersaults in the streets, stood on his head at parties'. See end-note 8 for details.

⁴ Sir Robert Scott: China Consular Service, 1927–47; POW after intelligence and information work in Singapore, 1942–45; Foreign Office Assistant Under-Secretary of State for the Southeast Asia Department, 1950–53; Minister, Washington Embassy, 1953–55.

decolonisation were decreasing the political and increasing the military role of the post. He was less enthusiastic in seeking regional federation, more sceptical about the value of applying Westminster-style politics in areas such as Borneo, and more concerned with preserving British defence rights. In addition, experience in the British embassy in Washington made him sensitive to the need to coordinate policy with the United States. By 1958, however, with the United States the dominant Western power in the region and Singapore about to become self-governing (June 1959), there was already consideration of one individual combining the roles of Commissioner-General and Commissioner of Singapore.⁹ This happened under Lord Selkirk, who filled both roles from late 1959 to 1963.*

The Commissioner-General also had a special responsibility for coordinating defence policy, with the power to issue directions to local Governors in this area. In June 1951 'defence' was extended to include all matters concerning the Malayan Emergency.¹⁰ In practice, Emergency policies were generally settled in Malaya, though at crucial moments London might have an important role in considering the question of sending new men or additional material.

The High Commissioner of Malaya (from October 1948 to October 1951, Sir Henry Gurney), the General Officer Commanding (Malaya), and the Commissioner of Police were initially the key figures in formulating Emergency policy. At first the Commissioner of Police was responsible for the direction of the campaign, advised by members of the three armed services. In April 1950 Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs assumed responsibility for coordinating the campaign, as the first Director of Operations (DOO). The DOO was in turn responsible to a Federal War Council, which consisted of senior members of the administration, and over which the High Commissioner presided from November 1950.

Despite ultimate civilian authority, there were continuing tensions between the High Commissioner, the DOO and the Commissioner of Police. These tensions remained until one man was given clear authority over both civilian and military affairs. In 1952–54 the posts of High Commissioner and DOO were temporarily combined in General Sir Gerald Templer. He merged the Federal War Council into the more representative Federal Executive Council, thus allowing greater association of the latter's nominated Asian leaders with the political direction of the campaign. The DOO committee remained responsible for operational matters, but five political leaders – two Malays, one Chinese, one Indian and one European – were made full members in October 1954.¹¹

While Templer exercised unquestioned direction of the Malayan Emergency campaign, the Commissioner-General's role continued to be that of assisting the coordination of regional defence with colonial, Commonwealth and foreign policy. In this capacity, he chaired the British Defence Coordinating Committee, Far East (BDCC).

* The Earl of Selkirk (Nigel Douglas-Hamilton), lawyer and conservative minister: Eton and Balliol Oxford; Paymaster-General, 1953–55; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1955–57; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1957–59; Commissioner for Singapore and Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, 1959–63.

In 1946 the British Defence Committee, Southeast Asia replaced Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command at the apex of military planning. Before 1948 its name was changed to the British Defence Coordinating Committee (Far East). The BDCC consisted of MacDonald and the Commanders-in-Chief of the three services. The High Commissioner of Malaya and Governors of local British territories were invited as appropriate. The BDCC drew intelligence from the Joint Intelligence Committee, Far East.¹² Its area of planning responsibility stretched across the entire Far East, the Indian sub-continent, and part of the Indian Ocean.

Its central concern, however, was the defence of Malaya and Singapore. Again, the Commissioner-General helped give the BDCC a regional and political perspective, but his peace-time power within the BDCC was limited to persuasion.¹³ When differences arose, his influence would depend on his ability to use his wider channels of communication, with the Foreign Office, Colonial Office and the Prime Minister, to persuade them to support his view.

Below the BDCC was the Commanders-in-Chief (CIC), Far East, committee, which in turn was served by a full system of sub-committees. Mountbatten's post-war calls for a single supreme commander to continue to oversee all three services initially came to nothing.¹⁴ Instead, the three service CICs had overlapping but not contiguous commands, each of them overseeing General-Officers-Commanding (GOCs) of their respective services in Malaya, Hong Kong, Singapore and (in the case of the RAF) Ceylon. The Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station, very reluctantly moved his headquarters from cooler Hong Kong to Singapore's unceasingly tropical climate in 1948. Whereas the army and air-force focused mainly on defending the Malayan peninsula (and to a lesser extent Hong Kong) the Navy looked seaward.¹⁵ Ultimately, the level of forces committed to the region had to be decided, of course, not in Singapore, but in discussions the COS committee in London. Likewise, where Southeast Asian demands affected global dispositions or the overall size of the defence budget, reference had to be made upwards, sometimes up to the Defence and Cabinet Committees.

This basic arrangement persisted until November 1962, when the service Commander-in-Chiefs and BDCC were replaced with a unified 'Far East Command'. One Commander-in-Chief now had authority over all three services. He was served by a committee whose main members were the three service commanders and a political adviser.¹⁶ This was part of a wider rationalisation that had already seen Lord Selkirk become Commissioner for Singapore as well as Commissioner-General in 1959.¹⁷ The latter post disappeared entirely with the formation of Malaysia, in September 1963. Then Britain resorted to one High Commissioner for Malaysia, the former conservative minister, Viscount Antony Head.¹⁸ The axing of the Commissioner-General's post in 1963 reflected both the long-delayed formation of a Malaysian federation, and the drastic reduction in Britain's regional responsibilities since 1948.

These changes were paralleled by reductions in the number of departments concerned with Southeast Asia and its defence in London. In August 1966 the Colonial Office was absorbed into the Commonwealth Office, being abolished

the following January. The appointment of one Secretary of Defence in 1964 also saw the political representatives of the individual services reduced to the status of junior ministers. In 1960–67, therefore, Asia and overseas defence lost several voices in Cabinet, culminating with the Foreign Office absorbing the Commonwealth Office in October 1968. According to Pickering, these changes quietened the weight of overseas interests. They made it easier to construct a Cabinet and official 'coalition' against preserving fixed bases, and so secure withdrawal after 1965.¹⁹ In other words, previous 'failure' to retrench bases had been, in part at least, because of bureaucratic structure and weightings.²⁰

In Singapore up to 1962, however, the Commissioner-General's Office, BDCC and a multitude of committees still ensured colonial, military and foreign affairs were coordinated, though the Commissioner-General lacked the authority to force agreement. In London, Southeast Asian issues frequently occasioned debate between departments, and in standing or ad hoc official committees.²¹ With the Whitehall departments maintaining simultaneous communications between each other, and between London and Singapore, a loose web of interconnections formed. There was, in some ways, almost overkill on overview, with the military in particular keeping an eye as far ahead in time as the shifting sands of the present would allow, in practice meaning up to a decade.²²

The service ministries' influence within this system, however, decreased the more a question was purely political rather than directly military. This reflected the natural tendency for a department's weight on any issue to reflect the degree to which it fell within that department's competence. Thus if a question involved bases or troops, the military input was substantial; if it involved political structures, service departments' views were of more marginal account.

The system was therefore characterised by competitive reconciliation of views between different services, departments and locations. There was, however, a lack of central policy planning staffs dedicated specifically to policy coordination, as opposed to committees where different departments thrashed out their respective positions.

Did this policy-framework, with its weight of overseas and service departments, and its web of interconnections and competing interests, reinforce imperial atavism, entrenching commitments and roles? Or did it encourage rational analysis and forecasting, thereby mitigating the effects of policy-makers' yearning for 'Great Power' roles? Either way, officials were ultimately not their own masters. These were the politicians in the Cabinet, Defence and other political committees. Since these political overlords seemingly underwent dramatic changes, with Churchill's coalition government from 1940–45, Conservative rule from 1951–64, and Labour's 1945–51 interlude, the political context demands further comment.

'METROPOLITAN' POLITICS: STRANGE CONTINUITIES

Apparently seismic shifts in politics, notably the changes of government of July 1945 and October 1951, caused only minor tremors in defence and decolonisation. This was not just because much policy was decided by

professionals in the services, and in the Colonial, Foreign and other Offices. It was also because Labour and Conservative approaches to defence and decolonisation, when actually in government, were not that different. They also did not differ greatly over the principles involved in rationalising the pre-war trend of increasing social expenditure. Both supported the new, postwar 'Welfare State'.²³ In the face of hungry budgets for the Welfare State's free health service and pensions, Labour's willingness to maintain and increase defence expenditure was to prove startling. Likewise, Conservative governments were to prove almost as sensitive to welfare needs, if not more so, than Labour ones.²⁴

Two further points about continuity need to be made. First, the wartime coalition gave Labour a major say in government. So when Labour won in July 1945, it was already deeply involved in managing the inevitable slide towards Indian independence, plans for constructing a Malayan Union, and the usual post-global war situation of stretched finances, engorged services, and defeated enemies. Massive demobilisation and concentration on salvaging the economy were predicated, as after the Napoleonic and First World Wars, by situation rather than party. So too was the need for decolonisation, given the continuing nationalist ferment caused by war, inflation, the rise of China, and the size of Britain's Empire relative to its now diminished capabilities. The sheer impossibility of holding on to India for much longer was also important in setting a British approach to decolonisation. Since Indian independence was 'inevitable', Britain determined to ride the tide and 'claim credit', which might later be cashed in for influence.²⁵

It is true that Labour's 1942 Annual Conference committed the Party to a more progressive stance than the Conservatives, to a 'Charter of Freedom for Colonial Peoples'. This went beyond even the Atlantic Charter of August 1941, in explicitly calling for full equality in political, economic and social rights for colonies. In reality, however, Labour's leaders were, by 1945, enmeshed in partnership with the Conservatives in ongoing imperial policy-making.²⁶

Secondly, the 1945-51 Labour Governments, in particular Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary, turned out to be as anti-Soviet and supportive of Cold War policies as any Conservative government could have been. This was despite a political row, in 1945-47, between Attlee - who wanted to lessen burdens in the Middle East - and Bevin and the COS. Attlee tried hard to get the COS to scale down British commitments in the Mediterranean and Middle East, which he thought less relevant as a line of communication in an age of aircraft, atomic bombs and Indian decolonisation. But the COS and Bevin adamantly insisted the area was vital: as a forward base, to hit the Soviet Union in war and so delay and lessen atomic attack on Britain; to screen oil-producing states and Africa; and to support Britain's 'Great Power' influence - and so non-communist governments - in Southern Europe.²⁷

The subsequent withdrawal of British aid from Greece and Turkey in 1947, and an April 1947 restriction of conscription to 12 months service, was the maximum Attlee could obtain. Even these were only because they were forced, by economic crisis in early 1947, by the hope the United States would pick up

more of the tab for world policing, and by a Spring 1947 back-bench Labour revolt against conscription at 18 months. Even then, the COS and Bevin finally won over the Middle East, as the deepening Cold War forced the lengthening of conscription to 18 months in 1948, a long enough time to allow service overseas and so prop up Britain's Middle East and Malayan roles. Bevin thereafter brought to bear on foreign policy a realpolitik attitude to negotiation, developed as a trade union leader. No doubt he was also fortified by skilled labour's suspicion of communism as a revolutionary creed, as opposed to Labour's preference for gradualism and negotiation.²⁸

Indeed, in 1950–51 the Labour Government over-reacted to the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, and the supposedly increased Soviet global threat. It violently reversed service reductions, calling for rearmament programmes which even the subsequent Conservative government recognised as ruinously impossible. It further lengthened conscripts terms of service from 18 to 24 months. Even the April 1951 resignation of Aneurin Bevan (Minister for Health) and Harold Wilson (President of the Board of Trade), in protest at the introduction of charges for dental and ophthalmic services, did not weaken the Labour Government's commitment to NATO, massive rearmament, counter-insurgency in Malaya, and progressive but gradual decolonisation.²⁹

In a sense, even Labour's commitment to a 'second colonial occupation' – to developing colonies economically as well as politically as a prelude to slow progress to 'self-government' – was unsurprising. Labour's socialist and 'Fabian' instincts led it to believe that, when it was in government, the state really could plan more efficiently and beneficently than private markets alone, even for colonised countries.¹ This was despite a genuine sympathy for Malayan aspirations, provided these were restricted to gradual constitutional advance, especially by men such as David Rees-Williams (a former Penang lawyer, and Parliamentary-Under Secretary of State in the 1945–51 government).² It was also despite the persistent criticism of the more radical, 'Movement for Colonial Freedom', and the persistent attacks by the communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*.³⁰

Bevin and Labour also represented workers whose comfort in the 1950s depended as much on colonial raw materials and Malayan dollar-earnings as did Conservative businessmen, despite Labour's democratic instincts. The prominent Conservative R. A. Butler deliberately touched on this irony in March 1950.

* The 'second colonial reoccupation' refers to the increased number of colonial officials after 1945, sometimes deployed on development work.

¹ The Fabian Society helped found the Labour Party. Its advocated government intervention to achieve development and social justice, and its 'Colonial Research Bureau' was for a time influential. Even ordinary Working Men's clubs and Co-operative Guilds could assume Britain had to remain a great power and tutor of colonial peoples, see Lim Yew Hock, *Reflections* (Kuala Lumpur, 1986), pp. 21–30. The groundnuts scheme, for mechanised production of edible oil crops in Tanganyika (1946–49), is the best example of colonial planning hubris. Labour backed massive development based on inadequate surveys, the result: less nuts harvested than sown. David Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development*. Vol. 2 (Macmillan, 1980), pp. 226–319.

² Rees-Williams (Lord Ogmoo): Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial and Commonwealth Offices (1947–50, 1950–51), Minister for Civil Aviation in 1951 See end-note 30.

In words which echoed Lenin's views on imperial exploitation, he reminded Parliament that the standard of living of 'the average British worker' depended on 'exploiting' and 'developing' Southeast Asian resources. It should be remembered that, as late as 1951, workers' comfort was somewhat lacking in Britain. Tea, for instance, was one of several foodstuffs still rationed.³¹ The Malayan Communist Party, of course, had already concluded the British Labour government was 'a wolf in sheep's clothing', which had 'set its iron claws on Malaya' to monopolise Malaya's postwar wealth.³²

Ironically but logically, then, Labour was as committed to taking decolonisation at a measured pace, under British guidance and culminating in Britain acting as *primus inter pares* in the Commonwealth, as the Conservatives. Indeed, given its greater willingness to accept non-whites in intimate partnership, even at the cost of weakening the bond to white dominions such as South Africa, Labour was in some ways more committed to the myth that British power could be perpetuated in a 'new Commonwealth'.

Thus Labour turned out to be prosaically unrevolutionary, if not unsocialist, where the Cold War, defence and decolonisation were concerned. Given the power of such common assumptions about Britain's role, it is not surprising that the change of guard from Attlee to Churchill, in October 1951, saw metropolitan strategies maintaining the same broad direction. In opposition, meanwhile, mainstream Labour criticism of the new regime at first focused on the details of colonial and defence management, rather than the fundamentals.³³

Nevertheless, it is commonly argued that the October 1951 change in government had a dramatic impact in Malaya, even if imperial strategies kept on the same course. The new Conservative Colonial Secretary of October 1951, Oliver Lyttelton, appointed General Templer both Director of Operations and High Commissioner for Malaya in 1952. Thus one man was given ultimate control of all Malayan matters, where before tensions between the police, services and civil authorities vitiated policy. Templer's appointment, and Conservative willingness to appoint a military supremo, is sometimes seen as transforming the Emergency almost overnight.³⁴

Chapter Four, however, will argue Malayan policy and fortunes continued on much the same path and pace as before, and that in this as in many other matters the change of political masters mattered little. Likewise, Chapter Four shows that the pattern of decolonisation remained basically unchanged through 1948-55.³⁵

Strangely, the political shifts which raise the most interesting questions for our period occurred not between parties, but within the Conservative Party. First, there was the summer 1954 replacement of Oliver Lyttelton by Alan Lennox-Boyd as Secretary of State at the Colonial Office. This raises the question whether the former, with his business contacts and past directorships in tin companies (and his previous role in encouraging imperial melting of tin), would have tolerated the rapid acceleration in decolonisation allowed by the latter.³⁶

The second Conservative change was from the premierships of Churchill (1940-45, 1951-55) and Eden (1955-57), to Macmillan in 1957. Did this

change, from the lax estate management style of the aristocratic Churchill, to the cost-benefit approach of Macmillan, cause the first rigorous post-war evaluation of defence and imperial costs? Was it this which triggered a new 'East of Suez' policy and accelerated decolonisation?³⁷ Again, Chapter Seven argues these shifts followed pre-existing trends, representing an attempt to maintain rather than abandon maritime and world power roles.³⁸ Indeed, at heart the half-American and wealthy Churchill, and the half-American international publisher Macmillan, shared much the same aims: to remain full partners of the United States on the world stage; and to avoid this being at the cost of preventing economic vitality, which both saw as the key to continuing world influence.³⁹

The basic point about metropolitan politics is that – up to 1964 – changes in political tide were not usually the prelude to, or mainspring behind, fundamental changes of policy towards Asia. All the governments of this period shared basic assumptions about Britain's imperial and world roles, and yet the knowledge these were constrained by dire economic conditions. Even at the very end of the story, it took the increasingly severe financial crises of 1964–67 to persuade Wilson to accept withdrawal from East of Suez.

Only then did domestic concerns assume a more direct role in the Southeast Asian story. Labour's internal politics, and its determination to forge a new economic strategy while improving social welfare, then resulted in a more abrupt withdrawal than otherwise likely. Nevertheless, even a Conservative government would probably, in the straitened circumstances of the mid-1960s, have accelerated retreat.⁴⁰ The mainsprings of policy change seem to lie more often in circumstance than in personality and British politics. Indeed, the roots of British policy are best traced to the interaction between shared official and political assumptions about Britain's world-role, combined with assessments of changing economic costs, interests and constraints.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS⁴¹

Darby has argued that Southeast Asia formed a military and trading periphery to the Indian Empire, that India's independence on 15 August 1947 should have augured the demise of Britain's regional role.⁴² In fact, the 1930s trade of Malaya and Singapore was already greater than 17 British African colonies combined, half or more the value of India's.⁴³ Missionary and romantic images of Africa as the 'Dark Continent', and of India's wealth, have too often distracted historians from Southeast Asia's real twentieth century importance. As early as 1937 Malaya and Singapore had taken an important place in balancing the Empire's trade, Britain having a dollar deficit and Malaya a large surplus. Malaya was already the world's largest single supplier of natural rubber, an important source of tin. By 1941 Malaya was the Empire's dollar 'arsenal'. Its loss to Japan, wartime debt and trade disruption only accentuated its postwar importance in earning dollars.⁴⁴

Before the end of 1945 wartime disinvestment and destruction had cost Britain as much as 25 per cent of national wealth. Debts to Sterling Area

countries amounted to £3.5 billion. Britain also emerged with high dollar debts, and yet needing dollar purchases to aid in reconstruction. After the sudden ending of Lend-lease in August 1945, only a generous settlement and an American loan of \$3.75 billion (authorised by Congress in 1946) staved off bankruptcy. Both Britain and the countries with sterling balances were desperate for American goods.⁴⁵

Consequently, when Britain honoured the 1945 loan conditions by making the pound convertible in July 1947, Britain's foreign reserves plummeted. Controls were reimposed in August, and Sterling Area countries again cooperated with Britain in limiting dollar purchases and sterling balance reductions. Colonial development also received an impetus as a source of substitutes for dollar goods, and for the potential dollar earnings of commodities such as West African cocoa and Malayan rubber.⁴⁶

After 1948 Marshall Aid pumped much needed dollars into Western Europe, and the 30 per cent devaluation in the pound of August 1949 boosted British competitiveness. By 1952–53 British trade accounts were moving broadly in balance.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, slow British economic growth relative to its major competitors now made balancing Britain's external trade difficult. Large sterling balances also left Britain vulnerable to Sterling Area countries running trade deficits, and so draining reserves from London.

Hints that growth in American and European trade would outstrip that of the Commonwealth also only became a trend at the very end of the 1950s.⁴⁸ The percentage of British exports going to Commonwealth countries dropped modestly from 47.7 per cent to 40.2 per cent between 1950 and 1960. Only between 1960 and 1970 did exports to the Commonwealth plummet to 24.4 per cent, making it increasingly seem that the path to economic prosperity lay in closer association with Europe.⁴⁹

Stockwell has thus emphasised that, for much of the period from 1945 to 1957, Malayan dollar earnings were of critical importance to Britain and the Sterling Area. In 1948 the Colonial Secretary, Arthur Creech Jones, could argue that, 'It is by far the most important source of dollars in the dependant Empire', and serious interference with its exports, 'would gravely worsen the whole dollar balance of the Sterling Area'. In 1950, as the Korean War commodity boom set in, Malaya earned \$350 million (gross) of the Sterling Area's \$1285 million.⁵⁰

In view of this value it is not surprising that the Treasury seldom raised serious objections to expenditure on Malaya by the military. The Treasury even agreed to make small, direct grants to Malaya itself, to ensure Malayan development—so vital to decolonisation, stability and winning 'hearts and minds'—was not unduly cut back in favour of counter-insurgency in lean years. Since the Emergency absorbed up to 40 per cent or more of gross Malayan government outlay in 1951, and most of this went on security forces and basic resettlement, Malaya had a clear claim.⁵¹ The Treasury nevertheless insisted Malaya pay its own way as far as possible, in the context of massive post-Korean War rearmament, and British balance of payments crises. It stated that, as a major exporter which did well when commodity prices were high, Malaya should raise

taxes and loans, or run down reserves when prices dropped. Malayan corporation tax was thus raised from 20 to 30 per cent in 1951, and British grants were kept small and occasional. In 1949–50 Treasury grants totalled £8.5 million, with another £1.5 million promised to build up the local Malay Regiment. In 1954, the Treasury gave another £6 million. More aid was promised during decolonisation negotiations in 1956–57. This compared, however, to yearly Emergency military costs (over and above normal recurrent expenditure on garrisons) sometimes exceeding £50 million. The vast majority of British expenditure on Malaya, over £420 million for the Emergency alone in 1948–57, was thus spent directly by the military. The Treasury problem was not so much whether Britain would pay, but how to divide the marginal increment needed over that borne by military departments. How much should British taxpayers pay, how much British companies? Raising Malaya's company taxes in 1951 meant British businesses, which dominated the heights of the Malayan economy, took on more of these marginal costs.⁵²

Notwithstanding Treasury wrangling over how to divide payments on the insurance premium for Malaya, its value was holding up. As late as 1954 Malaya and Singapore were still responsible for over 35 per cent of the Sterling Area's dollar earnings; while the Far East, South Asia and Australasia as a whole received fourteen per cent of British exports and nearly ten per cent of overseas investments.⁵³ Darby's argument that India's independence removed the value of proximate regions is thus misplaced, especially as the political and defence shift in attention from South to Southeast Asia was accompanied by an economic shift. By the 1950s British investments in the latter were earning about the same as those on the Indian subcontinent.⁵⁴

Even in the late 1950s, then, Malaya's remaining value makes it difficult to credit Britain's increased willingness to allow independence to a lack of economic interest. If decreasing economic interest, and a greater concentration on nuclear power and American partnership, is seen as underpinning accelerated decolonisation, this model can apply only to a subsequent, African phase, not to earlier decolonisation in Asia and the Gold Coast.⁵⁵ Most of the decisions leading to Malayan, Ghanese and Sudanese independence were made relatively early, certainly by 1954–56. At this time, in addition to the need to prevent a rapid rundown of Malaya's large sterling balances,⁵⁶ there remained the systemic interest in preventing the loss of territories and strategic commodities from capitalism to a semi-autarkic communist system. Southeast Asia was also still a rice-bowl for Asia, with Burmese and Thai rice vital as far apart as India and Japan.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, despite the continuing significance of Malaya, its importance to Britain was declining by the late 1950s. British trade with Southeast Asia (as distinct from the entire Far East) continued to hover at just three to four per cent of total trade.⁵⁸ The relative economic value of the region declined as British dollar-earning exports grew over 47 per cent between 1954–55 and 1956–57, while exports to the Sterling Area grew just six per cent. By the end of the decade, though not before, it was becoming obvious that this might be a long-

term trend, rather than just one of those short cyclical variations which bedevil economics. At the same time, the increasing use of synthetic over natural rubber, and aluminium rather than tin, saw a fall in the share of Malayan exports going to the dollar area. The pound was made fully convertible in stages between 1954 and 1958. By the latter date West Africa and Malaya's role in counter-balancing other Sterling Area countries' dollar deficits was over for good. In 1959 the Chancellor of the Exchequer told his colleagues that the era of dollar shortages had ended.⁵⁹

By the late 1950s Malaya was, therefore, ceasing to be a vital dollar-arsenal and was of modest and declining significance in British trade. The question arises, were British interests and investments in the area, though substantial, insufficient to justify the level of defence expenditure then being incurred in the region?

This clear decline in the relative economic importance of Southeast Asia was partly tempered by the rising importance of Persian Gulf oil. By 1960 the post-Suez Middle East air barrier had united British Far Eastern, East Indies and Middle Eastern theatres into one 'East of Suez' concept. Kuwait alone was now supplying over 50 per cent of Britain's oil (1957-61), held about one third of total British sterling reserves, and had £300 million invested in British banks.

In addition, both Hong Kong and Singapore, areas of British investment and launching pads for British regional interest, experienced instability in the early to mid-1960s. Consequently, significant but declining trade and investment interests combined with the strategic importance of oil to make a major defence presence 'East of Suez' seem of continuing importance. How far military force was an effective or necessary way of protecting these interests is of course another matter.⁶⁰

Darby's dismissal of Southeast Asia as the dregs of empire thus fails to account for the area's early importance. By contrast, Stockwell highlights Britain's need for Malayan dollars, but accepts this declined after 1954. Finally, White's argument that officials often disagreed with business does not negate the fact that they sought to uphold Britain's general economic interest. Officials' higher level of strategy – ultimately including accelerated decolonisation – simply involved indirect means of grooming successor elites tolerant of British economic interests.⁶¹

Malaya was thus a real but diminishing asset. Like any other physical asset, however, it involved liabilities. It required upkeep and maintenance to keep it a going concern. This raises the question of the economic constraints on Britain's ability to defend it.

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS AND STRATEGY

Britain's dilemma, in needing to defend Malaya, and yet not divert too many troops from Europe, was just part of Britain's wider struggle. The struggle to balance its 'continental' and 'maritime', or European and overseas, strategies in the context of severe resource constraints.⁶²

Clearly the economic benefits of Southeast Asia themselves provided an economic constraint in the 1950s. It was repeatedly recognised that in peacetime Malaya had to be defended, despite its cost, and the Emergency was seen as a direct threat to the Sterling Area's balance of payments. By 1951 forces engaged on the Malayan Emergency alone were costing almost £50 million a year, with more required to fund the Far East Fleet, East Indies Station, Hong Kong and the various bases and headquarters.⁶³ What was the changing strategico-economic context in which resource and strategic decisions were made for Southeast Asia?

Above all, the awakening of the American Leviathan gave Anglo-American relations a new importance. While the British economy limped out of World War Two, American productive capacity grew by 50 per cent. The United States ended the war with a navy three times the size of Britain's, and with the United Kingdom relying on it for equipment such as landing craft and transport aircraft. During the Pacific War it became clear that Britain's ability to influence events beyond its own Asian territories, and especially in China and Japan, would depend on the nature of Anglo-American relations.⁶⁴

Successive post-war British governments were also painfully aware that economic growth was the key to power. If anything the Conservative administrations after October 1951 were even more determined than Labour predecessors to favour economic growth over defence spending.⁶⁵ There was a sharp perception of choice between allocating resources to defence or to economic and export growth: Annual battles over defence expenditure saw successive Chancellors point out that heavy military spending reduced exports by absorbing research resources and occupying the vital metal-using and engineering industries.

From 1945–51 the major concern was the need to achieve an economic base sufficient to underwrite Britain as a world power. During 1951–57 the focus shifted to the need to match or exceed the greater rates of growth Britain's major competitors were achieving.⁶⁶ Despite this, Britain consistently spent a higher proportion of its GDP on defence than most of its major competitors except the United States.⁶⁷ Conscription was extended into peacetime, defence expenditure vastly increased after 1950, and butter and meat rationing continued until 1954.⁶⁸ In these circumstances, only the simultaneous intensification of demands in Europe and overseas can explain the paradox of British politicians consciously choosing military 'overstretch'.

The deterioration of East-West tensions after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia of February 1948 led Britain to take a leading role in encouraging European resistance to communism. During 1947–50 British strategy had envisaged a limited defence of Europe in the event of war, possibly culminating in a 'Dunkirk' operation. Britain's first priority would have been holding the Middle East as a base for nuclear counter-strikes on the Soviet Union, a cheap strategy relative to defending Europe. Then, with the formation of NATO in April 1949, it became necessary to encourage European allies by planning more substantive continental defence. Increasing American nuclear stocks also rendered Europe more defensible. In early June 1950 Europe became

Britain's first priority in global war. The Middle East was relegated to second-place. The threat to Southeast Asia was not expected to be great, but it was also considered to be ultimately dispensable. So there was a tension between the high economic, colonial and Commonwealth importance of Malaya in the Cold War, and its very low priority in global war.

The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 dramatically reversed the post-war decline in defence expenditure. It is too easy to forget that at this point the Labour Government was pressing hard for further cuts, which seemed likely to significantly reduce military capacity. The impact of the Korean War should not be underestimated. With the possibility that Korea was a feint, rearmament against the contingency of global war now became urgent. By 1952 preparations for the 'continental role', meaning global war in Europe, were threatening to undermine Britain's 'maritime' or overseas role. The French rejection of the plan for a European Defence Community (EDC) in summer 1954 saw the culmination of this tendency.⁶⁹ Britain pledged to keep four divisions and a tactical airforce on the continent in order to make German rearmament palatable to France. Could the demands of continental and world commitments be squared?

In a Cabinet paper of summer 1952 the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, insisted that there would be no repeat of 1947, the year of retreats. Avaricious communism precluded shedding colonial territories before they were fully prepared. Calculated retreat would also damage Britain's value as a Commonwealth and American ally, and might so damage prestige that it would turn into a rout. The British aim remained to encourage others to gradually assume more of the burdens of world-wide defence, while retaining as much influence as possible.⁷⁰

From 1952, Britain cited increasing nuclear power as a justification for constraining continental commitments. The COS Global Strategy paper of summer 1952 stressed that nuclear power would both reduce both the risk of global war, and its duration.⁷¹ With the advent of the hydrogen bomb in 1954, deterrence was held to justify minimal forces in Europe. This might make possible continuing overseas roles even with a static defence budget and spiralling defence equipment costs. Nuclear stalemate in Europe also increased the relative importance of Cold War over global war. Consequently, the relative claim on resources of 'East of Suez', where Cold War and small-scale conflict remained likely, seemed to increase. Sandys's 1957-58 defence reviews, with their use of massive nuclear retaliation as a deterrent, were intended to allow both economies and a continuing East of Suez role, and were the culmination of this process.⁷²

Consequently, in 1957 two opposite tendencies in strategic planning shaped the emergence of a new East of Suez concept. One was the increasing salience accorded to Cold War and so to Southeast Asia. The other was the ongoing drive to reduce the defence burden. From a low of £770 million in 1949, the outbreak of the Korean War saw defence expenditure soar to £1,548 million in 1953. The defence budget then remained broadly static in absolute terms, declining very slightly in real terms, from 1953 to 1960. Consequently, its percentage share of a

growing Gross National Product fell from a peak of around 9 per cent in 1952 to around 6.3 per cent in 1960, before stalling at about that level for a couple of years. Manpower also fell over 100,000 in 1955–57 (to approximately 700,000). This culminated in the 1957 Defence White Paper's announcement that National Service recruiting would cease in 1960. By the beginning of the Confrontation in 1963 there were 430,000 in the armed forces (190,000 in the army).⁷³

Static defence budgets and spiralling equipment costs resulted in smaller numbers of units of higher quality men and equipment. With Soviet, Chinese and 'Third World' forces also increasing in quality this represented shrinking military power. This book will examine British attempts to balance maritime, continental and deterrent strategies in the face of these pressures.

STRATEGIC CONCEPTS

Southeast Asia's weight in the Whitehall 'market-place' for declining resources and units varied according to its changing salience in Global, Cold and Limited War preparations. It changed, for instance, as the apparent urgency of developing Europe against the threat of major war increased and then declined. This work will relate Southeast Asian strategy to fluctuations in these different types of threat. It will also highlight the importance of the effect of nuclear strategies on these relationships. How did nuclear power affect hopes of continuing 'Great Power' and imperial roles, and the balance between 'continental' and 'maritime' strategies?

It is necessary to recognise that a single theatre could, and did, simultaneously carry different weights in planning for Global, Cold and Limited War. Global War refers to a major war involving the Soviet Union, and including the use of nuclear weapons. Limited War means any war not including the Soviet Union. Cold War described a condition short of actual war, from subversion to insurrection. As a general rule, while Southeast Asia's economic value was important in the Cold War, it was considered of little importance in global war, which was expected to see a grim struggle for survival in Europe.

CONCLUSIONS

Historiographical arguments about the relationship between decline and defence provide a contact point between this particular study and wider historical questions. Economic constraints, grand strategy and a policy-making community provide most of the framework or context. For most of the period under examination, Malaya was too economically valuable to lose in peace, but too peripheral to the main communist threat to Europe to be worth reinforcing in global war. In the light of domestic economic pressures and the communist threat in the West, this tended to reinforce British desires to limit the diversion of resources to the East. Yet the picture is not yet complete. Strategists and politicians are served by memories: personal, communal and institutional. These may fossilise into myths, versions of history with a didactic content.

The fall of Singapore spawned myths and interpretations of peculiar power. These in turn were to cast a long shadow over post-war planning. We must therefore begin with the 'lessons' of Singapore, and the immediate consequences of 'The greatest disaster and worst capitulation in the history of the British Empire'.⁷⁴

Notes

- 1 For political frameworks, see Reynolds, *Britannia*, pp. 44–50, 173; for historiography, John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 2. See also D. Goldsworthy, 'Keeping Change within Bounds', *JICH*, 18, 1 (1990), 81–108; and, Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. xxxi–1.
- 2 The Committee of Imperial Defence (1904–39) had been suspended, and its responsibilities taken over by the War Cabinet, on the outbreak of war. Churchill and then Attlee acted as their own ministers of defence between May 1940 and December 1946, when a separate Minister of Defence was appointed.
- 3 Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal*, pp. 116, 214, notes Treasury officials being reluctant to emphasise overseas cuts (as opposed to general defence economics) as late as 1959.
- 4 Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 19; Reynolds, *Britannia*, pp. 38–44; Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire 1918–64* (Oxford, 1993); Darwin, *End of the British Empire*, ch. 2, 123–24; Stockwell 'British Imperial Policy and the Decolonization of Malaya, 1942–52', *JICH*, 13, 1 (1984), 69–70.
- 5 Quotations from William Jackson, *Britain's Defence Dilemma. An Inside View: Rethinking British Defence Policy in the Post-Imperial Era* (London, 1992), pp. 52–53. Darby's *British Defence Policy* was an *ex post facto* plea for defence centralisation.
- 6 For the quotation, Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 17. See also Jackson, *Britain's Defence Dilemma*, pp. 3–22, for an 'insiders' view of the 'Whitehall market-place' for resources.
- 7 Adm205/69, Admiral Palliser, CIC, East Indies Station, to First Sea Lord, 1 July 1947. The Flag Officer (Malaya) furnished representatives for 18 committees, and had problems finding enough officers.
- 8 See Rho, LPP, 6/1, letter, 16 Jan. 1952, for Bukit Serene's 'wonderful view across the straits from the verandah'. For Han Suyin's view of the place and of MacDonald, see *My House Has Two Doors* (London: Granta edition, 1982), p. 86, 88. See also Rho, Lord Chandos (formerly Oliver Lyttelton, Colonial Secretary, Oct. 1951–July 1954), interview by Max Beloff, 1970; and Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', *JICH*, 13, 1 (1984), 83.
- 9 Defe7/1547, (46/1), and letter from Scott to Sir John Macpherson (Permanent Under-Secretary of State, CO), 17 June 1958. The office cost £485,000 in 1958. From the early 1950s this cost made the FO willing to consider ending the post.
- 10 Prem11/639, Gen 400/2, 'Commissioner-General, South East Asia: Powers and Functions', Note by the Joint Secretaries and enclosed Colonial Office report, 8 Jan. 1952.
- 11 There was a gradual increase in Asian leaders' association with the Emergency. See Air20/10377, 'Review of the Emergency in Malaya', DOO, 12 Sept. 1957, p. 14; and for command structures, Malcolm Postgate, *Operation Firedog: Air Support in the Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960* (London, 1992), pp. 6–7.
- 12 Richard Aldrich, 'Secret Intelligence for a Post-War World', in Richard Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence Strategy and the Cold War 1945–51* (London, 1992), p. 41, note 8.

- 13 For the BDCC, committees and Commissioner-General see: MMP 34/8/64, MMP 19/5/11, MMP 25/9/10, MMP 25/3/54, MMP 25/9/6 (MacDonald correspondence); Scott papers, box 1, piece 8; and Prem11/639, Gen 400/2, 'Commissioner-General, South East Asia: Powers and Functions', Note by the Joint Secretaries and enclosed CO report, 8 Jan. 1952, for an outline of the BDCC's development.
- 14 Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 33–34. For Mountbatten's calls for a single supreme commander to persist into peace, see Cab131/4, DO(47)76, COS report, 9 Oct. 1947.
- 15 Malcolm Murfett, *In Jeopardy: The Royal Navy in the Far East* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 14–15, 30–31, 46–48, 56–57, 67.
- 16 David Lee, *Eastward: A History of the Royal Air Force in the Far East, 1945–1972* (London: HMSO, 1984, pp. 88–91).
- 17 Simon Ball, 'Selkirk in Singapore', *20th Century British History* 10, 2 (1999), pp. 162–191.
- 18 Viscount Head (created 1960): Eton, Sandhurst; conservative MP from 1945; Secretary of State for War, 1951–56; Minister for Defence, 1956–57; High Commissioner for Nigeria, 1960–63; High Commissioner to Malaysia, 1963–66.
- 19 Mountbatten, as Chief of Defence Staff and ex-Supreme Commander SEAC, steered the change. Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 298. But bureaucratic changes reflected decreases colonies and military capacity.
- 20 Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal*, pp. 124–29. Baylis, *British Defence Policy*, p. 15.
- 21 At times (eg., 1949) a Far East (Official) Committee in London was important, and there were a number of ministerial and ad hoc committees on Malayan matters between 1950 and 1954. For an analysis of decision-making structures, see Stockwell, 'The Approach to a Possible "Transfer of Power" Series on Malaya and Singapore', in R. B. Smith and Stockwell, *British Policy and the Transfer of Power in Asia: Documentary Perspectives* (London, 1987), pp. 77–94.
- 22 Consider the COS reviews of global policy in 1950, 1952, 1954 and 1957, Eden's 1952 memorandum on Britain's world position, and his wide-ranging 1956 ministerial Policy Review Committee. For the latter, see David Goldsworthy, *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire, 1951–1957* (London, 1994), i, pp. xxviii, 72–73.
- 23 Reynolds, *Britannia*, ch. 2 'Policy'; Fieldhouse, 'The Labour Governments and the Empire-Commonwealth', in Ovendale (ed.), *The Foreign Policy*, 83–120. Expenditure on health, labour, insurance and pensions was similar under Labour and Conservatives. In 1946–51 they cost the same or slightly more than defence, in 1951–57 slightly less. But Labour's 1950–51 rearmament initiated the latter shift. Welfare's big gain was from 1959 – under the Conservatives – and by 1964 these items cost over 25 per cent more than defence. Butler, *British Political Facts*, p. 391.
- 24 See previous note; Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London, 1986); and his *The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities, 1945–51* (1995).
- 25 The quoted terms are from Cab128/CM(46)106, meeting of 31 Dec. 1946, minute 4, discussion of how to announce the intention to leave India by a specified date (as done on 20 Feb. 1947).
- 26 Tanner, 'Strong Showing', pp. 78f. The Atlantic Charter of Aug. 1941 pledged the UK and US to allow peoples to choose their own form of government. Britain insisted this covered only occupied European countries, not colonies, the US thought otherwise. Churchill resisted interference.
- 27 R.J. Aldrich and John Zametica, 'The rise and decline of a strategic concept: the Middle East, 1945–51', in Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War*, p. 240f.
- 28 Alan Bullock, *Foreign Secretary, 1945–1951* (New York, 1983); K. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945–51*. Attlee chaired the wartime India Committee, which agreed

- postwar Burma should regress from partial self-government to direct colonial rule for 3 years. Tanner, *Strong Showing*, p. 67. For conscription, see also F. Myers, 'Conscription and the Politics of Military Strategy in the Attlee Government', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 7, 1 (March 1984), 54-73.
- 29 K.O. Morgan, *The People's Peace: British History, 1945-1990* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 99-103. The main issue was the sustainability of the rearmament plan, versus the principle of a free health service.
- 30 Rees-Williams witnessed Malay demonstrations against the Malayan Union in 1946. In 1954 he helped the Alliance delegation which came to London to demand minor constitutional concessions. For Labour anticolonialism (but also an indictment of exploitation) and MPs Fenner Brockway, Stan Awberry and the 'Movement for Colonial Freedom' (MCF) see: S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* (Clarendon Press, 1993); and Tan, *The Prince and I*, pp. 52-53, 58-66. The MCF had a SEA Committee by 1953 with ex-Singapore political detainee John Eber as its Secretary-General. Eber was also Secretary to 'Malayan Forum', a UK-based student group and seedbed for Asian politicians. Awberry had written a 1948 report condemning communist abuse of Malayan unions. The more radical left, shading through Brockway to the communist, anticolonial writings of V. Palme Dutte, seems to have had limited impact on concrete Labour policy.
- 31 Britain's working class fitted Lenin's model of a contented Labour aristocracy, its living standards boosted by colonial profits. V. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (2nd edition, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1969), p. 9. See Susan Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds* (Leicester, 1995), p. 100, note 149, for Butler's 24th May 1950 statement; and pp. 97, 110, for the *Daily Worker*. See also, R. Hyam (ed.), *The Labour Government and the End of Empire, 1945-1951* (London, 1992). MacDonald remained committed to political advance. For further examples of Labour concern with progress, Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 268, 274-75.
- 32 See communist booklet (1949), in Rhodes House, Oxford, Hamer Papers, Box 2, Communist Booklet 'The Aim of the Revolution in Malaya', 'Lesson 4' (c. 1949, pp. 74ff).
- 33 For continuity in imperial policy across parties, see Hyam, 'Africa and the Labour Government, 1945-51', *JICH* 16 (1988), 148-72; and Goldsworthy, 'Keeping Change within Bounds', 81-108. For underlying assumptions, Holland, *Pursuit of Greatness*, pp. 329-33. For typical 'left' criticisms of Labour policy as not left-wing at all, see Newsinger's articles in the bibliography.
- 34 The argument for dramatic 1952 change is given in Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 275-343. It is contested in Hack, "'Iron claws on Malaya'". Stockwell *Malaya*, vol. i, p. xix, lxix-lxx Stockwell suggests a basic continuity in colonial policy.
- 35 Even if Labour had stayed in power after Oct. 1951, a supremo might have been appointed. The Secretary of State for War suggested this in 1950. In summer 1951 there was talk of replacing MacDonald with a man who could put drive into the Emergency. *Malaya*, ii, pp. 272-76, 298.
- 36 For Lyttelton, see White, *Business, Government*, pp. 37-38. Lennox-Boyd (later Viscount Boyd of Merton) was more professional politician. Contesting his first seat in his mid-20s, he was elected in 1931.
- 37 See White, *Business, Government*, p. 8; and Kahler, *Decolonization in Britain and France: The Domestic Consequences of International Relations* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 275-77. Macmillan called for 'something like a profit and loss account', see Cab134/555, CPC(57)6, 'Future Constitutional Development in the Colonies', enclosing memorandum by PM for President of the Council, 28 Jan. 1957. Typically, however, strategic and political considerations figured as much in the list of 'interests' as financial, and the resulting report was equivocal.
- 38 No consensus has emerged on how far the Sandys reviews represented continuity, or change induced by Suez and Conservative fears of electoral defeat (eg., Sandys ended

- supposedly unpopular conscription). Contrast Reynolds, *Britannia*, pp. 210–11, with Morgan, *The People's Peace*, pp. 158–60.
- 39 A good introduction to the issues of character and government in this period is Peter Hennessy and Anthony Seldon, *Ruling Performance: British Governments from Attlee to Thatcher* (1987).
- 40 By 1967 the decision for total withdrawal, however, was influenced by the fact that, *in extremis*, Labour could not sell domestic constraint to its left wing without ditching East of Suez.
- 41 See White, *Business, Government and the End of Empire* for Bank of England, business and Treasury views, and Stockwell, *Malaya*, vol. i, p. xlv, for a further guide to sources on finance.
- 42 Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 2–15.
- 43 Peter Elphick, *Far Eastern File: The Intelligence War in the Far East, 1930–1945* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), p. 122. Malaya accounted for around 40 per cent of colonial exports. Britain even controlled much of the modern sector and banking of independent Thailand. Tanner 'Strong Showing', p. 26.
- 44 Andrew Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam, Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca and London, 1987), p. 56, *passim*.
- 45 W. G. Hancock and M. Gowing, *The British War Economy* (London, 1949), p. 551. Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp. 159–64.
- 46 In 1945–48 Bevin harboured dreams of a 'Euro-Africa' or 'Middle Planet' under Britain balancing the superpowers, see John Kent, 'Bevin's Imperialism and the Idea of Euro-Africa', in M. Dockrill and J. Young (eds) *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945–51* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 47–75.
- 47 Reynolds, *Britannia*, pp. 176–77.
- 48 Cab129/C(57)65, 12 March 1957 and Cab129/C(59)49, 13 March 1959, Chancellor of the Exchequer. Computations on table 28 of the latter show dollar area exports grew over 47 per cent, 1954–5 to 1957–8, Sterling Area exports 6 per cent, exports to Australia less. Yet fluctuations meant only emerged as a *trend* around 1957.
- 49 Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, pp. 304–5. As late as 1960 Britain accounted for 38 per cent of Australian imports (48 per cent in 1951), dominated investment there, and helped to sustain the British arms industry by sales of equipment there, e.g. see T. R. Reese, *ANZUS 1941–68* (Oxford, 1969).
- 50 Cab129/CP(48)161, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 23 June 1948. See also Cab129/CP(48)171, 1 July 48; Cab129/C(51)26, 20. Nov. 51; and Cab129/C(51)22, 19 Oct 1951, all by the Colonial Secretary.
- 51 Malayan finances were generally sound, but commodity price fluctuations produced huge revenue swings. Prices were low in 1949, 1953–54, high in 1950–52. Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 194–204.
- 52 See N. White, 'Capitalism and Counter-Insurgency', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 32, 1 (1998), pp. 149; White, *Business, Government*, pp. 70–72, 76–78, 120–21; and Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 177, 195–200, 247–57, 270f, 467, iii, 6f, 228f. Stockwell (ii, 199) puts UK costs to 1950 at £38million: £20m War Damage compensation, £5.3m Colonial Development & Welfare, £4m additional imperial forces' costs, £8m internal security grants. Air20/10377, 'Review of the Emergency', DOO, 12 Sept. 1957, p. 6 put Emergency costs to 1957 at £700m, Britain's share £520m, of which £100m was normal garrison costs.
- 53 Fo371/111917; Stockwell, 'British Imperial Strategy and Decolonization in South-East Asia', in D. Basset and King, *Britain and South-East Asia* (University of Hull, 1986). Investments in China were being scuttled by 1949, but Hong Kong was worth £156,000,000 in British capital, see Cab129/CP(49)120, 'Hong Kong', Colonial Secretary, 23 May 1949. Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 25, suggests that c.1950 20 per cent of British trade was with the Far East and Australasia.
- 54 White, *Business, Government*, pp. 10–18, especially 11. SEA's share of UK returns

- on overseas investments increased from 5 to 10 per cent of the total, 1938–51, Tanner, *Strong Showing*, p. 129.
- 55 For the supposed role of diminishing economic interest in making Britain accelerate decolonisation in the late 1950s, as UK priorities turned to developed economies, see: Miles Kahler, *Decolonization*, pp. 275–7, 280–81, 299–313; and White, *Business, Government*, p. 279. For Britain supposedly cutting adrift dependencies which were net liabilities, even under Attlee, see R. Holland, 'The Imperial Factor in British Strategies: from Attlee to Macmillan, 1945–63', in *JICH* 12, 2 (1984), pp. 165–86.
- 56 Sudan also gained independence in 1956. Even without the Sterling Area, Malayan dollar earnings would have been important in easing Britain's dollar shortage at least to 1953. See COI, *Britain: An Official Handbook, 1960* (London, 1959), p. 463.
- 57 Rotter, *Path to Vietnam*, pp. 33, 63–65, argues US involvement in SEA was prompted by its importance to Japanese and European economic recuperation and to balancing European dollar deficits.
- 58 Saul Rose, *Britain and Southeast Asia* (London, 1972), p. 176.
- 59 Growth in Anglo-Australian trade was still slower. Cab129/C(57)65, 12 March 1957; Cab129/C(59)49, 13 March 1959, table 28, Chancellor of the Exchequer. In 1956–60 Britain's share of Malaya and Singapore's imports fell 16 per cent, Rose, *Britain and South East Asia*, pp. 173–77. For falls in the share of Malayan exports going to the dollar area, see N. White, 'Government and Business Divided: Malaya, 1945–57', *JICH*, 22, 2 (1994), 267. For the Gulf States, see also, Curtis, *The Ambiguities of Power*, p. 106.
- 60 For doubts about the value of military power in defending these interests, see Darby, 'East of Suez Reassessed', in J. Baylis (ed.), *British Defence Policy in a Changing World* (London, 1977), pp. 52–65.
- 61 White, *Business, Government*, pp. 34–43, shows P. Cain and Hopkin's idea of government collusion with 'gentlemanly capitalists' (*British Imperialism*, Longman: London, 1993) is unsustainable for Malaya at the level of individual businesses. But Britain's general economic interests were high on officials' list of concerns at a strategic level. See also A. J. Stockwell, 'Malaysia: The Making of a Neo-Colony', in Burroughs and Stockwell, *Managing the Business of Empire*, pp. 138–56.
- 62 Thomas Kaplan, 'Britain's Asian Cold War: Malaya', in Anne Deighton, *Britain and the First Cold War in Asia* (London, 1990), pp. 201–19.
- 63 Cab129/C(51)26, by the Colonial Secretary on Malaya, 20 Nov. 1951, Annex III. Maintenance charges were £48.5 million, additional costs of use in the Emergency £8.4 million. Refitting one aircraft carrier in 1964 cost £30 million, see Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 250.
- 64 Christopher Thorne, *The Issue of War: States, Societies and the Far Eastern War of 1941–45* (London, 1985), pp. 211–14, *passim*.
- 65 Cab128/CC(52)4, meeting of 17 Jan. 1952, minute 2. Churchill quickly scaled down Labour's 1951 response to the Korean War, which had been a 3 year, £4,700 million, rearmament programme.
- 66 Chalmers, *Paying for Defence*, pp. 50–4, 118, 112–33. Defence versus economy was one of the great annual set-piece battles in Cabinet from 1946–57, see William Jackson and Lord Bramall, *The Chiefs: The Story of the United Kingdom COS* (London, 1992), *passim*. Pickering refers to the use of 'models' – a demonstration effect – of more successful economies having lower defence burdens, *Britain's Withdrawal*, pp. 14–15, where he draws on R. N. Rosecrance, 'Overextension, Vulnerability and Conflict', *International Security* 19 (1995), 145–63.
- 67 Chalmers, *Paying for Defence*, p. 113. In 1950 it was 6.6 per cent to 5.5 per cent in France (the next most profligate) and 4.4 per cent in Germany. In 1955 the figures were 8.2 per cent, 6.4 per cent and 4.1 per cent.
- 68 National Service of 12 months was extended to 18 and then 24 months in Dec. 1948 and Sept. 1950. For this and rationing, see Butler, *British Political Facts*, p. 474.

- 69 The EDC would have absorbed German units into Euro-divisions, with Britain associating but not joining. See Saki Dockrill, 'Britain's Strategy for Europe: Must West Germany be rearmed?'; and Aldrich and Zametica, 'The Rise and Decline of a Strategic Concept: the Middle East, 1945-51', both in Aldrich, *British Intelligence*, pp. 193-214, 236-74. For Malaya's global war role, Co537/6264, JPS reports, 1950.
- 70 Cab129/C(52)202, 'British Overseas Obligations', Eden, 18 June 1952.
- 71 This paper should now be open as Cab131/12, D(52)26, 'Defence Policy and Global Strategy', 17 June 1952, see Alan Macmillan and John Baylis, *A Reassessment of the Global Strategy Paper of 1952* (Aberystwyth Department of International Politics (ADOIP), Research Paper 13, 1993).
- 72 Martin Navias, *Nuclear Weapons and British Strategic Planning* (London, 1991); Ian Clark and Nicholas Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy, 1945-54* (Oxford, 1991). For the idea West of Suez no longer required fully balanced forces, Cab131/18, D(57)10, meeting of 18 Nov. 1957, minutes 1 and 2.
- 73 The statistics are from Greenwood, 'Defence and National Priorities since 1945', in John Baylis (ed.), *Alternative Approaches to British Defence Policy* (London, 1977), pp. 182, 186, 190-1; and Michael Dockrill, *British Defence Since 1945* (Oxford, 1988), p. 151. Typically, the Sea Vixen of 1965 cost 7 times as much as its predecessor, see Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 249-50.
- 74 Winston Churchill, quoted in Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York, 1985), p. 156.

1942 and the 'Lessons' of Singapore¹

THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

The fall of Singapore has entered popular imagination, and sometimes the imagination of historians too, as the fall of an island-fortress which proved not to be an island and not to be a fortress. With the myth that Britain could guarantee to send a fleet exposed the Japanese swept down the Malayan mainland, across the Straits, and in through Singapore's back-door. The impression left is sometimes of a navy that never was, of defenders in the dark, and of guns uselessly pointing out to sea. Each image has assumed mythic quality because it symbolises one of the flaws which together proved fatal. Britain could no longer guarantee eastern naval supremacy. The incompetence in defence preparations was startling. The equipment provided was not what was needed.²

Together, however, these images might suggest a distorted picture of British planning as it had evolved by 1940-41. They obscure the essentially land and air-based nature of the final plans, and the tension between the need for a regional approach combined with resources sufficient only for local defence. To understand why Singapore fell, it is necessary to look both at glacial changes in the strategic environment and the rapid changes in plans as the tension mounted before 1941.

Penang (1786) and Singapore (1819) were acquired by the East India Company as peripheral trading and strategic outposts. Their value lay in their position athwart the Malacca Straits, the main shipping route for trade between India and China. An Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 removed the only European rival in the Malayan peninsula, by transferring Malacca from Holland to the East India Company. In return, Dutch primacy was acknowledged on the other side of the Malacca Straits, in the East Indies (present day Indonesia). By 1832 Singapore had become the administrative seat for the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang, which passed to Colonial Office control in 1867.³ From 1874 British influence was gradually extended to the Malay Sultanates of the peninsula, which were seen as the strategic and commercial hinterland of the Straits Settlements. British 'advisers' were installed in the Malay States.

Singapore's defences remained more remarkable for their weakness than their strength. Before the First World War the Straits Settlements and the Malay States

generally boasted little more than one battalion each of regular British and Indian troops, and an assortment of volunteer forces and police. The Royal Navy and the Indian Army remained the ultimate guarantors of imperial defence.⁴

As early as the 1840s it was recognised that if two major powers, one of them based on the Pacific, ever combined against Britain, effective Pacific defence might become impossible.⁵ After Japan won the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 its rising power was harnessed by the formation of an Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902. Japan would contain the Russian threat from the North, and so compensate for the Royal Navy's increasing concentration against the German navy in the West. By 1915, however, Japanese designs on China had made it clear that Japanese expansion might itself one day clash with British interests in Asia. For the first time, Britain now had to reckon with the possibility of a major rival based in the East.

Britain allowed the Anglo-Japanese treaty of 1902 to lapse in order to secure American cooperation at the Washington Naval Limitation Treaty of 1922. Economic stringency had ruled out entering a naval race with the United States and Japan. A 5.25: 5.25: 3 (or Rolls Royce, Rolls Royce, Ford) ratio of American, British and Japanese capital ships was now agreed. Once German, Japanese and Italian rearmament accelerated in the mid-1930s it became obvious that a simultaneous challenge in the Atlantic and Pacific would strain the Royal Navy almost to breaking point. Appeasement, not yet a pejorative term, was then attempted to avoid Britain having to face two or more major allies simultaneously.⁶

If the main threat was to materialise in the East, the plan was to despatch a major fleet to a new naval base at Singapore. Singapore was far enough from Japan to leave time for reinforcement, but unlike Australia, close enough to Asia to be a main base for operations. Its strategic location, clinging to the edge of Asia and yet 'Between Two Oceans' – the Pacific and Indian – thus made it ideal as a military bastion.

From the original 1921 decision to develop it, the Singapore naval base was also recognised as of vital concern to Australia and New Zealand, whose forward naval defence it would provide. At that time, though a thriving entrepôt, Singapore's defence still relied on a small garrison, local volunteers and five 9.2 inch guns. The decision to develop it as a major base meant that the days of naval mastery cheaply screening the empire were numbered. Possessions easily taken on the back of an early industrial lead were increasingly expensive to defend as the rest of the world caught up. How could a single navy cover two oceans in these modern conditions?⁷

In 1925 the Royal Air Force made a bid for a major role in defending Singapore. Their torpedo-bombers and reinforcement routes, however, were unproven, and the navy's 'main fleet to Singapore' strategy won through. By 1926 provisional plans envisaged leaving Malaya's defence to volunteer battalions. In the so-called 'Period-before-Relief', the gap between an attack and the arrival of a relieving British fleet from as much as 8,000 nautical miles away, no landward assault was expected to have time to take Singapore. Even

after the conflict between China and Japan began in July 1937, Japan was judged to lack suitable forward bases for an attack.

Singapore was thus viewed as a naval fortress, north Malaya as a distinct strategic area, though one which the enemy might seize as a forward logistics base for the main assault on Singapore. In the estimated 42 days before relief Singapore would rely on 15 inch naval guns, a few aircraft and a small garrison.⁸

By late 1940 aircraft ranges had increased, and Malaya had developed an extensive system of metalled roads. The Japanese had also acquired bases in the north of French Indochina in September 1940. In July 1941 their move into southern Indochina left them just 650 land miles from Singapore, and with just 400 miles of the Gulf of Siam separating north Malaya from air bases in Indochina. Overland attack towards Singapore was now feasible from Indochina, through Thailand and down the Malayan peninsula. This would remain possible even after the arrival of any relieving fleet. Even worse, the fall of France in June 1940 meant that Britain now faced the Italian and German fleets alone. After setting a period-before-relief of 180 days in September 1939, the Chiefs of Staff (COS) admitted they were, at least temporarily, unable to send a fleet.⁹

In response, plans were developed in 1940-41 for the defence of possible east coast landing sites in the Malay States; and for seizing, at 24 hours notice, the southern Thai port of Songkhla. This was around 50 miles from the nearest point on the Malayan border. The latter plan was eventually code-named 'Matador'. In contrast to the long, indefensible border, this offered a line of defence less than 60 miles across the Kra peninsula, and guarding the aerodromes in North Malaya. Malaya's geography explains why such a plan was to be central to strategy in both 1941 and 1950-55.¹⁰

Most of the Malayan peninsula is dominated by a range of forested hills rising to 7,000 feet, with no lateral communications from about halfway between Singapore and Thailand. The central backbone of hills dies away soon after crossing the Thai border, with good lateral communications in the vicinity of Songkhla, and sites for aerodromes. The Thai town of Haad Yai, just a short distance from Songkhla, is also the junction for road and rail communications from east and west Malaya. Consequently the 'Songkhla' position alone offered a narrow front, lateral communications, and adequate lines of communication back to east and west Malaya.¹¹

Malaya's west coast offered the more advanced north-south communications. If interior lines of communication were to be available to Malaya's defenders, they must either go forward to Songkhla, or abandon half of Malaya and fall back to a Kuantan-Kuala Lumpur line, if not to Johore and Singapore. By 1940 it was already too late for a third option, building an east-west highway or rail-track across northern Malaya.

By the time Admiral Nagumo's fleet slipped anchor for Pearl Harbor on 26 November 1941, the defence of Singapore had switched from a naval to an air-land emphasis. The Admiralty now hoped to assemble an eastern fleet by spring 1942. From being a priority in British plans of 1935, a reinforcing fleet had become more a desired extra.

Japanese convoys were spotted heading towards Malaya on 6 December 1941, the day after Brooke-Popham was given authority by London to launch Matador if the Japanese were clearly about to attack. Close to the Thai border British and Indian troops were made ready to execute Matador. Their supplies stood poised in railway sidings, and all preparations had been directed towards this one plan for forward defence. Under pressure not to violate Thai neutrality unless essential, however, the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham, failed to authorise 'Operation Matador'. With America still 'neutral', a pre-emptive seizure of Songkhla might both alienate the Thais and militate against the United States being drawn in to support Britain's imperial possessions. By the time British commanders were satisfied that Japanese ships spotted on the 6th were going to strike – not flaunting themselves in the Bay of Siam in order to trick Britain into violating Thai neutrality – Japanese transports were already moving in on the long, gentle beaches of Kelantan and southern Thailand.¹²

Facing Japanese air and naval superiority, and landings north and south early on the 8th, the Matador position might anyway have proved little better than the Maginot Line. Its defenders would have risked serious interdiction of their lines of communication, if not isolation. In early 1941 Churchill had assumed Japan would not risk war against America, and sent all available aircraft and tanks to the Middle East. After Germany launched operation Barbarossa in June 1941 saving Russia, which was tying up much of Germany's military power, also became vital. Churchill refused to take risks with active theatres in order to insure against risks in a passive theatre. Churchill's gamble looked logical in June, but the position was not reversed even after July: the month in which America embargoed sending strategic goods to Japan in order to undermine its China strategy, and Japan took bases in southern Indochina.¹³

Racial arrogance, poor training and lack-lustre leadership then compounded the effects of this grand strategic gamble.¹⁴ At one level, Britain simply failed to ensure coherence in its strategy. Britain needed to choose either to defend all Malaya and provide sufficient aircraft and tanks, or only Singapore and perhaps the southern state of Johore. Either option would probably have ended in defeat anyway – a Singapore 'hedgehog' being vulnerable to artillery and air power. But a lack of clear choice left no coherent strategy. Churchill and the COS withheld the weapons necessary for all-Malaya defence and Matador. Yet they allowed planning to continue on the basis of defending all Malaya, since only this would secure airfields Britain had built in the north, and give maximum protection to the Sembawang Naval Base. This had been built on Singapore's northern shore, scarcely more than a mile from Malaya's southern coast across the causeway, and so had to be screened from artillery as well as air attack.^{15*}

Training was as deficient as strategy was ineffectual. Adequate jungle-warfare and anti-tank training was the exception not the rule. The Japanese were assumed by many to make inferior soldiers and short-sighted pilots, despite

* Malaya was attacked early on 8th Dec. local time, making it 7th Dec. GMT and in Pearl Harbor.

intelligence to the contrary.¹⁶ With British commanders so myopic in their evaluation of the enemy, the need to avoid damaging morale and the desire to keep Malaya's dollar-earning industries at full capacity were just additional reasons for not putting men to work on fall-back positions. Malaya and Singapore were neither psychologically nor physically prepared for the attack. Nevertheless, with the limited resources provided, the Japanese could have responded to local improvements or changes. Superiority in the air and at sea gave them the edge in mobility and in tactical intelligence. The Japanese ability to control the strategic environment made final British defeat almost certain, poor British strategy and leadership helped to make the speed of the defeat humiliating.¹⁷

When the attack came, over 600 Japanese aircraft soon asserted superiority over 158 inferior, front-line Allied adversaries.^{18*} Some unfortunate infantry dubbed the ill-fated airforce the Penguin Club, 'because they had wings but didn't fly'. A Singaporean in the Medical Auxiliary Service described the Japanese *Zeros*, swooping down on the slow climbing *Brewster Buffaloes*, as 'like a swift falcon striking a pigeon in mid-air'.¹⁹ With no British tanks until late in the campaign it became, 'a battle of flesh and blood against equipment', as the Japanese drove the allied forces down the peninsula and into Singapore. When their tanks could not break through – as they did at Slim River north of Kuala Lumpur in January 1942 – or their infantry could not infiltrate British positions, the Japanese could use amphibious operations to cut off British lines of communication and force retreats.²⁰ By late January, the Japanese were on the shores of Johore, opposite Singapore and its Sembawang Naval Base, which was now rendered useless.²¹ By 15 February 1942 it was all over. In total, over 130,000 allied military personnel had been defeated by a much smaller number of Japanese.²² On the sixteenth, an eerie silence heralded the fall of Britain's eastern empire. A pall of smoke from Singapore's offshore oil tanks spread across the bright blue tropical sky, and the harbours were spotted with the dark hulks of ships which had not escaped in time.²³

What 'lessons' did the defeated British draw from this humiliation?²⁴ The first was expressed in a partial myth which still refuses to die, that the guns of Singapore faced out to sea, useless against the attack from the mainland. In fact most of the guns could and did fire landward, though their small numbers, low trajectory and mainly armour-piercing shells had more bark than bite in this anti-infantry role. In reality they were relics from another strategic era, strategy having already shifted from seaward defence of Singapore to the air-naval defence of the Malayan peninsula as a unit.²⁵

* Including reserves, there were over 180 aircraft. In Oct. 1940 theatre commanders asked for 566. In Jan. 1941 the COS suggested 336. Britain sent too few, too late. Several hundred went to the Middle East and Russia, which in Sept. 1941 the Joint Intelligence Committee decided was Japan's likely target. Yet Dill (CIGS) suggested to Churchill on 15 May 1941 that small numbers might make a difference in Singapore. Then came July 1941 embargoes on the export of strategic goods to Japan (making SE Asia's resources attractive) and Japan's moves in Indochina. There was a massive failure assessing relative risks in London and Singapore. See end-note 18 for sources.

The myth, however, warned against ever again underestimating an enemy; either in its determination or its ability. Churchill had gambled on the Japanese refusing to commit what seemed to be national suicide by attacking the United States, and lost.²⁶

A second lesson drawn was that in global war Britain could no longer extend its reach to the Indian Ocean and Pacific. As one military historian put it, in global war, 'British strategy, then as now, was concerned with winning the last battle: if Malaya had to be lost to this end, it was for ... the British Commonwealth to stomach it, and ... to learn the lesson'.²⁷

War had simultaneously confirmed Malaya's economic importance, and its role as a Commonwealth link. The withdrawal of Australian divisions from the Middle East to Australia after December 1941 showed that if Britain wanted the Antipodean Dominions to be sources of strategic reinforcement, then their peace-time anxieties about Southeast Asia must be calmed.²⁸ In global war the area was apparently dispensable. In peace and limited war it was important. The area's importance in post-war planning was to have an inverse relationship to the likelihood of global war and the threat in the West. It was also to vary in importance according to the salience of its Cold and Limited war threats compared to other regions.

The sinking of the battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser *Repulse*, caught without air cover, by Japanese aircraft on 10 December 1941, also ended the 'illusion' of a two-ocean navy. Again, British naval forces in the Far East were in future to be provided for peacetime and limited war tasks, but in global war most would be recalled westward.

In fact, in 1942 Japan as well as Britain was stretched in Southeast Asia, if only because of the audacity of its plans. It would have been pertinent to ask if a relatively small quantity of modern aircraft, and the aircraft-carrier which was sent but never arrived (it ran aground), might have given the defenders a fighting chance. Some historians have argued that by the time of Singapore's surrender Japanese supplies and stamina were nearing their end. Drawing on Japanese accounts, Louis Allen suggests that by the last day of fighting the Japanese commanders began to fear that 'they might be the ones to surrender'. Might larger and better prepared forces have delayed the Japanese advance, so exhausting their supply lines before they could take Singapore? Large additions of naval or more especially of air power would certainly have made some difference.²⁹

Evaluating Allen's suggestion that Singapore's fall was a close-run thing even with the forces provided is more problematic. The final judgement must depend on the disposition, intentions and flexibility of the Japanese on the eve of 7 December 1941. The temporary Japanese control of the strategic environment has already been noted. Japan landed troops on Palembang in Sumatra on 14 February. On 19 February it launched a mass air-attack on the Australian town of Darwin. Its forces overran the East Indies and attacked New Guinea within a month of Singapore's fall. In the Philippines, the Americans held on for weeks in Corregidor without affecting the end result. Can we really believe the Japanese

lacked the resources to finish off Singapore? Have some Japanese sources exaggerated the close finish to highlight their (undoubted) achievements?³⁰

In fact, the last-gasp problems may have been the result of the over-confidence of the Japanese commanding officer, Lieutenant-General Yamashita, and of his eagerness to grasp the symbolic prize of Singapore. Having taken Malaya with unanticipated speed, Yamashita had Singapore at his mercy. It could be contained, attacked at convenience or bypassed. The decision to attack immediately rather than pausing to restock was not just a 'bluff' intended to cover up supply shortages. It was also the result of Yamashita's impatience, and his expectation that Singapore's demoralised garrison would crumble even more quickly than it did. The South Seas were awash with Japanese men and machines, moving in waves towards the resources of the East Indies. The question was never whether Singapore would become *Syonan*, but how far Yamashita could make this achievement outpace and outshine those of his rival generals.³¹

In the end, Singapore's fall came down not to naval guns and non-existent fleets, but to a land-air strategy. One of the main 'lessons' to stick in official circles was thus that failure to take the Songkhla position had been a serious mistake, depriving the defenders of their best line of defence.³² One historian has even argued that if Matador had been executed on 7 December the Japanese, with their relatively small force, would have turned back rather than trying to force a landing. This underplays the fact that the Japanese were able to land against opposition in Kelantan, to the south of Songkhla, and could land virtually unopposed to its north. It ignores overwhelming Japanese aerial and naval superiority. A 'Songkhla' force would have risked being cut off and destroyed. Despite this, Songkhla came to be perceived as a lost opportunity.³³

This view was confirmed by Thailand's rapid collapse, and the use Japan was quickly able to make of Thai airfields and ports. The indecent haste with which it seemed the Thai Prime Minister, Phibun Songkram, came to terms with the Japanese, destroyed all faith in Thailand as a neutral buffer. With no significant allied assistance, Phibun Songkram had been left with little choice. He played the traditional Thai game of making friendly noises to all potential enemies until a pre-eminent power emerged, modified by a willingness to use Japan to assist Thailand in regaining lost territories from French-controlled Cambodia, and British Burma and Malaya. On 8 December 1941, the Thais conceded the Japanese passage for their troops. On 11th December, their Cabinet decided Thailand could only avoid the fate of Manchukuo by cooperating with Japan militarily. On 25 January 1942 Thailand declared war on Britain and the United States – unlike previous acts, something not even necessary to ensure Thai sovereignty. In 1943 Japan duly placed four northern Malayan states with historical links to Thailand (Perlis, Kedah, Trengganu and Kelantan) under Thai sovereignty.

There was serious debate in Britain about whether Phibun and the Thais were guilty of treachery or just feebleness. Phibun himself was charged as a war criminal, before the Thai Supreme Court declared the laws used unconstitutional

in 1946. Nevertheless, rightly or wrongly, British confidence in Thailand's capacity to resist aggression was to remain low into the 1950s.³⁴

Thailand's declaration of war on Britain and America, and acceptance of the four Malay States, only encouraged the belief that Thailand should be treated as an enemy state after the war. The security of the Kra peninsula could, it was believed, only be secured by Britain forcing conditions on Thailand, or by seizing it in an emergency.

An opposite lesson could have been drawn from the abortive 'Matador'. The plan had been so politically sensitive that it only became politically viable when the threat was so close as to preclude adequate military preparations. Should Britain rely on such a precarious plan? If so, should there be a reserve position? Ironically, defeat later seemed to undermine the weight of the Foreign Office's political warnings, compared to the need to secure the position at all costs.³⁵

The use of forward airfields in Indochina against Malaya also confirmed that Singapore's strategic frontiers lay as far afield as the Kra Isthmus (southern Thailand) and Tonkin (northern Indochina). Indochina must be denied to enemies both because it was a potential strike base against Malaya, and because Thailand might crumble before any advancing threat. Consequently the image of an Indochina-Thailand-Kra nexus was evoked. As far as the British were concerned, the foundations for a Southeast Asian 'domino' theory were established by 1942.

Singapore's defence was now believed to depend on Malaya, Malayan defence on a position inside Thailand, and a supposedly fragile Thailand was thought to rely on the existence of buffer states to its north. This fuelled a belief that Britain must try and play a wider role in Southeast Asia, and that a central coordinator would be needed in Singapore. A December 1942 Colonial Office report, 'The Lessons of Singapore', stated that the latter point was one of the 'prime lessons' of the fall of Singapore. As soon as Indochina was invaded, furthermore, a single individual would have to be given overall command of the area. The overlapping and confused commands of 1941 must never be repeated.³⁶

The Colonial Office was later to become worried about Foreign Office pretensions to regional influence, and about possible foreign interference in their territories. Nevertheless, the defence of Britain's interests now came to be seen to rest on a nexus extending to Tonkin. Ironically, the fall of Singapore both confirmed the limitations of British power, and yet was interpreted as reinforcing the need to see defence in regional terms.

The fall of Singapore appeared to demonstrate Britain's limited capacity and determination to defend Southeast Asia in global war, but confirmed its economic and political importance in all situations short of world war. It shattered 'illusions' of Pacific naval power, but apparently confirmed the importance of the Songkhla position. It was perhaps the most humiliating defeat in British history since Yorktown in 1781, yet it apparently demonstrated an important British interest in the security of Thailand and Indochina. The facade of white superiority was destroyed in defeat, and yet Britain was to return to

Southeast Asia determined to reshape its own territories. For defeat was understood to reflect not just martial failure, but the feebleness of colonies managed as imperial trusteeships. Ironically, the fall of Singapore not only damaged British prestige in Asia, but helped to persuade the metropolis to plan for a radical, transforming 'second colonial occupation'.³⁷ It was the starting point for serious British planning for decolonisation.

A DOMINION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA: TRUSTEESHIP TO PARTNERSHIP

The postwar political reconstruction of Southeast Asia was a vital part of overall strategic planning. From 1936 onwards the defence of Malaya and Singapore had been increasingly seen as interlocked. When war came, however, the administration of Britain's Southeast Asian territories and protectorates was still divided between no less than thirteen units.

In 1939 Britain's Malayan territories included nine sovereign Malay States. Of these the four Federated Malay States (FMS) had some functions centralised at Kuala Lumpur. The five unfederated Malay States (UMS), their treaties with Britain involving less obligation for their Sultans to follow the 'advice' of British officials, were averse to centralisation. The Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore) were under a Governor in Singapore, who acted as High Commissioner for the Malay States. He also kept a watch over British interests in the protectorates of Sarawak, the Brunei Sultanate and North Borneo.

The racial picture was as fragmented as the administrative one. From the Taiping rebellions of the 1850s, increasing numbers of Chinese had arrived in the Malay States to mine tin and work on plantations. By 1931 the Malays formed approximately 49 per cent of the population of the Malayan peninsula (excluding Singapore) and the Chinese 34 per cent. Recruiting for rubber tapping and clerical work had also resulted in an Indian minority of up to 15 per cent. If Singapore was added into the equation the Chinese, who were increasingly settling rather than returning to China, rose to over 39 per cent.³⁸

In the interwar years British aspirations for greater administrative uniformity, and for progress towards a wider Malayan union, made little headway. Despite some decentralisation in the FMS, the UMS Sultans continued to fear that any move towards union might diminish the degree of Malay control in their states. The wealthier FMS also had reason to doubt the need to incorporate the UMS, some of which might prove expensive to develop. The Straits Settlements, meanwhile, saw little benefit in moving towards a union which might undermine Singapore's advantage of free trade. The doctrine of trusteeship for the Malays also prevented the integration of the Chinese and Indian communities in Malaya. Most of the Muslim Malays remained *kampung*-dwellers, while the Malay aristocracy were able to join the bureaucracy. The Chinese continued to dominate economic life and the towns, but – being seen as transient, economic migrants – remained largely excluded from citizenship and the administration.³⁹

The British formed the iron framework for this cultural mix. When war broke out, the British commanders announced that, '... from the civilian population, Malay, Chinese, Indian or Burmese, we expect that patience, endurance and serenity which is the great virtue of the East and which will go far to assist the fighting men ...'. The defending forces in Malaya were a hodge-podge of imperial units; Indian, British, and Australian. Regular local troops formed a tiny proportion of the starting force of nearly 90,000, an even smaller percentage after arrival of last-minute British and Australian reinforcements. Offers of help from the banned Malayan Communist Party (MCP) were also spurned until December 1941, when some of its members were belatedly trained as part of the irregular Chinese 'Dalforce', and as the stay-behind parties which later formed the nucleus for a 'Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army' (MPAJA).⁴⁰ The battle for Malaya was above all a test of the fitness of the old system of imperialism and trusteeship.⁴¹

In advancing 600 miles in 70 days to force the surrender of Singapore by 15 February 1942, the Japanese rocked confidence in these systems. Coordinating civil-military relations in the several civil administrations on the Malayan peninsula proved frustrating, and many perceived the local populations as passive. Defeat appeared to confirm the need to impose unity on disparate territories and races. It seemed to confirm that trusteeships, with a British 'steel frame' binding together plural societies, were fragile. Long-term policies were needed to bind these communities into nations, to create a 'partnership' between races, and between Britain and its territories. In the words of a London *Times* correspondent, 'The conclusion would seem to be that a colonial army, largely composed of mercenaries, can never be a match for a national army'.⁴²

Defeat also exacerbated American criticism of the British Empire, and so spurred the Colonial Secretary to announce to Parliament on 13 July 1943 that Britain intended to guide its colonial territories along the road to self-government in the British Empire. Both progression to self-government and the creation of a strong, defensible state seemed to demand the forging of a nation from disparate parts. The predominance of the Chinese in the wartime resistance, the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), only seemed to confirm that any new nation must be built on the basis of common citizenship. The prospect of having to deal with a stronger post-war China over Hong Kong no doubt confirmed this. Britain could no longer afford to preserve the Malay States as exclusively Malay polities, and the disruption of war and reoccupation seemed to offer an opportunity to impose change.⁴³

Early in 1942 Viscount Cranborne (Colonial Secretary from February to November 1942) ordered that postwar planning should concentrate on the defence aspect. Initial plans in 1942 envisaged an association of all British territories in Southeast Asia. In mid 1943 a Malayan Planning Unit was set up, formally under the War Office but predominantly staffed by uniformed Colonial Office personnel, to lay the groundwork for Malaya's reoccupation. By then the Colonial Office had already decided Singapore should be excluded from any federation, because its free port status and predominantly Chinese population

made immediate inclusion premature.⁴⁴ Sarawak and North Borneo were to pass from private to government control as Crown Colonies, but also needed separate treatment initially because of their lack of development.^{45*}

By 1944 plans envisaged a united Malaya, with the removal of the Sultans' sovereignty making possible a generous common citizenship. This would facilitate the nurturing of gradually increasing self-government in a non-communal political environment. Non-communal politics and a 'Malayan' identity would be allowed to emerge slowly and before national-level politics – from local politics and civil society – so as not to alert and alienate existing communal sentiments.⁴⁶

Wider federation was now to be fostered by appointing a Governor-General to coordinate policy in Southeast Asian territories. This, in essence, was the plan embodied in the White Paper on Malaya and Singapore, published in January 1946, by which time the MPAJA had apparently peacefully disarmed. Malayan federation was seen as vital to political advance and it asserted that, 'International relations as well as the security and other interests of the British Commonwealth require that Malaya should be able to exercise an influence as a united and enlightened country appropriate to her economic and strategic importance'.⁴⁷

The needs of both defence and self-government seemed to demand larger units capable of supporting everything from tertiary educational institutions to armies. As regional centres of influence these would sustain rather than sap Commonwealth power. By 1945–47 Britain was moving towards the creation of federations or regional associations in Southeast Asia, the West Indies, and in Central and East Africa, albeit over an extended time-scale.⁴⁸

Britain returned to Malaya and Singapore in September 1945, and by December the Malay Sultans had, under some duress, all signed new treaties ceding sovereignty to the Crown. This paved the way for the inauguration of the Malayan Union as a strong central state under a Governor on 1 April 1946. Britain had chosen to start decolonisation in Southeast Asia, then, by creating three entirely new colonies: Malaya, Sarawak and North Borneo. In each case, these had previously been protected territories, not colonial possessions.

British plans, however, underestimated the impact of war. The way in which turmoil, inflation and shortages made even rural Malays aware of the need to defend their interests in the world outside their *kampongs*.^{49†} The period 1945–47 was characterised by an outbreak of organisations and acronyms: *Peta*, *KRIS*, *Saberkas*, *Kesatuan Melayu Johore*, *API*, the Malay Nationalist Party, UMNO and innumerable others crowded the pages of the Malayan Security

* Prewar Sarawak was ruled by the Brooke family as Rajas, British North Borneo by chartered company. These were thought unequal to post-war development and to increasing self-government. North Borneo became a Crown Colony in June 1946, Sarawak (despite the Malay members of its Council voting against it) in July. Secessionist opposition in favour of the Raja's heir, Anthony Brooke, died down only after the assassination of Governor Stewart in Dec. 1949 led the former to renounce all claims.

† *Kampong* is Malay for a village.

Service's reports. Disease and disorder, anger and hope, merged into a period of movement, of struggle to formulate and express identities. The space Britain provided in the hope that a 'Malayan' identity would emerge, complete with multi-racial charitable organisations and British-style trade unions, was instead filled by radical demands for popular sovereignty, and by multiple, mutually exclusive images of what Malaya should become.⁵⁰ Britain found itself proposing Malaya become a Colony with no dates set for elections, at a time when the MCP's 'Eight Points' of August 1945 moderately called for self-government and civil liberties.

Singapore's Suchen Christine Lim catches the flavour of this era in her historical novel, *Fistful of Colours*. She has a 1940s journalist on the nationalistic Malay-language newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*, recall that the Malays felt like *pelandok* (a fragile, endangered species of mousedeer), surrounded by crocodiles in the jungle. She has this journalist, 'Haji Hussein', cite Malay leader Dato Onn as saying it was 'time for the frog to come out of the coconut shell' (*Katak keluar dari bawah tempurong*).⁵¹ Pre-war Malay anxieties about being submerged by the Chinese had been increased by Chinese dominance in the MPAJA. This was exacerbated by tension between the MPAJA and the Malay police and administration. In the month or so after the Japanese surrender there were ugly communal incidents, as Malays resisted MPAJA attempts to administer some towns and to try wartime 'collaborators'. Sections of Chinese youth remained more vocal and politically conscious – sometimes physically intimidating – thereafter.⁵²

At the same time, though the Japanese 'East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' came to be recognised as exploitative, it exposed European pretensions. By trying to channel Malay energies into volunteer organisations it also encouraged Malay nationalism. In addition, the sudden Japanese surrender in August 1945 removed the need for a lengthy reconquest, during which Britain had hoped to re-establish prestige and lay the groundwork for its new plans. Ironically, Britain returned determined to insist on inter-racial cooperation just when the war had sharpened communal sensibilities. Fear of the Chinese, incipient nationalism, loyalty to their States, and the fact that some Sultans signed away their rights under duress, combined to create combustible feeling among Malays.⁵³ Having seen their Sultans sign away sovereignty, the response of the Malay *rakyat* (people) to the Malayan Union plan was rapid. A pan-Malayan meeting of Malay associations formed the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) on 11 to 12 May 1946. Effective sovereignty had passed from the Sultans to the (Malay) people, even if the former still had a role to play.⁵⁴

Initially the Colonial Office and Colonial Secretary refused to contemplate demands to restore the Malay position. The Crown's control was seen as necessary if Malaya was to be welded into a progressive and united country. Any restoration would make the Sultans a potential block to wider federation, Chinese integration and the introduction of democratic government.⁵⁵

While the Malays became increasingly vocal, however, Chinese support for the Malayan Union was initially low-key. With Chinese community leaders

distracted by civil war in their home country, and restoring their businesses, and Malay cooperation vital to the administration and police, Britain concluded that Chinese support would be no counter-balance for Malay ire. By June 1946 reports showed that the Malayan Union issue was allowing local leaders to use religious and racial themes to whip up Malay feeling. Besides, Britain could not assuage 'radical' Malay and non-Malay demands without accelerating the introduction of democratic institutions, and reviving plans to give most non-Malays citizenship. This might have redoubled Malay communal fears, leading to a dangerous cocktail of electoral politics and racial tension, at a time when Indian nationalism, rumblings in Burma, and demobilisation made manpower a problem.⁵⁶

By 2 June 1946 the Colonial Secretary had very reluctantly accepted the combined advice of MacDonald and of Sir Edward Gent, the Governor of the Malayan Union, that Britain would have to compromise. Between July and December 1946 the basis for the substitution of a Federation of Malaya for the Malayan Union was established in private negotiations between Britain, the Malay Rulers and UMNO.⁵⁷

After the new proposals were made public on December 1946, the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Communist-front organisations united in the PMCJA (Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action). This joined the *Putera* grouping of left-wing Malay organisations in the loose PMCJA-*Putera* front.* The Malay Nationalist Party (MNP), which formed the core of *Putera*, may have had a membership of 60,000 or more in 1947, when UMNO claimed under 120,000. Funston argues that Britain never gave 'radical' Malay groups such as the MNP a chance. One youth group, *API* (the acronym spells 'fire' in Malay), was banned as early as July 1947. There remains room for dispute over how far Britain (and a conservative Malay elite) was foreclosing on a potentially vibrant, radical Malay nationalism. This work assumes that, in so far as the MNP supported the Malayan Union it opposed the entrenched, majority Malay communal sentiment, so that the penetration from membership to a mass base was limited.⁵⁸

Protests in late 1947 included widespread if short *hartals* (combined strikes and boycotts), but it was too late. Even if Britain had been willing to court radical Malay groups and the MCP, with its aim of a socialist republic of Malaya, there was little likelihood of these being able to deflate Malay communal sentiment.⁵⁹ Besides, in 1946-47 Malay radicals were the object of considerable attention by the Malayan Security Services. With the Dutch launching a 'police action' against Indonesian Republicans in July 1947, it was feared that any backtracking on the December 1946 proposals might make MNP sympathies for union with Indonesia contagious.⁶⁰ Without reliable 'moderate' supporters for the original experiment of Malayan Union and 'partnership', Britain now retreated to working towards multi-racial politics more slowly, through the Sultans and UMNO.⁶¹

* The PMCJA was called the All-Malayan Council for Joint Action (AMCJA) from Aug. 1947. *Putera* was short for *Pusat Tenaga Rakyat*, or 'Centre of People's Power'.

The Malayan Union was replaced with the Malayan Federation on 1 February 1948. The Federation restored sovereignty to the Sultans in their States, though retaining a strong central state, and central Legislative and Executive Councils under a British High Commissioner. There was still to be a 'common' citizenship, though this was made inclusive for anyone remotely 'Malay', and restrictive for non-Malays. Birth in Malaya was not sufficient to confer automatic citizenship for non-Malays. They also had to fulfil exacting residence requirements.⁶² In order to facilitate progress towards self-government, the preamble envisaged the introduction of elections to the various councils 'as soon as circumstances and local conditions would permit'.⁶³ Together these provisions might allow the development of a unitary, democratic and defensible Federation of Malaya, rather than a shambolic collection of loosely aligned micro-states.

In some respects this retained the essence of the original state-building plans, but it also represented a significant blow to Britain's chosen tactics. The Malayan Federation was essentially a deal between the British and Malays. Constitutionally, the achievement of a common citizenship was a significant step forward for Britain's nation-building aspirations. Politically, however, the retreat to the Malayan Federation represented an important defeat. The Sultans, now restored as sovereign in their states, were left determined to demonstrate their sovereignty was real. Stricter citizenship rules would also leave many Chinese disenfranchised, and a totally non-elected Central Legislative Council (though with elections promised as soon as feasible) closed off constitutional outlets for the aspirations of radical Chinese.

Stenson rightly identifies Britain's 1946 decision to favour Anglo-Malay negotiations over the left's call for elections and racial equality as a decisive retreat. He underplays Britain's real fears, however, of the alternative, which meant fuelling Malay communalism and courting communism. He also underestimates Britain's belief that it could still achieve its original aims, albeit at a slow pace.⁶⁴

Thus there was a continuity in British aims, but the change in method, from forcing through reforms to accepting UMNO's ability to limit the pace and scope of change, was vital.⁶⁵ Britain had retreated from the ideal of partnership, to a compromise of working towards communal partnership through the methods of trusteeship; of edging and cajoling the Sultans and UMNO. As late as 1949 time still seemed to be a commodity in plentiful supply. One paper of the Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East) saw the Malays as 'an easy-going and inexperienced people', moulded by history and climate so as to lack the qualities needed for national autonomy in the modern world.⁶⁶ It seemed that Malay Sultans and politicians were not yet ready to face the Chinese without British support, and would not be ready for many years if not a whole generation.⁶⁷

Malay nationalism had not forced British retreat in a literal sense. What mattered were the implications of Malay resistance to Britain's overall strategic aims. Britain was committed to facilitating progressive self-government, in the hope of ultimately handing power to cooperative nationalist movements. The image of British power reinforced by familial relations with successor states

demanded the construction of stable, viable and friendly countries. In 1946–47 UMNO won concessions because it represented the threat of long-term Malay animosity, of a consequent increase the cost of maintaining British interests, and of damage to Britain's good name with countries such as India, Ceylon and Burma.⁶⁸

The British attempt to impose a radical plan had reinforced increasing Malay fears that they were becoming strangers in their own country. With the inauguration of the Malayan Federation in February 1948, the Sultans and UMNO were left in no mood to assimilate the Chinese. Creating any sense of a common community in Malaya, let alone the incorporation of Chinese-dominated Singapore, was going to be difficult. The British long-term aim, perhaps best styled 'unite and quit' rather than 'divide and rule', had got off to a mixed start.

CONCLUSIONS

In the aftermath of the fall of Singapore, Britain's planning for post-war defence and decolonisation became intertwined. Both political and defence planners emerged from the war envisaging the gradual development of a 'Malayan nation' as the prelude to creating a new, more defensible 'Dominion of Southeast Asia'. By the beginning of 1948 these were still Britain's long-term aims. The military continued to base their planning for local forces on the assumption that territories and communities would eventually be united. Yet local conditions had had a double-edged effect on strategy.

The threat of Malay dissent had induced a retreat from the Malayan Union plans. The Malayan Federation which replaced it achieved constitutional advance towards a strong central state and a unified citizenship, but at a high political cost. The entrenchment of Malay sovereignty in the Federation gave the Malays a pivotal position in political development. British hopes of bringing the Chinese further into a 'Malayan nation' were now dependent on Malay cooperation, while the Malayan Union debacle had heightened Malay fears of Chinese dominance.

Yet the Malay sensitivities which scuppered the Malayan Union also made full self-government seem as much as twenty five years away. With Britain seeing the Malays as politically backward and not yet confident enough to face the Chinese alone, there seemed to be plenty of time for nation- and state-building. There was thus continuity in British aims, though these were now to be realised by gradually winning over local opinion. The political nature of this task also meant that its implementation would be overwhelmingly a Colonial Office responsibility, over which the military could exercise only very limited influence.⁶⁹

Post-war defence plans, particularly for an emergency invasion of Songkhla, also can not be fully explained without reference to similar pre-war concepts. Military catastrophe appeared to reveal limits to Britain's capacity and will to defend Malaya in global war, let alone Southeast Asia. It drew attention to the

Songkhla position as the point which Britain had the best hope of holding with its limited resources. Yet at the same time it seemed to confirm that Singapore's defensive frontiers stretched forward in an Indochina-Thailand-Kra nexus. The upsurge of Asian nationalism in the war years also confirmed that Malaya and Singapore could not be considered in isolation from the region as a whole. In the light of Britain's economic capacity and post-war burdens, British policy-makers then had to decide how far to concentrate on the minimal needs of British territories, and how far to try and influence wider developments in Southeast Asia.

Notes

- 1 The Official history for the following is, S. Woodburn-Kirby, *The War Against Japan: The Loss of Singapore* (London, 1957), volume i. For bibliographies see: C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 347-50, which is annotated; and the more up-to-date Malcolm Murfett, John Miksic, Brian Farrell and Chiang Min Shun, *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore from First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal* (Singapore, 1999).
- 2 Peter Calvoceossi, Guy Wint and John Pritchard, *Total War: The Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (Revised Edition, Harmondsworth, 1989), pp. 986-98, still emphasise the guns facing the wrong way and a British 'delusion' that Singapore was 'impregnable' to land attack. This despite being well aware (p. 990) that British plans in 1941 centred on an air-land defence of the Kra in the north.
- 3 Wong Lin Ken, 'The Strategic Significance of Singapore in Modern History', in Ernest Chew and Lee, *A History of Singapore* (Oxford 1991), pp. 17-35. Dutch primacy in North Sumatra was confirmed in 1871.
- 4 Nadzon Haron, 'Colonial Defence and the British Approach to the Problems of Malaya', in *MAS*, 24, 2 (May 1990), 275-95. The most comprehensive work on Singapore is Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*.
- 5 John Bach, *The Australia Station: A History of the Royal Navy in the South West Pacific, 1821-1913* (New South Wales, 1985), pp. 171-75.
- 6 William R. Louis, *British Strategy in the Far East, 1919-39* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 17-49, 78-109, 242.
- 7 James Neidpath, *The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Far Eastern Empire, 1919-41* (Oxford, 1981), p. 55. Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, chapter 6, pp. 145-74.
- 8 See Neidpath, *Singapore Naval Base*, pp. 81 ff; W. D. MacIntyre, *The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base, 1914-42* (London, 1979), pp. 69 ff; and Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 149.
- 9 Malcolm Murfett, 'Living in the Past: A Critical Re-examination of the Singapore Naval Strategy, 1918-1941', *War and Society*, 11, 1 (May 1993), 73-103. For 6,500km of roads, 1,600km of railway, see Ong, *Operation Matador: Britain's War Plans Against the Japanese* (Singapore, 1997), p. 61.
- 10 C. C. Ong, 'Major General Dobbie and the Defence of Malaya, 1935-38', *JSEAS*, 5, 2 (1986), 282-306; and Ong, *Operation Matador*. Serious planning began in March, and was endorsed by a somewhat reluctant Churchill on 10 April 1941.
- 11 Adapted from, Air Chief Marshal Brooke Popham, 'Operations in the Far East', *Supplement to the London Gazette*, (London, 22 Jan. 1948), p. 537. For the Songkhla position, see the map on p. ix.
- 12 Intelligence showed attack imminent, but not whether Malaya would be targeted early. Brooke-Popham knew he was to be replaced, and a 29 Nov. intercept showed

- pro-Japanese Thai ministers hoped preemptive UK attack would justify calling Japan for help, Elphick, *Far Eastern File*, pp. 308–26.
- 13 Brooke-Popham did not control the Navy. For Churchill's rejection, in 1941, of COS advice that Malaya could be reinforced while still sustaining the Middle East; and his diversion of aircraft to Russia, see John Pritchard, 'Winston Churchill, the Military, and Imperial Defence in East Asia', in, Saki Dockrill, (ed.), *From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima: The Second World War in the Pacific, 1941–1945* (London, 1994), pp. 26–44.
 - 14 For 'psychological' explanations, see N. Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London, 1976). For inexperienced men and officers and the quality of the Japanese, H. Wilmott, *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942* (London, 1982), pp. 93–94, 168–70.
 - 15 See Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, pp. 180 for incoherence, pp. 151 for Sembawang, and p. 217 for 3 out of 4 Singapore airfields coming in Japanese artillery range.
 - 16 Underestimation was fuelled by inadequate structures for disseminating intelligence, and wrongly comparing Japanese to European rather than Asian weapons and modes of war. Racist assumptions were not absent. The Far East Combined Bureau (the main intelligence centre) was small, navy-dominated, and concentrated on Japan's strategic intentions. See Peter Elphick, *Far Eastern File: The Intelligence War in the Far East, 1930–1945* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997); John Ferris "'Worthy of Some Better enemy?': The British Estimate of the Imperial Japanese Army, 1919–41", *Canadian Journal of History* 28 (1993), pp. 223–56; and Antony Best, 'This Probably Over-Valued Military Power': British Intelligence and Whitehall's Perception of Japan', *INS*, 12, 3 (1997).
 - 17 Weak airpower limited tactical intelligence, see Prem3/168/B. Britain and the US nevertheless had greater industrial power, and had broken Japanese diplomatic and naval codes, giving them control over the strategic environment in the long-term. For post-war allegations of incompetence, see the Shenton-Thomas papers in Rho. See also CO967/77, 'Malaya, 1941–42'; and for betrayals and some Indian troops' poor quality (because of nationalism, race and the draining of experienced officers) Peter Elphick, *The Pregnable Fortress* (London, 1995), ch. 4.
 - 18 Singapore even concluded the monsoon might postpone any attack until Feb. 1942, despite Percival (GOC Malaya) having argued as early as 1938 that it did *not* rule out operations. Allen, *Singapore: 1941–1942*, pp.50–51; Ong, *Operation Matador*, p. 167; Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 185.
 - 19 For the first quotation, see Rho, Granada 'End of Empire' series, Malaya, vol. 4, p. 129, comments by Lt. Harold Payne, made during 1980s interviews. For the Singaporean view, see Maurice Baker, *A Time of Fireflies and Wild Guavas* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1995), p. 87.
 - 20 See (quotation) I. Morrison, *Malayan Postscript*, (London, 1942), pp. 187–88; Macintyre, *Rise and Fall of the Singapore Base*, pp.195–96; Prem3/168/3, 'Wavell's Report on Operations in Malaya', Sept. 1942; and Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 193.
 - 21 As early as 1921–22 it was recognised that the Naval Base required a 30-miles screen on mainland Johore, to prevent artillery fire, Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 151–54.
 - 22 Yamashita had 80–90,000 troops for the campaign in total. At Singapore – after previous deaths, captures, desertions and reinforcements – Percival was left with around 100,000 according to Louis Allen, *Singapore 1941–1942*, pp. 270–71, and 85,000 according to Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 218. Allen suggests around 35,000 Japanese were used in the final assault on Singapore. Allen's larger figures for British forces are probably due to his including 14,382 local volunteers in the count.

- 23 Rho: Mss Brit Emp 527/9, Granada End of Empire interviews, Malaya, Madoc interviews.
- 24 In 1947 the Joint Planning Organisation (FE) was ordered to study the lessons of Singapore, see CRA: A816/51, 11/301/698, (186), record of BDCC meeting (12), of 23 June 1947.
- 25 Churchill's, *The Second World War* (London, 1948–54), iv, pp. 42, 48, reveals, 'The fortress cannon of the heaviest nature have all-round traverse'. See also: MacIntyre, *Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base*, pp. 233 ff; Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, pp. 167–69 which maps gun positions; and Neidpath, *Singapore Naval Base*, pp. 223–25, saying all but one of the 15", and 6 of the 9.2" guns, could turn 360 degrees. The 9.2" guns had high explosive shells, the 15" guns armour-piercing only. Yet *The Independent*, 28 Feb. 1992, quoted Alistair Horne as saying the guns faced 'the wrong way'.
- 26 For suggestions intelligence forewarned Roosevelt or Churchill, see R. Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (New York, 1963); James Rusbridger and Nave, *Betrayal at Pearl Harbor* (London, 1991); and R. Aldrich's counter-arguments in *Intelligence and National Security*, 7, 3 (July 1992), 335 ff.
- 27 National Library of Scotland, Murray-Lyon papers, Dep 233, Colonel A. M. L. Harrison, *History of the 11th Indian Division*, (3 volumes, typescript, no date or place), i, p. 34.
- 28 Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 170–71.
- 29 The quotation is from Louis Allen, *Singapore 1941–42* (London, 1977), pp. 174 ff. See also Turnbull, *History of Singapore*, p. 183; and Masanobu Tsuji, *Singapore: The Japanese Version* (London, 1962), pp. 260–61. Andrew Gilchrist, *Malaya 1941: The Fall of an Empire* (London, 1991), pp. 61 ff, points out Japan was also operating at its limits, given operations stretching from China to India, and Manchuria to Perth.
- 30 This idea was developed in response to suggestions and papers by Richard Aldrich and Carl Bridge.
- 31 Japanese generals were notoriously competitive, a factor spurring Yamashita's impatience. This might have complicated reinforcements. *Syonan* (or *Shonan* – Light of the South) was the name Japan gave to Singapore. See Wilmott, *Empires in the Balance*, pp. 227–29, 234–36, 296–99, 303, 324–25, *passim*. Murfett et al *Between Two Oceans*, ch. 8 and Appendix 3, argue this point in more depth.
- 32 Morrison, *Malayan Postscript*, pp. 55–56, for 1942 criticism of the failure to launch Matador; MacIntyre, *The Singapore Base*, p. 212. In 1947 the Joint Planning Organisation (Singapore) was directed to study the lessons of 1941–42. This work has been unable to trace the results, but one Australian account described it as 'of very great importance'. See CRA: A816/51, 11/301/698, (186), 23 June 1947, Report by the Office of the Australian Commissioner for Malaya on the 12th meeting of the British Defence Committee.
- 33 Gilchrist, *Malaya 1941*, pp. 11, 106 ff, argues that Matador could have prevented catastrophe, so avoiding a defeat which led, 'directly to the impotence of Britain ... in the post-war world'. Gilchrist served as a Foreign Office Counsellor in the Commissioner-General's Office in the 1950s. Yet see also Prem3/168/3, General Wavell's report (Wavell arrived in Singapore as Supreme commander in the Far East on 7 Jan. 1942), 'Operations in Malaya and Singapore', 8 Sept. 1942. This concluded that Matador, 'without denying the enemy in any appreciable degree ... [gave] every possibility of losing an entire brigade'. Gilchrist's *Malaya 1941* is an example of the opposite conclusion coming to predominate.
- 34 Nigel Brailey suggests Thailand inclined to Japan as an anti-Western power and as a means of regaining lost territory, see, *Thailand and the Fall of Singapore* (London, 1986), pp. 2, 19. See also Richard Aldrich, *The Key to the South: Britain, the US and Thailand* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 311–61 for political difficulties with Matador; J. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand* (London, 1991); and E. Bruce Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's*

- Southern Advance, 1940-1945* (1994). Pro-Phibun Kokbua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades, 1932-1957* (Kuala Lumpur, 1995), pp. 240-71, sees Phibun inclining to Japan for party as well as national reasons.
- 35 As early as summer 1940 Vlieland predicted the plan might prove so politically sensitive that it would not be authorised until too late, LHCMA, Vlieland, 'Disaster in the FE', p. 71 ff, 'Appreciation by the Secretary of Defence', July 1940. Vlieland resigned in Spring 1941 after differences with the military.
- 36 Co968/15/1, 'Lessons of Malaya'. This contains results from a CO committee's investigation of late 1942. See also, Co537/2506, 'Lessons of Malaya'; and Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 28-39.
- 37 See Tim Harper, 'The Colonial Inheritance: State and Society in Malaya, 1945-57' (Cambridge: Unpublished D.Phil thesis, 1991), pp. 1 ff, 56, and ch. 3, for the idea that, in Malaya as in Africa, Britain planned progressive social and political policies which implied greater metropolitan intervention, and so a 'second colonial occupation' by experts. Europeans in post-war Kuala Lumpur more than tripled, to 6,645, by 1957. Harper, *End of Empire*, p. 217. The MCP claimed Britain's Labour Government proved a 'sheep in wolfs clothing', with new organisations springing up 'like mushrooms'. Rho, Hamer Papers, box 2, Communist Booklet 'The Aim of the Communist Revolution in Malaya' (c. 1949, pp. 74ff), Lesson 4.
- 38 See Co537/1478, FE(0)(46)52, 'British Foreign Policy in the FE', 16 April 1948, para. 59, for the 1931 census; and Werner Vennewald, *Chinesen in Malaysia: Politische Kultur und Strategisches Handeln* (Hamburg, 1990), p. 116. With Singapore included, Malays made up 44.4 per cent of the Malayan peninsula's population of 5,849,000, Chinese 39.2, Indian 14.3, 'others' 2.1. See also, A. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics During the Malayan Union Experiment* (Kuala Lumpur, 1979), p. 85, note 1.
- 39 The Chinese had a better position in the Straits Settlements, which was a Crown Colony. For decentralisation, see Barbara Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaya* (London, 1982), pp. 240-45.
- 40 Yoji Akashi, 'Lai Tek', *Journal of the South Seas Society* 49 (1994), 67. Special Training School 101 did the training. Britain realised that it was arming one enemy (the communists) to fight another. So 1941 is the best starting date for the origins of the postwar Emergency, as it is for decolonisation.
- 41 For the quotation and figures, see 'Operations in the Far East', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (22 Jan. 1948), Order of the Day by Brooke-Popham and Layton of 8 Dec. 1941; and Appendix M, pp. 575-76, 569-74. The core of regular Asians was the one (later two) battalion of the Malay Regiment. See also the comments on race in, Morrison, *Malayan Postscript*, p. 39; and Allen, *Singapore*, pp. 247-63.
- 42 For the quotation, see Morrison, *Malayan Postscript*, p. 39. Morrison and Perham's views (through *Times* articles) impacted on CO and public opinion at the time. Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, p. 2. 'Partnership' was part sop to American anti-imperialism and local nationalism, part aspiration for new, stronger imperial relationships. See also W. R. Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States, and the Decolonisation of the British Empire* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 27-33, 134ff, 225-45; C. Thorne, *Issue of War*, pp. 185 ff, and *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War Against Japan* (London, 1978), pp. 205-206, 341-45.
- 43 For planning, see Albert Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy, 1942-1948* (Oxford, 1991), p. 28-63; Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, documents 1-25; and Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics*, ch. 2. Lau stresses 'strategic and power considerations' (pp. 276-77). For US criticism, see references to Louis and Thorne in the note above. For the Colonial Secretary's 1943 announcement, see R. Pearce, *Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial Policy, 1938-1948* (London, 1982), pp. 34-35, *passim*.
- 44 Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics*, pp. 23-28, 71, 81; Albert Lau, 'The CO and Emergence of the Malayan Union Policy, 1942-43', in Smith and Stockwell,

- British Policy and the Transfer of Power*, pp. 95–126; Lau, *Malayan Union*, pp. 58, and 276–78.
- 45 Cab128/CM(48)45 and 50, July 1945. R. Reece, *In the Name of Brooke: The End of White Rajah Rule in Sarawak* (Kuala Lumpur, 1982).
- 46 The Cabinet provisionally approved future policy in Malaya and Borneo on 31 May 1944, on the understanding that there would be no publicity. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics*, pp. 28–29. See also Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 84–85, for a 1944 summary by Colonial Secretary Oliver Stanley.
- 47 Command 6724, *Malayan Union and Singapore: Statement of Policy on Future Constitution* (1946).
- 48 Command 7167, *The Colonial Empire, 1939–47* (London, 1947); Command 7120, *Closer Association of British West Indian Colonies* (London, 1947). The latter saw self-government as 'impossible' for small units under 'modern conditions'.
- 49 Paul Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–1945* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1998), pp. 71–3, 91, 356–61.
- 50 Rho, Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journals, 1946–47, *passim*; Harper, *End of Empire*, pp. 55–93. The meanings of just some of these acronyms are: KRIS (*Kesatuan Rakyat Istemewa*); Peta (*Pembela Tanah Ayer*, later *Ikatan Pemuda Tanah Ayer*) was first a Japanese para-military organisation, then one of Malay youth; API was the youth wing of the Malay Nationalist Party; and Kedah's Saberkas evolved from wartime cooperative to nationalist orientation. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics* is still the best source for detail.
- 51 Suchen Catherine Lim, *Fistful of Colours* (Singapore: EPB Publishers, 1993), p. 153–54, 164–67.
- 52 Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 176–77; Harper, *End of Empire*, pp. 44–54.
- 53 Stockwell, *Malaya* i, pp. 180–86ff, for use of the threat of British non-recognition to force the hand of a reluctant Sultan Badlishah (who acceded in the Occupation) and his State Council. For the Rulers, see also Simon Smith, *British Relations with the Malay Rulers* (Oxford, 1995).
- 54 Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation, 1941–46* (Singapore, 1983). See also: Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics*, pp. 9–15, 28, 38–39; Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 199ff; and Thorne, *Issue of War*, ch. 5, pp. 144–76, 269–70. Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Community and Democracy, 1945–50* (Oxford, 1993), traces a shift in Malay identity from *kerajaan* (royal and state-focused identity) to *Bangsa Melayu* (Malayness, the Malay community). Cheah Boon Kheng, 'The Erosion of Ideological-Hegemony and Royal Power and the Rise of Postwar Malay Nationalism, 1945–46', *JSEAS*, 19, 1 (March 1988), 1–26.
- 55 Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 241–46.
- 56 ISEAS, Tan Cheng Lock papers 1/3, Memo on the Future of the Chinese in Malaya, Dec. 1946; Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation* (Kuala Lumpur, 1974), pp. 34–38; and James de V. Allen, *The Malayan Union* (New Haven, 1969), pp. 49–51, 57.
- 57 Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 236–41; and Lau, *Malayan Union*, pp. 151–214.
- 58 For radical parties' strength, see N. Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur, 1980), p. 40; Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu*, pp. 100–101, 120, and 114 for the quotation.
- 59 1946 saw strikes and demonstrations led by the MCP and its General Labour Unions. For British concerns, see Rho, MSS Indian Ocean s251, Malay Security Service, Political Intelligence Journal, 1946, *passim*. Hereafter abbreviated as Rho, MSS, PIJ.
- 60 Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics*, p. 168. Allen, *Malayan Union*, pp. 49–51, 57. Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia*, pp. 209–212.
- 61 Stenson, 'The Malayan Union and the Historians', 334–354, argues the Malayan Union's democratic deficit muted support for it. For radical and Chinese behaviour,

- see Rho, Ms Indian Ocean s251, Malayan Security Service reports, 1947/6, 30 April 1947, containing the MCP's 'Freedom News' of 15 Jan 1947; and C. F. Yong, *Tan Kah Kee* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 298 ff. For PMCJA-*Putera* opposition. Yeo Kim Wah and Lau, 'From Colonialism to Independence', in Chew and Lee, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 119-21.
- 62 Anyone born in the Federation, of parents born there, and of 15 years' residence, qualified automatically. For non-British citizens born in Malaya, whose parents had not been born there, residence for 8 of 12 years entitled them to apply for citizenship. For those not locally born, residence for 15 out of 20 years was required before an application. Applicants had to be of good character, with a knowledge of English or Malay. Yet all subjects of Rulers (all Malays) and anyone speaking Malay and conforming to Malay custom (which might be taken to include some recently settled Indonesians and Arabs) was automatically a citizen. Chinese born in the former Straits Settlements Colony were British subjects, and as such were also deemed to qualify automatically. Citizenship terms under the proposed Malayan Union and Federation are contrasted in Victor Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free*, p. 56; and Kok Koun Chin, *History of Malaya and Singapore* (Singapore, 1997), p. 99.
- 63 For the quotation, see Gordon Means, *Malaysian Politics* (Second edition, London, 1976), pp. 56-59.
- 64 Stenson, 'The Malayan Union and the Historians', pp. 344-54.
- 65 For policy continuity, see Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', 70-71.
- 66 For these views and phrases, see CRA: A1838/2, 413/3/6/1/1, British Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East), paper of Sept. 1949, entitled 'Malay aspirations'.
- 67 For these views and phrases, see CRA: A1838/2, 413/3/6/1/1, British Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East), paper of Sept. 1949, entitled 'Malay aspirations'.
- 68 Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics*, p. 89; Lau, *Malayan Union*, pp. 161-68; Allen, pp. 57-71; and Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation*, pp. 34-38. The last speculates Labour was anxious to avoid responsibility for any major mishap in Malaya.
- 69 Defe5/46, COS(53)223, 'Defence Aspects of British-Controlled Territories in SEA', 14 May 1953.; Defe5/46, COS(53)288, 'Defence Aspects of British-Controlled Territories in SEA', 20 June 1953.

Regional Ambitions and Limited Resources (1945–54)

Defending Southeast Asia

In 1941, Indochina had been a springboard for attacks on Malaya, confirming that its defence had to be conceived of in regional terms. The August 1943 creation of Mountbatten's SEAC (Southeast Asia Command) confirmed that Southeast Asia was no longer a mere geographical expression. It is true that SEAC only managed to break out of India in its summer 1944 advance into Burma, but by then its area of responsibility already embraced Thailand and Sumatra, as well as British territories.¹ The events of 1942–45 seemed to confirm that the region was strategically and politically interdependent, requiring rehabilitation and defence as an area.² Britain's withdrawal from South Asia in 1947–48, and its decreasing presence in East Asia, was to increase this focus on Southeast Asia as a region.

In addition, the war gave a boost to Southeast Asian nationalism. Britain's attempts to create positive relationships with its own colonial politicians, and with the territories closest to Malaya and Singapore, had to take into account this rising nationalist tide.³

After 1945 Britain tried to use regionalism to address the growing tension between the demand for colonial withdrawal, and the need to preserve stability. Western powers and emerging Asian states would be induced to cooperate, influenced, it was hoped, by Britain's 'spiritual leadership'. Regionalism was to be the successor to the imperial system.

It was probably a relief to Britain that both the French and the Dutch announced they would carry out reforms in their Southeast Asian territories. Both intended to allow more self-government, but to retain links with their colonies. This made it possible for Britain to hope that the European powers might cooperate in producing stability, economic rehabilitation and an orderly and friendly transition to 'self-government'.⁴

Britain was then presented with a dilemma, as it became obvious Dutch and French reforms would be too limited to avoid conflict with nationalists. How could Britain keep decolonisation slow and disciplined, and encourage 'regionalism', when European and Asian perspectives were so divergent?

In addition to this political problem, military disaster in 1942 had highlighted Britain's limited capacity to defend Malaya, let alone Southeast Asia. Hopes that post-independence India would continue to underpin the region's defence also

quickly dimmed, further limiting the resources available. Attention thus focused not only on regional interdependence, but also on the need for contingency plans in case the countries to the north of Malaya fell into hostile hands. With Thailand supposedly weak, military planners became determined not to repeat the 1941 failure to execute plans for the defence of the Kra Isthmus. The Kra was to be denied to any enemy or seized in good time, as a position where Britain's 'thin red line' (largely Indian before 1941, largely Gurkha after 1948) could make a stand.

It took the outbreak of uprisings of a communist complexion, and the rise of communism in China in 1948-49 to bring these British concerns with the interdependence of Indochina, Thailand and Songkhla to the fore. The conjunction of Cold War with decolonisation then accentuated tensions between regional ambitions and limited resources. Creating a stable international environment, so fledgling independent states would not fall from the nest of empire into the waiting jaws of communism, became more urgent. Britain's desire to see communist expansion contained also complicated its policy of attempting to create working relationships between Western powers and Asian nationalists. Countries such as India and Indonesia, for instance, were less willing than Britain to see the *Viet Minh* as communists who must be opposed, rather than as anti-colonial nationalists.

This chapter looks at tensions between regional concerns and limited resources as an aspect of the defence of Malaya and Singapore. How far was Britain able to persuade allies to share its burdens? Did Britain manage to 'punch above weight' by using its position between newly independent Commonwealth countries and the United States? How far were regional ambitions frustrated by tight metropolitan constraints? In addressing these questions it breaks the subject down into four key sections: on regional policy, relations with the United States, Anglo-Australian concerns, and the interaction between the Asian Cold War and Songkhla planning.⁵

It also makes the point that the mere existence of strategies cannot be assumed to imply that the requisite resources were provided. We need to ask not only how Britain hoped to use regional policies to defend Malaya and Singapore, but how far this affected force posture. Southeast Asian regionalism had to compete for resources in the context of Britain's search for economies. It also had to vie with responsibilities in Europe and the Middle East. It is necessary to ask how resources were actually allocated. How far did Britain succeed in minimising commitments while maximising regional security, in sharing burdens while maintaining influence? Was the threat in Southeast Asia perceived as mainly military or primarily political, and what calls did each make on British resources?

SEAC TO ASIAN COLD WAR: THE BIRTH OF INDEPENDENT MONSOON ASIA AND THE ADJUSTMENT OF BRITISH AMBITIONS

The war confirmed Britain's interwar decline as an East Asian power. Extraterritorial privileges in China were given up in 1943. The United States

dominated the China theatre, with Roosevelt hoping Chiang Kai Shek's China would emerge as one of four 'world policemen'. In August 1945 Britain quickly reclaimed Hong Kong, valued as a gateway to Northeast Asia's trade and services, but this was the exception to general retreat.⁶

For a while, businessmen clung to Shanghai and to their historic belief in the China market's potential. British warships briefly returned to the Yangtze, but the mauling of *HMS Amethyst* by communist artillery in April 1949 finally laid to rest the era of gunboat diplomacy. By 1950, British warships had left the Yangtze for good. Communist obstruction and Western embargoes were leading to the withering away of remaining British businesses in China, though low-level trade continued.⁷

The recognition of economic weakness, the prospect of Indian independence and retreat from China, all concentrated attention on Southeast Asia. A late 1945 paper by the Cabinet's Far East Civil Planning Unit summed up British prospects. North of the Tropic of Cancer, in East Asia, the United States would play the leading role. South of the Tropic of Cancer Britain would be predominant, with India's progress to self-government preparing the way for a British role in mediating between the West and Asia.⁸

Rehabilitation was the priority. Despite Burma having had virtual self-government from 1937, and Japan granting it 'independence' in August 1943, the May 1945 Burma White Paper envisaged three years of direct rule.⁹ This would restore prestige and allow the recuperation of an economy incinerated by war. Only then would Burma resume progress to self-government. The return of Indochina and the East Indies to France and the Netherlands were also seen as important steps towards defence cooperation and economic recovery. In Malaya too, the emphasis was to be on reconstruction and nation-building, with progress to self-government calculated in decades. In neither case did Britain realise that insurgents Mountbatten had supplied as part of the war effort – the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army and the Burmese Defence Army – would indirectly underpin postwar drives for more radical progress.¹⁰ British planning thus envisaged a general return of colonial powers, and sought a pivotal role in coordinating regional defence and economic rehabilitation.¹¹

During 1942-44 the Colonial Office even considered the idea of creating regional commissions in areas such as Africa and Southeast Asia. Based on cooperation between metropolitan powers, these might facilitate reconstruction and defence, while deflecting American proposals to make colonial authorities accountable to an international body.¹²

After 1944, however, the threat of interference in colonial areas receded. Roosevelt's initial attacks on colonialism were tempered by reluctance in the Administration to weaken Britain's potential as an ally. In addition, the United States military had reason to distrust international supervision, since they hoped to gain unfettered strategic control over certain Japanese Pacific islands. Finally, American interest in the SEAC area (SEAC was a joint Anglo-American command) decreased. American attention shifted from Burma – where there had been friction over whether to direct effort towards China or southwards towards

British colonies – as America focused more on the Pacific and China theatres.¹³ At Potsdam in summer 1945 the United States agreed to make SEAC responsible for reoccupying all colonial Southeast Asia (apart from Indochina above the sixteenth parallel, which Chiang Kai Shek's forces would occupy). This suited Britain, which wanted to fight back into Southeast Asia to erase prior humiliation, rather than have territories grudgingly returned at peace negotiations.¹⁴

As American pressure eased, the Colonial Office lost interest in regional commissions, fearing they would bring foreign interference in colonial territories. The Colonial Office prepared to fight Foreign Office demands for appointing a diplomat as regional coordinator, 'tooth and nail'.¹⁵ SEAC, however, had imposed one authority from India to Indochina. The Foreign Office had no intention of allowing a return to prewar parochialism, which had supposedly contributed to the 1941 disaster. By 1945, the Colonial Office was resisting ambitious Foreign Office schemes, including the suggestion of appointing a Resident Minister for the region.¹⁶

SEAC's postwar role, meanwhile, appeared to confirm that Britain had an important regional role. From September 1945 until November 1946, SEAC's reoccupation of Thailand, south Indochina and Indonesia, as well as British territories, brought influence to a peak. Britain was committed to supervising Japanese surrender, and to returning the French and Dutch to their colonial territories. The latter was both because Britain hoped for orderly decolonisation under European guidance, and because it wished to see these countries become strong allies in Europe.¹⁷

SEAC nevertheless worked under severe constraints. The extension of its area from Malaya, Burma and Sumatra to most of the rest of Southeast Asia only came into effect after Japan surrendered on 15 August. It was short of shipping and faced domestic pressure to demobilise British conscripts. Some Labour backbenchers disliked the principle of national service in peacetime. Manpower was anyway desperately needed for an export drive, given Britain's pecunious postwar state. There were even rumbles and occasional mutinies by troops frustrated at being in the East long after VE-Day.¹⁸

Between February and October 1946, demobilisation saw SEAC shrink from 360,000 to 130,000 men. Reliant on Indian troops and logistics, SEAC was ordered to concentrate on disarming the Japanese – over 500,000 – and repatriating over 200,000 internees and Prisoners of War, in an area incorporating over 120 million people. It was not clear how far this would involve controlling territory outside a few cities and coastal enclaves. What was clear, however, was that SEAC could not afford to become embroiled in long-term commitments.

India, meanwhile, had already been promised an early move towards self-government. The impossibility of policing any widespread Indian trouble in post-war circumstances accelerated its decolonisation. The Indian army was increasingly officered by Indians, the loyalty of its police and administration could not be counted upon *in extremis*. Muslim attempts to secure the protection

of their interests, meanwhile, contributed to growing communal tension. An August 1946 Muslim campaign sparked northern Indian riots, leaving thousands dead.

In September 1946 an interim government of Indian ministers was set up, but Muslim-Hindu agreement still came no nearer. On 20 February 1947, Britain promised independence before summer 1948, hoping to push the two sides into agreement. Mountbatten was appointed viceroy, and in June 1947 he played Britain's last cards: partition and scuttle. He promised independence for two states – mainly Muslim Pakistan and mainly Hindu India – for August 1947.

This proximity of Indian independence, and demands by the Indian National Congress for an early return of troops, militated against using Indian forces in disputes between nationalists and the French and Dutch. As early as January 1946 Cabinet determined on reducing troops in the region as quickly as possible, and pressing for negotiated settlements between the Dutch, French and local nationalists.¹⁹

The Indonesian nationalists had announced independence on 17 August 1945. The communist-dominated *Viet Minh* proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 2 September. In both cases, the interregnum between the Japanese surrender on 15 August and the arrival of SEAC troops in early September allowed nationalists to seize Japanese arms and consolidate. This even threatened the safety of French and Dutch internees, who were seen by nationalists – with some justification – as an advance guard for colonial reoccupation.

In assuming rehabilitation required Western leadership, and that the nationalist movement in Indonesia was a quisling elite group, Britain underestimated the roots nationalism had grown during the war. In Indonesia alone, the Japanese had trained hundreds of thousands of youth – *pemuda* – in paramilitary and auxiliary bodies as the war turned against them. These had been subjected to Sukarno's fiery nationalist propaganda, to Japanese anti-western diatribes. Almost inevitably, Britain's act in returning French and Dutch officials provoked disorder, and clashes between those newly freed, and those still seeking freedom.²⁰ At its extreme, in the Javanese coastal city of Surabaya in November 1945, Britain demanded the surrender of arms by Republicans after clashes. A British Brigadier was killed, positions in a teeming city bombarded, and three weeks of fierce street fighting ensued between 'British' (mainly Indian) and nationalist forces. Even appeals by nationalist leaders, who wanted to keep Britain's goodwill, could not stop local youths resisting the surrender of arms and positions, and the hauling down of their red and white (*merah putih*) Indonesian flag.²¹

This only fortified Mountbatten's desire – as Supreme Commander of SEAC – to encourage negotiations with nationalists, citing Britain's example in India. In early 1946 Bevin sent out Lord Archibald Clark-Kerr (a former Ambassador to the Chinese nationalists and later Baron Inverchapel) to continue the search for a settlement in Indonesia. Britain hoped to avoid Indonesian events having ripple effects in India, Malaya and Southeast Asia generally, a danger the Cabinet discussed several times before mid-1949.²²

Britain was able to extricate itself from Indochina more rapidly. British troops restored French control in the South, where the *Viet Minh* were weaker. In March 1946, the French agreed to recognise *Viet Minh* control of Tonkin (north Vietnam) within an Indochinese federation. The French would keep control of foreign policy and of the rest of Indochina. By the end of April all British forces had been withdrawn.

In Indonesia, meanwhile, Britain did not even allow Dutch military forces to land until March 1946. It then lifted a ban imposed the previous November, due to the rogue behaviour of early arrivals. Lifting the ban allowed Britain to warn the Dutch that British forces would now withdraw, increasing pressure to negotiate with nationalists, or to shoulder the whole burden of any conflict. The aim was to persuade both the Dutch and Indonesians to agree, yet without being seen to abandon the Dutch, or to oppose nationalism; without damaging a European ally, or Southeast Asian regionalism. Since the Dutch were certain only of holding towns and ports, the Republicans only of surviving in rural areas, Britain's policy worked. In November 1946 – as the last SEAC troops left – the Linggajati agreement saw Dutch recognition of *de facto* Republican control in Java and Sumatra. The Indonesian government, in return, accepted that their inner Republic would form part of a federal United States of Indonesia, with a continuing link to the Dutch crown.

In Indochina and Indonesia the 1946 agreements were thin veneers over continuing antagonism. Nationalist opposition to federalism and distrust over the continuing role of the colonial power were acute. Nevertheless, Britain was able to hand responsibility for Indonesia to the Dutch and withdraw its last troops in November 1946, having helped broker an agreement.²³

SEAC's logistic support, meanwhile, underpinned Britain's role in coordinating regional rehabilitation. Food shortages also necessitated, in March 1946, the temporary appointment of Lord Killearn as Foreign Office 'Special Commissioner' for Southeast Asia. Killearn was plucked from his job as High Commissioner in Egypt and rushed to Singapore, in order to tackle what the Cabinet feared was becoming a critical food crisis.

Killearn's brief focused on supply problems. The Colonial Office, which had its own Governor-General of Southeast Asia from May 1946, still had not accepted a long-term future or wider role for such a Foreign Office post. Killearn held conferences on food, agriculture and transport, coordinated rice allocation, and helped mediate between the Indonesian Republic and the Dutch. He viewed Southeast Asia as an essential bastion of the Commonwealth and with Mountbatten's support sought to entrench regional coordination.

At the April to May 1946 meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Ernest Bevin, as Foreign Secretary, also supported the Foreign Office line that regional coordination was vital. He advocated fostering economic development in order to provide a new basis for cooperation with Asians. During 1946-47 Killearn further advised forestalling extreme Asian nationalism, and any growth in communist influence, by encouraging economic and social improvement.²⁴ The Colonial Secretary, however, doubted the time was ripe for a formal agreement,

given events in Indochina and Indonesia. So Bevin merely stressed the Foreign Office line that Killearn's organisation, by providing for technical and economic cooperation, might pave the way for more formal cooperation in the future.²⁵

Part of the problem was that many Asian countries would not accept French and Dutch participation in any organisation, while Britain initially envisaged colonial powers providing leadership. By February 1947, the Foreign Office was cooling towards this original idea of cooperating with France and Holland. Britain decided arms for French Indochina could only be supplied indirectly, through France itself; and placed an embargo on arms for the Dutch in Indonesia after the first Dutch 'police action' in July 1947 caused international uproar. With Burma and India promised independence, Dening, then an Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office,* argued in February 1947 that: 'the degree of co-operation [with the French and Dutch] must depend largely on the extent to which [they] are able to settle their differences with the Indonesians and the [Vietnamese] ... our aim should be to contrive a general partnership between independent or about-to-be independent Eastern peoples and the Western powers who by their past experience are best able to give them help ...'.²⁶ From 1947-49 French and Dutch refusal to allow greater concessions to nationalists continued to threaten Britain's policy of courting moderate nationalism as a prerequisite for regionalism.²⁷

Despite this, the Foreign Office's desire for a coherent regional policy remained. Furthermore, it argued the Governor-General of Southeast Asia, as a colonial official, was unsuitable for coordinating policy towards foreign territories. The Special Commissioner's role was vital since, 'With our imminent withdrawal from India and Burma, Southeast Asia becomes of even greater importance ... [and] its focus will be in Singapore'.²⁸

Colonial Office and Foreign Office regional ambitions were partially reconciled when the posts of Special Commissioner and Governor-General were amalgamated, to achieve economies, in May 1948. MacDonald, formerly the Governor-General, became Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, responsible to both departments. Presumably Colonial Office fears were assuaged by the knowledge that MacDonald, an ex-Labour government Colonial Secretary, understood their viewpoint, and was not a Foreign Office creature. Ironically, by the time of MacDonald's appointment, Britain's regional role had already fallen from its SEAC-era peak.

From late 1947 a United Nations 'Good Offices Committee' took over from Britain the main role in assisting Dutch-Indonesian dialogue.²⁹ In September 1948 the Republican government defeated the 'Madiun' revolt, which had a strong communist hue, proving its reliability in western eyes. Then American pressure (the threat to reconsider aid) pressurised the Dutch to cede independence in December 1949, after a second 'Police Action' a year earlier

* Dening had been seconded to SEAC as Mountbatten's chief political adviser in October 1943, returning to the FO as Assistant Under Secretary of State (1946-50). In 1946 he became Chairman of the new Far East (Official) Committee.

alienated world opinion.³⁰ In Indochina, the French dispute with the *Viet Minh* rumbled on, and Britain (and for that matter the United States) found the French took little notice of calls to make more substantive promises of self-government.

As British troops withdrew from Southeast Asia in 1946-47, and postwar shortages receded, Britain's role in coordinating scarce resources diminished. In 1947 the United Nations established an Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE). ECAFE subsumed many of the social and economic coordinating functions Killearn's organisation had served.

By early 1948 Britain still hoped for a regional role, but was unsure how this could be made palatable to newly independent Asian states. At this point the outbreak of communist insurrections seemed to intensify the need for regional policy. By the end of 1948 Burma (March 1948), Malaya (June 1948), Indochina and the Philippines were all faced with communist insurrection, and communists were sweeping southwards in China. Coming after the 25 February 1948 communist coup in Czechoslovakia, and with rising tension in the West, the Southeast Asian uprisings of 1948 seemed to fit a general 'Cold War' pattern.

Even before this, in 1947, MacDonald identified communism as a major threat for a region characterised by poor living conditions.³¹ By November 1948 MacDonald was pushing London for a more energetic stance, warning that communist victory in China would make Southeast Asia, 'a major theatre in the Cold War'. Despite sharing his worries about communist subversion, the Foreign Office was still reluctant to allow too much cooperation with the Dutch and French. Independent Asian countries such as India, as well as Australia, might balk at this.³²

By the October 1948 Commonwealth conference an air of crisis surrounded Southeast Asia. Nehru stated a broad 'regional understanding' was necessary, including Australia and New Zealand. He stressed his sympathy for Asian nationalists and his suspicion of the United States. Bevin floated the idea of regional cooperation to establish the area on a firm political and economic footing, but economic action received most attention. In the opinion of the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Herbert Vere Evatt, 'The most efficacious weapon against Communism was the improvement of the standard of living of the people'.³³

In late 1948 the Joint Planning Staff in London and the Commanders-in-Chief in Singapore agreed with the above views. In addition, they stressed that Southeast Asian countries' resistance to communism should be bolstered, and that the West should show it was determined to hold the area. With the Chinese communists sweeping south towards the Yangtze, the threat from Southeast Asian communist movements was also expected to increase.³⁴ As early as April 1948, the Colonial Office had stressed that Britain should build up the stability and powers of resistance of Malaya's northern neighbours, in order to keep communism at arms length from British territories.³⁵

The need to demonstrate determination to resist communist expansion inspired the 1949-50 increase in Hong Kong's garrison. In 1948-49 some Ministers suggested its internationalisation. On 26 May 1949, however, Attlee

warned Cabinet that failure to meet the challenge might undermine the anti-communist front in Thailand, Burma and Malaya. In addition, a Colonial Office paper of 16 May 1949 argued that holding Hong Kong was important to Britain's commerce and prestige. Though the COS had advised the colony could not be held against full-scale assault, a show of determination might deter attacks, and enable Britain to meet lesser contingencies such as internal unrest. Hong Kong might be a Chinese city of two million, teetering on the edge of a communist volcano, but Britain was determined to use its core of just 10,000 'reliable' personnel (including the police) to hold on.

In the spring 1949 the Cabinet agreed to strengthen the garrison, which grew from two battalions to over a division. In early 1950, however, Hong Kong was then drained of men in order to reinforce Malaya and Korea. This left an enlarged internal security garrison, little more than a tripwire force. Hong Kong's main defence then lay in its usefulness to China, strengthening British tendencies to accommodate Peking, and try and draw it into the international community.³⁶

As early as December 1948, the Cabinet agreed a dual policy of keeping, 'a foot in the door' in China, while consulting allies on countering the spread of communism.³⁷ By February 1949, it was obvious the United States was reluctant to become involved in Southeast Asia. The Foreign Office and MacDonald therefore sought ways of paving the way for local action: action which was supposed to persuade the United States that such self-help deserved support. This seemed all the more urgent, because the Foreign Office expected Russian subversion of Southeast Asia to increase as Western measures for the defence of Europe and the Middle East became effective.³⁸

By spring 1949, MacDonald was emphasising the political importance of involving India. He also wanted to endorse the idea of encouraging Asian powers to build a common front against communism by prompting them to cooperate first over economic development. There could be an Asian equivalent to the Marshall Plan.³⁹ On 14 April, Bevin sent Attlee a memorandum on Nehru's recent speeches, which highlighted agrarian unrest, and Western neglect of Asia. Bevin warned that, 'If we wait too long, we may find ourselves no longer able to influence the situation, since a tendency is already developing, on the part of Nehru, to issue invitations to conferences without asking the United Kingdom'.

India's attempts to organise Asian opinion, by convening the Asian Relations conference of March 1947, and the Asian conference on Indonesia of January 1949, further convinced Britain it must regain the initiative. These conferences resulted in mild motions supporting nationalism against imperialism, but failed to produce a practical 'Asian' approach to foreign relations.

The problem for Britain was one of tactics. Britain recognised that Asian countries, newly independent and anti-imperialist, were too jealous of their independence to accept overt British leadership. Neither were they likely to accept a political or defence organisation at a time when the *Viet Minh* were widely seen as nationalists, and while India and Pakistan were quarrelling over

Kashmir. MacDonald, Nehru and Evatt's mutual interest in economic action now pointed to an alternative approach.⁴⁰

Sir William Strang, who became Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office in 1949, toured the Far East at the year's beginning. With the United States still keeping its distance from the area, and the French and Dutch embroiled in colonial wars, he reported that Britain's postwar record left it in a unique position to coordinate policy, using British experience and American resources. In April 1949 a formula was found which allowed a Republican India to remain in the Commonwealth, keeping alive British notions of a special role in Asia. In May an interdepartmental working party of the Far East (Official) Committee was set up. It was told to study the Far East in the context of President Truman's January 1949 suggestion, that some Point Four aid (assistance to countries resisting communism) might be made available for Asia.⁴¹

Killlearn and MacDonald's long-term aim of launching a regional policy was now seen both as a vehicle for drawing the West and Asians together, and as a device for opposing communism. On 27 October the Cabinet endorsed a policy of working towards regional political and military cooperation. It agreed that the best tactic was to start slowly, by encouraging aid coordination amongst Asian Commonwealth countries. Commonwealth cooperation in Asia would be the bait to catch the larger, American fish – a sprat to catch a mackerel.

In January 1950 the Australians, who had always viewed welfare as the key to fighting communism, were encouraged to take the initiative at the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers' conference, at Colombo.⁴² As a result, the first meeting of the Consultative Council of the 'Colombo Plan', intended to coordinate bilateral aid, took place in the Ceylonese capital in May. Australia also successfully suggested the idea of a technical assistance fund. The 'Colombo Plan' was born.

The United States and most Southeast Asian states became full or associate members of the Colombo Plan by 1954. Since no significant new cash funds were made available, however, it was overshadowed by the outbreak of the Korean War, America's policy towards China, and an Asian tendency to view the *Viet Minh* as nationalists.

Most Colombo funds in the early years also went to South Asia. The sums targeted at Indochina, Indonesia and Thailand, could only have had a minimal impact. Judged as the first stage of an Anglo-Australian attempt to produce an East-West front against communist expansion, and to harness American resources to Commonwealth designs, the Colombo Plan must be judged only a small success. Technical assistance and training did enhance British and Australian reputations, and helped to increase links between Asian countries. Yet these were unlikely to make Asian states more overtly anti-communist, or to seriously undermine the economic conditions which facilitated communism. In other words, it had success in its short-term aim of coordinating aid to the region, but contributed little to the long-term objective of fostering a regional political and military association to combat communism.⁴³

By contrast, the United States became more involved in the area, but at its own pace and for its own reasons. It also directed most of its assistance directly to front-line states: the American aid programme to Indochina reaching \$164 million in 1950-51, \$274 million in 1952, most of it military-related.⁴⁴

Britain was now to find that, far from being amenable to British advice, American policies undermined British strategies. The declaration of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949 saw British and American approaches to China diverge. In November 1949 MacDonald's annual meeting of British representatives in the Far East recommended recognition of China. Britain was eager to avoid provoking Chinese pressure on Hong Kong. It also wanted to avoid driving China deeper into the Soviet embrace. Sino-Soviet interests might collide over Sinkiang, or Soviet access to ice-free ports and other facilities in North China. The Cabinet took the decision in mid-December, leaving the timing of recognition up to Bevin.⁴⁵

By this time, Mao Tse Tung controlled almost all China, and India had made clear its intention of extending formal recognition. A last-ditch attempt to secure Commonwealth unity failed. India recognised China on 30 December 1949, but in January 1950 Australia and New Zealand spurned Anglo-Indian pleas to follow suit. Britain extended recognition to China on 6 January 1950. The United States, constrained by its record of supporting the Kuomintang and by a powerful China lobby, instead demanded China first recognise its international obligations. Since the 'loss' of China to communism was a hot issue in American politics, British recognition brought Anglo-American relations in the Far East to a low point. The US even saw British tactics as an echo of 1930s appeasement.⁴⁶

Britain still sought to draw the communist Chinese sting by sweet reasonableness, and was already being frustrated by the more frosty American approach. Britain wanted to draw China into the international community, but Peking distrusted British diplomacy and resented Britain's continuing links with the KMT in Taiwan.⁴⁷ Britain saw Asian and especially Indian cooperation as vital in buttressing the area, but by early 1950 recognised that a long period of 'education' and technical cooperation would be necessary before political and military cooperation could follow.

While Britain's influence waned, American interest intensified. Britain and France had pushed the United States to assist Southeast Asia since early 1949. American policy had only veered towards intervention, however, with the December 1949 appropriation of \$75 million for the general China area (later extended to include Indochina). Defeated in China, American attempts at containment retreated to Indochina. As indications that the Chinese communists would assist the *Viet Minh* increased from the end of 1949, Indochina was increasingly seen as the guard domino for Southeast Asia. Holding it would help ensure that raw materials from the rest of Southeast Asia continued to assist in balancing the European (especially British) dollar deficits, and in revitalising Japanese trade. By May 1950 the United States had begun its first shipments to Indochina. In early 1950 the American administration was also considering the

National Security Council paper NSC-68 (drawn up by April). This took a hard-line view that the communist world posed a monolithic, expansive threat, which must be resisted at every instance. In Asia this meant a shift in emphasis from a strategy of holding an island chain on the perimeter, to one of denying communism any gains on the Asian mainland.⁴⁸

By early 1950 British officials were already worried that an uncompromising American stance over China could alienate Asian opinion, undermining Britain's policy of keeping a foot in the door in China, and of playing a pivotal role between newly independent Asian states and the West. Nevertheless, in January 1950 the United States did announce it would not intervene between nationalist Taiwan and communist China.⁴⁹

Then domestic pressure, the Sino-Soviet Treaty of February 1950, and Soviet and Chinese recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 18 and 20 January 1950 respectively, all hardened American attitudes. It was the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, however, which crystallised this pattern. In British eyes the United States then became something of a Frankenstein's monster; throttling Britain's policy of sweet reasonableness, and presenting the danger of a widening spiral of conflict.

The Asian 'Cold' War had accentuated the duality and tensions within British strategy even as it had led to intensified British efforts to put a regional policy into effect. Despite the onset of the Asian Cold War, Britain's regional policy in 1950 still represented a development from, rather than a replacement of, strategies which had been emerging by 1946. If Britain was determined to contain threats which it labelled as communist it still believed that this required careful courting of Asian states such as India and Indonesia. Many Asian states, however, remained jealous of their new independence, and sometimes differed from Britain over whether to make anti-colonialism or anti-communism the priority.

One example of the tensions this caused in British strategy was Britain's increasing support for French policy in Indochina from late 1949 to early 1950. This was despite the realisation that Ho Chi Minh and the communists were probably the only force with genuine, widespread support, and despite a continuing belief that French concessions to nationalism were insufficient. Here at least, stopping communism now took priority over both abstract notions of democracy and the needs of regional policy. Many Asian powers, however, were not ready to accept the *Viet Minh* should be treated solely as a Cold War threat, rather than as a nationalist movement. In these circumstances, few Asian countries would be able to ascribe to any East-West alliance cobbled together on an anti-communist basis. Not surprisingly, in the summer of 1953 the Foreign Office informed the COS that, of the Asian countries, only the Philippines and Thailand might seek membership if a regional defence pact were formed.⁵⁰

It might be argued, however, that the period 1948-49 marks a more dramatic break from previous policy. That holding Malaya and Singapore as a point in the global Cold War became, after 1949, an aim in itself, rather than communism simply supplanting Asian nationalism as the main challenge to British interests.

This is in part a question about British motives. From late 1948 the BDCC, MacDonald, and then the COS and the Foreign Office, began to discuss regional policy in Southeast Asia more and more in terms of holding the region as a point the global Cold War. The COS also stressed the importance of the Singapore bases for controlling air and sea communications between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, as well as the strategic importance of the region's resources.⁵¹

Several other motives, however, are sufficient to explain Britain's commitment to defend Malaya and Singapore with a regional policy. Such a policy was over-determined. It was seen as necessary to provide a safe international environment for Malaya and Singapore, with their indispensable dollar earnings and their importance to Anglo-Australian relations. This was quite apart from any desire to remain a regional power, or the need to show a determination to defend colonial territories, lest measured decolonisation should start to turn into scuttle. The test this work will apply to see which motives predominated, concerned as it is with defence posture rather than planning *per se*, will be: how far Britain was willing to take risks and commit resources in support of regional policy? What price, if any, was Britain willing to pay for the defence of the wider region, or for any part of it other than British territories?⁵²

Regardless of how far resisting the expansion of communism in the region was an additional motive in its own right, the Asian Cold War did increase the difficulties involved in Britain's regional policies. The onset of the Asian Cold War in 1948-50 led to communism, rather than Asian nationalism, being seen as the primary threat in Southeast Asia. It accelerated Britain's implementation of a regional strategy, complicated Britain's relations with Asian states, and led to increased military planning. For though the regional threat was seen as primarily one of politics and subversion, it was thought that local states needed to be convinced that Western countries would defend the area. In addition, Britain needed contingency plans to deal with the possibility of Thailand falling in the Cold War. The resulting acceleration of defence planning, and the way British perceptions of a Tonkin-Thailand-Kra nexus shaped responses, is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

In summary, in 1950 Britain still hoped to play a pivotal role in drawing Asian states into partnership with the West. This political policy was supposed to help Britain to gradually replace colonial control of Asian possessions with post-independence cooperation. It was also intended to encourage local resistance to communism without drawing heavily on scarce resources. The assessment of the regional threat as primarily political allowed Britain to conclude that large quantities of British resources would not be required. Where Western aid was needed, for instance to underpin the Colombo Plan and to shore up French Indochina, Britain hoped America would pick up the bill while remaining amenable to British advice.

Britain continued to believe early decolonisation in India and Burma, combined with diplomatic skill and moderate policies, would boost its influence. It also intended that a stance of firm support for resisting communist expansion should not undermine attempts to placate China. If the defence of Malaya and

Singapore thus far seems to have touched on matters as far apart as India and Hong Kong, the next section must go still further. For though 'China policy' was a subject in its own right, developments in China and Korea were seen as having a direct significance for Malaya and Singapore.

BRITAIN, THE UNITED STATES, AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

Communism was increasingly seen as the main threat in Southeast Asia, China as a major external stimulus to regional communism. It gave training and arms to the *Viet Minh*, whose success Britain believed might see Thailand turn communist. Hong Kong's vulnerability to attack, and China's influence over the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, reinforced Britain's desire to court it. Yet Anglo-American China policy could not be formulated with reference to Southeast Asia alone. Responses to China's East Asian policies inevitably intruded. In this way, Malayan defence, and that of the Southeast Asian region in which it was located, became connected to events in East Asia.

Developments in East Asia were to harden American attitudes towards China, accentuating Anglo-American policy differences. On 25 June 1950, North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea, threatening to push US and Korean forces off the peninsula. On the 27th, the United Nations recommended members assist South Korea. Cabinet then decided American containment of communism must be supported. On 28 June, nearby British ships were ordered to assist Korean operations.

Despite this, Britain worried about the strategic displacement of forces from Europe, even that Korea might be a communist feint. On 24 to 25 July the British Cabinet reluctantly overrode COS warnings that resources were stretched and agreed to send two battalions to Korea. The Cabinet did not see Korea as vital in itself, but felt it necessary to underscore Anglo-American relations and NATO, and to demonstrate anti-communist solidarity. In an ironic twist, Britain's Korean involvement was thus a reflection of its global and European priorities, not of desires to sustain influence 'East of Suez'.⁵³

The intensification of fighting in Korea was to test Britain's commitment. On 15 September, General Douglas MacArthur landed at Inchon behind North Korean lines. The surprised communist forces were sent reeling back, and Chinese warnings against crossing the 38th parallel were ignored in early October. MacArthur advanced almost to the River Yalu, which formed the border with China. In response, Chinese volunteers intervened at the end of the month.

With massive Chinese intervention by November, it again seemed an allied 'Dunkirk' might become necessary. Truman replied to questions at a 30 November press conference in a way that implied the atomic bomb was an option.⁵⁴ Attlee had already told the Cabinet, on 29 November, that Korea (separated from the industrial potential of Japan only by the narrow Straits of Tsushima) was of only symbolic importance. The Cabinet also worried that

MacArthur wanted to attack military targets in Manchuria, threatening to widen the war and divert resources from Europe and the Middle East.⁵⁵

Attlee hurried to Washington on 3 December. There he found the United States not contemplating using the bomb. The Foreign Office nevertheless remained alarmed at American attitudes, which they argued might lead to direct Sino-American conflict. With a Sino-Soviet Treaty signed on 14 February 1950, this would risk Soviet involvement, especially if there were attacks on Manchuria. With bombers of the United States Strategic Air Command in East Anglia, Britain would be a prime target if global war resulted.⁵⁶

In December 1950, Britain still favoured diplomatic recognition of China, its admittance to the United Nations, and an attempt to engage it in normal diplomatic relations. Britain was determined to stick to this policy even if it meant discussing Taiwan's status. In the winter of 1950–51, Britain realised it would not be able to make quick progress on any of these issues. Britain's China policy then stalled because of an overriding desire to avoid damaging Anglo-American relations, and aversion to causing a public split amongst Western powers.⁵⁷ Britain accepted frustration over a policy it rated extremely important. So important that Britain had recognised China, in January 1950, despite being warned by the Colonial Office that this would encourage Malayan communists, and despite the fact that Australia declined to do likewise.

Anglo-Indian moves in the United Nations now failed to find any basis for negotiation with China, the latter rejecting proposals outright. Britain then had little alternative but to vote, on 1 February 1951, for an American-sponsored motion in the United Nations condemning Chinese 'aggression'. By June 1951 Britain had also agreed to place the issue of Chinese membership of the United Nations on hold. It further acquiesced in tightened trade controls on 'strategic' goods – despite 45 per cent of Hong Kong's exports being China-bound.* By June 1951 this included a total ban on Malayan rubber exports to China.⁵⁸ Britain's policy of 'keeping a foot in the door' had now been largely submerged by American determination to take a strong stand. In 1950–53 British ambitions shrunk from keeping a foot in the door in the hope of improving relations, to keeping a toe in the door to avoid escalating Sino-American tension triggering wider conflict.⁵⁹

The fighting in Korea stabilised in 1951. Negotiations on a ceasefire started in on 8 July 1951, bogging down on how to supervise any armistice, and whether POWs should be allowed to decline repatriation.⁶⁰ In the meanwhile, there was the question of how to respond should China attempt to break the stalemate by massively increasing the level of fighting. In May 1951 the British Cabinet agreed that heavy Chinese bombing of allied forces in Korea might justify attacks on source air bases. Nevertheless, they considered prior consultation

* Han Suyin, *My House Has Two Doors*, p. 269, presents this as tragic affecting livelihoods – and farcical: 'Since 1957 ... each duck exported from Hong Kong ... was to be accompanied by a certificate of origin. This was a stamp upon its webbed foot ... certifying the duck was born in Hong Kong, from eggs laid in Hong Kong by parent ducks resident in Hong Kong. Certificates of origin were required for everything ...'.

crucial. There was no question of endorsing a general counter-strike against China, only a measured response.⁶¹

By late 1951 it was also necessary to consider what should be done if the Chinese were to break any armistice negotiations might lead to, and how to prevent a peace in Korea from displacing conflict to Southeast Asia. In November, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) insisted any armistice be accompanied by a warning of dire consequences should it be broken. This set in train an investigation of strategies for retaliating against any Chinese aggression, whether in Korea or Southeast Asia.⁶²

The JCS opposed British requests to set up a military organisation covering Southeast Asia. They proposed Chinese aggression should be countered by blockading the China coast and air and naval action against selected targets. British and French support was seen as a requirement, if only token. Britain, by contrast, had no intention of endorsing plans of this nature. It wanted planning machinery, as a means to access and influence American thinking.⁶³ This might encourage the French in Indochina, and provide Britain with an excuse to involve the United States in planning for a Kra operation.

On 11 January 1952 the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General (CIGS) Sir William Slim, met American and French counter-parts. They agreed on the need to warn China against intervening in Southeast Asia, which raised the question of how to back it up. General Bradley, Chairman of the JCS, insisted 'we couldn't go back to the same type of [attritional] fighting as in Korea'. Slim's opposition to using the atomic bomb as a threat was not contradicted, the limited stock of weapons being referred to. Slim then suggested an ad hoc military committee should investigate the possibility of a warning on the lines of that agreed for Korea (and issued on 7 August 1953); that responses to aggression might not be confined to the area of aggression.⁶⁴

When it met in February 1952, this Ad Hoc Committee confirmed differences. The British COS envisaged bombing only areas of China adjacent to any battlefield, the American JCS believed it necessary to bomb Chinese ports and communications. The COS felt blockade would be ineffective unless it included eastern Soviet ports, involving risking global war. Churchill wrote: 'It would be silly to waste bombs in the inchoate mass of China and wrong to kill thousands of people for no purpose'.⁶⁵

As early as 1950, the COS believed war between America and China would be like the battle between the whale and the elephant. Neither could do the other real harm. China was seen as a rural, undeveloped country ..., 'and human life in China is held very cheap. A historic tradition of flood and famine have rendered the Chinese people impervious to large-scale destruction of the extent that could be imposed by atomic attack'. While China was seen as able to withstand bombing, it could seize Hong Kong and overwhelm Indochina, cause Thailand's subsequent fall to communism, and so threaten Malaya. A failed atomic attack might even undermine the value of nuclear deterrence against the Soviet Union.⁶⁶

Despite Anglo-American differences, both wanted to boost French morale in Indochina. In addition, the Americans sought allied approval for their bombing

and blockade strategy, the British, planning machinery. Officials met in June 1952 to thrash out a political directive for more planning. A messy compromise resulted. The objective of any action would be to cause China 'to cease an aggression', but action should be confined, at least initially, to, 'the area of aggression and support areas in Chinese territory'.⁶⁷

This vagueness left the Britain hoping to trim American ideas and yet still secure military machinery. The Americans still hoped for allied commitment to the wide-ranging bombing and blockade they thought necessary to induce China to cease any aggression.

Partly in order to edge their allies towards this strategy, the JCS agreed to some planning coordination. This involved military planners from Britain, France, America, Australia and New Zealand. An ad hoc five power military meeting of October 1952 paved the way for a 'Five Power Staff Agency'. This involved military officials meeting occasionally to debate Southeast Asian plans, without commitment. After a preparatory meeting in April 1953, this first convened at Pearl Harbor in June to July. Studies ranged from the effects of bombing and blockade, to schemes for seizing Hainan. British planners agreed any China bombing should be limited to targets directly related to an aggression, rather than to a fixed radius of action from the battlefield, but they would go no further.⁶⁸

During discussions, it remained unclear if American bombing would include atomic bombs. In February to March 1953 there was serious American consideration of this, against the eventuality of Korean negotiations breaking down. At Bermuda, on 7 December 1953, President Eisenhower told Churchill that, if war in Korea resumed, 'the most effective weapons' should be used. This included atomic bombs, which he said were now regarded as established weapons of war. The British Defence Committee, however, would only reaffirm its May 1951 commitment, that the source bases of heavy air attacks could, in principle, be bombed; and the 16-nation joint declaration of 7 August 1953, that the consequences of renewed Chinese aggression in Korea might not be confined to Korea itself. In particular, it could not agree to the use of atomic weapons.⁶⁹

Yet in February 1954 the Five Power Staff Agency's steering committee concluded that, unless the use of weapons of mass destruction were contemplated, realistic appraisals on Southeast Asian defence were not possible. In the context of the *Viet Minh* investment of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu, it was agreed future studies should consider the possible use of nuclear weapons by both sides.⁷⁰

Britain still believed nuclear action against China would be ineffective and politically suicidal. It would highlight the issue of white supremacy over yellow in its acutest form, the first atomic bombs having been dropped by white America on yellow Japan.⁷¹ Atlantic-oriented Britain was also unwilling to accept even a remote risk of global war, and nuclear destruction, in order to contain communism in Asia.

Britain's record in multilateral planning in this way echoed regional policy. American and French action to hold Indochina were encouraged, but only in so

far as they involved no serious diversion of American attention away from Europe, and if the risk of tripping wider conflict was negligible. Britain sought to encourage others to provide for the defence of the region and yet to retain influence and minimise its own commitments. When Britain did contribute forces outside of its own territories, in Korea, this had more to do with underpinning Anglo-American cooperation against communism and in NATO than it did with British concerns about Asia. There was a continuous tension between the British desire to maintain influence over America and encourage regional, anti-communist and non-communist states, and its equal determination to commit little more than words to the task.

Increasing American involvement in East and Southeast Asia was also a double-edged weapon. Vital resources were provided, but Britain found itself overshadowed by American policy, over which it exercised little substantive influence. Far from harnessing American power, Britain found itself trying to prevent American policies undermining its own strategy. The American approach of deterring and confronting China threatened to erode the foundations from under the British policy, which envisaged bringing the West and non-communist Asian states together, and drawing China into the international community.⁷²

BRITAIN, AUSTRALIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

If attempts to harness American and Indian support enjoyed equivocal success, how far did Australia help alleviate Britain's Southeast Asian burden? Again, this is a complex question. For, just as Britain's policy towards China saw East and Southeast Asian concerns overlap, defence relations with Australia involved balancing Southeast Asia against the Middle East.

Britain had to decide which area it most wanted to direct Australian attention to, assuming Australia was willing to cooperate at all. For Australia's resort to the 1951 ANZUS Pact has sometimes been seen as a decisive turning away from Britain, the result of British betrayal at Singapore.⁷³ In this tripartite pact with Australia and New Zealand, the United States recognised that armed attack on any of the parties would be dangerous to its own safety. Signed on 1 September 1951, effective from April 1952, ANZUS symbolised Australia's new-found willingness to enter agreements which excluded Britain.⁷⁴

The 'Great Betrayal' and Postwar Planning⁷⁵

In one sense the fall of Singapore had represented a betrayal of Australia, and so catapulted Australia into an American embrace. Britain had encouraged Australia to commit forces to the Mediterranean, and then provided inadequate defences for Singapore. How far Britain had been economical in sharing information with Australia is more questionable. Australia was well aware the Royal Navy would be stretched if Britain simultaneously faced Germany, Italy and Japan. With America neutral, however, there was little choice but to rely on Britain.

With their confidence betrayed, Australian politicians determined not to be forced to trust Britain again.⁷⁶ Australia wanted to become 'a metropolitan country' in the Pacific, with sufficient forces and diplomatic posts to form independent judgements and to give their opinion weight.⁷⁷ It was this quest for leverage, to escape mere dependence, that underlay Australian responses to the war. Australia's brief wartime embrace with America was, ironically, to suggest that more and not less Commonwealth cooperation was necessary.

After the fall of Singapore Japanese forces thrust southwards. The Netherlands East Indies fell in March. On 19 February the first air-raid on Darwin confirmed that for Australia, 'What Britain calls the Far East is to us the Near North'. With Japanese forces on New Guinea, Australia felt alone and open to invasion. The fall of Singapore only confirmed the need for forward defence, the impression that the Indonesian archipelago linked rather than separated Australia and Asia. 1942 left Australia schizophrenic over Malaya. The memory of defeat would make a return difficult. Yet the memory of Darwin gave Malaya a latent significance as the gatehouse to the Indonesian archipelago, which stretched like a pontoon-bridge between Malaya and Australia.

On 29 December 1941 John Curtin, the Prime Minister of Australia from October 1941, appealed to the United States, 'free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom ...'. General Douglas MacArthur established his South West Pacific Area Command (SWPA) in Australia. American ships checked the Japanese Navy at the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942 and turned the tide at the battle of Midway in June. There could be no doubt the United States was now the only effective 'Blue Sea' guarantor for Australia.⁷⁸

Against this, MacArthur denied Australia an effective voice in higher command. Australian attempts to gain access to the war's political direction were frustrated. Pacific Councils established in London and Washington in March and April 1942 respectively were talking shops. Australian anxieties about exclusion from decisions, especially about postwar planning, were fed by the Cairo conference of December 1943. There the United States, Britain and China made decisions on the postwar fate of Japanese territories without consulting Australia.

Australia responded with the January 1944 Australia-New Zealand (ANZAC) Agreement. This demanded the two Dominions participate fully in the any postwar settlement for Japan. It suggested a regional zone of defence be established, comprising the South West and South Pacific area, and based in Australia and New Zealand.⁷⁹

At the October 1944 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference Curtin pressed the theme of regional defence, 'The best defence of Australia ... is to be secured on the island screen to the north of these Dominions ... Australia cannot provide a fleet and equip a base like Singapore ... Co-operation with the United Kingdom is therefore essential ... [and] plans should exist between other powers'.⁸⁰

At the same time, British leaders were looking for a way of harnessing Commonwealth power so as to alleviate postwar burdens. Canada and South

Africa (with their significant French and Boer populations) were as determined as ever to resist centralised imperial planning. Nevertheless, the COS were anxious to get acceptance of the principle of each Dominion becoming a 'Main Support Area'. As such, a Dominion would provide industrial and logistic support, and in return take planning responsibility for its own region. By accepting a position of influential cooperation, rather than outright leadership, Britain hoped to secure resources which would make Commonwealth defence practical, despite British constraints, and despite Britain's vulnerability to atomic attack. These ideas were pursued at the April to May 1946 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. Each Dominion was to assume responsibility for joint defence planning in its area, assisted by service liaison representatives from other Commonwealth countries.⁸¹

Chifley, the Australian (Labor Party) Prime Minister from July 1945 until December 1949, told the conference there should be a larger Australian defence contribution, which should be in the Pacific. Australian defence ideas, however, were dominated by the idea of an island and naval defence against a revitalised Japan, a maritime concept in which Malaya played little part. Chifley was wary of British suggestions that Australia accept responsibility for Southeast Asian planning. He did not want to imply Australian responsibility for finding the resources.⁸²

Chifley's abrasive External Affairs minister, Herbert Vere Evatt, also proposed policies, such as United Nations' trusteeship for colonies, which clashed with British interests. As a small nation, the liberal internationalist principles underpinning the United Nations offered Australia more opportunity of influencing foreign affairs than Britain's balance of power approach. They also suited Evatt's background as a lawyer who had fought for working class rights through due process of the law. Bevin, by contrast, brought to foreign affairs experience of hard bargaining as a trade unionist.⁸³ The Australian Labor Party's concern to build peace on the basis of the United Nations, and with international justice and the rights of small powers and the colonised, continued to colour Australian policy until 1949. These priorities caused friction with Britain's increasingly *realpolitik* approach to the Soviet Union and the Cold War.

Chifley and Evatt nevertheless wanted a Commonwealth axis, to draw the United States into a Pacific defence organisation. Australia needed to place itself at the centre of Commonwealth planning if it was to maximise its influence over American decision-making, to escape from mere dependence. In 1948 Chifley and Evatt's opposition to British war planning which assumed the hostility of the Soviet Union began to dissipate.⁸⁴

Australian concern to achieve Commonwealth coordination of Pacific defence was thus driven as much by its inability to influence British and American planning in 1941-45 as by estimates of Soviet intentions. In 1948 a British services liaison mission was established in Australia. By the time that the Commonwealth Prime Ministers next met in London, in October 1948, there were serious communist uprisings in Burma, Malaya and the Philippines. With communists also pushing south in China, the main Commonwealth response was

political, to encourage Asian cooperation and stability, and to draw in American resources. The October 1948 conference also agreed on the need to increase regional military cooperation. Australia was reassured that assuming responsibility for coordinating planning would not imply increasing its burdens. In May 1948 Australia took up the running, suggesting it assume planning responsibility in an area stretching from Malaya to the Pacific waters surrounding New Zealand. This later came to be known as the ANZAM (Australia, New Zealand and Malayan) area.⁸⁵

The Australian Defence machinery, with British and New Zealand representation, was to initiate ANZAM regional naval and air plans. Local defence, including that of British Southeast Asian territories, remained outside its scope. All plans were subject to agreement by the three national Chiefs of Staff. Attlee informed Chifley of British agreement in December 1948. The Australian government formally endorsed ANZAM in 1950, and in February 1951 the United States recognised the ANZAM region for limited naval purposes.

For Britain and Australia, ANZAM was a way of coordinating Commonwealth planning in order to achieve satisfactory Commonwealth representation on any wartime American Pacific command. Britain hoped that, having gained real partnership in Commonwealth war planning for the Pacific, Australia would now provide more resources for global defence. In a strange twist, the COS saw ANZAM not as a means of drawing Australia into Malaya, but back into the Middle East.

The COS reasoned that in global war American bases on Okinawa would neutralise any Soviet menace to the Pacific and Southeast Asia. With China in turmoil and Japan occupied there was no other threat. Australian responsibility for the ANZAM area was therefore likely to encourage it to accept Middle East commitments. In August 1949 the Australian planners agreed that, in global war, the Middle East appeared to be the priority.⁸⁶

The COS rated the Middle East as one of the 'three pillars' of imperial strategy, along with home defence and the protection of Commonwealth sea communications. It provided an important source of oil, a shield to Africa, and a forward base from which atomic bombers could reach the heartland of the Soviet Union. The Middle East strategy received final confirmation by June 1947, and it remained Britain's first priority for wartime reinforcement until 1950. In summer 1950 NATO's development did lead to a fall in priority for Middle East reinforcements, but only to second place behind Europe.⁸⁷

As early as 11 September 1949, the Prime Minister of New Zealand committed his forces to British direction (and so the Middle East) in global war. Australian planners were also sympathetic to the argument that, with America securing Asia, they could best prop up the Western world in the Middle East. Australia, however, had felt the hot breath of Asia down its neck in a way New Zealand had not. It was unwilling to accept British assurances that Southeast Asia was safe without an American guarantee.⁸⁸ Before further tracing British attempts to commit Australia to the Middle East, however, we must ask what

scope there was for persuading Australia to provide more resources for the defence of Southeast Asia.

'Splendid Fighters'⁸⁹

The call for Commonwealth contributions to ease imperial burdens was a *leitmotif* in British planning. There was, therefore, a tension between the need to focus Australian attention on Cold War forces for Southeast Asia, and yet on a global war role in the Middle East. When, in 1950, the COS examined strategic requirements for the Far East, they expected an increasing Australian role in maintaining political, economic and political stability in Southeast Asia. This was, however, to be without prejudice to British sovereignty, or to any contribution to the Middle East. British policy was to have their Australian cake and eat it.⁹⁰

The problem was that 1942 had left a deep Australian ambivalence over Southeast Asia. The Japanese thrust southwards in 1941-42 had increased the Australian sense of geo-demographic vulnerability, and so willingness to invest in security. It also reinforced a limitation. 'Populate or Perish' was the battle-cry of 1947, when a new immigration scheme acknowledged that suitably pale Europeans, as well as British, were necessary to fill the Australian vacuum.⁹¹

The stress on immigration and development, together with a tradition of citizen's militia forces with limited liability to serve overseas, left Australia with few of the infantry crucial to imperial tasks. The 1947 five year defence plan envisaged a regular army spearheaded by a single brigade group (of around 4,500). In reality there were about a thousand men available as infantry in 1949, by which point the single battalion left in Japan had ceased to be an effective field unit. Australia had to scrape together volunteers to raise even a single battalion for Korea in 1950. Despite the desire to court American opinion during negotiations for a Pacific Pact, the decision to send a second battalion to Korea was not taken until September 1950.

By contrast, in February 1951 Britain fielded in excess of 10 divisions, with a third stationed outside Europe. Yet in the Second World War Australia had sent three divisions to the Middle East. After the war it retained a volunteer militia capable of providing the framework for a new expeditionary force. While the COS perceived a real risk of global war, they were unwilling to abandon the prospect of three or more 'ANZAC' divisions in order to secure Cold War forces which would be an Australian drop in an imperial ocean.⁹²

The Australian Navy and Airforce, however, could send forces overseas on a compulsory basis. By the end of 1949 Australia had an operational aircraft carrier, a cruiser and several destroyers and frigates. As early as 1948 Australia contributed 40 aircrew to the Berlin airlift.

Unfortunately, the declaration of the Emergency in Malaya in June 1948, when Britain had managed to form just one brigade of its proposed central strategic reserve, meant Britain most needed infantry. Chifley was informally asked how he would respond to an approach for forces for Malaya. The answer

was negative. Chifley's Labour government was willing to send equipment but not men. Where British policy-makers emphasised communist direction behind Malayan insurgency, the Australian government placed a heavier emphasis on social, economic, and labour problems and on nationalist grievances. Consequently it called for a focus on conciliation rather than just coercion.

In part, this reflected Australia's more 'idealist' approach to foreign relations and the Soviet Union. It also stemmed from concerns about the nature of the 'counter-terror' approach Britain adopted towards Malayan insurgency in 1948-49. There was suspicion by Australia, as an ex-colony, that its parent state's attitudes to nationalism were not always as progressive as they might be. The Australian Labor Party's self-identity as the guardians of the underdog was compounded of the Irish roots of much of its supporters, a colonial past, and fighting for working class rights. There had been Australian sympathy for Indonesian Republicans after 1945, and in 1948-49 Australia also tried to encourage negotiations in Greece, between the Greek government and communist insurgents: negotiations which Britain feared might facilitate subversion. There were major disagreements within the Australian administration over how far even the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) should be written off as communist, how far seen as reflecting anti-colonialist revolt.⁹³

When in May 1949 Britain was looking for reinforcements for Hong Kong, Australia was again unhelpful. New Zealand, by contrast, made available three to four frigates from June 1949, and a transport flight of five *Dakotas*. This provided transport services for Hong Kong and, as a by-product, supply services in the Malayan Emergency.

In December 1949, Chifley's Labour government fell to Robert Menzies's Liberal-Country coalition. The coalition's base in the countryside and amongst employers large and small gave it a vigorous anti-communist hue. The election campaign played up the threat of domestic and international communism, following communist-led strikes and accusations of inadequacy in Australian security. Menzies's party also represented the more Anglophile section of the Australian elite, and he was inclined to see himself as a statesman whose stature demanded a Commonwealth rather than a mere Australian stage.

This represented a change from the Chifley government's fading anti-colonialism and internationalism. Electoral defeat may also have reflected some public impatience with Labor's stance of limiting active support for Britain's in the Cold War. Behind the scenes, meanwhile, the Australian COS had continued to be more sympathetic to British dilemmas, and to the British desire to plan against Soviet aggression on a global scale.⁹⁴

On 21 and 24 April 1950 Menzies was asked if Australia could supply a squadron each of *Dakota* transports and of *Lincoln* bombers for Malaya. On 2 May the Australian Cabinet still worried commitments might prove long-lasting, and that contributing to Britain's 'militaristic' policy could undermine the Colombo strategy of drawing Asian states into cooperation. Nevertheless, it believed that if Malaya fell to communism Indonesia might follow, and that Malaya was drawing British forces away from more important areas, namely, the

Middle East. In May, Australia agreed to provide the *Dakotas*. The outbreak of the Korean War settled remaining doubts about despatching more offensive aircraft. On 27 and 28 June the Australian Cabinet agreed to send the *Dakotas*, *Lincolns* and a military mission (including jungle warfare experts). It should not, however, be presumed that this led inexorably to the sending of an Australian infantry battalion in 1955. The emphasis was on temporary help to Britain in a limited conflict, when no significant external threat to Malaya was perceived.⁹⁵ In addition, this in no way deflected Menzies's belief that Australia's main wartime responsibility should be the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the Australian commitment of two battalions to Korea up to 1953 ruled out sending any ground forces to Malaya or anywhere else. Responding to American requests was seen as storing up useful goodwill to assist Australia's search for a Pacific guarantee, as a small downpayment on an insurance policy. Australia, meanwhile, still inclined towards making the Middle East its main priority in global war.⁹⁶

Anzam to Commonwealth Strategic Reserve

In 1949 British approaches for an Australian Middle East commitment had met with sympathy but not results. Australia remained reluctant to commit forces without clear indications of American plans for the Pacific. It needed reassurance that the United States would screen the northern approaches to Australia. Nevertheless, in a June 1950 visit to Australia the CIGS, Slim, contrasted Japanese sea-power in 1942 to the Soviet Union's continental orientation. Australia subsequently drew up alternative plans for reinforcing either the Middle East or Southeast Asia.⁹⁷

On 14 July 1950, Menzies reassured Ministers in London that he believed, as he had in 1939-40, that keeping Australian forces at home in total war played into their enemies' hands. In December Sheddin and Menzies told MacDonald they believed it was important Australia did not become 'Malaya minded'. Australian priorities in July to December 1950 can be described as the Middle East in total war, with reservations, Malaya in the Cold War.⁹⁸ The problem was to secure access to American global planning, and an American guarantee in the Pacific.

The Korean War encouraged the United States to show more sympathy towards Australian desires for a Pacific security arrangement. Initially the United States proposed an offshore island pact, avoiding commitments in Hong Kong or mainland Asia, and including Japan and the Philippines. Anticipating a soft Japanese peace treaty, however, Australia wanted a compensatory guarantee against Japan, not a pact including it. Britain opposed any wider pact from which it was excluded, and believed any Pacific Pact was premature while wider Asian, particularly Indian support, was unlikely.

With no immediate prospect of a wide offshore alliance, the United States became more sympathetic to Australian needs. On 15 to 17 February 1951 John Foster Dulles, as American envoy on the Japanese peace treaty negotiations, agreed the outlines of a tripartite pact with Australia and New Zealand. On

12 March, Attlee persuaded Cabinet not to oppose the agreement, despite some ministers' deep reservations about the effect of Britain's exclusion on Hong Kong and Malaya.⁹⁹

Signed in September 1951, operative on 29 April 1952, ANZUS was both the Australian 'price' for a soft Japanese treaty, and reflected American efforts to encourage allied assistance against communism in Asia. Despite the angst British exclusion caused in London, it potentially freed Australia to concentrate on the Middle East.¹⁰⁰ It was therefore not entirely unwelcome to the COS.¹⁰¹

Britain kept up the pressure for commitments to the Middle East. In September 1951 Australia was reassured it would take nine and a half months before a Chinese threat to Malaya could develop in global war. Britain would defend Malaya with the forces *in situ*, and should they fail the American navy would screen Australia.¹⁰²

On 3 and 4 December the Australian Cabinet finally agreed it should send the first of any wartime reinforcements to the Middle East. This reflected the determination of Menzies, Shedden and the Australian COS that, as in 1941, the main global enemy, now the Soviet Union, was the key to victory or defeat. Had the decision been communicated to the British government it would have been an unprecedented advance commitment.

As it was, confusion in early 1952 about precisely what Australia would commit (especially air forces levels) was followed by increasing concern over Southeast Asia. Calls by the Department of External Affairs for stronger emphasis on this region began to be entertained more sympathetically by the military and Menzies.¹⁰³

The decision for a Middle East priority (which was not now communicated) had probably come in December because it then appeared ANZUS provided an American guarantee and access to American planning. Between the signing of ANZUS on 1 September 1951 and its inauguration in April 1952, however, it became obvious that any access to American planning would be very limited. As a result, Australia reverted to the attitude that wartime deployment would be to the Middle East or Asia depending on circumstances.

Australia did send two (half-strength) fighter squadrons to Malta in 1952-54, and a New Zealand squadron was despatched to Cyprus. This was partly the result of British pressure for Middle East Cold War contributions from January 1951. In the latter case it was also partly a result of Britain's offer to supply the aircraft.

Spring 1952, however, saw rising concern over Indochina. In February a French campaign in Tonkin, to extend the fortified Red River Delta area around Hanoi to Hoa Binh, an adjacent town, was abandoned. In April 1953 the *Viet Minh* penetrated Laos almost to the Thai border. Menzies's spring 1952 trips to Washington and London also confirmed Britain and America were downgrading the likelihood of global war (and so the value of Australian involvement in the Middle East), and upgrading the Southeast Asian Cold War.¹⁰⁴

In January 1953 an Australian Defence Committee report entitled 'A Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy', which subsequently received government

approval, warned that if Malaya fell Indonesia could become communist. It then would remain a threat to Australia even if China and the Soviet Union were defeated. Officially this paper still only placed Southeast Asia over the Middle East in Cold, not global, war. Nevertheless, it envisaged a long regional Cold War in which Australian contributions to a strategic reserve in Malaya would eventually be desirable.¹⁰⁵

In 1951-52 Britain maintained its conviction that Australia should send its first reinforcements in global war to the Middle East. Southeast Asia, however, was rising in salience. On 31 March 1952 the Chief of Air Staff, Slessor, told the COS committee that the West would hold an atomic preponderance for at least a few years. Was it not wise to, 'plug the gap in the Far East' where 'soldiers counted for more than bombs'? A COS's Global Strategy Paper endorsed by the Defence Committee in July 1952 confirmed that increasing nuclear power would result in global war being decided in 'the first few intense weeks'. The timescale for ANZAC reinforcements was months not weeks.¹⁰⁶

At the same time, the need for Australian assistance in Southeast Asia appeared to be growing. Should Indochina fall, British plans to hold the Kra position in Thailand would require reinforcements. A Malayan-based strategic reserve might play a crucial role. By the time Commonwealth Ministers met in London in June 1953 the COS were anxious for greater Australian contributions in Southeast Asia. A prospective Korean armistice (eventually signed on 27 July 1953) might release Australian manpower for a Malayan-based reserve. It might also allow the Chinese to escalate assistance to the *Viet Minh*, and so cause a general deterioration in Southeast Asia. On 29 June 1953 the Minister of Defence, Lord Alexander, wrote to Menzies suggesting a strategic reserve would help prevent a recrudescence of Korean-type fighting, and suggesting representatives of the British and New Zealand COS discuss the matter with the Australian Defence Committee. Yet increased Australian commitments to Southeast Asia were still seen as additional to, not a replacement for, its role in reinforcing the Middle East.¹⁰⁷

In August, the Australian Defence Committee reaffirmed their support for a strategic reserve.¹⁰⁸ It would demonstrate Western determination to resist communist expansion. Malaya was considered an ideal location. Its climate was similar to Indochina's, it was a likely point of aggression, possessed logistic facilities, and yet was relatively secure. Involvement in anti-communist operations would sustain morale and provide operational experience at little extra cost. Australia was torn between a desire to contribute to Southeast Asia and memories of Singapore's fall in 1942; and between the Middle East and Malaya.

The Commonwealth Relations Office, however, now warned that Australian Cold War contributions could only be maximised by focusing all its attention on the Far East. With this in mind, in early October the COS accepted Australia should concentrate on the Far East in both war and peace.¹⁰⁹

On 19-21 October 1953 General Sir John Harding, then CIGS, met the Australian Defence Committee and New Zealand COS in the 'Melbourne'

discussions. These agreed New Zealand's wartime priorities should remain unchanged, but Australia should make Malaya its priority in war. The establishment of a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve was recommended. It was suggested Australia might contribute a battalion, a bomber squadron, and perhaps re-deploy two fighter squadrons from the Middle East to Malaya. Britain would earmark forces to make up a Commonwealth Infantry Brigade. Small naval contributions were envisaged. New Zealand would maintain its air contribution in Malaya at less than the equivalent of a squadron, including both maritime and transport aircraft. The British Defence Committee endorsed the Melbourne conclusions in January 1954.¹¹⁰

Conclusions

1942 was a turning point in Anglo-Australian military relations. The United States replaced Britain as Australia's ultimate 'Blue Water' guarantor in circumstances which left a suspicion of British policy. Ironically, however, Australia's inability to influence wartime strategy led it to attempt to position itself at the core of Commonwealth Pacific planning. The result was an intensified Anglo-Australian relationship, but with its terms and nature changed.¹¹¹

The Japanese sweep southwards also reinforced the image of the Indonesian archipelago as bridge rather than barrier between Australia and Asia. Ironically, catastrophe in Singapore confirmed the importance of forward defence, and the potential of Malaya as a forward base. From 1945-51, however, the overt military threat to Southeast Asia seemed insignificant. Furthermore, the scope for Australian support in the Southeast Asian Cold War seemed limited both by Australian politics and by its small standing forces, while its potential contribution to the wartime defence of the Middle East seemed significant.

This position only gradually reversed as global war became a more distant possibility, as Menzies replaced Chifley as Prime Minister, and as communist advance in Southeast Asia appeared increasingly likely.

In October 1953 the COS reluctantly decided to advise Australia to concentrate on Southeast Asia alone. This particular period ends with the prospect of more rather than less Anglo-Australian defence cooperation in Southeast Asia. The Australian perception of a rising communist threat in Asia had changed the primary focus of the Anglo-Australian military partnership from the Middle East to Malaya. The question now was: where would Australia choose to contribute to Southeast Asia's forward defence? If the risks in Indochina were judged too high the answer might be in Malaya alone. This might slow Australia's move away from Britain. If a return to Malaya was judged to be too politically sensitive, or the answer was to be with the United States in Indochina and Thailand as well, this might accelerate the drawing apart.

The degree to which Australian forces would lighten Britain's defence load in Southeast Asia, and to which Britain would continue to influence Australian strategy, was still an open question in 1954. In 1945-53, however, British policy

had tried to focus Australian efforts more on the Middle East than Southeast Asia. This leads to the question which the last section will tackle. If India was neutral, if Britain was reluctant to underpin regional strategy with resources, if it was ambivalent about American policies, and if Australia's limited forces were torn between the Mediterranean and Malaya, how did Britain intend to defend Singapore?

SONGKHLA AND THE EXTERNAL DEFENCE OF MALAYA

In global war Malaya continued to be considered peripheral, with some Malayan-based naval and air units to be withdrawn to the Middle East. Malaya would be left capable of little more than internal security.¹¹²

Yet Britain was determined to protect its territories in limited and Cold War. Though the main regional threat was identified as political, this was thought to present a real danger that countries to Malaya's north would succumb to communism, leaving Malaya vulnerable. It was also held that displays of Western determination would be vital psychological props for states battling against subversion. What plans did Britain develop to defend its core interests against this threat? How far did British planners' pre-existing understanding of the importance of the Songkhla position, and of the inter-linking of the security of Indochina and Thailand, shape responses to the Asian Cold War?

Chapter two showed how Phibun's conversion to the Japanese in 1941 left the impression the Siamese were like bamboo that would bend in the wind. After 1945 it was thought that if Indochina went communist Thailand would follow within months. North Indochina (Tonkin), was therefore seen as the key to the rice-bowl of Asia (Thailand, Burma and Indochina), and ultimately to Malaya. The idea of a nexus linking Indochina, Thailand and the Kra developed, with effective defence only possible at either end of the chain.

Any deterioration in Indochina would therefore intensify concern for the Kra, or Songkhla, position. This offered a narrow front of under 60 miles, with good lateral communications; rather than the snaking, permeable 300 miles of the Malayan-Thai border. British planning after 1942 therefore saw two main possible approaches, the denial of Tonkin to any enemy, or contingency planning to seize the Kra should Tonkin's fall cause a chain reaction.

Britain turned its mind to strategic control over the Kra peninsula within months of Singapore's fall. Thailand had been occupied by Japan, and declared war on Britain on 25 January 1942. In 1942-43 Britain decided it would require a free hand over the Kra Isthmus after the war, and the right to give Thailand military advice. British demands were moderated, however, after clauses for war damage compensation, and for enforcing cheap supplies of Thai rice, enabled Thailand to attract American sympathy after the war.¹¹³

The final Anglo-Thai 'Formal Agreement' of 1 January 1946 substituted United Nations in place of British military advice. Thailand acknowledged it was of importance for the defence of Malaya and Indochina. It was, therefore, to cooperate to assure international security, as considered appropriate by the

United Nations. With the Soviet Union holding the power of veto in the United Nations Security Council, this soon looked like a weak safeguard. Moreover, after 1946 Britain saw a democratic Thailand as a potential bastion of regional security, and this clashed with the initial approach of enforcing guarantees.¹¹⁴

By 1948 the COS wanted to draw Thailand into a regional security scheme, but this was for the time being precluded by Thai sympathies for nationalist struggles in Indochina and Indonesia. The Malayan Emergency, meanwhile, required active Thai cooperation. In September 1949, Britain secured an Anglo-Thai police agreement allowing 'hot pursuit' of insurgents across the border. By late 1949, Britain was helping to procure arms for Thailand and had made available security force training facilities in Malaya.

A military coup overthrew Thailand's democracy in 1947, with Phibun Songkram resuming power in April 1948. Thailand returned to a quasi-democratic stance, with the military dominating the legislature. British scruples about the Thai democracy were overcome, however, as Phibun's anti-communism reversed previous, tacit government support of the *Viet Minh*. The need to foster Thailand as a stable, friendly power submerged the goals of cast-iron security guarantees over the Kra, and of Thai democracy.¹¹⁵

The Kra continued to be considered the natural line of resistance for Malaya, but until 1950 there seemed little danger to Thailand.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the failure of Thai democracy kept alive fears that, once subjected to communist pressure, Thai governments which lacked popular roots would bend with the wind or be toppled. Phibun in particular was regarded as a born opportunist, after his rapid change of colours on 8 December 1941. It was thought that, *in extremis*, Phibun might even convert to communism.¹¹⁷

Britain believed Thai politics harboured the potential to turn leftwards. In the immediate post-war period Thailand had allowed *Viet Minh*, Lao and Indonesian independence movements to have arms-purchasing agencies in Bangkok.¹¹⁸ The 'Free Thais', perhaps led by ex-Prime Minister Pridi Panomyong, were regarded as a possible communist fifth column. 'Free Thai' referred to those who, like Pridi, assisted or sympathised with the wartime 'Free Thai' resistance to the Japanese. The group was perceived as sympathetic to the *Viet Minh*, and possibly to China too. Pridi and his supporters had dominated Thai politics in 1944-47, before the November 1947 military coup.

After the involvement of his supporters in unsuccessful coup attempts in February 1949 and June 1951, however, Pridi was a spent force. The balance of power was shared between Marshal Phibun (Prime Minister), Phao Sriyanond (Director of Police) and General Sarit Thanarat (Commander of the First Army in Bangkok).¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, if Thailand was to find itself confronting aggressive communism in Indochina, and unable to rely on Western support, it was conceivable one of these three might compound with communism, or other factions might seize power. The Thai border with Indochina and Laos was long and permeable, fringed in the north east with tribal minorities and Annamite refugees, both vulnerable to communist penetration.¹²⁰

To Britain, Thai politics appeared to rest on the manoeuvres of a small elite of military and police officers, whose popular support could only be guessed at. In December 1948 MacDonal told the Foreign Office that, though the Thai government wanted to resist communism, its people were 'weak'. In 1950, the Singapore-based Joint Intelligence (Advisory) Committee believed Thai politics 'far from stable', making it possible 'that when pressure is exerted Thailand will follow the same course as in 1941'. In a June 1951 coup attempt Phibun's colleagues had the boat his opponents detained him on bombed. In addition, in 1951 Phibun's opponents blocked office-holders from having any current military post. This gradually weakened Phibun's influence over the military. As late as 1954, MacDonal was still disparaging Thai ministers as 'lustly and immature'.¹²¹

This British fixation with Thai behaviour in 1941 may have been only partly warranted. Thailand and Phibun had only aligned with Japan at the last gasp in 1941, when the alternatives were cooperation or catastrophe. Thailand also had a Chinese minority of around three million (estimates vary around from around five to ten per cent of the population).¹²² Ethnic Thais, and particularly Phibun, who had treated Thailand's Chinese with firmness in his 1938-44 premiership, would hardly welcome communist Chinese influence. Thailand recognised the Associated States of Indochina in February 1950, sent troops to Korea, clamped down on its own communism with increasing severity from late 1950, and received American aid from early 1951. An American Military Advisory Assistance Group was also established in Bangkok. By mid-1954, Thailand's army and para-military police amounted to almost 100,000. Phibun had deliberately and bluntly put all his eggs in the Western-American, anti-communist basket.¹²³

Britain had already underestimated the Malayan communists, and the West was to fatally miscalculate *Viet Minh* durability. Why was France, which capitulated to Japanese demands in Indochina from 1940, before being contemptuously brushed aside in March 1945, a better bet than an indigenous Thai regime? France already faced nationalist rebellion in Indochina, and was distracted by the fear of German resurgence in Europe. How far did British underestimation of Asians contribute to its 'domino theory', to its support of France in Indochina, and to its heavy reliance on a risky Songkhla plan? Alternative strategies, for instance urging compromise with the *Viet Minh*, firm support for Thailand, and combining Songkhla planning with the development of Malayan infrastructure, were not seriously considered.¹²⁴

By contrast, Britain concluded a fragile Thailand must be screened by a pro-Western Indochina. This fuelled alarm at what it saw as French mismanagement of Indochina; France being neither willing to grant its Indochinese territories the equivalent of 'Dominion Status', nor able to reestablish authority in the north. We must now examine Indochinese developments, before seeing how Britain's defence posture was shaped by the combination of these with attitudes to Songkhla and Thailand, and by a reluctance to commit resources to regional defence.

The communist-dominated and solidly supported *Viet Minh* front declared the 'Democratic Republic of Vietnam' (DRV) independent on 2 September 1945. The return of effective French power to the south, which was reoccupied by the British after the war, was possible by 1946. The return to the north was complicated by the Chinese Nationalist Government's responsibility for reoccupying Indochina north of the sixteenth parallel. They did not recognise the DRV, but neither did they challenge its power. Consequently France came to an agreement which allowed French troops to return to the cities, while preserving internal autonomy for the DRV. The result was a smouldering truce, which flared into full-scale fighting by December 1946. The *Viet Minh* then increasingly dominated the north outside of the Red River Delta and the main towns.

Grudging French concessions did little to prevent the *Viet Minh* consolidating. Britain swung from hoping the French would prove useful regional allies to qualified neutrality, as the inadequacy of French concessions became evident. As late as May 1949, France's position in Indochina was thought to be in no immediate danger. There was also hope that Sino-Vietnamese conflict stretching back to the tenth century might counter-act any *Viet Minh* temptation to enlist Chinese help.¹²⁵

From late 1948, however, the Foreign Office increasingly feared Mao Tse Tung's successes in China would stimulate communist movements elsewhere.¹²⁶ By November 1949 MacDonal, who from the latter half of 1948 had been arguing there was a concerted communist attempt to subvert Southeast Asia, was recommending support for the 'Bao Dai experiment'. By then the French had made sufficient progress towards granting Indochina independence to mitigate Foreign Office worries about appearing to support a repressive French colonial policy. In March 1949 the French agreed to grant a unified Vietnam heavily qualified 'independence'. The new state would be led by the former emperor Bao Dai of Annam. Bao Dai had abdicated during the August 1945 revolution and showed a greater enthusiasm for the fleshpots of Paris than for government. With characteristic optimism, MacDonal nevertheless gave the sybaritic Bao Dai an even chance of success, arguing a *Viet Minh* triumph would be a victory for communism not nationalism. With communist uprisings in Malaya and Burma in 1948, and with evidence of Chinese assistance to the *Viet Minh* from mid-1949, Bevin and MacDonal chose to view the Indochinese conflict in blinkered Cold War terms.¹²⁷

British and American recognition of the new state of Vietnam was delayed in favour of futile attempts to persuade Asian states to recognise the new regime, and in the hope France would increase concessions to nationalism. In February 1950, after the French formalised Vietnam's 'independence', Britain recognised the Bao Dai regime, Laos and Cambodia, as independent states associated with the French Union. Britain thus backed an experiment in which it had little influence, and which many Asian countries saw as the last fling of French imperialism.¹²⁸

With Thailand stable, British anxieties continued to focus on Tonkin more than Bangkok. The communist risings of 1948, notably those in Malaya and Burma, were interpreted as part of a communist attempt to subvert the region.

With the People's Republic of China formally proclaimed in October 1949, in early 1950 communism was still seen in Singapore primarily as a political threat. Land communications in Southeast Asia were not thought adequate for a major attack southward, the Chinese Navy was minimal, allied air superiority expected. The immediate danger was that if the 'rice-bowl' fell in the Cold War, it might exacerbate the Malayan Emergency. Into 1950 the defence of Thailand, Burma and Indochina was believed to depend mainly on their internal security and stable government.¹²⁹

In early 1950 the BDCC nevertheless felt increasing *Viet Minh* success in Indochina made it wise to accelerate planning. The BDCC followed a dual track. They favoured Anglo-American cooperation to secure Tonkin, shielding the region's rice-bowl and retaining a forward buffer.¹³⁰ If this proved impractical, or the COS maintained opposition to Indochinese commitments, the BDCC discounted effective defence north of the Kra.¹³¹

By 9 August 1950 the BDCC had a new paper on the defence of Malaya in global war. Despite London's emphasis on leaving only troops for internal security, the BDCC reiterated the ideal was an American-backed collective defence of Tonkin. The BDCC also argued the Chinese could launch major southward attacks, with large but relatively unmechanised forces.

The 'worst case' scenario, envisaged a drive southwards by up to 500,000 men. This would allow the deployment against the Kra of 60-80,000 with armoured support, leaving a reserve of similar strength at Bangkok. If Thailand was already communist, four to five Chinese divisions could deploy against Malaya in as little as four months. This was also the time required to develop the infrastructure to support a defence at Songkhla. Hence the Kra needed to be seized immediately if Thailand turned communist. With Thailand non-communist, enemy deployment would take over nine months.¹³²

The COS continued to resist both the BDCC's belief a southward attack was possible, and their desire to encourage American commitments to Tonkin. In London, ministers had decided as early 16 December 1949 that Britain could not become involved in Indochina.¹³³ The BDCC priorities implied an unacceptable diversion of resources from threadbare wartime provisions for the Middle Eastern and European theatres. There appeared to be an increasing danger, however, that communism would arrive at Malaya's northern door without a war. There was thus a growing tension between Malaya's marginal position in global war, and the possibility that Indochina would fall in the Cold War and pull Thailand down with it. Malaya's rubber and Singapore's control of the Straits of Malacca ensured a commitment to holding Malaya in all circumstances short of global war. Consequently, the BDCC now turned their attention away from Tonkin, focusing instead on emergency plans to secure the nearest point of the nexus, the Kra.

By September 1950 the Commissioner-General's Office was suggesting Thai agreement be sought for emergency occupation of Songkhla. It felt the Thais might agree if this was part of a nominal plan for defending Thailand itself. Yet suspicion could be expected. The Kra had a predominantly Malay population,

including an irredentist strand. In spring 1951 Phibun did indicate he was considering the Kra as last line of resistance, but the political dangers of a negative line prevented any detailed approach.¹³⁴ Britain's Chargé d'affaires in Thailand, Whittington, felt American cooperation unlikely, and warned occupation of the Kra might itself result in communist uprisings.

In December 1941 Sir Josiah Crosby, then British minister in Siam, had pleaded Britain should not launch Matador and so violate Thai neutrality. Whittington, however, now reportedly accepted Britain should act, 'if, and as soon as, it was clear that the Siamese had gone sour'.^{*} Unlike Crosby in 1941, Whittington had to consider the views of a Commissioner-General, MacDonald, with his status and wider strategic view. MacDonald and the BDCC were determined to avoid the 1941 'mistake' of hesitating over Songkhla.¹³⁵

From September 1950 concern intensified after the *Viet Minh* drove the French from the strategically important Cao Bang ridge in north-east Indochina. They thus gained control of supply routes to China and dominance of most of Tonkin. France continued to dominate the south, but French forces in Tonkin were left concentrated in the Red River Delta area around the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong.¹³⁶ On 1 December 1950 the Commanders-in-Chief, Far East, warned the COS that 'Chinese support of the present kind to the *Viet Minh*' might increase sufficiently to make the situation critical in the next two months, before French reinforcements could arrive.

By December 1950 the BDCC accepted the COS would not sanction British assistance to, or American guarantees of, Tonkin. They recognised the COS's determination to minimise expenditure of resources in the area. In December telegrams, the BDCC thus concentrated on securing agreement to seize the Kra in an emergency. They emphasised no prior reinforcements were needed. A single, local brigade could take the position.

The most likely Thai routes to communism were by coups or constitutional means, making the timing of a Kra operation difficult. Yet the Kra's importance had been publicly aired since 1941 and time would be required to prepare the position. The COS were therefore told it was vital to seize Songkhla the moment Thailand looked like going communist, or China invaded Tonkin.¹³⁷ A build-up of Thai forces could render the operation impossible.¹³⁸ The BDCC also argued memories of 1942 gave the operation psychological importance, 'on the morale of the Malays, Chinese and others in Malaya. It would be a welcome indication of our determination ... not, as in 1942, to be driven from the country'.¹³⁹

With BDCC plans requiring no extra resources in the first instance, on 22 December 1950 the COS agreed planning for a Songkhla operation could begin. The Defence Committee gave its endorsement on 28 February 1951. The ultimate decision on action was to lie in London, but the latter meeting accepted failure to occupy the Kra quickly might prejudice Malaya's defence.¹⁴⁰

* Richard (later Sir) Whittington: joined the Consular Service, 1928, serving in Thailand and the Netherlands East Indies until the war; Counsellor and Consul-General in Bangkok, 1947-51; and Chargé d'affaires in 1948, 1950 and 1951.

In January 1951 the Commanders-in-Chief (Far East) issued a directive to commanders-designate, just after a renewed communist offensive in Korea. This envisaged a Chinese assault towards Malaya of up to 60-80,000. If the code-name, 'Irony', was not a droll reflection on the fate of its 1941 precursor, it should have been. 'Irony' was for the occupation of the Kra against light opposition after the outbreak of war. 'Ringlet' was for prewar occupation. Thai forces were expected to be small and low quality. The Chinese would be tough, seasoned, and willing to incur high casualties. Their numbers, however, would be limited by the lack of a main Bangkok to Haad Yai road. This meant heavy reliance on the single-track railway, vulnerable to air interdiction and naval bombardment. Any British position would have to cover the Thai railway junction of Haad Yai, where the tracks from east and west Malaya met, and the port of Songkhla. Positions would have to be held in depth to avoid being turned, as had happened in 1941, and to be capable of being air-supplied.¹⁴¹ During 1951-52 it was estimated the position required a brigade to seize as a forestalling operation, and three divisions to hold against full Chinese attack. In global war, of course, Malaya would still lose rather than gain forces.¹⁴²

In 1951-54 Songkhla plans remained the basis for contingency planning against any deterioration in Indochina and Thailand. Crises in Indochina periodically saw these plans rise in saliency, and yet confirmed British determination to avoid committing resources to Thailand and Indochina, or to any physical preparations for the Songkhla operation.

In February 1952 a French operation to extend the fortified Red River Delta area to contiguous Hoa Binh collapsed.¹⁴³ With nervousness about possible Chinese intervention in Indochina also increasing, Britain worried the French were looking for a way out. A COS report of 12 March 1952 warned a French withdrawal from Indochina, 'might well see Siam compound with the communists as she did with Japan in the last war', with or without a change of government. This would affect the Malayan Emergency. Infiltration from Thailand would increase, and even limited extra support for Malayan communists might have a disproportionate effect on security.¹⁴⁴ The rice-bowl might be cut off and Malaya's fence-sitters descend on the communist side. Malaya would need to be reinforced by a division, two armoured car squadrons and over twenty patrol craft, to combat increased insurgency and infiltration. The Songkhla position was considered vital if communist infiltration into Malaya was to be minimised, and as a last line of defence.¹⁴⁵

On 19 March, however, the Defence Committee was reluctant even to encourage increased American aid to Indochina. Churchill suggested French withdrawal might ease the problem of defending Europe. Churchill - like Eden in the period up to early 1954 - remained reluctant to push France too hard to reinforce Indochina. Britain understood that the drain of troops from Europe reinforced French reluctance to ratify the European Defence Treaty. Signed in 1952 by France and five other countries, this was supposed to allow Germany to be rearmed - something France remained nervous about but the Americans demanded. German units would be locked into a supranational European Army.

Britain, however, refused to join the EDC – reflecting its traditional avoidance of federal and supranational schemes. It even avoided committing itself to maintain specific forces in Europe in support of EDC. European and Asian policy thus became entangled. Britain could have gambled that helping the French with EDC in Europe would free troops for Indochina, but even this ran against the grain of British caution, and the reality that no amount of men could be certain to turn Indochina around. Consequently, pragmatism demanded Churchill make Britain's 'domino' doctrine a little more flexible. He duly told the Defence Committee that he doubted Indochina's fall would quickly produce a threat to Malaya. Churchill thought a direct menace might not develop for over two years. As with 'Matador' in April 1941, Churchill now endorsed Songkhla planning, but with preparations to be without cost. As in 1941, Churchill in 1952 downplayed the COS's perceptions of a threat. Pragmatism and resources in this way dictated strategy be amended, rather than strategic appreciations dictating the commitment of resources Britain felt it could not spare.¹⁴⁶

Malaya remained, unlike Europe and the Middle East, a theatre with ordnance and heavy equipment at internal security rather than limited war levels. The emphasis was on building up Malayan forces, to relieve Britain of some of the security burden. Before 1954 Malaya also remained short of combat aircraft, with none capable of matching the Soviet-designed MIG-15, despite the arrival of jet fighters in 1951.¹⁴⁷

Tension rose again after 30 November 1952, when the *Viet Minh* took Dien Bien Phu. This straddled communication routes between Tonkin and Laos. Only a few isolated, air-supplied French garrisons now restricted *Viet Minh* domination of this border region. The *Viet Minh* seemed poised to move through sparsely populated Laos towards the Thai-Lao border.¹⁴⁸ In December, however, Sir William Strang, Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, opposed lending France transport aircraft to help keep northern garrisons supplied. This might become the thin end of the wedge.¹⁴⁹ British policy remained consistent, Tonkin was the essential forward buffer for the rice-bowl and Thailand only when the price was paid in French blood and American money. Even then, Britain remained ambivalent about diverting French men and American resources away from Europe.¹⁵⁰

By early 1953, however, there was less doubt a threat to Malaya might develop quickly if Indochina fell. The threat to Laos focused minds on the political danger to Thailand, rather than remote danger of Chinese attack. With the opportunity to occupy Songkhla likely to be 'fleeting', on 11 February the Defence Committee warned Cabinet it might be called on to authorise Songkhla operations at short notice. On 19 February the Cabinet responded by setting up a small ministerial committee to monitor the situation.¹⁵¹

In early April conditions again deteriorated. Three *Viet Minh* divisions struck deep into Laos, closing in on the administrative and royal capitals, Vientiane and Luang Prabang respectively. MacDonald and the Bangkok Embassy worried Laos could be a stepping stone to Thailand. Peking had set up an 'Autonomous Thai People's Government' in neighbouring Yunnan Province in January 1953.

There was concern this indicated intentions to sow communism in the ethnically Thai groups in the north of Indochina, Laos and Thailand.

On 25 April the French requested 25 to 40 civilian transport aircraft. A staff conference of the COS and senior ministers met the next day. They reaffirmed Songkhla planning should proceed.¹⁵² But the suggestion of sending transport aircraft was again thrown out, this time on the pretext of tension surrounding British bases in Egypt.¹⁵³

With the onset of the May rains, most *Viet Minh* forces retired. By June, however, the embassy in France reported France wanted to negotiate. In briefs drawn up for a three power leaders' meeting at Bermuda (Britain, the United States and France), the Foreign Office urged exhortation of France. They warned this might be the last chance to avert disaster. The French must speed the progress of the Indochinese 'Associated States' to the equivalent of 'Dominion Status', send reinforcements, and adopt a more offensive policy. Britain continued to see the conflict as requiring a political solution, but with military success as crucial to provide an environment in which non-communist nationalism could be nurtured. The COS fretted that without major changes the *Viet Minh* might be established on Thailand's border by the year's end.¹⁵⁴

The Bermuda conference was postponed after Churchill's 23 June stroke.¹⁵⁵ Instead there was a Foreign Ministers' meeting in Washington on 10 to 14 July. The main topic turned out to be Europe, though the French did indicate that the likely political conference on Korea (consequent to the Korean armistice of 27 July 1953) should include Indochina. This was greeted unenthusiastically. Before 1954 neither the Americans nor the British favoured any negotiations on Indochina until the French were in a stronger position.¹⁵⁶

In July 1953 the French promised to accelerate independence for the Indochinese states, with the United States agreeing to supply an even greater proportion of the war's costs. General Navarre, Commander-in-Chief in Indochina from May, drew up a plan to further develop the Vietnamese army and create increased mobile forces. When Churchill, Joseph Laniel (the French Prime Minister), and President Eisenhower finally met at Bermuda, in December 1953, Indochina was a minor topic. It was overshadowed by concerns at France's tardiness in ratifying the European Defence Community. In the same month MacDonald reported that the worst days in Indochina might be over.¹⁵⁷

The French retook Dien Bien Phu in November 1953. Though it was isolated, Navarre hoped to lure the *Viet Minh* into a pitched battle in which French fire-power would prevail. Thus the western powers felt able to agree, at the Berlin four-power meeting of February 1954 (Britain, France, the United States and the Soviet Union), that there should be a conference on Indochina. Britain and America nevertheless intended to encourage France to fight on until it was strong enough to secure a favourable settlement. The Geneva Indochina conference was to include communist China, as was the prior Geneva conference on Korea. The United States accepted an Indochinese conference was necessary, in order to appease French sentiment that peace in Korea be matched by attempts to secure peace in Indochina. It was also a means of encouraging French ratification of the ill-fated EDC.¹⁵⁸

Britain's uneasy confidence about Indochina was to be short-lived. The *Viet Minh* received increasing Chinese aid after the Korean armistice of July 1953, including lorries for supply and anti-aircraft guns to counter French air power. With the conference on Indochina due in spring 1954, the battle for Dien Bien Phu was to be the greatest crisis to threaten the 'nexus'. As yet, however, the nervous optimism of the previous Autumn was only just beginning to dissipate, as the first storm clouds gathered on the horizon.

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter two and the preceding section have shown how inextricably Malaya and Singapore's defence came to be seen as interlinked with the countries to their north. Developments in Songkhla planning, for instance, were stimulated by events as far away as Laos, the Tonkin-Chinese border, and even by anticipation of a truce in Korea.

When the onset of the Asian Cold War in 1948-49 encouraged accelerated military planning, British pre-conceptions about Thailand and the importance of Songkhla helped to shape the resulting defence posture. By 1950 Britain was particularly worried that communist successes against the French in Indochina might cause Thailand to slide towards communism.

Despite this 'domino' theory, and in the context of the requirements of British colonial territories, NATO and the Middle East, the COS and Defence Committee were not willing to commit resources to regional security. Influenced by history, by low estimations of Asian abilities and by a shortage of forces, British defence planning was forced into a conservative mould. Britain's defence posture was thus the result of a blending of the wartime legacy, metropolitan constraints and the Cold War.

The result was twofold. First, reluctance to commit more than minimal resources outside British territories. Secondly, heavy reliance on Kra plans, which avoided the necessity of making any preparatory commitment of men or money. It was true that China, unlike 1941 Japan, was not a naval power. The position would thus be easier to hold, and in the event of Thailand going communist would provide more chance of blocking reinforcements to Malaya's communists. But as in 1941, there was a high chance of Songkhla plans being paralysed by political indecision in a crisis. Again, as in 1941, Britain neglected alternatives which did require resources, such as (in 1941) building further Malayan fortifications, or (in the 1950s) developing infrastructure in north Malaya.

The COS and Foreign Office believed that the Cold War battle itself would be political as well as military in nature. With little danger of direct Soviet or Chinese intervention, the main regional need seemed to be the encouragement of pro-Western sympathies and of a local capacity to resist communism. This increased British determination to play a pivotal role between newly independent Asian states and the West. In 1950 Britain was instrumental in establishing the Colombo Plan, ostensibly to coordinate aid, but which Britain hoped would lay

the groundwork for Asian political and military cooperation against communism in South and Southeast Asia.

This approach, of attempting to encompass both military and political containment of communism, was complicated by Asian suspicions of colonialism and by American Cold War policies. After the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, many Asian states became increasingly worried by America's zealous anti-communism and by its aggressive deterrence of China. Newly independent countries, such as India and Indonesia, also saw the struggle in Indochina in anti-colonial as much as Cold War terms. Consequently, the Colombo Plan continued as a limited success. It coordinated aid without significantly facilitating the Commonwealth influence over American policy, or the Asian-Western political cooperation against communism, which were its prime British objectives.

Britain believed that diplomacy needed to be backed by evidence of the West's determination to resist communist expansion. It also held that the outcome of the struggle for Indochina would have important effects on the wider Cold War battle. Britain responded by a threefold approach: regional cooperation would be encouraged; allies would be exhorted to provide the men, money and materials required to contain communism; and Britain would sustain its influence through bilateral relationships and multilateral arrangements.

This represented a development from, rather than a replacement of, policies already taking shape by early 1948. After the war the Foreign Office aimed to increase regional cooperation, and the COS to secure Indian or at least Australian assistance in defence. The COS had also wanted to coordinate Commonwealth strategy as a prelude to gaining access to American Pacific planning. Britain hoped this combination might ease its burdens, while leaving it the preponderant power 'South of the Tropic of Cancer'. The Asian Cold War, however, made Britain believe American assistance was urgently required in Southeast Asia. Britain then aimed to marry American resources to British experience.

In June 1952 Eden described this British policy as an attempt to get the United States to assume 'the real burdens' of defence, 'while retaining for ourselves as much political control - and hence prestige and world influence - as we can'.¹⁵⁹ Eden hoped damage to Britain's influence could be minimised by making the transfer of burdens gradual and inconspicuous. The reality, however, was that while Britain could not pay for influence, the United States could. The United States thus rapidly became the major regional player, while Britain's careful husbandry of limited resources saw its influence ebb outside of its own territories. By 1953 America was not only undermining Britain's policy of sweet reasonableness towards China, but had become the predominant source of aid to Thailand and Indochina.

Thailand provides a good example of the contraction of Britain's ambitions. At first intending to enforce defence cooperation, Britain retreated to relying on assistance and diplomacy, and finally to the risky pre-war concept of seizing the

Kra in an emergency. By 1950, the United States was beginning to assume the role of Thailand's primary supplier of military equipment, and to offer advice and aid. Likewise in Indonesia, Britain continued to worry Indonesian nationalism might reverberate in Malaya, or that communism might take root there, but could do little about these anxieties. After playing a major role in returning the Dutch to Indonesia in 1945–46, Britain saw its influence there slump after the withdrawal of SEAC forces.¹⁶⁰

The low priority which Britain accorded to Southeast Asia as a region (as opposed to British territories there) can be also seen in its approach to Commonwealth and multilateral planning. The ANZAM framework was established after 1948 to plan for the war-time defence of Australia, New Zealand, and the 'Malayan Area'. In practice, Britain hoped that, if Australia was allowed to take the initiative in ANZAM planning, it would become more willing to reinforce the Middle East in global war. It was October 1953 before Britain accepted that Southeast Asia should be Australia's priority in both Cold War and global war planning. The COS's concern in the 'Five Power Planning Agency' meetings of 1953–54, meanwhile, was to minimise the risk that any conflict with China might escalate. In particular, they argued against American plans to counter any Chinese aggression in Korea or Southeast Asia with widespread bombing and blockade.¹⁶¹

Despite limited resources and Anglo-American tensions, in 1953 British hopes of remaining an influential force in the region remained strong. Britain's desire to assuage China remained more acceptable to Asian states, such as India and Burma, than the American tendency towards confrontation. Britain was also at least willing to accept that communist movements might be fuelled partly by nationalist aspirations. By comparison, US reduction of problems to simple Cold War calculation could seem crude to Asians, who sometimes saw anti-colonialism as more important than anti-communism. Britain still hoped that India might ultimately be drawn into a stabilising role in Southeast Asia, and still exerted considerable influence on Australia. While Britain failed to gain access to ANZUS, and ANZAM amounted to little, in October 1953 Australia did agree to contribute to the formation of a Malayan-based Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. Far from simply shifting from one major ally to another, Australia was increasing its military cooperation with both Britain and the United States.

Notwithstanding differences, it has been suggested elsewhere that the sheer multiplicity of Anglo-American links gave Britain and the United States an important place in each others consultations.¹⁶² According to some accounts, this gave British support particular importance in reassuring Congress when major new commitments were being considered. Chapter five will look at claims that, by refusing to sanction American plans, Britain averted American intervention in Indochina in 1954.¹⁶³

The main concern of this chapter, however, has been to outline the way Britain fostered the defence of Malaya and Singapore, by encouraging international stability while limiting British commitments. Britain's regional

strategy was intended to support a shield of non-communist states to Malaya's north at little cost and low risk. Far from this period providing evidence of great power illusions leading to 'imperial overstretch', it was characterised by falling regional influence and careful husbandry of resources. Britain even refrained from pressing France too hard to reinforce Indochina in 1952–53, partly for fear of the French asking Britain for a *quid pro quo*. That is, for a commitment of British troops to Europe or for Britain to join the EDC, to counterbalance planned German rearmament in the face of French military dispersal to Asia. Britain would not consider paying even this price for regional Southeast Asian security, despite the fact that it would be paid indirectly, in Europe.

Despite this parsimony, British 'illusions' of influence and regional role were very much alive. After all, the Gurkhas were originally intended as a regional reserve, and Britain remained tirelessly optimistic about its influence, but these were not the prime determinants of force posture in this particular period. This chapter's model, of Britain grudgingly doling out resources, thus raises the questions the next chapter addresses. Given that Britain did end up maintaining large forces in the region, on what basis did Britain apportion forces to Southeast Asia? And given Britain's refusal to commit forces to help with the regional struggles against communism, how did the Cold War affect Britain's force posture?

Notes

- 1 The Burmese campaign is here neglected. It does not fit into this story of 'defence and decolonisation', tending, instead, to be seen as part of South Asian decolonisation, or of global war.
- 2 See: Dennis, *Troubled Days of Peace*; Tarling, *Fall of Imperial Britain*, pp. 131–69; A. J. Stockwell, 'Southeast Asia in War and Peace', in Tarling (ed.), *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, ii, pp. 329–46; and Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, pp. 450–73.
- 3 For a Feb. 1946 Cabinet Office summary of these points, see Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 195–6.
- 4 See Turnbull, 'Regionalism and Nationalism', in Tarling (ed.), *Cambridge History of South East Asia*, ii, p. 595, for 'spiritual leadership'; Tarling, *Fall of Imperial Britain*, pp. 1–2, 63–5, 93, 131–33, 184, 157–58, 173–74, for Britain aiming to provide an 'order' to 'succeed' the 'imperial' one in the 'Third' world. See Tanner, 'Strong Showing', pp. 50–51, for Queen Wilhelmina of Holland's Dec. 1942 declaration promising a commonwealth of the Netherlands, Indonesia, Surinam and Curacao with 'self-reliance and freedom of conduct'. In Oct. 1944 De Gaulle declared self-government (not independence) the long-term colonial aim.
- 5 For interaction between earlier regional policy and the Asian Cold War, see Remme, 'Britain and Regional Cooperation', pp. 8–14.
- 6 The title phrase is from Co537/1478, comment on FO ideas for coordination from India to Japan by CO official H. T. Bourdillon, 17 June 1946. See also Aron Shai, *Britain and China, 1941–1947* (London, 1984), ch. 6 on Hong Kong; and for Anglo-American relations and China, Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, pp. 174–78.
- 7 Wenguan Shao, *China, Britain and Business: Political and Commercial Relations, 1949–57* (London, 1991), pp. xii, *passim*, shows that low-level Sino-British and Hong Kong trade continued. See also J. L. Wallach, 'Old Habits Die Hard: The Return of British Warships to Chinese Waters', in John Hattendorf and Malcolm Murfett (eds), *The Limits of Military Power* (London, 1990), pp. 203–17; and Malcolm Murfett,

- Hostage on the Yangtze: Britain, China and the Amethyst crisis of 1949* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, c1991).
- 8 Co537/1478, FE(0)(46)52, 'British Foreign Policy in the FE', 16 April 1946, containing a draft paper by the FE Civil Planning Unit. This was last revised in Dec. 1945, circulated in Jan. 1946.
 - 9 Burma followed India's development, as a 'Province' of India from 1923. Under the Indian system of dyarchy, it had 2 local ministers, and then from 1937 a wholly Burmese Government, though with the Governor having reserved powers over security, finance and tribal areas.
 - 10 The MPAJA was rooted in the once-banned Malayan Communist Party and in British-trained guerrillas of 1941–42. SEAC and Force 136 (Special Operations Executive) agreed in Dec. 1943 to supply it. Aung San's Burmese Defence Army shifted from supporting to opposing Japan, and received aid by 1945. Mountbatten recognised it would become a major political power in Burma, the first postwar Governor (Dorman-Smith) resisted this to some extent. Tanner, '*Strong Showing*', pp. 63–68.
 - 11 SAC, Killearn diaries, 31 May 1946, 16 April 1946, 1 Jan 1947, *passim*; Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, pp. 333–54, 450–73, 586–39; Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, pp. 278.
 - 12 Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, pp. 187–226, 315, 471 ff; Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 25–27, *passim*.
 - 13 Tanner, '*Strong Showing*', pp. 23–24. The US wanted to concentrate on keeping China's land communications through Burma open, and US opinion did not want to see American resources help with colonial reconquests, which was what Britain wanted SEAC for.
 - 14 See various COS, Dening, Mountbatten and War Committee documents in Fo371/41795 (eg., F1040, Dening, 17 Feb. 1944); Fo371/41798; and Fo371/41797, Dening to Eden, 21 July 1944.
 - 15 Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, pp. 595–604. SAC, Killearn diaries, 1 Jan 1947, 'It is an open secret that the CO fought tooth and nail ... [to prevent] ... the Special Commission'.
 - 16 Duff Cooper was Resident Minister in 1941. Tarling, 'Some Rather Nebulous Capacity, Lord Killearn in SEA', *MAS*, 20 (1986), 559–98.
 - 17 Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, pp. 622–23; Co537/1478, FE(0)(46)52, 16 April 1946.
 - 18 For a May 1946 mutiny at Muar (Malaya) by the 13th Parachute Regiment, see Cab128/CM(46)85. See also Myers, 'Conscription and the Politics of Military Strategy in the Attlee Government'; and Keith Jeffrey, 'The Eastern Arc of Empire', in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 5, 4 (1982), 531–45.
 - 19 Cab128/CM(46)5, minute 2. See also Mar. 1946 report on SEAC by Dening, in Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 210–18; H. Tinker, 'The Contraction of Empire in Asia', *JICH*, 16, 2 (1988), 218–33; Anita Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship* (London, 1993), pp. 25–27; and Tanner, '*Strong Showing*', p. 100. For India, see Judith Brown, *Modern India* (London, 1985), ch. vi (p. 307f); and for detail, Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia*, chapters 1–3.
 - 20 The official account of reoccupation is F. S. V. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East*. For a more recent analysis see Dennis, *Troubled Days of Peace*. At Potsdam, S. Indochina and Java were added to SEAC. In Indochina, Gen. Gracey helped the French expel the *Viet Minh* from Saigon's public buildings and (21 Sept.) announced he would maintain order in S. Indochina, but his concern was still securing order to facilitate POW and Japanese evacuation. Peter Dunn, *First Vietnam War* (London, 1985).
 - 21 For a critical account, see John Newsinger, 'A forgotten War: British Intervention in Indonesia', in *Race and Class* 30, 4 (1989), 51–66. See also Keay, *The Last Post*, p. 249. But Australian troops also returned Dutch administrators, as even MacArthur's South West Pacific Command had intended to.
 - 22 See Cab128/CM(46)5, meeting of Jan. 1946, CM(46)29, meeting of 1 April 1946, CM(45)78, 14 Aug. 1946; CM(47)48, 20 May 1947; CM(47)48, 20 May 1947;

- CM(47)54, 17 June 1947; and CM(49)29, 1 April 1949. The Cabinet's treatment of the problem was similar on each occasion.
- 23 For Vietnam see Anthony Short, *The Origins of the Vietnam War* (London, 1989), pp. 45–53; for Indonesia, Oey Hong Lee, *War and Diplomacy in Indonesia, 1945–50* (Australia, 1981), pp. 27; and for the effects of WW2 on nationalism, A. McCoy (ed.), *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation* (Yale, 1980), 1–14. See also Stockwell, 'Southeast Asia in War and Peace', pp. 355–57. Naturally, parts of the FO favoured a more pro-Dutch policy in Indonesia, but the more cautious line of the COS, Mountbatten and needs of India won out, see Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War*, pp. 87–105.
 - 24 The BDCC(FE) shared similar views in 1946–47, see CRA: A816/51, 11/301/698. For food, see Prem8/211. See also, Fo800/461, telegrams between Cairo and the FO of Feb. 1946 and 21 April; and Tarling, 'Some Rather Nebulous Capacity: Lord Killearn's Appointment in Southeast Asia', *MAS*, 20 (1986), 583–84. The Cabinet approved Bevin's appointment of Killearn on 11 Feb. 1946.
 - 25 Cab133/86, PMM(46)11, 3 May 1946. For Killearn's views, see Ritchie Owendale, *English-Speaking Alliance*, p. 145; for FO views, Tarling, 'Some Rather Nebulous Capacity', *MAS* 20, 3 (1986), 595–99.
 - 26 Fo371/63547, M. Esler Denning, 'Note on South East Asia', 7 Feb. 1947.
 - 27 Reasons for policy differences included: Dutch experience of wartime collaboration (making Sukarno's role as a collaborator a major obstacle); greater French and Dutch concerns with rebuilding prestige; the supposed economic importance of Indonesia to the Dutch economy; and domestic politics. Short compares their inflexible attitudes to British pragmatism, see his, 'Pictures From an Exhibition', in Hans Antlöv and Stein Tønnesson (eds), *Imperial Policy and Southeast Asian Nationalism, 1930–57* (London, 1995), pp. 15–33. See also Tarling, *Fall of Imperial Britain*, pp. 156–58, 171–73; and Remme, 'Britain and Regional Cooperation', pp. 172–73. The sheer size of Britain's empire, especially India, forced Britain to be more flexible, see Inder Singh, *Limits of British Influence*, pp. 21–25.
 - 28 Compare Co537/1478, FE(0)(46)52, 'British Foreign Policy in the FE', 16 April 1946, para. 29, to the source of the quotation, Fo371/63547, M. Esler Denning, 'Note on SEA', 7 Feb. 1947.
 - 29 M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (London, 1981), pp. 213–14. This was created Oct. 1947. Indonesia asked for an Australian member, the Dutch for a Belgian. Together these appointed an American. See also Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia*, pp. 211–26.
 - 30 See Petra Groen, 'Military Response: The Dutch Use of Military Force and the Decolonization of the Dutch East Indies', *JICH*, 21, 3 (1993), pp. 30–44; and Oey Hong Lee, *War and Diplomacy*, p. 27.
 - 31 RH: Dalley papers, Mss Indian Ocean s254, records of 26th June 1947 Conference under Macdonald.
 - 32 For the MacDonald quotation, see Turnbull, 'Regionalism and Nationalism', in Tarling (ed.), *Cambridge History of South East Asia*, ii, p. 597. For CO-FO discussion on how to respond to the revolts, Co537/3550, 'Anglo-French Collaboration, 1948'. See also, Owendale, *English Speaking Alliance*, pp. 145–84. Britain later concluded the revolts were linked to a change in the international communist line announced in Sept. 1947 and disseminated at communist conferences in Calcutta in early 1948. This de-emphasized the search for a 'united front', arguing conflict was inevitable between communist and imperialist camps. For the revolts as an attempt 'to prevent the success of the Marshall Plan', see Rho, Young papers, Mss British Empire s486/2/1, (F), 'Aim and Strategy of the MCP', around 1952–53.
 - 33 Cab133/88, PMM(48)3, meeting of 12 Oct. 1948, minute 2.
 - 34 Defe5/9, COS(48)200, 'China', 10 Dec. 1948, Annex III, letter by the CIC(Far East), CIC(FE)(48)8, of around Dec., on measures to be taken in response to the threat from

- communism in China. See also Defec6/6, JP(48) 101(0)(ToR), 'FE Strategy 1957', 8 Sept. 1948, *passim*, for JPS views.
- 35 Co537/6264, COS(50)89, 'Effect of Current Events on Proposed Wartime Strategy in SEA', 9 March 1950, containing BDCC(FE)(50)1/1, 11 Feb. 1950, Commissioner-General and the CIC(FE). Prem8/1406, memo. by the CO on the Security Situation in the Federation of Malaya', April 1949.
- 36 See Hyam, *Labour Government*, ii, pp. liii, 291–95, 384–403; Cab134/287, FE(O)(49)25(Revise). Draft memo. by Colonial Secretary, 16 May 1949; and Lowe, *Containing the Cold War*, pp. 94–96.
- 37 For the phrase, 'a foot in the door', see Cab129/CP(48)299, 'Recent Developments in the Civil War in China', Foreign Secretary, 9 Dec. 1948.
- 38 Owendale, *English-Speaking Alliance*, p. 156 and Part 4, 'The Cold War in Asia'; Owendale, 'Britain, the United States, and the Cold War in Asia, 1949–1950', *IA* 58, 3 (Summer 1982), 448–53; Tarling, 'The UK and the Origins of the Colombo Plan', *JCCP*, xxiv, 1 (March 1986), 3–28.
- 39 Owendale, 'Britain, the United States, and the Cold War in Asia', *IA* 58, 3 (Summer 1982), 450.
- 40 The Asian Relations Conference included 27 countries, see T. Remme, 'Britain, the 1947 Asian Relations Conference and Regional Co-operation in South East Asia', in T. Gorst, Johnman and Lucas, *Postwar Britain 1945–64, Themes and Perspectives* (London, 1989), pp. 109–133. For the quotation, see Fo800/462, PM/49/71, minute from Bevin, 14 April 1949. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (London, 1966), gives an Asian perspective on regionalism. See Turnbull, 'Regionalism and Nationalism', in Tarling (ed.) *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, ii, pp. 585–46, for a recent survey.
- 41 For Strang's report, see Cab129/CP(49)67, 17 March 1949. For the FE (Official) Committee's Working Party, set up on 12 May 1949, and its subsequent work, see Cab134/288, *passim*.
- 42 Owendale, *English-Speaking Alliance*, pp. 165 ff. Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, pp. 743, 745–49. The latter places the Plan in the context of Bevin's attempts to construct an anti-communist alliance in Europe.
- 43 From the Australian view, with its emphasis on its image in Asian countries, the Colombo Plan might be judged a more clear-cut success. David Lowe, 'Percy Spender and the Colombo Plan, 1950', *AJPH* 40, 2 (1994), 162–76. For objectives, see Cab134/288, FE(O)(49)81(Final), 'South East Asia General', Brief for Commonwealth Conference' by the Far East (Official) Committee, 15 Dec. 1949.
- 44 Figures from *FRUS 1950*, vi, 1, pp. 16–26; and *FRUS 1952–54*, xii, 1, p. 290. Contrast these to the meagre British aid available, eg., see Command 8529, *The Colombo Plan* (London, HMSO, 1952).
- 45 Owendale, *English-Speaking Alliance*, ch. 7, pp. 185–210; and Fo800/462, Conversation at the State Department, 13 Sept. 1949; Lowe, 'Combatting Communism', 103f, 110–12.
- 46 James T-H. Tang, *Britain's Encounter with Revolutionary China, 1949–54* (London, 1992), pp. 79–80; Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 206–8; Lanxin Xiang, *Recasting the Imperial Far East: Britain and America in China, 1945–1950* (London, 1995), pp. 177–200. The FO and ministers overrode CO fears that, recognition would encourage Malayan communists and see Chinese consuls sent to Malaya however, Britain and China did not immediately re-establish full diplomatic relations.
- 47 Shao, China, Britain and Businessmen, pp. 31–34. Tang, *Britain's Relations with China*, pp. 75 ff.
- 48 William Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 61–98. For the links to European and Japanese economic recovery, see Rotter, *Path to Vietnam*, p. 2, *passim*.
- 49 Owendale, *English-Speaking Alliance*, pp. 200–205.

- 50 Neither of these countries was thought capable of making a significant military contribution, see Defe5/46, COS(53)286, 'Proposal for a Pacific Defence Pact', 19 June 1953.
- 51 For COS views on containment, see Hyam, *Labour Government*, p. 397. For the region as part of the global Cold War, see Cab129/CP(49)67, 'Report by Sir William Strang', 17 March 1949; and for MacDonald's on a monolithic communist front, Owendale, *English-Speaking Alliance*, pp. 144 ff.
- 52 Inder Singh, *Limits of British Influence*, p. 49.
- 53 Cab128/CM(50)73 and 78, meetings of 13 Nov. and 29 Nov. 1950; and Cab128/CM(50)80, meeting of 30 Nov. 1950. See also Callum MacDonald, *Britain and the Korean War* (Oxford, 1990).
- 54 Barton Bernstein, 'New Light on the Korean War', *IHR*, x, v (1981), 256-77.
- 55 Cab128/CM(50)78, meeting of 29 Nov. 1950; Cab128/CM(50)80, meeting of 30 Nov. 1950. Korea and Honshu are as little as 100 miles apart. The far n-e of Korea borders the USSR as well as China.
- 56 Prem8/1171; Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, pp. 822-24. The Australian Commissioner for SEA, (Sir Alan Watt) argued Britain's sense of nuclear vulnerability dictated a reluctance to take risks, and 'appeasement', though not 'mere appeasement', in Asia. CRA: A1209/23, 1957/230, Watt to DEA, 2 Feb. 1956.
- 57 For Korea revealing the absence of a 'special relationship', see Peter Lowe, 'The Significance of the Korean War in Anglo-Australian Relations', in Dockrill and Young (eds), *British Foreign Policy, 1945-56* (London, 1989), pp. 126-48.
- 58 The loss of this trade was, however, offset by rising commodity prices.
- 59 M. Dockrill, 'Anglo-US Diplomacy and the Korean War, June 1950-June 1951', *IA*, 62, 3 (1986), 459-76; Tang, *Britain's Encounter with Revolutionary China*, pp. 117 and 97 ff; Lowe, *Containing Communism*, pp. 123-46, for trade. This picked up slightly after 1953, restrictions easing in 1957.
- 60 Lowe, *Containing Communism*, p. 248f. The POW problem was that some Chinese and Korean prisoners did not want to return, and later how to verify POWs views on this issue.
- 61 Cab131/10, DO(51)8, 9 April 1951, minute 1. Cab129/CP(51)127, Foreign Secretary, 8 May 1951. In May 1951 US, UK and French military representatives suggested a peacetime strategic reserve in SEA, but no-one would provide forces, see Cab131/11, DO(51)106, COS, 15 Sept. 1951.
- 62 Robert O'Neill, *Australia and the Korean War* (Canberra, 1981), i, pp. 272-84.
- 63 *FRUS 1952-54*, xii, 1, pp. 239-42, JCS memo. to Robert Lovett, Defence Secretary, 28 Dec. 1951.
- 64 *FRUS 1952-54*, xii, 1, pp. 8-22. A 16-nation warning to China, in the event of a serious breach of the ceasefire, it might not be possible to confine hostilities to Korea, was issued on 7 Aug. 1953.
- 65 For the quotation, see Cab131/12, D(52)2, meeting of 19 March 1952, minute 1. Defe5/36, COS(52)64, 'Collective Measures Against China', COS-approved Brief for Air Marshal Sir William Elliot [Chairman of the British Joint Services Mission in Washington, 1951-54], 26 Jan. 1952, which said China's river and unmechanised transport offered no effective targets, even for nuclear bombs. If they failed, 'it would so undermine the Western position in the Cold War as to make eventual global world war almost inevitable'.
- 66 For the quotation, see CRA: A816/30, 11/301/776, containing PMM(51)13, 'The Strategic Importance of Formosa', COS paper for Commonwealth Premiers, 6 Jan. 1951.
- 67 *FRUS 1952-1954*, xii, 1, 135-44, 'Ambassador in the UK (Gifford) to Department of State', 28 June 1952.
- 68 For Planners' meetings, see *FRUS 1954*, xii, 1, pp. 303-6, 319 ff; CRA: A816/52, 11/301/875, Australian Defence Department file on views of the British COS (dated Aug. 1953) about Five Power Staff Agency; CRA: A5954/28, 2306/8, Shedden papers

- on Five Power Planners' meeting of Feb. 1954; and CRA: A5954/28, 2306/4, Shedden papers, notes on Five Power Agency, 23 July 1954. Sir Frederick Shedden was the influential Secretary to the Australian Defence Department, 1937–56.
- 69 Cab131/14, D(54)8, Korea, Foreign Secretary, 1 Feb. 1954, discussed at Cab131/14, D(54)5, meeting of 14 April 1954, minute 1. See also Cab131/13, D(53)57, COS, 30 Nov. 1953, which still doubted whether tactical nuclear weapons could cause China to cease an aggression.
- 70 CRA: A5954/28, 2306/8, Shedden file on the Feb. 1954 Five Power Planners' meeting.
- 71 For nuclear strategies, see Fo800/462, record of a meeting of UK and French Foreign and PMs, 2 Dec. 1950. See also Defe5/36, COS (52)64, 26 Jan. 1952; and Defe5/43, COS(52)663, Dec. 1952. In Aug. 1945 Japan told Asians they were surrendering to prevent use of 'inhuman' atom bombs on Asian women and children. F. C. Jones, *Japan's New Order in East Asia* (London, 1954), pp. 389–90.
- 72 For Britain's limited ability to deflect allies towards its own policies in Asia, see Inder Singh, *Limits of British Influence*, e.g., p. 240; Peter Lowe, 'The Significance of the Korean War in Anglo-American Relations, 1950–53', in Young (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration*, especially p. 145; and MacDonald, *Britain and the Korean War*, especially pp. 94–96.
- 73 Revisionist historians argue the turn to America occurred in a more protracted and uneven manner, see Carl Bridge (ed.), *Munich to Vietnam: Australia's Relations with Britain and the United States since the 1930s* (Melbourne, 1991), pp. 1–12, 194–97.
- 74 For ANZUS in general, see W. David McIntyre, *Background to the Anzous Pact: Policy-Makers, Strategy and Diplomacy, 1945–1955* (Macmillan, 1994).
- 75 For debate on 'betrayal' see, *The Independent* (London) 28 and 29 Feb. 1992, 26 Jan. 1993; *The Guardian* (London) 29 Feb 1992; and John McCarthy, 'The "Great Betrayal": an Australian Perspective', in *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 48, 1 (May 1994), 53–60.
- 76 Ian Hamill, *The Strategic Illusion: The Singapore Strategy and the Defence of Australia* (Singapore, 1981). E. Andrews, *The Writing on the Wall: The British Commonwealth and Aggression in the East* (Sydney, 1987), argues Britain underplayed weaknesses. See David Day, *The Great Betrayal: Britain, Australia and the Pacific War, 1939–42* (London, 1988), pp. 1–17, 334, for Australia's self-betrayal and 'colonial mentality' leaving it dependent; and J. McCarthy, *Australia and Imperial Defence 1918–39* (St. Lucia, 1976), pp. 148–49. In April 1941 Menzies released Churchill from promises to abandon the Middle East for the Far East if necessary.
- 77 Ann Trotter, *New Zealand and Japan 1945–52* (London, 1990), p. 22. Until 1939 the only major Australian diplomatic postings were the High Commissioner and Political Liaison Officer in London. In 1940, Japan, the US and China were added, and by 1952 Singapore, Indochina, Burma and Thailand.
- 78 Curtin was Labor Party leader and PM from Aug. until his death in July 1945. He was attempting to appear in control. Britain had already agreed Australia would be in an American command. D. Day, 'Pearl Harbor to Nagasaki', in Bridge, *Munich to Vietnam*, p. 56. For 'the near north' see Alan Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 15, 19–20. Churchill's attempt to divert 2 returning Australian divisions to Rangoon, on 20 Feb. 1942, also left a bad aftertaste.
- 79 Peter Edwards, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in South-East Asian Conflicts, 1948–65* (Sydney, 1992), p. 12, for Australian beliefs that 'history' warned against undue reliance on America. See also Trevor Reese, *Australia, the New Zealand and the United States, 1941–68* (London, 1969), pp. 35–37; and Watt, *Australian Foreign Policy*, pp. 73–76.
- 80 For the Curtin quotation, Cab131/12, D(52)48, COS, 3 Dec. 1952, Annex.
- 81 Cab133/86, Commonwealth Premiers' meetings of April 1946; Prem8/743; *Britain and Decolonisation*, pp. 147–49. In Oct. 1945 Attlee accepted Australian command

- of the Commonwealth Occupation Force, Japan. Australia also provided the Commonwealth representative on the Allied Control Council for Japan. Bevin and the FO were determined these should not become precedents, see J. Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 196-98.
- 82 During the war Australia briefly considered acquiring mandates or defence rights over territories it occupied in the Pacific and Indonesia. Day, *Reluctant Nation*, pp. 176-193. See also N. Meaney, 'Australia, the Great Powers and the Coming of the Cold War', in *AJPH*, 38, 3 (1992), 316-33. Commonwealth attempts in 1946 to link American use of Australia's Manus Island to Pacific defence also came to nothing after American interest in keeping large numbers of minor Pacific bases waned.
- 83 Chris Waters, 'Conflict with Britain in the 1940s', in David Lowe (ed.), *Australia and the End of Empires* (Deakin, 1996), pp. 69-86; Peter Crockett, *Evatt: A Life* (Melbourne, 1993).
- 84 Evatt continued to push for more emphasis on conciliation. Waters contrasts Australian Labour Party 'idealism' with British 'realism', see C. Waters, 'Anglo-Australian Conflict over the Cold War', *JICH*, 22, 2 (1994), 294-316; and Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, pp. 1-59. The Liberals and Defence Department still favoured more Commonwealth cooperation and a more 'realist' approach.
- 85 See Cab133/86 and 88 for the Commonwealth meetings. The CO worried about appearing to renege on treaty obligations to defend the Malaya, and prestige. The COS replied there would be no Australian commanders until war, and local commands would remain British even then. Defe5/24, COS(50)392, note by the Secretary to the COS, 4 Oct. 1950, Appendix A, Annex II.
- 86 Ovendale, 'The Cold War', in Bridge, *Munich to Vietnam*, pp. 88-89.
- 87 Cab133/86, PMM(46)1 and 5, COS, 20 April 1946; R. Aldrich and J. Zametica, 'The Rise and Decline of a Strategic Concept: the Middle East, 1945-51', in Aldrich (ed.) *British Intelligence*, pp. 236-75.
- 88 For COS views on ANZAM, see Cab131/6, DO(48)79, 'Australian Defence Co-operation', COS, 18 Nov. 1948, Annex II; endorsed at Cab131/5, DO(48)22, 24 Nov. 1948, minute 2.
- 89 In April 1950 a FO official described Australians as 'splendid fighters ... but they tend to give trouble when they are not fighting', Edwards, 'The Australian Commitment to the Malayan Emergency', *AHS* 22, 89 (Oct. 1987), 610. For behaviour in 1942, see *The Independent* (London), 26 Jan. 1993; Prem3/168/7B, for G. W. Seabridge's (the editor of *The Straits Times*) 28 Feb. 1942 report on rape, looting and offensive capacity; and Prem3/168/3, Wavell's 'Operations in Malaya and Singapore', 8 Sept. 1942, Appendix B.
- 90 SAC, Killlearn diaries, entry for 18 July 1946. Cab129/C(52)202, 'British Overseas Obligations', Eden, 18 June 1952. For the COS's 1950 views, see Co537/6264.
- 91 Millar, *Australia in Peace and War*, p. 126. O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War*, i, 28-29.
- 92 O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War*, i, pp. 21-34. Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, pp. 193-212. For British forces, see Cab131/11, DO(51)21, COS, 28 Feb. 1951.
- 93 Sections of the Australian press criticised Labor's approach, and the anti-communist leanings of Labor's own Roman Catholic supporters contributed to a split in the party in 1955. Consequently the foundations for a more sympathetic Australian stance towards confronting communism and insurgency were there. For Greece and Australian attitudes, see Waters, 'Anglo-Australian Conflict Over the Cold War', *JICH*, 22, 2 (1994), 299, 303, 309-10. See also Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, pp. 21 ff.
- 94 See Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, p. 12, for Shedden's (a long-serving Secretary to the Defence Department) support for British relations. For Menzies, see A. W. Martin, *Robert Menzies: A Life* (Carlton, Victoria, 1993), vol. 1; and Judith Brett, *The Forgotten People* (London, 1993).

- 95 See Edwards, *Crises and Commitments*, p. 12, for Shedden's support for close British relations. See also, CRA: A4940/1, C171, Cabinet Secretariat file on 'Military Assistance to Malaya', covering 1950; Edwards, 'The Australian Commitment to the Korean War', *AHS*, 22, 89 (1987), 604–617; and O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War*, i, pp. 37 ff.
- 96 CRA: A4940/1, C248, Cabinet Secretariat file on Korea for 1950–51, containing Cabinet minutes and papers. R. O'Neill, 'The Korean War and the Origins of ANZUS', in Bridge, *Munich to Vietnam*, pp. 99–113. The 'insurance' analogy is common, eg., see Glen St. Barclay, *A Very Small Insurance Policy: The Politics of Australian involvement with Vietnam* (Brisbane, 1988).
- 97 O'Neill, *Australia and the Korean War*, i, pp. 39–44. In Feb. 1951 Shedden reiterated that SEA's fall would deprive Australia of 'defence in depth', so that a US guarantee was vital, see Defe11/52, (1207).
- 98 Prem8/1148, Meeting with Australian Prime Minister, 14 July 1950. Menzies's assurances masked the opposition of Spender and Casey within his Cabinet. See Lowe, 'Commonwealth and Communism: Australian Policies Towards South East Asia in the Cold War' (Cambridge: Unpublished D.Phil thesis, 1989), pp. 145–200, 176–77; and Defe11/52, (1199A), for Shedden and Menzies's Dec. 1950 remarks.
- 99 Cab128/CM(51)13, meeting of 12 Feb. 1951; Cab128/CM(51)16, meeting of 1 March 1951; Cab128/CM(51)19, meeting of 12 March 1951, minute 8.
- 100 For alternatives to the 'Spender-centric' view of the origins of ANZUS in Percy Spender's *Exercises in Diplomacy* (Sydney, 1969), see: David McClean, 'Anzus Origins: a Reassessment', in *AHS*, 94 (April 1990), 64–82; and H. Brands, 'From ANZUS to SEATO: United States Strategic Policy towards Australia and New Zealand, 1952–54', *IHR*, ix, 2 (1987), 252–66.
- 101 Lowe, 'Australia, South East Asia and the Cold War', pp. 280–81. Churchill was much more aggrieved by the American attempt 'to usurp our position'. Brands, *ibid.*, p. 259. He annoyed Australia by bad-tempered attempts to gain association with ANZUS from 1951–53. The COS only regarded inclusion as important for a spell in 1952, when they feared the US was using ANZUS to line Australia up behind their concept of bombing and blockading China. Defe5/42, COS(52)641, 'Anzus', 24 Nov. 1952; Pemberton, *All the Way*, pp. 11–34; Millar (ed.), *Australian Foreign Minister*, pp. 24, 41, 84, 90.
- 102 Lowe, 'Australia, South East Asia and the Cold War', pp. 280 ff; O'Neill, *Australia and the Korean War*, i, pp. 228–37. The 9 months plus assumed existing circumstances. Britain failed to highlight that, if Indochina and Thailand fell in the Cold War, attacks could develop within 4 months.
- 103 CRA: A462/2, 439/1/17, especially Menzies to Philip McBride, 4 March 1952.
- 104 E. O'Ballance, *The IndoChina War* (London, 1964), pp. 176–79; O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War*, i, pp. 285–88. I am grateful to David Lowe for highlighting the importance of Hao Binh. See also CRA: A462/2, 439/1/17, PM [Menzies] to Minister of Defence [Philip McBride], 23 July 1952, *passim*.
- 105 Defe5/46, COS(53)257, note by Directors of Plans, 1 June 1953. CRA: A5954/37, 1463/1, (72–74), paper by the Australian Joint Planning Committee on FE strategic reserve, 13 Aug. 1953.
- 106 For Slessor's, see Defe32/2, COS meeting of 31 March 1952. For the Global Policy Review, see Cab131/12, D(52)41, COS, 29 Sept. 1952; and Defe5/41, COS(52)514, 2 Oct. 1952.
- 107 Defe5/46, COS(53)244, note by Sir Nevil Brownjohn for COS, 26 May 1953. Defe5/47, COS(53)328, 'The Radical Review', COS, 8 July 1953. For COS concerns to keep an Australian Middle East contribution as late as Oct., see Defe5/49, COS(53)500, COS, 7 Oct. 1953, section 8. For Alexander, see CRA: A5954/37, 1463/1, UK Minister of Defence to Australian PM, 29 June 1953.

- 108 CRA: A5954/37, 1463/1, record of Australian Defence Committee minute 220/1953, 13 Aug. 1953, approving Australian contributions. British planners were told between 24 Aug. and 3 Sept. 1953.
- 109 See Do35/6064, Bishop to Pritchard, 1 Oct. 1953; Defe5/49, COS(53)500, COS, 7 Oct. 1953; and Defe5/49, COS(53)501, COS, 8 Oct. 1953. Australia had not given up on the Middle East. At a 16 Oct. 1953 meeting with the CIGS, Menzies argued for interesting America in Malaya through ANZAM. The US must see, 'that if she stood out of South East Asia, the Middle East would be weakened'. Do35/6064, Meeting in the Cabinet Room (Canberra), 16 Oct. 1953; CRA: A5954/37, 1463/1, 'Future of Australian troops', (72), Australian Joint Planning Committee, 13 Aug. 1953.
- 110 Defe11/97, (869), COS(53)136, meeting of 1 Dec. 1953; Cab131/14, D(54)1, meeting of 20 Jan. 1954. Templar and the BDCC argued Britain might appear to be shirking Malayan obligations. The COS successfully argued British forces would remain significant, and in war with China local commanders would initially be British.
- 111 Anglo-Australian cooperation in areas such as intelligence, missiles and nuclear testing also intensified. L. Arnold, *A Very Special Relationship: British Atomic Weapons Trials in Australia* (London, 1987).
- 112 Defe6/11, JP(49)134(F), 'Plan Galloper', 1 March 1950; Co537/6264, JP(50)47(F), 'Strategy and Current Defence Policy in SEA and the FE', 6 April 1950. Both are JPS papers for the COS.
- 113 Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, pp. 346-47, 356, 461-62, 586-87, 614-20, 679-80. N. Tarling, 'Atonement before Absolutism: The Anglo-Thai Rice Negotiations of 1945', *JSS*, 56, 1 (1978), 22-65; and 'The British and Siamese Rice, 1944-47', *JSS*, 74 (1987). See also Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand*. Ultimately, Britain had to pay reasonable prices to secure the required quantities of rice.
- 114 Russell Fifield, *Diplomacy of South East Asia: 1945-58* (New York, 1958), pp. 239-40.
- 115 Cab134/288, FE(0)49)82 Final, 8 Dec. 1949, Bukit Serene Conference (MacDonald's annual meeting of British representatives in the Far East), Day 3, 'Siam'; Fifield, *Diplomacy of South East Asia*, pp. 237-42. The Formal Agreement was effectively ended in 1950, formally dissolving in 1954. See further, Tarling, *Fall of Imperial Britain*, pp. 195-97; and Prem8/1072 and 1073.
- 116 Appeals by the Commanders-in-Chief in Singapore to give Thailand assurances of assistance against attack received short shrift from London in 1949, as they had done in 1941. Co537/6264, JP(50)47(F), 'Strategy and current defence policy in Southeast Asia and the Far East', 6 April 1950.
- 117 For a survey of Thai foreign policy and politics, see Kokbua, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun*, chs. 4-5. See also, Defe5/24, COS(50)376, 23 Sept. 1950, containing SEC(50)23 of 11 Sept. 1950, 'Defence of Malaya', by the Deputy Commissioner-General, Southeast Asia.
- 118 David Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven, 1984), p. 264. Christopher Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954* (London, 1999).
- 119 For short surveys, see Chai-Anan Samudavanija and Suchit Bunbongkarn, 'Thailand', in Zakaria Haji Ahmad and Harold Crouch (eds), *Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 78-117; and Joel Steinberg et al, *In Search of South East Asia* (Sydney, 1989 edition), pp. 387 ff.
- 120 Annam occupies the central area of Vietnam. Co537/6264, COS(50)89, 9 March 1950, sub-section on 'Siam'. Pridi fled in 1947, ultimately to China. For Thai politics, see: J. S. Stirling, *Thailand, Society and Politics* (London, 1981); and Donald Nuechterlein, *Thailand and the Struggle for South East Asia* (Ithaca, 1965).
- 121 Defe 11/32, MacDonald to FO, 10 Dec. 1948; Defe11/42, COS(50)479, 18 Nov. 1950. For Macdonald's views, see Defe11/100, (1152A).

- 122 For the Chinese, see G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand* (Ithaca, 1957). There was also an impoverished minority of over 10 million in the north-east, ethnically akin to the Lao, from which the Communist Party of Thailand was able to draw support for insurgency in the 1960s, see Donald A. Weatherbee, *The United Front in Thailand: A Documentary Analysis* (Columbia, 1970).
- 123 Defe11/114, BDCC(FE)(54)3, 26 May 1954; R. Randolph, *The US and Thailand. Alliance Dynamics 1950-85* (Berkeley, 1986), pp. 12; Kokbua, *Thailand's Durable Premier*, pp. 25-27, 52-54.
- 124 In 1953 Templer unsuccessfully suggested securing US finance for a strategic east-west highway in Malaya. Defe11/95, various telegrams to and from Templer, dated Jan. 1953 onwards. This would have provided northern lateral communications, benefiting Emergency, defence and the economy. An east-west highway was built by the 1980s. The potential of historical Sino-Vietnamese friction may also have been underplayed, see Laura Calkins, 'Sino-Viet Minh Relations, 1948-52' (SOAS, London: Unpublished Ph.D thesis, 1990).
- 125 For an introduction to Indochina between 1945-49, see Short, *Origins of the Vietnam War*, chs. 1-2.
- 126 For Foreign Office views see, Ritchie Ovendale, 'Britain, the United States, and the Cold War in South-East Asia, 1949-1950', in *JA*, 58, 3 (1982), 448.
- 127 See MMP20/9/3 ff, MacDonald to FO, 28 Nov. 1949; and C. M. Turnbull, 'Britain and Vietnam, 1948-1955', *War and Society*, 6, 2 (1988), 102-124.
- 128 Thailand was the first local state to recognise the Bao Dai regime, on 28 Feb. 1950, but this split the Cabinet, see Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, p. 91.
- 129 Co537/6264, COS(50)89, 9 March 1950; Defe11/40-42. Taiwan and Tibet were assumed China's priorities. For internal security, see Defe11/34, High Commissioner to CO, 15 Feb. 1950.
- 130 Malaya was a rice deficit country, and Templer later warned any substantial cut in Thai rice supplies would probably cause such problems as to delay political advance, see Co1022/200 and 242.
- 131 See *FRUS 1950*, vi, 1, pp. 11-18, Bukit Serene conversation, on 6 Feb. 1950, between the State Department's Ambassador at large in Asia, Philip Jessup, and MacDonald; Co537/6264, COS(50)89, 9 March 1950; and Prem11/1221.
- 132 See Defe5/23, COS(50)307, 19 Aug. 1950, 9 Aug. 1950 and, for informal Anglo-French military collaboration from 1949, Co537/6277.
- 133 For later views, see Defe11/42, COS(50)426, 1 Nov. 1950, COS study on the BDCC's Aug. 1950 paper. For the Dec. decision, see Ovendale, *Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments*, p. 127.
- 134 See Defe11/44, (1254A), annex to COS(51)78, 7 May 1951; Defe5/40, COS(52)402, 31 July 1952; and Cab131/13, D(53)1, COS, 22 Jan. 1953, for possible Thai use of Songkhla as a 'back-door'.
- 135 For 1941, see Stowe, *Siam*, p. 206; and Aldrich, *Key to the South*, pp. 328 ff. For 1950, see Defe5/24, COS(50)353, 'Siam in Relation to the Defence of Malaya', 12 Sept. 1950, containing a telegram from the BDCC to COS on Siam of 2 Sept. 1950; and COS(50)376, 23 Sept. 1950, containing SEC(50)23, 'The Defence of Malaya', BDCC-approved memo. by Deputy Commissioner-General (Foreign Affairs), for comments on Whittington's views.
- 136 O'Ballance, *Indo-China War*, pp. 113-139. According to a JIC(FE) report in Defe11/42, COS(50)479, 18 Nov. 1950, China and Russia's recognition of the DRV showed, 'that Communist aggression may follow the Japanese model of 1941', Thailand quickly accommodating. Co537/6328, BDCC telegram to COS, SEACOS 134, 1 Dec. 1950.
- 137 Co537/6328, BDCC telegrams to COS, SEACOS 134 and SEACOS 142, 1 Dec. and 18 Dec. 1950. Cab131/13, D(53)1, 'Defence of Malaya', COS, 22 Jan. 1953, suggested the Songkhla position be taken 'when the present government shows any signs of active co-operation with the communist powers'.

- 138 In 1941 Matador was never launched, and Thai border police initially prevented a two-battalion Indian force from taking an objective just across the Thai border. Wilmott, *Empires in the Balance*, pp. 168-70. Defe5/44, COS(53)99, Defence of Malaya, COS, 17 Feb. 1953, is clearest on timing.
- 139 Co537/6328, (27), BDCC telegram to COS, SEACOS 142, 18 Dec. 1950.
- 140 Cab131/11, DO(51)16, 'Defence of Malaya', COS, considered at Cab131/10, DO(51)4, 28 Feb. 1951, minute 1. The FO, which remained sceptical over Songkhla, suggested the formula that the position should be occupied only to meet (as in 1941) 'a clear and imminent threat' to Malaya.
- 141 Defe11/43, 'Directive for the Defence of Malaya on the Kra Isthmus', CIC(51)1/1(P), by Commanders-in-Chief (Far East) for force commanders designate, 12 Jan. 1951.
- 142 See Defe11/44, especially BDCC(FE)(51)3, 'Defence of Malaya', 12 June 1951; and Defe5/39, COS(52)303, 'Assessment of Forces Required for Songkhla', 10 June 1952. The COS took note of the latter report, with some reservations, on 5 June.
- 143 O'Ballance, *Indo-China War*, pp. 120-39, 158-72.
- 144 Defe5/38, COS(52)167, 'Effects of a French Withdrawal from Indochina', COS, 12 March 1952.
- 145 See Defe5/40, COS(52)404, 'Defence of Malaya Against an Increased Internal Security Threat', 31 July 1952. This also noted Malayan insurgents' limited capacity to keep reinforcements supplied.
- 146 For EDC linkage, see Kevin Ruane, 'Refusing to Pay the Price: British Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Victory in Vietnam, 1952-4', in *English Historical Review* 110, 435 (1995), 70-92. Cab131/12, D(52)2, meeting of 19 March 1952, minutes 1 and 2.
- 147 Defe5/41, COS(52)470, 'State of Preparedness for War', 28 Aug. 1952, containing a report by Commanders-in-Chief (FE); NLA: Ms 4936, Menzies papers, series 19, defence box 434, file 2, containing COS(55)41, 'Urgent Military Preparations Required in Malaya', UK COS, 24 Feb. 1955. For the Malayan Regiment, see Cab131/12, D(52)2, 19 March 1952, minute 2. For aircraft, see Defe5/49, COS(53)548, 'Action in the Event of Chinese Aggression', COS, 4 Nov. 1953.
- 148 See O'Ballance, *Indo-China War*, pp. 176-88; and Defe5/43, COS(52)679, 'Indo-China Situation', 12 Dec. 1952, COS-approved brief for the Minister of Defence.
- 149 Strang thought the best argument for assistance was it would ease French ratification of the EDC, see Fo800/782, UK delegation, Paris, to Dixon (FO), 16 Dec. 1952, *passim*.
- 150 See the previous note; Defe5/40, COS(52)404, 'The Defence of Malaya Against an Increased Internal Security Threat', 31 July 1952; and Cab131/12, D(52)2, meeting of 19 March 1952, minute 2.
- 151 See Cab131/13, D(53)2, of 11 Feb. 1953, minute 3, for discussion of Cab131/13, D(53)1, 'The Defence of Malaya', COS, 22 Jan 1953. See Cab128/CC(53)13, meeting of 19 Feb. 1953, minute 2, for 'flecting'. The ministerial committee was chaired by the Lord President, Lord Salisbury, and included the Minister of Defence and Colonial Secretary. See also Defe5/43, COS(52)713, 'Defence of Malaya', draft memo. by Lennox-Boyd for Defence Committee, 24 Dec. 1952.
- 152 The meeting was told air photography and covert means were being used at Songkhla. In 1941 it had been inundated with British and Japanese 'tourists'. Gilchrist, *Malaya 1941*, pp. 13-14. In May, Templer, the Emergency in mind, wrote it was vital to seize Songkhla before communists penetrated south Thailand. He worried a gradual Thai drift leftwards might complicate this. Defe11/95, Gen455/4, 30 May 1953.
- 153 See Cab131/13, D(53)26, note on 'Conclusions of a Staff Conference', held between the PM, Minister and Defence and COS on 26 April, dated 28 April 1953; considered at Cab131/13, D(53)7, meeting of 29 April 1953, minute 4. See also Cab128/CC(53)30, meeting of 5 May 1953, minute 1.

- 154 See Prem11/645, Selwyn Lloyd (FO Minister of State) to Churchill, 11 June 1953; Prem11/645, COS-approved FO brief for Bermuda, June 1953; Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (London, 1986), pp. 16-24; and Defe5/46, COS brief for PM, 22 June 1953. For Britain's view that the Indochinese problem was mainly political, see MMP20/9/3, MacDonald to FO, 28 Nov. 1949.
- 155 Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 19. Cab128/CC(53)39, 6 July 1953, minute 3. Just before the Foreign Ministers' meeting, Colonial Secretary Lyttelton, warned the Cabinet that if Indochina fell Malaya might deteriorate. The Cabinet endorsed a policy of encouraging further American aid to Indochina.
- 156 Prem11/645, Lord Salisbury [effectively in charge of the FO due to the illness of Churchill and Eden] to FO, 13 July 1953.
- 157 See O'Ballance, *Indo-China War*, pp. 194-202; Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 25, 36-39; Duiker, *US Containment Policy*, p. 148; and Prem11/645, telegram from MacDonald to London, 21 Dec. 1953.
- 158 It has been suggested that allowing the Geneva Conference was supposed to encourage the French to agree to EDC, but a conference was also necessary to persuade them to fight on in Indochina. See Cab128/CC(54)8, meeting of 10 Feb. 1954, minute 5; Cab128/CC(54)5, meeting of 26 Jan. 1954, minute 3; Command 9080, *Documents Relating to the Meeting of Foreign Ministers ... Berlin, Jan. 25-Feb 18 1954* (London, 1954); and Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 41-45. For the US accepting an Indochina conference because vetoing it might have cost the EDC and Indochina, see William C. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1986), i, p. 163.
- 159 Cab129/C(52)202, 'British Overseas Obligations', Foreign Secretary, 18 June 1952.
- 160 Britain worried that Indonesia might pose a political threat to Malaya, but could see little that it could do. For Indonesia as an example to radical Malayan nationalists, see Cab131/9, D.O.(50)94, J. Griffiths, 15 Nov. 1950. By 1954 MacDonald worried about increasing communist influence, see Defe11/85, (3228), Confidential Annex to COS(54)109, meeting of 20 Oct. 1954; and Defe11/102, (3354B), 'Situation in SEA', MacDonald to Eden, 8 Feb. 1955, Section III, (c). CO fears about possible arms smuggling to Malaya even precluded the use of military sales as a way of building links to its armed forces. There was a virtual arms embargo from 1950, see Defe7/199, Defe7/200 and Defe7/201.
- 161 The COS's priorities were to gain access to American planning, and to interest the US in Malayan defence. They were less anxious than the FO and Churchill about exclusion from ANZUS. In 1952 the FO suggested working towards a wider FE Security Pact. This would embrace south and n-e Asia, give Asian countries confidence in the Cold War, constrain American Sinophobia, and commit the US to SEA. There was, however, little American interest in such ideas, which had as much to do with British concerns about prestige as with defence. See Prem11/404, M.B(52)18, 'Mr Menzies Visit. towards a Far Eastern Regional Security System', Brief by the FO, 20 May 1952, *passim*.
- 162 For East Asia, Peter Lowe, *Containing Communism*, p. 265, concludes that '... Britain did not determine Western policies in East Asia but it did exert moderating influence on the United States on significant occasions.'
- 163 R. Aldrich, "'The Value of Residual Empire': Anglo-American Intelligence Co-operation in Asia', in Richard Aldrich and Hopkins, *Intelligence and Diplomacy* (London, 1994).

A Bottomless Pit? Forces and Bases (1945–54)

This chapter looks at the deployment and structure of forces in Britain's Southeast Asian territories. It asks how Britain planned for, and adapted to, the acceleration of decolonisation in India and then in Malaya and Singapore. Rather than focusing solely on British policies, it also asks how local conditions facilitated and frustrated British plans.

In particular, it investigates the way communal patterns affected insurgency and politics. The Malayan Emergency is considered not as an example of counter-insurgency in its own right, but as an influence on force posture. Likewise, politics are considered because the military continued to support the post-1942 political aims of building cross-communal Malayan institutions and larger territorial units. These were seen as vital to the construction of an administratively, economically and politically defensible local state. How far was progress towards these goals possible? How far did the communal divisions which shaped the Emergency also pattern decolonisation? This chapter thus investigates how the triangular and even quadrangular interplay between British planning, communal patterns, and communist and nationalist aims combined to affect forces. It will begin by arguing that in Southeast Asia, as in the Middle East, Britain's hope after 1945 was to return to the inter-war model of small garrisons backed by strategic reserves.

INDIAN FORCES: INDEPENDENCE FOR THE 'ENGLISH BARRACK IN THE ORIENTAL SEAS'

In early 1946 it was still thought that an independent India might follow British diplomacy and cooperate in Asian defence. In the nineteenth century India had supported at its own cost an army of 60,000 British and 150,000 Indian troops. This had underwritten British power in the Middle and Far East, and fought in the Crimea, Gallipoli and on the Western Front. After 1918 nationalism had increasingly affected its reliability and availability, and Indians had begun replacing British as officers. Nevertheless, in World War Two India provided two and a half million men, as much as the white Dominions combined and only exceeded by the United Kingdom's five million. During the re-occupation of British territories and Indonesia, Indochina and Thailand in 1945–47,

Southeast Asia Command overwhelmingly relied on Indian troops and logistic support.¹

Britain hoped that accelerated independence in 1946-47 – all Indian troops had returned home by the end of 1947 – would ease the way to a defence treaty. Nevertheless, optimism was tinged with doubt. From mid-1946 British planners knew they could take nothing for granted. Their worst case scenario envisaged India not even being a friendly neutral in a war against the Soviet Union.² The subsequent emergence of two Dominions, India and Pakistan, on 15 August 1947, and the outbreak of hostilities over Kashmir in October, made effective defence of the Indian sub-continent problematic, and assistance in Southeast Asia unlikely.³

The COS nevertheless hoped that, by keeping India in the Commonwealth, they might secure cooperation. At the April 1949 Commonwealth conference a formula was found to allow a Republican India to remain within the Commonwealth. Although by 1950 the Joint Planning Staff saw little hope of Indian assistance in Southeast Asia so long as the Kashmir dispute persisted, they noted that India was the only country in South or Southeast Asia whose resources were adequate to a major military effort. They hoped that, should Burma or Tibet come under communist control, Indian attitudes might change. The Colombo organisation was also intended, through economic cooperation, to help 'educate' Asian countries, so paving the way to a regional security arrangement.⁴ Memories of 1942, however, left many Indians convinced great allies attracted greater enemies. A nationalistic and anti-colonial India was unlikely to succumb to the charms of military partnership with its erstwhile imperial master.⁵

By 1950 Britain had accepted that 'educating' India, even in the face of expansive communism, would be a slow business. Its plans discounted Indian military help. Thereafter, Britain worried India might cause difficulties over air transit rights to the Far East in an emergency, or over the use of Gurkhas against 'nationalist' movements. Indian assistance in Southeast Asia remained a goal, not an expectation, and Britain had to set about constructing a defence system without it.

DEFENDING MALAYA: A MORE EXPENSIVE ORIENTAL BARRACK

India remained unreliable, and air transit rights there were vulnerable. In Burma, however, a defence agreement was concluded on 29 August 1947, so that at independence in January 1948 there was some protection for British interests. A British Services Mission was to assist the Burmese in training and equipment procurement. In this way Britain hoped to encourage stability in a country racked by communist and ethnic insurgency almost from the moment of independence, when it also left the Commonwealth. In order to counter disorder in Burma, Britain coordinated limited Commonwealth aid in 1948-50.⁶

Ceylon, anxious to avoid Indian dominance, appeared even more cooperative in agreeing to British air and naval facilities. Agreements were signed on 11 October 1947, and after independence in February 1948 Ceylon continued to be

the headquarters of the small British East Indies Station. The latter's handful of cruisers and frigates patrolled the Indian Ocean, facilitating naval cooperation with Ceylon, India and Pakistan.

In the Middle East the Suez Base remained the core of a regional system of British installations. Post-war British attempts to improve its relations with Egypt and reduce its peacetime garrison by negotiating new bases agreements soon stalled, however, over Egyptian demands for sovereignty over the Sudan.

It is scarcely surprising that Britain has been seen as clinging to an outmoded system of bases. The pattern mirrors 1918-22. Then, economy at home, nationalism abroad, and indigestion from trying to consume the remains of the Turkish Empire, forced retreat. In 1945 debt, austerity and the need to rebuild the metropolitan economy were even more pressing, extra-European nationalism more potent, and post-war reoccupation tasks greater. After 1918 Britain had tried to satisfy nationalist appetites for independence, while retaining the kernel of imperium: control over bases and, if possible, over foreign policy. Then, however, Suez had an obvious value as the short passage to India.

In addition, the relative quiescence of the international system, and the weaker organisational basis for nationalism, had made tactical and partial retreat possible. By 1945, war had accelerated the breakdown of favourable conditions. Postwar attempts to draw up agreements with countries such as Iraq and Egypt, allowing for residual bases and defence cooperation, foundered on the rocks of nationalist resentment. In 1951-54 keeping Egyptian bases operative in the face of local opposition was to occupy around 40,000 troops.⁷

The Singapore naval base was also quickly repaired after 1945. It still seemed more secure than Hong Kong but not too far from potential Asian theatres, unlike Australia, which was touted as an alternative. Singapore was convenient as a staging post between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and en route to Australia, and as a base from which to deploy strategically placed reserves anywhere from Aden to Hong Kong. It appeared necessary to underpin colonial security. Besides, the facilities - docks and airfields - were there, inviting repair and use. Retreat in India, combined with persistent British obligations as far apart as Fiji and Mauritius, seemed to confirm Singapore's value. Singapore, therefore, was by 1948 restored as a great port, the headquarters of British forces in the East, and the bedrock for British power in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.⁸

How far was this preservation of bases the clarion call to a lost cause? It is now necessary to look at how resources were committed to bases. Was the vast, empty harbour at Trincomalee in Ceylon a symbol of British illusions, or proof that resources were only forthcoming when real needs were identifiable? Was Singapore re-occupied in 'a fit of absence of mind' or were there serious attempts to plan for the future?⁹

In April 1946 a paper on Far Eastern foreign policy was issued by the Far East (Official) Committee, incorporating a Joint Planning Staff study on Southeast Asia. This assumed containment of the Soviet Union along a line of bases running from the Aleutians, through Taiwan to the Philippines, making the United States primarily responsible for defence North of the tropic of Cancer.

Britain would predominate South of the Tropic of Cancer where, 'Sea and air power are the dominating factors in the protection of our interests'. Considering 1942, French Indochina was, 'of particular importance to the defence of South-East Asia as a whole'.¹⁰

With Japan prostrate and China desolated by civil war, there was little immediate threat. Only Japan's fleets had made possible its 1941 victories. It was unlikely any enemy would develop the poor overland communications between Indochina and the Kra to the degree necessary to support land attack. The War Office thus hoped to minimise white troops East of India, making it possible to police the empire without conscripts. There would be a return to the pre-1936 situation, with Singapore protecting vital communications to Australia, and unlikely to form the base for large-scale army operations.¹¹

The War Office also intended to retain an imperial force, even if the traditional 'English Barrack in the Oriental Seas', India, could no longer be controlled.¹² After its entry into the interim government in September 1946, the Indian National Congress called for the return of Indian troops, which were underpinning SEAC's operations. The use of Indian soldiers in areas such as Burma and Indonesia became a sensitive issue long before the last Indian troops returned home in 1947. This was an important reason for Britain taking an increasingly conciliatory stance towards Burmese nationalism and granting early independence in January 1948.¹³

In October 1946 the Cabinet of the Interim Indian Government also indicated it would like to keep the Gurkhas (soldiers raised in Nepal for Indian Army service under British officers). The War Office, however, was already considering retaining them itself. A shattered home economy, labour shortages, and heavy post-war obligations, all intensified the Gurkhas' significance as a manpower source. This was especially so as it was initially hoped British conscripts would not serve abroad, both for political reasons, and because their 12-month terms of service (set by the 1947 Conscription Act) would have made foreign tours inefficiently short.¹⁴

Ultimately Britain lengthened National Service, to 18 months in 1948 and 24 months in 1950, making service abroad practical. In the meanwhile, Attlee and the COS searched for alternative manpower sources, with African colonies and Gurkhas high on their lists.¹⁵ In 1946 a plan was devised for three 'imperial' brigades in north Burma, each comprising one British, one Gurkha, and one Burmese hill tribe battalion. The promise of Burmese independence overtook this. During 1946-48 plans then developed for a mobile Gurkha division in Malaya, and just one brigade of British troops at Singapore, providing for an eventual complement of 4-5,000 British and 12,000 Gurkhas.¹⁶

In negotiations beginning in March 1947 Britain sought to secure Indian and Nepalese agreement to its unfettered use of up to 25,000 Gurkhas. An agreement was signed with Nepal and India on 9 November 1947, transferring eight Gurkha battalions (initially limited to 15,000) to Britain, twenty to India. The agreement contained little detail, but prior negotiations and exchanges of letters implied restrictions.

The Gurkhas were not to be used against unarmed mobs, which was supposed to reassure India they would not help suppress nationalists. Britain, however, made this subject to its own proviso. Since the Gurkhas were to be integral to the British Army (in order to avoid being seen as mercenaries, which of course they were), it must be free to give them the same orders as it would other troops. Britain had given little more than an informal assurance that the Gurkhas' intended task was not internal security, but to serve as a strategic reserve for external defence in Southeast Asia. Unequivocal assurances were given that Gurkhas would be subject to recall if Nepal was attacked, and could not be used against Gurkha units serving in other armies. In practical terms India would be in a position to apply pressure should Britain fail to address its clearly expressed desire; that Gurkhas should not be used against nationalists. Gurkha recruitment would rely on India's continuing willingness to supply transit facilities for landlocked Nepal.¹⁷

By late 1948 there were seven partially effective Gurkha battalions in Malaya. Thus the British kept one of the so-called 'martial races' of the old Indian Army, albeit reliant on Indian cooperation and now at British expense, to sustain eastern interests. As British and Indian troops returned home the strength of Allied Land Forces Southeast Asia (ALFSEA) dropped from nearly 250,000 in October 1945 to just under 30,000 in July 1947. By mid 1948 there were just three British battalions in Malaya to supplement the Gurkhas.¹⁸

Britain planned to use the Gurkhas as its regional reserve and for external defence, leaving internal security to local forces. By this time, two battalions of the Malay Regiment had been formed. Race was to be an important theme. After the Indian mutiny of 1857-58 Britain had been careful to keep adequate numbers of white troops in India, posting a British battalion with each Indian Brigade. Regiments were constructed from units of different communities and all artillery heavier than mountain batteries was kept in British hands. Those communities which remained reliable during the mutiny were looked upon as 'martial races' and recruited to garrison and police territories such as Malaya.

In the colonies local volunteer forces were raised in British-officered companies which, in Malaya, were recruited along communal lines and paid different rates. The British companies controlled the heavier weapons. There were fears in Malaya that recruiting local forces might undermine white power, but from the Boer War there was pressure from local British officers to increase indigenous participation in defence.¹⁹ The Malay Sultans also disliked funding Malaya's garrison of alien Asians, which included an Indian and later a Burmese battalion. The Malay Regiment was eventually formed from 1933-34, on an experimental basis, to test the 'martial' qualities of the Malays.

Expanded to two battalions at the outbreak of war in 1941, the Malay Regiment acquitted itself with distinction, notably in the defence of Pasir Panjang ridge in Singapore. Malay soldiers held their positions despite panic among white troops. Hastily trained Chinese volunteers fought bravely in 'Dalforce'. Even if isolation from Southeast Asia obscured the degree to which Japanese successes had boosted nationalism and damaged white prestige, defeat

did leave Britain convinced that in the modern world national armies, not just imperial mercenaries, were vital. The postwar desire to develop a central strategic reserve of three brigades, to be held in readiness in Britain, also required the greater development of local forces.²⁰

In January 1946 Allied Land Forces Southeast Asia (ALFSEA) headquarters therefore suggested, 'in line with political plans for fusing states of the Malay peninsula, opening [the] Malay Regiment to all races ...'. The ultimate aim was six mixed battalions, which would relieve imperial troops of internal security tasks. Initially, however, individual battalions would not be mixed, though technical arms would, in order to 'utilise the higher intellect available in minority races'. The quick reconstruction of the Malay Regiment was recommended as, 'a unifying force in post-war Malaya and as a counter-blast to the influence of [the] force raised by Japanese', and to their war-time appeals to Asian sentiment. Britain returned, therefore, hoping to form a multiracial Malayan Army, both as an instrument for moulding the cross-communal Malayan identity they hoped to engineer, and to enable the progressive rundown of white troops.²¹

It is not clear how far Malay opposition to Malayan Union and citizenship proposals was responsible, but by June 1946 the multi-racial policy had been modified.²² It was now proposed to recruit the Malay Regiment from Malays only. In line with the retreat from imposing racial equality to edging the Malays towards it, plans for a multiracial army were toned down. Now the all-Malay infantry Regiment was ultimately to form part of a 'Malayan Army' of a division. This would incorporate mixed supporting arms. By using non-Malays only in supporting units, 'it will be possible to gauge the military quality of all races ...', and then further consider the possibility of non-Malay infantry battalions.²³

In March 1947 the Overseas Defence Committee endorsed an initial two battalions of the Malay Regiment. A gradual expansion to six was authorised after the outbreak of the Emergency, the target date being October 1950.²⁴

In summary, by early 1948 the aim was one British brigade group in Singapore, six Malay battalions mainly for internal security, supporting arms to include non-Malays, and a mixed British-Gurkha division. At least one brigade of the latter was intended to act as a mobile theatre reserve. In March 1946 the Defence Committee decided Hong Kong was indefensible against major attack by any Asian power controlling the mainland. There, three battalions would hold against all other contingencies, and eventually the pre-war Hong Kong Volunteer Reserve would reform.²⁵

This represented a judicious mix of old methods and new departures. It was partly an attempt to return to the old imperial model. Small local garrisons would secure bases and internal security. Britain would retain one of the most reliable 'martial races' of the old Indian Army, the Gurkhas, to form its new, 'imperial garrison in the oriental seas' (albeit at British cost). Metropolitan power, in the form of the Royal Navy and a strategic reserve of three brigades in Britain, could be rushed to trouble-spots.²⁶

The new side was the commitment to increasing Malayan forces, both to relieve imperial troops and as an aspect of nation-building. Furthermore, the structure of local forces, with a division of labour leaving Singapore with primary responsibility for naval forces, was to be tailored towards the aim of uniting Malaya and Singapore. Military and colonial thinking had been moulded in the cauldron of 1942, and had emerged on parallel tracks, both aiming to blend races into a nation, and territories into a defensible federation, a 'Dominion of Southeast Asia'. Darby's argument that there was no attempt to coordinate defence and decolonisation fails to see that, initially at least, they were both strands of a single process, emanating from 1942.

A whole British-Gurkha division might seem a large force for Malaya after 1945, and it was of course intended to protect British interests throughout Southeast Asia, if not further afield. On the other hand, the dangers of an emergent China stirring up Chinese in Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong could not be overlooked.²⁷

In 1948, therefore, British plans for air, ground, and local forces were coordinated with colonial policy and intended to deliver defence cheaply, but also to provide a theatre reserve. They formed part of a larger strategy of harnessing the resources of local forces, the Commonwealth and allies to the defence of areas such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In 1946-47 there were even brief hopes that African troops might provide a partial replacement for the Indian Army. Meanwhile the British Army decreased from its wartime peak of five million to below 700,000 in 1947.²⁸

With the increasingly Herculean tasks of world policing shared, Britain hoped to use the old imperial model of defence, of small garrisons and mobile reserves, to discharge world duties at affordable cost. In June 1948 the Malayan garrison stood at just seven partially formed Gurkha battalions, three British and two Malay Regiment battalions, and a British Artillery Regiment organised as infantry; equivalent in all to thirteen infantry units. The illusion that such small forces could guard British interests in Malaya, and that the Gurkha Division would be free to play the role of strategic reserve, was about to be painfully exposed.

THE EMERGENCY: 'SCREWING DOWN THE PEOPLE'

On 16 June 1948, three European rubber planters were killed. By the 18, a country-wide state of emergency had been declared. The following sections look at this Malayan Emergency as an example of the interaction of defence planning with local conditions. They show that, despite recurrent hopes that reinforcements might be withdrawn, the Emergency called for the prolonged commitment of British, colonial and Australian troops. It also confirmed the difficulty in building balanced, cross-communal local forces. In short, colonial conflict postponed the achievement of the force posture outlined above.

This section further suggests that the Malayan communal patterns which fuelled insurgency, and so distorted force posture, facilitated the eventual

success of counter-insurgency. They fuelled conflict because many Malayan Chinese instinctively supported the communists, who had been the most staunch organisers in pre-war anti-Japanese movements, and had run the wartime Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). But communal patterns ultimately undermined insurgency, mainly because the guerrillas' predominantly Chinese nature alienated Malays. Opposed by most Malays, and with even the Chinese deeply split, the insurgents could not expand beyond a narrow support base.

In this context, British fortunes in the Emergency began to turn decisively by 1952. By then Britain had resettled the rural Chinese squatters who sustained insurgents and developed a nation-wide security framework. Yet it was only just beginning to extend elections up to municipal level, and to implement positive measures which it hoped would win back squatters' 'hearts and minds'.²⁹ Britain was able to win the insurgency, and clear the way for decolonisation and force withdrawals, by a 'population control' approach, with 'hearts and minds' measures playing an auxiliary role. Yet such British tactics, in turn, could win only because Malaya's inter-communal and intra-communal divisions fatally restricted the space available to the communists.²⁹

In short, interactions between British plans and communal patterns helps to explain both Britain's failure to minimise force commitments, and its counter-insurgency success. The rest of this section divides into two; first, an analytical narrative of the Emergency; secondly, an examination of the conditions which facilitated counter-insurgency success.

The declaration of an Emergency, on 16–18 June, caught the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) off balance. Its wartime Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) had been disbanded in 1945, and not yet reformed. Yet the MPAJA still retained heroic stature amongst sections of Malaya's Chinese. In 1947 Malaya's population was just under five million, of which around half were Malays and 38 per cent (1,885,000) Chinese.³⁰ Economic distress in the 1930s and wartime Japanese persecution had swollen the numbers of Chinese squatters on the jungle fringes. Squatters who supplied the MCP's 'invisible army'. For the Chinese at least, the MPAJA seemed to be a hidden force of moral power, their presence tempering abuses of power by the Japanese and police.³¹

When British forces returned in September 1945 the MPAJA had ostensibly demobilised (in fact concealing many weapons) and concentrated on a united front strategy. From 1945–48 it organised and penetrated unions, associations and political parties. It capitalised on postwar economic dislocation and hardship, and on the legacy of the unpopular 1945–46 'British Military Administration', locally dubbed the 'Black Market Administration'. MCP union

* 'Hearts and minds' is an over-used, under-dissected term. At least 3 types of policy can be identified. *Political* measures (promises of independence, concessions to Malay supremacy) helped keep most Malays onside. *Civilian or civic* measures (schools and piped water) minimised Chinese alienation. *Military* issues (propaganda, rewards, amnesties, limiting collateral damage), helped secure surrenders. In the cases of the *orang asli* of the interior, however, and of the Borneo tribes in the Confrontation, winning support through protection, veterinary and medical aid was central to operations.

leaders won hard-pressed workers real gains through labour disputes, at a time of shortages and high prices, and of malnutrition and disease.³²

The MCP hoped Britain's postwar Labour Government would provide concessions and political space. So it proved, with societies assumed legal until otherwise stipulated, and an explosion in newspapers. But wartime radicalisation, and postwar conditions, meant papers, unions and associations tended to become ethnically oriented, highly politicised, and to demand faster reform than Britain would countenance. By February 1946 Britain started demarcating permissible activity, preventing use of unions for political purposes, and blocking the use of demonstrations as tools to undermine British authority. A 15 February commemoration of the fall of Singapore, planned by the MCP and its offshoots, was banned. MPAJA officials who pressurised ex-collaborators were tried. If anything, government vigilance increased with the restoration of civil government in April 1946.³³

During 1946-48 societies legislation, evictions from plantations, and the banishment of organisers who were alien Chinese, challenged the MCP grip on labour. The inauguration of the Malayan Federation (February 1948) also signalled a close British partnership with Malay politicians, if not a 'divide and rule' strategy. Chinese and radical Malay support for the Malayan Union, and opposition to the Federation, had been ignored. With only limited citizenship granted to non-Malays, no definite programme towards elections, and improving economic conditions undermining its control of labour, there was little prospect of the MCP achieving its aims by peaceful means.³⁴

Whether the MCP could ever have achieved these aims without conflict remains a moot point. If it could have done so, and it was British actions that left the MCP little alternative but to revolt, then Britain itself made necessary the subsequent deployment of thousands of troops. Britain's repression would then be responsible for destroying its hopes of minimising forces. If, by contrast, the MCP's *modus operandi* and aims made conflict a matter only of timing, the verdict must be different.³⁵

For Britain, the problem was that any agreement satisfactory to the MCP – and so including equality of citizenship and early elections – would alienate UMNO and with it most Malays. It might also have led to further demands and intimidation. Caught between the MCP and UMNO, and buffeted by crises in labour relations and on the jungle frontier, Britain's position was delicate in the extreme.

According to a January 1947 issue of the MCP's paper, the 'Freedom News', the MCP's aim was to realise 'Communism' in Malaya. As one MCP member confirmed, this meant removing the power of Britain and its 'feudalist' Malay allies. In their place a 'Democratic', socialist Republic of Malaya would be established, initially with a broad united front with the middle classes, but under the vanguard leadership of Chinese 'working classes', and the party. In 1946-47, meanwhile, the interim demand was for 'self-government' not full independence, and the MCP worked with middle class parties such as the Malayan Democratic Union. This moderate stance should be seen in the light both of Chinese communist tactics for a 'united front' and 'new democracy', and

Marxist theories of a two stage revolution. That is, it was a temporary expedient to win concessions and allies, and was not inconsistent with the continuation of intimidation, or with full revolutionary war should the united front policy fail to deliver.³⁶

This was radical nationalism in the sense of its anti-colonialist and cross-communal aims. As we shall see, however, its hopes transcending its predominantly Chinese support-base were to prove as futile as British hopes of constructing cross-communal nationalist parties. It was to remain nationalist in vision but predominantly Chinese in support, and never entirely abandoned violent means.³⁷

In early 1947 its leader, Lai Tek, was exposed as a traitor and triple agent, discrediting by association his policy of legal agitation and union action.³⁸ By the time the Communist Youth and Indian Communist Party conferences met in Calcutta, in February 1948, the MCP had few options. These conferences endorsed the line espoused by Soviet Politburo theorist Zhdanov in late 1947. This 'Zhdanov line' was that the world had divided into two implacably hostile camps, the communist and the Western-Imperialist.³⁹ The Calcutta meetings were followed by communist revolts in Burma (March), Malaya (June) and Indonesia (September), and by a resurgence of insurgency in the Philippines. After initial uncertainty about how far Malayan disorder was communist-directed, Britain soon deduced cause and effect. Coming just after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia of February 1948, and with the Berlin airlift opening in the West, the Emergency seemed to fit a pattern of communist subversion of 'Western civilisation'.⁴⁰

Given British use of banishment against its leaders, increasing government controls over unions, financial and discipline problems, pressure from rank and file members, and Lai Tek's disappearance, the MCP's resort to violence was massively over-determined.⁴¹ Its potency was also threatened by the ebbing of postwar hunger and dislocation. By late 1947 to early 1948 violence and crime were decreasing and strikes were below their post-war peak. January and March 1948 saw record lows in murders, with just seven in each (both political and non-political). No doubt the MCP were encouraged to discover their need to increase violence accorded with the Soviet 'line'. The regional Cold War thus confirmed what local conditions made likely.⁴²

In meetings in March and May 1948 the MCP, now led by Chin Peng, decided to regain the initiative by increasing 'defensive' violence, particularly in union and labour issues.⁴³ After all, the authorities were moving to evict its squatter supporters and pull up their tapioca plants, classifying them as ecological threats and as trespassers on valuable forest, mining and plantation land. It was ignoring their moral claim to occupation, based on experience as wartime refugees, their land pioneering, and their contribution to the government's 'Grow More Food' campaign, which had been so necessary to fight postwar food shortage.⁴⁴ The MCP thus increased its 'defence' of workers of all kinds, and began to move cadres underground, anticipating Britain would respond sufficiently to provoke full-scale 'people's war' only after September 1948.⁴⁵

In April to May, however, increases in labour agitation in Singapore went badly, resulting in the arrest and banishment of unionists and communists. Then on 1 June, a police baton charge – an attempt to evict workers from their Johore estate – left eight labourers dead.⁴⁶ MCP members in Johore and Perak now killed three British planters (and two Asians) on a single day, the 16th, possibly as part of the policy of defending squatters from eviction, and labourers from strike-breaking.⁴⁷ Coming on the back of growing violence, planter and business frustration at the lack of action boiled over. On 17th June a *Straits Times* headline demanded: 'Govern or Get Out'. These events precipitated the British declaration of an 'Emergency' first in Perak (June 16), then nation-wide in Malaya (June 18), and finally in Singapore too (25 June).⁴⁸

Though the Emergency was a direct result both of British repression, and of MCP decisions to increase violence, neither side was prepared for what followed. The Malayan Government lacked clear proof of communist direction, and Britain was anxious to avoid appearing authoritarian. Consequently it labelled the insurgents 'bandits' (changed to 'Communist Terrorists' or 'CTs' in 1952). It did not ban the MCP until 23 July 1948. This reticence must, however, be contrasted to the quick arrest of several hundred suspects by June 21, and introduction of sweeping Emergency powers, including that of arrest without trial. The communists themselves had just bought a newspaper, and had neither an army nor a guerrilla strategy in place.

Britain now built up the small Malayan police force, still demoralised from its wartime collaboration, and raised part-time police (Special Constables) and village guards. The Army was ordered to assist the civil power under police direction, rather than resorting to martial law. Keeping the conflict simply a civil emergency avoided the insurance complications a war would have involved for business. By refusing to label the conflict a war, Britain also left itself scope to deport or execute captured, uniformed communists without technically contravening the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners.

Already overstretched, Britain was also anxious to limit reinforcements. Just one of the three brigades of an intended United Kingdom-based strategic reserve had been formed. The COS reluctantly decided to send it to Malaya, on the grounds that only there was Britain actively fighting communism.⁴⁹ By January 1949 the police had increased from 9,000 to nearly 13,000 regulars. Over 33,000 Special Constables, part-time police, had been raised. Britain had by then sent three more battalions and an armoured car squadron.⁵⁰

These forces were sufficient to break up larger insurgent units, itself a vital step if the situation was not to spiral out of control. The security force presence also disrupted the communists' relationship with their civilian supporters. As the MPAJA (calling itself the Malayan National Liberation Army – MNLA – from February 1949) retreated into the jungle, it seemed by summer 1949 that the security forces were winning.⁵¹ Hopes of an early rundown of British forces, badly needed in Europe and for the strategic reserve, were briefly revived. The aim remained to build up local Malayan forces so as to allow British units to be reduced as early as possible.⁵²

The prompt increases in military and police forces, the latter reinforced with seasoned police from Palestine, had prevented insurgents from consolidating control in any populated areas. The MCP was disrupting Malaya's tin and rubber plantation economy, but not enough to fatally weaken imperial determination. Though the MCP killed as much as seven per cent of planters by 1954, rubber production was maintained and Malaya again became Britain's major dollar arsenal. In an ironic twist, international communism and the Cold War it fought – particularly the Korean War of 1950–53 – also fuelled global rearmament. This boosted rubber and tin prices, and so increased the profitability of the very plantations and mines the MCP were attacking.⁵³ The frontline battle to maintain Britain's dollar supplies, and so its economy in general, was thus won partly by part-time, Asian Special Constables. It was these who formed the first line of defence for isolated white planters in sandbagged colonial bungalows.⁵⁴

The MCP's chosen tactics of rural guerrilla warfare and economic sabotage had got off to an indifferent start. Far from MCP-controlled rural areas increasing and the imperialists being pressed back into urban strongholds – so that main bases could grow and the countryside surround the towns – growing security forces had broken up larger MCP groups. They had disrupted the MNLAs often casual links to civilians, whereby the insurgents had been able to wander into Chinese villages to eat, to visit relatives, and even to celebrate festivals such as Chinese New Year.⁵⁵

Rapid security force expansion, however, also meant disorganisation, arrests that verged on the random and police inefficiency. The influx of police with Palestinian experience, which made such rapid expansion possible, brought with it fierce resentment from some locally-trained officers, and discipline problems.⁵⁶ Britain's early 'counter-terror' and disorganisation, at its extreme resulting in the massacre of 24 Chinese civilians by Scots Guardsmen at Batang Kali in December 1948, was grist to the guerrillas' millstone. The MNLAs compared British burning of villages, detentions, deportations and excesses to Japan's wartime brutality. British leaflets showing dead and crumpled Chinese warned against joining the insurgents, who would be 'exterminated like vermin'.⁵⁷ What has been termed an 'approach to a counter-terror', of mass deportations and arrests, of villages burned and undisciplined police and troops, arose from British inability to impose a security framework on the country, or to secure timely intelligence. Insurgent numbers and supporters increased. Their civilian support, the *Min Yuen* cells, were reorganised to function despite increased security forces.

The MNLAs returned to the charge with renewed vigour in late 1949. At that time, an acute lack of Chinese personnel still limited British intelligence. Besides, security forces could not offer effective protection, especially for squatters and plantation workers. Many Chinese wisely decided to sit on the fence until it was clear which side it was safe to come down on. After all, the Peoples Republic of China was proclaimed on 1 October 1949. The *Viet Minh* were pressing the French in Indochina. The Dutch were about to come to terms with Indonesian nationalists, and Britain had recently completed a breathless series of retreats from Greece, India, Burma, Ceylon and Palestine. Communism

and nationalism were on the march. If the British Lion had proved toothless in 1942, it hardly looked a reliable bet in 1949.⁵⁸

Between mid 1949 and 1950 monthly incidents more than tripled. By February 1950 local authorities were calling for reinforcements to cover units needing retraining, boost morale, and protect the population. The High Commissioner pleaded that he could not expect unprotected Chinese to support the government. Recently, 'a Chinese who was elected Chairman of [a] village by secret ballot wept on learning of his election'.⁵⁹ With the Chinese looking suspiciously at a mainly Malay and relatively low-paid police force, and afraid the MNLA would kill 'running dogs', it took a couple of years before their percentage in the police could be brought even to 10 per cent. Later on (in 1951) direction of manpower was attempted, but even that could not be carried too far, for fear of diverting resources from production (an echo here of 1941), or forcing more people into the jungle.⁶⁰ There was also the worry that the British recognition of communist China (in January 1950) might be followed by the arrival of communist Consuls in Malaya (which it was not), and so boost the insurgent morale (which it probably did).⁶¹

In early 1950 more reinforcements had to be sent to Malaya, with a Royal Marine Commando, a Brigade and an aircraft squadron arriving from Hong Kong. A disconcerted COS – seeing their plans for a strategic reserve in Britain undermined – stressed that ultimate victory would depend on reasserting civilian control over the population. Even before the outbreak of the Korean War, the COS were anxious that Malaya should neither divert forces from Europe and the Middle East, nor further prevent the development of a central strategic reserve. They warned there should be no more reinforcements, otherwise, 'Malaya would devolve into a bottomless pit, devouring all our resources, and playing straight into Russia's hands'.⁶²

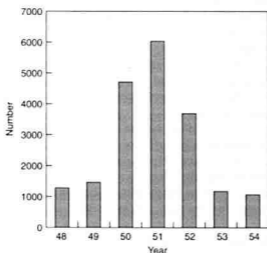


Figure 1: Yearly Emergency Incidents

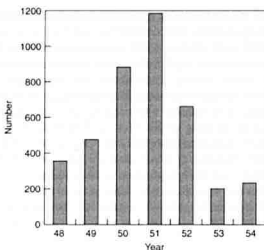


Figure 2: Yearly Total Security Force Casualties

Source: Director of Operations Report dated Sept 1957⁶³

Instead, Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs was appointed Director of Operations (DOO). He was given authority to coordinate police and service operations on behalf of the High Commissioner. Taking up his post in April 1950 he drew up a plan to systematically resettle the squatters – there had already been local schemes – so depriving the communists of support and forcing them out of the jungle.⁶⁴ Deteriorating security at home and communist advances abroad now overcame Malay concerns that squatters should not be secure land by illegal occupation. It was to be December 1951, however, before the government was able to offer land titles to Chinese who were resettled.⁶⁵

This resettlement was crucial to the so-called 'Briggs Plan' of 1950. Its aim was to undermine the communists' support network, the *Min Yuen*, by comprehensive resettlement, and by increasing civil administration, communications and police posts in populated areas. The police were to concentrate more on normal rather than para-military duties, while for intelligence purposes its Special Branch would be expanded.

Briggs also created a committee system which brought together the top military, police and administrative officers at all levels, allowing prompt, coordinated action. A small Federal War Committee considered policy, leaving execution to State and District War Executive Committees. Combined military and police operations centres were set up. His tenure saw a change of emphasis from large army sweeps to imposing a framework of small units across the country.

In addition to the framework, the Briggs Plan aimed to concentrate striking forces in each state in turn, rolling the communists up from south to north. Since the MNLAs were particularly strong in Johore, this aspect soon came to grief. By

the end of 1951, however, other elements were becoming increasingly effective. For the first time, efforts were systematic and coordinated, so that sweeps or the burning of houses in one area no longer displaced the problem to another. The resettlement of nearly 350,000 squatters (well over 70 per cent of the total) and the ongoing regroupment of 600,000 plantation workers had caused a crescendo of activity as the communists saw their supply and intelligence sources endangered. Planters, security forces and communists alike came under increasing pressure as incidents and casualties peaked.⁶⁶

As insurgent recruiting continued apace, it might be argued this 'law and order' approach had failed. The stemming of British tendencies towards indiscipline, however, shows that even in 1949-50 the MCP were failing to clutch themselves close enough to the people to force counter-insurgency into a cycle of terror and counter-terror. It was this erosion of distinctions between civilian and insurgent which was to fuel state terror and peasant alienation in Vietnam.⁶⁷ In Malaya, by contrast, it was the insurgents who faced the dilemma of how to extract continuing support from a weary population. In 1999 Chin Peng recalled how security patrols – given Malaya's good infrastructure – prevented the MNLA from holding populated areas, broke up larger units, and meant that even when the insurgents had plenty of money, it was difficult to buy food.⁶⁸

From 1951 the ratio of insurgents eliminated for every security force loss began a steady improvement.⁶⁹ With Britain determined to safeguard Malaya's dollar earnings, the prospect of outside assistance receding as the Korean War stabilised, and the vast majority of Malays opposed to insurgency, the communist campaign faltered. As early as 1949 Siew Lau, a senior party official in the Johore-Malacca area, criticised the MNLA for excessive coercion. His complaints were echoed by lower ranking members, such as political organiser Liew Thian Choy. In November 1949 the latter forlornly told an MCP labour leader at Batu Arang, 'that we coerced the people too much' and taught them too little. These accusations were repeated by surrendered insurgents, and in the defector Lam Swee's pamphlet, *My Accusation* which appeared in 1951.⁷⁰ MNLA excesses of exacting justice by summary shooting, of executions in front of families, or of tossing grenades into the cafes of supposed collaborators, were probably no more vicious than *Viet Minh* tactics. It seems, however, that they were having difficulty sustaining support while using both these methods and economic disruption.⁷¹

Even before resettlement began to become effective, therefore, the MNLA's methods of securing support, and its difficulty in sustaining large groups, presented an Achilles heel. Unable to dominate populated areas, without logistical links to other countries, and with the jungle offering only subsistence support to small groups, the MNLA had made itself reliant on its umbilical cord to the squatters.

Resettlement threatened to cut this link. The MCP responded with an August 1950 'Guide to the Anti-Resettlement Campaign'. Squatters were to be persuaded or coerced into resisting resettlement to the last. But this was easier

said than done, as the police and army conducted dawn raids, carrying villagers off to new settlements and burning old properties.⁷² By late 1951 the MNLA was facing problems maintaining popular support, increasing military pressure from the government, and the prospect of diminishing supplies as resettlement areas slowly became better protected and policed.⁷³ A British intelligence summary later concluded that the maturing Briggs Plan had, by this point, 'robbed the M.C.P of the initiative', resulting in 'a steadily increasing casualty rate', so that 'The situation clearly called for a drastic revision of tactics'.⁷⁴

Unable to seriously disrupt resettlement areas – only a handful were abandoned in the mid-1950s – the MCP Central Executive Committee issued new orders in September to October 1951. These so-called 'October Resolutions' included instructions to establish more jungle farms, and to avoid actions which harmed the people. They admitted anti-resettlement policy had proved counter-productive. The armed struggle was now relegated to second priority in the MCP's 'seven urgent tasks', behind building up mass organisations such as the *Min Yuen*.⁷⁵ The MCP was also to increase subversion, and build a 'united front' with the 'medium national bourgeoisie', meaning local capitalists outside the MCA. The long-term aim was to fortify popular support, and so enable the military campaign to be sustained if not ultimately increased. The short-term priority was to counter the slow garrotting of supply-lines which the Resolutions otherwise feared.

Several of the instructions indicated a declining ability to sustain large guerrilla groups, especially the decisions to move to smaller units, to increase jungle cultivation, and to improve relations with the *orang asli* (the indigenous tribes people of the interior).⁷⁶ The stress on improving work with Malays and Indians may also have reflected their increased importance for supplies.⁷⁷ These changes suggest that, though as yet partially effective, squatter resettlement was taking its toll on insurgent logistics.⁷⁸

The Resolutions also stressed avoiding actions which harmed the people, which they labelled 'left deviation'. The documents emphasised that previous failure to take account of the 'concrete' conditions in Malaya, and the interests of the masses, necessitated a re-examination of the way Marxist-Leninist thinking was applied. The MCP recognised their support was being undermined by economic sabotage, by attacks on resettled areas and by ill-directed violence.⁷⁹ By slashing rubber trees and destroying transport, the MCP had been breaking the workers' rice-bowl.⁸⁰

At the same time, economic sabotage was failing in its main aim, of destroying Malaya's economic value to Britain and so the latter's will to fight. 1950 saw rubber production peak despite terrorism. In 1950-51 the Korean War caused western countries to stockpile essential commodities, sending rubber prices and exports soaring. Plantations continued to function, despite the terrible attrition rate on European planters.⁸¹

The October 1951 Resolutions thus show the MCP forced to admit resettlement, and contradictions in its policies of economic sabotage and violence, threatened its survival. They show it responding by making 'mass

organisation' and supplies the number one priority, but also by reducing violence and economic sabotage, and increasing the emphasis on the united front and subversion.

The Director of Operations' Review of the Emergency of 1957, by contrast, stated that the Resolutions were also 'based on instructions published in the Cominform Journal'. Short has countered this by arguing 'the advice that was offered by both by China and Russia to Malayan Communists was at best uncertain'. Perhaps the most that can be said is that changes in the international communist 'line', towards placing more emphasis on 'united front' tactics in insurgencies, may have contributed to the MCP's October decisions. At the least, if stalemate in Korea in 1951 made outside help less likely, it was best to prepare the political ground for a long haul. None of these factors, however, should detract from the MCP's domestic military and politico-military difficulties.⁸²

The MCP's October 1951 Resolutions were reaching State Committees by April 1952. According to one British estimate, the resulting increase in Cultivation Units and in Armed Work Forces – the latter to give added protection to the *Min Yuen* and those engaged on political work – implied a net reduction in MNL strength of over 1,500. In other words, the MCP's change in tactics was not only an early symptom the Briggs Plan's success, but also implied a reduction in communist insurgency. The October Resolutions and the statements by SEPs and defectors, internal debates within the MCP, some British documents of 1952, and the MCP's inability to challenge tightening resettlement, all suggest the MCP's fortunes were on the wane by early 1952.⁸³

Meanwhile, the security forces continued to eliminate near-peak monthly levels of the MNL in 1952, partly because of improving intelligence. With the communists being held in Korea and Indochina, and the Briggs Plan maturing, the flow of information from the public began to improve. In spring 1952 a pattern of uneven improvements in Emergency indicators (incidents, and security force and civilian casualties) finally yielded to a sustained improvement. In 1951 incidents averaged over 110 a week. In the second, third and fourth quarters of 1952 they fell to weekly averages of 90, 56, and 31 respectively.⁸⁴

With improvements in resettlement likely to have a ratchet effect on MCP supplies, the change in fortunes was probably decisive, even if it could be exploited only through sustained security force action.⁸⁵ How far the change was caused by the MCP's Directives themselves, how far by the 'population control' which provoked them, is impossible to tell.

Ironically, just as the campaign approached the brow of the hill, the dramatic assassination on 6 October 1951 of the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, spread a sense of gloom. With the MCP perhaps given a momentary boost by Gurney's death, a series of major incidents and spectacular derailments gave officials and ministers the impression the communist campaign was steady. In particular areas, such as Johore, the MCP appeared to be maintaining its effort despite the early completion of resettlement. It was to take some time before British forces could refine operations around newly resettled villages, and perfect techniques for securing agents in them.⁸⁶

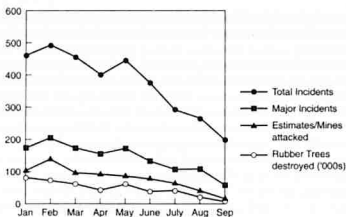


Figure 3: Emergency Monthly Statistics for 1952

Source: Rhodes House, Oxford, Mss British Empire s486/2/3: Young Papers, Combined Intelligence Staff (Malaya) Report of October 1952, Appendices A to G

Churchill, returning to the premiership in October 1951, was dismayed to discover the Emergency still costing £56 million a year, at a time when post-Korean War rearmament had sent Britain's balance of payments into crisis. His Government sent its Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, to Malaya in December 1951, and the latter concluded drastic action was required. He chose General Gerald Templer to be both Director of Operations and High Commissioner (February 1952 to May 1954). Malaya had its supremo.⁸⁷

With hopes of an early turn in the Emergency having been repeatedly dashed, Britain was understandably slow to realise the Emergency was at a watershed. Likewise, historians have been slow to realise the Emergency was not so much at a high-level stalemate – virtually requiring Gurney's removal and Templer's arrival to break it – as at a murderous climax and turning point.⁸⁸ There was, after all, a crisis in command. Briggs's term in Malaya had ended. Colonel Gray (Commissioner of Police and an ex-commando) had not yet retrained the hastily raised police, and was only reluctantly allowing them the armour necessary to protect from ambush in Malaya's jungle and defiles. There was also room for improvement in the direction of intelligence. Whether Gurney had died or not, London had to take difficult decisions on command.⁸⁹

Templer arrived in February 1952. He inherited security forces at their peak: around 23 battalions (not including an SAS Regiment); 67,000 police and up to 250,000 Home Guards. The sense of crisis surrounding his appointment gave him an increased leverage in securing and retaining resources, and in gaining concessions to the Chinese which the Malays had been grudgingly coming to accept.

Templer also arrived with the turning tide. Energising the administration, he capitalised on success. Special Branch was reorganised, with the attachment of

additional Military Intelligence Officers at headquarters helping to produce 'hot' intelligence for the troops. Gurney's 'New Villages' began to receive amenities (schools, medical assistance, councils) and perimeter lighting. Colonel Young, seconded from London as the new Commissioner of Police, retrained the Malayan police to emphasise normal policing and service to the public.⁹⁰

Since Templer only arrived in late February, however, we may suspect improvements before summer 1952 were due more to cumulative progress and changing MCP tactics than to Templer.⁹¹ Unless we believe charismatic leadership has instant and transmogrifying effects on complex campaigns, even those characterised by painfully slow jungle communications. Indeed, for changes in 1951-52 to be interpreted as a Templer-induced turn-around, his effect on insurgents must have been cataclysmic. For, quite aside from the October 1951 resolutions, in 1952 the MCP began what came to be seen as its version of the CCP's 'Long March'. Its 'Little Long March' from Bentong (Pahang) to Betong (South Thailand).⁹² In 1952-53 Chin Peng withdrew to the Cameron Highlands on the Perak border (Perak being his home state). Then in 1954 he retreated to the Betong salient on the Malay-Thai border, which was to be the MCP's main base until it agreed an end to hostilities in 1989.

The original intention had been to set up a new base in Chin Peng's home state of Perak. On arrival, Chin Peng recalls being told that the Perak State Secretary could himself keep only a small headquarters staff together. Chin Peng's headquarters found itself unable to secure the food and security necessary, and was forced into a step by step retreat to the border. It seems the communist campaign had a different chronology to the British. The former entered a downward spiral before Templer brought British tactics and leadership to their post-1952 peak. To be precise, from late 1951-52 - by when the communist leadership acknowledged resettlement could not be overturned, ordered the MNLAs to retreat deeper into the jungle, and Chin Peng began his march northwards. Left-behind MNLAs were then increasingly at the mercy of security forces, which could be concentrated against communist districts one at a time.

Templer had an additional impact, mainly through perfecting military tactics and population control. Arriving after the communist campaign peaked, he found many of the improvements he was to implement at an advanced stage of preparation. Planning had continued apace through October and November 1951, despite or even because of Gurney's assassination. Measures discussed then included arming more Chinese Home Guards, allowing elected Village Committees, improving New Village security and amenities, and land titles for new villagers (agreed in December 1951). Even the intensified use of collective punishments for recalcitrant villages, a hallmark of Templer's era, dates from Gurney's death. Templer's 'energising' impact thus consolidated existing trends in population control, with its mix of directed coercion, protection, promises of self-government, and provision of basic civic amenities.⁹³

From 1952-56 techniques for securing agents around New Villages, and for using these to destroy local MNLAs, were then refined. Eventually operations would start by intensified intelligence, arresting the best *Min Yuen*,

and then identifying and turning newer, more vulnerable suppliers. Intensified food operations were mounted, sometimes with tins punctured and rice pre-cooked or served from central kitchens. The grip might be relaxed at selected points, creating 'honeypots' where the insurgents could be drawn, and ambushed using information from informers. Many Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) proved surprisingly ready to betray compatriots. Their belief in the Communist Party as a source of power had been betrayed, and rewards offered them the chance of rehabilitation. Success produced accurate intelligence and intelligence bred success, creating a virtuous circle.

In 1953 an area of Malacca was declared 'white', with all restrictions removed. The inducement to continue to keep an area trouble-free proved effective. White areas and the number of New Villages with schools and water and other amenities slowly increased. By mid 1954 there were as few as 3,500 insurgents in the jungle, and the main threat was increasingly from subversion.

We must now relate the above account back to existing historiography. Why was a combination of population control and military pressure, and the alleviation of their negative effects by hearts and minds measures, so effective in Malaya? Many authors have argued that the turning of the Emergency was a victory for Templer's vigorous leadership and combined politico-military power, or for British 'hearts and minds' tactics.⁹⁴

According to 'hearts and minds' interpretations there was an early commitment to independence, and from 1952 resettled Chinese received medical, educational and social facilities. Elections were gradually introduced from village level up. Citizenship was extended to increasing numbers of non-Malays, particularly from September 1952. In 1953 non-Malays were allowed to join the senior administrative service in a ratio of one per four Malays. SEP were sent to tour villages. Surrender was made easy, with financial rewards for helping to secure other insurgents. Money or retraining allowed insurgents to re-enter society. In contrast to the campaigns in Algeria and Vietnam, the Malayan security forces became more disciplined as intelligence improved. As the British directed 'hearts and minds' strategy took effect in 1952-54, the Emergency turned for good.⁹⁵

By contrast, this section shows the tide in the Emergency turning in 1951-52, when New Villagers enjoyed only rudimentary facilities to compensate for the trauma of being uprooted. Often their new houses were further from jobs, or from vegetable plots and livestock. Farmers found themselves enclosed in barbed wire, often near poor or marshy land. Curfews and food controls were intensified when the security forces stepped up operations in an area. One of Templer's earliest acts was to descend on the unfortunate Chinese village of Tanjong Malim - which had supported the MPAJA in the war - harangue it and impose a 22-hour curfew in retribution for nearby ambushes.⁹⁶

In the light of such pressure, why have historians argued that Britain won over Chinese 'hearts and minds'? The answer is that 'hearts and minds' scholarship suffers a fatal deficiency: it deduces Chinese attitudes almost solely from British opinion, overlooking contradictory evidence from Chinese sources, and even from British documents on rural Chinese.

This is a critical flaw, because even an English-speaking government information officer such as Chin Kee Onn* could recognise that winning hearts and minds, as opposed to neutralising them, was an onerous task. His novel, *The Grand Illusion*, has its MNL hero Kung Li say, 'the Government still had a long way to go to win the hearts of the squatters. Squatters were essentially people of the open spaces. They wanted to farm land. They would never be happy cooped up in fenced-in villages, no matter how well managed ...'.⁹⁷ Han Suyin's† autobiography describes the SEP 'Ah Mui' – rubber tapper's daughter, stool pigeon, part-time housemaid in a Special Branch household, and perhaps a contraction of more than one real individual – as 'inhabited by a vague, unverballed resentment', and talking of 'the bitterness of resettlement'. Both authors are here describing the precise period we are interested in, around 1952 to 1953.⁹⁸

The adult population had to carry registration papers by the end of 1949. Over 12,000 Chinese were deported (some after October 1949, many more 'repatriated' voluntarily). Indeed, the intensification of resettlement from 1950 should be seen partly as a reaction to the closing off of outlets for banishment, as China fell under communist control, and alternatives such as Christmas Island and North Borneo were dismissed as unsuitable. One British officer later described deportees, who had been separated from their families by the confusion of war and administration, breaking down at the harbour.⁹⁹ In May 1952 the Australian Commissioner's Office in Singapore reported that 'Europeans as well as Asians have no confidence in the police'. Police were often haughty, allegations of assault too common, and the main interest of Sergeants brought in from Palestine 'the beer bottle'. Not for nothing was the opening book in Anthony Burgess's *Malayan Trilogy* entitled *Time for a Tiger* (London, 1956), Tiger being a popular local beer. According to the Australian report, improvements were just beginning to show. It took 'Operation Service', at the year's end, to begin to rebuild the idea that the police, at last being retrained, were genuinely at the public's service.¹⁰⁰

At the end of 1952 constitutional advance was also unlikely to impress sceptical Chinese. Despite the 1948 Federation Agreement calling for elections to the several legislatures as soon as possible, there had been no elections above municipal level. There was no guarantee the Malays and UMNO would not secure real power. British retreat from the Malayan Union to the Malayan Federation in 1946-48 could all too easily appear to be the imperial tactic of divide and rule. Britain's willingness in 1946 to dilute proposals for generous citizenship, in order to appease Malay anger, hardly suggested Chinese would

* After writing a book on the wartime MPAJA, which he admired, Chin Kee Onn English-educated teacher and Malayan tennis champion – was made research officer in the Psychological Warfare Unit for 1 year, before working in the federal information department. He got the idea for *The Grand Illusion* while interviewing SEP. He also supported Britain's aim for Malaya, to create a new 'Malayan nation'. Details courtesy of Mr Lee Liang Hye. See also the relevant end-note.

† Han Su-yin was a Chinese-Belgian doctor. After her first husband died – a KMT officer – she married Malayan Special Branch officer Leon Comber, and acted as doctor to a New Village. Her later writings and speeches sympathised with the new China, even with the Cultural Revolution.

gain an equal place in the country. In 1954 Victor Purcell* (who visited Malaya as a guest of the MCA in August to September 1952 and argued with Templer) described Malaya as a 'police state'. Tan Cheng Lock, chairman of the moderate, collaborationist Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), could say as late as December 1953 that 'the government has struck no root in the heart of the people'. Embittered as it was, Purcell's book *Malaya: Communist or Free?* (London, 1954) drew on the frustrations of less than radical Chinese.¹⁰¹

On a more negative note, Judith Strauch has noted that one Chinese New Village felt the stick more important than the carrot. Many resettled Chinese did not receive long-term land titles – 20 to 30 year leases – until long after 1952, or did not understand rights received. A study by Loh Kok Wah, based on participant-observation in four New Villages in Kinta, Perak, confirms that New Villagers remained frustrated agriculturalists. They received little farming land. There was recurrent pressure for a return to squatting, which they traditionally used to escape low wages, unemployment and poor conditions.¹⁰²

Despite improvements – and a few resettlements developing into thriving communities – some New Villages posed a public health menace even in 1954.¹⁰³ As late as 1956 the Director of Operations could talk of one area where, 'in spite of the sullenly hostile population, we are making very good military progress by screwing down the people in the strongest and sternest manner'. The Tunku (as the Chief Minister of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was commonly called) reportedly saw 'no hope whatsoever of changing the Chinese mind', which he felt was wedded to China.¹⁰⁴ These views echoed earlier British attitudes, that the Chinese would support the government only when 'forced into giving practical assistance', and that most rural Chinese were 'wind-blown', who would support whoever brought the greatest pressure to bear upon them. In so far as there is evidence, it suggests Chinese squatters, the insurgents' main support base, were not initially won over, so much as acquiescing in firm control.¹⁰⁵

It is, therefore, difficult to see the maturing of 'hearts and minds' measures – real as these were – as critical in 1951–53, especially in relation to recently resettled squatters. Nor were 'hearts and minds' policies new. Britain's long-standing and oft-repeated commitment to guiding Malaya towards self-government – a political 'hearts and minds' stance – had always helped avoid alienating Malay opinion, and prevented a wider section of nationalists being driven into welcoming communist arms. No doubt 'military hearts and minds' attitudes – which stressed controlled coercion and good treatment for SEP – also helped avoid population control spiralling into a downward cycle. Again, the resurfacing of Britain's entrenched preference for legality and minimum force after 1949 was important, despite earlier 'counter-terror'.

The key nevertheless seems to have been the maturation of the Briggs Plans' 'law and order' and resettlement approach, with 'hearts and minds' tactics playing an auxiliary role. It should be noted that Britain had used a population

* Purcell was a Chinese scholar of the pre-war Chinese Protectorate and post-war military administration, a Cambridge academic, and after 1946 supported Chinese calls for equal treatment.

control successfully before, in the Boer War, and did so again, in Kenya, in circumstances where hearts and minds measures were even less in evidence.¹⁰⁶ Yet why should this approach have worked in Malaya, and not Vietnam, Palestine and Algeria? Why were insurgents not able to step up guerrilla and terror activity and so win the battle over the legitimacy of force? Why was it possible to arm increasing numbers of Chinese 'New Village' Home Guards from 1951, without them turning these weapons back on the security forces?¹⁰⁷

The explanation might take the form of a *three-part model*. First, Britain cracked communist insurgency by 'screwing down the people' in a disciplined and quasi-legalistic manner, by 'population control'. The emphasis was on control of people and space, rather than on a simple body-count approach. Early military sweeps were essential to break up large communist formations. Later resettlement cut the umbilical cord between squatter and guerrilla, and restored government control over the forest frontier. Secondly, Britain avoided driving all nationalists into violent resistance. Its promise of gradual decolonisation was backed by the reality that it had granted independence to Burma, India and Ceylon. In addition, 'hearts and minds' measures – civic, military and political – helped limit insurgent support, and blunted the resentment caused by coercion. Thirdly and finally, these tactics could succeed largely because of local conditions, namely: the inter- and intra-communal divisions and characteristics of Malaya's population.

Success can thus be partly explained by the weak position of the MNL, reliant on Chinese for up to 95 per cent of its fighters. The leadership's early calls for its ranks to be 'Malaya minded' made little impression. The insurgents' caps may sometimes have sported three stars (*tiga bintang* – one for each main race), but the insurgent units were too often of one race.¹⁰⁸ Chinese was often used as the lingua franca in units, where small attachments of Malays might find themselves in an alien cultural milieu. Malay nationalism had its origins in a fear of being swamped by the Chinese. Serious clashes between Malays and Chinese MPAJA units in and after the war further limited the MNL's ability to recruit Malays, though the Emergency drove many radical Malays (fearing arrest) into their hands. The MCP recognised race as the crucial issue as early as 1947-48. Its Secretary-General (Chin Peng) has publicly stressed the centrality of this racial factor, and the MCP's failure to surmount it, as recently as June 1998.¹⁰⁹

The Chinese base of the MNL also suffered from adulterated nationalism. According to one British estimate, only around one million of Malaya's five to six million people were potential communist sympathisers.¹¹⁰ Chinese loyalties were torn between Nationalist and Communist China, traditional Chinese societies and the modern political organisation of the MCP, between cultural introversion and participating in the nascent Malayan state.¹¹¹ The MNL arguably never commanded sufficient breadth and depth of emotional commitment. The essentially mercenary origins of much Chinese immigration to Malaya also resulted in a large group of Chinese society with strong interests in the defeat of communism. Considerable Chinese business interests and ex-KMT supporters opposed communism. Chinese business leaders worked through

the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) to assist the government. MCA help included social welfare in New Villages, screening detainees, and forming a legitimate focus for Chinese political activity. Wang Gungwu, meanwhile, argues most Chinese wished to retain their traditional, communal organisations rather than follow mainland Chinese politics or seize the initiative locally. According to him, the MCA ran with the grain of Chinese politics, the MCP, with its modern political organisation, against the grain.¹¹²

Arguably, the war had only temporarily disrupted the Chinese trade guilds, clan houses and associations, whose focus was on achieving economic success through the existing system of government.¹¹³ The nature of the Chinese community in Malaya might also help to explain the willingness of many SEP to work with the state, in the most extreme cases joining the security forces in hunting down comrades. Lucien Pye has argued that, for many, communism did not represent a commitment to an ideology, or to a cause such as nationalism. It was more a means of adapting to a changing and modernising world, a potential avenue of advancement, or a personal commitment.¹¹⁴ For others, it was simply the most prestigious pro-Chinese, anti-Japanese body of the war, or for still others, a means of addressing social and economic grievances. In all these cases, the motivating force may have been less durable than that involved in nationalism.¹¹⁵

The MNLA also had leadership problems. In September 1942 a key meeting had been ambushed near Batu Caves outside Kuala Lumpur, the Japanese killing many senior members. Many more were arrested or banished by the British by July 1948. As early as October 1949 one SEP admitted he did not think the MCP would win because of its lack of experienced men. This low standard of leadership may have been a significant factor in preventing the MNLA from rooting itself inextricably even amongst the Chinese, and in the excessive reliance on terror.¹¹⁶

In post-war Malaya, then, Britain did not aim to divide and rule, but it did end up ruling communities which were divided.¹¹⁷ Divisions between and within communal groups fatally undermined the 'revolutionary space' of the MCP. Only limited numbers of Malays would risk being branded traitors to their community in order to support the MCP. If the insurgents had concentrated attacks on the mainly Malay police, for instance, they would only have reinforced the 'Chinese' nature of the insurgency.¹¹⁸

The Emergency demonstrates the complex way in which local conditions both frustrated and facilitated British plans. Malaya's social and communal patterns initially underpinned a Chinese-led insurgency, frustrating plans to reduce British garrisons and transfer responsibility for security to local forces. They then helped make possible British counter-insurgency success. As the next section will show, Malaya's communal divisions also helped to pattern local politics, complicating Britain's plans for nation-building, while in some ways assisting its project for creating a strong, defensible state.

The Emergency also eased Malay opposition to state-building, as they gradually accepted centralised state power as a necessary anti-communist

weapon. It also helped pave the way towards prolonged Anglo-Malay defence cooperation, even into independence. Sharma has argued the Emergency vitiated anti-imperialism by confirming the Malays' tendency to see Britain as a necessary counter-weight to the Chinese, and by focusing on a common, communist enemy. Yet if the Emergency helped British state-building plans, it undermined hopes for building the type of 'Malayan nation' Britain sought, or for forging a wider territorial association.¹¹⁹ The predominantly Chinese identity of the MCP, and largely Malay make-up of local security forces, confirmed ethnic rather than territorial perceptions of identity. Malay and Chinese identification of their interests with their communal groups, already fed by the Malayan Union fiasco, were further fuelled. Communal patterns and local developments, therefore, did not just restrict the 'revolutionary space' available to the MCP. They also helped pattern the unfolding processes of defence and decolonisation. It was these local forces (boosted as they were by the Cold War and a residue of Chinese respect for wartime 'anti-Japanese' fighters) – which caused Britain to deploy large numbers of troops despite plans to the contrary, and to concentrate the vast majority of these on internal security.¹²⁰

DECOLONISATION: UNITE AND QUIT

The preceding section shows how communist attempts to court support across class, communal and chauvinistic barriers were frustrated. It argues that inter and intra-ethnic forces underpinned the dynamics of the Emergency, setting the scene for the success of the Briggs Plan. Subsequent sections will detail how the Emergency affected plans to reduce British garrisons and for developing local forces. First, however, we must look at Britain's attempts to achieve those political aims on which the development of local forces was predicated. How did local communal patterns, and their interaction with the Malayan Emergency, affect Britain's ability to achieve progress towards a united, and hopefully more defensible 'Dominion of Southeast Asia'?

A British policy of 'unite and quit', of slowly blending communities into nations and territories into a 'Dominion of Southeast Asia' had emerged out of the ruins of 1942. The utility, in British eyes, of Malaya's plural society was the most significant casualty of Japan's seventy day drive to seize Singapore. Only a strong state and multi-racial politics were now believed adequate to the development and defence of territories in the modern world. Hence the 1945–46 attempt to deprive the Sultans of sovereignty, and to effect a Malayan citizenship which would for the first time embrace non-Malays. The Malayan Union was supposed to signal a departure from trusteeship with the Malays towards partnership, both between races and between the metropolis and local politicians.

Despite the retention of a strong central government and a common citizenship, the 1946–48 retreat from Malayan Union to Malayan Federation was a political setback. This highlights a second strand of British policy, a determination to defend core interests cheaply by courting 'moderate' nationalism. This pragmatic approach, and a clear commitment to guiding

Malaya to eventual self-government, made it easier to retain the support or at least neutrality of much of the local population in the Emergency. Yet it also implied limits to Britain's willingness to incur costs in pursuit of particular aims. In February 1948 the Sultans were re-established as guardians of special Malay rights, with citizenship qualifications initially excluding many Chinese. The Malays were left with the initiative in setting the terms on which they could be cajoled into accepting other races into participation in, and power over, the Malayan state and nation. A partial success in state-building plans had been won at the cost of a serious blow to Britain's nation-building aspirations.¹²¹

The individual Malay States were left determined to guard their recovered powers (for instance over land) against central interference. UMNO had crystallised Malay nationalism around deeply rooted fears of Chinese dominance. In 1949 an intelligence paper described 'the mind of the Malays' as 'still tinged with bitterness'. UMNO's leader, Dato Onn, at first felt constrained to avoid private functions attended by Tan Cheng Lock, chairman of the MCA. Malay politicians and rulers were left in no mood to assimilate the Chinese of Malaya, let alone the Chinese of Singapore.¹²²

British strategy nevertheless continued to envisage the creation of a Southeast Asian successor state with stable, cross-communal politics, capable of sustaining and not sapping Commonwealth power.¹²³ The post-1947 entrenchment of Malay sovereignty meant these aims had to be achieved through persuasion, which was overwhelmingly a Colonial Office rather than a military responsibility. The COS and BDCC nevertheless continued to base plans for local defence forces on the assumption these aims would, however slowly, be achieved. Hence cross-communal forces, structured to achieve the defence of Malaya and Singapore as one defensive unit, continued to be their goal.¹²⁴

Britain simply did not recognise that the Malayan Union fiasco was a decisive defeat for the more idealistic aspects of its nation-building programme. Britain's approach to the Emergency could thus be seen as screwing down the MNLAs in order to make Malaya safe for its long-term 'unite and quit' project. Britain remained optimistic that a long process of decolonisation would give time to edge the Malays, Chinese and Indians towards cross-communal politics, with a minimum of safeguards to protect the Malays.

From 1948 to 1953 MacDonald tried to create a local 'climate of opinion' in favour of bringing the communities in Malaya closer together. In September 1949 he helped establish an informal 'Communities Liaison Committee' (CLC) of fourteen community leaders. This had a tense start, with Malay representatives accusing Chinese business of squeezing out Malays, and demanding the sharing out of transport routes in areas where Malays predominated.¹²⁵ Ultimately, the Committee was able to publish an agreed programme in early 1950. It was based on increasing Chinese citizenship, but with the preservation of Malay safeguards and economic assistance to Malays as *quid pro quo*.¹²⁶

The economic part of this agreement was only partly followed up. Too much was left to ad hoc agreements and to voluntary Chinese help. Or to a small

'Rural Investment and Development Authority' (RIDA), set up in part to appease Malay anger that Chinese New Villagers received facilities, while many Malay children were still malnourished.¹²⁷ The economic issue lay festering, only to resurface after the May 1969 Kuala Lumpur race riots in the form of the 'New Economic Policy'. A policy which sought to ensure Malays entered business by prescription: reserving shares, scholarships and licences.¹²⁸

In 1950-51, meanwhile, UMNO's leader, Dato Onn tried to increase communal cooperation. From July 1951 he encouraged UMNO to admit non-Malays, urging them not to look at things only from the *kampung* view. On failing, he left to form the cross-communal Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) in September 1951. In 1953 Dato Onn and a number of prominent State First ministers (*Mentri Mentri Besar*) then held an April National Conference to reinvigorate the idea of cross-communal political organisations.¹²⁹

It failed. UMNO would not admit non-Malays. For many school-teachers, conservative *ulama*, and government servants UMNO was the defender of Malay rights, the guardian of the spirit of 1946. The MCA likewise rebuffed Tan Cheng Lock's pleas that admit non-Chinese as associate members, and was ambivalent about his initial support for IMP.¹³⁰

The majority of Malays, Chinese and Indians preferred to trust communal organisations rather than risk all in cross-communal parties. The personable but mercurial Dato Onn was incapable of assuaging Chinese fears or of winning Malays from UMNO. It did not help that some British at least saw him as erratic, if not 'slightly mad'.¹³¹ By 1955 his latest vehicle, the *Party Negara*, was resorting to themes with a specific appeal to the Malays, such as the need for restrictions on immigration. Thereafter it became obvious the Alliance of UMNO and the MCA, originally formed to fight the IMP in the Kuala Lumpur elections of February 1952, was consolidating.¹³²

Though the origins of the 'Alliance' were local, it was found to suit both UMNO and the traditional, conservative and wealthy leaders of the MCA. The MCA stood to secure continued access to, and leverage over, government, in the post-independence period. Both UMNO and the MCA shared common interests in defeating the IMP, with its claim to represent all races, and in dampening communal tension and undermining communism. The Alliance was also a response to British indications that communal cooperation must precede self-government.¹³³

Between the Malayan Union fiasco and 1955 Britain thus retained control over the pace of constitutional change, but local communal patterns patterned politics, and limited the scope for working towards larger territorial units.¹³⁴ A number of Malayan members of the Executive Council were made 'Members' of the government, responsible for departments, effective from March 1951. In response to Alliance electoral victories, two of their number were made 'members' in September 1953.¹³⁵ An additional British aim was the development of politics from the local level up, starting with municipal elections in Penang in December 1951. Templer modified the policy by applying the mildest of touches to the accelerator.¹³⁶ By December 1952 he envisaged elections to the Federal

Legislative Council between 1956 and 1958, with a further 'educative' period before self-government after 1960. Meanwhile, it was hoped there would be time to prompt new, cross-communal parties, and to persuade them to associate Singapore with Malaya. The relatively undeveloped Borneo territories were to be edged towards their own, separate, federal framework more slowly, before the idea of uniting Malaya and Borneo could be entertained.¹³⁷

With the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) joining in 1954, the Alliance dominated state and municipal elections which the British had hoped would encourage issue-driven rather than communal-driven parties. The Alliance sustained a boycott of elected Councils in June 1954. This secured British agreement that five of seven nominated reserve seats in the new Legislative Council would be appointed in agreement with the majority party's leader. The Alliance had argued that otherwise the victors in 1955 elections, which it had unsuccessfully sought to have brought forward to 1954, might struggle to carry their policies.¹³⁸

This was because the Colonial Secretary, in the teeth of Alliance opposition, had agreed the new Council would have 52 elected members, 46 nominated and one Speaker. This meant the Alliance would have to win virtually all the elected seats to avoid reliance on the Governor's nominees. This dispute over the composition of the Assembly also reflected British attempts to keep advance gradual, to buy time for cross-communal political groups to appear and for inter-racial cooperation to be tested. Britain had stuffed the 1953-54 Federal Elections Commission with a majority of non-Alliance representatives – mostly nominated members of the current Legislative Council, who supported Dato Onn and his increasingly lame *Independence of Malaya Party*. This was despite the Alliance sweeping 1952-53 municipal elections.¹³⁹ Almost inevitably this Commission – its members fearing they were not ready to fight the Alliance – had in January 1954 recommended a nominated majority for a new Legislative Council. Almost as inevitably, the Alliance had demanded a significant elected majority.¹⁴⁰

Since the Malays formed the majority of the electorate, as against less than half the population, UMNO was in a good position to deliver victory to the Alliance.¹⁴¹ The Alliance duly won all but one of the 52 elected seats in the July 1955 elections. British officials now recognised the Alliance victory represented a desire for early independence, and the best form of racial cooperation available. The creeping pace they favoured would have to accelerate. Britain began to anticipate handing power to the Alliance in the four years its leader and the new Chief Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, demanded. By the end of August the Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, had agreed that a Constitutional Conference should meet in London in early 1956, to discuss further advance towards independence.¹⁴²

Up to the 1955 elections, had the Emergency hastened or hindered progress towards self-government? On the one hand, the 1948 Federation Agreement had promised elections to the several legislatures as soon as feasible. The Labour Colonial Secretary of the time envisaged this should mean in the near future, since he disliked the fact that many Governor's nominees in the existing Council

in effect represented communal groups.¹⁴³ Then the Emergency intervened and elections were slow to materialise. The Gold Coast (Ghana), which in 1948 was no more politically advanced than Malaya, but free of insurgency, held elections to a central legislature before Malaya (in February 1951) and achieved independence earlier, in March 1957. Under pressure to reassure British business and local supporters, Britain meanwhile felt compelled to insist that Malayan security would not be sacrificed to political advance. Attlee told the House of Commons on 13 April 1949 that British policy was to guide Malaya to 'responsible self-government within the Commonwealth', but not at the expense of jeopardising security through 'premature withdrawal'. He reiterated this line in 28th March 1950. By the latter date MacDonald still envisaged independence in around 15 years.¹⁴⁴

Dato Onn even complained the Emergency was made an excuse for turning Malaya into a 'dumping ground' for expatriate officials. The accusation was unfair – the Emergency could not be won without these men, who risked their lives – but nevertheless he was right in seeing that this delayed 'Malayanisation'.¹⁴⁵ There was also pressure from Briggs and the Services not to divert resources from population control to preparing for elections.¹⁴⁶ As late as summer 1952 Templer was resisting Asian suggestions, for the appointment of a committee to investigate future political advance. He insisted this would reveal differences according to race, and distract attention from the Emergency. It is thus arguable that the effect of insecurity and administrative workloads was, if anything, to slightly delay the introduction of elections, if not the telescoping of decolonisation which these invariably produced in colonies.¹⁴⁷

On the other hand, Malaya was not Ghana. In 1948 majority Malay opinion, still afraid of Chinese domination, does not seem to have been pressing for decolonisation. Its main focus was on preserving Malay special rights over non-Malays, and ultimate Malay sovereignty. Some Malay Rulers were also reluctant to risk independence in the foreseeable future. In 1950 even Dato Onn does not seem to have envisaged independence in much under 25 years.¹⁴⁸

Kim Hoong Khong – and of course Chin Peng – go further. They argue that political concessions which Britain granted later were forced on it, by its need to sustain local cooperation in the Emergency.¹⁴⁹ To this can be added the British desire to make concessions before the communists took the lead in demanding them.¹⁵⁰ Certainly, local politicians were made 'Members' (a sort of quasi-ministerial post) for particular government departments from 1951, even before elections had been held.

Perhaps more significantly, the Emergency allowed Britain to ban and marginalise the MCP, and to proscribe radical Malay groups such as the youth association *API*, and the Malay Nationalist Party. The MNP had already weakened itself by supporting the Malayan Union anyway, but Malay nationalists who called for attacks on British business privileges, for nationalisation, or sympathised with the *Indonesia Raya* (Greater Indonesia) idea, now found themselves detained.¹⁵¹ This was no small matter, as prior to the Emergency the Malayan Security Service had spent as much effort observing

these Indonesian-influenced and radical left-wing Malay nationalists as it had the MCP.¹⁵²

The arrests which accompanied the Emergency thus left the field open for the more conservative UMNO. At the same time, the MCP's retreat into the jungle enabled the MCA to politically dominate the Chinese in the towns. This meant the indisputably strongest Chinese political organisation was now conservative, pro-business and, as far as some of its leaders were concerned, pro-Kuomintang. Not all its leaders were anxious to accelerate independence, at least not until there was a working relationship with UMNO. In 1952 Tan Cheng Lock told a friend: 'The Chinese in Malaya are definitely opposed to the attainment of independence too soon which would be a disaster unless the Malays give up the idea of being the master and dominant race in this country. As long as Malay racialism prevails let us remain under the British - even for ever'. In 1953 Leong Yew Koh felt the MCA should make clear what 'our people' would get while the Malays knew Chinese cooperation was necessary to independence: 'If it is necessary to quarrel let us do so now and not wait until our throats are slit when nothing more can be done as in the case of the Chinese in Indo-nesia'. Exaggerated comments given in private, perhaps, but words which illustrate how far ethnic tension created time and space for Britain to work in.¹⁵³

The MCA was thus cautious in its approach to self-government, and conservative in tone. The Emergency, with its restriction of political space, helped to prevent the MCA from being outflanked by Chinese with more chauvinist, radical or socialist positions, or having to change its own policy in response to such threats. It would be possible, from the perspective of a disillusioned Chinese-speaking Malaysian, to argue the MCP's campaign left the path open for the MCA, and for the MCA to compromise Chinese rights in return for a share in power.

In addition, the Emergency created an urgent need for UMNO's relatively conservative Malays to cooperate with the MCA's relatively conservative Chinese, in order to defeat the MCP. It also threw their members together in practical cooperation, for instance in bodies advising the District War Executive Committees. In a sense, then, the Alliance - which provided the communal cooperation necessary for decolonisation - was as much the child of the Emergency as a reaction to the threat of Dato Onn's cross-communal IMP, and a response to British claims that it would give independence if there was racial unity.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps, in this perverse sense, MCP claims to have facilitated independence have some foundation, because it frightened its natural enemies into cooperating against it.¹⁵⁵

Finally, the increasing number of Malays armed in the Malay Regiment, as Police or part-time Special Constables, or at least doing watch and ward duties as *kampung* guards, probably increased Malay confidence. This is quite apart from the effect of increasing responsibility in advising on, and later running, administrative and Emergency matters. This increasing confidence may have helped to spur Dato Onn, in forming his IMP in 1951, to demand independence in seven years.

Nevertheless, in the end Malaya did gain independence within months of Ghana, despite there not being an insurgency in the latter, and despite Malaya's communal fissures being of a more fundamental nature. The question on the Emergency's impact on decolonisation thus remains complex and perhaps unanswerable. It involves asking a number of subsidiary questions, any one of which is likely to provide a stumbling block. What would have happened without the Emergency? How far did the Malayan Emergency give the Malays the confidence to face the Chinese alone? How far can we distinguish Britain's general desires for gradual political advance and to keep abreast of moderate nationalism from its need to maximise local support in the Emergency? In short, how far was the Alliance the child of the Emergency, how far a development independent of that conflict?¹⁵⁶

Chapter seven will go on to ask how the Alliance used proposals about the Emergency to whip up enthusiasm before the 1955 elections, and to extract concessions from the British afterwards. These proposals included the issue of a new amnesty for MNLA members, and to seek to end to the conflict, which most Malaysians were by then tired of.

In mid-1955, however, the Tunku still had to convince his own party, let alone Britain, that the Alliance partners could work together in government, and that the Emergency was on a one-way journey to suppression. Even then, decolonisation was not expected to remove the need for British assistance in the external defence of a territory that was seen as small, internally divided and yet subject to an internal communist threat and regional insecurity.¹⁵⁷ If decolonisation was to accelerate, Britain also anticipated Malaya would require help with the Emergency after independence. Even at the end of 1955 British planners still hoped, therefore, that Malaya would move only to internal self-government in 1957, with Britain meanwhile retaining operational control of internal security. Full independence might follow a couple of years later.¹⁵⁸

Britain's approach remained pragmatic and patient, emphasising keeping moderate nationalists on-side and edging the Malays towards cross-communalism.¹⁵⁹ This had the advantage of serving Britain's core need to preserve its local interests cheaply, even if it did mean that Britain's hopes for greater nation-building and territorial unity had made little headway when decolonisation accelerated in 1955.

The increased pressure for political concessions which followed the July 1955 elections was not matched by progress towards territorial unity. By spring 1955 the Tunku was firmly refusing to consider the association of Singapore until after independence. A Joint Consultative Committee, including local politicians from Malaya and Singapore, met between 1953 and 1955 to discuss how to develop cooperation between the two over subjects such as finance and immigration. Despite MacDonald's incurable optimism, it became bogged down in detail as the territories accelerated towards self-government separately. MacDonald's strategy of gradually creating a climate of opinion in Malaya favouring the inclusion of Singapore had made little progress (though most Singaporean parties favoured association).¹⁶⁰ The inclusion of Chinese dominated Singapore

would tip Malaya's evenly balanced population-equation in favour of the Chinese. Singapore might even prove a Trojan Horse for communist subversion, since communism was increasingly infiltrating Singapore's unions, middle schools and the newly formed People's Action Party (PAP, November 1954).¹⁶¹ Consequently, Malaya appeared increasingly likely to advance to self-government on its own, and before Singapore.

This reversed the 1948-53 situation, when it seemed that Singapore's faster constitutional progress might leave Malaya, with its communal fissures and continuing Emergency, trailing in its wake. Elections in 1948 and 1951 saw the Progressive Party, led by moderate, English-educated professionals, predominate in elections for six and nine Legislative Council seats respectively. In both cases this left elected members a minority to the nominated members. With the MCP driven underground, however, there was no party capable of drawing on mass Chinese support. Even worse, electors had to register themselves, and a high proportion of those who registered and voted were Indian.¹⁶² British officials thus became anxious to interest the Chinese majority in constitutional politics, to use gradual constitutional advance in order to divert Chinese energies away from communism. The Rendel Commission, set up in November 1953, thus paved the way to April 1955 elections.

In order to increase mass involvement, the Commission recommended that voters be automatically enrolled rather than having to register (ensuring Chinese predominated). The 1955 elections were also to produce, for the first time, an elected majority on the Legislative Council and a government of elected ministers. Only three official ministers (in charge of finance, external affairs, defence, law and the Civil Service) and the Governor's reserved powers would limit the new government's autonomy.¹⁶³

After the elections, David Marshall's Labour Front – a moderate socialist party with the support of many public sector unions – emerged the surprise winners, forming a vulnerable coalition government. Marshall, a Jewish lawyer and fiery orator, rallied the Legislative Council behind him to secure, in August 1955, British agreement to a constitutional conference in 1956. Britain, however, was determined not to allow ultimate control of internal security to pass to Singaporean politicians.¹⁶⁴ The more moderate Peoples Action Party (PAP) leaders were only precariously retaining control of their party, which the MCP viewed as its own front organisation. Indeed, communist decisions from October 1951 had seen the main MCP effort shift away from armed insurgency, and towards winning political support through Singapore's parties, cultural associations, unions and Chinese-language schools.¹⁶⁵ With three seats on the Legislative Council of 25, the communist-infiltrated PAP, and its supporting unions, looked an increasingly likely inheritor of any reforms Marshall might win. With the spectre of a communist-controlled PAP haunting British policy-making, Marshall's passionate search for almost immediate, untrammelled, internal self-government was bound to end in personal frustration, if not in bloodshed.¹⁶⁶

While Singapore thus stalled, Malayan politicians began to set the pace of constitutional advance. In a letter dated 1 May 1955 (but received by the

government in June), the MCP indicated they wanted to negotiate a ceasefire in order to help achieve independence. British officials' feared Malayan politicians would now want to pay too high a price for peace, and might allow the MCP back into society 'like maggots into a pile of bread'. Britain was not willing to see the MCP recognised, or its members allowed to return to civilian life without strict screening.¹⁶⁷

The Alliance also suggested the possibility of a general pardon in their election manifesto of May 1955. They hoped this might accelerate the end of the Emergency, and so unblock the road to independence. Following his election, Alliance leader Tunku Abdul Rahman then instituted an amnesty from early September. He also insisted he should accept the offer of the MCP Secretary-General, Chin Peng, to talk. This overturned the British position of June, when the communist offer of negotiations had been rejected, and the government emphasised communists should avail themselves of existing surrender terms. Though the Tunku argued he would use any meeting to seek communist surrender, rather than to negotiate, he maintained he should have a mandate to settle the situation as best he could. He must speak as his own man, not as a British stooge or 'running dog'. British officials nervously accepted they could not risk losing Malay cooperation for the sake of obstructing a meeting, or imposing restrictive conditions. Yet Lennox Boyd told the Cabinet on 25 October that – if the Tunku looked like conceding too much – it might prove necessary to reject a Tunku-Chin Peng agreement, even at the cost of the Tunku's resignation and 'a crisis of the first importance'.¹⁶⁸

When the meeting took place, on 28 and 29 December, the Tunku refused to recognise the MCP or allow its members back into society without preliminary screening. He also manoeuvred Chin Peng into suggesting the MNLA might lay down its arms if the Malayan government secured control of internal security. British officials' original fears evaporated, to be replaced by respect for the Tunku and confidence in his anti-communist abilities. The Tunku now prepared to demand internal security control, and full independence for August 1957, at the January to February 1956 Constitutional Conference.¹⁶⁹

In January 1956 Lennox-Boyd warned colleagues that the Tunku possessed signed letters of resignation from all members of his party who served on representative councils. These need only be dated, 'to produce a situation in which the High Commissioner would be forced to assume direct administration of the affairs of the territory. Moreover, the sympathies of nearly all local members of the public service and police ... would lie with the Chief Minister ... and sooner or later we should have to concede in the most unhappy circumstances what we could earlier have granted with an air of generosity, the support of world opinion and the promise of loyal co-operation.'

Lennox-Boyd argued that, in these circumstances, internal security requirements could not be an obstacle to self-government. Britain should accelerate political advance, and use resulting goodwill to secure an external defence agreement. He even hoped Britain might retain control over Emergency operations after independence. By refusing to allow the communists to re-enter

Malayan politics, even as the price of peace, the Tunku had shown at Baling that Britain had little to fear from the Alliance, and much to gain from calling Chin Peng's bluff. The bluff that his forces were fighting against the British rather than for a monopolistic communist state, and would disarm once there was local control of the security forces. Lennox-Boyd told Cabinet there could now be no answer to the argument that a determined Malayan Government could deal more successfully with the communists than a retreating colonial power. Finally, the rising tide of nationalism throughout Asia, and the French withdrawal from Indochina, suggested that pressure for political change could only intensify.¹⁷⁰

As the electoral triumph of July 1955 was followed by effective UMNO-MCA partnership in office, the Alliance also offered the carrot of a sympathetic and probably stable government. In these circumstances, the stick, the threat of imposing costs in lost goodwill or a prolonged Emergency, was effective. At the January-February 1956 Constitutional Conference, Britain agreed to Malayan self-government for August 1957, to be accompanied by a defence agreement and full Malayan control of internal security. Malaya was set to attain independence before the Emergency was ended, without Singapore, and under the control not of a multi-racial party, but of the Alliance of communal parties. On the other hand, the arrest of progress in Singapore in 1957 was to demonstrate only too clearly that, when Britain's core interests were threatened, Britain was willing to swim against the tide of change.

How much control did Britain have over the decolonisation process? Stockwell has suggested that constitutional change in Malaya was part of a wider policy of courting friends in Asia, and of a 'Commonwealth' strategy. Britain always placed a high premium on gaining prospective successor elites' goodwill, in the hope of inducting them into a cooperative Commonwealth partnership after independence. The Indian example, and the impossibility of trying any other approach in its case, set the tone for decolonisation.¹⁷¹

It could also be argued that Britain saw increasing self-government as the necessary concomitant to modernising and developing its territories at a time of rising nationalism.¹⁷² Only by switching from trusteeship to a new partnership, and ultimately from formal empire to an empire of influence, could Britain maximise the benefits and minimise the costs of its overseas territories. Decolonisation was a way of maximising British world power. Clearly, material losses in the Second World War confirmed Britain, albeit on an extended timetable, on the path of decolonisation, by accentuating the need to develop colonial resources, accelerating the creation of independent India and Indonesia as beacons of nationalism, and inducing the early birth of a new world order dominated by two superpowers. Without these long-term, structural factors, and the critical shock provided by Singapore's fall, there can be little doubt that prewar Malay nationalism, living in the shadow of an assertive Chinese community, would have lacked the will, let alone the power, to shrug off colonial rule in a short time span.¹⁷³

Metropolitan, international and regional 'nationalist' factors clearly underlay the overall trend in British policy.¹⁷⁴ Stockwell has noted that the post-1954

acceleration in Malayan independence has been seen partly as a British reaction to Dien Bien Phu, and the new assertiveness of non-aligned opinion at the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference of April 1955. With Chou En-lai making overtures to Asian countries, and Khrushchev visiting Afghanistan, Burma and Indonesia in late 1955, the Sino-Soviet 'peace offensive' demanded a Western response. United States determination to distance itself from colonialism, as it took over from France in Vietnam, also added to the pressures for early decolonisation. According to Darwin, these international forces constituted, 'powerful, even overwhelming reasons for taking a much more flexible attitude to Malaya's constitutional development ...'.¹⁷⁵

In fact, though international forces underlay general British strategy, shorter-term accelerations correlate with the success of the Alliance in providing a bridge over communal fissures, and its increased willingness and ability to impose costs for British delay. Given Britain's long-term strategy of creating successor states which would make the Commonwealth a prop to British power, there was a high premium on goodwill.¹⁷⁶ International factors were important in the long-term, but on a shorter time-frame local forces were key determinants of change.¹⁷⁷

Alterations in the pace of decolonisation can be correlated with local and especially communal developments. In 1948 independence seemed 25 years or a generation away partly because of communal tensions, and British despair that the Malays would ever be able to stand on their own feet politically. December 1950 riots by Malays in Singapore – over the forced return to Christian parents of a 13 year-old Dutch Eurasian girl left in the war with Muslims – left 18 dead and British fears of communal fragility confirmed.¹⁷⁸ In January 1954 Templer still felt independence must be preceded by the creation of a new, cross-communal centre party or parties, which he hoped would emerge from local politics. MacDonald wanted to assist the development of a 'left-centre' party (the equivalent of Britain's Labour Party) to counter-balance the 'right-centre' Alliance.¹⁷⁹

As late as February 1955 Australia was assured that, since the inter-racial gap was 'wide and deep', constitutional advance was 'bound to be slow'. More confident judgement would only be possible after the Alliance had been tested by one to two years in office.¹⁸⁰ In November 1955, it was thought it would be twelve to eighteen months after the 1956 conference before a constitutional commission would resolve differences on issues such as 'Malay rights'.¹⁸¹ Again, the Alliance proved capable of quickly reconciling its parts. The MCA even agreed to reject the Commission's proposal to make 'Malay rights' temporary. By January 1956 Lennox-Boyd had realised that local leaders' success in bridging the communal fissure had changed the situation. He then argued that, though a wide gulf still separated the two races, 'we must accept the fact that the two races are completely united in the demand for self-government and that we no longer have anything to gain by arguing that relations between them must be more firmly and harmoniously established before self-government can be granted'. UMNO's consolidation as an effective representative of Malays,

and the Alliance's ability to paper over communal gaps, were thus vital in setting the pace of decolonisation. The British desire to retain goodwill, and minimise costs, then gave the initiative to local politicians.¹⁸²

Local communal patterns were setting parameters for 'nationalists', communists and colonialists alike. Imperialist compromise with communal politics, communist failure in the Emergency, the fate of Dato Onn's cross-communal IMP party, and Lee Kuan Yew's distress at Singapore's ejection from Malaysia in 1965, are dramatic examples of the frustration which greeted attempts to escape these limits.¹⁸³

Though Britain could insist on core needs, such as a broadly friendly, stable, non-communist successor regime, detailed defence-related policies foundered on forces rooted in colonial and pre-colonial times.¹⁸⁴ Britain's pragmatic approach was a thus proving a circumscribed success. It was securing continued access to Malaya's dollar-earnings and Singapore's bases and providing a working relationship with local nationalists. Yet just as divisions between and within ethnic groups set their pattern on the Emergency, so they were limiting British attempts at nation-building. By 1955 this meant Singapore and Malaya were proceeding separately towards independence and communal parties were dominating politics in the latter. Yet British strategy still stressed Singapore could only be defended with Malaya, and not as a 'hedgehog'.¹⁸⁵

Retrospectively, Malaya was fitting into a pattern in British decolonisation. In India, the West Indies, Central Africa, South Arabia and Southeast Asia Britain worked towards regional unity, only to fail before conception, or to see each fragile new creation fall apart. Smaller states than the large 'Dominions' Britain envisaged emerged, more likely to sap than support British power. Attempts to mould communally divided territories into nations achieved surface success at best. Reliant on a thin layer of white officials, British imperialism had always had limited ability to mould its charges. In politics, in the composition of the army and the police, in the unwillingness of the Alliance to consider a wider federation, British strategems were also making limited progress in Malaya. Ultimately, as potential successor elites consolidated, the cost of trying to delay or control the detail of decolonisation, to be paid in lost goodwill or decreased security cooperation, was increasingly not worth paying. The paradox of British policy then, of its pragmatism, was that it allowed Britain to achieve many of its broad strategic aims, but only at the cost of accepting repeated defeats for specific policies and principles.

With decolonisation accelerating from 1955, the potential for tension between politics and defence increased. How would Britain devolve power, and yet retain the ability to support the newly formed SEATO, keep Australian forces in Malaya, and ensure the speedy conclusion of the Emergency? How could local sovereignty be squared with continued British discretion over the use of bases? How could Britain reconcile the separate political development of Malaya and Singapore with local forces planned to be balanced over the two territories? How Britain attempted to balance the prerogatives of goodwill and defence, of British discretion and local sovereignty, will be subjects of chapters seven and eight.

Meanwhile the Emergency, and the ethnic patterns it reflected and reinforced, produced armed forces in Malaya very different from those originally envisaged by Britain. The aim nevertheless remained that of 1948, to reduce British forces East of India, and to develop pan-Malayan and cross-communal local armed forces. Having established the context of insurgency and political advance, we can now look again at Britain's attempts to obtain this force posture.

FORCES: BRITISH, LOCAL AND NAVAL

'A Bottomless Pit': British Forces and the Emergency

Throughout the Emergency the COS stressed British troops must be reduced as soon as possible, and local forces increased to this end. Initially the COS were concerned that colonial commitments were preventing the formation of a strategic reserve in the United Kingdom, which would itself facilitate further reductions in overseas garrisons. Whenever local commanders requested reinforcements between 1948-50, they thus reassured the COS these were necessary in order to achieve an early end to the Emergency, and a victory in the Cold War.

In fact there seemed several compelling reasons for providing reinforcements. Malaya's importance to Anglo-Australian relations and the desire to prop up British prestige in a colonial territory could not be dismissed lightly.¹⁸⁶ In addition, Malaya's dollar earnings were, as John Strachey, the Secretary of State for War, emphasised in May 1950, 'almost indispensable' in balancing the Sterling Area's dollar deficit. At the height of the Emergency, in 1949-53, British ministers were acutely aware of their reliance on Malaya's dollar earnings, making it unlikely they would refuse reinforcements in a crisis.¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Malaya's position in the Cold War was also cited, to justify draining resources from Europe and the strategic reserve. In August 1948 the COS justified sending to Malaya the only brigade of the central strategic reserve on the grounds that only there was Britain actively fighting communism, 'and it was British Empire territory'.¹⁸⁸ Success in Malaya was presented as 'a vital step in the "Cold War" against communism in the Far East' in an October 1950 memorandum by the Minister of Defence and Secretary of State for War.¹⁸⁹

By early 1950, however, the COS worried the Soviet Union was managing to disperse Western forces by proxy conflicts, distracting from the development of forces in crucial European and Middle Eastern theatres. The signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949 had given added urgency to planning for the defence of Europe, which became Britain's top priority for global war by June 1950.

Even before Korea, the COS warned in spring 1950 that Britain must avoid Malaya becoming a 'bottomless pit', and playing straight into Russia's hands. Hence additional reinforcements sent from Hong Kong to Malaya in early 1950 were intended to be strictly temporary. In addition, the COS decided against providing Hong Kong with replacements. Its garrison was allowed to fall to a

level sufficient to cope with infiltration and internal security. For Malaya, the COS and local commanders saw the 1950 reinforcements as necessary to create a minimum framework of order, in which the administration could then reassert control, undermine communist support, and pave the way a reduction in British forces.¹⁹⁰

Despite the COS's anxieties and protests, British and Gurkha units peaked at the equivalent of around 20 infantry battalions in 1950–51, and four Malay Regiment battalions. The burden, involving up to 40,000 troops, was exacerbated by the large support apparatus. Perhaps as little as 35 per cent of these British forces were 'teeth' units, rather than supporting 'tail'.¹⁹¹ Thus local forces – in the shape of regional communism – were frustrating postwar British desires to minimise the 'white' component in Malaya, and to use the Gurkhas primarily as a strategic reserve. The Emergency was presumably also a factor in the lengthening of National Service from 12 months to 18 (September 1948) and then 24 (1950), though the Middle East and Korea were equally important.¹⁹² It was thus in this indirect way, in helping to increase the forces needed to police the British territories of Hong Kong and Malaya, that the regional Cold War affected British defence posture.

Britain attempted to alleviate this unexpectedly high burden by enlisting Commonwealth and colonial help. Australia initially refused to send ground forces in 1948, but was persuaded to send a small number of transport aircraft and bombers in May 1950. In spring 1951 the Defence Committee agreed to send two battalions from East Africa and one from Fiji.¹⁹³

The arrival of colonial units from 1952, of an Australian battalion in 1955 and increases in Malayan forces, together allowed the British and Gurkha component to fall to around thirteen battalions by 1956. The Emergency was an 'imperial' conflict in the widest sense. Malayan rubber and tin flowed out to ease the Sterling Area's dollar shortage, troops flowed in the opposite direction from the metropolis and Empire. In 1956 there were two African battalions and the one from Fiji, the latter much admired for their rugby.¹⁹⁴ Gurkhas, Africans and Fijians, Malay soldiers, and police, Iban trackers, national servicemen from Britain, Rhodesians in the Special Air Service, Australian pilots and turned Chinese communists, together formed an imperial hotch-potch which would have been impossible only ten years later. Thus from 1952 on, Britain utilised colonial and Commonwealth assistance to alleviate its heavy defence burden in Malaya.

Committed to guiding Malaya to self-government, and yet ending the threat from the Emergency first, the COS and Cabinet in London were ill-placed to force faster reductions on the man-on-the-spot. With the *Viet Minh* tide rising until it overwhelmed the French at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, local officials could threaten the Emergency might stagnate. In addition, as the remaining MNLAs withdrew into deep jungle, finding them demanded longer patrols and the use of new techniques, such as helicopter-lifts, building jungle forts, and wining over the *orang asli*. Thus there were still a total of 23 battalions in Malaya in January 1957, though by then incidents had fallen to a trickle, and the

estimated insurgent strength from over 7,000 to less than 2,000.¹⁹⁵ Additional helicopters had also multiplied the use that could be made of units. In so far as British forces had been slightly reduced by 1957, this was achieved by substituting Commonwealth and colonial forces.

Consequently, it was 1957 before Britain started to significantly reduce forces by withdrawing another couple of British battalions. Between 1948 and 1957 the Emergency had constrained Britain to maintain an enlarged garrison in Malaya, and to spend £420 million over and above normal garrison costs. This was in addition to small, occasional direct Treasury grants to Malaya (for instance £8million up to 1950, £6million in 1954), and despite Treasury insistence that Malaya raise company taxes to self-fund the campaign as much as possible. The dollars earned by Malayan industry were thus not cheap in terms of the men and sterling expended in their defence. Though British control of Malayan financial and dollar-purchasing policy undoubtedly included an element of exploitation, exploiting Malaya turned out to be an expensive business.¹⁹⁶

Local and Imperial Forces

The Emergency and local communal forces also complicated the 'unite' or nation-building component of Britain's 'unite and quit' approach to defence and decolonisation. Even the straightforward task of raising all-Malay units proceeded more slowly than Britain hoped and planned for. Despite the need to minimise imperial battalions in Malaya, there were only four Malay Regiment battalions operational at the end of 1950, seven in 1954. This compares to an average of six to eight Gurkha battalions. Difficulties in financing expansion, in training sufficient Malay NCOs (given competition from the massive police expansion), and in finding quality British officers for secondment, slowed down progress.

Despite these problems the Commissioner-General's Office, detecting quickening interest in self-government, argued in August 1951 that, 'nothing is more likely to assist the new state to stand squarely on its own feet in the cockpit of South-East Asia, than ... well trained forces'.¹⁹⁷

In 1953 the Legislative Council agreed to a scaled down 'Templer Plan', envisaging nine battalions of the Malay Regiment, a mixed race Federation Regiment of three battalions, and mixed supporting units. This would provide an army of 12,000 by 1962. Templer took care to increase Malaya's flow of officers, picking out twelve for special preparation, and planning increased local officer-training facilities at the Federation Military College, Port Dickson.¹⁹⁸

Again, there was pressure to consider increasing the non-Malays in the armed forces even before Templer arrived. In August 1951 the Commissioner-General's Office talked of the need for, 'the early creation of adequate loyal forces drawn from all races in the peninsula'. The Colonial Secretary, James Griffiths, hoped it would be possible to make early progress in including non-Malays in the Malay Regiment.¹⁹⁹

The Chinese, however, were tending to fence-sit in the Emergency, and it was proving difficult to recruit enough even for the police. Why should Chinese risk

their lives for a state which had entrenched the Malay Sultans as guardians of the special Malay position, and only allowed Chinese to join the Malay Civil Service as late after 1952? The greater economic opportunities available to the Chinese, the Chinese dominance of the MNLA, and a traditional Chinese view of the army as a disreputable profession, all added to the recruitment problem.²⁰⁰

As late as November 1952, Templar hoped to raise three mixed race Federation battalions by 1955. A purely Chinese Regiment was mooted as a solution to recruiting problems, but the Malay rulers would agree only to a mixed regiment. Even this was reportedly 'only on the understanding that each Federation Regiment battalion raised is offset by an additional battalion of the Malay (an all-Malay) regiment'.²⁰¹

Recruiting for the first mixed race 'Federation [infantry] Regiment' of the Malayan Army, and of a mixed Armoured Car Regiment, began in late 1952. By November the Federation Regiment had 434 men, including 75 Chinese. Under 20 per cent were thus Chinese, over 50 per cent Malay.²⁰² The Chinese applied in higher numbers for technical support arms and to be officers. By independence there were seven Malay Regiment battalions, but just one of the three Federation Regiment battalions originally envisaged.²⁰³

British plans also assumed Singapore could only gain independence in association with Malaya, and again local politics worked against metropolitan plans. In view of the target of eventual association, a territorial division of labour was planned. Malaya was to develop an army, while in 1946 Singapore was allotted responsibility for the small Royal Malayan Navy. Logical enough when the territories were intended to merge, this left Singapore without infantry as late as 1956.²⁰⁴ This cast doubts on the ability of Singapore to control any internal unrest, and soon-to-be independent Malaya was left with a minuscule naval reserve. Thus Britain's failure to bring Malaya and Singapore together before self-government increased both territories' reliance on British forces. This was because the original conception of a division of responsibilities within a federation left a legacy of two territories, each with unbalanced forces.

British plans for a pan-Malayan Air Force also had to be altered when Malayan and Singaporean political developments diverged after 1955. Three Malayan Auxiliary Air Force (MAAF) Squadrons were formed in Malaya and Singapore in 1950-51, originally with a view to training to fly air defence jet fighters. This aim was dropped in 1954. Financial constraints and slow training progress meant they flew Harvard trainers and Tiger Moths until after independence, performing reconnaissance and light transport duties in the Emergency. Again, the need to concentrate men (the MAAF had a high reliance on seconded RAF personnel) and money on the Emergency limited the speed at which local forces, particularly the logistical and technical back-up required if they were to become independent, could be raised.²⁰⁵

In conclusion, Britain planned to increase local forces, both to relieve its own burdens and to prepare Malaya and Singapore for closer association and self-government. This was one area where the Treasury provided funds, agreeing in 1949 to help with the capital expenditure to raise the third and fourth Malay

Regiment battalions to the tune of £3 million, and in 1950 to help with capital costs for the fifth and sixth battalions. As with airforces, however, concentration on pressing Emergency needs led to a rapid development of 'teeth' units for the Federation Army, but a neglect of the support arms necessary if these were to become autonomous. By 1956, Britain was therefore ready to give additional aid, to help Malaya develop the service arms required to make its army more independent as decolonisation accelerated.²⁰⁶ This was yet another example of how decolonisation could increase rather than decrease short-term costs. Despite these measures, however, it remained obvious Britain would continue to provide significant air and naval defence for some time after independence, and at least some army assistance.

Naval and Global War Planning

How far did naval policy contradict the pattern so far suggested, of Britain matching resources primarily to its territories' internal security needs, despite continuing to aspire to regional influence? By the time Japan surrendered in August 1945 there was a sizeable British Pacific Fleet, albeit dwarfed besides American forces. Britain had been determined to have as large a presence as possible in the Pacific naval campaign – once the European war was over – in order to support claims to 'great power status'. In particular, Britain wanted to ensure a say in postwar arrangements for Japan and Japanese occupied territories.

Calls for a significant fleet to be maintained, however, could not survive the rapid rundown of British naval forces up to 1947. This was fuelled by demands to divert resources into rebuilding the economy, and the apparent remoteness of any major war. By late 1947 there were three cruisers and eight destroyers and frigates in the British Pacific Fleet. This should be seen in the context of India only becoming independent in August, and Britain's recent responsibility for the postwar reoccupation of Southeast Asia.²⁰⁷

In 1945–46 there was, however, pressure to return gunboats to Chinese waters, despite the ending of extraterritorial privileges in 1943, and despite Hong Kong's defenceless state against any major attack from China. One or two British ships could be found on the Yangtze, ready to evacuate 4,000 British subjects from Shanghai, as late as 1949. Then in April to July 1949 HMS *Amethyst* was trapped on the Yangtze for fourteen weeks, despite rescue attempts by other British ships, after being mauled by communist artillery.²⁰⁸ There was then a final withdrawal as the communists swept to power. The Royal Navy afterwards concentrated on protecting British shipping en route to Hong Kong, and on 'showing the flag'.

The Korean War intervened at this point, starting on 25 June 1950. By 28 June the much reduced British naval forces, now called the Far East Fleet, were ordered to assist American-led naval action. From 1950–53 a handful of British destroyers, frigates and cruisers, generally accompanied by an aircraft carrier, undertook blockade and bombardment duties. Action elsewhere in the Far East

remained small-scale, such as coastal bombardment and river transportation in the Emergency. The East Indies Station also kept a cruiser and three or four frigates, to patrol the Persian Gulf and Arabian littoral, and to assist developing Commonwealth navies in the Indian Ocean.²⁰⁹

From 1948 until after Korea the Far East Fleet settled at around three cruisers and as many as seventeen destroyers and frigates. By 1955-56 the latter was reduced to around ten, with three submarines on training duties in the Australia and New Zealand area. It could certainly be argued that the Navy had been more successful than the army or airforce in securing resources which had limited utility in internal security roles.²¹⁰

On the other hand, all major surface units were transferable in war. The Royal Navy quickly accepted that in global war the United States would be responsible for the Pacific naval theatre. The idea of sending a 'main fleet to Singapore' had sunk with the *Prince of Wales* in 1941. By 1948 a 'minor fleet from Singapore' strategy had grown in its stead.

In global war American bases in Japan and Okinawa were expected to leave only a limited Soviet naval threat to the South China Seas. Plan 'Gallop' (for global war deployment up to mid 1951), therefore envisaged withdrawing from the Malayan Area all major British naval units, 64 aircraft to leave just 48, and all troops in excess of internal security needs. Australian ground and air units would go to the Middle East, while its ships would remain in the East for convoy and general naval duties. Hong Kong was to be evacuated. In global war situations Malaya was thus perceived as generally secure, but as ultimately dispensable.²¹¹

With naval units on the Far East Station earmarked for Mediterranean and Atlantic duties in global war, it is difficult to fathom how far they represented an additional naval burden, how far they were simply part of an anti-Soviet requirement kept in Eastern waters in peace-time.²¹²

There must, nevertheless, be a suspicion that even if regional and great power ambitions had limited effect on air and ground forces, naval deployments, relating to less tangible tasks, were more susceptible. In 1947 the defence of Commonwealth communications was one of the 'three pillars' of British strategy. The naval contribution to Korea was in part related to the British desire to maximise influence and sustain the United States' new-found willingness to play world policeman. These roles were not unnatural for a country which still had the world's third largest economy in 1950. How far such marginal contributions really did reinforce influence must, however, be open to question.²¹³

After 1952 the Navy was increasingly called upon to justify the maintenance and replacement of large numbers of surface vessels. Increasing stocks of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons raised the prospect of a short, devastating nuclear war. This undermined the Navy's case for a role in any 'broken-backed' warfare which might follow the initial exchange. By 1956 the Navy were having to justify their ships increasingly in terms of Cold War and Limited War tasks. Then they successfully argued that they could provide 'floating bases' for imperial policing.

Chapter eight will ask how far the resulting 'East of Suez' posture suggests a continuing tradition of the Navy as a prop to great power influence, and how far a pragmatic response as bases became politically insecure.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter and chapter two have shown that military and political plans for post-war 'decolonisation' were influenced in similar ways by British reactions to Singapore's fall in 1942. Military defeat discredited plural societies and small territorial units. The Colonial Office subsequently sought to foster cross-communal politics and the military to build mixed race security forces: Viceroy encouraged the closer association of territories while generals aimed to organise local defence on a pan-Malayan basis. Darby's claim that military and political planning was not coordinated can not be ascribed to Southeast Asia in this period. It fails to acknowledge this common source and parallel development.

Neither is it true, for the period up to 1955, that force posture was greatly influenced by attempts to maintain regional and great power status. Chapter three traced Britain's reluctance to underpin either regional 'Cold War' policy or Songkhla plans with resources, and the low priority accorded to Southeast Asia in time of global war. Chapters two to four have also shown how Britain hoped to reduce its defence burdens in this area, by sharing responsibilities with Commonwealth and colonial forces.

As in the Middle East, Britain hoped this would help it return to a pre-war model of small garrisons backed up by the availability of reinforcements. In both theatres this aim was frustrated. Communist and nationalist resistance tied down large numbers of troops. The necessity for holding Egyptian bases at such great cost could be questioned, especially as increasing bomber ranges reduced their value as forward strategic bases. For Southeast Asia, however, there seemed little choice other than to defend Malaya's dollar-earnings, quite apart from questions of prestige and Cold War tactics.

Even the Gurkha battalions, which Britain had intended to use as a Malayan-based strategic reserve, were committed to the Malayan Emergency. Internal security needs were the main determinant of force-levels in this period, despite Britain's continuing desire to exert regional influence and to shield Malaya from communism. While the Cold War in Southeast Asia had a profound effect on regional policy and defence planning, it influenced actual force posture mainly through its effects on internal security in Hong Kong and Malaya.

This chapter has also argued that communal patterns set parameters for nationalists, communists and colonialists alike. Imperialist compromise with communal politics and communist failure in the Emergency are just the most dramatic examples of this. Hence Britain aimed to 'unite and quit', but by 1955 was accepting an alliance of communal parties rather than cross-communal politics. It had to accept the reflection of communal patterns in security force recruitment and was making almost imperceptible progress towards unifying Malaya and Singapore. Britain hoped to reduce white troops to a minimum, but

had to commit reinforcements and to provide an extra £420 million to fight the Emergency. Even then, the success of the 'Briggs Plan' in 'screwing down' a relatively small-scale insurgency depended heavily on the fissures within Chinese society and the opposition of most Malays to communism. Britain, in short, directed the Emergency to success and protected its fundamental strategic needs, but was most successful where it ran with rather than against the grain of local communal patterns.

Britain's approach to decolonisation also continued to be pragmatic, seeking to co-opt moderate nationalists in order to protect core interests cheaply, and to inherit a position of influence over successor states. This approach, with its clear commitment to ultimate self-government for Malaya, made it easier to harness local support in fighting the Malayan Emergency. At the same time it implied limits to Britain's will to insist on the detailed patterning and timing of decolonisation. In Malaya in particular the Alliance increasingly offered the prospect of a politically entrenched and reassuringly anti-communist successor government, which could deliver cooperation between communally based elites. The rising tide of nationalism throughout Asia, and the French withdrawal from Indochina, suggested that pressure for political change would only intensify. The Emergency itself had a dual effect. It gave Malay nationalism and British imperialism a common communist – and predominantly Chinese – enemy, and yet also made Britain sensitive to the need to use political concessions to maintain local support. By 1955 Britain had begun to accept an acceleration in decolonisation.

This presented awkward dilemmas. Britain anticipated that Malaya would require British assistance in external defence long after independence and that Singapore would remain a Commonwealth base. Singapore was not expected to be able to dispense with British help in internal security until it could be united with Malaya. How would Britain reconcile Malaya and Singapore's separate constitutional development with the desire for their closer association? How could a continuing military presence be made compatible with increasing local sovereignty? The development of these issues from 1955 is taken up again in chapter seven.

First, however, the deterioration in Indochina in 1954 was about to pose testing questions for American and British strategy. Could the United States square determination to save Indochina with aversion to 'another Korea' and to the risks of tripping its full China strategy? Could Britain restrain the United States from high-risk intervention? What regional strategy was it willing to support to hold the rest of the region if Tonkin fell?

Notes

- 1 See Keith Jeffrey, 'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas? India in the Aftermath of the First World War', *MAS*, 5 (1981), 370–87; Anita Inder Singh, 'Imperial Defence and the Transfer of Power in India 1940–1947', *IHR*, IV, (Nov 1989), 568–58; and Hugh Tinker, 'The Contraction of Empire in Asia 1945–48: the Military Dimension', *JICH*, XVI (1988), 218–33; and Dennis, *Troubled Days of Peace*.

- 2 CRA:A816/51, 11/301/698, DC(SEA)1, Appreciation on 'Future Policy of SEA', by the British Defence Committee (South East Asia), 8 July 1946; and 8th BDCC meeting, 24 Jan. 1947, where the BDCC recognised that the approach of independence necessitated the rapid return of Indian forces.
- 3 Inder Singh, 'Imperial Defence and the Transfer of Power in India' 568-88. See also, R. Aldrich, 'British Strategy and the End of Empire: South Asia, 1945-51', in Aldrich, *British Strategy*, pp. 275-307.
- 4 The Colombo Plan, established in 1950 with a Commonwealth membership, ostensibly sought to coordinate aid to South and Southeast Asia. Joint Planning Staff paper, JP(50)47, prepared for the COS between April and May 1950. This can be found, together with COS comments, in Co537/6264. See also G. H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (London, 1966), pp. 48 ff.
- 5 Thorne, *Issue of War*, pp. 165-68.
- 6 Britain's desire for Burmese compromise with the Karens and Kachins, inability to fulfil weapons requests, and insensitivity in trying to influence armed forces policy, saw the agreement terminated in Jan. 1954 (after Burma gave 12 months notice). Burma then looked to a variety of suppliers. Andrew Selth, 'Australian Defence Contracts with Burma, 1945-87', *MAS*, 26, 3 (July 1992), 451-68.
- 7 John Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policy Between the Wars', *Historical Journal*, xxiii, 3 (1980), 657-79; Cab129/C(53)17 Revise, 'Egypt', Foreign Secretary, 14 Jan. 1953, for up to 80,000 evacuees; Morgan, *The People's Peace*, p. 130; Reynolds, *Britannia*, p. 190.
- 8 Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, p.p. 283-86.
- 9 In 1956 the Singapore Base cost over £3 million, Hong Kong almost half that, but Ceylon just over £400,000, see *The Times* (London), 16 April 1956, 'Political Clouds over Eastern Bases'.
- 10 Co537/1478, FE(0)(46)52, 'British Foreign Policy in the FE', 16 April 1946. This originated in Feb. 1945, as a draft paper by the Far East Civil Planning Unit. The strategic section derived from a JPS draft, prepared with the cooperation of the Post Hostilities Planning Committee, and dated Feb. 1945.
- 11 CRA: A816/51, 11/301/698, Australian Commissioner to DEA, 19 Oct. 1946, enclosing the record of a meeting by the British Defence Committee in SEA, DC(SEA)(46)1, 8 July 1946. On white troops, see Wo216/226, Singapore meeting, 3 Aug. 1947, which included CIGS, Montgomery.
- 12 Jeffrey, 'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas?', 370-87.
- 13 Tinker, 'The Contraction of Empire in Asia 1945-48: the Military Dimension', 218-33. Increasing nationalism had seen the use of Indian troops for imperial purposes come under restrictions even before WW2. See also Keith Jeffrey, 'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas', 370-87.
- 14 In 1946 the Defence Committee hoped Malaya would become a manpower source. See: Co537/1263; Cab21/1850, DO(47)8, Defence Committee, 17 March 1947, minute 7; Inder Singh, *Limits of British Influence*, pp. 25-27; and Prem8/537. Rotating short-service conscripts to the East, and then acclimatising them, was an inefficient use of transport. The COS initially accepted 12 months as the length of postwar conscription. This was after parliamentary pressure, and on condition overseas obligations be reduced and regulars alone serve overseas. This did not happen. Conscripts served in Malaya from 1948. In late 1948 the length was extended to 18 months, in Sept. 1950 to 2 years.
- 15 Jeffrey, 'The Eastern Arc of Empire', 542; and Myers, 'Conscription and the politics of military Strategy in the Attlee Government', *passim*.
- 16 Tinker, 'The Contraction of Empire,' *JICH*, 16, 2 (1988), 226. The latter plan was emerging from 1946, Cab131/4, DO(47)22, 'Future of the Gurkhas', Secretary of State for India, 7 March 1947; and Co537/4085, extract from Defence Committee meeting of 2 Oct. 1946, *passim*.

- 17 See Do35/2462; Cab21/1850; and Leo Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival* (Berkeley, 1971).
- 18 Nadzon Haron, 'The Malay Regiment 1933–55', (Essex: Unpublished Ph.D thesis, 1988), p. 60.
- 19 N. Haron, 'Colonial defence and the British Approach to Problems in Malaya 1874–1918', *MAS*, 24, 2 (May 1990), 275–95; Dol Ramli, 'History of the Malay Regiment', *JMBRAS*, 38, 1 (July 1965), 199–243; Abdul Karim bin Badoo, 'The Origins and Development of the Malay State Guides', *JMBRAS*, 35, 1 (1962), 51–94. For general accounts, see: Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as Superpower 1919–39* (London, 1986), pp. 33–44; Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: an account of the Indian Army* (London, 1974); and B. Farwell, *Armies of the Raj: From the Mutiny to Independence* (London, 1990).
- 20 See Wo32/10835, War Office and Allied Land Forces South East Asia discussing the future of the Malay Regiment; M. C. Sheppard, *The Malay Regiment* (Kuala Lumpur, 1947), and Cab131/5, DO(48)16, meeting of 13 Aug. 1948.
- 21 For the quotation, see Wo32/10835, (17A), Allied Land forces SEA (ALFSEA) to War Office, 5 Jan. 1946; (7A). See also, Wo268/1, ALFSEA Quarterly Report, 31. Dec. 1946. The Japanese-raised forces referred to included the militia Peta, (*Pembelah Tanah Air*, Defenders of the Fatherland).
- 22 Other possible factors are: doubts about overseas Chinese loyalties, the apparent willingness of the MPAJA to disarm, or the realisation the Chinese were unlikely to volunteer in numbers as infantry.
- 23 Wo32/10835, (60A), HQ Allied Land Forces South East Asia to HQ Supreme Allied Command South East Asia, 14 June 1946.
- 24 See the file Wo268/8; and Haron, 'The Malay Regiment', pp. 223–229.
- 25 Cab131/6, DO(48)36, 'Hong Kong', COS, 8 May 1948. In Oct. 1946, Montgomery hoped a gendarmerie might one day take over Hong Kong's defence. He remarked on the 'suitability' of 'personnel from North Borneo and Sarawak' for 'this kind of work'. Presumably he was not implying any similarity between concrete and wooden jungles. See Co537/4085, DO(46)26, Defence Committee meeting of 2 Oct. 1946.
- 26 See Cab131/5, DO(48)16, meeting of 13 Aug. 1948, minute 3, for the reserve. See also Cab131/5, DO(47)37, 'The Role of the Colonies in War', memo. by Overseas Defence Committee, 11 April 1947.
- 27 Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford, 1980), p. 118. There were 8 or 9 [depending on whether you read his text or map] UK battalions in the FE in Jan. 1938, including 2 in China.
- 28 223,000 East African troops served in 1939–45, and some later in Malaya too. In 1946–48 Bevin dreamed of harnessing African development into a Euro-Africa, a 'middle planet' force counter-balancing Soviet and American power. The reality was that Britain lacked the necessary finance. By 1948 CO scepticism and the Cold War concentrated Bevin's attentions more on drawing America into Europe, see John Kent, 'Bevin's Imperialism and the Idea of Euro-Africa', in Dockrill and Young, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 47–75; and Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence*, p. 26.
- 29 'Population control' included relocating a substantial proportion of the population (1 million out of a total of 5–6 million when labour regroupment is included), deportations (over 10,000 just for involuntary deportation, equivalent to around 100,000 from a country Britain's size), registration, detention without trial, and large security forces.
- 30 W. Vennewald, *Chinesen in Malaysia*, p. 116. Excluding Singapore, this makes Malays 2.4 million out of a population of 4.9 million. Indians were 535,000.
- 31 For the quotation, see Chin Kee Onn, *Malaya Upside Down* (Singapore, 1946), pp. 117–20. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation* (Singapore, 1983); Lucien Pye, *Guerilla Communism in Malaya* (London, 1956), pp. 47–82.

- 32 The British Military Administration lasted from Sept. 1945 to April 1946). Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, pp. 10-21; Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, pp. 186-87.
- 33 Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 55-93.
- 34 Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, pp. 14-18; Michael Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948* (London, 1970), ch. xi, pp. 214-35; Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Masked Comrades: A Study of the Communist United Front in Malaya* (Singapore, 1979). Frank Furedi, 'Creating a Breathing Space: The Political Management of Colonial Emergencies', *JICH*, 21, 3 (1993), 89-106, and *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London, 1994), pp. 144-46, 160-62, 195-96, 265, argues colonial emergencies resulted from British attempts to deradicalize nationalism (p. 265).
- 35 M.R. Stenson, 'The Malayan Union and the Historians', *JSEAH*, 10, 2 (1969), 344-54, argues communist violence must be related to British policy. See also Cheah, *Masked Comrades*, ch. 11, for police support of planters (charging at pickets, evicting unionists) leading to worker deaths.
- 36 Cheah, *Masked Comrades*, pp. 16-30.
- 37 See Rho, Brewer Papers, box 1, file 4, Interrogation of Leong Yat Seng; and Rho, MSS Indian Ocean s251, for the communist paper 'Freedom News', of 15 Jan. 1947. Intimidation of non-communist unionists and 'scabs' was routine.
- 38 Lai Tek seems to have been planted by Special Branch. He betrayed the MPAJA to Britain pre- and post-war, and to Japan. He took Party funds with him, exacerbating MCP difficulties. Yoji Akashi, 'Lai Tek', in *Journal of the South Seas Society* 49 (1994), 57-103.
- 39 The Youth Conference of 19-24 Feb. was sponsored by the World Federation of Democratic Youth and by the Conference of Youth and Students fighting for Freedom and Independence. The Second Congress of the Communist Party of India was held from 28 Feb. to 6 March. Charles McLane, *Soviet Policies in South East Asia* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 385-401. R. Smith, 'China and South East Asia: The Revolutionary Perspective 1951', in *JSEAS*, xix, 1 (March 1988), 97-98, argues the Indian Communist Party, not the Youth Conference, was most important. See also: Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, pp. 54-62; and Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 43-53.
- 40 See Stockwell, "'A Widespread and long-concocted plot'", in *JICH*, 21, 3 (1993), 66-88, and *Malaya*, ii, pp. 50-51. The classic challenge to the conspiracy theory is Ruth McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings* (Ithaca, 1958). 'The Threat to Western civilisation', was the title of a paper submitted to Cabinet by Bevin in early 1948, see Cab129/CC(48)72.
- 41 On 31 May 1948 the government banned the communist Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions. It decreed union officials must have 3 years experience in the relevant industry, thus excluding many communists.
- 42 Harper argues the MCP responded to a social crisis spiralling out of its control (see next note). But Malaya was at its most turbulent in 1945-46. Indeed, strikes and violence decreased in Jan. to March 1948, with record lows of 7 murders each in Jan. and March. Strikes and murders increased suddenly from April, after the MCP decisions. For instance: murder incidents fell from 421 (1946) to 220 (1947), rising to 470 in 1948 due entirely to post-April 1948 increases; gang-robbery with firearms fell from 459 (1947) to 186 (1948), despite the Emergency. 1948 figures were less than 1947 for some other categories of crime too, notably housebreaking and theft. See *Annual Report of the Federation of Malaya, 1948* (Kuala Lumpur), pp. 8 and 124-25.
- 43 Co537/3753, MSS, PIJ number 14/48, 31 July 1948, Supplement 9; Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare*, pp. 59-61.
- 44 Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 94-114, shows evictions gathering pace from late 1947.
- 45 ANU Workshop, Canberra, 22-23 Feb. 1999. Chin Peng stressed the March-May policy was to step up violence to maintain strikes and union power against disruption

- (an anti-'scab' policy) and begin assembling the core for an army. The MCP Central Committee expected to meet again around Aug.
- 46 Cheah, *Masked Comrades*, pp. 149-51. This 'Segamat massacre' was at Chan Kang Swee Estate. Workers, sacked *en masse* by a European purchaser to enforce authority, had continued to tap until cleared.
- 47 Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 113, 142-43, 146. One planter murdered on 16th was involved in evictions and a strike. A May 1948 MCP article praised nearby peasants for opposing crop destruction. But such local actions did accord with the central MCP decisions to increase violence.
- 48 Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya*, pp. 214-51. See also Rho, MSS Indian Ocean 251, MSS, PIJ, 1948/10, 31 May 1948; and, for pressure on squatters by licensing and evictions, Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 94-114, who builds on Loh Kok Wah's *Beyond the Tin Mines*. Harper and Loh see the Emergency partly as an ecological contest. The state was reasserting control over the jungle frontier This had been lost in the war to Chinese seeking farming livelihoods free of the exploitative conditions of mines and plantations, and whose practices were sometimes ecologically damaging.
- 49 For reinforcements, see Cab131/5, D(48)16, 13 Aug. 1948. For the Cabinet's reluctance to proscribe the MCP, Stockwell, 'A Widespread and long-concocted plot', in *JICH*, 21, 3 (1993), 66-88.
- 50 Cab131/5, DO(48)16, 13 Aug. 1948. Air20/10377, 'Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to Aug. 1957', by DDO Lieutenant-General Sir Roger Bower, 12 Sept. 1957, Appendix B; and figures. Emergency figures are often inconsistent and so indicative only. By late 1949 British forces had risen from the equivalent of 13 to 17 infantry battalions.
- 51 Many works and British documents suggest 'Malayan Races Liberation Army'. Chin Peng (ANU Workshop, Feb. 1999) and CC Too (*New Straits Times*, 3 Dec. 1989) say 'National' was the intended meaning of 'Min Tsu'.
- 52 Wo35/10835: High Commissioner (Malaya) [Gurney] to Colonial Secretary, 15 Dec. 1950; Officer Administering Government to Colonial Secretary, 13 Nov. 1950.
- 53 White, *Business, Government*, p. 97f, suggests 10 per cent. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, 84f, puts 'the planting community' (presumably including dependents) at c. 1,500.
- 54 The image of the Lucy family's twins in a sandbagged, guarded plantation house nursery has been evoked in accounts (they left Malaya for Kenya in 1952, just in time for Mau Mau). Eg., see Keay, *The Last Post*, p. 301; and Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs* (Arrow, 1989 edition), pp. 49-65.
- 55 See Rho, Hamer papers, box 2, file 7, diary '1A', 1 Jan 1949.
- 56 Both Colonel Gray (Commissioner of Police, 1948-51) and Sir Henry Gurney (High Commissioner, 1948-1951) had experience in Palestine, the latter as Chief Secretary.
- 57 Rho, Brewer papers, box 1, file 4, diaries, pp. 2, 43 ff. 'Inside Story', BBC1, Wednesday 9th Sept. 1992, presented evidence for Batang Kali as cold-blooded killing of civilians presumed to be communist sympathisers. See also Stubbs, *Malayan Emergency*, pp. 66-97; and Wo268/8, leaflets, for 'vermin'.
- 58 See Defe11/34, High Commissioner to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1950, 'The confidence of the Chinese has not recovered from 1941, and they see a similar situation developing now'; and MMP19/11/5-6, MacDonald to FO, 10 Aug. 1950, 'A great many [Chinese] believe that the war will soon become general, and that 1941 will be repeated in Malaya with the Communists playing the part previously taken by the Japanese'.
- 59 Defe11/34, High Commissioner to Secretary of State, 15 Feb. 1950.
- 60 ISEAS: Tan Cheng Lock, folio 24, 'Appendix F to Agenda' [for Federal War Council of 15 Nov. 1951], 10 Nov. 1951. 45,000 men of 18-24 had been registered up to Nov., but after evasion and rejects just 4,100 had been directed. For Chinese recruitment, see also Hack, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency', *INS* 14, 2 (1999), 149-50, endnotes 42-43.

- 61 See Keay, *The Last Post*, p. 300, for Gurney saying this would be worth a division of reinforcements to the MNLA. FO desire to court China, and protect interests in Hong Kong, won out over CO fears of the impact of recognition and consuls in Malaya. But China did not send Consuls, since negotiations over representation dragged on, in the light of differences over UK recognition of Taiwan, the Korean War etc. Tang, *Britain's Encounter*, pp. 79-80, Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 206-8
- 62 Defel11/35, telegrams between COS and BDCC, April 1950; Cab131/9, DO(50)14 and 32, Minister of Defence (Shinwell) 9 March and 29 April 1950. For the quotation, see Prem8/1406, MAL. C(50)6, 21 April 1950, 'Military Situation in Malaya', COS.
- 63 Air20/10377, 'Review of the Emergency', DOO, 12 Sept. 1957. The figures have been extracted and re-entered in different form.
- 64 A Government Squatter Committee advised resettlement as early as Jan. 1949, but this was left to State initiative. The States guarded their sphere carefully after the Malayan Union fiasco, and many now moved slowly because of cost, reluctance to give land to Chinese, and a feeling that uncoordinated resettlement would displace insurgents elsewhere. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, p. 101.
- 65 Land issues went to the core of ethnic tension. The Malays saw resettlement as rewarding illegal Chinese squatting at a time when many Malays suffered malnutrition and limited access to facilities. Squatting allegedly caused loss of timber, stream silting and soil erosion in Malay reservations. By contrast, Chinese felt the war - when Japan encouraged farming, and squatter support for the MPAJA - legitimated their position. See ISEAS: Tan Cheng Lock, folio 23, 'Notes on discussions of the CLC', 18-19 Feb. 1949.
- 66 For the 'Briggs Plan', see Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 231-53; and Air20/7777, 'Report on the Emergency in Malaya from April 1950 to Nov. 1951', by Lt-General Harold Briggs. 'Regroupment' meant moving workers' huts short distances to concentrate them in more easily defended groups.
- 67 See G. Kolko, *Vietnam: Anatomy of a War* (London, 1986), pp. 92-6, 131-37; and Milton Osborne, *Strategic Hamlets in South Vietnam* (New York, 1965) for the contrasting failure in Vietnam.
- 68 Chin Peng at ANU Workshop, Canberra, 22-23 Feb. 1999.
- 69 After a low of 2.5 in 1950 the insurgent:security force elimination ratio climbed to 3 in 1951, 6 in 1952, 15 in 1953, see Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p. 76, 190-202, for monthly figures. See also Air20/10377, 'Report on Emergency Operations', DOO, Sept. 1957, para. 11. This estimates average yearly CT strength at 7,292 in 1951 and 5,765 in 1952, numbers falling roughly 20 per cent a year, 1951-57.
- 70 For excessive use of fear and the hardening of public opinion, see Rho, B. P. Walker-Taylor papers: 'Statements' of SEP, pp. 1; and Liew Thian Choy, pp. 25-29. See also Rho, Young papers, Mss British Empire s486/2/1, (N), 'Surrender of CTs', pp. 29, 35-39, and (B); Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, pp. 63 ff for insurgent weaknesses and Siew Lau; and Pye, *Guerrilla Communism*, pp. 95 ff, 104-5.
- 71 SEP statements may over-represent less committed MNLA members; and may have been playing to their captors. See Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 164, for fear in New Villages in 1951 that ex-supporters of SEPs would be betrayed leading to a 'confessional kind of politics'.
- 72 John Coe, 'Beautiful Flowers and Poisonous Weeds: problems of historicism, ethics and internal antagonisms: the case of the Malayan Communist Party' (University of Queensland, Unpublished D.Phil, 1993), pp. 166-67. Chin Peng, ANU Workshop, Canberra, 22-23 Feb. 1999, also stressed MCP difficulties in sustaining the policy of resistance to resettlement.
- 73 For the Korean War Boom, Stubbs, see *Hearts and Minds*, pp. 107 ff.
- 74 Rho, Young papers, Mss British Empire s486/2/3, CIS(52)(7)(Final), 'Combined Intelligence Staff Review of the Emergency as at 30th Sept. 1952', 10 Oct. 1952, paras. 6-7. This examined reasons for Emergency changes in the six months to 30 Sept. 1952.

- 75 An English-language copy of the October Resolution, in the form of 7 documents, can be found in Co1022/187, sheets 62-158, enclosed with High Commissioner (Malaya) to Colonial Secretary [from J. P. Morton, Director of Intelligence], 31 Dec. 1952. The 'Directive of the Central Politburo on Clearing and Planting' dealt with the present and future danger posed by resettlement. For 'seven urgent tasks', see also Co1022/187, 'Captured Malayan Communist Party Documents', FO, 27 Nov. 1953.
- 76 For the directives as a response to pressure, see Rho, Mss British Empire s486/2/1, Miscellaneous, pp. 53 ff. 'Short History of the Emergency', Operations Branch, Federal Police, 21 Oct. 1952, paras 33-34; (F).
- 77 See the review on 'Aim and Strategy of the MCP', filed in the Commissioner of Police's lecture notes (Colonel Young) for 1952-53. This described the Oct. 1951 changes as the result of 'the success of the Government's resettlement in New Villages of the Chinese', increasing the need for work amongst the Malays and Indians, 'whose importance from the supply point of view had been enhanced ...'. The switch increase in political effort and more selective use of violence was 'because a reverse policy had alienated mass support'. Rho, Young papers, Mss British Empire s486/2/1, (F), 'Review of the Security Situation in Malaya: Aim and Strategy of the MCP'; (I).
- 78 The Oct. Directives are discussed in Hack, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency'. 'Mass Organisation' is often interpreted as purely political, but the Directives also explicitly linked it to supply issues.
- 79 See Co1022/187, sheets 62-158, High Commissioner (Malaya) to Colonial Secretary, 31 Dec. 1952, especially 63-69, 89-90, 116, 120-121; and 'Captured Malayan Communist Party Documents', FO memo., 27 Nov. 1953. For Short and the quotation, see *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 309-321. Short targets Purcell's claim that, 'Templer's predecessors had succeeded in subjecting the Communists to such pressure that they had virtually called off the shooting war four months before his arrival in Malaya ...', Purcell, *Communist or Free*, quoted in Short, *op. cit.*, p. 318. Yet it is possible to argue that the directives had military causes and consequences without assuming a communist intention to call off the shooting war.
- 80 For the quotations, see Rho, Young papers, Mss British Empire s486/2/1, (F), 'Review of the Security Situation in Malaya: Aim and Strategy of the MCP', esp. paras 5 and 6. See also, *ibid.*, pp. 35-36; and (I). See Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 161, for the MCP asking labourers to 'break their own rice-bowls'.
- 81 White, Business, Government and the End of Empire, pp. 97, 121-23.
- 82 Short, *Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, p. 318, argues the Cominform line was not clear. For the 'Cominform' quotation, see Air20/10377, 'Review of the Emergency in Malaya', DOO (Malaya), 12 Sept. 1957, p. 3. Smith makes the world context and the international communist 'line' (not instructions) important in, 'China and South East Asia'.
- 83 For quotations, see Rho, Young papers, Mss British Empire s486/2/1, item 1, 'Review of the Security Situation', Commissioner of Police lecture notes for 1952-53. Pye, *Guerrilla Communism*, pp. 105-106, suggests the directives reduced MCP aggression, leading to late 1952 orders to increase activity.
- 84 Defe11/47, 'Malaya Report', March 1952, (C), Average weekly incidents by months, (1576B). By 4th quarter 1952 incidents were at the 1949 level. Air20/10377, 'Review of the Emergency', DOO, Sept. 1957, p. 9, para. 34, dates the improved flow of information from late 1951. Rho, Mss British Empire s486/2/3, CIS(52)7(f), 'Combined Intelligence Staff Review of the Emergency', 10 Oct 1952, para. 4(a), and appendices, show statistical improvements becoming steady in the first half of 1952. For instance, attacks on buses fell dramatically. Short notes that a week after Gurney's death security forces suffered their heaviest weekly total of casualties (*op. cit.*, p. 306). Such figures are atypical of the trend. For Oct. 1951-March 1952 this is complicated, at worst unclear, at best showing erratic improvement.

- 85 Short, *Communist Insurrection*, p. 381, stresses resettlement deficiencies in 1951 (eg., in barbed wire), but its effectiveness should be judged from MNLAs responses, not progress towards an ideal final state.
- 86 See Cab129/C(51)26, 'The Situation in Malaya', Colonial Secretary, 20 Nov. 1951, for a BDCC telegram of 15 Nov, describing the communist hold as, 'as strong as ever'; CO1022/13-14; and Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 306ff. For improving Special Branch-army operations, see Hack, 'Intelligence and Insurgency'.
- 87 See Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p. 186. For British frustration, the change of London government and economic concerns leading to changes in personnel (but not the thrust of policy), see Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', *JICH*, 13, 1 (1984), 79-83, and *Malaya*, ii, p. 306.
- 88 Short uses counter-factuals: 'How would Gurney have dealt with the Chinese?' 'Would resettlement have continued?' Short, *op. cit.*, pp. 303-6). Yet over 70 per cent of squatters were moved before 1952, and the basic policy was never seriously questioned, only its timing. On 3 Oct. 1951 Gurney wrote to Sir T Lloyd (Permanent Under-Secretary of State, CO) that resettlement consolidation could now begin, and that he was attempting to increase Chinese cooperation. On 5 Oct he wrote to Tan Cheng Lock. Gurney's 4 Oct 1951 paper, which Short argues shows a dangerous hardening of policy, is harsh in tone, but culminates with practical suggestions for more cooperation. Gurney always mixed ruthlessness towards communist supporters with calls for cooperation, and Templer's initial Chinese policy was famously tough.
- 89 Jenkins (Director of Intelligence) resigned. But on the positive side, in late 1951 intelligence was told to make getting 'live' intelligence from agents (ultimately achieved in New Villages) the priority, and to target MCP 'inner ring' leaders (less successful). CO1022/51; Cloake, *Templer*, pp. 197, 228.
- 90 For Templer's efficiency and the term 'energised', see Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 342-43.
- 91 See Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 336-37, for Templer's impact on and after arrival.
- 92 See Leon Comber "'The weather ... has been horrible", Malayan Communist Communications during the "Emergency"', *Asian Studies Review* 19, 2, (1995) p. 49 note 6. The 10th and 8th Regiments moved in 1954. On the British side, a Frontier Intelligence Bureau was set up by Aug. 1953. Chin Peng has confirmed there was no grand plan for a Long March in 1952-53, rather a step by step retreat forced by food scarcity and security force pressure. ANU Workshop, Canberra, 22-23 Feb. 1999.
- 93 ISEAS: Tan Cheng Lock papers, folio 24, Appendix A to the Agenda [for the Federal War Council of 15 Nov. 1951], 10 Nov. 1951; Appendix B: 'Protection of Concentrated Villages', 12 Oct. 1951; Appendix D, 12 Nov. 1951; and Appendix E on the need for village elections.
- 94 Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, pp. 1-2, 125-27, 248-49, Cloake, *Templer*, pp. 188 ff, 262-94. Stubbs stresses that without Templer's 'hearts and minds' strategy, in 1951 Malaya was heading for years of chronic insurgency. Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p. 186, call Gurney's death, 'a fitting epitaph to a muddled policy'. Guy Madoc (Assistant Superintendent of Special Branch, 1950-52, Director of Special Branch under Templer. Director of Intelligence, 1954-58) believed that in a way Gurney's death was fortunate. Rho, Granada 'End of Empire', *Malaya*, vol. 2, pp. 98-99; vol. 4, p. 70. Short, *Communist Insurrection*, 301-306, agrees there was a 1951 stalemate, but stresses Templer's leadership rather as the critical extra ingredient. See Hack, 'Iron Claws on Malaya' for a full discussion.
- 95 See Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experience from Malaya and Vietnam* (London, 1972), pp. 50-51, 55 ff. Thompson also stresses military-civil cooperation, remaining within the law and clear planning. For comparisons, Charles Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars* (London, 1986).
- 96 Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 340-41, 343; Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, p. 424.

- 97 Chin Kee Onn, *The Grand Illusion* (London, 1961), p. 144. This traces the disillusionment of 'good' communist Kung Li. As such it aimed at undermining the respect which could linger even in Chinese such as Chin Keen Onn for the MCP's wartime role. For more on Chin, see Su Fang Ng, 'Chin Kee Onn's Ma-rai-ee and the Narration of the Malayan Nationalist Subject in the Aftermath of the Pacific War', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 34, 1 (1999), 85–102.
- 98 Han Su-yin's autobiography, *My House Has Two Doors* (Granada edition, 1982), pp. 77–79, 81, 232–33, and semi-factual novel ... *And the Rain my Drink* (London, 1956) depict New Villagers pounded between insurgents and government. Han Suyin, *My House has Two Doors*, p. 91, mentions Ah Mui: 'Daughter of a rubber tapper ... captured in enemy armed action ... After much interrogation she had "come clean".'
- 99 'Review of the Emergency', DOO, 12 Sept 1957, pp. 13, 17. See also Rho, Granada End of Empire series, Malaya, vol. 2, pp. 17–19, for Hugh Humphrey, Secretary for Defence and Internal Security, 1953–57. In a 1983 interview he described deportation as 'ruthless' but 'necessary', with 'women breaking down and children screaming' on occasions.
- 100 CRA: A5954/1, 2294/4, 'The Police', 26 May 1952, Australian Commissioner's Office (Singapore) to DEA. The main source was an experienced English manager. For a more sympathetic account, see A. J. Stockwell, 'Policing During the Malayan Emergency, 1948–60' in David Anderson and Killingray, *Policing and Decolonisation* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 105–26. See also Anthony Burgess, *The Malayan Trilogy* (London: Minerva edition, 1996), p. 5. *Time for A Tiger* (first published 1956) opens with debt-ridden Palestine veteran 'Nabby Adams' craving alcohol and ranting about Palestine as the real East. Burgess came to Malaya as an education officer in 1954, learnt Malay, and wanted to write about Malaya from the inside. See also Zawiah Yahya, *Resisting Colonialist Discourse*, (Bangi, Selangor, 1994), pp. 124–55.
- 101 Victor Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free* (London, 1954), pp. 5–14. For a critical view, see Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 379–87. For radical and Marxist Emergency accounts, see R. Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire* (London, 1957 edition), pp. 179–90; and Mohamed Amin and Caldwell (eds), *Malaya: The Making of a Neo-Colony* (1977). The Tan Cheng Lock papers confirm Purcell reflected Chinese anger despite his tactlessness. ISEAS: Tan Cheng Lock papers, 3/158–158j, 5/304–7, 6/1,–3, 10/passim. Tan refused to disavow Purcell despite government pressure to do so (3/271).
- 102 Judith Strauch, *Chinese Politics in the Malaysian State* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), pp. 63–72; Francis Loh Kok Wah, *Beyond the Tin Mines: Coolies, Squatters and New Villagers in the Kinta Valley, Malaysia. c.1880–1980* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 127, 139, 144–47, 154, 161, 178–81, 192–99. Donald Nonini's review in *Kajian Malaysia*, 10, 1 (1992), pp. 96–99, argues Loh 'demolishes the myth' of 'hearts and minds', depicting a 'Foucaultian nightmare' of control and alienation. Yet this should not be taken too far. Eg., if half the New Villagers had schools by late 1952, this was a gain for squatters who had minimal facilities.
- 103 Short, *Communist Insurgency*, p. 400. For Sungei Boleh (near Sungei Siput of the June 1948 murders) as a good example, see Vernon Bartlett, *Report from Malaya* (London, 1955), p. 51. By 1954 it had metalled road, bean factory, pig farm, fishpond, town council, and medical and veterinary visits. See also ISEAS: Tan Cheng Lock papers, folio 10, Brian Stewart to Tan Cheng lock, 26 Jan. 1953.
- 104 Wo216/901, 15 March 1956, DOO (Bourne) to Templer. Cheah Boon Kheng's review of Stubbs's, *Hearts and Minds*, in *JSEAS*, 22, 2 (1991), 427–30: 'The Chinese memory of Templer's reign is probably one of fear and resentment, a most unhappy experience in which Templer used tough language and tactics to intimidate them ... the Malay memory of the Emergency was equally unpleasant – one of

- government indifference and neglect of Malay rural areas ...'. Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 150-94, expands on 'a society living in a state of terror'.
- 105 The view on Chinese helping only when forced dates from an April 1949 paper attached to a letter from Gurney to Creech Jones. Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 129-133 (132 for the quotation). For 'wind-blown', see Co1022/148, R.P. Bingham, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, paper on Chinese for Secretary of Defence, Malaya. This is attached as Appendix B to a memo. for the Malaya Borneo Committee, MBDC (51) 74, 16 June 1951.
- 106 Britain used population control even when there was no violence. The population of the Indian Ocean Island of Diego Garcia - destined for lease to the US as a base - was moved to Mauritius (from which the island had been detached at independence) in 1965-73. Curtis, *Ambiguities of Power*, p. 118.
- 107 Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-62* (London, 1977), pp. 131-6, 170-72. Did aspects of Malaya's population make the level of 'terror' used by the *Viet Minh* and FLN ineffective?
- 108 Rho, Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journals, 1947/6, MCP 'Freedom News', 15 Jan. 1947. The figure is from Postgate, *Operation Firedog*, p. 5.
- 109 W. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Up to 10 per cent of the MNLAs were non-Chinese. 10 Regiment MNLAs was formed from Pahang Malays in 1949, but soon crippled. BBC2 broadcast, 19 June 1998, 'Malaya: The Undeclared War'. Review of the latter in *Straits Times*, 18 June 1998, p. 30. For MCP concerns, see Rho, Hamer Papers, Box 2, SEP Tan Ah Teng statement of Dec. 1948.
- 110 For the figure, see Air20/10377, 'Review of the Malayan Emergency', DOO, Sept. 1957, para. 11.
- 111 UK officials also saw the Chinese community as fractured, see Gurney to Sir T. Lloyd, 8 Oct. 1948, in Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 73-77.
- 112 See Heng Pek Koon, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia: A History of the MCA* (Oxford, 1988); Loh Kok Wah's review of *Chinese Politics* in *JSEAS*, 22, 1 (1991), 200-201; Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation* (Singapore, 1981), pp. 142-190; and Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 86ff.
- 113 This should not be exaggerated, however. Rubber and tin sales were cyclical, and as early as 1953 a post-Korean War fall in prices set in, see Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 221.
- 114 Pye, *Guerrilla Communism*, pp. 128-60, 225-47, 331. We should not exaggerate negative Chinese 'hearts and minds'. Just over 20 per cent surrendered (1948-60), 67 per cent were killed, most of the rest captured. For MCP recognition that damaging economic livelihood undermined support, see, Co1022/187, High Commissioner, Malaya to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 Dec. 1952, sheets 63-67.
- 115 Philippine insurgency was vulnerable to surrenders when concerns about the 'moral economy' (land, justice, fair elections) were addressed, recovering when these resurfaced. Edward Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars ...* (London, 1972), p. 51.
- 116 For SEP doubts, see Rho, B. P. Walker-Taylor papers, 'Statements' of SEP', pp. 29 ff, especially, p. 32 ff. see also Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, pp. 49-76; and Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, pp. 248-49.
- 117 How far Malaya's plural society was itself caused by prewar British policy is not the issue here.
- 118 For radical politics dividing along communal lines, see Muhammed Said, 'Ethnic Perspectives of the Left', in Joel Kahn and Francis Loh Kok Wah, *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia* (Sydney, 1992), pp. 254-81, especially 275. By contrast, Frank Furedi, 'Britain's Colonial Wars: Playing the Ethnic card', *JCCP* 28, 1 (March 1990), 70-89, argues Britain precipitated 'emergencies' in Kenya, Malaya and British Guiana in order to control radical nationalism.

- 119 One could argue the Emergency strengthened nation-building, making possible racial cooperation in the Alliance. Such cooperation, between communities self-consciously safeguarding their differentness, is, however, not identical with the process of building a shared nationality. The Emergency increased cooperation between racial elites, rather than strengthening nation-building *per se*.
- 120 Archana Sharma, *British Policy Towards Malaysia* (London, 1993), pp. 41-43; Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 306-10, *passim*. For instance, New Villages cemented ethnic spatial separation. See also Z. Ahmad and Sandhu, 'The Malayan Emergency: Event Writ Large', in Kernial Singh and Wheatley, *Melaka* (Oxford, 1983), i, pp. 388-420, for state-building, ethnicity and urbanisation.
- 121 Common citizenship was a step towards a 'Malayan nation', even if most Chinese were initially excluded. Yet Britain gave up sovereignty, which the CO saw as the key to state- and nation-building.
- 122 Quotation from, CRA: A1838/2, 413/3/6/1/1, JIC(FE)(49)326, 'Malay Aspirations and Capabilities', JIC(FE), Sept. 1949. Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', *JICH*, 23, 1 (1984), 68-84; MMP120/ 'Constant Surprise', MacDonald autobiography, pp. 306-15.
- 123 Such a unit would include Malaya and Singapore, if not the Borneo territories. For continuity in British aims, see Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', 68-84.
- 124 For COS assumptions Malaya and Singapore were defensively intertwined and must be united, see Defe5/46, COS(53)223, 14 May 1953. For winning over local opinion and limited COS influence, Defe5/46, COS(53)288, 20 June 1953; and Goldsworthy, *Conservative Government*, pp. 376-78.
- 125 ISEAS: Tan Cheng Lock papers, folio 23, discussions of the CLC, 18-19 Feb., *passim*; Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 259-62. Heated complaints included 'strangulation' of Malay business, and even disputes over the marketing of durians.
- 126 Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', 71.
- 127 Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 228-73, especially 231-33; Butler, *British Political Facts*, p. 324. Malay death-rates (the mean for all Malay States) were 111 per 1000 as late as 1948 - far above Chinese rates of 67. For comparison, UK death-rates were 18.4 in 1900, 14.4 in 1940, 11.8 in 1950. Malaria, hookworm and tuberculosis were amongst the main killers.
- 128 Gordon Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 1-24; Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 360-67.
- 129 For Dato Onn, see: Ramlah Adam, *Dato Onn Ja'afar: Penganan Kemedekaan* (Kuala Lumpur, 1992); and Shaharom Husain, *Biografi Perjuangan Politik Dato Onn* (Petaling Jaya, 1985).
- 130 Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 319-20, 326. By Aug. 1953 IMP had 2,200 members, UMNO claimed 930,682, of whom a fraction were active subscribers. The MCA claimed 204,906. Onn perhaps mistook the basis of his power. He had legitimacy as the most prominent defender of Malay rights in 1946. His espousal of multi-racialism abdicated this role to UMNO as an institution, vitiating his personal position.
- 131 ISEAS: Tan Chang Lock papers 5.517, George Maxwell [retired Malayan Civil Service] to Tan, 24 July 1951. Maxwell dismissed Onn's IMP plans (which Tan favoured) saying: 'Anyone who smoked opium or ate hashish might have a dream ... I cannot help wondering whether Onn is not slightly mad'. British sympathy with Onn's aim was tempered by distrust of his temperament and tactics.
- 132 Party *Negara* was launched in Feb. 1954. As with the IMP, it suffered from appearing more closely allied to the colonial government than the Alliance. It initially seemed less anxious to accelerate decolonisation, and had more representatives in the Federal Executive Council. See Rho, Brewer Papers, box 1, file 5, 'Note on Political Parties in Malaya', 1954. See also Stockwell, 'British

- Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', 68-84; and Heng, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia*, pp. 136-78.
- 133 Whether such a compromise would have been possible without the neutering effect of the Emergency on more radical groups questionable, see Heng, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia*, pp. 157-66.
- 134 After 1950 the CLC declined, as members became immersed in politics and Emergency work. In 1951-53 MacDonald encouraged local politicians to favour associating the territories by bringing them together Commonwealth Parliamentary Associations. See Co1022/86 and 87, *passim*.
- 135 This was being discussed from 1949, Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 192-94.
- 136 Prem8/1406, DO(50)94, 'Political and Economic Background to the Situation in Malaya', Colonial Secretary, J. Griffiths, 15 Nov. 1950, described 'the whole process' of introducing elections from municipal level up as likely to occupy 'two or three years'. See also Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 376f.
- 137 Co1022/86, especially CO meeting of Dec. 1952 with Templer; and Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 376f. For policy continuity, see Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', 83.
- 138 Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 343. The boycott involved 600 UMNO and 400 MCA representatives.
- 139 Most post-holders were *in situ* when Onn split, and favoured IMP. The Alliance got its first 2 'Members' appointed in Sept. 1953 (Col. HS Lee and Dr Ismail). Tunku Abdul Rahman and Leong Yew Koh were appointed to the Executive Council in early 1952, Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 373f.
- 140 Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, p. 21ff. For the Alliance pushing Britain from 1953, see T.H. Tan (MCA Secretary from 1953, later Alliance Secretary-General), *The Prince and I*, ch. 2. Even the early appointment of an elections commission had probably been influenced by the knowledge, by early 1953, that scheduled national meetings of April and Aug. were about to demand faster change.
- 141 Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 344, for 600,000 Chinese being eligible to vote (out of 1.6 million eligible), but only 140,000 registering out of a 1.28 million total. Stockwell, 'Malaysia: The Making of a Neo-Colony', p. 145, can thus say Malays 'accounted for 84 per cent of the electorate'.
- 142 Simandjuntak, *Malayan Federalism*, pp. 71-75; Means, *Malaysian Politics*, pp. 144-50, 161-67.
- 143 See Creech Jones memo. for the Cabinet of 28 June 1948 in Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 352-55.
- 144 White, *Business, Government and the End of Empire*, p. 135-36. See also Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 113, 120, 123-27 for 1949 discussion on statements; and *ibid*, ii, pp. 127, 264 for the statements.
- 145 See Ramlah Adam, *Dato Onn*, p. 208, for Onn's complaint to James Griffith of 11 Nov. 1950.
- 146 See Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 202-6, for Gurney (April 1950) already decided on using 'Members' and hoping to hold municipal elections in 3 towns in 1951. Just 1 (Penang) managed this, Kuala Lumpur following in Jan. 1952, and the Member system started a year later.
- 147 MacDonald had to convince Briggs political changes justified diverting resources from the Emergency. See MMP19/7/32, MacDonald to Briggs, 24 Nov. 1950; and for Templer, Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, p. 393. Templer argued racial differences would emerge in talks, the MCA was the only sound party, and local politics was the necessary, prior foundation for later federal politics. For Ghana, see R. F. Holland, *European Decolonization, 1918-1981* (London, 1981), pp. 130-35, 212-19.
- 148 Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, p. 223-30 (Macdonald thinking of 10-15 years), and 265 (Rulers).

- 149 Kim Hoong Khong, *Merdeka: British Rule and the Struggle for Independence in Malaya, 1945-57* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor, 1985), pp. x-xi, 188. Chin Peng expressed this view at a Workshop at the Australian National University, Canberra, on 22-23 Feb. 1999.
- 150 For this worry in 1952, see Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, p. 408.
- 151 Khoo Khay Kim, *Malay Society* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk, 1991), pp. 243-79.
- 152 Short, *Communist Insurrection*, p. 80; Rho, Dalley Papers, MSS, PIJ, 1946-48, *passim*.
- 153 ISEAS: Tan Cheng Lock papers 3.275, Tan to George Maxwell, 10 April 1952; 11.38 and 38a, letters of Leong Yew Koh, 13 June 1953.
- 154 T.H. Tan, *The Prince and I*, pp. 25-30.
- 155 For MCP claims, see BBC2, 19 June 1998, 'Malaya: The Undeclared War', review in *Straits Times*, 18 June 1998, p. 30; and Kitti Ratanachaya, *Communist Party of Malaya*, pp. 53, 71, 74-75, 256-60.
- 156 Defe11/85, (3228), annex to COS(54)109, 20 Oct. 1954. MacDonald emphasised the importance of gradual progress towards self-government if the confidence of moderate nationalists was to be retained.
- 157 Wo216/901, Loewen (CIC, Far East Land Forces, 1953-55) to Lt-General Sir Harold Redman (VCIGS), 11 March 1955. See Defe11/85, (3228), COS, annex to COS(54)109, 20 Oct. 1954, for MacDonald telling the COS Malayan ministers knew they needed defence help after independence.
- 158 Defe7/496, Negotiations on the Defence of Malaya and Singapore, NDMS/M(56)1, inter-departmental meeting of officials, 1 Jan. 1956.
- 159 Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', 83-84.
- 160 See MMP/Boxes 21 and 22, for MacDonald's papers on JCC work, and 34/1/70, 'Notes of a meeting of Drafting Committee' [for the Joint Consultative Council's terms of reference], 1 April 1953.
- 161 The following are good for Singapore: Yeo Kim Wah, *Political Development in Singapore, 1945-55* (Singapore, 1973); C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988* (Oxford, 1989); and for the PAP as a Trojan Horse, Dennis Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse* (Singapore, 1986).
- 162 Indians made up a disproportionate number of registered voters, and Indians and English-educated professionals dominated politics, yet the majority of the population were Chinese-speaking.
- 163 For politics, see Yeo Kim Wah and Lau, 'From Colonialism to Independence, 1945-1965', 117-54, in Ernest Chew and Edwin Lee, *A History of Singapore* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 117-54.
- 164 Prem11/1302, PM(56)3, memo. by Lennox-Boyd for the PM, 5 Jan. 1956, *passim*.
- 165 This 'open united front' phase penetrating organisations to create a broad united front accelerated in 1954. It is impossible to capture its complexity here. See Lee Ting Hui, *The Open United Front: The Communist Struggle in Singapore, 1954-1966* (Singapore: 1996), chs. 2-4.
- 166 See Chan Heng Chee, *A Sensation of Independence: A Political Biography of David Marshall* (Singapore, 1984), pp. 89 ff; David Marshall, *Singapore's Struggle for Nationhood, 1945-59* (Singapore, 1971); and for the PAP, Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, pp. 80 ff.
- 167 Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 460-61. For the quotation, see Rho, *Granada End of Empire series*, Malaya, vol. 2, Guy Madoc, television research interview conducted in the 1980s, p. 115.
- 168 For the quotation, Cab128/CM(55)36, meeting of 20 Oct. 1955, minute 4. The High Commissioner and Commissioner-General had warned that obstructing the Tunku could lead to his resignation. See also Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, pp. 118, for CO fears this could mean the end of responsible government;
- 169 Short, *Communist Insurrection*, pp. 460-69. For Baling records see Co1030/29-31. Chin Peng's propaganda chief, Chen Tian, made it clear the MCP meant control over

- all armed forces in Malaya, despite Chin Peng agreeing to a phrasing by Marshall which merely mentioned 'internal security'.
- 170 Defe11/187, (83), CA(56)3, 'The Federation of Malaya', Lennox-Boyd, 7 Jan. 1956.
- 171 Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', 72-74. For concerns with the international context, see Defe11/187, CA(56)3, Lennox-Boyd, 7 Jan. 1956.
- 172 In W. and E. Africa postwar attempts to develop colonies led to a 'second colonial occupation' of advisers and interference in society, helping nationalists to form broad coalitions from affected groups. See Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 8, 56; and Stockwell, 'Southeast Asia in War and Peace', p. 348.
- 173 For a guide to theories of decolonisation, see Darwin, *End of the British Empire*.
- 174 David Low, *Eclipse of Empire* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 9, 22-25, emphasises rising nationalism forcing the hand of metropolitan powers in 'monsoon Asia'. His argument is attractive for India, Indonesia and Vietnam, but weaker local nationalism lessens its relevance to Malaya and Borneo.
- 175 Stockwell, 'Insurgency and Decolonization during the Malayan Emergency', *JCCP*, 25, 1 (1987), 71-81. See also Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, pp. 202-204.
- 176 For maintaining world influence by becoming *primus inter pares* in the Commonwealth, see Cab129/C(54)307, 'Commonwealth Membership', Commonwealth Secretary, Viscount Swinton, 14 April 1953. Cain and Hopkins suggest the need to keep successor elites 'sterling-minded' pointed towards accepting accelerated decolonisation, see Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, ii, p. 288.
- 177 Hack, 'Screwing Down the People: The Malayan Emergency, Decolonisation and Ethnicity', in Hans Antlov and Stein Tønnesson, *Imperial Policy and South East Asian Nationalism* (London, 1995), pp. 83-109. For a more detailed account, see Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 341, *passim*.
- 178 For the 11-14 Dec. 1950 Maria 'Hertogh' riots, so-called after the girl in question whose Dutch parents were interned in the war - see C.M. Turnbull, *Dateline Singapore: 150 Years of the Straits Times* (Singapore, 1995), p. 173f. 199 cars were burned, 173 people injured.
- 179 MMP 25/5/1-9, MacDonald-Templer correspondence, Jan. 1954; Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 393-95. Templer brutally stated his dim view of the 'pale pink intellectual type' he saw MacDonald as favouring.
- 180 CRA: A816/40, 19/321/30, 'UK aims in Malaya', Colonial Secretary, Feb. 1955. This was given to Australia to encourage it to commit forces to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. See also Fo1091/28, 'Assumptions for ... Forces', Singapore meeting, 31 Jan. 1955.
- 181 The Federation Constitution recognised 'special rights' of Malays, as Britain's original treaties in the area had been with Malay States under their Sultans. These included Malay predominance in the Malayan Civil Service, the Rulers' position and ultimate sovereignty.
- 182 Fo1091/7, BDCC paper on defence negotiations, 26 Nov. 1955. For the quotation, see Cab134/1202, 'Conference on Constitutional Advance in the Federation of Malaya', Extracts from Cabinet Memorandum by Secretary of State for the Colonies, Jan. 1956, para. 4, taken from Andrew Porter and A. J. Stockwell, *British Imperial Policy and Decolonization, 1938-1964*, (London, 1989), ii, p. 404.
- 183 See A. Milner, 'Colonial Records History: British Malaya', *Kajian Malaysia*, 4, 2 (Dec. 1986), 1-18; and Yeo Kim Wah, 'The Milner Version of History', *Kajian Malaysia*, 5, 1 (June 1987), 1-28.
- 184 To pre-colonial Malay culture and sovereignty had been added British-encouraged Chinese and Indian immigration. Colonial tendencies to treat communities discretely cemented communalism. Before 1945, for instance, most Malays, Chinese and Tamils received education in their vernaculars.

- 185 For the term hedgehog, see Co1022/62, CO comments on Mr Dodds-Parker's memo., 3 Feb. 1953.
- 186 Prestige was mentioned in Prem8/1406, Part 1, DC(48)16, meeting of 13 July 1948.
- 187 Prem8/1406, Part 2, memorandum by J. Strachey for the Malaya Committee, 12 May 1950. He suggested Britain should be willing to spend sterling resources to optimise Malayan development.
- 188 Prem8/1406, Part 1, DO(48)16, meeting of 13 Aug. 1948, minute 3.
- 189 Prem8/1406, Part 2, DO(50)92, 'Present Situation in Malaya', Minister of Defence and Secretary of State for War, 24 Oct. 1950, prepared for the Defence Committee.
- 190 For the quotation, see Prem8/1406, MAL. C(50)6, COS to Malaya Committee, 21 April 1950. See also, Defe11/35, telegrams between the COS and BDCC, April 1950. For military forces providing the environment for administrative consolidation, Prem8/1406, Seacos 24, BDCC to COS, 24 Feb. 1950.
- 191 For the teeth to tail situation, see Prem8/1406, Part 1, CP(49)52, Colonial Secretary, 5 March 1949, saying there were 43,000 troops in Malaya and Hong Kong, 14,600 attack troops, and 26,800 tail.
- 192 There were also up to 2 Regiments each of artillery and armoured cars. See Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 155; Postgate, *Operation Firedog*, p. 160; and Cab129/C(51)26, 20 Nov. 1951, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20 Nov. 1951. *Equivalent* because at various times a Royal Marine Commando and Royal Artillery Regiment functioned as infantry. For the Conservatives' anxiety about costs in 1951, in the context of rearmament and a balance of payments crisis, see Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization', 82; and for 1950/51 anxieties, Stockwell, *Malaya*, pp. 277f.
- 193 Cab131/10, DO(51)13, 28 May 1951, minute 1. For the background, see Prem8/1406, Part 2, Gen. 345/7 and Gen. 345/8, meetings of ministers, COS and Commissioner-General, March 1951.
- 194 Air20/10377. Australian and New Zealand involvement began with small air contingents in 1949 and 1950 respectively. For the Fijians, see Rho, LPP, personal letter of 21 Dec. 1952; Richard Miers, *Shoot to Kill* (London, 1959), p. 13; and Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p. 166.
- 195 In 1955, 23 battalions was said to equal 38,500 men. Local forces declined slightly in 1953–54, as spending was cut after rubber and tin prices (and so revenues) fell. Combined regular/part-time police declined from 71,500 to 48,500 from March 1953 to 1954. See Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, pp. 86–87; and Postgate, *Operation Firedog*, for airpower in jungle operations. See also my review of Postgate in *Twentieth Century British History*, 4, 3 (1993), 302–6. The Emergency mostly used available theatre airpower, never exceeding 170 aircraft, though this was double the number available in July 1948.
- 196 Air20/10377, 'Review of the Emergency', DOO, 12 Sept. 1957, p. 6. Costs to 1957 were £700m, Britain's share £520m, of which £100m represented garrison costs. Exploitation is clear. Malaya was not allowed to spend all dollar earnings. White, *Business, Government*, pp. 70, 76, 120; Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 177, 195–200, 247–57, 270, 467, iii, 6, 228. Stockwell (ii, 199) puts UK costs (excluding those of British forces) to 1950 at £38million: £20m War Damage compensation, £5.3m Colonial Development & Welfare, £4m additional imperial forces' costs, £8m internal security grants. Estimated BMA costs (1945–46) were £12m. The Treasury accepted interest in helping dollar-earning Malaya in the Emergency as a Cold War fight. Malayan deficits loomed in 1950–51 (before the Korean War Boom). Thus the Treasury agreed a £3million grant for 1950, but stated that, as a wealthy exporter, Malaya should fund most costs, using reserves, higher taxes or loans (corporation tax went from 20 to 30 per cent in 1951). Treasury help was intended to be marginal, to ensure development – vital to decolonisation and winning 'hearts and minds' – was not unduly cut back in lean years.

- 197 Defe7/421, Office of the Commissioner-General to Colonial Secretary, J. Griffiths, 9 Aug. 1950.
- 198 See Cloake, *Templer*, pp. 246-48; and Co968/341, (3), Templer to Colonial Secretary, 17 Dec. 1952, *passim*, especially for Templer's plans for 12 battalions; and Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 413f.
- 199 Defe7/421, Office of the Commissioner-General to Colonial Secretary, 9 Aug. 1951.
- 200 Heng, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia*, pp. 121. Large numbers of Chinese were nevertheless raised for the Home Guard (static, part-time local defence units) after 1950.
- 201 See Defe7/421, *passim*; Fo1091/28, MacGillivray to MacDonald, 8 March 1955; and for the Rulers' attitudes, Co968/341, Templer to Colonial Secretary, 17 Nov. 1952.
- 202 See Nadzon Haron, 'Malay Regiment', pp. 237-39; and Co968/341, for military and colonial papers on the Federation Armed Forces, especially (96), 'Federation Military Forces', 14 Nov. 1953.
- 203 By 1969 the Malayan Army was 35 per cent non-Malay. Malays dominated the infantry, non-Malays were better represented as officers and in technical arms, Zakaria Ahmad, 'Malaysia', in Zakaria Ahmad and Crouch, *Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 118-35.
- 204 Air8/2132, OAG (Singapore) to Colonial Secretary, telegrams 155 and 156, both 3 May 1956. The grounds were geography, tradition and the supposed antipathy of Chinese to military service.
- 205 The original plan called for 4 MAAF squadrons, see, Postgate, *Operation Firedog*, pp. 135-46.
- 206 White, *Business, Government*, p. 121; and Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, p. 272; iii, 228f.
- 207 There were also 3 submarines. In 1948 there were 4 Cruisers, 5 destroyers and 10 frigates in the British Pacific Fleet and East Indies Station combined. The Navy was in between decommissioning old ships and developing new. It had just one operational carrier. Grove, *Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy Since World War Two* (London, 1987), pp. 33, 37, 47; Murfett, *In Jeopardy*, chs 1-2.
- 208 Malcolm Murfett, *Hostage on the Yangtze: Britain, China and the Amethyst Crisis of 1949* (Annapolis, 1991).
- 209 Grove, *Vanguard to Trident*, especially p. 127. For Korea, see Murfett, *In Jeopardy*, pp. 109-28.
- 210 Defe11/114, BDCC(54)54, 'UK Forces in the FE', BDCC paper, 26 May 1954, Appendix C.
- 211 See two JPS papers for the COS: Defe 6/11, JP(49)134(f), 'Plan Galloper', 1 March 1950; and Co537/6264, JP(50)47(f), 6 April 1950. By summer 1951 removing Malayan land forces in war was seen as impractical, see Wo216/395, *passim*.
- 212 See Defe5/47, COS(53)333, 'The Radical Review', 10 July 1953; and Defe5/52, COS(54)136, 'Redeployment of Far East Fleet in War', 28 April 1954.
- 213 For the 'three pillars', see Grove, *Vanguard to Trident*, pp. 31-32.

1954 and Continuity in the Face of Change

Dien Bien Phu to SEATO

Chapters two and three showed how, from the early 1940s, Malaya and Singapore's defence came to be seen as linked to Indochina. In the early 1950s, however, with the French persisting in the fight against the *Viet Minh*, Indochina had not seemed in immediate danger. Britain had then been able to concentrate resources and planning on its own territories, and its hopes on French stamina and reforms. 1954 was to end such hopes.

In 1954 Tonkin was lost and America became committed to defending mainland Southeast Asia. The hydrogen bomb began to impact on British strategy and Australia committed ground forces to Malaya. This chapter looks at the way these four changes occurred, and argues that, together with developments in British territories, they formed a watershed. The environment in which Britain planned for Southeast Asia was significantly changed.

It also argues, however, that British aims showed continuity, seeking to sustain regional influence and shield Malaya, but without committing substantial resources outside of colonial territories and without incurring significant risks. Indeed, Britain's response to the Indochina crisis of 1954 confirmed not only its desire to balance military and political containment of communism, but its reluctance to commit resources to the defence of the rest of Southeast Asia.

In each of the four areas covered the contrast between the end of 1953 and the beginning of 1954 is marked. In 1953 Tonkin was assumed to be the first of a chain of dominoes which stretched to the Kra. In 1954 Britain had to respond to the imminent prospect of this lead domino falling. In 1953 there seemed to be only a distant prospect of a regional defence treaty. Then the crisis at Dien Bien Phu prompted American interest in collective defence and the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). Again, despite increased stress on nuclear deterrence in the COS's 1952 Global Strategy Paper, in 1953 the emphasis in both the 'Continental' and the 'Maritime' strands of British strategy was on conventional forces. In Europe, fighter command was being strengthened, abroad there were large garrisons in Malaya and Egypt. It was thought that, even with atomic bombs, the West might not be able to force China to cease an aggression. By the end of 1955 the development of the hydrogen bomb was to undermine these assumptions.

These changes – in Indochina, in the prospects for collective defence and in nuclear power – combined to prompt the fourth. Australia worried that the fall of Tonkin might send communist ripples down through Southeast Asia and towards its northern approaches. At the same time SEATO and increased nuclear power made it seem less likely Malaya would ever have to be abandoned. Australia therefore treated plans for a Malayan-based Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, agreed at military level in October 1953, with renewed urgency.

How Britain responded to these four developments is the subject of the current chapter. Central to all of them was the drama unfolding at Dien Bien Phu.

DIEN BIEN PHU AND THE LOSS OF TONKIN

In early 1954 British planners found themselves in the eye of a storm, awaiting the scheduled Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina, and the results of the battle at Dien Bien Phu. It was clear by March that the French would offer real concessions in Geneva, in order to satisfy public desires to end seven years of '*la sale guerre*'.¹ The COS were also coming to accept that the tide was not going to swing back in France's favour. Between the beginning of March and 1 April the Foreign Office responded by thrashing out a new 'Policy on Indochina' paper, with the endorsement of the COS and Eden. This recognised that France might be determined to reach a settlement at Geneva come what may. It suggested that the best agreement they could hope for include the partition of Vietnam, and the preservation of an independent Cambodia and Laos.²

Even the irrepressibly optimistic MacDonald had by 18 March recognised that a choice between the evils of *Viet Minh* participation in a national government, or partition, might be unavoidable. It was feared that the only alternative, increased American involvement, might divert resources from Europe, could cause war with China, and possibly invoke the Sino-Soviet treaty. Dulles came to believe that this fear of tumbling into nuclear war exercised a morbid effect on British policy.³

In early April Lieutenant-General Charles Loewen, the Commander-in-Chief of Far East Land Forces, confirmed after visiting Indochina that the problem should be seen as primarily politico-military (like Malaya) rather than military-strategic. His report revealed *Viet Minh* infiltration was spreading in the South as well as the North. On the 10 April the COS reaffirmed that, even if the French held at Dien Bien Phu, they lacked the resources to maintain control throughout Indochina. Threats aimed at causing China to cease supplying the *Viet Minh* would be ineffective without including atomic war. Unless Britain was willing to risk tripping war with China and perhaps with the Soviet Union too, it would have to accept either communist participation in a coalition government or partition. The COS favoured partition, a coalition would result in communist domination of all Indochina.⁴

British policy now focused on the possibility of saving a non-communist barrier of countries to the south and west of Tonkin. So long as Cambodia, Laos

and South Indochina could be secured, the Mekong River basin would be safeguarded and Thailand shielded from communism.⁵

The Storm Breaks

By late February 1954 the *Viet Minh* had closed the ring around Dien Bien Phu, seeking to maximise pressure before Geneva. On 13 March the storm broke. A heavy artillery barrage heralded the onslaught on Dien Bien Phu. Britain initially expected the heavily fortified French positions to survive until the rains in April or May. On 30 March, however, a second wave of attacks began, continuing even after the rains came on 22 April. *Viet Minh* supplies, aided by China's provision of Molotov trucks, held up. The effective deployment of artillery and anti-aircraft guns on the hills overlooking the garrison turned the battle. Finally, on 7 May, just before the Indochina section of the Geneva Conference began, Dien Bien Phu fell. It had taken 50,000 *Viet Minh* to overcome an isolated French post of 16,000 (supported by airpower and napalm). The French had lost about six per cent of their forces, but the psychological blow outweighed any physical loss.⁶

Eden's Appeasement

The agony at Dien Bien Phu caused periodic crises in American strategy. General Ely, the French COS, visited Washington between 20 and 24 March. Admiral Radford (Chairman of the JCS) gave Ely the impression the administration might be persuaded to intervene with carrier-launched air strikes to save Dien Bien Phu. On 4 April, France urgently requested intervention. The rest of the JCS, however, remained sceptical about such action.⁷

In addition, JCS discussions over the past few years had emphasised the need for allies in any conflict against China. On 3 April Congressional leaders were consulted about the conditions for American intervention. They confirmed the need for allied support, full independence for the Associated States and continued French resistance. The French request was therefore refused, and a campaign to gain British support intensified.⁸

On 29 March Dulles had publicly called for 'united action' to save Indochina from communist domination. The administration was by no means decided on what this meant. An ad hoc alliance, however, was the necessary foundation for any action, from persuading the *Viet Minh* and Chinese to be conciliatory, through air assistance to Dien Bien Phu, to intervention should Geneva fail.⁹

On 5 April Churchill was given a personal letter from Eisenhower. The latter believed the situation at Dien Bien Phu was not hopeless, and that the French request for immediate intervention was panicky. Nevertheless, he believed Geneva could result only in a face-saving device, either to cover French surrender or communist retreat. Dulles's united action speech, he said, had outlined American determination to save Southeast Asia. He suggested they now needed an ad hoc coalition, to include the United States, Britain, the Antipodean Dominions, France and the Associated States, Thailand and the Philippines.¹⁰

The aim would be to make China and the Soviet Union realise support for the *Viet Minh* would lead to increased allied action. Eisenhower suggested the threat would work, but that it should not be a bluff. Though large ground forces were not envisaged, any coalition must be, 'willing to join the fight if necessary', and Eisenhower alluded to the consequences of appeasement of Hirohito and Hitler. Above all, he saw it as a test of his 'profound belief' in the coalition principle, and offered to send Dulles to London.¹¹

Warnings by Britain's Ambassador in Washington, Sir Roger Makins, that Britain must clearly support or clearly oppose 'united action', did not sink in. When Churchill read Eisenhower's letter to Cabinet on 7 April, it enthusiastically endorsed Eden's position. This was that actions which might imperil Geneva should be avoided, as Britain believed Indochina required a political solution. Saving southern Indochina, Cambodia and Laos, was the best to be hoped for, and Cabinet believed French defeat was not imminent.¹²

A warning to China before Geneva might wreck the chances of a peaceful settlement. If it was ignored, it would be followed by the humiliation of climb-down or the disaster of intervention. In the shadow of revelations of the hydrogen bomb's power, Cabinet felt the dangers of escalation acutely. Eden nevertheless hoped to nurture the idea of a defensive alliance with a view to the longer term. It might fulfil British desires for American cooperation in Malayan defence and remove the anomaly of exclusion from ANZUS. Eisenhower's offer to send Dulles to London could be accepted, but nothing done to imply a British commitment to action.¹³

It was inevitable Britain would also want time to persuade the 'Colombo' powers to join any alliance. Britain stressed the political aspects of communist encroachment, and hoped the emerging Commonwealth would help to sustain its world influence. Asian participation was seen as vital to any Southeast Asian organisation. In a 10 April memorandum, Eden even feared Dulles's provocative line could lead India to leave the Commonwealth. India reacted with horror to American posturing, abhorring the idea of an 'Asian Nato', and believing the Americans lacked the intellectual and moral fibre required for leadership. Nehru wanted a 'peace zone' in Asia.¹⁴

So Britain was keen to foster a defensive coalition for after Geneva, courting Asian opinion to the maximum. Eden's attempts to keep this long-term aim on tap, while freezing the short term, were to cause American bewilderment.

Dulles duly arrived in London, and between 11-13 April Dulles and Eden hammered out a joint communiqué. This deplored increased communist activity on the eve of Geneva, and indicated Anglo-American agreement, 'to take part, together with the other countries principally involved, in an examination of the possibility of establishing a collective defence ...' for Southeast Asia. After issuing a similar declaration in Paris, Dulles thought he could force the pace. This was naive, since the British had insisted on changing the wording to emphasise only an 'examination' of the 'possibility' of collective defence, while reaffirming Geneva's importance. Eden did agree to a preparatory working group in Washington, but he envisaged this as a forum where Britain could work for

the timing and composition it desired. Eden, though, was only slightly less naïve in believing he had so easily deflected America from a more immediate alliance or action.¹⁵

Even this level of posturing before Geneva caused criticism in the Commons. On 13 April, Eden was accused of endangering Geneva and Indian Commonwealth membership. Eden insisted he was committed only to an 'examination'.¹⁶ Dulles nevertheless decided to push ahead. He called a meeting of the Ambassadors of Australia, New Zealand, France, Britain, the Philippines and Thailand for 20 April to discuss setting up the proposed collective defence system. When Eden discovered this on Saturday 17 April, he responded with a series of acerbic telegrams to Dulles. Makins was instructed not to attend. Dulles then converted the meeting into a harmless briefing for the Korean part of the Geneva conference, and Eden and Dulles were left fuming.

On 22 to 23 April the ailing Laniel government, at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council, again pressed for American air intervention to save Dien Bien Phu. On 23 April the French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, argued that if Dien Bien Phu fell it would be their last battle. Indochina and EDC would sink with the Laniel government. The American government were as eager to save EDC – the European Defence Community which would make German rearmament possible – as they were Indochina. According to Billings-Yun a critical bundle of conditions for intervention was almost in place. Dulles still doubted air strikes could save the garrison. But he believed an allied coalition, prepared for intervention, might be necessary to prevent French collapse in Indochina. On 24 April, Eden was told by Dulles and Radford that British agreement to intervention might be necessary to gain Congressional approval. Radford suggested this could involve RAF squadrons from Malaya or Hong Kong.¹⁷

Dulles now informed France that the Administration would be willing, France and other allies desiring, to request from Congress powers for intervention and internationalisation in Indochina.¹⁸ Eden told Cabinet on 25 April that, 'his [Dulles's] specific proposal was ... that the United States and United Kingdom Governments should jointly give an assurance to the French that they would join in the defence of Indochina against communist aggression; and that, as an earnest of their intention to carry out this assurance, there should be some immediate military assistance, including participation by token British forces'. If Britain would offer its support, it seemed the President might gain Congressional authorisation for intervention.¹⁹

Two emergency meetings of Ministers and the COS were held on Sunday 25 April. At the first, Eden outlined Dulles's desire for a joint assurance to France and for intervention. Eden did not believe the defeat now likely at Dien Bien Phu would cause a French collapse. The COS did not believe intervention, postulated as carrier and ground-based aircraft attacking *Viet Minh* communications, would be effective. On the contrary, large forces were likely to be sucked into the Indochina vortex for a protracted period. There were also fears that American intervention might alienate Asian countries in general. Those assembled

shuddered at the risks of escalation into Chinese or even world war. It was feared that American 'wild men' such as Radford, now thought the time ripe for operations against the Chinese mainland.

Eden recommended the Chinese be kept guessing and the French given diplomatic support, with the object of obtaining partition. The Americans should be told that neither action nor a declaration would be considered prior to Geneva. Britain would be ready to join in a guarantee of any Geneva settlement and, if negotiations failed, would examine with allies what action needed to be taken. It would be willing to start discussions immediately on how to defend the region, especially Thailand and Malaya, should Indochina be lost. In endorsing Eden's line the meeting accepted the fall of Indochina could destabilise these countries, and the importance of Kra plans for sealing off Malaya from Thailand.

The second meeting considered an urgent call from René Massigli (the French Ambassador in London) for Britain to facilitate American intervention. Its conclusions were no different. The Prime Minister said Britain was in effect being asked to aid in misleading Congress into approving an ineffective operation which might precipitate a major war.²⁰

Eden departed for Geneva, leaving Churchill to dine with Admiral Radford on Monday 26 April. The Admiral was in apocalyptic mood, envisaging an Indochinese disaster opening the floodgates to communist infiltration across Asia. Churchill responded that, 'The British people would not be easily influenced by what happened in the distant jungles of Southeast Asia', but would worry about the American bases in East Anglia, war with China through the Sino-Soviet pact, and so the possibility of, 'an assault by hydrogen bombs on these islands'. Churchill told the House of Commons on the 27 April that Britain had entered into no commitments in advance of Geneva.²¹

According to some historians, British noncooperation was instrumental in preventing American intervention in late April. Yet it is unlikely the American administration, fearful of escalation, could have convinced itself to act, let alone Congress. Indeed, on 24 April the 'united action' Dulles attempted to facilitate may have been not immediate intervention at Dien Bien Phu (which he told Eden was not possible), but the formation of a coalition which, by promising to join the fight 'in a few weeks', would encourage the French to negotiate hard.²²

Recent American work suggests a less significant British role. The tortuous National Security Council meetings of January to June 1954 show Eisenhower and Dulles determined to shore up the French position on the negotiating table if not on the battlefield, but equally determined to avoid another Korea, and frightened of taking a course which might trip the full 'China strategy'.²³ Eisenhower's electoral promise to end fighting in Korea; and his 'New Look' with its aims of increased nuclear deterrence, decreased military costs, and fiscal responsibility, all militated against intervention. The more bellicose position of Admiral Radford, who was thought to favour early war with China, may have increased their fears. In other words, conflicting pressures produced a paralysis over the issue of intervention. It could not be ruled out, but neither could its preconditions be secured.²⁴

Interpretation is complicated because there were three main strands to American 'united action' policy, only one of which involved intervention before Geneva. First, Dulles wanted a coalition prepared to use the threat of 'united action' to fortify the French and soften up the communists before Geneva.²⁵ Secondly, if Geneva failed, this coalition might persuade Congress to authorise air and naval action in support of continued French fighting. Lastly, in the short-term a coalition might be necessary to persuade Congress to allow American aircraft to intervene at Dien Bien Phu, either to save the garrison or to encourage French persistence after its fall.

In early April, Congressional leaders had made it clear any intervention would be conditional not just on allied participation, but on the completion of Indochinese independence and yet also an assurance France would continue to fight. Short-term intervention was only likely to be seriously considered if these conditions could be fulfilled, and if it also became necessary to prevent the French from capitulating, either in Tonkin as a whole or at the negotiating table. For such intervention to have proceeded before Geneva, a chain of factors would have had to have linked together simultaneously.

Eisenhower and Dulles would have needed to conclude it would decisively achieve an immediate purpose, such as keeping the French fighting or stopping them from rejecting the EDC. They would have needed to overcome uncertainties about whether intervention was worth risks which included spiralling commitments, failure and consequent damage to American prestige, and provoking a Chinese response. Army scepticism about intervention would have to have been overcome.²⁶ The French, ever equivocating and under enormous pressure to seek a negotiated solution, would have had to agree to internationalisation and potential American dominance in Indochina, on the very eve of the Geneva Conference.

The French Government did sound desperate for intervention around 22 to 26 April, but it was also far from politically secure. Even if it secured a promise of American intervention and agreed to continue fighting it could not be relied upon to hold onto power, let alone to stick to its guns. Besides, to ask the French both to give Indochina unfettered rights to leave the Associated States of Indochina (and so any real connection with France), and to promise to keep on fighting, was to ask for what Warner has called the 'virtually impossible'.²⁷

In addition, Congress would have needed to speedily pass a resolution authorising Presidential action, despite fears of 'another Korea'; the lack of a clear, achievable objective; and the distinct possibility the French were about to negotiate their way out of the war. By the 24th even Radford did not believe Dien Bien Phu could be saved. For Britain's refusal to cooperate to be established as a key block on intervention, a plausible case would have to be made that neither Eisenhower nor Dulles was likely to oppose intervention, and that all the other links – some of which look extremely weak – could have fallen into place simultaneously.

In these circumstances, British refusal to cooperate was almost certainly not instrumental in preventing immediate intervention in Indochina. Britain's main

impact may have been to weaken France's negotiating hand at Geneva, by preventing the early formation of an ad hoc coalition willing to threaten 'united action'.²⁸ Given that Dulles was well aware of Eden's stance, it is also possible that on 24 April he was trying to encourage the French by offering the prospect of 'united action', while pinning blame for short-term inaction on Britain.²⁹ His and Eisenhower's frustration with Britain could nevertheless be explained by dismay at not being able to assemble a coalition to strengthen France's hand, and to be ready if Geneva should fail.³⁰

By late April intervention seemed unlikely, at least before Geneva.³¹ Nevertheless, Eden still perceived Dulles as aggrieved in early May. Eden's stance of refusing even moral support for any alliance or action was confirmed by Cabinet on 3 May. From the British point of view, it appeared as if they had averted American intervention, and at some cost to Anglo-American amity. Eden interpreted events this way, and Britain's impression of its influence was boosted.³²

In May to early June the Americans continued to consider forming a coalition to underpin eventual intervention, as negotiations at Geneva struggled. British participation was no longer presented as indispensable. Nevertheless, with the British resolute, the French not about to collapse, and world opinion looking to Geneva, intervention was unlikely unless negotiations broke down.³³ The immediate question was whether Geneva would see agreement, or whether France would fight on after the failure of negotiations, with America then considering the provision of at least air and naval support.

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE: MAY TO JULY 1954

The Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina opened on 7 May, just as the French position at Dien Bien Phu collapsed. British policy was consistent throughout, and reflected its main aims, namely: to keep a screen of non-communist countries as far to the north of Malaya as possible; and to avoid committing its own resources, or too many of its allies' resources. In addition, Britain was equivocal about France continuing even its current level of commitment in Indochina. This was because the diversion of forces made France weaker relative to Germany in Europe, less willing to agree to EDC, and so less amenable to the German rearmament which would accompany it.

France must therefore be supported, with a view to a partition of Vietnam which would safeguard vital east-west communications between the sixteenth and eighteenth parallels. This would leave a south Vietnamese section, which must not be left open to subversion by all-Vietnam elections or by power-sharing in a national government. Laos and Cambodia should be preserved as independent, neutral states. Finally, any agreement would need supervision, preferably by the Colombo powers. In this way Indochina would be neutralised by non-aligned supervisors. India in particular was perceived as having an interest in the 'Indian' cultured Laos and Cambodia, and China would be reassured by a buffer state in north Vietnam.³⁴

American intervention must be avoided at all costs. Britain was willing to have confidential talks about Thailand's defence, but it was seen as ultimately dispensable. With an army of 55,000, assessed as poor-quality, and a paramilitary of 40,000, the Thais were not seen as a good substitute for over a quarter of a million being abandoned in Indochina. The British were, as always, last ditchers, willing to fight only if cornered behind the Songkhla position.³⁵ Yet the foundations for a Southeast Asian defence system were to be laid by restricted talks, while Asian opinion was courted. Britain did want a post-Geneva defence pact, but under no circumstances should its premature formation be allowed to jeopardise either the conference, or maximum Asian participation.

The prospective Southeast Asian Defence Treaty was envisaged as a way of avoiding British commitments by means of American deterrence. An American defensive umbrella would rule out overt Chinese aggression, giving local States the confidence to resist communism. From the outset a 'SEATO' was seen partly as a form of psychological warfare to support allies, rather than as a defensive organisation alone. Providing those parts of Indochina remaining free could receive aid, this was expected to provide a sound approach to a political and insurgency problem.³⁶

American policy towards Geneva vacillated. Public glimpses of American planning, as in revelations on 15 May of French requests for intervention, kept up a rumbling thunder.³⁷ At the conference itself, the United States began adamantly opposed to partition, and signalled its distance by making the Under-Secretary of State, Walter Bedell-Smith, rather than Dulles, its main representative for most of the conference. Since any agreement was likely to involve recognising communist expansion, an American administration elected on a programme of 'rollback' was unlikely to be able to give active endorsement.

By mid June, however, Bedell-Smith intimated the Americans now accepted partition was inevitable. Eden, moreover, was anxious the Americans should be able to respect any agreement. On 29 June 1954, Eden and Dulles agreed 'seven points' as minimum conditions. These stipulated that Cambodia and Laos must be left able to maintain non-communist regimes, that there should be no political provisions which might cause the loss of South Vietnam, and a partition around Dong Hoi (preserving lateral communications under the eighteenth parallel). International supervision would also be necessary.³⁸

On 23 June, Eden also told the House of Commons there should be a 'Locarno' arrangement, with all involved parties guaranteeing a Geneva settlement. This was part of the British vision of a neutralised core to Southeast Asia, by which all parties would be visibly committed to guaranteeing the status quo. There would be a separate Southeast Asian defence system, which Eden explained as a parallel to the Sino-Soviet agreement. In early July Robert Scott, then a senior official at the British embassy in Washington, pushed the Locarno idea in bilateral discussions, only to find it unacceptable to the Americans. Attempts to push the 'Locarno' idea in June and early July merely caused irritation. He also emphasised the British belief that, whereas NATO and ANZUS were primarily military, a Southeast Asian defence organisation would

be a Cold War move. Hence it was vital to do everything possible to win the sympathy of the Colombo powers.³⁹

At Geneva, Eden and the British delegation helped nurture hints of Soviet and Chinese tractability. The ultimate resolution, however, was determined by French desires to end the struggle, and the willingness of the Soviets, Chinese, and a reluctant but exhausted *Viet Minh*, to concede enough to preserve a shred of French dignity. The Chinese, Soviets and *Viet Minh* may all have wanted to limit their commitments in order to concentrate on domestic consolidation, as well as fearing that America might otherwise be dragged directly into the conflict. In addition, they may have hoped that, once Tonkin was secured, politics and subversion might secure the rest of Indochina.⁴⁰

At the beginning of the Conference, the *Viet Minh* would not concede partition, and maintained that insurgent organisations in Laos and Cambodia represented large-scale movements. The British idea of supervision by teams of neutral Asian powers, with majority voting to ensure decisions, was also rejected. The Soviets instead proposed a supervisory commission of two Western and two communist powers, which was likely to result in deadlock. In addition, when the French and *Viet Minh* did talk about partition, the *Viet Minh* wanted the thirteenth parallel (embracing Annam or Central Vietnam, where they had considerable strength), and the French wanted the more northerly eighteenth. Finally, the *Viet Minh* were understandably determined to have national elections as soon as possible, so re-uniting the country under their control.⁴¹

Bruising plenary sessions of early May gave way to more profitable restricted and bilateral talks. Nevertheless there were moments, such as when Eden saw the Cabinet on 5 June, when it seemed it might be impossible to close the gap. The Laniel government, represented by Foreign Minister Bidault, was uncertain of support in the French National Assembly, unable to fight on, and yet not ready to concede partition.⁴² The fall of Laniel's government (with Bidault at Geneva writhing against partition to the last) opened the way to a solution. By 18 June Pierre Mendes-France, distinguished by his commitment to ending the war and promising to negotiate a solution by 20 July, was the new Prime Minister. From the fall of the Laniel government, Chou En-Lai and Molotov (then Soviet Foreign Minister) began to show increased flexibility.⁴³

The ultimate agreements fell short of both the Anglo-American 'seven points' and British aims.⁴⁴ On the positive side, International Supervisory Commissions (ISCs) were to oversee the implementation of the agreements in the three territories. The Soviet Union compromised by suggesting the eventual membership of Canada, Poland and India.⁴⁵ The ISCs could be expected to make positive reports. Cambodia and Laos were to remain under existing royal governments, though with elections in 1955. Both could receive outside assistance, but not foreign troops or bases, except specified French missions which would remain for training. In Laos the *Pathet Lao* insurgents, who enjoyed the support of the *Viet Minh*, would regroup in the northern provinces of Luang Prabang and Phong Saly. Both they and the Cambodian resistance were to be re-integrated into society.

Neither Laos nor the southern portion of Vietnam were allowed to join any military pact. There was nevertheless Anglo-American agreement that these territories, together with Cambodia, could still be guaranteed by an alliance. A point Eden failed to make clear to Chou En-Lai. Hence the Southeast Asian Collective Defence Treaty (SEACDT) being planned in Washington could defend, but not incorporate, its most important objectives.

The dividing line for Vietnam was to be the seventeenth parallel. The most critical drawback, however, was the Western concession that the final declaration should call for Vietnamese national elections in July 1956. There was little doubt the *Viet Minh* would win any such elections. Hence either Vietnam was likely to turn communist, or, if the elections were stalled, Britain's vision of a neutralised Indochina would be damaged or derailed.

For Britain, another flaw was that South Vietnam's new Prime Minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, accepted the ceasefire but repudiated the agreements in general, and elections in particular. With the Locarno approach dead, Ngo Dinh Diem uncompliant, and America doing no more than promise not to upset the arrangements by force, the 'neutralisation' achieved was inherently unstable.

The agreements of 21 July allowed a creeping ceasefire from July to August, and the rapid run-down of French forces. Britain had at least helped avert a total French scuttle, and the concomitant dark horses of communist domination of all Indochina, or renewed American attempts to intervene. It is not clear, however, whether the temporary division of Indochina should be regarded as a success, buying time to stabilise Southeast Asia, or as the creation of a South Indochinese Moloch, ready to devour American resources and, ultimately, men. The answer might depend on whether Thailand is seen as a feeble state, needing screening, or a potential anti-communist stalwart. Arguably, Thailand was the latter and the strategic nexus or row of dominoes a chimera, a creation alike of British trauma in 1942 and of anti-communist ideology. Underscored by a failure to accurately gauge the resilience of either Thais or Vietnamese, the British strategic vision was perhaps just one of the factors preventing Western adjustment to Vietnamese nationalism.

The British, of course, hoped South Vietnam could be neutralised, defended by diplomacy and not blood. From the beginning, however, it was unclear whether South Vietnam would emerge strong enough to be defensible. Realising the infant's sickly nature, Britain and the United States moved quickly to provide the protective cover of a defence treaty.

THE BIRTH OF SEATO

From April 1954 Britain had tried to keep the idea of a Southeast Asian defence treaty on tap for after Geneva, and to win Asian support for it. Eden and Churchill met with the American administration in Washington on 24 to 29 June. This resulted in a joint communiqué on their determination to form a defence organisation whatever the result of Geneva. The communiqué also warned, as a sop to the French, that breakdown at Geneva would lead to a grave international situation.⁴⁶

The Washington meetings led to an Anglo-American working group in Washington, composed of high-level officials from American State Department and the British Foreign Office. Several meetings over 7 to 17 July revealed fundamental agreement. Both recognised that, as opposed to NATO and ANZUS, the organisation's main role would be to fight the Cold War. Where Britain and America differed was over timing. The Americans wanted an immediate declaration of intent to fortify the French, the British emphasised securing Asian support first.⁴⁷

The final report of the Anglo-American bilateral meetings, dated 17 July, recognised the necessity of fighting communism in all forms, and recommended agreement to assist against armed attack, and to develop local capacities to resist infiltration. Assistance to the military, police, intelligence, and in technology and economics were mentioned as possible courses of action. Both agreed that substantial new economic and military commitments would be undesirable, despite prompting by Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines. The United States, however, wanted the Treaty to specify communist subversion and aggression as the target, which Britain considered politically inept. With Britain's recent allergy to any form of 'united action' in mind, Dulles interpreted British aversion to the 'c' word as lack of commitment. For itself, the United States attached a rider to the eventual treaty, that it was committed only against 'communist' threats.⁴⁸

Britain emphasised political conciliation and the non-aligned Asian powers, where America inclined towards unambiguous deterrence. Even the COS believed the battle to limit communist influence was mainly political. During August, additional differences emerged between British and American versions of a draft treaty. Britain wanted a modest secretariat and a military council. The political council should in turn create machinery for effective cooperation, including cooperation with states not parties to the treaty. The United States wanted to avoid precise commitments beyond yearly political meetings.⁴⁹

Despite British attempts to court the Colombo powers, only Pakistan attended the Manila Conference, at which the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty was signed. Ceylon and Burma, though privately sympathetic, would not join. India bristled with hostility. India had seen Geneva as an opportunity for a new departure, a movement towards easing tensions and increasing understanding. It believed a defence pact would exacerbate Chinese fears, and regarded the attempt to keep even South Vietnam non-communist as anti-nationalist. In December 1954, Krishna Menon, forlornly urged Eden to persuade the Americans not to replace the French in Vietnam.⁵⁰

New Zealand, Australia, France, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, the United States and the United Kingdom met at Manila on 6-8 September. Most of the fundamentals of the treaty had already been refined by officials. In the event of an aggression, Article IV(1) committed the participants, 'to act to meet the common danger in accordance with their constitutional processes'. In the event of a threat, Article IV(2) called for consultation. In line with the Geneva agreements, Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam were designated as territory

protected under the treaty ('protocol states'), but could not be participating members. From the outset, Dulles told the conference American power must remain mobile, free to strike wherever necessary over its vast range of commitments.⁵¹

For the moment the Americans had won over limiting organisation. There was to be a political council (Article V) but the need for subsidiary machinery was not mentioned. This fulfilled the American requirement to establish a framework through which it could seek allied support. Support necessary to carry Congress in any future 'united action'.⁵²

It achieved this while preserving the JCS's freedom from allied interference in planning. Britain had wanted a small military organisation, but together with the Antipodean Dominions also hoped for secret 'white' or 'inner circle' planning. Asian countries' poor security and limited resources were felt to make their inclusion in 'real' as opposed to 'facade' planning impossible. The Asian countries, and to a lesser extent Australia, were more disappointed that there was not provision for military organisation, which might secure real access to planning and tangible American commitments.⁵³

From the outset there was a disjunction between America's interest in the treaty as an alliance response organisation and the other powers' desire for practical action; between its role as the producer of security, and the role of the other seven as consumers. The comparatively insignificant support which the others could render each other meant the United States was the only significant net exporter of security. Hence bilateral flows of aid between America and individual allies overshadowed practical 'alliance' or multilateral action. SEATO's main contribution as an organisation was thus initially psychological and in coordination, rather than in resources. Under Asian pressure, Article III did mention the possibility of economic aid, but recognised the continued importance of other channels. The Western countries were wary of encouraging expectations of additional aid.⁵⁴

Before Manila, Britain also stressed the need to strengthen local security services, propaganda and intelligence coordination. One suggested channel was a Committee of regional security heads. From the beginning, however, poor security in countries such as Vietnam and Thailand was seen as a barrier to intelligence cooperation. Also, the base available to be built upon in South Vietnam, Diem's tenuous regime, was weak. After Manila the British therefore switched attention to gaining white 'inner circle' planning, while gradually seeking to expand overt SEACDT machinery in order to reassure Asian countries.⁵⁵

Both Australian and British hopes for inner circle planning were kept alive into mid 1954, after which it became clear America would not entertain the idea. The JCS's aversion to sharing planning, and fear of offending Asian states, ruled it out.

These trends were clarified at Commonwealth Prime Ministerial meetings in London in January to February 1955. The theme of countering subversion was pressed home, and also that concrete evidence of Western determination was a psychological weapon.⁵⁶ The differences between British and American

approaches was confirmed. Commonwealth members also shared Britain's concern over the Offshore Islands crisis which briefly flared up. Chinese attacks on the Nationalist-held offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu held the danger of the United States being sucked into Sino-American conflict.⁵⁷ It was in this environment that the first meeting of the SEATO political council was held in Bangkok, from 23 to 25 February 1955. Meanwhile, British strategy adapted to the loss of Tonkin by switching from opposing to endorsing a nuclear strategy for Southeast Asia.

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN BRITISH STRATEGIES

Up to 1954 Britain opposed strategies which called for large-scale attacks on China.

Opposition to 'united action' in Indochina was also informed by the fear this would provoke large-scale Chinese intervention. Since America's strategy for dealing with Chinese aggression involved bombing and blockade of the mainland, the results would be incalculable. Thus the British fear of any American action escalating, soaking up American resources or tripping world war and nuclear attack on Britain, remained intense.

The COS also doubted whether nuclear attack would be effective against China. In 1950, they believed Chinese traditions of flood and famine had hardened it against the scale of human disaster atomic war threatened. As late as 1952 there was debate as to whether atomic weapons had changed the quality of war, or merely the quantity of destruction. Tanks left close to atomic explosions sometimes had their engines still running after the event, ships their hulls intact. The full dangers of radiation were only just dawning. It was conceivable that the limited stocks of atomic bombs available would not neither deter nor defeat China, and Mao Tse Tung said as much.⁵⁸

Rapid technological change, however, saw the influence of atomic weapons on planning changed quickly. In 1950, atomic weapons were judged advanced enough to make Europe's defence plausible for the first time. This led to calls for increased conventional forces in Europe, and the 'continental' strategy threatened to sap Britain's 'maritime' or global role. Then the 1952 COS global strategy review argued increased atomic capacity was making nuclear deterrence more credible. This reduced the likelihood of global war, and the level of forces required should war erupt. Britain was thus spared the necessity of paring down overseas commitments.

Information becoming available on American hydrogen bomb explosions of November 1952 and March 1954 then made 1954 an anxious time. Cabinet was informed the radius of total destruction of such a weapon was three miles as against one half of a mile for the atomic bomb. By 27 July, Cabinet was endorsing a new Global Defence Review, which stressed a four to five year American lead in these weapons further reduced the risk of war. British planning would therefore concentrate more on the nuclear deterrent, and the forces necessary to fight limited colonial and Cold War actions.⁵⁹

Thus in 1954–55 increasing stocks and the advent of the hydrogen bomb metamorphosed perceptions of nuclear weapons; from being conventional weapons of multiplied magnitude and finite number; to being tools of mass destruction of unlimited scale. The H-bomb made it seem that deterrence could work against China. This helped to shift British planners from regarding nuclear deterrence in the East as a bluff China might call; to seeing it as a way of minimising the need for British commitments in the area.

This had repercussions for attitudes towards nuclear strategies in Asia. In February 1954 Five Power Staff talks British representatives accepted a report that combined measures, including naval blockade and air attacks on China, offered the best chance of causing it to cease an aggression. The British position was still that no possible actions could force China to cease an aggression, but, in May, the JPS recognised the necessity of air attack on China in global war.

In June 1954 another Five Power Staff meeting, which discussed ways of holding Indochina if Geneva failed, concluded that if China precipitated open war, air attacks should be launched using nuclear as well as conventional weapons. By November 1954, MacDonald was telling Australian ministers the British military were 'beginning to support' the United States over the use of nuclear weapons. British doubts remained, especially about the effect of using nuclear weapons on Asian opinion, but a sea-change was underway.⁶⁰

With SEATO committing America to act against Chinese attacks in Southeast Asia, it was futile not to recognise this might involve nuclear weapons. By the time ANZAM planners met in Singapore, in December 1954, it seemed the United States would almost certainly use nuclear weapons against China in a global war. The Planners' reports (based on the Songkhla position) were seen as unrealistic, precisely because they did not account for the effect of an American air offensive when calculating the scale of any likely attack on Malaya.⁶¹

In 1955, the threat to Malaya was reassessed on the assumption of American nuclear strikes against China. By October, Templer had been told by Radford that American strikes would leave such a small threat that it could be dealt with in Siam, by small, mobile forces. It seemed increasingly clear that American nuclear weapons would be used in a war with China alone. In December 1955 the Defence Committee noted a paper that argued China's conventional superiority necessitated the prompt use of nuclear weapons to repel any attack, even in conditions short of global war.⁶²

In a wider sense, the July 1954 Global Policy Review was based on the assumption that increased nuclear efficacy was likely to prevent global war, so freeing resources for Cold War roles. Thermo-nuclear deterrence was seen as providing a shield, behind which Britain could make the long-delayed return to the ideal, pre-war imperial model of small garrisons and mobile forces. The main danger appeared not to be in Europe, but in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The relative salience of the Cold War in British strategy, and so of maritime over continental defence, had again increased.⁶³

Ironically, the French finally threw out plans for the EDC in summer 1954. Britain promised in September to keep four divisions and a tactical air-force in

Europe, in order to facilitate French agreement to German rearmament. Yet again, British attempts to have their cake and eat it resulted in a paradox. Just as changes in the nuclear environment were thought to point to a relative shift of resources from continental to maritime and Cold War strategy, Britain made unprecedented continental commitments.

At a more mundane level, uncertainty about South Vietnam's chances of survival, and the embryonic form of SEATO, prolonged the need for Kra plans. In late 1954 the conversion of South Vietnam to communism in or before July 1956 was still seen as possible. British policy thus still envisaged the possibility of Thailand slipping towards communism as a result of a collapse in South Indochina.⁶⁴

In the summer of 1954 the old plans for occupying the Songkhla position, Irony and Ringlet, were replaced. The new plan, dubbed first 'Warrior' and then 'Hermes' recognised the increasing capacity of the Thais. An initial Thai force in the Kra, of 5,000 police, 3,500 troops and 12 guns, was bad enough. 28 days after a Thai build-up began, however, there could be as many as 23,550 troops and 36 light tanks. Fifty Thai *Bearcat* piston-engined aircraft would hardly challenge RAF dominance, but with just 48 British ground attack and fighter aircraft available, any intervention by Chinese MIG-15 interceptors and or light bombers would make British forces inadequate.

Limited British forces made speed essential. Four hours after dawn on D-Day, two squadrons of SAS would be dropped onto Songkhla airfield, securing the landing for a small airborne party on their way to the port. Almost simultaneously, a Gurkha Brigade and two British infantry battalions would cross the border by land. The plan was far from overwhelming. Of the 248 aircraft required the Commonwealth could provide 200. Britain still hoped the prospective formation of a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve might help in securing American interest in Malaya's defence, and so in making up the numbers. If the ground forces were delayed the advance forces, less than 300 men and a jeep, would be destroyed. Against this, the distance from the crossings to Songkhla was under 70 miles. A front covering Songkhla – Haad Yai – Ratta Dum – Satun could initially be held by three Brigades, with up to two divisions required to consolidate the position.⁶⁵

There were also question marks over the timing of the operation. The Foreign Office felt Thailand could slip towards communism by slight increments, presenting no clear moment at which seizure would be acceptable. Even worse, Australia doubted British resolution to send the necessary reinforcements and worried Britain might repeat its 1941 performance, stalling at the critical juncture. If China intervened American support would be even more vital, since the Commonwealth could then meet only a fraction of the naval needs, and of the 600 aircraft required. Yet there was still no sign that America could be drawn into Malayan planning.⁶⁶

Consequently, when pressed by the British to proceed with the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, Menzies replied on 12 October 1954 that Australia agreed in principle, but required American cooperation in planning Malayan

defence. The Australians had since October 1953 been committed to forward defence in Malaya. With the 1954 Australian general elections out of the way, and a September 1954 agreement with the United States to scale down the Commonwealth Division in Korea to a Brigade, the obstacles were crumbling. Above all though, late 1954 to early 1955 was a time of acute anxiety about the susceptibility of Southeast Asian states to communism. It was this anxiety which was to accelerate Australian commitments to Malaya.⁶⁷

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN AUSTRALIAN POLICIES

The fragility of South Vietnam and the embryonic state of SEATO convinced Australia the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve should be formed quickly. Shedden and Menzies in particular believed the Kra position essential to Australia's defence. Menzies had been committed to it as early as a Singapore visit in January 1941.⁶⁸ When MacDonald visited Australia in November 1954 Menzies agreed that the position was essential, and that if China became involved it might move on the position despite atomic attack.⁶⁹

The Australian Minister of External Affairs, Casey, thought otherwise. He felt the United States would use nuclear weapons to blunt any Chinese attack, and so would regard Malaya as irrelevant. Most of the Australian Cabinet, however, wanted forward defence, while requiring American assurances against any repeat of 1942. As Shedden later warned Harding, 'The fate of the 8th Australian Division' was 'still fresh in Australian minds'.⁷⁰

Casey's position, which by January 1955 envisaged limited forces in Thailand, also failed to address fears that countries north of Malaya would fall in the Cold War without a shot being fired. In which case American support for seizure of the Kra position was important regardless of whether nuclear weapons would be used against China.⁷¹

In December 1954, ANZAM planners had argued their own plans needed revising to account for American nuclear interdiction. By January 1955, Admiral Radford had reassured Admiral Lambe (then CIC, Far East Fleet) that, in global war, American air action would leave only a limited threat to Malaya. Radford also doubted the degree of threat in limited war, 'particularly if nuclear weapons were used'.⁷²

Menzies still needed definite American assurances, and preferably joint planning, to make a repeat commitment to Malaya possible. The last Australian Cabinet meeting before his departure to London was reportedly lengthy and at times 'torrid'. It was agreed Australia must be sure the position of its troops in Malaya would be maintainable in all circumstances. Menzies was, if necessary, to put the Australian need for assurances to the Americans 'quite brutally'.⁷³

While the Cabinet largely backed Menzies, Casey was unconvinced. Believing American nuclear power would render Southeast Asia safe from overt attack, he wished to concentrate on bolstering countries to Malaya's north by stationing token troops in Thailand, and by propaganda and Cold War cooperation. In January his Department of External Affairs took over

coordination of Australian Cold War activities in Southeast Asia. Casey does not seem to have been able to sway his colleagues in Cabinet towards his more forward policy, certainly not when pitted against Menzies.⁷⁴

Menzies's notes for his trip to London and Washington show that an American assurance of support for the Kra operation, if Thailand went communist, was a prominent concern. He remained acutely aware, into March, of the danger that the Indochinese states would not survive. This was quite apart from the need to know what the net threat would be after American bombing, and the need to ease fears that Malaya might again prove expendable to Britain.⁷⁵

Menzies first travelled to the London Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference. There he met senior British ministers and the COS on 4 and 10 February. Churchill, Eden, and Macmillan attended the first session and Harold Macmillan, as Minister of Defence, the second. Menzies agreed in principle that Australia should contribute naval, air and ground forces to a Malayan-based Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. They agreed he should approach the United States about four power planning. This would clear up the position on American use of nuclear weapons. In addition, he would want assurances of American commitment to building up Malaya as a base, so Australia would be eligible for high-technology American equipment. The Australian version of the London talks also stresses the need for American endorsement of Kra plans. If all went well, it was hoped Menzies could then formalise Australian agreement to form a strategic reserve, and to send further reinforcements in war.⁷⁶

Menzies set out for Washington with clear objectives. He wanted four-power planning on Southeast Asia. With the Five Power Staff Meetings in abeyance, and the security of Asian SEATO members thought poor, this seemed the way to advance real planning. He also needed to know American attitudes to nuclear weapons, and whether they would support a Kra operation. In addition, he sought an assurance that Australia would receive American equipment on the basis of a role in Malayan defence.

In Washington, Radford duly repeated (on 18 March 1955) that the defence of Malaya was the 'last ditch'. American nuclear interdiction would reduce or eliminate any Chinese thrust towards Malaya, and possibly place China on the defensive. On 14 March, however, Eisenhower offered a statement that Malaya was of integral importance to Southeast Asian defence, and hence that Australia would not be ineligible for American aid.

On 15 March, Dulles told Menzies the Americans believed the Kra position essential if Thailand went communist. The Australians were subsequently given an assurance of American support if the operation was deemed necessary. Menzies returned to reassure his Cabinet, which on 31 March agreed he should announce Australia's commitment to the strategic reserve.⁷⁷ On 1 April Menzies announced Australia would contribute to a strategic reserve in Malaya: a battalion, two fighter and one bomber squadrons, an airfield construction squadron, and two frigates. An aircraft carrier would serve on station from time to time. In war, Australia would send up to two divisions to Malaya.

Menzies emphasised that the fall of Southeast Asia might allow the subversion of Indonesia, leaving communism 'at the very threshold of our northern door'. Australia, 'With our vast territory and our small population ... can't survive a surging communist challenge from abroad except by the cooperation of powerful friends ...'. This geo-demographic dilemma, or at least its existence in the minds of Australian planners, underlay defence thinking. Even against Indonesia this imbalance could supposedly only be corrected by allies, or by technology secured through allies. This was the thinking which tied Australia increasingly to American policy in the Pacific and Vietnam. This was also the policy which led to the lending of Australian 'real estate' for American defence installations.⁷⁸

Australian disappointment followed hard on the heels of its commitment to the strategic reserve. The Americans had agreed to study ANZAM defence plans for Malaya. Menzies forwarded a 31 March memorandum on these, and hoped four power planning might follow. In late July Radford sent a discouraging reply. America was not willing to join planning which envisaged the possible loss of almost all of mainland Southeast Asia.⁷⁹

All this happened just before April and July elections, in Singapore and Malaya respectively, which signalled accelerating decolonisation. Indeed, there was Australian nervousness about local complications as early as June 1955, and especially that there might be opposition to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve's 'strategic' role. Had further delays occurred, the commitment to the reserve might not have been a foregone conclusion, despite the commitment of Menzies, Shedden and the Australian COS.⁸⁰ It also cannot be seen merely as part of the 'insurance' premiums on an American policy, since Menzies at least was left in little doubt about American scepticism over Malayan defence, and its preference for mobile power. It reflected Australian perceptions of the Indonesian archipelago as stepping stones between communism and Australia, and Malaya as the guardhouse to this bridge between Asia and Darwin.

The Second Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (RAR), arrived in Penang in October 1955, joining the campaign against the insurgents early in 1956.⁸¹ From the British perspective Australian involvement in Malaya was not just an adjunct to immediate security, or to SEATO. It was also part of an ongoing attempt to sustain local defence capabilities and regional influence, but simultaneously to reduce costs. In mid-1955 it remained to be seen whether Britain could control decolonisation in such a way as to prevent Australia from deciding the Strategic Reserve was too circumscribed to be of value in supporting American policies in Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSIONS

The climax at Dien Bien Phu and the partition of Vietnam confirmed that Britain saw Tonkin as the key to Southeast Asia only so long as its defence was at others' expense. Britain then began a gradual shift from opposing to accepting that nuclear weapons had a part to play in Western plans against Chinese attack.

Underlying the acceptance of this change was the advent of thermo-nuclear power, which meant deterrence was increasingly likely to be effective. Britain could now accept a nuclear strategy for Southeast Asia because there seemed little danger of it being invoked. It had become consistent with Britain's policy of screening its own territories, while avoiding committing resources or taking risks.⁸²

Hence Britain could oppose 'united action' while genuinely desiring, for the longer term, the construction of a collective defence organisation for Southeast Asia. It saw this as a way of providing deterrence against China and encouragement to frontline states. It also offered the prospect of harnessing America's more aggressive instincts. Britain differed from the United States not in lacking enthusiasm for SEATO, but over the timing, membership and role of the proposed organisation, and in placing greater stress on the importance of combining military with political containment.

Britain continued to place greater emphasis than America on the need for a political approach to the Cold War in Asia. Hence it also desired a greater initial effort to persuade India to at least sympathise with SEATO. India, however, wanted a purely political approach to China and thought military posturing counter-productive. America, meanwhile, focused on military containment and suspected that assuagement would be interpreted as weakness.

Britain sought an allied strategy combining military and political policies. It hoped both to develop SEATO and to seek an accommodation by which Cambodia and Laos, if not South Vietnam, would be neutralised. Its belief that it could help to balance these opposing approaches was encouraged by the role it played during two major crises: the American attempt to form a coalition ready for 'united action'; and the Geneva Conference.

At the Geneva Conference Britain assumed a major diplomatic role. Yet even Cable has suggested British diplomatic influence in 1954 was 'a result of a fortuitous combination of circumstances' rather than 'any balance of real power', with these successes promoting later 'illusions' of British influence.⁸³ At Geneva the Soviet Union and China seem to have accepted an agreement partly out of fear of American intervention, in the hope of winning political influence in Indochina and the wider 'Third World', and because of a desire to concentrate on domestic rebuilding. Faced with pressure from their communist allies, the *Viet Minh* accepted compromise.

It seems unlikely that Britain was vital in obstructing American 'united action' in Indochina, though Britain's stance may have undermined American attempts to manipulate the threat of action. Fear of Chinese counter-action and a 'second Korea', French unreliability, and a 'New Look' defence policy all counselled American caution. Yet, even if British objections did not prevent America from intervening, they seemed to have done so. Given intense American and French pressure for Britain to endorse 'united action', it is not surprising that, for Eden at least, 1954 seemed to be the *annus mirabilis* of British diplomacy.⁸⁴

British perceptions of its role at Geneva, in opposing 'united action', and in the creation of SEATO, together reaffirmed the belief that Britain had an important

regional role to play. While SEATO's limited membership was a blow to British policy, Indian chairmanship of the three ISCs kept alive hopes that Asian governments might be drawn into taking an interest in, and so neutralising, the Indochinese states. Britain's role, with the Soviet Union, as co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, was also to lead the ISCs to refer problems in supervising the Geneva agreements back to Britain and the Soviet Union.

So, despite the inherent flaws in the Geneva agreements, in late 1954 Britain still believed they might provide opportunities to encourage the stabilisation of Indochina. Support for the French in Tonkin had been replaced by support for the creation of buffer states to its south and west. Ironically then, opposition to American China strategies and then support for nuclear policy; endorsing and then rejecting the defence of Tonkin as crucial; shepherding resources and yet founding SEATO; and upholding the Geneva agreements; were all manifestations of a British policy of screening core British interests while minimising risk and commitments. 1954 thus saw a dramatic change of environment and strategies, but with core British aims remaining constant.

Notes

- 1 Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 45, 47. For contrasting French perspectives, see Jacques Dalloz, *The War in Indochina 1945-54* (Dublin, 1990); and Edward Rice-Maximin, *Accommodation and Resistance: The French Left and the Cold War, 1945-54* (London, 1989).
- 2 Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 43-45, 56 and footnote 23 on p. 154.
- 3 Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 43-45. For MacDonald, see Prem11/645, Singapore to FO, No. 129, 18 March 1954. For Dulles's views, see *FRUS, 1952-54*, xii, 1, pp. 446-48; and for similar views held by the Australian Commissioner's Office in Singapore, see CRA: A816/34, 11/301/ 928, Singapore to Casey, 9 July 1954; and CRA: A1838/214, 383/1/2/Part 3, Alan Watt (Australian Commissioner in Southeast Asia, 1954-56) to A. Tange (Secretary to the DEA), 19 July 1954.
- 4 Prem11/645, Loewen to CIGS, 9 April 1954; *passim*, for the circulation of this report to the Minister of Defence, Churchill and Salisbury. See also, Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 56.
- 5 Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 41-50.
- 6 See O'Ballance, *Indo-China War*, pp. 202; Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, pp. 200; Prem11/645, Sir H. Graves to FO, 18 March 1954; and for a FO assessment of the importance of Dien Bien Phu, Fo371/112106, British Legation (Saigon) to Eden, 24 May 1954.
- 7 Duiker, *US Containment Policy*, pp. 155-59, 161.
- 8 *FRUS, 1952-54*, xii, 1, pp. 55-68, 107-114, 367-81. For Congress's conditions, see R. H. Immermann, 'Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu', in Richard Melans and Mayers, *Re-evaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the 1950s* (Chicago, 1987), especially p. 127 and note 27. Some historians argue Eisenhower or Dulles invoked Congressional conditions to frustrate hawks at no political cost, see Frederick Marks III, 'The Real Hawk at Dien Bien Phu', *Pacific Historical Review*, lix, 3 (1990), 297-322. See also M. Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York, 1988); and D. Anderson, *Trapped by Success: Eisenhower and Vietnam* (Oxford, 1991). The latter offers a picture (favoured here) of the administration wanting to intervene, but constrained by fears of escalation and by the 'New Look'.

- 9 Prem11/645, Sir Roger Makins (British Ambassador Washington) to FO, March 27 and 29, *passim*.
- 10 For Eisenhower's letter, see the following note. For the historiography on Eisenhower see Stephen Rabe, 'Eisenhower Revisionism', *Diplomatic History*, 17, 1 (1993), 97-116. Once seen as letting others set the tone for policy, some accounts now see even his mangled syntax as a 'hidden hand' ploy to maintain ambiguity and keep options open.
- 11 Fo800/785, Eisenhower to Churchill, 4 April (delivered 5 April).
- 12 On 3 April Makins cabled U.S. views on united action were unformed. Hence London believed it might influence events. Prem11/645, Washington to FO, 3 April 1954. For Cabinet and Eden, see Cab129/C(54)134, Foreign Secretary, 7 April 1954; and Cab128/CC(54)26, 7 April 1954, minute 3.
- 13 Cab129/C(54)140, Foreign Secretary, 10 April 1954. For Nehru, see CRA: A816/30, 11/301/924, Australian High Commissioner (Delhi) to DEA, 20 April 1954. The military also saw Indochina as a politico-military problem (as in Malaya), see Prem11/645, Loewen to CIGS, 9 April 1954.
- 14 A ministerial meeting, including Churchill and Eden, was pleased, feeling the U.S. was moving towards commitments to Hong Kong and Malaya. See Prem11/645, Gen. 463/1, 'SEA', 12 April 1954; Cab128/CC(54)28, 13 April 1954, minute 6; and Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 55-66.
- 15 See Prem11/645, FO to Paris, No. 780, 13 April 1954; and the note below.
- 16 The best short account of these manoeuvres is Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 55-61. See also, Prem11/645, Paris to FO, No. 262, 24 April; and M. Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War*, pp. 135-38.
- 17 Short, *Origins of the Vietnam War*, p. 141.
- 18 Short, *op. cit.*, p. 141. Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 60-62.
- 19 Quotation from, Cab129/C(54)155, 'Indo-China', note by Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook, on two emergency meetings of ministers on Indochina held on 25 April 1954, dated 27 April 1954.
- 20 The reference to 'wild Americans' is in CRA: A816/34, 11/301/928, Singapore Commissioner to Casey, 9 July 1954. For the meetings of 25 April, see the reference to Cab129/C(54)155 in the previous note. See also Prem11/645; Fo800/784; Fo800/785; and Short, *Origins of the Vietnam War*, p. 142, for Massigli's claim that U.K. agreement might facilitate American intervention by 28 April. Yet there appears to be no American evidence of an offer to effect such rapid action.
- 21 Prem11/645, Record of dinner conversation at Chequers, 26 April 1954.
- 22 Short, *Origins of the Vietnam War*, pp. 140-48. Short admits that on 24 April Dulles made it clear intervention at Dien Bien Phu was impossible. Yet he interprets Dulles's simultaneous attempts to facilitate Congressional approval (by securing British support) as for *immediate* use, rather than as for the more general united action aim of fortifying the French at Geneva. By not distinguishing which strands of united action Dulles was pursuing at each point, Short suggests Dulles made contradictory statements. See also, Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, pp. 213-15, for Dulles's view an alliance might send forces 'in a few weeks'; and *FRUS 1952-54*, xii, 1, p. 1395.
- 23 For this China strategy see pp. 70-73.
- 24 Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, pp. 161, 171-72, attempts to synthesise the literature, making the administration's prime aim the use of the *threat* of intervention to support France, while keeping the possibility of intervention on tap. For the New Look and MacCarthyism, see Randle, *Geneva 1954*, pp. 31-37. For Eisenhower as 'dove', see Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower* (New York, 1983), p. 170. For Dulles as a restraining force, see Marks, 'The Real Hawk at Dienbienphu', 298-304.
- 25 Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, pp. 171-72; Randle, *Geneva 1954*, pp. 116-24.
- 26 The Army Chief of Staff, General Mathew Ridgeway, was an opponent, thinking even tactical nuclear weapons (which were considered for use at Dien Bien Phu) would not

- suffice without the addition of American divisions. See Alan Levine, *The United States and the Struggle for Southeast Asia* (Wesport, Conn., 1995), pp. 34–35. Levine (p. 36) calls the British connection 'just an excuse for American inaction'.
- 27 For evidence even Bidault might ultimately have opposed intervention, see Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, p. 215; *FRUS, 1952–1954*, xiii, 1, p. 1373; and *FRUS, 1952–1954*, xiii, 2, p. 1475. For American conditions being 'virtually impossible' for France to fulfil, see Geoffrey Warner, 'The United States and Vietnam 1945–65', in *International Affairs* 48, 3 (1972), p. 362.
- 28 Randle, *Geneva 1954*, pp. 119, 121–27, suggests this possibility.
- 29 This possibility has long been recognised, see Randle, *Geneva 1954*, pp. 1, 100–101, and 116–120, for 'united action' as mainly a 'New Look' tactic of achieving deterrence by threats; and Levine, *The United States and the Struggle*, p. 36 for the British connection as 'just an excuse for American inaction'.
- 30 Anderson, *Trapped By Success*, pp. 17–40, comes close to the 'paralysis' explanation offered here. See also Immerman, 'Between the Unacceptable and the Unattainable: Eisenhower and DienBienPhu', in Melanson and Mayers (eds), *American Foreign Policy*, pp. 120–54. Though Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War*, pp. 134–46, makes British and allied attitudes critical around 24 April, its account of the Administration's and individual's shifts and doubts could equally show paralysis.
- 31 The impulse may have dissipated as early as the 24th, when Dulles discovered the French threat that Dien Bien Phu's fall would precipitate rapid withdrawal was a bluff. Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War*, pp. 138–142. Pages. 141–42 acknowledge Dulles made it clear immediate intervention was not on the cards, pp. 142–44 suggest Eisenhower's support was doubtful.
- 32 Cab128/CC(54)31, meeting of 3 May 1954, minute 1.
- 33 For American moves to form a coalition without Britain, see Pemberton, 'Australia, the United States and the Indochina Crisis of 1954', *Diplomatic History*, xiii, 1 (1989), 45–66.
- 34 For details, see Fo371/112069–82; Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 72 ff; and Geoffrey Warner, 'The Settlement of the Indochina War' in John Young (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration, 1951–1955* (Leicester, 1988), pp. 233–59. See also MMP 20/10/45, MacDonald to Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, Permanent Undersecretary of State at the FO, 19 June 1954, on buffer states.
- 35 See *FRUS, 1952–54*, xii, 1, pp. 569–70, 'PM of the UK to President Eisenhower', 21 June 1954; and for Thailand, Defe11/114, UK Geneva delegation to Washington Embassy, 22 May 1954. There were 463,000 non-communists in Indochina: 211,000 Vietnamese, 218,000 French and French-paid, and 312,000 Viet Minh (130,000 regulars).
- 36 See Cab131/14, D(54)41, 'Defence of SEA', COS., 16 Dec. 1954; and Defe11/102, 'Defence of SEA', minutes of a meeting of ministers, 3 Feb. 1955.
- 37 The French request for new information on US willingness came 9 May. 11 May Dulles cabled France 7 conditions before the President would ask Congress to authorise force. Whether or not the Administration hoped to act, or used conditions to block action, it is obvious (and surely *should* have been obvious to Dulles) France could not fulfil such conditions. These included keeping French forces *in situ* during united action of *unspecified length*, allowing the Associated States to withdraw from the French Union or order French troops out at will, *and* agreement by France's near paralysed National Assembly! For a still valuable summary, see Geoffrey Warner, 'The United States and Vietnam 1945–1965, Part I: 1945–54', *International Affairs*, 48, 3 (July 1972), 379–394.
- 38 Cab129/C(54)227, Eden, 8 July 1954. For partition, see Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, pp. 176–77. See also Fo371/112075, message from Casey to Menzies covering Bedell-Smith's views, 18 June 1954.

- 39 For Locarno, see Fo371/112075, especially F1071/792, 'Indochina and the Defence of SEA', Washington Embassy to FO, 28 June 1954; and *FRUS 1952-54* xii, 1, pp. 569-70, the PM of the UK to President Eisenhower, 21 June 1954. For Scott and the U.S. record of the meetings of the US-UK bilateral working group on SEA defence, of 7-17 July 1954, see *FRUS 1952-54* xii, 1, pp. 605-42, 622.
- 40 See Thayer, *War by Other Means*, pp. 1-5, *passim*. For Soviet and Chinese stress on domestic priorities and on 'coexistence' undermining the *Viet Minh*, see Ken Post, *Revolution, Socialism and Nationalism in Viet Nam* (Aldershot, 1989), i, pp. 2-5, 210, 215-17. See also Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, i, pp. 8-16, 22-23, for the communist 'line' of 'restraint'. The Chinese seem to have been instrumental in persuading the *Viet Minh* to compromise. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, pp. 182-83, 183-86, 191.
- 41 See the following note.
- 42 See Cable, *Geneva Conference*, pp. 73, 75, 83-85; Cab128/CC(54)39, 5 June 1954, minute 1; and for FO correspondence on the Geneva Conference in mid-June 1954, Fo371/112073, *passim*.
- 43 Cab129/C(54)205 and 207, Foreign Secretary, 21 and 22 June 1954. See also Fo371/112074 and 112076. Mendes-France was invited to form a government by 13 June, negotiating at Geneva from 21.
- 44 The Geneva agreements are summarised in Fifield, *Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, pp. 278-83. For Cambodia, see also, Michael Liefer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security* (London, 1967), pp. 53-57.
- 45 Many Geneva compromises can be traced to Soviet or Chinese-inspired compromises. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, p. 182. On 25 May the *Viet Minh*, perhaps to minimise the danger of U.S. intervention, and realising their allies' desire for a solution, suggested partition rather than 'leopard spot' regroupment, see Post, *Revolution*, pp. 3-5, 213-14.
- 46 Defe131/14, D(54)26, COS, 17 June 1954. 'SEATO' in parenthesis because the Southeast Asia Defence Treaty was renamed in Nov. 1955. COI, *The Security of South-East Asia* (London, 1956), p. 1.
- 47 See Cab129/C(54)225, Foreign Secretary, 7 July 1954; Cab129/C(54)275, Foreign Secretary, 26 Aug. 1954; and Prem11/651. Despite sympathising with Britain's opposition to intervention in Vietnam, Australia also wanted an early declaration, see also CRA: A4940/1, C928.
- 48 See *FRUS, 1952-54*, xii, 1, pp. 576-80, 'US Memorandum of Bilateral Conversation with the UK', 28 June 1954; and pp. 631-47. For the desire to avoid commitments, Cab129/C(54)275, Foreign Secretary, 26 Aug. 1954. For the rider, see Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, p. 204.
- 49 See Defe13/228, COS(54)259, 'The Main Military Requirements of a Collective Defence Organisation for SEA', 12 Aug. 1954, approved by the COS on 11 Aug. This emphasised building stability, but also covert and unattributable operations, 'to ensure that the influence of fear is not all on the Communist side'.
- 50 See *FRUS, 1952-54*, xii, 1, pp. 686 ff; Prem11/651, UK High Commission (Delhi) to CRO, 2 Aug. 1954; and CRA: A816, 11/301/924, Australian High Commissioner (New Delhi) to DEA, 20 April 1954, for Nehru and a 'peace zone'. See also Fo800/785, Eden on a talk with Menon, dated 10 Dec. 1954. Menon was High Commissioner in London 1947-52, and Indian UN delegation leader, 1952-60.
- 51 Leszek Buszynski, *SEATO. Failure of an Alliance Strategy* (Singapore, 1983), pp. 21-71. For the wording see Command 9282, *The South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty* (London: HMSO, 1954).
- 52 For SEATO as a tool to facilitate US intervention, see R. Dingman, 'John Foster Dulles and the Creation of the SEATO in 1954', *IHR*, 11 (1989), 457-77.
- 53 See Cab131/D(55)9, COS, 25 Jan. 1955; Defe13/228, message from Casey to Churchill, 16 Sept. 1954; and Defe13/228, minute by Minister of Defence, 20 Sept. 1954, 'white' planning.

- 54 Prem11/651, C(54)275, 'Proposed Treaty on the Defence of SEA', Eden, 26 Aug. 1954.
- 55 See Defe13/228, COS(54)259, 'The Main Military Requirements of Collective Defence Treaty for SEA', 12 Aug. 1954. For inner circle planning, see Defe13/228, COS(54)282, 'Military Brief for S.E.A.T.O Conference in Manila', COS, 30 Aug. 1954; and message from Casey to Churchill, 16 Sept. See also Defe11/102, extract from COS(55)3, meeting of 15 March 1955.
- 56 See Defe11/102, for records of Commonwealth Premiers' meetings in London on 3 and 8 Feb. 1955.
- 57 See Defe11/102, especially (3354A), PMM(55)8, meeting of 8 Feb. 1955, which included Churchill, Eden and the Prime Ministers of Canada, New Zealand, India, Ceylon, Pakistan and Rhodesia.
- 58 For changes in nuclear power compare C. Barclay, 'Atomic Warfare', in *RUSI 1952 Annual* (London, 1952), ch. 5, to the 1955 editorial of the same journal; and see Cab128/C(54)54, meeting of 27 July 1954, minute 4. For China, John Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb* (1988), pp. 1 ff. Privately, fears of American atomic intervention, e.g. over Taiwan, precipitated the Chinese nuclear programme in 1955.
- 59 Cab129/C(54)250, 24 July 1954, contains the report of the Cabinet Committee on defence policy and C(54)249, the COS's Global Policy Paper of 1954. The latter is closed until 2005. The Cabinet's report was endorsed at Cab128/CC(54)54, meeting of 27 July 1954, minute 4.
- 60 The five were: Britain, USA, France, Australia and New Zealand. See Defe11/114, Extract from JPS(54)50(First), 27 May 1954; and Cab131/14, D(54)26, 'Five-Power Military Conference in Washington - June 1954', COS, 17 June 1954. Defe11/100, (1152A), record by British High Commission (Canberra) of a meeting between MacDonald and Australian ministers of 17 Nov. 1954.
- 61 See Defe11/55, for the ANZAM planners' (representatives of the COSs of Britain, Australia and New Zealand) Dec. 1954 Singapore meeting. See also Defe11/100, (1140).
- 62 Wo216/912, (48A), Templer to Loewen, Oct. 1955. For the Dec. 1955 meeting and report, see Defe7/688, (16), COS(57)264, 'Provision of a Nuclear Capability in the FE', COAS, 5 Dec. 1955.
- 63 It was suggested that, with nuclear attacks on the Caucasian and Zagros mountain passes into Iraq, the Middle East might be defensible, see: Cab129/C(54)181, Minister of State, 31 May 1954.
- 64 See Cab131/14, D(54)41, COS, 16 Dec. 1954; and Defe11/55.
- 65 In Dec. 1941 Thai police held up 2 Indian battalions heading for a ridge just across the border, see Wilmott, *Empires in the Balance*, pp. 169-70. For Plan Warrior, see Defe5/54, COS(54)294, 'Outline Plan "Warrior"', 7 Sept. 1954. This had been forwarded to the COS by the BDCC.
- 66 FO officials let the Australian DEA know their misgivings, see CRA: A1209/23, 1947/4250, 'Defence of Malaya', James Plimsoll (DEA) for Menzies, 11. Feb. 1955. For the need to secure U.S. interest, Cab131/14, D(54)41, COS, 16 Dec. 1954; and Defe11/99, (1070AAA). The COS were authorised to communicate Songkhla plans to America in April, see Cab129/ C(54)155, 27 April 1954.
- 67 CRA: A4311/1, 98/5, Spender to Menzies, 4 Jan. 1955. See also NLA: Menzies papers, Defence Box 434, file 3, DEA (Canberra) to Ottawa for PM, 9 March 1955, for the 'critical state' of Indochina.
- 68 NLA: Menzies Papers, Ms 4939, series 13, 'Diaries', 1941 Overseas Diary, Box 397, (A), 29 Jan. 1941.
- 69 Defe11/100, (1152A), record by British High Commission (Canberra) of meeting between MacDonald and Australian ministers of 17 Nov. 1954. The COS hoped MacDonald would convince Australia Malaya was defensible, see Defe11/99, extract from COS(54)115, 3 Nov. 1954.

- 70 See Wo216/902, Sir Frederick Shedden (Secretary to Australian Defence Department, 1937-56) to General Sir John Harding (CIGS, 1952-55, Governor of Cyprus from Sept. 1955), 9 Sept. 1955.
- 71 See CRA: A1209/23, 1957/4250, General Rowell (Chief of the General Staff, Australia) to Jos Francis (Australian Minister for the Army and Navy), 23 Nov. 1954. For Casey's in Jan. 1955, see Defe11/100, (1169), UK High Commission to Commonwealth Relations Office, 14 Jan. 1955.
- 72 Defe11/100, (1158-59), COS(55)3, meeting of 12 Jan. 1955. Defe11/100, (1135A and B).
- 73 For the term 'torrid', see Defe11/100, (1169), UK High Commission (Australia) to CRO, 14 Jan. 1955. The High Commission's source is not made clear.
- 74 Defe11/100, (1169), UK High Commission (Australia) to CRO, 14 Jan. 1955; (1152A), record by British High Commission (Canberra) of a meeting between MacDonal and Australian ministers (including Menzies) of 17 Nov. 1954. See also CRA: A1209/23, 1957/4510, 'Operation Hermes'.
- 75 NLA: Menzies, Mss 4936, series 19, defence box 434, file 2, 'Defence of Malaya and Singapore PM's Notes for Discussion in Washington, 1955', *passim*. For preparations for the Commonwealth Premiers' meetings of Jan.-Feb. 1955, see also the Prime Ministerial file, CRA: A462/2, 845/78. For fears about Malaya's expendability, see CRA: A4311/1, 98/5. Spender to Menzies, 4 Jan. 1955.
- 76 For the meetings, see CRA: A1209/23, 1957/4250, Menzies to Acting PM, Sir Arthur Fadden, 16 Feb. 1955; and Defe 11/99, minutes of 10 Downing Street meeting, 4 Feb. 1955. See also NLA: Menzies, Ms4936, Defence Box 434, file 3, 'The last line of defence for Malaya', memo. for Menzies by the Secretary for External Affairs, A. Tange, c. March 1955; *ibid*, Defence Box 434, file 2, 'Defence of Malaya and Singapore. PM's notes for discussion in Washington, 1955', *passim*.
- 77 For the Washington meetings, see CRA: A1209/23, 57/4250, 'Operation Hermes', *passim*. The Cabinet's conclusions are recorded in CRA: A4940/1, C155, Cabinet minute of 31 March 1955.
- 78 For Menzies's speech, see Wo216/912. For Australian policy towards Vietnam and 'real estate', see Desmond Ball, *A Suitable Piece of Real Estate: American Installations in Australia* (Sydney, 1980).
- 79 See Defe13/58, Sir R. Scott (Washington Embassy) to FO, 25 Sept. 1955; and CRA: A1209/23, 57/4250, Radford to Percy Spender, 28 July 1955, *passim*.
- 80 CRA: A1209/23, 57/4503, A. S. Watt (Australian Commissioner for Southeast Asia) to Casey, 3 June 1956. See also CRA: A816/40, 19/321/30, record of a conversation with Mr G. W. Tory (Acting High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in Canberra), by J. Plimsoll (Assistant Secretary, DEA, 1953-59).
- 81 CRA: A816/52, 19/321/47, Australian Defence Department file on the Second Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment Battalion Group in Malaya, covering 1955-57.
- 82 It might, for instance, help to convince Australia that Malaya was defensible, and so ease the way to Australian assistance there. As late as 1956, however, Britain was anxious that SEATO should not offend Asian sentiments by publicly announcing it was to authorise planning based on nuclear weapons.
- 83 Cable was an official in the SEA Department of the FO. See Cable, *Geneva Conference*, p. 143, for quotations. Stockwell appears to accept that Britain was influential, but that Eden's *annus mirabilis* consisted of little more than appeasement, see Porter and Stockwell, *British Imperial Policy and Decolonization*, ii, pp. 15-16.
- 84 An impression fortified by the role Britain played in brokering alternative arrangements for German rearmament when the EDC crashed in 1954.

SEATO and Regional Policy (1954–57)

Atom Bombs and Human Ants

This chapter examines how post-1954 British policy towards SEATO, Indochina and the neutral Asian States was intended to achieve Malaya and Singapore's defence. It confirms that, far from being dragged into SEATO, Britain saw collective defence as a vital part of a dual track policy. This aimed to combine political and military containment of communism. In addition it shows that Britain, and to a lesser extent the United States, continued to see SEATO's role as more than simply repelling overt aggression. It was also perceived as a psychological crutch for nervous front-line Asian states.

Britain hoped SEATO might also increase its influence over American planning. The United States, however, remained averse to white favouritism and against any form of secret 'inner circle' planning. Consequently Britain had to hope that the broader SEATO could be used to restrain the United States' more confrontational instincts.

In March 1955 the Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, Malcolm MacDonald, described British policy as envisaging three lines of defence: first, local peoples and governments who were 'by nature hostile to Communism', but lacking in confidence; secondly, supporting SEATO and encouraging the Colombo Plan and economic assistance; thirdly, encouraging the 'benevolent neutrality' of the Colombo powers.¹ The combined effect would at best deter overt and semi-overt communist intervention and so win a breathing space, while leaving the 'protocol states' free enough of its embrace to allow continued Indian interest. At the least, the advance of communism would be delayed as it was forced to find ways of subverting front-line states without provoking SEATO.

By 1955 the immediate question was whether the front-line countries could be built into viable states. Were Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam nascent nations or fractured societies with fractious and underdeveloped elites? Was Thailand a chameleon ready to change with the scenery, or did it offer a defensible point at which to draw a line in the jungle? Could Britain juggle parallel policies of SEATO support and Indochinese neutralisation in such a way as to help preserve a buffer region in Indochina?

In early 1955 MacDonald still believed British wisdom would allow it to play a pivotal role in Southeast Asian diplomacy. Britain's reputation for sagacious and independent foreign policy, reinforced at Geneva, would allow it to balance

passive Indian neutralism and American bellicosity. In the light of the growing 'Asian inclination' to suspect the United States and give the benefit of the doubt to Chinese good intentions, Britain had 'a valuable part' to play.²

This chapter will trace how developments in Indochina in part came to fulfil the requirements of British strategy, despite Britain's limited success in influencing India, America and SEATO. Britain could not persuade India to sympathise with military containment. It could not convince America to put more effort into accommodating China and neutralising Indochina. Ultimately, it was not willing to provide the scale of resources necessary to support significant influence. By 1956 British influence at a regional, as opposed to a sub-regional level, was becoming decreasingly significant.³

THE INDOCHINESE SUCCESSOR STATES⁴

Madman or Joan of Arc: South Vietnam

Britain sought refuge in partition of Vietnam more from the conviction that Thailand and Cambodia must be shielded than from belief in South Vietnam's viability. At the same time Eden perceived the Geneva Agreements (which he saw as a triumph for his diplomacy) not as the exercises in obfuscation they were, but as a potential route to peace in his time in Indochina.

He thus determined that their requirement for all-Vietnam elections in July 1956 should be honoured. Neither the United States nor South Vietnam, however, was directly a party to the Geneva ceasefire agreements, nor to the (unsigned) final declaration which prescribed elections. France had signed the ceasefire agreements for the State of Vietnam. The United States promised only to refrain from disturbing the arrangements by force. Eden nevertheless maintained that since South Vietnam's very existence had been secured by the Agreements, it could not repudiate their conditions.

If there were elections, there was little doubt that Ho Chi Minh would win. In June 1954 one British report from Saigon called Bao Dai and the Vietnamese, 'A spineless people headed by a flabby octopus'.⁵ The French had utilised paramilitary and religious sects such as the Cao Dai. The peasantry, a proportion of which had occupied land rent-free when landlords fled rural disorder, were unlikely to welcome the consolidation of control by the South's landlord and urban-based elite. The picture was complicated by over 850,000 northern refugees, mostly from the Catholic minority.⁶

On 19 June 1954 Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic who had resigned from the pre-war French administration, was appointed Prime Minister with virtually unrestricted control of the government. The American Under-Secretary of State, Bedell-Smith, at first hoped Diem might become a modern Joan of Arc.⁷ Ultimately, Diem's reliance on a small circle of family and accomplices was to underline a chronic inability to build a broad-based power structure. His initial problem, however, was how to avoid being undermined by the sects, French-trained administrators and potential challengers in the army.

As early as October Britain and France wanted Diem replaced. Britain's Ambassador in Saigon, Sir Hubert Graves, talked of 'a muffled crisis' 'slowly asphyxiating' the country. MacDonald pushed for a ministry of all talents. By December he was gloomily arguing it might be possible to hold Laos and Cambodia even if South Vietnam fell.⁸ British and French pleas to replace Diem nevertheless met firm resistance. Dulles rhetorically asked who else there was, argued a viable nationalist alternative could not be created by manipulation, and promised to review the situation if there was no improvement within a month. By April 1955, however, even General Collins, sent as American Ambassador to Saigon with a brief to evaluate Diem, recommended he go.

At this point Diem's confrontation with the sects came to a head. To everyone's surprise, he neutralised them by June, and removed his opponents in the army. Eden remained irritated at American tendencies to support Diem 'at any price', but his Foreign Minister, Harold Macmillan, argued Diem's successes left no answer to the question, 'who else?'. Despite France's Prime Minister, Edgar Faure, describing Diem as 'incapable and mad', the French also accepted Diem was staying. The Americans held the purse-strings, took over military training by 1956, and for better or worse, had linked their star to Diem.⁹

The United States was unwilling to pressurise Diem to open talks about elections, which should have begun by July 1955. As joint co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, Britain reassured Nehru and Molotov (the Soviet Foreign Minister) in June to July, that it would push for the Geneva Agreements to be implemented. Eden's annoyance with the United States, however, was futile. Diem announced on 16 July 1955 that his country had not signed the Geneva Agreements and was not bound by them.¹⁰ The Korean and German examples did not counsel optimism for a reunion and neither side could trust the other to allow a free poll. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) may have pinned more hope on a political collapse in the South than on elections anyway. Short of this, the 'temporary' regroupment zones north and south of the seventeenth parallel were likely to ossify.

The Soviet Union appeared more interested in fostering détente than furthering Vietnamese revolution. China too was intent on reconstruction, and feared any escalation could lead to American bases on its south-western as well as its south-eastern flank. Even the DRV leadership appears to have accepted it could do little in the South until political activity made conditions there ripe for revolution.

After the consolidation of Diem's American-funded regime in late 1955, and the postponement of elections, British strategy towards Vietnam was of marginal significance. It mainly consisted of formalised exchanges between the ISC, which relayed DRV complaints about breeches in the Geneva agreements, and Britain and the Soviet Union in their capacity as co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference. In November 1955 Macmillan and Molotov merely noted the inadequate implementation of the Geneva Agreements in Vietnam. China and the DRV called for another Geneva Conference, but even the Indians, as chairmen of the ISC, could see this would be futile.¹¹

Eden's insistence on elections gave way to acquiescence in Dulles and Diem's refusal to cooperate. The Indians continued to chair the ISCs despite the withdrawal of French assistance in 1956. At the same time, the number of American advisers in South Vietnam apparently remained below the level Geneva had allowed the French they replaced.

By 1957 Diem's regime superficially seemed in good health. Land reforms restricted land-holdings and held rents to 25 per cent of the annual crop, in theory at least. The army had been pared down to 150,000, even if it was more suited to conventional than counter-insurgency warfare. In October 1955 Diem secured a suspiciously impressive 98.2 per cent of the vote in a referendum on the question of deposing Bao Dao and installing himself as Head of State. Elections in March 1956 gave him control of a newly elected National Assembly. Even more impressively, by the middle of that year vigorous action had crippled up to 90 per cent of *Viet Minh* cells in the South. The DRV, meanwhile, was still giving domestic reconstruction priority over reunification with the South.

It appeared South Vietnam would remain an American funded anti-communist bulwark for some time. British anxieties now focused not on the prospects of collapse or elections, but on the need to arrest the alienation of the peasantry which formed 80 per cent of its population. For corrupt soldiers and officials ensured land reforms were ineffective. Opposition was muffled. In 1956 municipal and village elections were cancelled. By 1957 the hard-pressed southern communist party had begun assassinating local officials. It was to be 1959, however, before the cycle of violence and counter-terror in the South led the DRV to give more support to revolutionary action there. Meanwhile, Laos stole the headlines.¹²

Laos¹³

If the examples of Germany and Korea cast doubts on Geneva's prescription for a united Vietnam, there were no such ambiguities over Laos. On 10 June 1954 Eden told the Geneva Conference that recent *Viet Minh* 'invasions' of Laos and Cambodia, 'not only crossed a political boundary ... [but] the frontier that divides the two great civilisations of Asia - the Indian and Chinese'.¹⁴ Eden saw Laos becoming a neutralised buffer state between communist China and Western-aligned Thailand. In September 1954 Britain indicated it would open a Legation in Vientiane, upgraded to an embassy in August 1955. Though it was named one of SEATO's Protocol States, to be defended on request as if it were a SEATO member, the Geneva Agreements did not allow Laos to join military alliances or receive foreign bases. The 5,000-strong French military mission was, however, allowed to stay.

The 5,000 to 6,000 *Pathet Lao* resistance fighters (a *Viet Minh* supported offshoot of an earlier anti-French nationalist movement) were to regroup in the two northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua. They were to be reintegrated into society, with national elections prior to June 1955.¹⁵ At Geneva Eden had joined the French and the Royal Laotian government (RLG) in resisting *Pathet*

Lao claims to share in the administration, arguing it was only a minor force in Laotian society.

After Geneva, Britain hoped the RLG would make minor concessions, but not admit the *Pathet Lao* into a coalition. In March 1955 Britain reacted sharply when Dulles urged the RLG to clear out northern areas where the communist elements were regrouping, on the grounds they were also establishing their authority in these regions. Dulles assured the RLG that if this provoked external attack the Manila Pact could be invoked.

The Foreign Office responded by warning the RLG not to expect help if outside aggression resulted from over-zealous action against the *Pathet Lao*. Britain thus discouraged actions which might corner the *Pathet Lao*. Yet at the same time it insisted to India that the *Pathet Lao's* right to regroup in Phong Saly and Sam Neua did not imply it could administer these provinces.¹⁶ British policy was a negative one, aiming to throw enough crumbs to each side to prevent a final breakdown, and to use gentle outside pressure to prevent open conflict or *Pathet Lao* dominance. As a policy it was short on long term solutions, but initially India, which provided the ISC chairmen, saw things in the same way.

On 15 June 1955 the ISC reaffirmed the RLG's right to administer the two northern provinces. In July, Thailand reacted to fighting in Northern Laos by seeking to take the question to SEATO. Britain again tried to neutralise the issue, rather than allow it to be turned into a SEATO, and so Cold War, matter. Britain insisted that without clear evidence of outside involvement the matter should remain with the ISC.¹⁷ Britain consistently supported RLG rights as the legitimate administrative authority, while hoping the RLG would reabsorb the *Pathet Lao* with a minimum of concessions. After all, one of the *Pathet Lao's* key leaders, Prince Souphanouvong, was the half-brother to Prince Souvanna Phouma, the prime minister from March 1956. Hence in January 1956, when Macmillan and Molotov met as co-chairmen of the Geneva conference, Britain unsuccessfully argued they should call for the immediate restoration of RLG administration in the two northern provinces. The Soviet Union would accept no more than a call for the two parties to re-enter negotiations.¹⁸

Britain was concerned above all that Indochina should not detract from the search for East-West détente, which gathered momentum after Stalin's death in March 1953. On 29 September 1955 Molotov mentioned the *Pathet Lao* to Eden over dinner in New York. According to Eden: 'He said "where were the *Pathet Lao*?" I said I did not quite know but I was sure that they were where they should not be. After a course or two I said that I thought it important to keep small countries in Southeast Asia and everywhere else quiet so as not to interfere with our more serious negotiations'.¹⁹ In connection with Egypt, Molotov added that, 'we all have friends whom we have to help. This is not always very convenient'.²⁰

Molotov's aside highlighted limits to détente. Despite further Soviet shifts towards 'peaceful co-existence' after Khrushchev began de-Stalinisation in February 1956, both the United States and Soviet Union felt obliged to assist minor allies. 'Peaceful coexistence' meant 'competitive coexistence' at best.

This meant Laos could only fulfil the buffer role Eden envisaged if its internal politics could stabilise without an overtly communist, or an actively pro-Western government, emerging. Inter-relationships between the communist and non-communist elites there boded well. The *Pathet Lao*, however, had a strong base to fall back on if they were to find their path to power frustrated.

In the nineteenth century, before France crystallised 'Laos' as a component of French Indochina, it had consisted of several units. These had possessed overlapping tributary relationships with Thailand and Vietnam. The border regions between areas of Thai and Vietnamese predominance had been the mountainous north and the cordillera. The latter stretched from above the Dien Bien Phu plateau in the north almost to the border with Cambodia in the South, following and sometimes straddling Laos's border with Vietnam.

This base was in the poor, mountainous regions of the north and the eastern border with Vietnam. While these regions provided areas of potential resistance and ease of contact with the *Viet Minh*, however, about half the Laotian population of 2.5 million were Lao-Thai of the lowlands. The lowlands extended from the Mekong plain below the mountain backbone westwards into Thailand. Much of the population of north-east Thailand shared dialect and customs with this group, and was in addition poorer than the population in south Thailand. Should communism come to dominate the lowland Laotian population it would gain a bridgehead for subverting north-east Thailand.

The cordillera, and to some extent the northern provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, also contained hill-tribe or ethnic Thai groups which often ranged across the Lao-Vietnamese border. These had a history of resentment towards political control by lowland administrations. The *Viet Minh* built up constructive relationships with these during their incursions into Laos in 1952-54. *Viet Minh* policies included disciplined behaviour and allowing local autonomy. Meanwhile American aid, despite attempts to set up rural development programmes, concentrated in urban and lowland areas, so further fuelling Laos's 'vertical segregation'.²¹

The conclusion drawn by Peter Lyon and Hugh Toye is that Laos as formed by French colonialism was neither a viable international and geographical entity, nor ethnically the same as the nineteenth century barrier area between Siam and Vietnam. It was too fragmentary to perform the buffer role prescribed for it.²² Had the DRV, China and the United States all been willing to support a truly neutral Laos this might not have proved fatal. After 1954, however, the RLG became addicted to increasing American aid. The American-financed Lao armed forces were unlikely to find the *Pathet Lao* tolerable bedfellows, and the United States distrusted neutralism. Neither were the *Viet Minh*, with an eye to Laos's strategic position athwart the seventeenth parallel - which now divided north and south Vietnam - likely to tolerate an American-inclined regime.²³

By 1956-57 developments in Laos were still giving Britain some cause for satisfaction. In December 1955 elections were held in the ten government-controlled provinces. In 1956 Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, despite relying on American aid, stated that, 'a complete neutrality like Switzerland's ... is for

us a vital necessity'.²⁴ Protracted negotiations resulted in agreements between the RLG and Pathet Lao, starting in August 1956. The two sides agreed to return the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua to RLG administration, integrate *Pathet Lao* forces into the Royal Army, and bring the *Pathet Lao* into a government of National Union pending elections. In November 1957 two *Pathet Lao* members entered an RLG government which continued to receive American assistance.

However uneasy this integration of communists into an American funded administration, Laos had at least got this far. This may have been largely because of the desire of China and Vietnam to concentrate on their own internal reconstruction, and to avoid provoking increased American involvement while political avenues to victory seemed open. Nevertheless, the basic British aim of shielding Thailand from communism was satisfied. Events were not to take a downward turn until well after Malayan independence in August 1957.

Elections were held in March 1958, the *Pathet Lao* taking 13 of the 21 National Assembly seats contested (out of a total of 59) with 32 per cent of the vote. Whether this meant non-communists were so divided as to be incapable of long resisting domination, or that there was now the basis for an ongoing coalition, is unclear. What is clear is that the United States suspended aid in June on the grounds of needing to secure financial reforms, and encouraged Phoui Sananikone's successful move in August 1958 to replace the coalition with a more right-wing government. One which excluded the *Pathet Lao*.

The scene was now set for the *Pathet Lao* return to the hills. In June 1959 a *Pathet Lao* battalion avoided integration into the Army by slipping out of the *Plaine des Jarres*. By 1959-61 instability seemed to be increasing, not only in Laos, but in Indochina generally. The exception was Cambodia, which had always looked the most promising candidate for neutralisation.²⁵

Cambodia²⁶

Like Laos, Cambodia was bisected by the Mekong and shared a border with Thailand. Unlike Laos, Cambodia had a relatively weak communist movement and a leader who enjoyed widespread support. Prince Sihanouk (crowned in 1941) had won wide-ranging Cambodian self-government in November 1953. At Geneva, the Cambodian delegation resisted allowing the small, communist *Khmer* resistance a regroupment area, and retained the right to make military alliances in conformity with the United Nations Charter. It was not to allow foreign military bases on its soil unless its security was threatened; nor was it to accept foreign military aid 'except for the purpose of the effective defence of its territory'. In other words, the Cambodian declaration of 21 July 1954 made clear an intention that Cambodia should not become the instrument of foreign military power, while leaving it real freedom to decide what assistance it required.²⁷

Relative to Laos it also enjoyed greater ethnic and territorial homogeneity. Optimism was confirmed when Prince Sihanouk's *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* (Popular Socialist Community) party took over 80 per cent of the vote and all 91

National Assembly seats in September 1955 elections. Despite the use of intimidation against the opposition Democratic and *Pracheachon* ('People's') parties in these elections, and the suppression of dissent afterwards, Sihanouk remained genuinely popular until the early 1960s.

After Geneva Cambodia played with the idea of inclining towards the United States. At Bandung in April 1955, however, DRV Foreign Minister, Pham Van Dong, assured Cambodia he desired 'peaceful coexistence'. Sihanouk was now unequivocal, 'We do not', he said at a press conference after his election victory of September 1955, 'even wish to have the protection of SEATO'. From 1955 Cambodian policy was to open economic and diplomatic relations with both communist countries and the West, rather as Thailand in the nineteenth century had survived by inviting advisers from several western powers. In fact it always retained greater links with the West, but that did not prevent American fears that it might fall under communist influence.²⁸

Cambodia's rejection of SEATO protection was an embarrassment. Nevertheless, Sihanouk's strong internal position meant Cambodia was capable of fulfilling a buffer role in the eyes of the United States and SEATO. Eden tried to encourage India, already providing the chairmen of the three ISC, to take an interest in what he saw as a culturally and historically 'Indian' Cambodia and Laos. With neither Cambodia nor Laos seen as 'properly defensible from a military point of view', the Foreign Office hoped an Indian role might make it difficult for China and the DRV to pressurise these countries. British hopes for Indochina paralleled those of Nehru, that a political environment would be created, 'where the other party cannot break its words, or ... where it finds it difficult to break its words'.²⁹

In December 1954 Eden cabled to Nehru that Dulles had agreed, 'that the influence of India would play a particularly important part' in upholding the Geneva agreements. In February MacDonald reported that Nehru, on seeing the monuments at Angkor, had exclaimed, 'But this is India'. According to MacDonald, it reflected the 'Greater India' of old, with Indian influences in art, culture and religion and Indian 'physical types of people'.³⁰ In early 1955 Eden encouraged Nehru to send a military mission to Cambodia. Premier U Nu of Burma was sympathetic and at Bandung in April the Chinese Premier, Chou En-Lai, professed support. Ostensibly this idea was derailed in May 1955, when Cambodia annoyed India by signing a military aid agreement with the United States. The International Supervisory Commission (ISC) for Cambodia ruled unanimously on 23 July 1955 that this did not contravene the Geneva agreements, but India felt it inconsistent with the spirit, if not the letter, of Geneva.

Cambodia was also annoyed by meetings between Son Ngoc Thanh (an opposition leader) with an Indian official who later became first secretary of the Indian Legation in Cambodia. Cambodia was sensitive to hints of overbearing Indian behaviour. By August Britain's Ambassador reported Cambodia would not accept patronage even from a great Asian power, and that Britain should not press the Indian link.³¹

Despite the limited effectiveness of Britain's involvement, Cambodia's move after September 1955 towards a vocal neutralist policy largely fulfilled British desires. The signing of a Sino-Cambodian friendship agreement in February 1956 and the subsequent receipt of grant-aid from communist countries seemed to confirm Cambodia's ability to balance East and West, capitalist and communist. Cambodia appeared internally stable while offering little provocation to China, the DRV or the United States. In short, Sihanouk's political effectiveness, declaratory neutralism, and the continuing Western links and acceptance of American aid, made the country a sound buffer. Cambodia was if anything the most promising of the three non-communist Indochinese successor states.

Conclusions

Until 1953 Britain insisted Tonkin was the key domino in Southeast Asia, but refrained from actions which might involve contributing to its defence. In 1954 Britain accepted the risks of escalation or of the diversion of American resources from Europe were too high to justify saving Tonkin. From 1954-57 Britain then hoped increasing Indian and non-aligned interest in the non-communist portions of Indochina, together with the Geneva agreements, would neutralise the area. South Vietnam would be shored up at least long enough to win a 'breathing space' for Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. In short, Britain consistently aimed to maximise the buffer region between communism and Thailand, but without committing British resources. It also hoped to achieve this without excessive diversion of American resources, and while retaining some sort of harness on confrontational American instincts.

It is difficult to estimate the part British policies played in producing a 'breathing space' between 1954 and the resurgence of communist campaigns in Laos and South Vietnam in 1959. What part did the British role at Geneva, and the Indian role in encouraging non-alignment, play in producing a propitious climate?

China, the Soviet Union, and to some extent the DRV, may have accepted a pause in order to concentrate on domestic consolidation. After losing over half a million men in Korea, and unsure of how close the United States came to intervention in Indochina in 1954, China may have decided it would only support revolutionary wars which were largely self-sustaining. SEATO too may have encouraged China to emphasise protracted 'people's war' and the need to build revolutionary pressure from below. In addition, China already faced American bases or allies in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Undermining SEATO politically may have temporarily been a priority, in order to avoid being semi-encircled.

Perhaps in 1954-56 there were also genuine communist hopes of wooing neutral countries into their camp, or at least of nurturing anti-Western instincts? Shifts in the Soviet-led international communist 'line' about East-West relations may thus have been crucial in setting the tone of this period.³²

It seems possible to account for other countries' policies without invoking British policy very much. America's refusal to act in response to British objections to Diem, and to Diem's rejection of the Geneva agreements, is one example of how little influence British diplomacy sometimes had. Nehru did not need Britain to tell him to take an interest in Indochina, which fitted his desire to play a distinctive role in Asia. The powers perched on the precipice of armageddon in Indochina also knew a degree of neutralisation was the only short-term way to avoid still unthinkable escalation. All sides needed to work out strategies which offered hope of victory without too much danger of escalating Great Power confrontation.³³

Whatever the reason, China and the Soviet Union had by early 1955 shifted from deriding the successor states of European empires as neo-colonial, to courting them assiduously. Communism, of course, had long recognised that cooperation with national bourgeois movements might be a necessary revolutionary stage. It is impossible to tell how far Soviet or Chinese policy genuinely held it could coexist with non-communist states, how far it was playing an opportunistic game. Either way, the 'peace offensive' of 1955-57 increased the tension between the strands of Britain's strategies, making it more difficult to balance military and political containment of communism.

THE BANDUNG CONFERENCE AND THE SINO-SOVIET PEACE OFFENSIVE: SEATO COMES OF AGE

Britain was to have little more success persuading America to court neutral Asian states than in convincing India of SEATO's value. In 1955 Britain unsuccessfully attempted to restrain American support for Chiang Kai Shek's retention of Quemoy and Matsu, two island specks within artillery range of the Chinese mainland. Britain feared escalation. In addition, it still wanted to combine deterrence with political courtship of neutral Asian states, if not China.³⁴

Despite acquiescing in China's exclusion from the United Nations and continuing trade restrictions, Britain still believed that China was best constrained by a combination of deterrence and entanglement in normal international discourse. Britain continued to follow a dual track policy of military and political containment.

This duality was well summed up by MacDonald (Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia until October and subsequently High Commissioner in India) in February 1955. He saw India and the Colombo powers as stabilising factors. Yet India deplored American bellicosity over Quemoy and attempts to shore up Diem in Vietnam. While Asian nations supposedly worried about inexperienced and 'narrow-minded' American diplomacy, MacDonald argued Britain was, 'Almost universally in Asia ... regarded as the wisest of the Western powers'. With China's growing might exercising 'an hypnotic effect on many Asian peoples' Britain should moderate American policy and bring China into the 'comity of nations'. This would avoid forcing Asian states to take sides in the Asian Cold War.

Less than a week before MacDonald's comments, Harold Macmillan (then Minister of Defence) told colleagues the communist threat was now greater in the Far East than the Middle East. Britain must help 'nourish the will of the peoples of South-East Asia to resist this menace', by maintaining British forces and enlisting American support. The political approach favoured by India was, in British eyes, insufficient to secure front-line states. 'Nourishing the will' of these meant combining military and political approaches, courting, supporting and deterring as appropriate.³⁵ The problem for Britain was: how could it make India and neutral Asian states more military-minded, the United States less so?

Even before the Southeast Asian Defence Treaty was signed in September 1954, China and the Soviet Union were courting non-aligned states such as India and Burma. This was likely to make these less sympathetic to the military approach. In 1953-54 the Korean Armistice (July 1953) and Geneva Agreements signalled the Soviet Union, and to some extent China, might be willing to negotiate *modus vivendi* for destabilising issues.³⁶

In this context, India reached agreements with China in 1954 over Tibet and Sino-Indian relations in which five principles, later known as '*Panch Shila*', were mentioned, namely: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, and 'peaceful coexistence'. On 27 June Chou En-Lai also stated that, 'Revolution can not be exported, ... outside interference with the expressed will of the people should not be permitted'.

When the Colombo Powers began organising an Afro-Asian conference after April 1954 - the 'Bandung' Conference - Britain thus feared this might become a platform for anti-imperialist, anti-nuclear, neutralist, and anti-SEATO rhetoric. Only after a great deal of debate was Anglo-American agreement reached on encouraging rather than discouraging well-briefed friends to attend, so as to moderate proceedings.³⁷

The Bandung Afro-Asian Conference of April 1955 disproved initial Western fears. Ceylon, Pakistan (a SEATO member which in April 1955 signed a military aid agreement with America), the Philippines and Thailand (also SEATO members), and Turkey and Iran (which had just joined the 'Baghdad Pact'), all insisted the conference criticise Soviet as well as Western imperialism.

Nevertheless, newly independent Asian states, which wished above all to preserve independence, welcomed Sino-Soviet offers of 'peaceful coexistence'. Ceylon, for instance, abandoned ideas of supporting SEATO because of the strength of domestic political opinion and the importance of its cash-crop exports to communist countries. Nehru felt China's helpful attitude gave new hope for peaceful approaches to world affairs and declared SEATO ran against this trend. In September 1955 Nehru publicly explained that, 'the steps they take against aggression in themselves encourage aggression', to which he added 'if we want peace we must avoid doing things which create an atmosphere of war'.³⁸

Chou En-Lai had already used the Bandung Conference to reassure Thailand, Laos and Indonesia that it did not wish to intervene in their internal affairs, and

that it wanted overseas Chinese settle down as citizens in their host countries. From 1955 to 1956 China came to agreements making the '*Panch Sila*' the basis of its relations with Indonesia and Burma.

By late 1955 Soviet and Chinese courtship of Asian states was developing into what Britain perceived as a peace offensive, eroding Western influence and threatening SEATO.³⁹ In the last two months of 1955 Bulganin (Soviet Prime Minister) and Khrushchev (First Secretary of the Communist Party) visited India and Burma. By late 1956 the Soviet Union had concluded aid or trade agreements with Cambodia, India, Burma, Indonesia and Afghanistan.

From the Chinese perspective, this diplomacy aimed at reducing the danger of encirclement by American alliances, by making such arrangements seem unnecessary. With Sino-American talks on matters such as American prisoners also being held from August 1955, Asian states also worried that any thaw in communist-Western relations could leave them vulnerable. Soviet concessions, such as agreement to the Austrian State Treaty in May 1955, and so to a neutral Austria, confirmed the danger. In response, Thailand began to hedge its bets by opening informal channels of communication to China.⁴⁰

From the American perspective, the communist 'peace offensive' was an attempt to isolate, undermine and paralyse SEATO, and to undermine Western influence. Non-alignment was seen as a danger, not a real alternative, and so the American reaction was to strengthen its hand with front-line states and the unequivocally committed, if necessary at the expense of relations with the non-aligned. By December 1955 the American priority was to breathe life into SEATO. Britain had previously been unable to persuade the United States to agree even to a small permanent SEATO secretariat. Now American enthusiasm outran British aims.

In December the new Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, Sir Robert Scott, argued the situation in Southeast Asia was improving. South Vietnam had survived and the Laotian government was if anything over-confident. He doubted the American diagnosis and prognosis, worrying that if 'the growth of the SEATO baby is forced' the infant might be overloaded. Britain preferred the gradual development of a small international secretariat, and small committees dealing with practical issues such as intelligence cooperation.

A modest organisation suited Britain's dual policy of securing a military shield, while still wooing non-aligned states. It also suited British desires to avoid substantive new military or economic commitments.⁴¹ By late 1955, however, the United States was increasingly anxious about the Sino-Soviet peace offensive, and determined to respond to demands by Asian countries and Australia to put more substance into SEATO.⁴²

After the first SEATO council in Bangkok in February 1955, a system of meetings had been established. A Council of Ministers (generally Foreign Ministers) was to meet once a year, with decisions to be reached unanimously. At a lower level a Council of Representatives was to meet from time to time to provide political oversight, and there was an analogous Military Advisers Group.⁴³ The Commissioner-General represented the United Kingdom at the

Council of Representatives, and the senior Commander-in-Chief in Singapore attended the Military Advisors Group.

Then United States pressure saw more permanent machinery put in place in 1956-57. A Military Planning Office (MPO) was formally established by March 1957. SEATO also received its own secretariat and Secretary-General. In addition, a Permanent Working Group, drawn from officials in Bangkok Embassies provided supervision of expert committees. So by 1957 the MPO provided permanent coordination for military committees, the Permanent Working Group and Secretariat for civil committees. These now included those of security and of economic experts.⁴⁴

None of this changed SEATO's fundamental nature as an organisation in which only one member, the United States, was a significant security producer. This factor, and Anglo-American preference, also dictated that SEATO continued to be a multilateral organisation without multilateral military muscles. Most aid remained bilateral and no forces were earmarked for SEATO until after 1957. It could provide coordination and disseminate information, but the organisation's prime function was to give credibility to American deterrence in a way which would facilitate local resistance to communism.

Given Britain's equal concern with the political battle against communism, it also welcomed increased American support, in 1956, for developing SEATO's non-military aspects.⁴⁵ Britain saw its role as giving tightly targeted, small-scale aid, which would go to non-SEATO as well as SEATO countries. MacDonald and then Scott as Commissioner-Generals, and a major review of British foreign policy initiated by Eden in 1956, all argued for increases in non-military spending in 'Eastern Asia'. In April 1956 Scott pointed out that Britain spent £100 million a year on military services in Eastern Asia, but just one fifth of that on civil provision. He pushed for a transfer of resources away from war preparations and to areas such as military attaches, the British Council, and training for other countries' police and administrations.

British ministers and officials continued to believe Britain had a role to play in countering the siren call from China to Asian countries. Calls for a transfer of resources were, however, unlikely to make much progress. There was general pressure to restrict spending, and the military insisted their forces were the minimum required for peacetime tasks. Indeed, chapter eight will show how an increasing emphasis on the Cold War in Asia was one of the factors leading to a new 'East of Suez' defence posture. Scott himself felt Britain's military presence played an important part in maintaining influence in Asia.⁴⁶

Given these priorities, the next section asks how Britain reacted to the development of detailed SEATO military planning. Why, when the Colombo powers had come out against nuclear weapons from April 1954, did Britain encourage SEATO to move towards a nuclear defence stance? How far did SEATO come to provide the assistance in building up sound administration and security services which Britain believed should be one of its main functions?⁴⁷

SEATO POLICIES 1955 TO 1957

SEATO never developed a command, as opposed to a planning, structure. After 1957 its members earmarked limited forces for specific SEATO operations, but these remained small-scale, and in Britain's case there was little real commitment to making these available in a crisis. American aid remained the economic and military underpinning both for Asian SEATO members, and for vocally non-aligned countries such as Cambodia and Laos. Nevertheless, the Manila Agreement did provide for mutual assistance in building up the anti-subversion abilities of member states.

Moreover, Britain and the United States remained convinced SEATO must have a tangible multilateral existence if it was to reassure front-line states. In the words of a defence brief for Macmillan of late 1957, 'Although we see the primary task of SEATO as the maintenance of confidence in the Cold War, its effectiveness will be judged by our Asian allies, to a large extent, by the preparedness of the organisation to counter Communist aggression'.⁴⁸

The following sections examine British attitudes towards various areas of SEATO multilateral activity. They underline the continuing tension between desires to strengthen SEATO and use it as a forum for restraining the United States; and yet aversion to taking risks or committing extra resources.

Subversion and Internal Security

Britain and the United States agreed in identifying communist subversion as the primary threat to Southeast Asia. They also agreed most assistance would need to be bilateral. In 1955 General Harding stated that: 'The defence of our vital interests in Malaya must be conducted in the weak states on its borders. If these states are lost to communism, our position in Malaya will be threatened ... Economic aid, reinforcement of local security services and propaganda will be our weapons'.⁴⁹

By 1955 Thai paratroopers and officers had attended courses in Malaya and Singapore. Britain had accepted Burmese and Thais onto Special Branch courses in Kuala Lumpur. 'Security Intelligence Far East', the Singapore-based political intelligence service, had provided advice on security, organisation and training, 'notably in Siam, Indonesia, India and Ceylon'. Meanwhile, there had been some Anglo-French-American cooperation on Indochinese intelligence.⁵⁰

A SEATO intelligence committee met from May 1955, eventually being called the 'Committee of Security Experts' (CSE), but effective multilateral cooperation proved problematic. Britain was sceptical about French, Thai and Filipino security, and these countries proved reluctant to discuss their weaknesses, or to disclose sensitive information. Britain and America were diffident about providing information on their own security systems. Australia, meanwhile, doubted the value of a wide-ranging committee, favouring specialised committees aimed at limited, practical results. By 1957 the CSE had advanced little further than an estimation of the threat and limited

coordination. What did prove possible was the collation of information on communist penetration, for instance in a November 1957 'Seminar on Counter-Subversion'. Related work was carried out by the Research Office and other committees, such as the 'Committee on Information, Culture, Education and Labour', which investigated communist penetration of labour movements. Multilateral action remained limited, however, despite the recognition of internal security as the predominant threat.⁵¹

Economic Affairs

Articles II and III of the Manila agreement made provision for economic aid, but the United States and Britain agreed on restricting most of this to existing channels. Britain, in particular, did not wish to detract from the Colombo Plan, because of its Commonwealth origins, and because channelling aid through SEATO might aggrieve the majority of (non-SEATO) Asian states. SEATO's Asian members naturally pushed for SEATO-labelled aid. Pakistan's membership in particular was related to its desire to maximise American military aid. In April 1957 the British Chief of Air Staff, Sir Dermot Boyle, reported that the Philippines and Thailand, 'cheerfully ask for aid in any context'.⁵²

While American bilateral aid remained predominant, there were some small concessions to Asian demands. At the Karachi Council in March 1957, the United States suggested members might qualify for a higher ratio of military aid than non-members, and some SEATO-labelled projects, such as a graduate engineering school in Thailand, were suggested. In fact American aid continued to be apportioned according to the requirements of global strategy, meaning higher amounts for Pakistan and South Vietnam, for instance, than for Thailand.

Britain's contributions remained concentrated on Commonwealth countries. Increasing but very small amounts went to SEATO-labelled aid and front-line states after 1957. There was little point Britain straining itself, as its contributions could have added only a few drips to an American ocean. Britain nevertheless continued to believe that tangible SEATO activity was important. As General Harding (CIGS) expressed it in December 1954, 'I think we are all agreed that the real danger is Communist infiltration ... but military strength on the spot, strong support behind it, and clear determination to use it are powerful weapons against infiltration'.⁵³

Military Planning – Overt Aggression

Harding was voicing a pervasive belief that SEATO was a psychological shield behind which front-line states, even those which publicly rejected SEATO protection, could counter subversion with confidence. A small part of this function was fulfilled by the SEATO exercises, with several a year by 1956. Typical examples included 'Firmlink', an air-ground exercise in Thailand in February 1956, and 'Saddle-Up', when American Marines exercised with a

British battalion in Borneo in 1959. Modest in scale, these joint exercises at least ensured a minimum ability for inter-force cooperation.⁵⁴

The main deterrent continued to be American mobile and strategic power, in the form of the Seventh Fleet and bases in Japan and the Philippines. Chapter Five has also shown how in 1954-55 British strategy accepted the idea of a nuclear counter-offensive against any overt Chinese attack. It recognised that the region was otherwise indefensible, that the United States could not be persuaded to abandon a nuclear strategy, and that thermo-nuclear weapons might make deterrence effective.

This reversed the pre-1954 position, when Britain did not believe nuclear attack could even force China to cease an aggression, let alone deter it, and feared it might trip global war. Britain now thought China could be deterred, and the Soviet Union probably would not risk global war to save China. At the time of the early 1955 Quemoy and Matsu crisis, the American Seventh Fleet was 'paraded off the Straits of Formosa with its strategic bombing equipment in full sight of Communist observers'.⁵⁵ By November 1955 Britain knew that American strategy relied on a nuclear response to attack, and that targets included Chinese airfields, communications and troop concentrations. The American hope was that this would reduce the threat to the Kra Peninsula and Thailand to guerrilla proportions.⁵⁶

In a strange twist, a SEATO-based nuclear policy might now minimise the risk of conflict while maintaining access to American planning. In addition, Britain hoped it could bolster flagging British influence by declaring contributions to regional nuclear deterrents. Behind the nuclear barrier, Britain could still aspire to a regional role. This might be possible while returning to pre-war models of imperial influence, using small garrisons and mobile reserves. In Southeast Asia this traditional model had remained the aspiration, despite having been postponed by repeated crises: in Hong Kong (from 1949); Korea (1950-53); and above all, by the Malayan Emergency.

This policy was also to apply to the Middle East. In May 1954 it was suggested that, with tactical nuclear attacks on the Caucasian and Zagros mountain passes into Iraq and on Russian lines of communication and airfields, the Middle East might be defensible. Britain acceded to the Turkish-Iraqi Pact in March 1955, with Pakistan and Iran joining by the year's end. From 1956 Britain's main declared contribution to this 'Baghdad Pact' was nuclear capable squadrons of Canberra bombers.⁵⁷

There must be doubt as to how far Britain's nuclear contribution, as opposed to the American nuclear umbrella, was thought significant by allies. Australian doubts are dealt with in the following chapters. Mohamad Ali (Prime Minister of Pakistan, 1955-56), told Commonwealth Ministers in July 1956 that, if a nuclear stalemate developed, aggressive nations might be tempted to bully smaller countries. He pointed to the possibility of Soviet pressure on, or penetration of, Afghanistan and Iran. He wanted precise commitments of nuclear and conventional forces and joined Australian ministers in expressing disquiet at Britain's over-emphasis of nuclear deterrence.⁵⁸

Britain's eastern nuclear policy evolved within this context of attempts to reduce the defence burden, and yet retain influence. In December 1955 the British Defence Committee noted that in limited war with China its conventional superiority necessitated the prompt use of nuclear weapons.⁵⁹ With the first Valiant (medium range nuclear-bomber) squadrons only just forming, the assumption was that America would provide the nuclear capability. Given British and American determination to avoid ground force commitments, it was also obvious Asian members must be told there was a nuclear underpinning to SEATO.⁶⁰

In January 1956 the SEATO Military Advisers endorsed the view that nuclear weapons were necessary if overt Chinese attack was to be reduced to manageable proportions, and if SEATO was to retain credibility with its Asian members. The COS, meanwhile, determined SEATO must not interfere with any reductions the latest British defence review might suggest.⁶¹ The COS thus argued that assuming the use of nuclear weapons was necessary. As the Commonwealth Secretary, Lord Home, put it in a note to the Prime Minister, 'Free Asia can only be defended by the employment of nuclear weapons ... this is not in question'. The question now was how the SEATO Council could authorise nuclear-based planning without further damaging relations with neutral Asian countries.⁶²

The Cold War, not overt aggression, was still the main problem, and a nuclear stance might have political costs. At Colombo in April 1954 and at Bandung in April 1955 Asian representatives had called for the international control of thermonuclear weapons and the prohibition of manufacture. Ministers were sensitive to Colombo Power opinions, the effects of Bandung and the Sino-Soviet peace offensive. In early 1956 Lord Home warned that, 'Asia has not forgotten that the only atom bombs dropped have been on Asians', and of the possibility of it raising, 'the question of white superiority in its acutest form'. Pakistan might leak a decision, 'if only to impress the Afghans'.⁶³

The Cabinet minutes for the discussion on SEATO scheduled for 28 February 1956 are not open, but in Singapore Scott told the BDCC all available weapons should be used to force China and North Vietnam to cease any attack.⁶⁴ At the Karachi Council in March 1956 Britain emphasised the public relations aspect of any decision. It suggested the Council adopt a motion which avoided direct mention of nuclear weapons, but which enjoined planners to use only such forces as would effectively counter aggression. In the end the SEATO Council of Ministers of March 1956 simply noted a military planners' report which advised Southeast Asia was only defensible using nuclear weapons.⁶⁵ SEATO planning for war against China, and against North Vietnam too, then assumed nuclear weapons might be used, though political clearance would be required at the time.

Britain, however, still sought to prohibit SEATO statements from mentioning nuclear weapons. Britain only became open about eastern nuclear policy in 1957, when it was used to justify British force reductions to Australia. The documents consulted have not uncovered Foreign Office attitudes to this change in declaratory policy. It may have accepted that with British policy increasingly

anchored to massive retaliation, American attitudes openly expressed and leaks of SEATO policy likely, further public reticence would reduce the benefits of Britain's nuclear strategies without mollifying neutral powers.⁶⁶

By 1957 SEATO's defence concept for combating North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam envisaged the possibility of using nuclear weapons, though in June 1956 Admiral Radford believed these might not be needed if Chinese assistance was restricted to advice and aid. In Summer 1956 the State Department also emphasised, in debates within the American administration, that political implications should restrict the use of nuclear weapons to the most crucial situations.⁶⁷

Should nuclear weapons be used significant land forces still seem to have been required, in order to force the enemy to concentrate large forces for a break-through, so presenting suitable targets for nuclear power. Britain seems to have moved away from this concept of 'fixing' targets as early as Summer 1956. Britain hoped that the availability of greater nuclear power would reduce the need for 'fixing' suitable targets and so minimise conventional force requirements. Interdiction of airfields, railway yards and communications might then leave a residual threat which SEATO mobile forces could contain.⁶⁸ Australia and the United States seem to have had only slightly more sympathy with the Thai and Pakistani 'human ant complex'. This was the fear that coolie-supplied communist armies would advance, despite any air-launched nuclear action, until halted by ground forces.⁶⁹ Ultimately, Western SEATO powers all wanted to avoid any planning which implied reinforcement by large ground forces from outside the region.

SEATO's planning dealt only with limited war and not global war. In March 1957 the Asian states accepted 'with polite scepticism' the Western view that in global war the threat to Southeast Asia would be smaller, because a general nuclear offensive would divert and deaden Chinese attentions.⁷⁰

These developments left Britain with the question of how it would support SEATO strategies, or at least appear to support them. On 10 July 1956 the Defence Committee considered a COS paper which argued that, in limited war with China, Britain should contribute up to three squadrons of V-bombers. The COS believed a British nuclear capacity would be vital to maintain influence in ANZAM and SEATO. The Committee's conclusions nevertheless stated the main effort, including nuclear capability, would be American.⁷¹

The Defence Committee was recognising the temporary limitations of Britain's embryonic nuclear bomber force. Ministers were not so modest with allies. At the 1956 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference (27 June to 6 July), Britain stated three V-bomber squadrons might be available for eastern Emergencies and that V-bombers would make periodic visits to the area. In September 1956, with the Malayan Emergency easing, the COS began to plan the reduction of local garrisons. Lord Home (Secretary of State for the Commonwealth, 1955-60) warned that the repercussions on relations with Australia might be serious. This strengthened tendencies to see a nuclear capacity as a way of maintaining 'influence' with Australia, as well as in SEATO.⁷²

By early 1957 the Air Ministry was seeking approval for the infrastructure to support a nuclear policy. *Tengah* airfield in Singapore was already due to be developed to *Hunter* (fighter) and *Canberra* (light bomber) standards (8,000 feet) but not the hardened 9,000 feet necessary for V-bombers to hit target systems in 'South China, the Red River Delta and North Vietnam'.⁷³ In March 1957 the SEATO Council was told Britain would send three nuclear-capable V-bomber squadrons in an emergency, despite the lack of adequate infrastructure and Britain's as yet minuscule force.

In 1956–57 British nuclear capacity was increasingly seen as necessary to maintain influence with Australia and America in the face of conventional force reductions. On a more mundane level, the Air Ministry saw nuclear capacity as a way of convincing the Treasury to fund development of local airfields to medium jet-bomber standards. After determined Treasury resistance, partly on the grounds that Singapore's future was politically insecure, the Defence Committee endorsed the development of *Tengah* (Singapore) on 20 February 1958, as necessary to maintain influence in ANZAM and SEATO.⁷⁴ Given Britain's small V-bomber force, the possibility of actually flying any quantity of aircraft to the Far East in a crisis was remote.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the development of SEATO and strengthening of the Thai military led Britain to abandon Songkhla planning. In late 1955 Scott lamented Thai politicians' preoccupation with political intrigue, and the resurgence of 'traditional characteristics, compounded of national pride and natural sloth'. Marshal Phibun Songkram did, in 1955–56, allow press criticism of SEATO, and encouraged a thaw in relations with China. This appears, however, to have been an attempt to preserve a reservoir of left-wing and neutralist goodwill in domestic politics, and at the same time to show America and SEATO they needed to help Thailand more. The thaw was firmly reversed when Marshal Sarit Thanarat came to power in a September 1957 coup.

In addition, growing Australian desires to align with American plans, and not identify with a British concept which would abandon most of Southeast Asia, undermined the plan. As early as January 1956, the Australians, whose cooperation would be vital, told Britain they wanted *Hermes* put in cold storage, and they might refuse permission for the Australian part of the strategic reserve to move into Thailand. By December 1957 the BDCC, MacGillivray and Scott agreed that SEATO and Thai development made '*Hermes*' (the latest version of the Songkhla plan) politically inadmissible. General Festing (CIGS, 1958–61, and CIC of Far Eastern Land Forces, 1956–58) added that force reductions made it militarily impractical.⁷⁶

No doubt some of Britain's military saw Britain as meaningfully participating in nuclear-based SEATO planning. The reality was that Britain valued a nuclear stance because it believed deterrence would work, providing a shield behind which Britain could decolonise, reduce its forces to small, mobile units, and yet retain wider influence at little cost. Britain wanted to use nuclear capacity to underpin its position with SEATO and Australia. Yet it also wanted to preserve and use 'influence' in SEATO more to constrain American plans than to facilitate them.⁷⁷

Laos - SEATO's Fire Brigade Role

SEATO's response to insurgency, rather than its global war plans, was always most likely to test its ability to act as an effective alliance. By 1958 the Military Planning Office (MPO) initiated 'Plan 5', to assist the RLG against insurgency.

Britain's role in 'Plan 5' illustrates the obstructive nature of British membership. By 1959 Britain was committed to providing a battalion for Plan 5's initial requirement of a Brigade Group. ANZAM meetings were being used to coordinate the Commonwealth's 'Plan Buckram', designed to expedite Commonwealth assistance. In September 1959, however, when fighting between the RLG and *Pathet Lao* precipitated a crisis, Britain tried to restrain SEATO. It wished to retain its ability to function as co-chairman of the Geneva conference of 1954, believing Britain would in this way be free to help renew the neutralisation of Laos if an opportunity presented itself. It suggested that, if there was to be any intervention, it would be best carried out by America alone, since the United States was not strictly a party to the Geneva agreements.⁷⁸ Into the early 1960s, Britain's position remained one of trying to appear to support SEATO planning, yet discouraging it from demanding forces and from any tendencies towards military action.⁷⁹

CONCLUSIONS

There was continuity in British aims in Southeast Asia. Britain sought to keep communism at arm's length from Malaya, Singapore and Borneo. This was to be achieved in three main ways: by encouraging allies to provide the necessary resources; by reassuring Asian states of Western determination to defend the area; and by fighting a political battle for the region's governments and peoples.

All this was to be achieved without committing significant resources outside of British territories. Consequently, Britain tried to persuade its SEATO partners that a nuclear-based strategy would enable the area to be defended without substantial reinforcements. It hoped SEATO would develop a modest planning organisation, with the provision of aid and information strengthening members' counter-subversion capacities. The increase in SEATO's machinery from late 1955 was spurred by American determination, in the face of a Sino-Soviet 'peace offensive', to prove SEATO's value to Asian members. It did achieve the permanent planning machinery Britain had sought from the outset. Given the Colombo powers opposition to SEATO, however, and Britain's desire to avoid commitments, its attitude to expansion was ambivalent.

Britain persisted in trying to balance military and political containment of communism. Thus it supported both SEATO and the neutralisation of Laos and Cambodia. It continued to court the 'Colombo Powers', aiming to assist in preventing the spread of communism '... without angering India too much, since India is the most influential non-Communist power'. It continued to differ with the United States over the importance of neutralist states, and over the American

and Australian desire to put SEATO's case without apology or, as Britain saw it, without tact.⁸⁰

There was continuing tension between Britain's desire to retain a restraining influence over America and SEATO, and yet to woo non-aligned Asian states. Despite the extensive nature of Anglo-American military, political and intelligence cooperation, differences remained fundamental. Britain repeatedly had to acquiesce in policies it disliked. In 1957 the United States still had not recognised China and was blocking Chinese membership of the United Nations. Eden had been forced to accept American support for Diem and Diem's refusal even to discuss elections. Australia, America and India did cooperate with Britain, but generally only in so far as they agreed not just on ends, but on the means to be used in the pursuit of regional security.⁸¹

Britain's attempts to straddle multiple interests and relationships may even have weakened rather than strengthened its capacity to influence individual states. A meeting of Commonwealth Premiers in July 1957 exemplified the stresses in Britain's pivotal position. Menzies argued SEATO was a 'military bulwark'. Nehru retorted that since 'one has to win people not governments', SEATO was, 'inconsequent' in the military sense and 'in the psychological sense ... an irritant'. No-one seemed to share Britain's view of a middle way.⁸²

Tensions between the strands of British policy also complicated relations with Indonesia, where Britain wanted to counter the growing influence of its communist party. Indonesia was seen as posing three kinds of threat. First international, as a neutralist country likely to incline towards Sino-Soviet sympathies. Secondly, the communists gained over 16 per cent of the vote in national elections in September 1955 and seemed to be increasing support. Finally, there was the danger Indonesia could act as a siren to those UMNO members who inclined towards a neutralist outlook. The latter two aspects should not be exaggerated, however, since the UMNO leadership's grip over their party was strong. The Indonesian army and its Islamic parties could also be expected to form significant barriers to communist advance, even if President Sukarno appeared to be playing a dangerous game of balancing the military against the communists.⁸³

There was little Britain could do to court Indonesia or potentially sympathetic Indonesian groups. Britain voted against Indonesia in 1954 and 1957, when the latter attempted to secure a United Nation's call for renewed negotiations with Holland over Dutch West New Guinea (*Irian Jaya*). Since Holland and Australia were opposed to any transfer of the territory, and Indonesia equally determined to achieve it, it was difficult to avoid offending at least one party. Britain also could not bring itself to sell significant numbers of major weapons to Indonesia. This was despite its desire to influence the potentially anti-communist armed forces, and despite the alternatives being supply by other European countries or, still worse, the Soviet Union. Again, Britain could court Indonesia more only at the risk of incurring Australian wrath.⁸⁴

Faced with these tensions, and with American aid dwarfing the resources it was willing to provide, Britain gradually reduced its ambitions for regional

influence. It retreated from aiming to be the predominant power 'South of the Tropic of Cancer' in 1945, through visions of British wisdom guiding American power and money, to hopes of preserving limited 'influence' over SEATO, Australia and Asian powers. As joint co-chairman of the 1954 Geneva conference, Britain did play some part in sustaining the Geneva agreements and the idea of neutralising Cambodia and Laos. How far the 'breathing space' between 1954 and the resurgence of communist insurgency in Vietnam and Laos in 1959 was affected by British policy is nevertheless open to question. Britain's role as co-chairman of the Geneva conference, which was recalled in 1961-62 to consider Laos, was perhaps more as a convenient channel of mediation, or even obfuscation, than as a positive force. The speed with which the renewed neutralisation of Laos broke down after 1962 reinforces the impression that local forces and international *realpolitik*, more than diplomatic skill, were driving events.⁸⁵

The underlying reason for the 'breathing space' may have been the unwillingness of China and the *Viet Minh* to risk increased American involvement in Indochina, at least while local forces were unlikely to withstand such intervention without massive help. Soviet, Chinese and even *Viet Minh* desires to temporarily emphasise domestic development may have increased their willingness to undermine the Western position by politics rather than force.

Nevertheless, from London's perspective it seemed Britain had played a significant part in securing peace in Indochina in and after 1954. This reinforced Britain's belief that it could continue playing an important regional role. Chapter eight will ask how far these beliefs affected British planning when it came to adjust its base and force structure in Southeast Asia. Did visions of macro-regional influence suggest a continuing need for significant eastern forces, even as decolonisation accelerated? How far did they reinforce British hopes of maintaining its position as a global power by drawing on Commonwealth support? Despite Britain's emphasis on courting the Colombo Powers and on limiting burdens, SEATO did imply at least some level of support for a regional alliance. After 1955 the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve was theoretically available to support SEATO. Discussions about Southeast Asian defence were peppered with references to maintaining British influence with SEATO, the United States and Australia, and to demonstrate tangible Western commitment to front-line Asian states.

Before examining the changing level and structure of Britain's forces, we need to look again at the growing tension between decolonisation and military requirements. How far did military planners encourage the retention of commitments, of *points d'appui* from which to project global power, even at the cost of confronting nationalism? How did they adjust themselves to the forecasts of the Colonial Office? To what degree did the various dictates of service aggrandisement, great power and SEATO roles, and the practical needs of colonial territories, dictate the military safeguards Britain sought from decolonising countries?

Notes

- 1 Fo1091/2, MacDonald, address to day two of the 'Mallaig' Conference, March 1955.
- 2 See Defe11/102, (3354B), 'Situation in South-East Asia', MacDonald to Eden, 8 Feb. 1955.
- 3 'Influence' is here interpreted as the ability to significantly deflect other countries towards British aims and policies. If a 'soft' definition was applied, of the ability to have British opinions considered by allies, the conclusion might be slightly different.
- 4 For details on the following see, Fifield, *Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, pp. 274-95; and Command 2834, *Documents Relating to British Involvement in the Indochina Conflict, 1945-65* (London, 1965).
- 5 Cab128/CC(54)52, meeting of 23 July 1954, minute 4. The quotation is from Cab129/C(54)202, 'Indochina', Eden, 18 June 1954, circulating a letter from the British minister in Saigon. See also C. M. Turnbull, 'Britain and Vietnam, 1948-55', *War and Society*, 6, 2 (1988), 102-24.
- 6 According to Gabriel Kolko, *Vietnam: Anatomy of a War, 1940-75* (London, 1985), pp. 17-18, 39-42, 48, 92-96, 107-8, the revolution's social dimension made the Geneva Accords ephemeral.
- 7 For Bedell-Smith's hopes, Fo371/112075, copy of message from Casey to Menzies, 18 June 1954.
- 8 For 'asphyxiating', see CRA: A463/30, 56/1566, Sir Hubert Graves, 31 Oct. 1954. See also CRA A1838/1, 383/4/1 Part 3, Singapore to DEA, 14 Dec. 1954; and Australian COS to DEA, 14 Dec. 1954. For British pressure in Dec. 1954, see Prem11/1310, MacDonald to Eden, 12 Dec. 1954, *passim*.
- 9 For the quotations, see Prem11/1310, PM's minutes on JIC(55)38, 27 June 1955; Macmillan for PM, 1 July 1955. For the French Foreign Minister's comments of 7 April, see CRA: A816/47, 19/311/219, Washington Embassy to DEA, 9 May 1955. See also Smith, *An International History*, i, pp. 35-53.
- 10 See Prem11/1310, FO to Geneva for Secretary of State, 18 July 1955, for Diem's announcement; CRO to UK High Commissioner in India (Acting), 24 July 1955; and *passim*.
- 11 Deputy Foreign Ministers Lord Reading and Gromyko agreed to call on both parties to talk when they met in April-May 1956. See Prem11/1310, FO to Saigon, 4 May 1955, enclosing text of a message from the co-chairmen to the Governments of Vietnam (delivered on the 8th). See also Short, *Origins of the Vietnam War*, pp. 199-207; and Smith, *An International History*, i, pp. 62-4, 85-107.
- 12 See Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness*, pp. 7, 10, 78-9, 137, 293, for 1956-57; Smith, *An International History*, i, pp. 71-84, 166-71, 217; Short, *Origins of the Vietnam War*, pp. 206-222; and Thayer, *War By Other Means*, pp. 13-15, 18, 113, 143, *passim*.
- 13 For a summary of Laotian History, see Martin Stuart-Fox, *Laos: Politics, Economics and Society* (London, 1986), pp. 1-4; or his *A History of Laos* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 14 See CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230. COI, *The Security of SE Asia*, p. 1. Vietnam was more heavily Sinitised, a millennium of Chinese dominance having left it a 'chopstick' country with a Confucianised tradition and Mahayana (North East Asian) not Theravada (Southeast Asian) Buddhism.
- 15 Cab129/CP(56)121, 'Anglo-Soviet discussions on Laos', Selwyn Lloyd, 15 May 1956.
- 16 In Oct. 1954 the *Pathet Lao* recognised the RLG right to administer Phong Saly and Sam Neua. Prem11/1310, Eden to Indian High Commission, 9 May 1955; Prem11/881, Nehru-Eden correspondence, April-May 1955.
- 17 George Modelski (ed.), *SEATO: Six Studies* (Sydney, 1962), p. 8; and Buszynski, *SEATO*, p. 116.

- 18 See Prem11/1310, CP(56)121, 'Anglo-Soviet Discussions on Laos', Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, 15 May 1956, *passim*; and FO to Moscow no. 429, 8 April 1956.
- 19 See the following note.
- 20 For the quotation, see Prem11/1310, Secretary of State to Sir P. Dixon (Permanent British Representative at the United Nations, 1954-60), 29 Sept. 1955, *passim*.
- 21 In 1955-63 less than 1 per cent of aid was spent on agriculture, which provided the living of 96 per cent of the population. Many officials also made 'their harvest on the backs of the people', see Hugh Toye, *Laos: Buffer State or Battleground* (London, 1968), pp. 114-17, *passim*. See also the next note, especially Lyon, for the term 'vertical segregation'; and Smith, *An International History*, i, pp. 77 ff.
- 22 Toye, *Laos*, pp. xv, 116, *passim*. Peter Lyon, *War and Peace in South-East Asia* (London, 1969), pp. 84 ff. For the Pathet Lao, see Michael Brown and J. Zasloff, *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-85* (Stanford, 1986).
- 23 Lyon, *Peace and War*, p. 170. Short, *Origins of the Vietnam War*, pp. 227-42. Toye, *Laos*, p. 104ff.
- 24 Fifield, *Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, pp. 344-66. The quotation is from p. 363, where Fifield quotes from *The Times of Vietnam*, 8 Sept. 1956.
- 25 Toye, *Laos*, pp. 116. Smith, *An International History*, i, pp. 79-81, argues U.S. policy, 'without being powerful enough to prevent further communist intervention in Laotian politics, seemed to threaten both the Chinese and North Vietnamese interests'. American global policy prevented it from working for a neutralisation which China and the DRV supposedly might have accepted. While Kolko makes Vietnamese social dynamics the key, Smith emphasises changes in the communist international 'line' around 1958, see Kolko, *Vietnam*, pp. 34, 72-89, 111-12, 249-50.
- 26 David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War and Revolution since 1945* (London, 1991), is a good general work on Cambodia. There is a short summary of British diplomatic thinking on Cambodia in Inder Singh, *Limits of British Influence*, pp. 185-92.
- 27 Fifield, *Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, pp. 366-71.
- 28 Sihanouk abdicated in favour of his father in March 1955, to take a political lead. Chandler, *Tragedy of Cambodian History*, pp. 46-121. Sangkum was more a *rassemblement* than a structured party. Fifield, *Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, pp. 366-95. Around 85 per cent of Cambodia's 4.5 million people were of Khmer descent. For the quotation, see Prem11/1310, Phnomh Penh mission to FO, 14 Sept. 1955.
- 29 For Laos and Cambodia as more 'Indian' than Vietnam, and the need to get Ceylon, Burma and India involved, see Defe11/102, (3354B), MacDonald to Eden, 8 Feb. 1955. See also Inder Singh, *Limits of British Influence*, pp. 188-89, for the FO belief, in March 1955, that Laos was indefensible. For Eden encouraging India, see Prem11/1310, G. Millard to Eden, 20 June 1955. The quotation is from Prem11/1310, CRO to UK High Commissioner (India), 23 Dec. 1954, from a speech of Nehru's to the Lok Sabha of Sept. 1954.
- 30 See Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, p. 170. For MacDonald's comments, see Defe11/102, (3354B), MacDonald to Eden, 8 Feb. 1955, paragraph 26d.
- 31 See Prem11/1310: Littlejohn-Cook to FO, 12 Aug 1955; Tomlinson to FO, 21 July 1955; and Millard to Allen, 20 June 1955. Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: The Search for Security* (London, 1967), pp. 60-61, nevertheless argues that in late 1954 to early 1955 the Indian model of diplomacy was a formative influence on Sihanouk's foreign policy.
- 32 Smith, *An International History*, i, pp. 5-6, 9-13, *passim*, places a heavy stress on the influence of changes in an international communist 'line' or approaches.

- 33 For a summary which hardly acknowledges any role for Britain, see Thayer, *War by Other Means*, pp. 1–5, *passim*. Inder Singh's, *Limits of British Influence*, does not distinguish between Britain as dispensable facilitator rather than vital *formateur* of events. Consequently, it appears to assume minimal British influence normally, and yet a British 'tour de force' at Geneva in 1954. Contrast, pp. 8, 98–105, 157 and 235 to the title, pp. 191–92, 234–40 and the general tone of the book.
- 34 Prem11/1310, Eisenhower to the Churchill, 29 March 1955. For a summary, see Cab129/C(58)192, 'History of the Offshore Islands Question', note by the Minister of State for the FO, 2 Sept. 1955.
- 35 Defe11/102, (3354B), MacDonald to Eden, 8 Feb. 1955. For Macmillan, see Defe11/102, Minutes of a 10 Downing Street meeting of 3 Feb. 1955. Also Fo1091/2, 'Mallaig', March 1955, Day Two.
- 36 See G. H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (London, 1966), *passim*; and R. Longmire, *Soviet Relations with South East Asia: An Historical Survey* (London, 1989), pp. 29–40.
- 37 Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, pp. 143 ff. Coral Bell, *Survey of International Affairs, 1954*, pp. 60, 244–7, (quotation on p. 60). Anglo-American attitudes to Bandung are covered in N. Tarling, 'Ah-Ah: Britain and the Bandung Conference', *JSEAS*, 23, 1 (March 1992), 74–111. In June 1955 Nehru and Soviet Premier Bulganin agreed on 'non-interference in each other's internal affairs for any reasons of economic, political or ideological character'. Fifield, *Diplomacy of Southeast Asia*, p. 510.
- 38 Prem11/881 and Prem11/1310, Nehru to Eden, 29 April 1955. For the quotations, see COI, *The Security of SE Asia* (London, July 1956), pp. 3–4; and Longmire, *Soviet Relations with SE Asia*, pp. 49–53.
- 39 Cab129/CP(55)197, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations', Foreign and Commonwealth Secretaries, 13 Dec. 1955.
- 40 Eg., see Anuson Chivanno, *Brief Encounter: Sino-Thai Rapprochement after Bandung, 1955–1957* (Bangkok, 1991), pp. 23–31, *passim*.
- 41 CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230, Commonwealth Relations Office to Australia, 2 Dec. 1955; and the comments in quotation marks are from Scott to FO, 11 Dec. 1955. Despite General Loewen's (CIC, Far East Land Forces) desire for a NATO-type organisation, the JPS and COS continued to prefer a small international secretariat, see Defe11/102, Extract from COS(55)3, meeting of 15 March 1955.
- 42 CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230, Commissioner General, Sir Robert Scott, to FO, 11 Dec. 1955, *passim*.
- 43 The first meetings were in Bangkok (Feb. 1955), Karachi (March 1956) and Canberra (March 1957).
- 44 See Modelski, *SEATO*, pp. 17–84, for the development of SEATO organisation.
- 45 See Defe11/123, BDCC(FF)(55)162, meeting of 30 Nov. 1955, item 1, for the need to balance military and political approaches.
- 46 For Australian beliefs Britain would minimise SEATO contributions, see CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230, A. S. Watt (Australian Commissioner for SEA) to Casey, 2 Feb. 1956. For Eden's 1956 policy review, see Goldsworthy, *Conservative Government*, ii, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii, 61–68, 100–102, 193–96. For the Commissioner-Generals' views: Defe11/102, (3354B), MacDonald to PM, 8 Feb. 1955, Scott to PM, 18 Dec. 1955; Defe13/228, Scott to PM, 15 April 1956; and for extra service attaches being refused in 1960, Do35/8833, Selkirk to PM, 17 Feb. 1960. For Scott's views on Anglo-American defence of Hong Kong, Defe11/123, BDCC(56)171, meeting of 13 April 1956, item 5.
- 47 For emphasis on security assistance, Cab131/D(54)41, 'Defence of SEA', COS, 16 Dec. 1954.
- 48 Defe4/102, COS(57)98, meeting of Dec. 1957, minute 3, containing 'Brief for PM's Tour of the Far East', Annex, Appendix F, Dec. 1957.

- 49 Wo216/902, Harding (CIGS) to Loewen (CIC, Far East Land Forces), 20 Jan. 1955.
- 50 See Aldrich, *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War*, p. 34; Fo371/117205, DF1201/11, Singapore to FO, 29 June 1955; CRA: A816/501, 11/301/954; and Defe13/228, COS(54)259, 12 Aug. 1954, for Security Intelligence Far East. COI, *The Security of South East Asia* (London, 1956), p. 5, mentions assistance to Pakistan, Thailand and Australia. In 1961 Robert Thompson established a British Advisory Mission to Vietnam. Diem's partial execution of Malayan techniques caused criticism, see Bernard Fall, *Viet-Nam Witness*, pp. 197 ff. See also, R. Aldrich, 'The value of residual empire', in Richard Aldrich and M. Hopkins, *Intelligence, Defence and Diplomacy* (London, 1994).
- 51 CRA: A816/52, 37/301/408, 'SEATO Summaries 1957', numbers 1–39. CRA: A816/52, 11/301/1088, (268), 'Terms of Reference for Security Experts' meeting, Feb. 1955, *passim*. CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230, 'SEATO', Alan Watt (Commissioner for Southeast Asia) to Casey, 2 Feb. 1956, 'It is in the field of subversion that the least satisfactory results have been achieved ...'
- 52 Defe11/187, (568), 'Report on Canberra meeting' of SEATO Council, Boyle (COAS), 1 April 1957.
- 53 Buszynski, *SEATO*, p. 50. Modelski, *SEATO*, pp. 103, 253–288. CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230, March 1958 report on SEATO. For the quotation, Wo216/902, Harding (CIGS), 20 Dec. 1954.
- 54 Richard Emery, 'Britain and SEATO', (Cardiff, M.Sc. Economics thesis, 1971), pp. 75–76.
- 55 For the quotation, see CRA: A1838/235, 383/5/3 Part 2, meeting between A. Gilchrist (Counsellor in UK Commissioner-General's Office for SEA) and Sir Arthur Tange (Secretary, Australian DEA), 30 Nov. 1955. Gilchrist's informant was a 'CIA representative'. For fears of escalation and the UK taking 'the first load' in global war, CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230, 'SEATO', Alan Watt to Casey, 2 Feb. 1956. For nuclear power and economics, see also Navias, *Nuclear Weapons*, pp. 46–47, *passim*.
- 56 Defe11/123, BDCC(FE)(55)161, meeting of 16 Nov. 1955, item on SEATO Staff Planning.
- 57 Cab129/C(54)181, Selwyn Lloyd, 31 May 1954. Navias, Navias, *Nuclear Weapons and British Strategic Planning*, pp. 37, deal with alliances. Like Clark and Wheeler, *British Origins of Nuclear Strategy*, he stresses the economic rationale of avoiding large force contributions. For the Baghdad Pact, see Defe13/148–150; and Ayesha Jalal, 'Towards the Baghdad Pact', *JHR*, 11, 3 (1989), 409–33.
- 58 CRA: A816/42, 11/301/1039, containing PMM(D)(56)1, meeting of 3 July 1956. This was attended by Eden, Menzies, Mohamad Ali and other Commonwealth representatives, but notably not by India.
- 59 Defe7/668, (16), COS(57)264, 'Provision of a Nuclear Capability in the Far East', Note by COAS, Sir Dermot Boyle, 5 Dec. 1957. Defe13/228, Sir William Dickson (COAS and Chairman of the COS), note dated 27 Feb. 1956.
- 60 Defe7/1111, (5), 'The Size of the V-Bomber Force', probably a brief for the Minister of Defence, c. Feb.–March 1955. Targets included airfields, 'arteries of Russian life' and submarine pens. Tactical support in Europe and the Middle East provided over 100 targets. U.S. nuclear bombing in the FE was assumed in global and limited war, see Air20/10314, Brief for VCAS, 17 Aug. 1956.
- 61 See Air20/10314, Air Staff brief for COS meeting of 24 Feb. 1956; and Air20/9881, Brief for VCAS, 13 Aug. 1956. See also CRA: A816/52, 11/301/1088, Report by Casey, Minister for External Affairs, for Cabinet on the SEATO Council of 6–8 March 1956, around March 1956.
- 62 See Defe13/228: Minute by Home for PM, copied to the Foreign Secretary and Minister of Defence, 25 Feb. 1956; and minute by Dickson for the Minister of Defence, 27 Feb. 1956. See also Air20/10314, Brief for COAS for CM(56)17, 28 Feb. 1956, on CM(56)57, 'SEATO: Nuclear Weapons', by Home.

- 63 See Prem11/881 for Bandung. For the quotation, Defe13/228, Home memo. for PM, 25 Feb. 1956.
- 64 The Cabinet minutes, if open, would be in Cab128. For Scott's comments, see Defe11/123, BDCC(FE)(55)177, meeting of 8 May 1956.
- 65 CRA: A816/52, 37/301/408, 'SEATO Summaries for 1957', especially 6, 12, and supplement to 10, reports from March to June 1956. See also CRA: A5954/27, 1437/1, Sir Philip McBride (Minister for Defence) to Washington for the PM, 25 July 1956; and CRA: A816/52, 11/301/1088, report for the Cabinet on the SEATO Council of 6–8 March 1956, Casey, around March 1956.
- 66 CRA: A816/52, 37/30/408, SEATO summary 12, 13 June 1956. Casey, *Australian Foreign Minister*, pp. 237–38, diary entry for 8 March 1956.
- 67 Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, pp. 223–24. See also p. 230 for Diem's scepticism about the value of nuclear weapons rather than additional troops. For SEATO nuclear policy, see the following note.
- 68 See CRA: A5954/27, 1437/1, (183), minute of Australian Defence Committee of 18 June 1956; Air20/9881, report on the June 1956 SEATO Staff Planners' Conference, 28 June 1956; and CRA: A816/42, 11/301/1039, PMM(56)1, meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, 3 July 1956.
- 69 For the quoted term, see Air20/9881, report on June 1956 SEATO Staff Planners' Conference.
- 70 Defe11/188, (568), 'Report by the COAS [Sir Dermot Boyle] on the SEATO Meetings – Canberra 1957', annex 5 to COS(57)26, meeting of 1 April 1957.
- 71 Defe7/688, (11), minute for Mr Richard Way (Deputy Under-Secretary of State at the War Office, 1955–57) by V. H. Cole, 22 Nov. 1956, discussing DC(56)18. The latter was a COS review of defence requirements in Singapore for the Defence Committee. It was discussed at DC(56)6, minute 4. Both documents are closed, but for a summary of DC(56)18, see Cab129/CP(56)85, 23 March 1956.
- 72 Defe7/688, (4), G. Whittuck (Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Air Ministry, 1955–63) to Serpell (Treasury), 6 Nov. 1957. Cab131/17, DC(56)24, 'Reduction of the Garrison in Malaya', memo. by Commonwealth Secretary, Home, 1 Oct. 1956; and DC(56)7, meeting of 2 Oct. 1956, minute 2.
- 73 Defe7/688, (4), Whittuck to Serpell, 6 Nov. 1957. From an 8,000 feet runway Valiant/Vulcan/Victor radii of action were 1,000/1,200/1,350 nautical miles respectively. Targets were 1100–1500 nautical miles from Singapore (less 200 from Butterworth).
- 74 See Cab131/19, D(58)3, 'Deployment of V-Bombers in the FE', COS., 19 Feb. 1958; considered at D(58)3, 20 Feb. 1958. Defe7/668, (4), costed upgrading airfields to V-bomber level at £0.4–0.7 million. See also Defe7/688, (68/1); and for aircraft availability, V. Flintham, *Air Wars and Aircraft* (London, 1989), pp. 335–37; and Lee, *Eastward*, pp. 184–85. The first two Valiants visited Tengah in Oct. 1957, followed by regular detachments. In Sept. 1959 (Defe7/688, (68/1) nuclear weapons were expected by 1960, storage facilities at Tengah by 1962. The Carrier HMS Victorious was due in the FE, with nuclear capable NA-39s (Buccaneers) in 1960.
- 75 In 1958 the JIC still suggested China's acquisition of nuclear weapons in 5–10 years (actually 1964) would necessitate permanent deployment of 1 V-bomber squadron in the FE, see Air20/10113.
- 76 For Scott's comments, see CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230, Commissioner-General to FO, 11 Dec 1955. Britain now felt American analyses of Thailand too bleak, though it could still slide 'down the hill', see Wo216/902, (48A), Templer (CIGS) to General Loewen (CIC, Far East Land Forces, 1953–56), 17 Oct. 1955. For Hermes, see Defe4/102, COS(57)95, meeting of 11 Dec. 1957, minute 1. For Thai politics, see Co1030/167, Dec. 1956 Eden Hall meeting; and Anuson Chinvanho, *Brief Encounter*. For Australia, see, David Lee, 'Australia and Allied Strategy in the Far East', 528.
- 77 See Air8/2280, Mountbatten to Minister of Defence, 24 Jan. 1961, for 1960 UK attempts to moderate SEATO Plan 6, for the defence of Protocol States against N.

- Vietnam. This stated that, 'SEATO will be prepared to use nuclear weapons on suitable enemy targets if the situation demands'. Britain wanted the wording clarified, to subdue any possible implication nuclear attack might be automatic.
- 78 CRA: A1838/242, 410/4/4/1 Part 1 and 2. See also Do35/5938, for differences between Britain, US and Australia. Britain tried to appear supportive, while wanting to ensure no serious intervention took place. For instance, it secured from Malaya agreement that forces based there could be sent to support SEATO action in Laos, and in Nov. 1959 Malaya agreed such forces could return to Malaya after a decent interval. This was probably designed to allow Britain to support less serious SEATO action, and to meet Australian needs to be able to use its Malayan-based forces to support America. Australian aircraft from the Commonwealth Reserve flew to Thailand during the Laotian crisis of Spring 1962.
- 79 See Inder Singh, *Limits of British Influence*, p. 189, for a similar conclusion; and Modelski, *SEATO*, pp. 293-4, for the Rusk-Thanas agreement. In this March 1962 agreement the US recognised that SEATO allies interests were too diverse to ensure the unanimity necessary for action, and so assured Thailand that it regarded its SEATO commitments as unilaterally binding.
- 80 For the quotation, see Defe11/188, (568), 'Report by the COAS [Sir Dermot Boyle] on the SEATO Meetings - Canberra 1957', annex 5 to COS(57)26, meeting of 1 April 1957.
- 81 There is little here to controvert Inder Singh's conclusion, in *Limits of British Influence*, pp. 235-40, that Britain was influential only when there was agreement with America on means as well as interests.
- 82 For the quotations, see CRA: A1209/23, 57/4230, London to DEA, 29 July 1957. See also, Wo216/902, Scott to Eden, 18 Dec. 1956.
- 83 For 1958 FO debate on the degree of communist advance in Indonesia, see Fo371/135857. For 1957, Fo371/129336. For the political threat (and Britain's lack of scope for countering it), see Defe11/85, (3228), Confidential Annex to COS(54)109, meeting of 20 Oct. 1954; and Defe11/102, (3354B), 'Situation in South East Asia', MacDonald to Eden, 8 Feb. 1954, Section III, (c). Though communist successes would strengthen Malayan tendencies to neutralism, a military threat was seen as improbable, Defe4/102, COS(57)98, meeting of 31 Dec. 1957, annex to minute 2.
- 84 West New Guinea was the only part of the Netherlands East Indies the Dutch retained after 1949. Pemberton, *All the Way*, pp. 70-106; Drummond, 'Britain's Involvement in Indonesia', pp. 240-44.
- 85 Toye, *Laos*, pp. 170-97; Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, 118-34.

Merdeka and Bases (1954–57)

Chapter four showed how decolonisation accelerated after 1955, as the Alliance showed it could manage cross-communal political cooperation. In January 1956, anxious to avoid 'radicals' or communists exploiting anti-imperialist feeling, Britain agreed Malaya should become independent on 31 August 1957. Singapore achieved internal self-government less than two years later, in June 1959.

Chapter four also showed how British strategy after 1945 matched military plans to long-term expectations of decolonisation. The aim was to minimise white troops, making local forces and a Gurkha division, backed by mobile British power, the mainstay of eastern defence. Cross-communal Malayan security forces were to become one of the foundations for future independence. Given the supposed necessity of federating Malaya and Singapore, and ultimately Borneo too, defensive responsibilities could be divided. Malaya was to build an army, Singapore a navy, and an air-force was to be constructed on a joint basis. Australian and New Zealand forces would ease the way towards reducing British burdens while maintaining regional stability. The Emergency postponed and complicated the achievement of these aims, but did not change them.

Elections in 1955, however, led to pressure for accelerated and separate constitutional advance. Tunku Abdul Rahman's Alliance government in Malaya (July 1955) and David Marshall's Labour Front led coalition in Singapore (April 1955) demanded concessions. The ebbing of the Emergency increased Alliance confidence, and the Alliance's staunch anti-communism made it easier for Britain to accommodate them.

In Singapore Britain also needed to buttress moderate politicians against being politically outflanked, as the MCP shifted emphasis from the jungle war to the 'united front' and PAP. There was, however, no equivalent to the Alliance. With Marshall's coalition government precarious, and the PAP looking the strongest challenger, there was initially no successor elite to which Britain could confidently hand control of internal security. Here defence requirements argued both for maintaining local cooperation by making concessions, and for retaining safeguards against the danger of rising communist influence. The fear that an independent Singapore might fall into the hands of communists at first

confirmed the COS's determination that it could achieve full independence only through union with Malaya.¹ Tensions increased between the policy of encouraging merger between Malaya and Singapore and accepting their separate development, between the need to accommodate local nationalism, and yet the desire to keep watch and ward as communism permeated Singapore.

The Singapore dilemma was exacerbated because several other changes suggested the time might be ripe for a radical review of British forces and bases in Southeast Asia. Not only was the Alliance in a strong position to demand concessions, but SEATO was now providing a shield to the north of Malaya, and Malayan communists posed a manageable and diminishing threat.

This chapter deals with the implications of this intensifying pressure for decolonisation for British defence interests in Malaya and Singapore. Which defence requirements did Britain insist on protecting as decolonisation accelerated? The ability to control internal security? The defence of imperial territories? Or Commonwealth and regional 'Great Power' needs, such as participation in SEATO and the 'strategic' role of the newly formed, and Malayan-based, 'Commonwealth Strategic Reserve'?

MALAYA

The first general elections to the Malayan central Legislative Council took place on 27 July 1955. Prior to these, a paper by Lennox-Boyd (Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs, 1954-59) warned that elections would be followed by mounting pressure for political advance. All the main parties sought the establishment of a Constitutional Commission, to draw up a constitution for post-independence Malaya. Yet Malaya would 'for some time to come be quite unable to defend itself against external aggression, to maintain internal security or even to balance its budget'. An agreement would be required to preserve Britain's responsibility for external defence 'for many years to come'.

Lennox-Boyd proposed negotiations should be quickly entered into. The object would be to keep the initiative, by incorporating safeguards for financial and military needs into an agreement for further advance towards self-government. The Cabinet endorsed Lennox-Boyd's paper, though stressing the need to safeguard Britain's commercial and Sterling Area interests and to keep Australia and SEATO allies informed. The Alliance then secured nearly 80 per cent of the vote and 51 out of 52 elected seats in the July Federal elections. In August, Lennox-Boyd duly agreed to invite Malayan representatives to a Round Table conference on constitutional advance in early 1956, to be held in London.

By 17 August, when Lennox-Boyd met the BDCC, the Far Eastern Commander-in-Chiefs had already started on a paper covering Britain's defence requirements. At the BDCC meeting there was agreement Britain should use the propitious climate generated by political advance to seek agreement on the broad outlines of a defence agreement.² The questions now were: at what speed would decolonisation progress; what requirements would London and the BDCC

decide upon between September and the Conference expected in early 1956; and how far could these could be secured?

The Tunku decided to demand full control of internal security in London, and implied in October that he would resign if disappointed.³ The Tunku's meeting with Chin Peng at Baling on 28 and 29 December 1955 only redoubled his determination on this point. The MCP had first made a 'peace offer' and asked for talks in May to June, but Malaya's then British-dominated government had rejected this. The momentum towards the Baling meetings really developed from October. On 8th October the Tunku fulfilled his election promise to offer a full amnesty for insurgents who surrendered. The MCP then asked for talks, and the Tunku decided he would have to meet Chin Peng. This was discussed up to Cabinet level in London. Britain worried that, in his desperation to clear the road to independence, the Tunku might make dangerous concessions. British officials and ministers wanted to restrict the Tunku to clarifying the amnesty's terms to Chin Peng. They only reluctantly accepted High Commissioner McGillivray's argument that this would be a disaster. The Tunku would not accept and Britain would be blamed for stopping the meeting, prolonging the Emergency, and delaying independence.⁴

Ending the Emergency, and offering a new amnesty, had been a vital part of the Alliance's election platform, and one reason for the enthusiasm which swept it to victory. This policy had touched a cord in a people tired of endless curfews and restrictions. If frustrated the Alliance might resort to a boycott of elected bodies, on the model of June 1954, when hundreds of Alliance representatives had been withdrawn in a dispute about the future make-up of the Legislative Council.⁵

The Tunku now tried to avoid appearing a British stooge, but also to avoid fuelling British fears. He ruled out recognising the MCP as early as October. Britain still feared, however, that were the Tunku to allow MCP members to pass quickly back into society, it might prove impossible to control subversion. As a minimum, Britain wanted the retention of current Emergency powers, and the right to detain and screen communists following any ceasefire. Having brought insurgency to a low ebb, Britain felt less confident of its ability to police peace than of its capacity to defeat insurgency.⁶

The danger of the Tunku making unwelcome concessions seemed increased by past British statements. In order to reassure Malaysians that Britain would not do a Palestine – that is, scuttle – they had been told on several occasions that Britain would solve security problems before going. In Attlee's words (of April 1949), Britain 'had no intention of jeopardising the security, well-being and liberty of these peoples ... by premature withdrawal'. The Tunku might easily conclude that he had to end the Emergency in order to secure independence.⁷

In order to forestall this, the High Commissioner was told on 1 November 1955 that he could reassure the Tunku. He was to say the Emergency's continuation at current levels would not prevent further advance to self-government, providing Baling saw no concessions to the communists which might undermine internal security. At the end of November the High

Commissioner was told he could publicly state that the Emergency would not stand in the way of political advance.⁸

All that was needed now was for the Tunku and David Marshall to play their part at Baling. At the Baling meetings, on 28th to 29th December, Chin Peng's strategy was twofold: to allow his followers to return to Malayan life and politics, even if under a new organisation; and to help the Tunku gain independence, and by extension get rid of Britain. He promised to lay down arms if substantive independence and control over internal security and 'national defence' (that is, all armed forces in the country) was secured. By contrast, the Tunku gave nothing. He made it clear the Alliance would not recognise the MCP, and that this was not something foisted on it by Britain. He told Chin Peng communism was alien to Malaya, and to Malays with their Islamic faith. He argued the MCP aimed to make Malaya the colony of 'a foreign ideology', that Chin Peng's supporters would have to give up communist ways, and stood firm on a period of investigation before insurgents could re-enter society. In other words, he offered little more than a genuine amnesty for past crimes for those who handed over their weapons. He played to his own supporters by making the effort to talk, and by talking firmly he pleased his Britain audience. Chin Peng turned down an offer which to him amounted to 'surrender' and returned to the jungle.⁹

The British were impressed, and Chin Peng's promise on laying down arms gave the Tunku an unanswerable case for an early transfer of control over internal security. On 18 January 1956, the Tunku wrote to tell Lennox-Boyd he wanted immediate control over local forces, and over the direction of the Emergency through a War Council, but that he would accept continued British operational control of Commonwealth units.

He stressed that an independent government could deal with communism better than a colonial administration, and that the Federation's, 'vital position ... in the anti-communist struggle', would justify it receiving post-independence aid. His implicit message was that without British money social spending would drop, undermining the battle for 'hearts and minds'. Far from Britain needing to force a defence treaty on the Tunku, the Alliance felt it needed to secure formal British commitments to its defence.¹⁰

The overlapping of interests suggested defence cooperation could continue into independence, but initially the military in Southeast Asia were still inclined to slow progress down, or else to secure detailed defence safeguards. In March 1955, General Loewen (Commander-in-Chief, Far Eastern Land Forces) believed Malaya's heterogeneity, insurgency and proximity to external threats from both the north and Indonesia required the prolonged pre-*Merdeka* development of local forces. Menzies likewise counselled caution. On learning that independence was intended for 1959, he wrote to Eden that, 'We would think it most undesirable to discuss with the Malayan leaders even a possible time for the completion of full ... independence before efforts have been made to conclude an effective defence agreement ...'. They must first, he believed, be 'educated' to accept the Malayan bases' vital strategic reserve and SEATO roles.¹¹

As late as November 1955, Loewen told a BDCC meeting that it was 'impossible for Malaya to be granted self government' until the Emergency ended or at least until it had sufficient forces to guarantee internal security. He wanted to keep the strategic reserve in Malaya and to use its airfields in an unfettered, strategic role. It 'appeared to him that the Colonial Office policy of granting self-government and independence to Malaya and Singapore at the earliest possible date might undermine this strategic policy'. The Far Eastern Commanders-in-Chiefs' desire for detailed safeguards now sat uneasily beside the High Commissioner, Donald MacGillivray's, desire to grant early independence and use the resultant goodwill to secure detailed defence needs.

MacGillivray warned that if independence was not agreed at the London talks of early 1956 local Ministers might want to negotiate an end to the Emergency with the communists.¹² By contrast, early *Merdeka* might secure an end to the current amnesty for those who surrendered and a big drive against insurgency. Scott, summing up the BDCC meeting of November 1955, encouraged the services to list minimum needs. If these could not be secured, 'it might be necessary to consider how to keep our essential requirements even if this made it necessary to reconsider the policy of constitutional evolution'.¹³

Britain need not have worried. At Baling the Tunku duly confirmed his reliability, in British eyes, by his stark refusal of MCP demands. With MacGillivray and Lennox-Boyd now determined to press on, internal security was unlikely to become a stumbling block. In early January 1956, Lennox-Boyd warned ministers that despite communal differences, 'the Malays and the Chinese are united in a vehement desire for early self-government'. Requiring the acquiescence of the people in order to govern, Britain must grant early self-government and tap the resultant goodwill. Lennox-Boyd saw no advantage in delaying the advance of a cooperative local party, and no answer to the argument that a determined, independent government would be better able to combat communism.

Ideally, British control of operations in the Emergency would be retained until it ended, and of the police until full self-government. It was hoped that the interim period before full independence might stretch to 1959. Lennox-Boyd and MacGillivray, however, saw everything to be gained in accepting advance and cultivating a working relationship. The Cabinet gave Lennox-Boyd authority to cede full administrative powers over internal security on 17th January, the day before the London Constitutional conference began.¹⁴

The London Conference ran from 18 January to 6 February 1956 and quickly agreed that 31 August 1957 should be the target date for *Merdeka*. The Malaysans willingly offered safeguards for expatriate staff, the civil service and foreign capital.¹⁵ Malayan ministers, fully cognisant of their country's reliance on rubber and tin exports and on foreign investment, sought a continuing Sterling Area relationship. At the conference Britain agreed to consider further aid towards the Emergency, to continue to finance the capital costs of the Federation Armed Forces' expansion, and to assist the Federation in raising loans in London.

One of the characteristics of the detailed defence negotiations subsequently held in Malaya and London, between April 1956 and January 1957, was to be the

Malayan attempt to maximise British promises of economic and military aid. In January 1957 Britain agreed to spend £6.5 million on expanding the Federation Armed forces, later increased to £14 million, as well as giving equipment and honouring the unspent balance of Colonial Development and Welfare loans, to the tune of £4.4 million.¹⁶

The 1956 Conference also agreed Britain was to retain full control of external defence and external affairs in the interim period before independence, ceding these at *Merdeka*. The interim period was to commence immediately, and would last until a Constitutional Commission had successfully reported, which Britain hoped might delay independence beyond August 1957.¹⁷ The overall direction of internal security was to pass under Malayan control immediately. The seconded British officer who commanded local forces was to become responsible to a Federation Armed Forces Council, and to the elected Minister for Internal Security and Defence. This local minister would also chair a new Malayan-controlled 'Emergency Operations Council' (EOC) which would replace the Director of Operations Council in exercising general and political direction of the Emergency. Operational control would remain with the Director of Operations (DOO), a British officer responsible to the United Kingdom rather than Malaya, who would be a member of the EOC.¹⁸

The London agreements also set the scene for post-independence arrangements on internal security. In September 1957 an agreement was formalised that for Emergency purposes Commonwealth forces would remain under the general direction of the DOO, who was now made responsible to the independent Malayan government. The command of Commonwealth units, however, remained the responsibility of national commanders, who retained rights to appeal to their national authorities against orders they considered inexpedient on operational or political grounds. The Commanders of British Commonwealth land, air and, where appropriate, sea forces would join the DOO on the EOC. It was also understood that both the Officer Commanding Federation Armed Forces and the DOO would for the moment continue to be seconded from the British Army. Commonwealth forces were not to be employed on operations of a policing or law and order nature unless these were integral to their Emergency tasks. The arrangements thus satisfied Malayan requirements for sovereignty while retaining British control over the operational use of their own forces.¹⁹

The overlapping of British and Malayan interests was also reflected in the 'Anglo-Malayan Mutual Defence Agreement' signed in October 1957, which covered external defence. Britain formally agreed to provide Malaya with 'such assistance as the latter may require for the external defence of their territory' (Article I), and to help in the training and development of Malayan forces (Article II).²⁰ Both sides concurred in the belief that, after independence, imperial troops should be concentrated on a few areas, preferably away from population centres, and kept out of normal policing operations as far as possible.²¹ Shared interests in defeating communism and fostering British-driven economic development had combined with mutual trust to produce what John Darwin has termed 'genial complicity' in decolonisation. This did not, however,

prevent Malayan Ministers from fighting their corner on finance, nor when Britain's defence demands seemed to threaten their political interests and the sovereignty of their new state.²²

Malaya – External Defence Negotiations

The main difficulty in defence negotiations turned out to be that of reconciling Britain's external defence requirements with local sovereignty. Though Malayan ministers needed Commonwealth forces to lighten the cost of Emergency operations and to provide external defence, they balked at becoming a British 'aircraft-carrier' in the Eastern seas.

Partly at the BDCC's prompting, an interdepartmental committee of officials in London began examining British defence requirements as early as 19 October 1955. The BDCC insisted that strategic as well as local defence requirements must be protected. Malaya provided air bases closer than Singapore to potential targets in the north. The Australians also needed to present their infantry battalion in the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve as available to serve alongside American troops in SEATO and in regional 'fire brigade' operations. As early as October 1955 Casey discovered that the Tunku wanted as little as possible said publicly on this matter. Australia was soon urging Britain that on no account should full discretion over the use of the reserve and Malayan bases be diluted.²³

The COS and the London inter-departmental committee, however, resisted the BDCC calls for an agreement covering everything from labour to radio frequencies. The COS and London committee confirmed the Colonial Office view, that the London Conference should endorse only the general principles of a defence agreement to accompany independence. Britain could then use Malayan goodwill to negotiate the details. The important point was to secure agreement on principles. Principles which would establish Britain's post-independence right to use Malayan-based forces and facilities for international purposes as well as to meet local needs.²⁴

The London Constitutional Conference of January to February 1956 agreed that, in the interim period before independence, Malayan ministers would be represented on a purely consultative External Defence Committee. This would be chaired by the High Commissioner. Independence itself was to be accompanied by a treaty to allow Britain 'to retain in the Federation the forces [and facilities] which they consider necessary for the defence of the territory and for the fulfilment of their Commonwealth and international objectives'. The Commonwealth Strategic Reserve was explicitly mentioned as one of these forces, and Britain was enjoined to inform and offer opportunity for comment before significantly altering the size or composition of its forces in Malaya. The BDCC still hoped that such a defence agreement would preserve British discretion over the use of Malayan-based forces for local, imperial and strategic purposes. The role of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in support of SEATO, and of *Butterworth* (near Penang) as a fighter and nuclear-bomber base, were prominent among their concerns.²⁵

With the Bandung Conference in the background, however, the Tunku was unlikely to accept the public identification of Malaya with SEATO or nuclear strategies. At Bandung (April 1955), Sukarno talked of Afro-Asian states organising 'the moral violence of nations' to ensure the triumph of nationalism over imperialism, and of neutralism over armed blocs. In June 1956 the Tunku announced that Malaya would follow the spirit of Bandung.²⁶

For UMNO ministers, visibly untrammelled Malayan sovereignty was crucial. If Commonwealth troops could be presented as an army of occupation it might offend nationalist pride and prolong the Emergency. Nuclear power, SEATO, a defence agreement and the 'strategic' role of Commonwealth forces provided potential rallying points for those with neutralist or anti-imperialist sentiments. Given that the defence agreement was between equals 'in status but not in stature', Alliance leaders knew they must avoid giving the impression of exchanging political for military dependency.²⁷

In February 1956 Sir Robert Scott and MacGillivray pushed for the immediate establishment of an Anglo-Malayan working party to discuss the details of a defence agreement, in order to take advantage of the positive atmosphere created by the London Conference. The first meeting of the Anglo-Malayan Working Party on defence duly took place in Kuala Lumpur, on 16 April 1956. These meetings were chaired by Scott on the British side, with the Tunku leading the Malayan delegation. Yet agreement did not turn out to be easy as had been hoped. Meetings dragged on until 20 March 1957, correspondence until 23 August.²⁸

The Tunku made it clear he wanted to restrict British freedom to use aircraft against China, fearing retaliatory bombing of Kuala Lumpur. He also sought to avoid anything which might commit Malaya to assist Britain outside Southeast Asia, or against fellow Malays in Indonesia. Initial British drafts, which left Britain full discretion over the use of Malayan bases, and obliged the parties to assist each other in the event of an attack on Malaya or British territories, proved unacceptable to the Malayan side.²⁹

By June 1956 the Tunku was also saying publicly that British troops stationed in Malaya could not be used for SEATO purposes, and that Malaya would not join 'a certain bloc'. Privately, the Tunku reportedly reassured British negotiators that, 'to side with China would bring the extermination of the Malay race and, therefore, the Malays would always choose the United Kingdom'.³⁰ Nevertheless, Malayan desires to restrict British discretion to use aircraft against China raised the possibility Britain might be denied the use of *Butterworth* and, if the treaty was later extended to Singapore, perhaps even *Tengah* airfield, as medium bomber bases.

Article III of the eventual Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement provided for the preservation of facilities, 'for the fulfilment of Commonwealth and international obligations', but Articles VI to VIII made it clear that, except in the event of an actual attack on Malaya or on British territories in the Far East (VII), Britain was required to secure agreement before using Malayan bases (VI and VIII).³¹ In the event of threats to the peace or hostilities outside of Malaya and British territories, but still in the Far East, Britain was required to obtain

'prior agreement' before using Malayan bases. In this respect the treaty was not ambiguous. Malaya accepted British freedom of action if Britain's Far Eastern territories (including Hong Kong) or Malaya were attacked as the 'price' of maximising British aid. Britain accepted that Malayan consent would be required before bases could be used in direct support of SEATO.³²

Britain, however, retained the unhindered right to withdraw forces (Article VIII) and believed that this would allow them to be channelled through Singapore for SEATO tasks. When a deterioration in Laos raised this possibility in 1959-60, Malayan ministers agreed to informal 'quarantine' procedures. Forces routed through Singapore would be allowed to re-enter Malaya after a decent interval. The Malayan concern was to avoid a SEATO link being made public, and to retain ultimate control. Privately, however, they tolerated and even facilitated the connection to SEATO, through allowing Singapore to be used as a discreet 'back-door'. In this sense the ambiguity central to the agreement arose from its public presentation, not from the text itself. Malaya emphasised there was no direct SEATO link, Australia that forces in Malaya could be used in a SEATO role. Both versions were the truth, but not the whole truth.³³

Britain also believed that, in the event of an attack on Malaya or on British Far Eastern territories, the unfettered right of Article VII, 'to take such action as each considers necessary', would allow it to launch a nuclear response from Malaya. Article IX did require Britain to consult Malaya before making major changes in the character or deployment of forces, but the context of its discussion suggests this was originally aimed only at controlling the size and possibly racial composition of forces. As Chin Kin Wah notes, however, the Federation was later quick to claim that Article IX did give them a veto over the introduction of nuclear weapons.³⁴

The question British officials then asked was, did the spirit of the agreement call for Malayan agreement over the introduction of nuclear bombs? The nuclear issue was to clarify the parameters of the defence agreement before it was even signed.

Malaya - Bases and Nuclear Strategies

Duncan Sandys (Minister of Defence, 1957-59), in Canberra on 20 August 1957, told the Australian press that force reductions in Malaya would be compensated for by making available nuclear weapons. His statement that Malayan-stationed Canberra bombers were being made nuclear-capable was interpreted in Malaya as meaning nuclear weapons were to be sent there. His aim had almost certainly been to reassure Australia that Britain would maintain substantial forces in the Far East despite the radical April 1957 Defence White Paper. Coming just before *Merdeka* (31 August), this was insensitive in the extreme. Colonial Office hopes that Britain could avoid discussing the issue until after the Defence Agreement was signed were dashed. On 21 August *The Straits Times* carried the headline 'A Bombers for Malaya'. Dato Abdul Razak (Malayan Minister of Defence-designate) stated on the same day that Malayan

consent would be required for atomic bases, and that there was 'no intention of making Malaya an atomic base for anybody'.³⁵

On 23 August Sandys retreated to saying no decisions had been taken on what weapons would be available, or where they would be deployed, but the damage was done. The *Utusan Melayu* (a popular, vernacular Malay-language daily) declared 'the people of this country' were shocked at the 'news' that aircraft in Malaya would be 'armed with atomic and hydrogen bombs'.³⁶

On 24 August the Tunku regretfully informed MacGillivray that he could not, as expected, initial the Malayan Defence Agreement on 27 August, and then sign it within forty-eight hours of independence. His explanation was that he had overlooked a promise to the UMNO General Assembly that the Legislative Council should be allowed to debate the agreement before it was signed. The Treaty now could not be signed until October.

The Colonial Office were inclined to believe the Tunku really had been caught out by an absent-minded promise. On 26 August Templer thought otherwise. He suggested that: 'The spanner in the works has been inserted by Razak, who is a pretty suspicious character at any time, and he was I imagine brought to the point by the Minister of Defence's [Canberra] statement ... The Tunku ... is having difficulty with his UMNO people, particularly on the lower level'.³⁷ Despite the Tunku's assurances that he remained firmly committed to the Treaty, the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office now believed the Tunku should be given reassurances over nuclear weapons.

They worried that otherwise the passage of the Defence Agreement through the Legislative Council might be complicated, or the Tunku driven to state nuclear weapons could never under any circumstances be stored in, or used from, Malaya. On 23 August the Colonial Office informed the present and designate High Commissioners of Malaya (Sir Donald MacGillivray and Geoffroy Tory respectively) that they might reassure the Tunku that Britain endorsed Malayan Ministers' public statements. These had been to the effect that Malayan consent was necessary for the introduction or use of nuclear weapons. The Colonial Office saw this as no more than admitting, 'the political consequences implicit in the Federation's becoming a sovereign independent state'. Britain had demanded similar assurances from the United States and 'we could not expect the Malaysians to be content with less'.³⁸

Templer's view was that, 'The snag is of course that if there is any alteration to the Defence Agreement because of this latest flap, we might have our liberty of action [destroyed] in the event of an attack on any of our British Far Eastern possessions - Hong Kong being the most likely. In such a case we would want to do exactly what we thought fit including [possibly] the despatch of bombers carrying nuclear weapons from *Butterworth*'. Templer feared that 'interested parties' in London, were exaggerating the affair, and that MacGillivray was 'release happy'. *Merdeka* had to proceed as planned, but if it went through without a defence agreement, 'we shall look a lot of suckers'.³⁹

This debate delayed a final decision on Britain's position. On 27 August Tory and Macgillivray argued the spirit of the agreement required informing Malayan

Ministers before introducing nuclear weapons, which in practice amounted to consultation. They compromised by suggesting that, when reassuring Malayan ministers, they should seek to avoid becoming tied to the Federation Government's consent. This was despite a warning by the Tunku to Tory in their first meeting (on 26 August) that he feared public feeling might be whipped up.⁴⁰

By contrast the BDCC and Scott, supported by the Minister of Defence, came out against reassurances. For them it was vital to retain maximum discretion. Then on 28 August the Tunku publicly stated that any SEATO nuclear bombs should go elsewhere, adding that, 'The bases that will be allowed in this country ... are purely for the purpose of this mutual pact and for the use of the United Kingdom under her Commonwealth obligations'.⁴¹

There seemed to be a danger that any private sympathies some Malayan ministers had towards SEATO would be swamped by this controversy. In July 1957 an Anglo-Australian meeting had been told that the Tunku privately agreed it would be in the Federation's interest to become a member of SEATO, and that there was every indication he intended to work towards this after independence.⁴² As late as 7 August 1957, the Tunku reportedly maintained 'flatly' to the Australian Commissioner that he was not hostile to SEATO, but that he would, 'take no initiative in joining it unless the Malayan people showed clearly that they wished it so'. Malaya, he said, must put its own house in order first.⁴³

The Australian Department of External Affairs, however, soon reported that Sandys's statements were alienating Malayan ministers from SEATO. The Tunku, Abdul Razak and Inche Khir Johari (Minister of Education-designate) all started taking a stronger anti-SEATO line in private conversations. Agriculture Minister Inche Abdul Aziz bin Ishak, meanwhile, was already unhappy about foreign bases remaining in Malaya.⁴⁴

Final authorisation for Tory to approach Malayan ministers came on 5 September, after Scott had tried the last-minute ploy of arguing that promises for Malaya might snowball, so depriving Britain of flexibility in the medium bomber base at Tengah in Singapore as well as at Butterworth. The BDCC argued it was vital to retain maximum discretion over these bases.⁴⁵ The Colonial Office and Commonwealth Relations Office successfully countered that political realities placed a premium on goodwill and on recognising Malayan concerns over sovereignty. When it came to the crunch, the requirements of strategy were less immediate than the need to create a working partnership with a moderate government.

On 11 September Tory told Malayan Defence Minister, Abdul Razak, that Britain 'would consult [the] Federation Government and seek their agreement before adopting any proposal to stockpile nuclear weapons in Malaya, or to deliver them from Malayan bases'. Tory stressed the communists should be kept guessing and that Malayan defence might ultimately rely on nuclear weapons. He argued, therefore, that it might be in Malaya's interest to avoid an unequivocal rejection of nuclear defence. Britain had no objection to the Malayan Government making Britain's assurance public. The Malaysians, however, preferred their stand to be seen

as independent. Tory understood that Malayan ministers would try and avoid any further statements on nuclear weapons.⁴⁶

Tory claimed to have felt Razak, 'was on our side entirely'. When Tory subsequently saw Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Tunku said he thought that a memorandum left with Razak on the above lines was 'fair enough'. The Tunku talked of a 'deep fear' having been sown. He was 'most anxious' nothing should further stir public opinion prior to the debate on the defence agreement. He added that if there was a general explosion in that part of the world 'everybody would obviously have to fall into line', but he preferred to say as little as possible publicly, or which could be construed as a commitment. Tory believed that, by giving the Malaysians assurances, their goodwill had been retained, and categorical statements against nuclear weapons averted. The Tunku had been, 'much relieved' to be able to reassure their colleagues that they had British backing.⁴⁷

From the Malayan point of view they had now secured the whip hand over nuclear weapons and over the use of Malayan bases in all circumstances short of an attack on British or Malayan territory in the Far East. Malayan ministers' public assurances, designed to retain political support, were nevertheless at variance with the reassurances that they were giving in private. It is not clear how genuine the latter were, or how far some ministers' sympathies for SEATO were constrained by radical compatriots and the rank and file. In the light of the Emergency, Malaya did remain sensitive to communist threats, and later gave diplomatic support for the American position in South Vietnam.⁴⁸

In private both Malayan ministers and MacGillivray and Tory tried to produce the impression that Malaya sympathised fully with British aims. Both the incoming and outgoing High Commissioner wanted to optimise political goodwill towards Britain rather than rely on the safeguards favoured by the military. Their critics feared they might be 'going native', their own views eliding with those of local ministers. Hence Templer's accusation that MacGillivray was 'release happy'. Alan Watt, the Australian representative in Malaya, feared as early as 1955 that Britain would 'trust too much on defence'. According to him, 'Rahman is a Malay, and it is rare in my experience to find a Malay who frankly and boldly says directly to a Westerner things which a Westerner would not want to hear ... he likes to tell people what they wish to know'.⁴⁹

Both British and Malaysians were trying to retain goodwill (and aid and British troops), and yet defend their own sovereignty or discretion. Quite apart from assistance and spending by British armed forces (especially on the Emergency), British aid to Malaya in 1957-61 amounted to £33 million.⁵⁰ It was in the Tunku's interests, and perhaps his nature too, to be, or appear to be, as sympathetic as possible to British needs.*

* Did the Tunku manipulate Britain? He was 'a relaxed, aristocratic Anglophile' who played inside right for his village soccer team in Britain, *Financial Times* (London), 7 July 1987. Educated at Cambridge and the Bar he took the lowest pass degree after prolonged study. Charm, however, was compatible with nationalism. He was conscious of descent from that Sultan Abdullah of Kedah, who, in 1786, signed the treaty giving Britain its first foothold in Malaya, at Penang. See Harry Miller, *Prince and Premier* (London, 1959); and Allan Healey, *Tunku Abdul Rahman* (London, 1982).

Quite apart from UMNO leaders' fear of communism, they faced a dilemma. If Malaya received less defence assistance, aid or investment, it would slow national development and Malay improvement. It might make it impossible to fulfil Malay aspirations without imposing divisive burdens on non-Malays. The dependency of the Malayan economy made a high degree of 'collaboration' a nationalist imperative. In addition, the Alliance's MCA component was led by Chinese businessman. Men such as tin-mining leader Colonel H.S. Lee (Member for Transport from 1951, Minister for Transport in 1955, and Finance from 1956), and rubber magnate and Oversea Chinese Banking Corporation Director Tan Cheng Lock (MCA Chairman).⁵¹ Such MCA leaders made decolonisation seem safer to Britain from an economic perspective. They kept the Alliance aware of Malaya's acute need for international investment, and of the advantages in delaying the transfer of military burdens.⁵² Yet, if the Alliance were to make more concessions than the Malay *rakyat* (people) or UMNO would indulge, they might weaken their position. The Malayan Union experiment of 1946 had left many Malays suspicious of Britain. As late as April 1956 an Australian observer could still suggest that lingering 'anti-British feeling in some of the kampongs' could grow.⁵³

Though aware of the radical potential in UMNO, especially from the youth, the Tunku was later reported to have been shaken by the degree of opposition in UMNO and Cabinet before the Defence Agreement debate began on 2 October 1957.⁵⁴ In late September UMNO grass-roots concern spawned demands for a time limit to the defence agreement and criticism of the indirect SEATO link. Some UMNO branches called for a special UMNO meeting before the debate. The Tunku headed this off by agreeing to meet the UMNO Central Executive Committee. He was reportedly firm with this, threatening to resign if there was UMNO opposition to the treaty in the scheduled debate. There was support, notably among the UMNO youth, for reducing dependence on the West and for working more closely with Asian countries. To appease the doubters the Tunku promised to review the agreement after one year. In private he assured Britain's new High Commissioner for Malaya, Tory, that this would only be at Cabinet level.

The Tunku's modest concessions to critics helped to ensure that effective opposition in the debate of 2 and 3 October revolved around the one elected opposition member (out of 52) and the nominated trade union members. Mr Narayanan (Secretary, National Union of Plantation Workers) doubted the value of a protector so recently defeated by Japan, and called for assurances that the Federation would never be used for nuclear warfare. He also suggested that the presence of foreign troops in Malaya would be used by the communists to justify continuing their struggle. The government argued that the Federation had secured necessary protection cheaply, freeing resources for development. The Tunku pointed out that Malaya had no air-force, no navy, and could not afford adequate protection itself. On nuclear weapons the Tunku merely confirmed that no provision had been made for nuclear bases or experiments. The government position was that they retained full discretion to act in the light of prevailing circumstances.⁵⁵

In a press conference just before independence the Tunku also took the line that, as regards alliances, 'Later, when we have become more mature as an independent country, we might be able to make our own decisions'.⁵⁶ In October 1957 some Australian officials still felt that it was popular opinion which was constraining the Tunku from supporting SEATO openly. According to one Australian Department of External Affairs telegram, sent to several of its overseas missions, key Malayan leaders perceived a life and death struggle with communism in which SEATO provided advantages, but 'their basic concern is political survival', and they would only join SEATO if they felt they could do so without damaging political consequences.⁵⁷ Tory recommended gently inducting Malayan ministers, enmeshing them in military discussions at informal or fairly low staff levels.⁵⁸

The Defence Agreement was signed on 12 October. According to Chin Kin Wah, London meanwhile suggested an exchange of letters to cover the gap between independence and the agreement, leaving the Tunku offended by Britain's lack of trust.⁵⁹

How far there was real sympathy among Malayan ministers for SEATO is open to question. They did adopt a West-leaning policy, recognising the Soviet Union but not China and generally aligning with the West in votes at the United Nations. They also adopted an understanding approach to Britain's desire to be able to use Malayan-based forces for SEATO. An indirect and publicly deniable link was the compromise. It became increasingly obvious after October 1957, however, that Malayan sympathy for anti-communism was accompanied by a political aversion to anything more than an indirect SEATO link. By 1960, Malayan ministers were becoming increasingly blunt in their criticisms of SEATO.⁶⁰

Britain had secured a SEATO link for Malaya, but Malayan ministers had managed to limit this and make it ambiguous enough to be publicly deniable. Furthermore, the attempt to preserve Malaya as a base for projecting British power and for influencing SEATO had a cost for Britain. Britain had an interest in ensuring the smooth ending of the Emergency. Malayan assumption of full defence responsibilities could only have been gradual. In the Defence Agreement negotiations, however, Britain focused as much on how to preserve its regional role and 'influence', as on how to achieve a transfer of burdens to Malaya. It also gave Malaya a 'blank cheque' for its external security, at least in the sense that, in Article I, Britain undertook 'to afford the Government of the Federation of Malaya such assistance as the Government of the Federation of Malaya may require for the external defence of its territory' - a relatively open-ended British responsibility. Despite this, and the pledge in Article II to give such assistance as might be mutually agreed upon for the training and developing of Malaya's armed forces, Britain had only secured an indirect rather than a direct SEATO link.⁶¹ Forces could be redeployed from Malaya to SEATO, but only through Singapore. Singapore's role in facilitating the SEATO link now seemed to confirm that it was, if anything, becoming increasingly important to Britain's military presence 'East of India'.

SINGAPORE: FROM COLLISION TO COLLUSION

Somewhat to his surprise, David Marshall emerged from Singapore's April 1955 Legislative Council elections as the Colony's first Chief Minister, at the head of a weak coalition. His Labour Front had taken 10 out of 25 elected seats in an Assembly of 32. The PAP won three of the four seats it contested. Its young, Chinese-speaking radicals also harnessed the radical 'Middle Road' unions (so-called after their headquarters location) of shop, bus and other Chinese workers. It seemed less than certain that Marshall, a Sephardic Jew heading a minority government in a predominantly Chinese city, could inherit the future.

The PAP was established in November 1954. Its leader, Lee Kuan Yew, was already making his name defending unions and Chinese-speaking students in court. Lee and the 'moderate', English-educated group in the PAP (he achieved a First at Cambridge and attained fluency in Chinese dialects after 1954) sought to tap the mass support of communist-influenced unions and students. The latter, especially in the Chinese Middle and High Schools, were young and idealistic, proud of China's communist renaissance and resentful at exclusion from government jobs (which required English education). The rising popularity of English over Chinese-language education, and government attempts to increase control over Chinese-language schools, ran contrary to these feelings. Feelings which culminated in the foundation of the privately-funded, Chinese-speaking Nanyang University in 1956.⁶²

Lee Kuan Yew's legal work for unions helped the PAP cement its links with these groups, through Chinese-speaking radicals such as Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan. These were officials of the militant, 'Middle Road' Singapore Bus Workers Union (SBWU), and along with the communists and their fellow-travellers they needed the PAP as a constitutional facade, just as Lee needed their popular support.⁶³

In these circumstances, Britain had to prevent disorder without appearing heavy-handed, support 'moderates' by constitutional advance, and yet avoid allowing communism to ride to power on the back of the PAP.

Singapore posed a particular challenge, not only because it was wracked by labour disputes, but also because of communal tensions. In December 1950 the 'Hertogh' riots had been sparked when a court decided to return to her parents a Dutch Eurasian girl, Maria Hertogh. She had been bought up by a Muslim family during the war and had married a Muslim. Over two days eighteen people were killed and 173 injured. If racial tensions in Malaya were ever to trigger further disturbances in Singapore, there was a danger its mainly Malay police force might be affected. The more immediate threat, however, was that labour and left-wing action would intensify. In 1955 a dispute involving the SBWU culminated in violent disorder in May, with the union securing concessions after Marshall refused to use troops against pickets. In October 1956, government attempts to disband communist-influenced student unions led to rioting in many parts of Singapore, with fifteen killed and over a hundred injured.⁶⁴

Singapore's volatility was matched by its military importance. It was the linchpin for Commonwealth forces in the Far East, and the key strategic, logistic and communications centre. The COS re-emphasised in early 1956 that Singapore should not be given independence unless it federated with Malaya. Otherwise there would be a high risk that Singapore's predominantly Chinese population would be drawn into the communist orbit. It would then become a fatal thorn in Malaya's foot. The COS also saw it as an increasingly important naval base and a vital strategic centre for the Western powers, a Cold War bastion. The COS's views accorded with the BDCC line, that it was 'scarcely possible to exaggerate the calamitous effects of Singapore becoming an outpost of China'. The effects on Malaya, Southeast Asia, the British position in Eastern Asia, and on America and Australia were 'too obvious to need explanation'.

Britain thus identified a core need for a broadly cooperative, stable and non-communist Singapore, as a base from which to protect British territories and Western interests, as a regional *point d'appui*, and to protect Malaya from communism.⁶⁵

Britain wanted both to undercut communism with decolonisation, and yet to retain unfettered control of the bases, external affairs and defence. In the view of the BDCC and the COS, however, neither the defence facilities nor Malaya would be secure without internal order in Singapore, and they doubted the ability of Singapore's politicians to turn back the tide of communism. For the Governor, Sir Robert Black (1955-57), the services' reliance on civil labour argued against halting political advance, but the services' refused to accept his diagnosis. Marshall's unwillingness to face down the rioters and SBWU in May 1955 - not long after he became Chief Minister - was seen by both the military and Scott as indicating a potentially fatal security weakness. It was the subsequent British reluctance to cede full powers over internal security which was to be the sticking point in Singapore negotiations.⁶⁶

In response to demands by Marshall, Britain agreed, in August 1955, to hold a Constitutional Conference in London in 1956. At this point the Colonial Office hoped Singapore would settle for internal self-government, leaving foreign affairs, defence and internal security to the Governor's discretion.⁶⁷ In December 1955, Marshall met Lennox-Boyd in London. They agreed the Conference should meet in April 1956, and should define the nature of the 'full self government' Singapore was to receive. Lennox-Boyd envisaged making the maximum concessions possible without weakening Britain's control of internal security. These came to include expanding the Legislative Assembly from 32 to 50, removing the three ex officio ministers from the Executive Council, and associating local ministers with a consultative Defence Committee. Through this Defence Committee Britain would retain control not only of external, but also of internal, defence.⁶⁸

On his return to Singapore, however, Marshall proclaimed his aim was 'Dominion Status' by April 1957, with external affairs and defence to be freely ceded back to Britain. He set about creating pressure to back this claim, culminating in a 'Merdeka Week', which backfired when a rally turned into a

riot. This compounded the worries he had already caused in Britain by compromising with the bus strikers after their May 1955 strike.⁶⁹

Marshall's Singaporean delegation also failed to achieve unity before arriving in London for the Constitutional Conference. Marshall now wanted to secure total control of internal security, as Malaya already had. The largest opposition party, the Liberal Socialists (LSP), wanted Britain to maintain some influence in this area.⁷⁰

On the British side, the BDCC determined Britain must retain effective control of internal security, the police, and legislation dealing with nationality. The last was important to avoid Singapore's citizenship becoming so generous that it would be impossible for Malaya, with its precarious racial balance, to consider merger. There should be, the COS agreed, no transfer of internal security until Singapore possessed enough forces to guarantee its own safety. Since pan-Malayan planning had allotted Singapore the small Royal Malayan Navy, but no troops, raising the 'necessary' two brigades would take time. Meanwhile, local Ministers might be associated with the proposed, consultative defence committee. British control was essential, to give it the ability to get white troops on the streets early to pre-empt any incipient racial or communist disorder. Otherwise a tardy call for help from a Singaporean government might face Britain with the prospect not of preventing violence from breaking out, but of using British bayonets to quell rioting Asians.⁷¹

The Governor, Sir Robert Black, agreed on 19 March 1956 that a PAP electoral victory would be a victory for communism, despite Lee's 'professed' non-communism. He commented on the 'virile' leadership of the PAP and feared that Singapore's 'decent westernised minority' had been hopelessly 'softened by the paternalism of British rule'. Yet he forecast a cataclysm, a descent into rule by 'British bayonets' and a Cyprus or Saigon-type political meltdown, if the talks failed. In this scenario the bases would become a liability rather than an asset. 'The choice between two evils', he wrote to Lennox-Boyd, 'is an appalling one'. There could, however, be no halfway house once the snowball of constitutional advance had begun to gather momentum. Besides, even if Marshall was a poor bet, he was the only one available.⁷²

Lennox-Boyd replied on 20 March there could be no transfer of internal security. Black countered that this was already controlled by the Singapore Colonial Secretary (a post held by a British official) in the context of the collective responsibility of local Ministers. In theory the Governor had reserved powers. In practice, forcing through internal security action against the wishes of elected ministers would result in their resignation. To insist on internal security control now would be to claw back powers already effectively ceded, and which would ultimately be of no more use than the right to suspend the constitution.

The BDCC and Scott still disagreed, arguing the communists hoped to inherit concessions won by Marshall, and that Marshall was not worth paying a price to keep. Now was the time to call a halt, before the replacement of European with local personnel in the Public Services, Police and Special Branch made intervention doubly difficult. On 19 April the BDCC cabled they were confident

of keeping order, and that firm action would encourage the support 'of a large body of public opinion'.⁷³

Lennox-Boyd decided to follow the combined advice of Scott and the BDCC, and not the Governor. Marshall's success in getting the Singapore Legislative Council to instruct his delegation, on 5 April, to seek independence within the Commonwealth, ceding back external affairs and defence, only confirmed Lennox-Boyd's determination. He felt Marshall was guilty of bad faith. Having agreed on 'self-government' in December 1955, Marshall was now moving the goal-posts. Marshall's argument that Singapore had a larger population and greater finances than several United Nations members cut no ice with Lennox-Boyd, who shared the common British view that micro-states were not viable in a Cold War world, and that with independence Singapore's Chinese population would be inexorably sucked into China's orbit.

Lennox-Boyd consequently regarded the 'highly charged atmosphere of emotion' surrounding the demand for 'independence' not as a cause for concession but as a reflection of Marshall's unstable personality. On 23 March he told the Cabinet that, except in a federation with Malaya, "independence" for Singapore is a delusion'. Despite the need to counter growing Asian nationalism, Britain should not hand over control of internal security. He was inclined to risk having to 'rule by British bayonets', as Marshall had fatalistically expressed it, rather than trust to the 'Levantine approach and almost psychopathic personality' of David Marshall.⁷⁴

There were, therefore, multiple reasons for not granting Marshall the concessions he demanded. He was not regarded as a solid electoral bet against the rising star of the communist-riddled PAP, he was regarded as politically inept, and in these circumstances Britain felt the retention of extensive rights to intervene in internal security was vital. On 17 April the Cabinet endorsed Lennox-Boyd's view: Britain should offer the fullest degree of internal self-government and as much of the trappings of independence as possible, but could not sign a 'blank cheque' for the support of Singapore. Britain must retain the ability to control internal security, and so the conditions in which British troops might be required to intervene. Internal security should be reserved to the Governor, but with local ministers associated with it through a defence council.⁷⁵

The London Constitutional Conference began on 23 April 1956. Lennox-Boyd warned that, 'we do not intend that Singapore should become an outpost of communist China - in fact a colony of Peking'. Marshall forcefully replied that 'an immediate decision for self-government is [therefore] all the more vital if nationalists are to have an opportunity to repel the threatened flood of an ideology that seeks to destroy the democratic process'. He could not combat nascent anti-white hate, he warned, unless Singapore was given, 'a sensation of freedom'. From Marshall, precariously in power in a territory where much of the Chinese majority viewed anti-communism as synonymous with anti-Chinese attitudes (hence Lee's 'non-communist' stance) the call had little force.

Control of external affairs and defence was never the issue. Even when he called for 'independence' by April 1957, Marshall explicitly intended that these

powers (excepting certain trade and cultural matters) should be ceded back to Britain. The issue was the wide-ranging powers Britain proposed in order to maintain its grip on internal security. The Singapore delegation wanted Britain to cede internal security, and settle for the right to suspend the constitution *in extremis*. Britain insisted this would prevent it from acting until too late. It also wanted to be able to reserve legislation for Her Majesty's pleasure when this was regarded as affecting defence, and even to legislate on defence matters by Order-in-Council. The High Commissioner (who would replace the Governor) should be able to act in an emergency without suspending the constitution. Defence and internal security would be controlled by a 'Defence and Security Council' on which the High Commissioner would have a casting vote. The Commissioner of Police would also serve on this and have access to the High Commissioner.

Britain subsequently agreed to make the ability to reserve legislation or govern by Order-in Council subject to a report from the Defence and Security Council. It would not, however, agree to Singaporean demands for equal voting powers in this Council. Here was the crunch, for the ultimate supervision of internal security would lie with a Council under effective British control. Britain was offering to concede local executive control of internal security, reserving the ultimate, and normally dormant, right to re-assert executive power through the Defence and Security Council, or legislative power through Order-in-Council. For Marshall, however, there could be no freedom with the threat of imperial intervention still hanging over Singapore. That some of his delegation might want this threat to remain as a safeguard apparently did not occur to him.

On 14 and 15 May the Singaporean delegation tried to break the deadlock by suggesting the Federation of Malaya supply a representative, who would have the casting vote on the Defence Council. Lennox-Boyd, however, was well aware that disaffection with Marshall's hard line was growing amongst the Singapore delegation, and that securing timely cooperation from Malaya might be difficult. He was anyway not yet willing to make British powers reliant on the Federation. On 15 May he advised the Cabinet to reject the suggestion. That evening a communiqué was issued in London announcing the breakdown of the talks. Marshall responded by telling the press that the British offer was 'Christmas pudding laced with arsenic sauce', an assertion he reportedly put directly to Eden and Lennox-Boyd on 17 May.⁷⁶

Marshall tried to renew negotiations on his own authority on 17 May. He suggested three amendments, namely: any overriding powers for Britain to legislate by Order-in-Council should be subject to approval by the House of Commons; control of Singapore should pass from the Colonial Office to another department; and the Queen's representative in Singapore should be Malayan born. Lennox-Boyd was uneasy about transferring a less-than-independent Singapore to the Commonwealth Office, which fully independent Commonwealth members might object to. He also considered that a separate Malayan born Queen's representative might leave Her Majesty's Government's representative (the High Commissioner) with inadequate access to the Singapore government. It quickly emerged, however, that Marshall had not secured the

backing of the delegation for his amendments. By 20 May Marshall had been told that, though Britain would consider reopening negotiations later, it could not continue the present conference with Marshall's suggestions as preconditions.

The Conference failed at two levels. At one level, Britain's insistence on retaining effective control of a Defence and Security Council with wide powers over internal security proved unacceptable. The fundamental problem, however, was that Britain did not trust Marshall's mercurial temperament and weak party and could see no safe, non-communist alternative.

The storm that the Governor, Sir Robert Black, had forecast never came. Singapore lapsed into calm confusion. On 23 May Lim Yew Hock, second in the Labour Front to Marshall, confirmed to Lennox-Boyd that the whole delegation, including Labour Front members, were distressed by Marshall's tactics. Marshall himself resigned in early June 1956, to be replaced by Lim Yew Hock as leader of the Labour Front and Chief Minister. Lim knew he needed to demonstrate firmness against subversion if he was to maximise his bargaining power.⁷⁷

A Singapore ministerial committee on subversion was formed in September, and began to put pressure on communist-front organisations.⁷⁸ On 18 September 1956 the Government issued banishment orders on six prominent trade unionists, and afterwards arrested several schoolteachers. By 10 October several communist 'front' organisations, such as the Singapore Chinese Middle School Students Union (SCMSSU), had been de-registered. The latter responded with sit-down strikes, culminating in the police clearing two Chinese High schools at dawn on the 25 October. When dispersing students mingled with workers to foment rioting on 25 to 26 October Lim reacted vigorously. British troops were quickly summoned from Malaya, swelling the Singapore garrison to six battalions.

These supported the pre-planned 'Operation Photo'. Army-backed road-blocks, and police-car and helicopter patrols, supported by mobile riot units, prevented crowds from spiralling out of control. Nevertheless, 13 died, cars were burned and two schools razed, while the police arrested 1,000 people.⁷⁹ The PAP's militant 'Middle Road' Union leaders, including Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan, were amongst those detained.

Lim Yew Hock thus earned his colours. The arrests also gave Lee Kuan Yew breathing space by removing the communist '1st XI' from the PAP. Not for the last time, Lee was able to criticise a government for security measures which stacked the odds in his favour. Indeed, Lee had a double boon. Lim Yew Hock's Labour Front (in November 1958 allied with members of the Liberal Socialist Party to become the 'Singapore People's Alliance' - SPA) had fatally tarnished itself. It made itself appear to be anti-left, anti-union, and against the Chinese schools and so Chinese culture.⁸⁰ Yet simultaneously Lee made himself lawyer for the detained PAP men, increasing the legitimacy he enjoyed as the legal defender of anti-colonial and left-wing causes. With Lim Yew Hock thus demonstrating his firmness, and the communist arm of the PAP weakened, the case for trying to secure local goodwill by negotiating an agreement was increased.⁸¹

Lim Yew Hock also tried to find a compromise over the issues which had derailed the London Constitutional Conference. In July 1956 he restated the Singapore suggestion to Britain that there should be a Malayan-born Head of State and a Malayan casting vote on the Defence and Security Council. He also suggested the Defence and Security Council be associated with future police appointments. With the changed political aspect, the Colonial Secretary and COS were, by December, willing to accept this compromise. They belatedly accepted the Governor's view, that British rights to reserve legislation and take executive action over internal security would, if local ministers opposed them, be of limited use. If the local government resigned in the face of British intervention, as was likely, Britain would be forced to suspend the constitution anyway. Besides, with the Suez debacle undermining Britain's accumulated credit from decolonisation – including in Malaya – Lennox-Boyd felt that 'our decisions on Singapore will be regarded as a test of our true intentions'.⁸²

By the time Cabinet discussed the Singapore talks, on 11 December 1956, the COS and Commonwealth Relations Office accepted there might be no alternative but to cede control of internal security to the Singapore Government. As early as November it seems Scott, who earlier backed the Singapore Commander-in-Chiefs, reversed his support for keeping control of internal security. He joined those who said there might be no sustainable halfway house. The COS argued that, if this was so, Britain should ensure representation on an advisory defence or internal security council, and rely on the right to suspend the constitution *in extremis*. Britain would of course still retain the unfettered right to use Singapore bases for external defence.⁸³

Lennox Boyd by this point felt a settlement was essential, Lim Yew Hock trustworthy, and that concessions would rob the communists of much appeal. Furthermore, the Colonial Office was warning that the Singapore delegation might refuse to consider even paper rights for Britain over internal security. If a second breakdown in talks resulted, it could lead to anarchy, leave Britain 'with no allies' in Singapore, make operation of the bases difficult, and force Britain to negotiate a less satisfactory settlement.

On 11 December Cabinet considered Lennox-Boyd's argument that Britain should settle for machinery which provided 'constant consultation' rather than actual control of internal security. The Federation of Malaya should be represented on such machinery, and Britain should retain the right to suspend the constitution. Cabinet requested the matter be reconsidered before a final decision.

Then in mid-December Lim Yew Hock visited London to discuss the reopening of talks in March 1957. He repeated the suggestion of giving a Malayan representative the casting vote on a Defence Council. He also suggested, however, that a council thus constituted might be allowed to exercise supervision over internal security. By this offer Lim Yew Hock probably conceded more than he need have done. In his eagerness to get agreement, he either failed to extract the maximum concessions; or, more probably, he wanted and needed Britain's ultimate control of internal security to continue.⁸⁴

Lim Yew Hock's offer, by going beyond the minimum Britain was now willing to consider, made the March 1957 Conference almost a formality. On 20 December Lennox-Boyd was authorised by Cabinet, subject to review, to agree to a Malayan-born representative of the Queen. It also agreed that Britain was to retain the ultimate right to suspend the constitution, and access to security information. Where Britain required action over internal security, however, it would be reliant on obtaining the Federation's casting vote on an Defence Council otherwise divided equally between British and Singaporean members.⁸⁵

The Cabinet endorsed these new proposals as the basis of negotiation on 4 and 28 March 1957. This meant splitting the 'Defence and Security Council' functions between an executive 'Internal Security Council' (ISC), and a consultative External Security Council (later called the Inter-Governmental Council, or IGC). The latter would deal with all matters affecting external affairs and defence. Deciding how the matters would be apportioned between the two councils became the next major problem. Who was to decide what was a matter for the ISC, where the Federation was to hold the balance, and the IGC, which Britain was to control? How was the boundary in the proposed dyarchy to be policed?⁸⁶

This provided the only matter of substantial dispute in the 11 March to 11 April 1957 Constitutional negotiations. The Singapore delegation argued that to accept British discretion over what constituted matters affecting external defence could allow Britain, if it desired, to interfere in internal affairs. The Singapore delegation would be accused of accepting 'perpetual colonialism'. With the change of atmosphere, Britain now accepted that the ISC itself should decide whether a disputed matter fell in its own sphere of competence, or in that of the IGC. In the latter case, Britain would be free to demand the reservation of legislation or the fulfilment of requirements affecting its defence interests. Furthermore, when an ISC vote was necessary, all members were to attend, lessening the danger of deadlock. The ISC would consist of three British, three Singaporean and one Malayan representative. The Malayan member was expected to support Britain in a crisis, though it could be withdrawn at six months notice.⁸⁷

A further clause was added at the suggestion of the Singapore delegation. Should the Singapore Government fail to meet an ISC requirement, the Chairman of the ISC (the High Commissioner) could require the Queen's representative (the *Yang di-Pertuan Negara*, who was to be Malayan born after the first six months) to meet this requirement by issuing a legally enforceable order. The same provision would apply for decisions in the IGC, which the Singapore delegation reluctantly accepted they should be represented on. This would strengthen the ISC and IGC's ability to demand executive action. Ostensibly it was a gesture intended to help break the deadlock over who should decide whether matters belonged to the ISC or IGC.⁸⁸

In reality, the new clause was welcomed by much of the Singapore delegation, in order to give Britain an effective way of intervening should communist subversion get out of hand. The ISC could act as a convenient conduit for action which a local government desired, but could carry out only at political cost. By 1959 Lee Kuan Yew was privately telling Britain he valued the ISC for this very

reason. In one other instance Lim Yew Hock and Lee Yuan Kew left the United Kingdom to 'insist' on a clause which Britain believed the two men had themselves urgently requested. Anyone who had been detained for subversive activities, which included the communist '1st XI', was not to be allowed to take office in the first elected assembly under the new constitution. Lennox-Boyd gladly obliged, making this a 'condition' of the agreement, on the understanding the delegation's public complaints would be kept temperate.⁸⁹

The Conference also agreed Britain should continue to have full access to the products of the Singapore Security Intelligence services, with a British security liaison officer to be attached to the Singapore Special Branch. The High Commissioner would be entitled to see all papers affecting external defence and affairs. Appointments of the three senior police officers (the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police and the Director of Special Branch) could also be questioned once in the ISC. Their appointments would then have to be re-examined by the independent Public Services Commission, and would stand if it confirmed them.⁹⁰

The Legislative Council was to become an elected body of 51, to which an elected Executive Council of ministers would be responsible. Having removed any element of unilateral British discretion over internal Singaporean affairs, the Singapore delegation could claim to have ended British 'colonial' control. At the same time, they had preserved the 'Damocles' Sword' of British intervention. The British delegation, meanwhile, had secured access to the security services and, barring any drastic change in Malaya, the prospect of being able to intervene to protect its interests. Since the renamed 'State of Singapore' would remain a Crown Colony, all existing provisions governing the bases continued. Even better, the United Kingdom's rights over the bases not only remained unfettered, but were backed up by constitutional safeguards for enforcing local cooperation. That Singapore got only *tiga suku merdeka* (three quarters independence, as Lee Kuan Yew dubbed it on his return to Singapore) thus suited both Britain, and Singapore's non-communist politicians.⁹¹

In some ways more important, Lee Kuan Yew was emerging as an able anti-communist, increasingly likely to become Prime Minister of a self-governing Singapore, and willing to use whatever means necessary to defeat the left-wing of his party. From the British point of view the question was whether Lee, who benefited from Special Branch information on radicals from at least 1952, would be able to keep control of the PAP.⁹²

Lim Yew Hock effectively helped Lee again in August 1957, by arresting PAP radicals at a crucial juncture. The detentions were intended to halt a creeping radical threat to moderate unions which formed part of the Labour Front's own political base. Nevertheless, they swept up the communist's '2nd XI' in the PAP. Five of these '2nd XI' detainees had in early August been involved in the capture of half the PAP Central Executive Committee's 12 seats. The arrests not only allowed Lee Kuan Yew's moderates to return to office after resigning, but also enabled them to reorganise their party. In future only party cadres, to be appointed by the Central Executive Committee, were to be able to vote for the

Central Executive Committee and for party offices. In this way the moderates secured control of the machinery of the party against the danger that its branches, permeated with radical members and communist sympathisers, would turn against them.⁹³

The danger of communist capture of the PAP remained, but Lee Kuan Yew now had three factors in his favour. First, joint British and Malayan dominance of the ISC would force his opponents to fight him constitutionally, giving him ultimate security against losing this battle. Secondly, since merger was a major aim of his party, with broad support in Singapore, he would be able to argue that Singapore should abide by ISC votes reached with the Federation's agreement. Thirdly, he realised that the communists might win a fair battle, 'But', as Lee reportedly told William Goode (Governor from December 1957 to 1959), 'they were not going to give them a free hand ... It was no good sticking to the liberal rules practised in the United Kingdom. The only way to defeat the Communists was to use their methods of fixing meetings before they were held'.⁹⁴

Meanwhile, *Tengah* airfield was selected as the site for a nuclear bomb store (which is not to say that bombs were sent) because Singaporean independence was not anticipated without merger, and merger was seen as unlikely for five to ten years. Publicly it was merely stated that developing *Tengah* to take V-bombers reflected their status as front-line aircraft. In private Sir Robert Black told Lim Yew Hock that Britain must be able to use Singapore effectively for defence purposes, 'Lim accepted this and said his concern was that he should not be involved and that there should be no more publicity than was absolutely necessary'. Lim publicly admitted in September 1957 that Singapore might become an atomic base despite local opposition, though he did express the hope that local ministers would be consulted.

Britain had retained full discretion over Singapore's bases, sufficient local goodwill to make these bases operable, and knew that both Lim Yew Hock and Lee Kuan Yew would fight communism with determination and skill. Whether the triumph was more Lennox-Boyd's, who made the concessions, than Lee Kuan Yew's, who had managed to ride both the communist tiger and the imperialist lion, remains open to question.⁹⁵

So when the PAP, its executive now firmly in moderate hands, took 43 out of 51 seats in the May 1959 elections, it provided no immediate threat to Singapore's strategic role. Lee Kuan Yew formally took office on 3 June 1959, and was soon cooperating in the ISC and in the expansion of the Special Branch. With 45,000 unemployed in Summer 1959, Singapore's future appeared to rely on the PAP leaders ability to find work and housing for a rapidly growing population. The communist threat remained, but the PAP moderates were more capable and determined leaders than Britain could possibly have hoped for.⁹⁶

MERGER AND BASES

Between 1955 and 1957 the military had seen their plans for organising defence on pan-Malayan lines outpaced by the separate acceleration of Malayan and

Singaporean decolonisation. By mid 1957 Singapore had begun raising the first battalion of the Singapore Infantry Regiment, while the Royal Malaysian Navy was due to be transferred from Singaporean to Malaysian control in 1958. Britain had also failed to restrict the Malaysian defence agreement to terms which it was likely to find acceptable for Singapore as well as Malaya, since they only retained the discretion to use forces in Malaya for strategic and SEATO roles by withdrawing them through Singapore.

By October 1957 the COS realised that this produced a tension between their belief that Singapore could only achieve independence by merger with Malaya, and yet their desire to retain absolute discretion over the use of Singapore's facilities. Templer (CIGS) pointed to 'a real danger of gradually losing our rights in Singapore', especially in a merger. As Chairman of the COS Mountbatten, however, concluded only that the COS would at the appropriate time need to consider, 'the defence relationship we should then require'.⁹⁷

British opinion on merger became equivocal. It was presumed Singapore would have to progress to full independence through merger, but Britain was no longer in a hurry to encourage an event which threatened defence rights. It suited Britain well to have the PAP behaviour moderated by hope of a federation. According to one Colonial Office official, this would be 'a carrot dangling in front of the noses of the PAP which we know in fact is likely to be kept beyond their reach'. With the Tunku seemingly determined not to accept merger, it seemed likely it would be several years before the PAP could convince Malaya they were not a Trojan Horse for communists.⁹⁸

Likewise, political development in the Borneo territories was at an early stage. Britain sought to achieve closer ties between the three Borneo territories as a prelude to any wider future federation, but local jealousies ensured that even this made limited progress. In addition, whereas MacDonald had worked hard to create the conditions for merger, Scott was both less influential in this sphere once decolonisation accelerated and less enthusiastic.

Indeed, he warned the Prime Minister, Eden, of the dangers of encouraging accelerated decolonisation, or too much 'inappropriate' Westminster-style democracy. By the late 1950s, there seems to have been a British drift away from believing that pure Whitehall-style democracy should be the aim of Southeast Asian decolonisation. This reflected in the conviction that Lee Kuan Yew's brand of strong government was necessary to combat communism in Singapore, as well as in the belief that Western-style democracy might not suit Borneo.⁹⁹

This was not without ulterior motivation, as from 1956 Scott and the BDCC argued for the dispersal of some of their military facilities to the politically more secure Borneo area. The Treasury, Colonial Office and Commonwealth Relations Offices at first resisted this on the grounds of cost and of the danger of appearing to show a lack of confidence in Singapore. In the end limited training facilities, with accommodation for one battalion, were developed in North Borneo from 1959. SEATO exercises were held there in 1959 and again in 1960.¹⁰⁰

The aim of merger remained, but manifested in little more than creeping coordination between the Borneo territories. Brunei received autonomy in local government and a separate defence treaty in 1959. By this time the COS were beginning to think that in ten years time they might have to look to Australia as a main support base, perhaps with forward facilities in Borneo.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, with Lee Kuan Yew cooperating with the ISC, developing Singapore's Special Branch, fighting the communists for public support, and yet desiring the retention of Britain as a provider of jobs, Britain seemed content to let Malaya and Singapore work out their cooperation and possible merger at their own pace.

AUSTRALIAN RESPONSES TO DECOLONISATION 1956 TO 1957

Accelerating decolonisation also had implications for Anglo-Australian military cooperation. Australia was not allowed to affect the pace of decolonisation, but Britain did seek a settlement which would not discourage Australia from maintaining forces in Malaya.

In late 1953 Australia had agreed to contribute an infantry battalion to a Malayan-based Commonwealth Infantry Brigade, which would itself form part of a multi-service Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. Political endorsement of this plan was delayed by Australian elections in 1954, an Australian battalion finally arriving in Penang in late 1955. By then, however, accelerating decolonisation was already threatening to restrict the 'strategic' use of Malayan-based forces.

At the same time, the consolidation of Diem's regime in South Vietnam and the development of SEATO was increasingly focusing Australian attention away from Malaya. As Thailand and South Vietnam began to seem defensible, Australia moved closer to the United States, with its commitment to defending Indochina, rather than to Britain, with its determination only to expend significant resources in defence of its own territories. As early as January 1956, the British High Commissioner in Australia was told the Australians wanted to put 'Hermes' and ANZAM planning in cold storage until it had seen what might emerge from SEATO.¹⁰²

In October 1956 the Australian COS completed a new 'Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy'. Stressing dependence on 'great power' assistance, it emphasised the need to 'play an effective part' in SEATO and collective defence. This would contribute to the 'defence in depth' of Australia, and 'strengthen her case for the support of her allies' should there be a direct threat.¹⁰³ By late 1956 Menzies was considering additional, highly mobile forces to be kept in Australia, at readiness to support an American 'fire brigade' strategy for Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁴

This tendency was reinforced by Australia's 'insurance' approach to cooperation with America, which became more important as Britain's future role in the region became less certain. Australia balked at British reluctance to acknowledge SEATO's nuclear strategies publicly, and disliked Britain's lack of real commitment to SEATO planning.

Australia also opposed any use of the ANZAM planning framework to coordinate a Commonwealth line for SEATO. ANZAM had been designed to allow Australia to take responsibility for coordinating Britain's regional strategies for global war with those of the Antipodean Dominions. Since the ANZAM region was expected to fall within an American zone of responsibility in war, and since the United States made it clear after the formation of ANZUS that it would not welcome cooperation with ANZAM, it had amounted to little. After 1956, Australia would only allow 'ANZAM' meetings to discuss the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, and to coordinate Commonwealth support for plans SEATO had already agreed upon. Australian determination to deepen American entanglement in Southeast Asia and SEATO increasingly meant taking a separate, though preferably not conflicting, line from Britain.¹⁰⁵

The 'strategic' role of Australia's Malayan-based forces was central to this wider strategy of involving America on the Asian mainland.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, Australia was alarmed by the acceleration in decolonisation of 1955, and by discussions in 1956 on the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement. In November 1956 Menzies warned Eden against making the use of Malayan bases for regional purposes dependent on consultation with Malaysians. He argued this would place in doubt the value of Malayan-based forces as a regional reserve, necessitating a review of the role of such forces by the Australian Cabinet.

Ultimately the political capital sunk in the Malayan commitment mitigated against withdrawal. The Malayan presence was perceived as providing useful acclimatisation for Australia's role in cooperating with its 'great and powerful friends'; physically for the troops, politically for the Australian public. Darwin to Singapore was 2,000 miles as the crow flies (much longer as the Australian bomber might fly in order to avoid Indonesian air-space), so Malayan and Singaporean bases had a vital role in Australia's forward strategy. No doubt the possession of bases to the rear of Indonesia was also reassuring.¹⁰⁷

By Summer 1956, however, Australian officials suspected British obsession with global overstretch and nuclear weapons would lead to a nuclear-based 'new look' in defence, and to drastic force cutbacks. In July 1956 Menzies warned a meeting of Commonwealth ministers that Britain's increasing stress on nuclear strategies might leave Asia and the Middle East vulnerable to limited wars. What, he asked, of the danger of piece-meal communist advance through South Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia? What if the nuclear 'bluff' was called?

The Suez fiasco and Sandys's April 1957 Defence White paper seemed to confirm that Britain would reduce Far Eastern conventional forces.¹⁰⁸ Fears about decolonisation and British economies thus confirmed Australian momentum towards a new stance. One of retaining mobile units in Australia in readiness to serve alongside American forces in Southeast Asia. Australia's geo-demographic concern with achieving technological superiority over populous neighbours also pointed to a need for the most sophisticated, and hence American, equipment. Menzies announced in April 1957 that Australia would form an Australian-based mobile brigade with equipment standardised with the American units it was likely to serve alongside.

Australia was to seek American howitzers, Hercules transport aircraft and F-104 fighters.¹⁰⁹ In fact, Australia's dollar deficit and the failure to get American defence aid blunted the move towards American equipment.¹¹⁰ Australia went on to buy British Bloodhound surface to air missiles, and only abandoned interest in the ill-fated TSR-2 multi-role combat aircraft in 1962.¹¹¹ The military shift to America was halting and divergent, complicating and attenuating, rather than cancelling out, Anglo-Australian military cooperation.

Australia continued to contribute forces to the Malayan area. In April 1955 Menzies had announced that Australia would send a battalion, two fighter and one bomber squadrons to Malaya. Two destroyers or frigates would remain on station in the Malayan Area, while an aircraft carrier would visit from time to time. New Zealand had earlier announced that it would send a frigate, an SAS squadron, one squadron of aircraft suitable for fighter and ground-attack roles, and a half a squadron of transport aircraft. By late 1957 most of these forces were in place. In June 1957 New Zealand announced it would also send an infantry battalion. The Commonwealth Infantry Brigade in Malaya therefore came to consist of one battalion each from the three participating countries.¹¹²

Though the reserve's primary task remained as a strategic, regional reserve, some of its forces were almost immediately made available for anti-insurgency operations. In 1964-65 both countries provided modest ground and air support in the Malayan peninsula and then Borneo during the confrontation with Indonesia. Indeed, Australian commitment to stationing forces in Malaya outlasted the Britain's 'withdrawal' from 'East of Suez'. Australian aircraft operated from Butterworth until the late 1980s. After their withdrawal, Australian aircraft still carried out frequent exercises, and an Australian headed the Five Power Defence Arrangement's only permanent component, the Integrated Air Defence Scheme.

There was, then, a slow change in the nuances of Australian military policy. By the late 1950s it had extensive relations with Asian countries, SEATO and America, and generated its own strategic assessments. Increasingly these resulted in Australia siding with the Asian powers and the United States in disagreements over policy towards SEATO, Vietnam and Laos. It was increasingly obvious that marginal alterations in British forces would be insufficient to 'influence' Australia back towards closer support of Britain. This did not preclude, however, a continuing though more peripheral Anglo-Australian defence relationship, based around declining defence equipment purchases and on Malaya and Singapore. It also did not prevent continuing Australian commitment to stationing forces in Malaya. As yet, Australia's shift towards closer alignment with America added a new layer (an Australian-based 'mobile' brigade) rather than removing an older, overlapping one (the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve).

CONCLUSIONS

Previous chapters showed Malaya's communal balance undermining the Malayan Union, patterning politics and underpinning insurgency, but also providing an

environment in which British-led counter-insurgency could succeed. This chapter has traced how the double-edged interaction between British requirements and local conditions continued up to and beyond independence. Malay fears of Chinese-supported communism, at both domestic and international levels, provided a continuing motive for defence cooperation. The Alliance, Lim Yew Hock, and Lee Kuan Yew's non-communist associates in the PAP, all had reason to value Britain as a counter-weight to communism and as a provider of jobs.¹¹³

Hence local conditions offered both opportunities and costs. Britain's hope that imperium would transmute into influence required the maintenance of a high degree of goodwill. Defence requirements, and the desire to keep control until politically strong local elites emerged, had to be measured against the costs of resisting demands for political advance. Britain thus accepted that Malaya and Singapore would temporarily have to advance towards self-government separately, and did not allow Australian concerns to slow down decolonisation.

Malayan ministers nevertheless did not simply accept *Merdeka* 'on a Gold Plate'. Britain originally sought a high level of discretion over the post-independence use of Malayan bases. In lengthy negotiations Malayan politicians secured ultimate control over the use of bases in all circumstances except attacks on Malaya or on British territories in the Far East. The latter exception was the 'price' for maximising post-independence military and financial assistance. Even then, Malaya would probably have the capacity to frustrate actions it opposed. Britain also preserved an indirect SEATO link, but only through the right to withdraw Malayan-based forces through Singapore.

At the same time Malayan ministers wanted to keep substantial British forces in the area, having no intention of diverting their own resources from economic and social development. Thus they skilfully balanced private sympathy for British needs with public distancing from SEATO. The ambiguity in the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement lay mostly in the scope for those affected by it to tailor its public presentation to domestic opinion. This was especially so with the Malayan need to deny any SEATO link, and the contradictory Australian need to demonstrate such a link existed. The Agreement and accompanying understandings in fact precise, and were made more so by the exchanges following Sandys's announcements on nuclear power in August 1957.

Post-independence arrangements for Malaya's internal security proved less problematical. Before the Baling meeting of December 1955 it had seemed conceivable that the Malayan Emergency might provide a stumbling block to independence. Afterwards, shared interests in combating communism led to complicity in arranging continued British assistance. Once the Alliance had become politically entrenched, and had demonstrated its determined anti-communism, Britain quickly recognised it as the best antidote to insurgency. Malayan ministers secured responsibility for the overall direction of the Emergency in 1956 and full operational control at independence. Britain could rest secure in the knowledge that the DOO would continue to be a seconded British officer, while the commanders of Commonwealth units would retain the right of appeal to their national authorities.

The parameters of debate were narrower in Singapore, where Britain made it clear that unfettered rights to use its bases for Commonwealth, colonial and SEATO tasks were non-negotiable. It also insisted that Singapore could not obtain full independence except through association with Malaya, which Britain regarded as the only way of making Singapore economically feasible, and militarily and politically defensible.

It is ironic that, while external defence gave the most problems in negotiating a Malayan defence agreement, in the great imperial base at Singapore it was internal security which prevented constitutional advance in 1956. Again, however, Britain saw decolonisation as a process which it could manage but not halt. As Malayisation proceeded, paper safeguards for the control of internal security and base rights would become increasingly difficult to enforce without a high degree of local cooperation.

Once Britain was convinced that Lim Yew Hock was determined and capable, and that the PAP had a chance of emerging non-communist, it accepted the moment for compromise had arrived. In April 1957 Britain agreed that, though Singapore should remain a Crown Colony, it would gain internal self-government in 1959. Britain was to retain full discretion over the use of bases in Singapore.

Deadlock over internal security was ostensibly broken by proposals for a supervisory ISC on which Malaya would hold the balance. These arrangements suited Singaporean ministers as much as the British. They needed the economic sustenance provided by British bases and preferred to fight domestic communists with the assurance of a safety net. Malayan participation in the ISC gave an additional advantage. Singaporean ministers would be able to argue that unpopular security action was forced on them by Britain and Malaya. At the same time they could suggest that, if Malaya was to be persuaded to allow a union and so ultimate Singaporean independence, its arbitration on the ISC must be accepted. The Malayan role would both facilitate police action and yet soften accusations of imperial tutelage.

Britain had by 1957 been willing to cede control of internal security anyway, even without ISC powers to give the Singapore Government security instructions. It had by then concluded that strong anti-communist measures would, in the near future, become sustainable only if supported by local government. In the absence of this, ministerial resignations might see the island descend into chaos and the bases paralysed. As Lennox-Boyd warned his colleagues in March 1957, 'We can only govern Singapore by consent. We can only fight Communism if we have allies'.¹¹⁴ With the 1956 conference failure having drawn down Britain's stock of goodwill in Singapore, and Suez having undermined it at large, the managerial approach to decolonisation now demanded further concessions.¹¹⁵

In both Malaya and Singapore overlapping but not identical interests thus led to a combination of tension and cooperation. Malayan and Singaporean politicians and British negotiators were all attempting a delicate balancing act between the needs of defence and decolonisation. Above all, the pace and nature

of British decolonisation was heavily influenced by Britain's desire to manage it so as to produce amenable, stable local elites. This was not only seen as the only way of making decolonisation affordable and successful, but also as necessary to buttress Britain's positions as *primus inter pares* in the Commonwealth, and as a respected power in Asia.¹¹⁶

Yet Britain sought more from defence negotiations than an efficient transfer of power and transitional arrangements for security. It did not aim only to protect economic interests in Malaya and to ensure the security of British and Commonwealth territories. Internal insecurity and weak local forces did seem to require a continuing British military presence, as did the need for a *point d'appui* from which British interests in Borneo, Hong Kong and the West Pacific could be protected. Nevertheless, Britain's interpretation of how it should deal with these interests was coloured by aspirations for continuing regional and world influence. Hence the attempt to secure discretion to use Malayan bases to project regional power and so support influence over allies. Hence the British concern with the need to be able – on paper at least – to use Malayan-based infantry, and reinforcements of nuclear bombers, to support SEATO.

Britain also could not foresee any point at which Malaya and Singapore would be able adequately to provide for their own defence. Anticipating a continuing need for British assistance, and eager to maximise its defence rights in the region, Britain accepted – indeed sought – full responsibility for the external defence of Malaya. Britain's focus in negotiations appears to have been on perpetuating safeguards and its own military role. This leads to one of the questions the next chapter asks. How did this mix of local defence needs and metropolitan attitudes affect force posture?

Notes

- 1 See the summary of DC(56)8, COS paper on Singapore's strategic value, in Cab129/CP(56)85, 23 March 1956. The full version should be in Cab131/17, but is retained. See also CIGS Templer's comments in Cab128/CM(56)29, meeting of 17 April 1956, minute 5.
- 2 Cab129/CP(55)81, 20 July 1955, 'Federation of Malaya', and Cab128/CC(55)25, meeting of 21 July 1955, minute 8. Areas Lennox-Boyd argued Britain needed to keep the initiative in were: defence, internal security, finance; Singapore-Malaya relations; Malayan nationality; and a Constitutional Commission. See also Defe11/123, Captain Moore to Lovegrove, 20 Aug. 1955, for BDCC views.
- 3 CRA: A816/40, 19/321/30, Casey to PM, 25 Oct. 1955.
- 4 See Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, pp. 188ff, for MacGillivray, and Cabinet's endorsement on 25th Oct.
- 5 Cheah Boon Kheng made this point in a Sept 1999 conversation at the National University of Singapore, recalling the general enthusiasm at his school in Klang.
- 6 Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, pp. 172ff, 176ff, 182–85ff. Co1030/27.
- 7 The quotation is from A. J. Stockwell, 'Malaysia: The Making of a Neo-colony', p. 144. See also Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, pp. 113, 120, 123–27, 264. Attlee repeated the assurance on 28 March 1950.
- 8 Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, p. lxxvi, iii, and pp. 118ff for the MCP peace offer, 190–93 for 1 Nov, and 193–95 for 30th Nov. MacGillivray had to apply persistent pressure to

- extract the concessions. Initially received in June 1955 and rejected by the then British-dominated government, the MCP's peace offer emphasised that UK troops and reserved powers were the block to *merdeka*.
- 9 See Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, p. 213 for the Tunku's report on Baling, and especially 218, 220, 224–25. Chin Peng said he would lay down arms if Malaya got 'control of internal security and local armed forces', but Chin Peng and Chen Tian had made it clear in discussion that this included control of *all armed forces in Malaya*.
 - 10 Cab21/2883, 18 Jan. 1957, Tunku to Lennox-Boyd.
 - 11 Wo216/901, Loewen to Redman, 11 March 1955. Prem11/2298, Menzies to Eden, 2 Dec. 1955.
 - 12 In Feb. 1999 Chin Peng claimed the MCP had let the Alliance know, prior to Baling, that it would consider further talks if the first ones failed due to British interference. This was supposedly passed on during 'talks about talks', when the British officer present had gone to the toilet. It would not be unlike the Tunku to ingenuously let such information slip. Canberra Workshop with Chin Peng, Feb. 1999.
 - 13 Wo216/901, Loewen to Redman, 11 March 1955. Fo1091/7, BDCC(FE)(55)160, 2 Nov. 1955.
 - 14 Prem11/1302, PM(56)3, Lennox-Boyd to PM, 5 Jan. 1956; and *passim* for Lord De L. 'Isle and Dudley's concerns about Malaya while Minister for Air, and Eden's request for a response from Lennox-Boyd in Dec. See also Defe11/187, (183), CA(56)3, 7 Jan. 1956, Lennox-Boyd on Constitutional advance in Malaya; and Cab128/CM(56)4, meeting of 17 Jan. 1956, minute 3.
 - 15 Command 9714, *Report by the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Conference* (London, 1956). See also, Defe7/494, Constitutional Conference on Singapore, Jan.–Feb. 1956.
 - 16 Sharma, *British Policy*, pp. 30–36. Malaya has been seen as staying in the Sterling Area as a *quid pro quo* for assistance. Reynolds, *Britannia*, p. 225; Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 204. Yet Malaya knew Britain wanted defence rights and would give aid. Britain expected investment-dependent Malaya would not 'kill the goose that lays the golden eggs' by leaving the Sterling Area. Defe11/188 (529), Dickson to Minister of Defence, 4 Feb. 1957. It chose to treat Malaya as a member of the family for finance. Defe7/496, NDMS/M(55)1, 19 Oct. 1955; Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, p. 28. In 18 Dec. 1956–10 Jan. 1957 talks Malaya settled for a quarter of the M\$775million economic and M\$330m military aid it wanted. This included up to £20m for the Emergency to 1961 and £13m (including equipment transfers) for expanding Malaya's armed forces, Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, pp. 353, 359.
 - 17 Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, pp. 251, 263.
 - 18 Command 9714, *Report by the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Conference*.
 - 19 Command 264, *Arrangements for the Employment of Overseas Commonwealth Forces in Emergency Operations in the Federation of Malaya after Independence* (London: HMSO, September 1957). See also Fo1091/71, Commissioner General's file on 'Malaya – Use of UK and Commonwealth Troops after Independence', 1957, *passim*; and Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, pp. 24–26, 28.
 - 20 Defe7/1539. Article VII added that in the event of an armed attack on UK territories in the Far East the Governments would cooperate and 'take such action as each considers necessary for the purpose of meeting the situation effectively.
 - 21 Stockwell, *Malaya*, iii, p. 343ff.
 - 22 Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 204. Saravanamuttu, *Dilemma of Independence*, p. 171.
 - 23 The Whitehall Committee was chaired by Sir Harold Parker (Permanent Under-Secretary to the MOD, 1956–59). See Defe7/494, 'Defence Agreement with Malaya', Brief for UK delegation by the BDCC(FE), 21 Oct. 1955. Its papers were labelled NDMS (Negotiations for the Defence of Malaya and Singapore). The BDCC had

- pressed the need to examine defence as early as Aug. 1955. See also CRA: A816/40, 19/21/30, Singapore to DEA, 25 Oct. 1955, on the Casey-Tunku meeting of 24 Oct.
- 24 Defe7/496, NDMS/M(55)2, meeting of 8 Nov. 1955, *passim*.
- 25 Defe7/494, Constitutional Conference on Singapore, Jan.-Feb. 1956. See also Command 9714, *Report by the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Conference*; and Defe7/940, especially (85A), Commissioner-General to Colonial Secretary, 8 Dec. 1956, for the BDCC and COS's hopes.
- 26 Paul Johnson, *A History of the Modern World from 1917 to the 1980s* (London, 1984), pp. 477-79.
- 27 For the quoted term, see Chin Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia*, pp. 33-35. According to R. Scott, 'uppermost' in Malayan minds was, 'the question of how to present and justify to the Malayan public opinion an agreement which would not be popular in some quarters', Do35/9781, (40).
- 28 Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, pp. 29, 35, 39-40. Problems delaying agreement included jurisdiction over offences by on-duty servicemen. The normal procedure of a host country ceding control over on-duty offences would remove powers Malaya already exercised. Britain agreed to retain the primary right to try service employees for on-duty offences, but to consider waiving this in individual cases. UK desires for a duration clause were also caused problems. An exchange of letters eventually gave land leases of 30 years, to persuade the Treasury to fund new buildings. Britain accepted a duration clause was impractical, since it could not bind successor governments and would invite criticism. The Tunku argued that Malaya could not hope to defend itself unaided for the next 50 to 100 years anyway. See Defe7/940; Do35/9781; and Co1030/829, (27), 'Malayan Defence Agreement - Note of a Meeting held in the CO on Friday 21 Dec. 1956'.
- 29 See Defe7/940, (85A), Commissioner General to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8 Dec. 1956; Defe7/940, CRO to UK High Commission in Australia, 14 Dec. 1956; Do35/9781, Scott to Colonial Secretary, 20 Nov. 1956; and Co1030/829, Defe7/494 and Defe7/496 for early discussions.
- 30 See Defe7/794, (84), extract from *Utusan Melayu* of 25 June 1956, for a speech of 23 June. For the latter quotation, see Do35/9781, (81), Scott to Colonial Secretary, 20 Nov. 1956.
- 31 Command 263, *Anglo-Malayan Mutual Defence Agreement* (London, 1957).
- 32 Defe7/940, 'AMDA Negotiations', MOD brief of c. Dec. 1957. For the compromise, see Co1030/829, (46), COS(57)3, 2 Jan. 1957, 'Note by the CO and MOD', on a meeting between the Colonial Secretary and Malayan ministers of Dec. 1956.
- 33 J. Saravanamuttu, *The Dilemma of Independence*, pp. 25-26. For quarantine, see Defe7/1539, (101), High Commission (Canberra) to CRO, 15 June 1960. In 1958 the Tunku publicly admitted an indirect link in so far as the Treaty would come into operation if British territory was attacked as a result of it supporting SEATO. Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, p. 31, stresses the treaty's ambiguity.
- 34 See Do35/9781, (17), (19); (40), 'Memorandum on Defence Agreement between UK and Federation of Malaya', enclosed in a letter of 15 Oct. 1956; and Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, pp. 29-36. See also Co1030/829, (183), for Article IX's origins with suggestions Britain seek Malayan agreement before increasing forces above 4 brigades or introducing African troops. Article IX dealt with troop changes. Article X required each party to allow 'adequate opportunity for comment' upon administrative and legislative proposals affecting the agreement. See also the text of the agreement in Peter Boyce, *Malaysia and Singapore in International Diplomacy* (Sydney, 1968), pp. 134-36.
- 35 Dato Abdul Razak bin Hussein (later Tun Haji) was an UMNO leader: Education Minister, 1955-57; Defence Minister, 1957-60; later rising to become Prime Minister, 1970-76. Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, p. 33 (note 46). See also *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 Aug. 1957; and *The Times*, 21 and 29 Aug. 1957. For the quotation and *Straits Times*, Do35/9785, (37).

- 36 Do35/9785, (37), Press Cuttings, *Utusan Melayu* of 23 Aug. 1957.
- 37 See Do35/9785, (77), note appended to a letter of 20 Sept. 1957. The Templer quotation comes from Wo216/910, Templer to VCIQS, 26 Aug. 1957. There is evidence of CO irritation that Sandys had broached a delicate subject, see Defe4/99, COS(57)67, meeting of 22 August 1957, minute 7.
- 38 Tory became High Commissioner at independence. See Defe4/99, COS(57)67, meeting of 22 Aug. 1957, minute 7; and Do35/9785, (77). The CO had the PM's authority for these reassurances.
- 39 Wo216/910, Templer [CIGS, in Malaya for *Merdeka*] to Sir William Oliver [VCIQS], 26 Aug. 1957.
- 40 Do35/9785, (26), (26A), *passim*, for Tory and MacGillivray.
- 41 See Do35/9785, (77); and *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 Aug. 1957, for the Tunku's statement of 28 Aug.
- 42 CRA: A1209/23, 57/5380, 'Defence Policy SEA', Gen. 606/1, for a meeting of 9 July 1957, which included Macmillan, Sandys and Menzies.
- 43 CRA: A1945/19, 162/4/1, Malayan Foreign Policy, Australian Commissioner (Kuala Lumpur) to Department of External Affairs, 5 April 1957 and 9 Aug. 1957.
- 44 See CRA: A1945/19, 162/4/1, DEA to Washington, 5 Sept. 1957 and 29 Aug. 1957; and Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, p. 289, note 2, iii, p. 282 for Aziz and his run-in with Templer in 1953 over his journalism. The Tunku, Dr Ismail, Tan Siew Sin, Abdul Razak (Dato, later Tun) and Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ghazali Shafie, seem to have been key figures in foreign policy-making, see Saravanamuttu, *Dilemma of Independence*, p. 50.
- 45 See Do35/9785, (77); CRO minute by Chadwick for Mr James, 23 Aug. 1957; and Defe11/190, CRO Reference, MAL 29/5, 29 Oct. 1957, for High Commissioner (Malaya) to PM, 12 Oct. 1957.
- 46 By 1959 there were facilities at Butterworth for one V-bomber squadron, see Defe4/102, COS(57)98, meeting of 31 Dec. 1957. Treasury clearance for temporary bomb stores at Butterworth or Tengah was sought in 1959. Tengah was supposed to have a permanent store by 1962, Defe7/688 (68/1). In Aug. 1957 an Australian report stated, 'It is the UK intention to stockpile nuclear weapons in Singapore. Atomic bombs for Canberras will be available ... in 12-18 months'. This may have been wishful, see NLA: Menzies, Box 435, Folder 8, 'UK Defence Policy in SEA', discussion with Sandys, Aug 1957.
- 47 CRA: A1209/23, 1957/5729, [UK] High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur to CRO, 11 Sept. 1957; and High Commissioner to CRO, 16 Sept. 1957. These can also be found in Do35/9785, (61) and (73); For Malayan Ministers' public statements, see Do35/9785, (89), (93).
- 48 N. Sopicce, 'The Neutralization of South East Asia', in Hedley Bull, *Asia and the Pacific: Towards a New International Order* (Sydney, 1975), p. 136, note 8, 'it is worth remembering, because Malayan leaders do not forget, that the first aerial bombardment of Kota Bharu, which was the prelude to the Japanese assault in the Second World War, was made by bombers based in South Vietnam. Kota Bharu is nearer to Quan Long in South Vietnam than it is to Johore Bharu'. See also Defe11/190, High Commissioner to Macmillan, 12 Oct. 1957.
- 49 Alan Watt, Australian Commissioner in Southeast Asia, reported, 'I myself have had the unhappy experience of Rahman telling a large audience of Malays in Penang that I had said things which I did not and could not possibly have said'. CRA: A1838/235, 383/5/3 Part 1, Watt to DEA, 8 March 1955.
- 50 Rose, *Britain and South East Asia*, p. 134. Defe7/1535, (64), in 1959 Britain pledged £2.5 million and £1.5 million aid towards the Emergency, let alone economic and military aid, for 1960 and 1961.
- 51 White, *Business, Government and the End of Empire*, pp. 51-52, 144-47
- 52 In 1954, the Alliance Elections committee supported retaining representatives of the Chambers of Commerce and tin and rubber industries in the federal legislature. There

- were no less than 16 nominated members for commercial interests after 1955, just 4 unionists. These remained until 1959. Since Tan Cheng Lock and Col. H.S. Lee were rubber and tin *towkays* (the latter educated at St John's College Cambridge), and MCA finance underpinned the Alliance, perhaps this was not surprising. Tan, *The Prince and I*, pp. 33–37; White, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–59; and Stockwell, *Malaya*, i, p. 187, note 1.
- 53 Cheah Boon Kheng, 'The Erosion of Ideological Hegemony and Royal Power and the Rise of Postwar Malay Nationalism', *JSEAS* 19, 1 (March 1988), 243–69. For foreign policy, see Saravanamuttu, *Dilemma of Independence*, and 'Malaysian Foreign Policy' in, Zakaria Ahmad, *Government and Politics*, pp. 128–160; and for the quotation, CRA: A1838T184, 3024/10/1/1/Part 1, Critchley to DEA, 4 April 1956. See also Wo216/910, Templer to Sir William Oliver, 26 Aug. 1957.
 - 54 CRA: A1945/19, 162/4/1, telegram from the office of the Commissioner for New Zealand in Southeast Asia to the Ministry of External Affairs (Wellington), 29 Nov. 1957.
 - 55 Defe11/190, UK High Commissioner (Malaya) to Macmillan, 12 Oct. 1957. CRA: A1945/19, 162/4/1, 'SEATO and Malaya', DEA telegram to London High Commission, 11 Oct. 1957. J Saravanamuttu, *Dilemma of independence*, pp. 23–24. Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, pp. 34–36.
 - 56 Defe 11/190, High Commissioner (Malaya) to Macmillan, 12 Oct. 1957. This reports that the Tunku preceded his statement by saying that Malaya was not interested in joining any pacts. It does not give a precise date or place for the Tunku's statements.
 - 57 CRA: A1945/19, 162/4/1, DEA to Washington, 17 Oct. 1957, *passim*.
 - 58 Defe11/190, High Commissioner (Malaya) to Macmillan, 12 Oct. 1957. In fact Malaya showed little interest in talks about external defence until around 1960, see CRA: A1209/64, 60/869, *passim*.
 - 59 Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, pp. 34–36.
 - 60 Malaya did not uncritically embrace neutralism. If, 'when two elephants fight, the mousedeer in the middle gets killed' ('*Gajah sama gajah berjuang, pelandok mati tengah tengah*') how do you stop elephants fighting? Malaya's commitment to neutralising SEA emerged from 1968, as UK and US protection fell off. N.Sopiee, 'The Neutralization of SEA', in Bull. *Asia and the Pacific*, ch. 11, p. 132.
 - 61 For the term 'blank cheque', see Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, pp. 1–2.
 - 62 Nanyang (South Seas) University attracted emotional Chinese-speaking support – with millionaires and dance hall hostesses contributing alike. Yet between 1950–55 numbers in Chinese-language education were overtaken by those in more commercially useful English-language education.
 - 63 See Bloodworth, *Tiger and the Trojan Horse* for communist attempts to make the PAP their 'Trojan Horse': John Drysdale, *Singapore: Struggle for Success* (Singapore, 1984); and for security, Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*. James Minchin, *No Man is an Island: A Portrait of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew* (Sydney, 1990 edition), is a recent assessment of Lee Kuan Yew. Finally, for the Chinese-educated in the PAP see Sai Siew Min, and Huang Jianli, 'The "Chinese-educated" political vanguards: Ong Pang Boon, Lee Khoo Choy and Jek Yuen Thong', and CJ W-L Wee, 'The vanquished: Lim Chin Siong and a progressivist national narrative', in Lam Peng Er and Kevin Tan (eds), *Lee's Lieutenants: Singapore's Old Guard* (St Leonards, 1999), pp. 132–68, 169–90.
 - 64 See Turnbull, *History of Singapore*, pp. 242, 255–59. For continuing worries about Singapore's police in a racial context, see Defe11/124, BDCC(FE)(55)205, meeting of 25 June 1957, item 1.
 - 65 Cab128/CM(56)29, meeting of 11 April 1956, minute 5. For the COS's views, see the reference to DC(58)8 in Cab129/CP(56)97, 'Singapore', by Colonial Secretary, 14 April 1956. For the BDCC, see Air8/2132, SEACOS 61, BDCC to COS, 19 March 1956.

- 66 See Defe7/503, COS(56)35, meeting of 23 March 1956, for the COS and BDCC's determination that agreements over bases would be useless without the ability to control internal security. For Marshall in 1955, see Defe11/123, BDCC(FE)55)148, meeting of 22 June 1955. For Goode's doubts about the usefulness of bases in the event of local opposition, see Defe11/123, BDCC(FE)55)172, meeting of 17 April 1956, item 3; and Defe11/123, BDCC(FE)55)168, meeting of 17 March 1955, item 1.
- 67 Cab129/97, 'Singapore: Constitutional Crisis', Colonial Secretary, 10 Aug. 1955.
- 68 See CRA: A1838/T184, 3024/10/1/1 Part 1., UK High Commission to Secretary of the PM's Department, 23 Feb. 1956, on the Dec. 1955 Marshall/Lennox-Boyd meeting; and Chan, *Sensation*, p. 136.
- 69 Chan Heng Chee, *Sensation*, pp. 155, 160-61.
- 70 Chan Heng Chee, *Sensation*, pp. 161 ff. The LSP combined middle-class, often English-speaking members, with the wealthy, Democratic Party. Singapore's delegation was 7 LF, 4 LSP and 2 PAP.
- 71 Fo1091/45, SEACOS 66, BDCC to COS, 25 March 1956; Defe7/503, COS(56)123, 26 March 1956, BDCC telegram of 20 March 1956 on repercussions of failure in talks. The COS broadly endorsed the BDCC's call in SEACOS 61 for retaining control of internal security, prosecutions, defence, foreign affairs, franchise and nationality, see references to DC(56)8 in Cab129/CP(56)85, 23 March 1956.
- 72 For the quotations, see Air8/2132, Black to Colonial Secretary, 19 March 1956; and Fo1091/45.
- 73 See Air8/2132, correspondence between Black and Lennox-Boyd, 19 to 24 March, *passim*; and SEACOS 74, BDCC to COS, 19 April 1954, for BDCC views.
- 74 The quotation is from Cab129/CP(56)85, 'Singapore', by the Colonial Secretary, 23 March 1956. See also Cab129/CP(56)97, by the Colonial Secretary, 19 April 1956.
- 75 Cab128/CM(56)29, meeting of 17 April 1956, minute 5.
- 76 For conference quotations, see Cab133/149, 'The Singapore Constitutional Conference, 1956'. See Chan Heng Chee, *Sensation*, pp. 165-171, for 'arsenic'; and Cab128/CM(56)33 and 36, 3 and 15 May.
- 77 Air8/2132, SEACOS 86, BDCC to COS, 25 May 1956; Lennox-Boyd to Black, 23 May 1956; Scott to Lennox-Boyd, 29 May 1956. CRA: A1838/235, 383/5/3 Part 1, R. Harry to DEA, 12 Sept. 1956.
- 78 CRA: A1838/235, 383/5/3 Part 1, Harry to DEA, 13 Sept. 1956, *passim*.
- 79 Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: The Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore, 1998), p. 249. The 1,000 (presumably given as a round figure) included 256 secret society gangsters.
- 80 This point is succinctly put in Long Shi Ruey (Joey), 'The U.S. Involvement in Singapore' (Unpublished MA thesis, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 1998), pp. 71-86.
- 81 Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, pp. 142 ff.
- 82 See Cab128/CM(56)104, meeting of 20 Dec. 1956, minute 4. For the COS gradually accepting these arguments, see Air8/2132, SEACOS 119, BDCC to COS, 14 Feb. 1957; Def232, MOD to Scott, 1 Feb. 1957; and extract from COS(56)130, meeting of 6 Dec. 1956, minute 4. See also Air8/2132, 'Singapore Constitutional Development', by Colonial Secretary, Dec. 1956, enclosed as annex I to COS.1635/30/11/56. For Suez, see Cab134/1202, CA(56)36, 30 Nov. 1956.
- 83 See Air8/2132, 'Strategic Importance of Singapore in Relation to the Forthcoming Talks on the Status of Singapore', brief for VCAS, 6 Dec. 1956; extract from COS(56)130, meeting of 6 Dec. 1956, where Sir William Oliver (VCIGS) and General Bishop (CRO) conceded the CO argument that there might be no alternative; and SEACOS114, BDCC to COS, 5 Dec. 1956. For Scott's views, see Defe11/124, BDCC (FE)55)191, 9 Nov. 1956, item 4.
- 84 At any rate, Lee Kuan Yew sought to balance the appearance of control with the continuance of a British guarantee on internal security matters, see Lee, *The*

- Singapore Story*, p. 229. Air8/2132, 'Singapore Constitutional Talks', of c. Dec. 1956, gives the background to Cabinet discussions of 11 Dec. These should be at Cab128/30, CM(56)98, but are closed. See also Cab134/1202, CA(56)36, Lennox-Boyd memorandum for the Cabinet Committee, 29 Nov. 1956; and Cab128/CM(56)104, 20 Dec. 1956, minute 4, on Lim Yew Hock's position.
- 85 Cab128/CM(56)104, meeting of 20 Dec. 1956, minute 4.
- 86 See Air8/2132, 'Constitutional Talks'; Cabinet discussions, 11 Dec. 1956; CM(56)104, Cabinet meeting of 20 Dec. 1956; CC(57)15, 4 March 1957; and Cab128/CC(57)27, 27 March 1957, endorsing Cab129/85 CC(57)48, 'Singapore Constitution', by Colonial Secretary, 28 Feb. 1957.
- 87 See the note below; and Defe7/1547, (45), which shows that in 1958 the Malayan Defence Minister, Dato (later Tun) Abdul Razak, got Britain to agree that Malaya could abstain on ISC votes.
- 88 See Co1030/507, *passim*, for the Conference proceedings.
- 89 See CRA: A1838/235, 383/5/3/Part 2, JIC(FE)(59)93(F), JIC (FE), report of 11 Nov. 1959, paragraph 25, for Lee Kuan Yew and the ISC as a 'scapegoat'. For exclusion requests, Co1030/651; Co1030/508, (47/49); and CRA: A1838/235, 383/5/3 Part 2, R. Harry to DEA, 7 Sept. 1957. Lee had seen the Colonial Secretary about exclusions, making clear he wanted the measure, but would have to protest against it for the record, see Lee, *Singapore Story*, p. 258.
- 90 Co1030/507, CSC(57)12, meeting of 29 March 1957 - on CSC(57)16, a UK note on internal security of 28 March 1957. The latter stressed retention of expatriate staff was vital for security intelligence.
- 91 Co1030/507, Singapore Constitutional Conference, 1957. Command 147, *Report of the Singapore Constitutional Conference, 1957* (London, HMSO, 1957). See also Air8/2132 and 2133, *passim*, for correspondence on the 1956-57 conferences. For *tiga suku merdeka*, see Lee, *Singapore Story*, p. 261.
- 92 Minchin, *No Man is an Island*, p. 62.
- 93 Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 259-60. PAP radicals opposed merger before independence and the ISC terms of 1957. The branches could still threaten the PAP by defecting, as many did in 1961.
- 94 Co1030/651, Goode to Lennox-Boyd, 10 Oct. 1958.
- 95 Defe7/688, Goode to Lennox-Boyd, 25 March 1958, Goode may have been implied. Chin Kin Wah, *Defence of Malaysia*, pp. 42-43, note 20, citing *The Straits Times*, 17 Sept. 1957.
- 96 See Defe7/1548; and Prem11/2659, report by UK Commissioner of Singapore (Goode), 30 July 1959. Lee released the communist '1st XI' in June, but extracted their written support for non-communism and merger. See CRA: A1838/235, 383/5/3/Part 2, JIC(FE)(59)93(F), 'The Outlook in Singapore', by JIC (FE), 11 Sept. 1959, for 'totalitarian' features.
- 97 Air8/2132, for COS(57)77, meeting of 8 Oct. 1957. The Singapore agreement provided for review of the new constitution inside four years. If there was no agreement, the existing one was to remain in force.
- 98 Defe4/100, COS(57)71, meeting of 19 Sept. 1957. Cab134/1559, CPC(60)17, 'Possibility of an Association of the Borneo Territories', Colonial Secretary, 15 July 1960. For the 'carrot' comment, see Co1030/559, extract from a note of 19 Feb. 1959 by CO official W. I. J. Wallace.
- 99 See Wo216/902, Scott to PM, 18 Dec. 1956; and Defe13/228, Scott to PM, 15 April 1956. Even MacDonalld had told the Mallaig meeting of Britain's Eastern representatives in March 1955, that, 'Essentially the Asian peoples wanted leadership and were content to live under a benevolent autocracy', see Fo1091/2, record of the 2nd day of the Mallaig Conference, 1 March 1955. For Scott's equanimity, in Oct. 1955, at the idea that the Tunku might be aiming at 'old-fashioned Muslim dictatorship, with some democratic trappings', see Harper, 'The Colonial Inheritance', p. 431.

- 100 See Defe7/1723, Southern Deployment Plan, 1959, for the BDCC wanting to station a brigade with an armoured element in Borneo. Vulnerability to nuclear attack was given as a reason for base dispersal. See also Cab134/1859, CPC(60)17, Colonial Secretary, 15 July 1960, *passim* and chapter 9 below for British caution about Tunku Abdul Rahman's 1960 overtures, when he suggested Malaya federate with Brunei and Sarawak, leaving Britain freedom to use North Borneo as a military base.
- 101 Defe7/1723, COS(58)84, meeting of 1 Oct. 1958. Brunei became fully independent only in 1984, when it agreed to employ and pay for a British Gurkha battalion. Britain continued to run Jungle Warfare training facilities there into the 1990s. For a radical account, see B. Hamzah, *The Oil Sultanate: The Political History of Oil in Brunei Darussalam* (Negeri Sembilan, 1991).
- 102 David Lee, 'Australia and Allied Strategy in the Far East', in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 16, 4 (1993), 528.
- 103 See Air20/9881, (4), report by Air Marshal Braithwaite on the June 1956 SEATO planners' conference, for Australian opposition in SEATO. CRA: A433/1, 95/2, extract from the Casey diaries, 10 Oct. 1956. CRA: A1209/23, 57/4121, 'Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy', report by Australian Defence Committee, Oct. 1956.
- 104 David Lee, *Australia Turns to the United States, 1955-1957* (London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies Working Paper in Australian Studies no. 84, 1993), p. 7.
- 105 See Air8/1890, especially 'Summary of Report by UK Service Liaison Staff, Australia', for the Chief of Air Staff, early 1957.
- 106 For the central role of this aim in Australia's commitments up to Vietnam, see Pemberton, *All the Way, passim*. See also Peter Edwards, *Crises and Commitments, passim*.
- 107 CRA: A4940/1, C1473 Part 1, Cabinet Decision 811, 11 Nov. 1957; and Defe7/940, Australian PM's Department to Tory, 9 Nov. 1956. Australia still became increasingly nervous that if an independent Malaya drifted towards the neutralist camp it might prevent the use of Malayan bases for SEATO purposes. It was early 1958 before Macmillan secured Australia's agreement to a cost-sharing formula for building the Commonwealth infantry Brigade's Malacca (Terendak) cantonment. See Defe7/998; Defe7/20; and Defe7/777.
- 108 Suez reinforced Australian concerns that supply routes to Britain would be cut in war, see CRA: A816/42, 11/301/1039, PMM(D)(56)1, 3 July 1956; and Casey to Menzies, 1 Aug. 1956; and CRA: A816/52, 14/301/734, correspondence between Air Marshal Valston Hancock (Head of the Australian Joint Liaison Staff in Britain, 1955-57) and Shedden, June 1956; and Harry (Australian Commissioner for SEA, 1956-57) to Casey, 21 Jan. 1957.
- 109 See CRA: A1209/23, 57/4121, for Menzies's statement of 4 April 1957, announcing a mobile brigade group of 4,000 was to be established in Australia; and Do35/8832, Eden Hall Conference, 1959, Scott to PM, 18 Jan. 1959. Scott warned that, 'our basic policy must be to avoid putting them in a position where they have to make a choice between the UK and the US'.
- 110 In 1957-59 Australia's Air Minister (Townley), Menzies and McBride were interested in the possibility of Britain supplying nuclear weapons, see Do35/8287; and CRA: A1945/13, 186/5/3. Australia cooperated in the use of the Woomera and Maralinga atomic and rocket testing grounds, and in 1958 considered offering similar facilities to the US. Low-yield nuclear weapons were held to be 'of considerable importance' in the event of a direct threat 'requiring defensive operations in the northwest approaches to Australia', see CRA: A4940/1, C1148, 'Nuclear Weapons for Australian Forces', memorandum by the [Australian] Defence Committee, Feb. 1958.
- 111 Economically, Britain remained Australia's largest trading and investment partner into the early 1960s. Demographically and emotionally Australia was still strongly

- 'British', as shown by the reception given to Queen Elizabeth's 1954 visit and the 'Blind Loyalty' displayed during the Suez crisis. William Hudson, *Blind Loyalty: Australia and the Suez Crisis, 1956* (Carlton, Victoria, 1989).
- 112 Defe13/221, Minister of Defence file on New Zealand; Defe11/188, (617), UK High Commission New Zealand to CRO, 12 June 1956.
- 113 In 1962 Singapore's military bases employed 40,000, providing the source of support for 120,000 out of a population 1.7 million. Sharma, *British Policy Towards Malaysia*, p. 71.
- 114 Cab129/C(57)78, 'Singapore Conference: Progress', Colonial Secretary, 26 March 1957.
- 115 The quotation is from Cab134/1202, CA(56)36, Lennox-Boyd, 29 Nov. 1956.
- 116 Cab129/C(54)307, 'Commonwealth Membership', Commonwealth Secretary, 11 Oct. 1954.

Merdeka and Forces (1954–57)

From 'East of India' to East of Suez

This chapter asks why decolonisation led to a dramatic new 'East of Suez' posture, rather than to residual garrisons and a gentle sunset over Britain's eastern empire. It suggests it would be misleading to depict the 'East of Suez' strategy as the triumph of entrenched service interests over determined ministerial attempts at reform. East of Suez was not merely the unintended child of bureaucratic consensus or sclerosis. It was the conscious creation of the highest ministers and the COS alike – or at least the result of shared concerns and priorities. It resulted from a combination of the immediate security needs of Commonwealth territories, an ongoing process of strategic reviews, and ministers and officials' assumptions about the importance of maintaining regional influence. In other words, it can not be explained in terms of colonial, Cold War or great power concerns, but only as a result of the congruence of all of these.

THE IMPACT OF DECOLONISATION ON AIR AND LAND FORCES

The threat which dictated the size and disposition of forces in Malaya from 1948–55 was not primarily external. It was the Emergency. Between 1952 and 1956 this occupied most of the Gurkhas, which had originally been intended to serve as a strategic reserve and to provide for external defence. It also called for British and colonial reinforcements. By the time of *Merdeka* in 1957 there were still no less than 21 battalions (including seven Malay and one mixed-race Federation unit) in Malaya. Yet between 1952 and 1957 the estimated insurgent strength dropped from over 7,000 to around 1,800, and serious insurgency became restricted to the Thai border area. In Southeast Asia and Hong Kong as a whole there were still approximately 29,000 British and Gurkha troops in early 1957.

At this point Duncan Sandys, Minister of Defence from January 1957 to October 1959, imposed new cash and force limits on the services. This was both part of a continuing drive to restrain defence costs and a response to the financial damage and political embarrassment caused by the Suez crisis. It also reflected the gradual downgrading of the likelihood of global war after 1952, as nuclear deterrence came to be seen as increasingly effective. Sandys envisaged the armed services declining from 690,000 to 375,000 by 1962, when National

Service would end. Accelerating decolonisation also pointed to local governments increasingly assuming defence burdens.¹ These developments appeared to point the way towards smaller British garrisons. It seemed that the model which Britain had wanted since before 1946, namely, small imperial garrisons backed up by a central strategic reserve and mobile striking power, might at last be attainable in 1957.² This section looks at British responses to these changes in terms of land and air force dispositions, and of development policies for local forces.

In 1956 the Malaysians were told, for the purpose of defence negotiations, that Britain expected to maintain in Malaya three mixed British-Gurkha brigades and the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve.³ By early 1958 there were already hopes that a further brigade might soon be withdrawn, leaving one mixed British-Gurkha brigade each in Malaya and Singapore.

In theory, these forces would be available for the external defence of Malaya. In practice, most were expected to be engaged in, or available for, internal security duties. Notwithstanding its title, some of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve units were also to be used in counter-insurgency operations. In 1956-58 Scott argued resources should be shifted away from preparations for war and towards political and propaganda uses more suited to the Cold War. The military responded that forces were not set by the needs of a major war anyway. Despite the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement's emphasis on British responsibility for external defence, planning for internal security needs continued to be the most significant determinant of the size of British land forces in Southeast Asia.⁴

In Hong Kong, meanwhile, the local garrison, already too small for much more than internal security and border patrols, was to be reduced from two brigade groups plus support to one (or twelve units of infantry, artillery and armour to six). The Governor and local commander grumbled that this might not suffice for internal security. The colony was perched precariously on the edge of communist China, teeming with refugees, which contained in their number a dangerous mix of nationalist and communist sympathisers. In October 1956 illegal societies and nationalists had fomented brief but serious riots in Kowloon.⁵

Britain also remained ready to suspend Singapore's constitution and fly in British administrators, should this become the only way to prevent it from falling under communist control. Singapore's own forces were as yet embryonic. Recruiting for its first battalion started in March 1957, and was slowed in 1958 to improve the screening out of secret society members. Neither Hong Kong's predominantly Chinese police nor Singapore's mainly Malay force were viewed as reliable in all scenarios.⁶

In late 1956 the COS were already considering whether it would be necessary to increase inter-theatre mobility. This might allow the BDCC to cover internal security contingencies in Hong Kong, Singapore, and to a lesser extent Borneo and the Western Pacific, as British forces in their area declined in strength.⁷

By Spring 1957 plans nevertheless called for British air forces to be reduced from eleven to seven squadrons as Australian and New Zealand forces arrived,

and local aircraft began to assume light support duties in the Emergency. The changes would involve the replacement of three ageing *Valetta* medium-range transport squadrons with one squadron of *Hastings*. This would provide increased lift and range. Two helicopter squadrons, no longer necessary as Emergency operations declined, were also to go. By 1958 airforces in the Malayan area were, if anything, stronger than in 1955, as Australia and New Zealand by then provided a total of three fighter squadrons, one of bombers and a flight of transport aircraft.

The local Royal Malayan Airforce (RMAF), however, had developed slowly as resources were concentrated on forces having greater short-term relevance to the Emergency. Until 1958, when it changed title from the Malayan Auxiliary Airforce to the RMAF and took delivery of the first of twelve modern, short-range transport aircraft, it flew just three auxiliary flights. Each a rag-bag of mainly obsolescent aircraft. As late as 1956, the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Air Force (Air Marshal Sir Francis Fressanges) dismissed the idea of an independent Malayan airforce as, 'plain balls'. Not surprisingly, by 1960 the RMAF was only just extending its role from light support duties in the Emergency to maritime reconnaissance. This slow expansion was thus due to difficulties in funding, over building technical support services and in prioritising between various arms of the local security forces. In addition Britain remained sceptical about Malaya's ability to assume total defence responsibility, even in the long-term.⁸

British politicians and officers found it difficult to conceive of Malaya developing a fully autonomous defence capability. They envisaged a long period when Malaya would concentrate on internal security, leaving external defence to Britain and the Commonwealth. Even the Federation Army temporarily halted the expansion of its fighting units in 1957-62, concentrating instead on building the support units necessary to free it from dependence on British logistical assistance.

Indeed, in the defence negotiations and the resulting Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement of October 1957, Britain entrenched its obligation to secure Malaya's external defence. Far from making it clear that Malaya must gradually assume the burden of external defence itself, Britain was anxious to emphasise its own continuing and undiminished responsibility in this sphere.

This attitude may have resulted partly from Britain's concentration on securing maximum discretion over the use of Malayan bases and of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. In turn, Britain valued this freedom because it saw Malayan bases and the Reserve as providing at least a theoretical capacity to project regional military power. It was hoped this would help preserve a restraining influence over America and SEATO, and sustain Anglo-Australian relations.

Thus while British desires to buttress its regional stature were persistent after 1945, it was only after 1957 that they significantly affected defence posture. This suggests two periods. In the first, 1945-55, forces-levels were almost entirely committed to internal security tasks. The commitment of forces to Korea was an

exception to this rule, but this was intended to support the Anglo-American 'special relationship', rather than to buttress British power in the Far East. As the post-1956 period dawned, the waning of the Emergency and the proximity of Malayan independence presented an opportunity for a more thorough reappraisal of Britain's role, its relationship to local forces, and the level of its commitment.

Britain's interests in Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong nevertheless still appeared to require significant forces to guard against subversion and to handle the transfer of responsibility to local forces. Arguments for 'imperial overstretch', or that Britain failed to tailor military planning to decolonisation, need to take cognisance of the continuing defence needs of colonies and ex-colonies, as well as of Britain's desire to buttress regional and world influence.

So far only ground and air forces have been discussed. The section below relates adjustments in local forces and garrisons to changing British perceptions of regional instability. It also tries to explain the relative shift of British naval resources from West of Suez to East of Suez after 1956. For the most dramatic and criticised aspect of Britain's Southeast Asian strategies began at the point this work finishes, with Britain's post-1956 'East of Suez' policy.

THE ROYAL NAVY 'EAST OF SUEZ': SINGAPORE AND SANDYS

After 1956 the Southeast Asian or 'East of India' region was subsumed into 'East of Suez'. British aggression and humiliation at Suez in November 1956 compromised communications to the East. Neutral and Middle East countries, such as Egypt and India, were now seen as increasingly likely to deny British military aircraft passage. This presented the danger of an air barrier, obstructing the quick despatch of reinforcements eastwards. The need for reserves East of this potential barrier, and for more theatre mobility, increased.

An election in Ceylon in 1956, bringing in the nationalist Bandaranaike government, also led to Britain vacating its air and naval bases there in November the following year. In the light of these changes a new 'East of Suez' concept developed, envisaging a central, Singapore-based Carrier Task Force operating in a triangular zone stretching from Aden and Mombasa to Hong Kong. An area that has become identified not with a planned reduction of forces, but an unequal struggle to maintain great power status and a system of world power. A struggle carried on until imperial overstretch faced Britain with a financial Dunkirk in 1967.⁹

This section will look at the emergence of the 'East of Suez' posture from a naval point of view. It will suggest that, contrary to Darby's arguments, the new strategic stance cannot be seen primarily as the result of consensual and sclerotic Whitehall bureaucracy. Neither can 'East of Suez' be presented as the result of the military frustrating ministers' determined attempts at reform. When Macmillan made Duncan Sandys Minister of Defence in January 1957, with a specific brief to control defence spending, he gave Sandys far-reaching powers to determine the size, cost, balance and disposition of the armed services.¹⁰ Lack of planning also can not be presented as having allowed overcommitment East of

Suez by default: between 1952 and 1960 there was an abundance of 'radical' and 'long-term' defence reviews.¹¹

The new policy was in part shaped by beliefs and priorities shared by many senior ministers, officers and officials; and their image of Britain as a diplomatically influential power 'East of Suez'. This argument can be substantiated by examining the flows of strategic thought which merged in 1957 to form the East of Suez strategy.

The communications dilemma and the long-awaited opportunities to reduce the size of overseas garrisons have already been mentioned. The fact that Indonesia, Vietnam and Laos now seemed safe from external invasion, but increasingly vulnerable to subversion, also suggested opportunities to run down garrisons would be tempered by a continuing need for British forces. In addition, in 1956 Britain finally managed to assemble a central strategic reserve without it being instantly sucked into another long-term engagement. Large garrisons might at last give way to more affordable tripwire forces, which could rely on imperial ships and air-staging posts. The post-Suez Sandys review built on these factors and on a renewed impetus to trim defence spending.¹²

The military and political thinking which then led to the emergence of the East of Suez posture can be further examined through two conflicts: the dispute between Mountbatten and Sandys over the size of the Navy; and the debate on how nuclear policy could be used to ease tensions between 'maritime' and 'continental' strategies.

At one level Sandys's 1957-58 Defence White papers were the culmination of progressive reductions in the threat assessment for the NATO theatre and 'continental' warfare. Nuclear and then hydrogen bombs had reduced the possibility and likely duration of any European conflict. With Europe sheltered behind a thermonuclear defence shield and tactical (battlefield) nuclear weapons, Britain could substitute bombs and missiles for troops and aircraft. British forces West of Suez were also no longer to possess the full range of defence capabilities in their own right, only as part of NATO. This 'balanced collective forces' concept - emerging from 1957 - reinforced hopes that continental savings would make a maritime posture affordable. The April 1957 White paper announced a reduction of the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR) from 77,000 to 64,000. This was intended as the first stage towards reducing BAOR to below 50,000.

This allowed British ministers to hope they might cut the defence burden and still remain a world, 'maritime' power. The cuts achieved, however, remained limited. In part this was because Britain also believed it could and should retain major influence over NATO policy. Yet it became obvious allies would not accept the level of reliance on nuclear weaponry Britain suggested, and would balk at large unilateral force reductions. By 1961 NATO was moving towards a policy of graduated deterrence, which required a Western ability to counter Soviet attacks with conventional forces in the first instance. In 1957, however, the British aim was to secure defence savings in Western theatres. West of Suez nuclear weapons would underpin world power status despite significant reductions in conventional forces.¹³

These attitudes reflected and reinforced ministerial commitment to retaining significant conventional forces East of Suez.¹⁴ This implied a significant shift in naval policy. Apart from a commitment to the Korean War around 1950-53, the Far East Fleet had been restricted to anti-pirate duties off Borneo, 'flag-showing' and to assisting British shipping. Up to the mid-1950s this limited range of roles had not led to serious calls for reductions, since the major naval units available in the Far East were required for other theatres in global war.

By 1956, however, global war planning was moving towards retaining only forces required for an initial, intense exchange. The concept of the Navy performing communications and anti-submarine roles during a subsequent period of 'broken-backed' warfare had diminishing buying power in Whitehall. In January 1957 Sandys suggested land-based aircraft might cheaply supplant aircraft-carriers. This placed the onus on the Navy to justify them.

Aircraft-carriers had ceased to be stationed in the East in 1948, though there was usually at least one serving off Korea in 1950-53. By 1955 the Far East Fleet was again carrier-less, relying on visits. It had contracted to two cruisers and ten destroyers and frigates, with two Australian and one New Zealand frigate available as part of the 'Commonwealth Strategic Reserve'.¹⁵ The East Indies Station, until it closed down in 1958, also had two cruisers and two frigates, with responsibility for liaison and training in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.

As early as July 1956 the Navy argued that, with a reduction in overseas garrisons imminent, it would be necessary to adjust the existing naval forces so that they could take over Cold War policing duties, and hold the position on the outbreak of limited war. A carrier task force including an aircraft carrier and commando ship should cover the Aden-Mombasa-Hong Kong triangle from Singapore. Suez strengthened the Navy's hand both by demonstrating the efficacy of landing troops by helicopter and the increased dangers of isolation and delay.¹⁶

By January 1957 the Navy feared Sandys would make deep cuts, particularly in its carrier force. Pressure had been mounting in 1956 (even before Suez) to relieve the research, manpower and economic burdens on the UK, so that it could maintain the economic strength needed to compete in a 'long-haul' Cold War.¹⁷ Mountbatten, now First Sea Lord, thus moved quickly to get COS backing for the East of Suez carrier task force concept by 19 February 1957. Sandys backed down just six days later. In July, approval was also given for the conversion of a carrier to a commando ship, HMS *Bulwark* entering service as a result in January 1960.

In so far as there was serious pressure for naval reductions in the East, this was for the closure of eastern dockyards and the servicing of the carrier task force in Britain. Under pressure to make savings the Navy did accept the closure of the Hong Kong dockyard and Ceylon base in 1957.¹⁸ With the Dominions' help, however, it fought off attempts to have the Singapore dockyards - whose importance increased now it was the only significant RN dock East of Suez - transferred to civilian control. It seems the COS quickly accepted the argument that the Navy's task force concept, structured around an aircraft carrier and a

commando ship, would give much needed mobility, and provide 'floating bases' secure against the vagaries of local politics.

Sandys did not focus the carrier-debate on East of Suez, but on the Navy's attempts to keep aircraft-carriers West of Suez in a strike role. This reflected growing belief that West of Suez Britain did not need its own, balanced forces outside of NATO. The Navy consequently tried to present its carriers West of Suez as having an alliance anti-submarine role. In November 1957 Mountbatten also secured agreement on the retention of aircraft-carriers for West of Suez, on condition this would not increase Navy personnel above 88,000.¹⁹ The Navy was to keep three carrier-task forces, one to be East of Suez at all times. A further carrier was to be converted for a commando role East of Suez. With deep cuts accepted for the Mediterranean, and in minesweepers and the reserve fleet, naval forces East of Suez were set to continue at approximately the same overall level, and with greater striking power.²⁰

There must be a suspicion that Sandys was attracted to the nuclear strike capability carrier forces could project East of Suez. He was one of the ministers most committed to sustaining regional and 'great power' status, and prone to seeing nuclear bombs as a way of doing this while cutting costs. In early 1958 it seemed to Eugene Melville (an Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the Colonial Office) that Sandys felt Britain's only defence interest in the Malayan Peninsula to be the stationing of nuclear-capable medium bombers as part of the regional deterrent.²¹ When Sandys visited Australia in August 1957 he tried to reassure Australia of continuing British power by focusing on the intended development of a Far Eastern nuclear capacity. He publicly announced Britain would deploy nuclear-capable bombers to the East on the very eve of Malayan *Merdeka*.²²

In all of these debates, there seems little evidence of serious ministerial questioning of the East of Suez posture. Indeed, the main debates over East of Suez in the Cabinet and Defence Committee were about whether the 'cuts' involved would damage Britain's influence. Australian sensitivities were often raised in 1956-57 as a reason for avoiding drastic reductions in the East, especially by Sir Alec Douglas-Home as Commonwealth Secretary.²³

While neither Home nor Sandys can be portrayed as opposing the emerging East of Suez concept, Macmillan was neutral if not supportive. Macmillan may have called for a 'profit and loss account' on British territories in January 1957, but in the very next sentence he had stated that this must 'of course' be 'weighed against the political and strategic considerations involved'.²⁴ In 1957-58 Macmillan still believed Britain had a major world role to play.²⁵ In 1957, for all his talk about the need for economic solvency, he was concerned with rebuilding Anglo-American relations as a means of increasing diplomatic leverage. 1957 to 1958 saw increasing Anglo-American cooperation in both the intelligence and nuclear fields.²⁶ Macmillan's Commonwealth trip of late 1957 confirmed his view that Britain, by acting as interpreter of the new Commonwealth members to the old, could still be a major force. After attending the Commissioner-General of Southeast Asia's regional conference in Singapore, in January 1958, he

remained convinced British prestige, supported by military power, remained important in the area. Macmillan's views on Britain's world role appear to have been predicated on a strong East of Suez presence.²⁷

Macmillan and Sandys seem to have shared a belief that nuclear power and Commonwealth leadership would sustain Britain's great power role. It could be argued that the military were able to convince ministers not so much because of weaknesses in policy-making, as because both groups were ultimately willing to pay in order to sustain Britain's regional role.

In 1958-61 there was a further shift in emphasis from European-continental tasks to a maritime East of Suez posture as forces moved East of the 'air barrier'. By 1958 two battalions were stationed in Kenya as an eastern strategic reserve. In 1960 a Royal Marine Commando, with 600 men, moved to Aden, with additional commando forces moving from Malta to Singapore in the next two years. The Amphibious Warfare Squadron moved to Aden, its squadron of Centurion tanks intended to ensure against Iraq using its 100 or so tanks against Kuwait.²⁸ The air and naval mobility of forces was strengthened and stockpiles built up.²⁹ By 1962 there may have been more ships East than West of Suez.³⁰

This might seem to support an 'illusion' or 'overstretch' judgement of British East of Suez strategies. British investments in Malaya and the Persian Gulf, the latter of which provided the majority of Britain's oil by 1957, were extensive. Nevertheless, it was already unclear how far these could or should be defended by military means. By 1960 one British study had reportedly shown that 'the net economic benefit' obtained from Far Eastern interests 'was in fact little more than our expenditure there'. No company, and equally no country, can long afford to pay out insurance premiums which almost obliterate all revenue, and this was what Britain may have been doing in the East, even before Confrontation.³¹

The costs of 'overstretch' to a straining economy are often held to have been high. In Spring 1956 there were 400,000 unfilled jobs and only 216,000 unemployed in Britain. Defence needs were tying up seven per cent of the working population, 12.5 per cent of the output of the metal-using industries, and soaking up a greater proportion of research and development than it was in competitors such as Germany or even France. It is sometimes argued that the strain on the balance of payments caused by the foreign exchange costs of overseas forces was a major cause of sterling's weakness. The deflationary policies used to shore up sterling when it suffered consequent speculation against it are then blamed for Britain's relatively slow post-war growth.³²

Any acceptance of this radical critique of Britain's relative decline, and of 'imperial overstretch' arguments, would have to be qualified at a number of levels. The foreign exchange argument is weakened for East of Suez because many costs borne there were met in sterling, while regional oil and rubber saved or generated foreign currency. The size of naval forces East of Suez also reflected the tendency to deploy existing forces to areas of maximum threat. The forces deployed against Indonesia after 1963 present an obvious case of prudent overkill. The assumption that many of these would have been retrenched if not

East of Suez may not be sound. Nevertheless, it remains true that Malayan independence, and the withdrawal from Ceylon, were followed not by a decrease, but rather by an increase, in British forces 'East of Suez'. An increase that Britain could ill-afford.

CONCLUSIONS

Chapters seven and eight have confirmed that, up to and even beyond 1957, ministers continued to think in terms of preserving rather than phasing out Britain's role in Southeast Asia. In many ways defence planning shows a continuity of intention which stretches back to before 1948. The aim was for local forces to assume as much of the internal security burden as possible. Small British garrisons, backed by Malayan-based Gurkhas and a metropolitan strategic reserve, would provide for external defence and buttress Britain's regional influence cheaply. This remained the ideal between 1948 and 1956. In practice, internal security requirements in Malaya, and to a lesser extent in Hong Kong too, shaped force-levels by tying down the Gurkhas and sucking in reinforcements.

With the Emergency much reduced, by 1956 Britain was able to contemplate a significant reduction in its forces in Southeast Asia. At this point, however, the Suez crisis and Sandys's reviews saw planning subsumed into a larger 'East of Suez' concept. The 1957-58 defence reviews concluded nuclear deterrence would minimise the threat of war West of Suez. The Suez humiliation also threatened to encourage challenges to Britain East of Suez while complicating reinforcement. With nuclear deterrence rendering European war decreasingly likely, the salience of the Cold War, maritime defence and Southeast Asia increased.

The process of 'withdrawal' was also complicated by the financial and recruiting difficulties involved in expanding local forces, the desire to preserve Singapore and Hong Kong's internal security, and by regional instability. Managing successful transition to a post-colonial world seemed to require significant commitments in men and money, regardless of how far Britain also sought influence with America and in SEATO. Even Britain's determination to retain a regional role for the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve could be presented as easing withdrawal, since it was one factor in encouraging the retention of Australian forces in Malaya.

The 'East of Suez' posture was thus the result not so much of bureaucratic sclerosis, as of atavistic pride, combined with the way several strategic concerns came together, namely: local security, the Cold War, nuclear strategy, economic strains, and sustaining regional influence.

If a case is to be made for illusions of regional power leading to damaging 'overstretch', it will have to concentrate on this new, post-1957 phase of strategic thinking. That is, after Southeast Asia was subsumed into 'East of Suez', after the threat from the Malayan Emergency declined, after Malaya's importance as a dollar-earner diminished, and when decolonisation was starting to sweep Africa and Borneo alike. It might ask whether Britain's commitment to sustaining

regional influence indefinitely then distracted it from planning for withdrawal, and how far Britain tried to adjust defence expenditure to declining regional interests. It would have to acknowledge both the changing cost-benefit calculus behind Britain's 'East of Suez' presence, and the difficulty of withdrawing from a region where communism, Sukarno's unpredictable brand of nationalism, and remaining dependencies stretching from Rhodesia to Hong Kong, fuelled uncertainty. It would also have to accept that in colonial and post-colonial territories – as opposed to independent countries such as Greece and Turkey – the baton could not simply be passed to the United States, which was often viewed with more suspicion than Britain.³³ Tracing the detailed development and effects of this 'East of Suez' posture is a task for another work, but an epilogue may serve to place events up to 1957 in perspective.

Notes

- 1 See Air20/10377; Defe7/1723; and Defe13/ 227. For 20,000 British and 9,000 Gurkhas, see NLA: box 435, defence file 8, Sandys to Australian COS, 20 Aug. 1957, Annex 2.
- 2 Several problems prevented the formation of a significant pre-1956 reserve. Egypt (40,000+ troops), Malaya and Cyprus were the most demanding.
- 3 The reliance on Gurkhas, half Britain's 'teeth' strength in the area by 1959, meant Britain worried in case Nepal swing towards neutralism, Defe7/1723, (91); and Co1030/559, Scott to PM, 18 Jan. 1959.
- 4 Defe7/1723, (1), 'Army Order of Battle', brief for Minister of Defence stamped Feb. 1958; Defe13/86, 'Long Term Deployment', memorandum for Minister of Defence, 17 Jan. 1958; Wo216/902, Scott to PM, 18 Dec. 1956; Wo216/902, CIC, FE Land Forces [General Festing] to CIGS [Templer], 3 Jan. 1957, *passim*; and Defe7/1547, Scott to Macpherson, 17 June 1958.
- 5 CRA: A816/32, 19/301/1093, (58), 'Reduction of Hong Kong garrison', G. W. Tory (CRO), 10 Dec. 1956. Defe13/237, 'Draft Paper on U.K. Defence Policy', Chilver (Deputy Secretary, MOD), 16 Jan. 1957. Felix Patrikeeff, *Mouldering Pearl: Hong Kong at the Crossroads* (London, 1989), pp. 38–51.
- 6 See Defe7/503: COS(56)123, 26 March 1956; and Governor Sir Robert Black to Colonial Secretary, 2 Oct. 1956. See also Defe4/98, COS(57)53, 23 July 1957; Co1030/839; Co1030/578; and CRA: A1838/235, 383/5/3 Part 2, DCC(FE) (59)368, 'Maintenance of Law and Order', BDCC, 16 Nov. 1959. Pan-Malayan defence planning originally saw Singapore concentrate on the Royal Malayan Navy. This was transferred to Malaya by 1958, when self-government led Singapore to concentrate on internal security. By 1963 Singapore had 2 infantry regiments and an armoured car squadron. Chan Heng Chee, 'Singapore', in Ahmad and Crouch, *Military-Civilian Relations*, pp. 136–56.
- 7 Defe7/777, COS(56)446, 'Strategic Mobility in the Far East Theatre', COS, 21 Dec. 1956.
- 8 Defe13/227, 'Level of UK Forces in the FE', MOD Paper, March 1957. Defe7/1552, (107/1A), p. 12. By Spring 1962 the RMAF had 18 light transport aircraft, 15 trainers, and plans for 6 medium range transports, 16 helicopters and 16 Gnat fighters. See also Wo216/901, Loewen to VCIGS, 7 Jan. 1956 (quotation); and Fo1091/7, 'Notes for Brief to the Chief Minister of Singapore', Governor (Singapore), 2 Nov. 1955, for the need for 2 Malayan divisions (one for internal security), and finance and officer-training limits meaning, 'The economy of the country cannot support the necessary sized force to ensure external defence'.

- 9 The East Indies Station dissolved by 1958, Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 126. Groundwork for a network of air staging posts across Africa and the Indian Ocean, bypassing neutral countries, started before Suez. Gan air-field (opening in 1959 on an island in the British-protected Maldives, 400 miles s.w. of Ceylon) enabled aircraft to bypass India, Pakistan and Ceylon. Defe7/1153.
- 10 This is not to deny that a COS-defence-Foreign Office axis could weight discussions against the Treasury. For criticisms of 'consensual' politics, see Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness*, pp. 291-92; Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 54-6, 327, 330-31; and Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp. 47-50. For Sandys's brief, see Jackson, *Britain's Defence Dilemma*, p. 52.
- 11 For the review of Britain's place in world affairs initiated by Eden in 1956, see Goldsworthy, *Conservative Government and the End of Empire*, pp. 61-81. For a questioning review of East of Suez policies in 1959-60, see Air8/2280.
- 12 Suez and the arrival of Sandys as Minister of Defence in Jan. 1957 arguably added little. The determination to end conscription by 1962, partly intended to shore up sagging electoral fortunes, did imply forces would fall from 690,000 to 375,000. Eden, however, was already aiming at 445,000. Defe13/237; Defe13/228; Rosecrance, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 221-22. See also, Defe7/7777, COS(56)446, 21 Dec. 1956, for the enclosed [B]DCC(FE)56)15, 'Strategic Mobility in South East Asia', 14 Dec. 1956.
- 13 By summer 1957 there were hopes BAOR would shrink to under 44,000 in 1961. Defe13/86, MOD working paper of 5 April 1957. See also C. Bluth, 'Nuclear Weapons and British-German Relations', in Beatrice Heuser and O'Neill, *Securing Peace in Europe, 1945-62* (London, 1992), 139-49; Martin Navias, *Nuclear Weapons and British Strategic Planning*; and Cab133/237 on balanced forces. Dockrill, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 78-80, covers changes in British and NATO emphasis after 1959.
- 14 See Cab131/18, DC(57)10, meeting of 18 Nov. 1957, minute 2, 'Role and Composition of the Navy', for Britain needing balanced naval forces East of Suez, because it was there that Britain was 'most likely to be involved in the defence of important British interests without the assistance of allies'. See also Cab131/18, D(57)26, 'Balanced Collective Forces', brief for the PM's Oct. meeting with Eisenhower on collective defence, by Duncan Sandys, 12 Nov. 1957.
- 15 Defe5/47, COS(53)333, 'The Radical Review', 10 July 1953, 'The major naval forces deployed in the Far East are required for tasks in the vital Home area and other theatres on the outbreak of war'. See also Grove, *Vanguard to Trident*, p. 199; Lord Carver, *Tightrope Walking: British Defence Policy since 1945* (London, 1992), pp. 42-44; Defe7/1777, COS(56)280, 25 July 1956; and Defe13/237.
- 16 Defe13/86, COS(56)219 (Revise), 25 July 1956. See also Defe7/1177, (46), 'Notes on Some Points raised at Meetings [of the Minister of Defence] with Admiralty Representatives, 15-16 Nov. 1956'.
- 17 Wyn Rees, 'The 1957 Sandys White Paper: New Realities in British Defence?', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 12, 2 (1989), 219-21, 226.
- 18 Hong Kong's small naval base was allowed to survive, the distinction between this and the dockyard being the latter's capacity to carry out major repairs and refits.
- 19 No doubt it helped that keeping aircraft-carriers as yet involved only maintenance and refitting costs, not yet replacement. Singapore was costing just over £3 million a year and Hong Kong £1.5 million out of the Royal Navy's overall dockyard expenditure of £69 million. Parliamentary Paper, *Navy Dockyard and Production Accounts, 1955-56* (London, HC, 1956-57); Ziegler, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (London, 1985), pp. 549-54; Darby, *British Defence Policy*, p. 193.
- 20 A second carrier was converted to a commando role, allowing helicopter-borne infantry assaults.
- 21 Col030/503, (83), E. Melville for Mr W. Wallace (also CO), 18 Feb. 1958. Melville's concerns were: Sandys's scepticism about the need to spend £20 million on service

- works in Singapore; and his query – after PAP successes in City Council elections in Dec. 1957 – whether Singapore's new Constitution should be reconsidered.
- 22 Prem11/1772, telegrams from the Minister of Defence's party in Australia to the MOD, Aug. 1957. Air Marshal Hancock (Head of Australian Joint Services Staff in Britain, 1955-57) argued British desires to maintain influence, 'make it essential for the UK to have nuclear capacity in the Far East', CRA: A816/52, 14/301/734, Hancock to Shedden, 24 July 1956. For Sandys in Australia, see NLA: Menzies, Box 435, Defence, Folders 7 and 8.
 - 23 Home's warnings included: Cab131/17, DC(57)7, meeting of 27 Feb. 1957, minute 2; Cab131/18, D(57)21, 22 Aug. 1957; and Cab131/18, D(57)9, meeting of 13 Nov. 1957.
 - 24 Cab134/555, CPC(57)6, Annex A, Harold Macmillan to Lord President of the Council, 28 Jan. 1957. Macmillan envisaged a full account, in which strategic interest, obligations and politics would be weighed alongside economics to arrive at an overall balance sheet.
 - 25 Holland, *Pursuit of Greatness*, pp. 291-92. In, Cab131/18, DC(57)6, meeting of 31 July 1957, minute 3, discussion centred on the danger of losing 'our position at the centre of the Commonwealth' if naval forces fell too much. With the exception of Heath's doubts (Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury), it is difficult to find questioning of the military role in maintaining 'influence'. See Cab131/18, *passim*, especially D(57)31, 'Naval Dockyards', by Heath, 13 Nov. 1957; and Cab131/18, D(57)24, 'The Future of ANZAM' by Minister of Defence, 27. Feb. 1957, minute 1, Annex.
 - 26 Prem11/1826, PM's file on 'The Economic Consequences of Suez'. The post-Suez financial crisis caused by the run on the pound helped to bring Macmillan to the premiership on 14 Jan. 1957.
 - 27 Cab129/CC(58)128, note on 'PM's tour of the Commonwealth', 4 June 1958. For Jan. 1958, see Sharma, *British Policy Towards Malaysia*, p. 63 and note 190. After the 1957 launch of Sputnik the US promised in Oct. to improve nuclear cooperation. It amended the Atomic Energy Act in summer 1958. John Simpson, *The Independent Nuclear State* (London, 1986), pp. 135-41. See Cab133/237 for 1957 Eisenhower-Macmillan meetings. Macmillan hoped these would become routine.
 - 28 These forces did move to counter a perceived threat from Iraq to Kuwait in 1961.
 - 29 A second Commando Carrier and two assault ships were ordered in 1960-61. Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 34, 78, 108-110, 127, 166. There was no long-range transport aircraft until the Britannia (which could carry 113 troops 4,268 miles, or from Mombasa to Australia via Gan) in 1959. Previous aircraft could reach Penang from Gan (2,250 miles). Prior to 1957 Transport Command was neglected – and unable to transport bulky equipment. Then, between 1956-63, it almost doubled to over 260 aircraft, including 13 Britannias.
 - 30 Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 163, 193, 197-98. Peter Boyce, *Malaysia and Singapore in International Diplomacy*, pp. 133, 142.
 - 31 Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 286. The conclusion on net economic benefit is mentioned in Air8/2280, 'Meeting of the Minister of Defence with the COS', 5 Oct. 1960, extracts from the minutes. It is mentioned in connection with an investigation of Far Eastern defence policy which is not named. The study referred to was probably part of the background work for the 'Official Committee on the Far East, South and South East Asia' which met in 1959-60 to consider policy for the years 1960-70. Most files on this seem closed or heavily weeded. See for instance, Do35/8865.
 - 32 See Morgan, *The People's Peace*, p. 146; Carver, *Tightrope Walking*, p. 50; and Chalmers, *Paying for Defence*, pp. 1, 65, 112-113, and p. 121 for low spin-offs from military research. One problem is that French military expenditure, boosted by Indochina and Algeria, was only fractionally lower (as a percentage of GDP) than Britain's in the 1950-60s, yet its GDP growth rates were much higher.

- 33 Joey Long Shi Ruey, 'The US Involvement in Singapore, 1953-1960'. See also Stockwell, *Malaya*, ii, p. 70; and Robert McMahon, 'The Cold War in Asia: The Elusive Synthesis', in Michael Hogan, *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941* (Cambridge, 1995).

Epilogue: From Malayan Independence to British Withdrawal

Southeast Asia has frequently been submerged in analysis of 'withdrawal East of Suez'. Yet this book has shown that Britain treated Southeast Asia as a distinct area during 1943 to 1957. The previous chapter demonstrated how and why 'East of Suez' emerged as an overarching strategic concept only after 1957. The policies, failures and successes of 1957–68 – the East of Suez period and the subject of this epilogue – should not be projected backwards uncritically.¹

What historians usually mean, when they claim East of Suez withdrawal could have happened before 1957, is that Britain wrongly believed it must hold, 'a great chain of fuelling stations, air-bases, and military outposts'. A chain envisaged as stretching from Gibraltar, through the Middle East and on to Hong Kong.²

The problem is that, in an era of challenges such as the Malayan Emergency and Brunei revolt, of continuing interests, and yet when aircraft had limited ranges and capacity, Britain did require at least some bases and staging posts. These enabled overstretched forces to be deployed and redeployed economically, to manage the process of decolonisation. The Suez debacle of 1956 seemed to make this doubly necessary, as it made Islamic and Middle Eastern countries seem more likely to create an 'air barrier' in a crisis. Yet Suez had simultaneously shown how disastrous delays could be, so that having forces *in situ*, with heavy equipment, and fully acclimatised seemed even more necessary.

Even when the East of Suez policy was implemented, after 1957, it was not merely atavistic. It was in many ways a new policy, involving weakening infantry forces in the east, and strengthening naval ones to unprecedented levels, building new bases, and abandoning old ones.³

The period 1957–61 was one of transition to this new posture: the strategic air-base at Gan Island (the Maldives) was being constructed; naval units moved; and small, mobile reserves stationed east of the 'air barrier', at new bases in Kenya and Aden. The East of Suez posture was only fully in place in 1961, by when there was an aircraft carrier and Amphibious Warfare carrier East of Suez, as part of a balanced Carrier Task Force.⁴

These forces were called into action repeatedly: in Jordan and Oman in 1957–58; Kuwait in 1961; Brunei in 1962, when 2,000 troops were flown in within 60 hours to combat an equal number of rebels; East Africa in 1964; and in Thailand in 1962, when a *Hunter* squadron was flown in to counter SEATO

concerns about Laos. All this in addition to the Confrontation with Indonesia of 1963–66 and Hong Kong riots in 1967. China's Cultural Revolution made the 1960s a particularly nerve-wracking time for Hong Kong, with mosquito sheets threatening individuals, bombs planted, and border tensions.⁵

In 1957–63 regional developments further perpetuated tensions between Britain's competing aims: to reduce military expenditure; to continue underpinning regional security for British dependencies and ex-colonies; and to influence American policy and so decrease the dangers of Cold War rivalry. Instability in Laos and Vietnam culminated in the Catholic President Diem's overthrow in November 1963, after he mishandled Buddhist protests. By then the southern-based, northern-supported *Viet Cong* numbered over 300,000, while the United States commitment stopped at advice and supplies. It did not commit combat forces until 1964–65.⁶ Britain then found itself disengaging from Southeast Asia just when the United States was becoming more deeply involved.

In Singapore, meanwhile, there still seemed everything to play for. Self-governing from June 1959, Singapore had two infantry battalions and virtually no air force. The PAP relied on the threat of British intervention, to be affected through Singapore's Internal Security Council (ISC), to limit opponents' room for manoeuvre. Britain worried Singapore could still lurch leftward or sink into disorder, so paralysing the military bases there.⁷

These bases seemed vital not only to British strategy, but to the PAP's chances of withstanding assault from the left. They contributed twenty per cent of Singapore's Gross National Product and employed 25,000 of its people. This at a time of unemployment, and when the PAP needed to deliver concrete results.⁸ Until 1963, it seemed far from certain that Lee Kuan Yew's faction would retain control of the PAP. Its core of English-language educated leaders had shallower mass roots than their more radical and Chinese-speaking opponents. Thirteen PAP members (out of 43 in an Assembly of 51) split in mid-1961. They formed a new party, the *Barisan Sosialis*, and called for an end to the ISC. Lee Kuan Yew argued he might not survive British departure.⁹

Singapore and Malaysia also had to worry about their unpredictable southern neighbour, Indonesia. President Sukarno moved towards 'Guided Democracy' from 1957 to 1959. He took over the selection of Cabinets, and buttressed his power by balancing two extra-parliamentary forces: the communists – with rising mass support; and the military – whose leaders possessed coercive power and anti-communist instincts.

As early as December 1957 the COS concluded that Indonesia was likely to make a claim on British Borneo 'sooner or later', and whoever ran it. If the PKI secured control, this would also encourage communists in Malaya and Borneo, though a serious military threat would remain unlikely.¹⁰

Indonesian interest in buying Soviet and Chinese weapons, and in Dutch West New Guinea (later called Irian Jaya), were taken as warning signs. West New Guinea was the only part of the Netherlands East Indies not included in Indonesia at independence. The possibility Indonesia might also covet Britain's Borneo territories increased in late 1957, when it seized Dutch businesses as part

of its West New Guinea campaign. This raised political temperatures and caused economic deterioration. Nationalist feelings were further fuelled by the 'confrontation' which persuaded the Dutch to cede West New Guinea in late 1962 (effective May 1963): a campaign featuring Indonesian infiltration and American diplomatic intervention.¹¹

To make matters worse, Britain had already interfered in Indonesia's internal politics. There had been regional rebellions in Sumatra and Sulawesi in 1957–58. Britain responded by taking a *laissez-faire* attitude to Singapore-based supporters of the rebels, since many of the latter were Islamic and instinctively anti-communist. The rebels' supporters in Singapore arranged supplies. The United States did the same, using commercial freighters and submarines. In May 1958 an American pilot of Civil Air Transport – a CIA front – was shot down over Indonesia. Britain was by then supporting an Anglo-American policy of 'maximum disavowable aid', including intelligence cooperation, hosting American warships in Singapore, and possibly staging Sumatra-bound flights through Changi airport.¹²

The Anglo-American hope was that rebellions might force Sukarno to reduce his courting of communists, soften his stance towards the West, or see him replaced. The Foreign Office had no desire to break up Indonesia. Their long-term aim was a stable, non-communist, friendly and united Indonesia, which would not require British troops to be stationed in the area.

The policy of 'maximum disavowable aid' had to be abandoned precipitately, as the rebels collapsed from May. By June the United States and Britain were stopping aid to the rebels, and restarting assistance and arms sales to Indonesia. The new aims were to prevent Soviet sales and strengthen ties with the Indonesian military, identified as the most promising anti-communist force.¹³ This tentative courting of Indonesia remained limited, however, because of Sukarno's confrontation with the Dutch over West New Guinea. After just two years, it was to be totally derailed by events in Malaya and Borneo.

In May 1961 Malaya declared an interest in federating with Singapore and British territories in Borneo. Given Britain's record, Sukarno could hardly fail to be suspicious. Britain had not supported Indonesia's claim to West New Guinea. Britain had tolerated both rebel sympathisers based in Singapore and large-scale rubber smuggling from Indonesia. It was a major Cold War player and SEATO member, while Indonesia sought to organise Afro-Asian diplomacy. There were also fears that the Malays of Sumatra could gravitate towards Malaya. The proposed Malaysian federation seemed to threaten Indonesia with the creation of a large, pro-British and potentially anti-Indonesian state. In addition, there seemed good reason for Sukarno to suppose he could frustrate the proposed merger. All he had to do was to threaten to move closer to communist countries, and to use confrontation tactics – low-level harassment combined with high-level diplomacy – in order to invoke the sort of American support which persuaded Holland to compromise in 1962.

Britain, meanwhile, saw the proposed Malaysian Federation as a way of decolonising Singapore without it going broke or communist; of decolonising

Borneo without leaving its small and poor populations stranded and under-developed. The reason for federation being put on the agenda now, however, had much to do with local developments, little to do with British plotting. Britain had long pressed Malaya to associate with Singapore, and had long been studiously ignored.

Then came Tunku Abdul Rahman's announcement, on 27 May 1961, that he favoured merger between Malaya, Singapore, and the British Borneo territories. This reversed Malaya's previous opposition to any arrangement which included Singapore. It was not that the Tunku had ever been against federation as such. Malaya was itself a federation of Malay States. It was just that he feared Singapore – with its mainly Chinese population – might undermine Malay dominance and special Malay rights.¹⁴ In 1959–60 the Tunku had suggested Malaya federate with Brunei and Sarawak only, leaving Britain to use North Borneo as a 'fortress', and to control Singapore 'for a long time'.¹⁵ This tailored with Britain's limited development of military facilities in North Borneo. The Tunku seemed to want to unite with Malays in Sarawak (where they were a considerable minority), and gain Brunei's oil, leaving Britain to bear military costs. In July 1960 the British Cabinet was informed this was not attractive. Malaya was told it could not devour desirable parts of Borneo without swallowing the less palatable Singapore. It was still stalemate by the year's end. Despite Britain's determination to maintain pressure in private, its long-term aim since the war – a 'Dominion of Southeast Asia' – seemed as elusive as ever.¹⁶

Then events in Singapore intervened. Singapore's 1959 Constitution, which conferred internal self-government, had a provision for review after five years – in 1963–64. The clock was ticking. If by 1963 independence within a Malaysian federation appeared unlikely, the PAP would come under pressure to seek full independence, alone and without an ISC. Even worse, PAP losses in by-elections in 1960–61 culminated in the PAP split of mid-1961. This suggested it could lose control through the ballot box when general elections were next held, again around 1963. The turning point was the Hong Lim by-election of 29 April 1961. In this, populist mayor Ong Eng Guan, having been expelled from the PAP, beat the PAP candidate by a huge margin. Malaysia, with its own Emergency only formally ended in 1960, an MRLA rump on the Thai border, and its large Chinese community, could not tolerate its neighbour drifting both leftwards and to independence. Singapore's politics convinced Malaya it would have to marry Singapore, and Britain that it would have to let the Borneo territories go, even if they were not ready.¹⁷

Britain now abandoned its plans to federate the less developed Borneo territories as one unit, and Malaya and Singapore as another, as a prelude to bringing them all together.¹⁸ There followed bruising pre-nuptial negotiations between Malaya and Singapore in 1961 to mid-1963. Squabbles over who would collect tax in post-federation Singapore, how much autonomy Singapore would have, how soon Singapore's more 'extremist' and communist-leaning politicians should be arrested, soured the marriage before it was consummated.

Despite this jousting, the Tunku wanted the Borneo territories, and feared what would happen if he were to ditch Singapore. The PAP wanted Malayan markets and believed merger the only practical route to independence. Malaysia duly came into being on 16 September 1963. On that day, Malaya federated with Singapore, North Borneo (renamed Sabah) and Sarawak. Only Brunei's Sultan and its oil wealth stayed out. Singapore was given special terms, retaining control of labour, education and most revenue.¹⁹ Malaysia as a whole preserved a non-Chinese majority, as Borneo's Malays and indigenous peoples offset Singapore's Chinese.

Britain's defence interests were relatively easily satisfied. The Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement of October 1957 was extended to cover Singapore on merger. Article VI of a supplementary Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement, of July 1963, stated Britain could continue 'to make such use of these [Singapore's] bases and facilities as the Government may consider necessary for Commonwealth defence and for the preservation of peace in South-East Asia'. The wording theoretically preserved Britain's complete freedom to use to Singapore for regional and SEATO purposes, but the ambiguity of the 1957 agreement also continued. The 1957 agreement had stipulated Britain must consult Malaya when it used its bases, and if there was any significant change in forces. It could be argued this now applied to Singapore too, and that consultation should imply Malaysian consent was required. Together with the practical politics of dealing with an independent, post-colonial state, this could limit the use of Singapore's bases. What made this ambiguity work was Britain and Malaya's record of discreet, practical cooperation, which aimed to facilitate British flexibility while minimising the visibility of Singapore's SEATO link.²⁰

The Malaysian federation, meanwhile, was to be one of Britain's most successful, compared with those in Southern Arabia and Central Africa. The latter had disintegrated by 1963, and on 9 August 1965 Malaysia was ruptured as well. But at least only Singapore left. Lee Kuan Yew had pushed a vision of racial equality – a 'Malaysian Malaysia'. This proved incompatible with UMNO's vision of Malay dominance – a 'Malay Malaysia', to be combined with partnership with other racial groups. UMNO also had a Singapore branch. Almost inevitably, some Malayan-based UMNO members supported their colleagues in Singapore's September 1963 elections. There was some feeling that special Malay rights (such as preferences in civil service places) should be extended to Singapore. The PAP likewise hoped to replace Malaya's communally-based MCA as the representative of the Chinese and urban populations on the mainland. Reversing an earlier gentleman's agreement not to contest the next federal elections, the PAP fought in the April 1964 peninsular Malaysian campaign. It won just one seat, but the damage was done.²¹ To make matters worse, Indonesian propaganda pressed the theme that Malay rights were being suppressed in Singapore.²²

One result of these developments was racial riots in Singapore in July and September 1964. These left 36 dead and hundreds injured.²³ Lee Kuan Yew even challenged the logic of special Malay rights in May 1965. As tensions rose,

Britain tried hard to deter the federal government from thoughts of arresting Lee Kuan Yew, and to prevent separation.²⁴

As early as January 1965, Malaysia and Singapore discussed restructuring Singapore's association, possibly limiting it to defence and foreign affairs. By February, Denis Healey (the Labour Government's Defence Secretary) worried in case Malaysia should unravel, leaving Britain with internal security responsibilities in Singapore and Borneo again. Malaysia, it seems, was indeed a neo-colonial plot, as Sukarno charged. Britain had rushed the Borneo territories into it after the 1962 Cobbold Commission showed one third of its people strongly supporting it, one-third amenable if there were sufficient safeguards, and one-third hostile. Then Britain strove to keep the disintegrating vessel together. Not, however, just to perpetuate British influence, but also for the selfish purpose of reducing Britain's regional burden.²⁵

With the Confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia still at its height, talk of changing the terms of association came unstuck on the details and on British opposition, but not for long. On 9 May 1965 a 'Malaysian Solidarity Convention' was launched, consisting of the PAP and opposition parties throughout Malaysia. This was committed to the 'Malaysian Malaysia' ideal, and its foundation propelled the doomed federation closer to its grave. UMNO's patience was fast disappearing. Singapore meanwhile felt prospects of Malaya implementing a common market – seen as vital for Singapore's industrial development – were receding. Since Britain had earlier opposed any restructuring, in July 1965 Singapore and Malaysia decided to plot in secrecy. They agreed total separation was required.²⁶ As the resulting plan unfolded, the two sides determined that Britain would be informed only on the day of Singapore's independence: 9 August 1965.²⁷

In this way, British plans again met with frustration at the hands of immovable ethnic and political differences. Differences which had wrecked the Malayan Union scheme, fuelled the Emergency, undermined plans to create a common 'Malayan' sense of nationality, and now caused Singapore to be parted from Malaysia. Talking of the role of Britain's High Commissioner in Malaya, Viscount Antony Head, Lee Kuan Yew put it this way: 'But despite the presence of some 63,000 British servicemen, two aircraft carriers, 80 warships and 20 squadrons of aircraft, he could not prevail against the force of Malay communalism'.²⁸

On 9 August Singapore duly became an independent state, which Britain had always said would at best be unviable, at worst become the Cuba of Southeast Asia. Lee Kuan Yew himself had once stated that, in the twentieth century Southeast Asian context 'island nations are political jokes'. Normally clinically self-controlled, on the 9th, Lee shed tears in his first television broadcast to the infant nation.²⁹

On the other hand, merger, and confrontation with Indonesia, strengthened the PAP despite Singapore's abortion. They provided cover for the ISC to order Operation Cold Storage in early February 1963. This arrested many *Barisan Sosialis* supporters, after they voiced sympathy for a Brunei rebellion of

December 1962.³⁰ With the opposition thus crippled, in September 1963 the PAP took 37 (out of 51) seats in the Singapore elections, their share of the vote falling slightly to 46.5 per cent. The *Barisan Sosialis* took 33 per cent, but just 13 seats.³¹ With several years of sound government behind it, the PAP now looked increasingly secure. In addition, Britain had conveniently jettisoned North Borneo and Sarawak into Malaysia, even if Confrontation was to prove an expensive dowry.

The divorce of 9 August 1965 did leave Malaysia and Singapore sensitive neighbours, and an initial joint defence council failed. Yet despite friction, both recognised a common interest in maintaining Commonwealth defence aid, and a high degree of interdependence. Singapore also developed its own defences rapidly. It introduced National Service in March 1967 and raised military expenditure to 10 per cent of government spending. It quickly laid the foundations for a 'poison shrimp' model of 'total defence' – which recognised Singapore could not prevent a determined foe from swallowing it, but could make the meal unpalatable.³²

Meanwhile, Britain had assumed the Malaysian federation would be an opportunity to run down (though not abandon) its military position in Southeast Asia. 1962 plans had anticipated leaving a single infantry brigade and the Commonwealth reserve in Malaya and Singapore. The first result of Confrontation was to suspend hopes of force reductions. Then, of course, Confrontation with Indonesia (Sukarno's term) caused a massive build-up of British forces.

The background to Confrontation was tortuous. Initially there were no official Indonesian complaints about the Malaysia plan. Then in August 1962 Indonesia secured the return of West New Guinea, made effective in May 1963.

Indonesia was thus freed of one international dispute, but Sukarno was also deprived of a unifying nationalist cause. He did not have to wait long for a new one. A revolt broke out in Brunei on the 8 December 1962, led by the *Partai Rakyat Brunei* and its 'North Borneo National Army' (TNKU).³³ Though this rebellion was quickly crushed, its background ensured Britain's smallest Borneo dependency would trigger its most expensive commitment.

The *Partai Rakyat Brunei* (PRB), led by Sheikh A.M. Azahari, sought independence for Britain's North Borneo territories as *Kalimantan Utara* (North Borneo). This was to be a unified, democratic state, under Brunei's Sultan as constitutional monarch. The *Kalimantan Utara* plan echoed Brunei's historical dominance of the same area, and contrasted to the Malaysia proposal to integrate the Borneo territories directly, as separate Malaysian states.

The PRB also wanted more democracy for Brunei. Under its 1959 constitution, tiny Brunei was dominated by its Sultan, and by an Executive Council whose advice he was not bound to accept. Britain was still to handle foreign relations, and its High Commissioner gave 'advice', but there was virtually complete internal self-government.

There was to be a narrow minority of indirectly elected members in a Legislative Council of 33. The PRB took all 16 of the elected seats, on the basis of a sweeping victory in August 1962 district elections. In a rerun of the

Emergency origins, however, the PRB saw little hope of progress towards majority-party rule.³⁴ Britain (the protecting power) and especially Royal Dutch Shell (which tapped Brunei's oil via a subsidiary) viewed Azahari's party as pro-Indonesian, as linked to radical Chinese in Sarawak, and as likely to alter the terms of British oil concessions.³⁵ A politically weak Sultan seemed a more suitable oil collaborator than the PRB. PRB's *Kalimantan Utara* idea also threatened to derail the Malaysia proposals.³⁶ Some PRB supporters were arrested in November, and the Sultan postponed calling the Legislative Council. The PRB guessed the Sultan had no intention of ever allowing it power, hoped Indonesia and the Philippines might sympathise, and increasingly felt a militant line the only one left.³⁷

In desperation and hope the rebels struck on 8 December 1962. Though 'virtually every family in Brunei was involved or affected in one way or another', poor organisation and weaponry allowed British forces to defeat the rebels piecemeal and rapidly.³⁸ On failure some fled to Indonesia.³⁹ There was sympathy there for the view Britain was denying its Borneo territories the kind of radical *Merdeka* Indonesia had won. Especially as Azahari had fought on the side of the Indonesian Republicans in 1945-49.⁴⁰

Pressures within Indonesia also pointed towards Confrontation, namely: economic deterioration; Sukarno's ideology of 'new emerging forces' rolling back imperial countries such as Britain; the redirection of nationalist ambitions fuelled but not satiated by the West New Guinea campaign; and the links between Indonesians and the PRB. Above all, Sukarno could only keep the army and communists in balance, not to mention regional, Islamic and other forces, by finding an emotive, nationalist issue.⁴¹

In January 1963 the Indonesian government started to attack the Malaysia plan verbally. In February, Sukarno formally condemned it. Indonesia then drifted towards using the West New Guinea model of confrontation, combining diplomacy with increasingly menacing pinpricks.⁴²

The diplomacy included implicit threats to move closer to China and the Soviet Union, and meetings with counterparts from Malaysia and the Philippines, notably in Manila in June to July 1963.⁴³ Military pressure started from 23 April, when armed men were allowed to begin raids into Sarawak from Indonesian territory. Joined by the Indonesian military, these began deeper penetration of the Sabah and Sarawak jungle after Malaysia's inauguration on 16 September 1963. In August 1964 this was extended to sending agents and sporadic raiding parties of up to a hundred to peninsular Malaysia and Singapore, by boat and plane. Singapore was shaken by the occasional bomb, one of the worst on 10 March 1965. It killed two and injured 33 at the heart of Singapore, at MacDonald House on Orchard Road.⁴⁴

From the British perspective, these latter events had the advantage that Australia was drawn into the fighting, since it had troops on mainland Malaysia for the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. Australia announced in February 1965 (with New Zealand) that it would send combat forces to Borneo.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Britain increased its forces and flaunted nuclear-capable V-bombers. In April

1964, it also decided to allow operations and ambushes to be mounted on the Indonesian side of the Borneo border.⁴⁶ The aims were to apply counter-pressure, impose costs and uncertainty on Jakarta, but avoid serious escalation. Britain simultaneously kept such operations secret and deniable, being careful to appear the defensive and hurt party before the court of world opinion. Like Indonesia, it combined low-level conflict with careful diplomacy. Britain was using Confrontation tactics to combat Confrontation.

Britain ultimately committed up to two aircraft carriers, a commando ship and over 60,000 service personnel – including the Navy and Royal Air Force – to defend nearly 1,000 miles of jungle frontier in Borneo, over 3,000 miles of Malaysian coastline, and to deter Indonesia from using its patrol boats and aircraft against Malaysia.⁴⁷ This at a time when Malaya (just before federation) had under 15,000 in its armed services, and Singapore just two battalions.⁴⁸ It was an operation calling both for small-scale, helicopter-supplied patrols in Borneo, and Surface-to-Air Bloodhound missiles and sophisticated air defence. Above all, operating against Indonesian forces in deep jungle territory called for intensive air support – up to 70 helicopters alone. These not only supplied Commonwealth troops on jungle patrols, but helped the SAS win over indigenous forest people who could provide intelligence.⁴⁹ Paradoxically, Britain's largest operation since Suez was based on strict economy of force. Indeed, the very size and power of Britain's deployment may have helped to limit Indonesia's willingness to intensify its low-level campaign. In the end, as Denis Healey put it, 'After a campaign which lasted nearly four years, the toll [114 Commonwealth dead, an estimated 590 Indonesians] was comparable with that on the British roads in a single Bank Holiday weekend.'⁵⁰

Britain's measured approach worked. The United States was unwilling to force Britain's hand, and Indonesia's economy slowly unravelled. Inside Indonesia, the army began to fear the PKI would gain most as Confrontation radicalised society, and the PKI that the army would strike first. In the end, the internal tensions which Confrontation was supposed to manage undermined the campaign.

Confrontation's deathknell was sounded on the night of 30 September to 1 October 1965. Dissatisfied army and airforce officers attempted a coup. Claiming to be pre-empting a CIA-inspired plot against Sukarno, they killed six senior generals, announced a revolutionary council, and brought Sukarno and the PKI chairman to their headquarters.

Suharto, then a Major-General and commander of the Army Strategic Reserve, coordinated a rapid and successful army counter-strike. Sukarno's initial failure to unequivocally condemn the murders now left him a damaged figure. The apparent complicity of the PKI also allowed the army to eliminate their one real rival, as hundreds of thousands of communists were arrested or killed.⁵¹ Suharto was able to assume all executive powers from Sukarno on 11 March 1966, and in March 1967 was made acting President. With Sukarno in decline, the army moved to end Confrontation by the Bangkok agreement of August 1966.⁵²

Meanwhile, Britain was looking to scale down its military presence after Confrontation. The case for British withdrawal was increasing. Decolonisation was reducing the rationale for an eastern defence role faster than expected in its third, post-1960 wave. The two previous phases had been confined mainly to South Asia and Palestine (1947–48) and then Sudan (1956), Malaya and Ghana (1957). They had been separated by almost a decade. The third phase gathered pace just a couple of years after the second, Macmillan's 'winds of change' were blowing increasingly strongly from 1960–61. The period when De Gaulle (French President from 1958) accelerated independence in French Africa, when the Congo disintegrated into chaos, and when it became obvious Britain's intended federations and cross-communal parties for southern and central Africa would not work. As with Malaya after the Baling meetings of 1955, delay seemed decreasingly likely to produce cross-communal parties and larger political structures, and increasingly likely to alienate entrenched local elites. This new pulse would carry East and Central Africa, Singapore and Borneo to independence within half a decade.

After 1959 there was an increasing discrepancy between this accelerating decolonisation and Britain's unwavering commitment to a string of bases and alliances East of Suez. Economically too, Japan was overtaking Britain as Australia's main trading partner, and Britain was losing its dominance in Malaysian trade. Other European countries were securing Middle East oil without policing the area, and Britain's presence there raised the danger it could provoke specifically anti-British stoppages of oil.

Regionally, Thailand seemed reasonably secure, and American troops intervened in Vietnam in 1964–65. Britain's military power also seemed to be of diminishing utility. It had been unable to prevent Singapore's separation from Malaysia, or Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. Britain also left the Federation of South Arabia prematurely in November 1967. It had to accept that the use of British troops could undermine governments it aimed to uphold.

Europe's relative importance was also increasing as the European Economic Community (EEC) succeeded. A second British application for entry was rebuffed in May 1967. Even without EEC entry, European collaboration seemed essential in high-investment industries such as aerospace.⁵³

This was the context the Labour Party faced when returned to government with a small margin of victory in the October 1964 elections, and with a larger majority in March 1966. The question was: what role should Britain plan for after Confrontation? The answer was influenced by two main factors: economic pressure; and Labour party strategy. Together these overcame the reluctance of Harold Wilson as Prime Minister, Denis Healey as Foreign Secretary, and of the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, to retrench East of Suez.⁵⁴ A reluctance fuelled partly by an unwillingness to ditch a 'Welfare State at home and Greatness abroad' consensus while holding a 'wafer-thin majority', partly by 'pride, habit and inertia', but also because of pressure from Britain's allies, notably the United States, for Britain to share in world peacekeeping.⁵⁵

The economic problem was structural. Technological innovation was multiplying weapons costs, resulting in any fixed sum buying less and less ships and aircraft. Unless Britain's commitments were cut somewhere, this would result in the its thin red line becoming inadequate everywhere.⁵⁶ Worse still, Asian countries were increasing the numbers and capacity of their weapons. The problem was exacerbated by Britain's slow economic growth compared to competitors. The maintenance of sterling at a fixed exchange rate despite relatively high British inflation, resulted in over-priced exports and so recurrent balance of payments crises. There were four major crises between 1964 and 1967. Each required deflation, so as to transfer resources from consumption (whether in defence or by consumers) to exports and investment. Defence naturally had to share in each round of cuts.

Within defence, cuts increasingly had to come from East not West of Suez. This was partly because Europe was increasing in importance, not necessarily strategically but politically and economically. The other major item which could have been cut was the nuclear role, but this was beyond the pale. American agreement to provide Britain with Polaris nuclear missiles cheaply, in December 1962, made abandoning the nuclear deterrent doubly unlikely.

Labour could have allowed defence spending to rise, so diverting resources from investment, but Labour's economic and social strategies ruled this out. Its 1964 manifesto committed Labour to improving social justice and welfare, with specific pledges to spend on pensions and education. Despite recurrent sterling crises, devaluation and rising taxes, Labour did expand higher education, and it did succeed in improving conditions for some of the less well off by 1970, partly by increasing family allowances. Wilson in addition campaigned in 1964 on the theme of using rational economic planning to fuel the 'white heat of technology' and end the 'stop-go' policies with which Conservatives had tackled the economy and sterling crises.

Labour's social priorities, and its socialist and Fabian confidence in planning, required both increased welfare spending and higher investment. As a part of attempts to secure this, and a related transfer in resources from military to civilian production and exports, the government imposed a £2,000 million ceiling on defence spending in 1965 (at 1964 prices). A limit it intended to maintain until 1969-70.⁵⁷

The limit on defence spending, designed to reduce its share of national wealth, became a vital part of overall strategy. It was accompanied by a vision for creating a fairer society and stronger industrial growth. In pursuit of these aims, Labour took radical and even politically risky measures. It created a new Department of Economic Affairs to circumvent any Treasury opposition, and sought to impose pay restraint and incomes policies which many Trade Unions disliked.⁵⁸ Labour thus did not have to end the East of Suez role - to retrench rather than reduce it - in a deterministic sense. What happened was that structural and relative economic decline, increasing weapons costs and decreasing effectiveness in the region, and social and economic strategy, combined to make Labour unwilling to increase defence spending.⁵⁹

In this context, even the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, endorsed the defence spending cap. This in turn doomed the East of Suez role to be nibbled to death, though Wilson clung to that role almost to the end. Wilson may have announced in June 1965 that Britain's frontiers lay on the Himalayas.⁶⁰ He may have looked back to Labour's Cold War leadership under Ernest Bevin, who had been Foreign Secretary in 1945–51.⁶¹ Yet this was the same Wilson who, in April 1951, resigned from a Labour government rather than endorse its post-Korean War rearmament. Though he then cited the unsustainability of Labour's programme as his main reason, he had been following the lead of the National Health Service creator, Aneurin Bevan. Bevan had resigned specifically to oppose the introduction of charges for spectacles and dental work, measures designed to cut non-military costs.⁶²

The 1950–51 rearmament was followed by electoral defeat and 'thirteen wasted years' of Conservative rule. Wilson's resignation, meanwhile, strengthened his left-wing credentials. It associated him with 1951 opposition to sacrificing 'Bevanite' ideals (Bevan's principle that health services should be free) to 'Bevinite' rearmament.⁶³ Wilson's attempt to straddle left-wing support on such issues, and yet right wing support on foreign policy, gave his commitment to East of Suez a soft underbelly.⁶⁴ Abolishing prescription charges was one of the first acts of his 1964–70 governments.⁶⁵ Nor could he totally ignore the groundswell of opinion in the Party, with the October 1966 party conference overwhelmingly endorsing a motion for withdrawal from East of Suez by 1969–70.⁶⁶

Against this background, Confrontation had increased Britain's eastern commitment to grotesque proportions. In 1965–66 there were still 80,000 working in or for the services in Singapore and Malaysia, and over 70,000 in 1967.⁶⁷ Already, however, the £2,000 million limit was biting, and the sheer cost of Confrontation focused attention East of Suez.

Denis Healey's first tactic, as Defence Secretary, was to try to maintain commitments while reducing capability. In April 1965 he cancelled the TSR-2 tactical-strike-reconnaissance aircraft project. Instead, Britain secured an option to buy F-111s cheaply from the United States, partly to provide long-range strike capability East of Suez.⁶⁸

At the same time, Healey tried to limit the danger of Britain finding itself the main anchor again for an operation of the order of the Emergency or Confrontation. The February 1966 Statement on Defence Estimates established vital principles. Britain would continue a peacekeeping role, but with limits: 'First, Britain will not undertake major operations of war except in co-operation with allies. Secondly, we will not accept an obligation to provide another country with military assistance unless it is prepared to provide us with the facilities we need to make such assistance effective in time. Finally, there will be no attempt to maintain defence facilities in an independent country against its wishes.'⁶⁹ There was also confirmation that Britain would end its role in South Arabia and Aden on independence in 1968, and cut forces. Yet it was still to maintain bases in Singapore, and even hinted at the possibility of establishing future facilities in Australia.

With these limits established, the 1966 Statement also announced Britain would not build a new aircraft carrier (CVA 01). This was a pivotal moment. The crunch came now because new carriers had to be ordered, if they were to be available when existing ships were phased out in the 1970s. Healey decided instead to rely on land-based aircraft – the F111s. For strike purposes these would be supplemented by Britain's V-class bombers, until a new Anglo-French variable geometry aircraft could be developed in the 1970s. This option was considerably cheaper than the estimated £1,400m required to keep three carriers afloat: a sum which would have guaranteed the presence East of Suez of a single carrier (with little more than 40 aircraft) at any one time.⁷⁰ A junior minister for the Navy and the First Sea Lord resigned in protest at Britain keeping commitments, while cutting the resources they required. Healey and Wilson, however, remained committed to both the cuts and the commitments. Wilson in particular argued that, since the greatest dangers of a world war lay East of Suez, Britain should help ensure stability there.⁷¹

By early 1966 the Labour government still planned to maintain an East of Suez role indefinitely, albeit with shrinking resources. Then the March 1966 General election turned Labour's single figure majority, which had made electoral consolidation its main motive, into one of almost a hundred. Politically strengthened, Labour returned to face another balance of payments crisis in the summer. More cuts followed.⁷² With Confrontation officially ending in August, a new defence review was underway by December. A review which started at a time of rising concern about poverty, and diminishing commitment to the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth seemed not only a diminishing asset, as trade switched towards Europe, but in some ways a liability, as immigration increased inner-city tensions. Labour opposed the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act as undermining Britain's leadership of a multi-racial Commonwealth. Then in 1964 a Conservative candidate defied a national swing to Labour to take Smethwick. The dominant theme in Smethwick – 'If you want a nigger neighbour, Vote Liberal or Labour' – resonated more widely in Birmingham. Labour reduced the quotas for immigrants in 1965. Its 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act stripped Kenyan Asians with British passports of the right of abode in Britain, and yet was passed by a Labour Government which liberalised divorce and homosexuality.⁷³

At the same time, there was rising concern about child poverty and housing squalor. After lengthy debates the Cabinet endorsed the principle that family benefit should be increased in February 1967.⁷⁴ Even before that, the screening of the BBC drama documentary 'Cathy Come Home' in November 1966 highlighted the inadequacy of Britain's housing and the reality of homelessness. A few days later the charity Shelter was formed in the crypt of St Martin-in-the-Fields – within a stone's throw of Admiralty Arch and Whitehall. It ran a full-page advertisement in the *Times* on 2nd December showing a child in a slum kitchen. The caption: 'Home Sweet Hell'.⁷⁵

Against this background, and as sterling again weakened, the Treasury demanded a further £300 million in defence cuts. Defence made heavy demands

on overseas spending, diverted industry and investment from export production, and the government was determined to put its economic and social strategies back on course. Despite this, Healey hoped to keep the East of Suez role (halving it) while still making the cuts. Cabinet colleagues, backed by Wilson, had to insist the defence review which started in December also consider the possibility of cutting commitments in the Middle and Far East.⁷⁶ It was proving increasingly difficult to justify keeping these indefinitely, as resources were pared away. By April even Healey had accepted it would eventually be more logical to cut roles than retain them on ever-diminishing resources.

Healey now offered a date which would allow for gradual withdrawal, leaving a British capability to intervene in the area afterwards. In meetings on 4 and 11 of April 1967, Cabinet agreed to halve Far Eastern commitments by 1970, and eliminate them by the mid-1970s. The precise date was left to be finalised in July.

With Singapore bases alone costing £70 million a year, they had been an obvious target. By cutting East of Suez on this timescale, Healey could offer to save £200 million, or two-thirds of the sum the Chancellor demanded. Half a dozen Cabinet members still called for faster withdrawal, led by an acerbic Richard Crossman (Lord President of the Council and a self-confessed 'Little Englander') on 6 July.⁷⁷ He mocked the proposals as 'less inadequate' than previous ones, forecasting attempts to withdraw slowly would inevitably collapse into scuttle. On this occasion his call for withdrawal by 1970-71 was rejected.⁷⁸

The United States, Australia, New Zealand and Lee Kuan Yew were all consulted and all vehemently opposed Britain's decision. The Supplementary defence statement of July 1967 went ahead regardless. It made public what Cabinet had first agreed in April: East of Suez forces would be halved by 1970-71, and withdrawn by the mid-1970s. There was still some debate over whether to base a residual air-maritime force in the area (composed of forces earmarked for other theatres). Healey optimistically claimed he could do this for £10 million a year. Australia was mentioned as a possible base, but given Australia's distance from the area - on which basis it had been rejected previously - this latter suggestion was a forlorn rearguard action.⁷⁹

A psychological barrier, a pain threshold in decline, had been breached. The principle of withdrawal had been accepted as a response to sustained economic pressure, and in the context of Labour's overall economic and social priorities.⁸⁰ This was the crucial step, achieved in part because the 'white heat' and Bevanite Wilson was already getting the upper hand over the Bevanite Wilson. The Prime Minister was offering a diminishing barrier to withdrawal, though the schizophrenic struggle between his will to world policing and his desire for domestic success was not yet fully resolved. Commitments to the Persian Gulf states were restated as late as October 1967, though British forces there were already slated to go by the mid-1970s, leaving just a capability to intervene East of Suez.⁸¹

The balance of payments recovered and the plan for mid-1970s withdrawal looked satisfactory, but not for long. The June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the resulting closure of Suez, and port strikes at home stoked up another sterling

crisis. As early as August the Chancellor pressed Healey to accept more cuts.⁸² Then on 18 November Labour finally devalued the pound. Devaluation, which had been resisted to the last and even at the expense of bouts of deflation, was a bitter defeat. It could only make sense if there were further cuts, to avoid inflation, to direct industry into exports, and to take advantage of the better exchange rate. Following previous rounds of deflation, this meant embarrassing decisions. Raising the school-leaving age to 16 (a manifesto commitment) was postponed, prescription charges ('a tax on the sick') reintroduced, house-building curtailed.⁸³ Wilson could not push through this package, and avoid resignations, without further starving defence. He was now willing to see defence commitments cut earlier, in order to present the latest deflation not as defeat, but as a new departure, a shift from consumer-led to export-led growth. By Christmas Day he was on the telephone to the Chancellor, plotting how to soften up the Foreign Secretary, George Brown, by playing on the latter's preference to cut eastern commitments rather than European ones.⁸⁴

Healey was also told, in December, that his earlier haggling was to no avail. He must trim the extra £100 million off defence estimates to make up the £300 million total. Faced with this, Healey, Brown, Stewart and Callaghan argued in Cabinet not to avoid withdrawal *per se* – that was already agreed – but about the timing. They wanted it brought forward only to March 1972. Crossman and others pushed for 1970–71.

Wilson, however, was now willing to swing the balance even against any delay in execution. Wilson summed up in favour of the proposal for a March 1971 withdrawal at the first Cabinet meeting on the issue, on 4 January 1968.⁸⁵ The American response was quick and bitter. On 11 January, Secretary of State Dean Rusk told George Brown (Foreign Secretary) to 'For God's sake act like Britain'. He threatened the end of an era of Anglo-American cooperation. Singapore hinted it might withdraw some of its sterling holdings. Threats, however, now riled Wilson, only confirming him on his new path, that of putting Britain's economic interests before everything else.⁸⁶ He also cast aside the familiar claim that Malaysia and Singapore needed British forces, for confidence and security. In Singapore's case investment was pouring in from Japan and Hong Kong, and the 'war boom' effect of American aid to South Vietnam was trickling through.⁸⁷

Healey, Brown and the Commonwealth Secretary were allowed to make a last bid to delay withdrawal till 1972, though it seems certain Wilson's mind was set. Cabinet heard their arguments on 15 January. Wilson then tipped a finely balanced Cabinet in favour of early withdrawal, with a compromise extension of the date from March 1971 to the end of that year.⁸⁸ In a draft personal message for President Johnson, Wilson said Britain was 'sick and tired of being thought willing to eke out a comfortable existence on borrowed money'. It had to make the cuts if it was to secure a new, long-term role 'on the world stage' [and] 'when I say quote the world stage unquote I mean just that'.⁸⁹

On 16 January 1968 Wilson announced to Parliament there would be total withdrawal from East of Suez in 1971, with the theme, 'There is no military

strength... except on the basis of economic strength'. There would after 1971 be only a European-based capability to intervene in the Far East, and a few troops in select dependencies. The F-111 order was cancelled.⁹⁰

The significance of the November 1967 devaluation and 1968 announcement can be exaggerated. It has been argued that withdrawal was possible now only because devaluation broke the solidarity of the 'Bevinite' and overseas ministers (Healey, Callaghan, Brown, Michael Stewart, and Thomson, the Commonwealth Secretary), strengthened the pro-Europeans and changed the balance of power within Cabinet. In addition, bureaucratic changes had weakened the defence and overseas ministers' position, with the disappearance from Cabinet of the individual service ministers and the Colonial Secretary.⁹¹

Bevinite solidarity, however, had not prevented previous cuts, and Wilson's position had been shifting since 1966. The critical change had come in 1966-67, with the principle of withdrawal from the Far East agreed as early as April 1967. By January 1968 withdrawal was not the main issue, just its pace.⁹² The main change in tangent had happened before November 1967. Before devaluation catapulted the pro-European Roy Jenkins to the Chancellorship in November, creating an alliance between pro-Europeans and left-wingers with domestic priorities.

The January 1968 decision thus speeded up a process of withdrawal already agreed upon in principle.⁹³ In as much as the Conservative Government of October 1970-74 reverted to the mid-1970s target for withdrawal, the January 1968 decision did not even accelerate matters. The announcement turned out to be little more than gratuitous self-humiliation.⁹⁴

In the mid-1970s there were still around 40,000 working for the military in Singapore, half of them civilians.⁹⁵ In 1971 the Conservative government entered new Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) for the area. These allowed for consultation with Britain, Australia and New Zealand in the event of hostilities against Malaysia or Singapore. There was, however, no obligation to act, as there had been under the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement they replaced. The Conservatives also formalised British cooperation in the air defence of the area. An Integrated Air Defence Scheme (IADS) was set up in 1971, and Britain agreed to make available five ships and one battalion as part of a renamed ANZUK force (Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom).⁹⁶

Only the Persian Gulf withdrawal went ahead as planned in 1967-68, British forces and obligations being replaced by treaties of friendship. Even then, declaratory withdrawal was not totally matched by the reality on the ground. 1970-76 saw Special Air Squadron troops deploy to Oman to help defeat opposition to that country's Sultan.⁹⁷

So it took another Labour Government in 1974 to effect full withdrawal from Malaysia and Singapore in 1976, leaving a New Zealand infantry battalion in Singapore and Australian aircraft at Butterworth to depart in the 1980s.⁹⁸

Even after 1976 withdrawal was not complete. Instead, large British bases were replaced by small forces in residual territories, and by arrangements for cooperation and the use of local facilities. Britain periodically renegotiated

defence cost-sharing arrangements with Hong Kong. Brunei had to be pushed reluctantly towards independence in January 1984. The Five Power Defence Arrangements remained in force at the end of the millennium, when Britain still contributed a handful of men to IADS headquarters at Butterworth, near Penang in Malaysia. It continued to participate regularly in five power exercises and meetings, and manages two rent-free berths and oil storage facilities at Sembawang on behalf of the FPDA.⁹⁹ Britain's generosity in handing over its naval facilities intact, and even getting Swan Hunter to turn them into the private Sembawang shipyards, ensured that the relationship with Singapore post withdrawal got off to a good start.¹⁰⁰ Britain also retained Jungle training facilities in Brunei.¹⁰¹

Not even Hong Kong's return to China in June 1997 was sufficient to end Britain's connections with Nepal, and with the Gurkhas. Renamed the Royal Gurkha Rifle Regiment and reduced to 3,400 men, the Gurkhas were now headquartered in Britain. The Sultan of Brunei continued to pay for one battalion of the British Army's Gurkhas to be kept in his country. In September 1999 Britain was able to provide around 250 of these as a rapid contribution to the Australian-led International Forces for East Timor (INTERFET). These Gurkha's, leftovers from the Raj, and the garrison for oil-rich Brunei, thus arrived in East Timor – one of the last territories in Southeast Asia to undergo decolonisation – as a contribution to the 'new world order' of United Nations-sanctioned world policing.¹⁰²

CONCLUSIONS

British ministers fought against withdrawal from East of Suez almost to the last. Yet British strategy for managing decolonisation, local circumstances, limited aircraft ranges and military technology also delayed withdrawal. In this context, the decisions of 1965–68, do not look as greatly mistimed as might be assumed. While the formation of Malaysia solved the problems of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, the PKI and Sukarno only began to be eclipsed after October 1965. It was August 1966 before Indonesia recognised Malaysia and formally concluded the confrontation, 1967 before it was clear Suharto's new regime was secure and pro-Western. Only in 1966–67 did it become clear that Singapore's abortion from Malaysia had not adversely affected the PAP.

Yet even before the devaluation crisis of November 1967, Britain had decided in February 1966 to abandon carrier development in favour of buying American F-111s. Then came the April 1967 decision for withdrawal, and in 1968 the announcement this would be accelerated.¹⁰³ A combination of spiralling equipment costs, economic crises, and Labour's economic and social aims, had slowly garrotted the East of Suez policy.

This is not to deny that illusions about ongoing influence existed. Nor is it to deny that Britain's emphasis on securing defence rights was at the expense of pressurising successor states to assume more of the defence burden. What seems to have happened is that a real policing role and the demands of decolonisation combined with older beliefs about the role of bases. This potent mix made

timely retreat, and the shift from maintaining bases to relying on facilities freely offered by friendly countries, doubly difficult to manage.

Indeed, Britain remained determined to maintain a system of defence facilities, some old, some new, despite falling utility. These included at various times: Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt, Cyprus, Aden, Iraq, Kenya, Gan, Ceylon, Singapore, and the British Indian Ocean Territory. The last was a new colony created in November 1965 to facilitate a never-to-be-built British airfield, and the lease of Diego Garcia island for use as an American base.¹⁰⁴

The bases in Malta and Cyprus present intriguing case-studies. Malta asked for integration with Britain before falling out over levels of economic assistance, demanded independence, and in 1959 had its constitution suspended. Britain then claimed that, like Singapore, it was too small to strike out alone. It received internal self-government only, effective from 1962.¹⁰⁵ Even when independence did come, in September 1964, Britain retained the right to station forces there for 10 years in return for £50 million aid. It was only in 1964 that Labour reversed this logic, offering more aid to facilitate quicker withdrawal in the face of local obstruction.

In Cyprus, Britain secured an uneasy compromise between Turkish and Greek Cypriots which left British sovereign bases – at Dhckelia and Akrotiri – intact from independence in August 1960. As with the Five Power Defence Arrangements, these bases were still to be operational forty years on.

It could be argued that Britain was atavistic not only or even mainly about East of Suez, many of these bases having wider roles. What was at stake was the value and use of military bases *per se*. In some cases, Britain clung to bases until decolonisation overtook them, notably Kenya (abandoned by 1963, not long after completion) and Aden (independent in November 1967). On the other hand, Britain did agree in 1954 to withdraw from Egyptian bases, a process completed just before the crisis over Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal broke out in July 1956. The 1956 Suez conflict was thus not about military bases, but rather it was a reflex reaction of a dying brand of imperialism and foreign policy. It was about strategic routes, deterring nationalisation without consultation, and making a last stand for British prestige and against Nasser's rising regional influence. In addition, the decision to station forces in Kenya had been taken not despite but in part because of the demands of decolonisation. The Governor of Kenya felt in 1957 that stationing a strategic reserve there would give the British connection a sense of permanence, making it easier to construct multi-racial politics before leaving.¹⁰⁶

Finally, the lateness of the withdrawal from Aden and South Arabia in 1967 was not just a result of clinging atavistically to military bases. It also repeated standard British decolonisation policies. Britain would not withdraw while there was hope of constructing a workable South Arabian federation, just as in Southeast Asia it did not withdraw until it had acted as midwife at the birth of Malaysia. That one federation failed totally while the other succeeded partially – and that in one case a friendly successor elite was produced, in the other not – should not obscure the common policy approach.

This policy of managing decolonisation, of searching for viable, friendly successor elites, of attempting to construct cross-communal politics, and of constructing federations capable of supporting rather than sapping Britain's world power, seemed to limit the opportunities for early withdrawal. The restricted aircraft capacity and ranges of the 1950s, with long journeys taking several days, also meant staging facilities only declined in significance late in the day.

It could thus be argued that up to 1965 Britain's regional over-insurance had been caused partly by a failure to ditch old assumptions about bases and military roles, partly by Cold War calculations, but also by a paradox of late British decolonisation. This was that during the most active stages of decolonisation costs often increased rather decreased, both in defence and economic aid.¹⁰⁷ This dilemma was intensified by Britain's conception of decolonisation, not as a severing of links, but as transferring power to a successor elite both well-disposed to Britain, and stable enough to strengthen rather than weaken both the Commonwealth, and the West in the Cold War.

As decolonisation approached, the cordiality of post-colonial relations, and the strength of new governments, became as important as securing military and economic safeguards. In this way Britain's desire to maintain world power was important, but often in the most general sense.¹⁰⁸ Singapore, for instance, seemed of increasing importance to the Cold War and Britain's global defence policy in 1957 as Malaya's independence loomed, and bases in Ceylon were vacated. Yet in that year Britain agreed Singapore could proceed to internal self-government (achieved in 1959), reversing the position of twelve months earlier. This change of heart, like others in Aden and in Central and Southern Africa, was in the last analysis aimed at the micro-management of local politics.¹⁰⁹ It seemed by 1957 that insisting on too many safeguards in Singapore would increase the danger of communism there, just as it was clear by 1960 that delay would bring federations and multi-racial cooperation no closer in Africa.¹¹⁰

The logic behind British decolonisation is perhaps to be found here. In the combination of a desire to maximise world power – through conserving economic strength and maintaining bases and investments – with the realisation an overstretched Britain could do this only by courting local elites who could command or coerce loyalty. Converting formal empire into informal influence, colonies into free-trading states, and collaborative mechanisms into partnership and understanding, required more than brute force, even if the latter had its place. If keeping entrenched successor elites on-side sometimes meant abandoning concrete British policies and interests, so be it. Policy and principle could, if necessary, be sacrificed on the altar of this more general strategy of expediency, pragmatism and managerialism.¹¹¹

This managerial approach explains Britain's willingness to make concessions, but also its continuing attempts to influence the process of decolonisation. It was, however, paradoxical in another way. The prospect of withdrawal which made it possible to manage or at least not alienate key local elites, made other opposition groups and states willing to risk violence. To ignore such challenges

would be to forfeit Britain's ability to shape postcolonial states and politics. The paradox in British decolonisation thus meant that withdrawal was often preceded by intensified commitment. Present premiums were paid to secure a future stream of savings, and as a wager for the prize of influencing the destiny of new countries.¹¹²

The paradox of managed withdrawal also meant that, while a Vietnam-style quagmire became less likely, it became more difficult for Britain to see the necessity of liquidating bases. For without bases, Britain would lose much of the ability to threaten, cajole and protect, all essential if certain local elites, such as communists, were to be excluded from the process, and if decolonisation was not to be scuttle and capitulation by another name.

Notes

- 1 Examples of projection backwards include Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez and Pickering, Britain's Withdrawal*, pp. 60–87.
- 2 Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal*, p. 1. See also Darby, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 10, 15–17, 21, 327–31; and Chalmers, *Paying for Defence*, p. 40 for the possibility of completing East of Suez withdrawal 'two decades' before it finally happened.
- 3 British aircraft carriers had, however, been used in Korea in 1950–53.
- 4 Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 307. Gan was completed in 1959.
- 5 Hong Kong and Brunei make interesting case-studies. The Brunei revolt threatened oil interests. Greg Poulgrain, *The Genesis of Konfrontasi: Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, 1945–1965* (London, 1998). Hong Kong exploded in 20 years from 0.6 to 4 million people, one eighth of workers being 'without a proper roof over their heads'. See Cab148/25, Overseas Defence and Policy Committee (66)33, 22 July 1966, minute 4, on Hong Kong contributions to its garrison of 6 2/3 major units; and *ibid* OPD(67)29, 5 Sept. 1967, for mosquito broadsheets etc. See also Felix Patrikeef, *Mouldering Pearl*, pp. 46–51; and Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, pp. 138–41. The still legal Hong Kong Communist Party was involved in agitation.
- 6 See Ian Beckett, 'Robert Thompson and the British Advisory Mission to South Vietnam, 1961–1965', in *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 8, 3 (Winter 1997), p. 49, for this 1962 estimate of Viet Cong strength.
- 7 See Chapter 6 above for the genesis of the Internal Security Council.
- 8 The figure is from Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, p. 294. Murfett, *Between Two Oceans*, p. 301, suggests bases – including expenditure by military, personnel and dependants – may have made up 25 per cent of Singapore's GDP. Cab128/CC(67)16, 4 April 1967, minute 3, states that forces accounted for 20–25 per cent of GNP and 10 per cent (33,000) of labour. Unemployment was around 10 per cent.
- 9 Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, pp. 351–61, 373–401; Lee Ting Hui, *The Open United Front*, pp. 188–227; For a short summary, see Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, pp. 269–77.
- 10 For the quotations, see Defe4/102, COS(57)98, 31 Dec. 1957. The COS felt the Indonesian air force was not a significant threat. In 1957 Indonesia denied intentions of making a West Irian question out of Borneo. Co1030/593, (11), press release of 26 July 1957 by the Indonesian Embassy in London. See also Fo371/135857, 'Indonesia – Communism'; and Fo 371/129336, *passim*.
- 11 Holland and Indonesia came to terms on 15 Aug. 1962, resulting in a transfer of West New Guinea to UN authority on 1 Oct. 1962, and to Indonesia on 1 May 1963. There was to be an act of 'free choice' on association before 1969, which was stage-managed in July to Aug. of that year.

- 12 Audrey and McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debauch in Indonesia* (New York, 1995), pp. 120–22. The pilot had Clark Air Base documents, and had just bombed Ambon (an eastern Indonesian island) hitting a church and a market as well as a naval boat.
- 13 Cabinet agreed to sell a few *Gannet* aircraft in Dec. 1959, before Australia and Holland complained weapons could be used in West New Guinea. Drummond, 'Britain's Involvement in Indonesia', pp. 271ff; Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy*; Mathew Jones, "'Maximum Disavowable Aid': The United States and the Indonesian Rebellion, 1957–8", in *English Historical Review* 114, 459 (1999), pp. 1179–1216. Jones takes the phrase 'maximum disavowable aid' from Templer (CIGS) on 15 April 1958.
- 14 In 1960 Malaya had 3.1 million Malays, 2.2 million Chinese and 0.7 million Indians. Add Singapore and Chinese outnumbered Malays 3.6 to 3.4 million. In the April 1961 Hong Lim by-election, Hokkien-speaking crowd-pleaser Ong Eng Guan, polled 73.3 per cent. Albert Lau, *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement* (Singapore, 1998), pp. 11–13.
- 15 The quotations are from Air19/979, G. W. Tory (High commissioner, Malaya) to Commonwealth Secretary, 'Constitutional Development of the Borneo Territories', 1 Dec. 1960.
- 16 Britain planned to influence Malaya privately. See Cab134/1859, CPC(60)17, Colonial Secretary, 15 July 1960; and Air19/979, Tory, 1 Dec. 1960. See also CO1022/1126; and Hussainmiya, *Sultan Omar Alifuddin III*, pp. 238–54, for Britain seeking closer association between Borneo territories in 1948–60.
- 17 Lau, *A Moment of Anguish*, pp. 11–13. Ball, 'Selkirk in Singapore', p. 172.
- 18 Hussainmiya, *Sultan Omar Alifuddin III*, pp. 218–68; Poulgrain, *The Genesis of Konfrontasi*, pp. 112–60. There was a Council of Governors of north Borneo and Sarawak from 1949, and from 1953 an 'Inter-Territorial Conference' which included Brunei. Britain increased integration at a painfully slow rate, for instance forming a joint judiciary in 1951. The Governors of Sarawak and North Borneo made public the idea of a loose Borneo federation on 7 Feb. 1958, but Brunei recoiled at the idea that its Islamic, Malay Sultan, whose ancestors once dominated all North Borneo, might come under a Borneo Governor-General. From 1948–59 it successfully fought to remove the Sarawak Governor's position as its *ex officio* High Commissioner, and to replace its Resident with a High Commissioner.
- 19 In return, Singapore's residents would only be allowed to vote in Singapore, and it would have less seats (15) in the federal parliament than its population warranted.
- 20 Anglo-Malayan agreement on defence details was reached in Nov. 1961. Boyce, *Malaysia and Singapore in International Diplomacy*, p. 138.
- 21 Lau, *A Moment of Anguish*, pp. 121–24, 136.
- 22 The Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East) saw Indonesian propaganda as contributory in July 1964, and felt 'pro-Indonesian Malay extremist groups' instigated events in Sept. Defe25/179; Lau, *A Moment of Anguish*, pp. 182–92.
- 23 See Lau, *A Moment of Anguish*, pp. 175 and 197 for the figures.
- 24 Leon Comber, *13 May 1969: A Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1988 edition), p. 60. There were also limited Sino-Malay clashes in Kuala Lumpur in 1965. May–July 1969 race riots there also killed 196, after UMNO opponents made gains in May elections.
- 25 Appointed in Jan. 1962, the Cobold Commission reported by 1 Aug. Lau, *A Moment of Anguish*, pp. 221–24; Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, pp. 628–63. For assessments that 'the great majority of the population of both colonies [Sarawak and North Borneo] is at present opposed', see Cab21/4626, Goode (Governor of North Borneo) to Colonial Office, 31 Jan. 1962. Key politicians were won round after persuasion by Lee Kuan Yew and in view of Indonesian hostility, however, and by Sept. 1963 a United Nations mission – appointed to appease Indonesia – could report majority support for merger.

- 26 Goh Keng Swee (Singapore's Minister of Finance) saw merger as aimed at getting Kuala Lumpur to finish Singapore's communists off, and as helping economically. For his 13 and 26 July 1965 visits to Malaysia, see Kwok Kian-Woon, 'The Social Architect: Goh Keng Swee', in Lam and Tan, *Lee's Lieutenants*, pp. 55–58; and Lau, *A Moment of Anguish*, pp. 257–59.
- 27 A Malaysian Cabinet Minister told Head at 7.30pm on the 8th. He tracked down the Tunku, Razak, Ismail and Tan Siew Sin at a rooftop restaurant. Wilson was told and immediately sent a note to the Tunku, but it was of course in vain. See Prem13/589, (221), telegram of 8. Aug. 1965; and (219).
- 28 See the following note.
- 29 For the quotations, see: Lee Kuan Yew, *Singapore Story*, p. 20; and (Lee to the Singapore Legislative Assembly in 1957), P. Boyce, *Malaysia and Singapore in International Diplomacy*, p. 25. See also Prem13/589, telegram of 9 Aug. 1965; and Defe25/179, Head to Commonwealth Relations Office, 16 June 1965.
- 30 See Tan Peng Hong, 'Reaching a Compromise: The Deliberations of the Singapore ISC (1962–1963)', (National University of Singapore: Honours Paper, 1997/98), for Cold Storage's 113 arrests (including 24 top Barisan Sosialis members, but not its assemblymen). Malaya suspended the ISC in Feb'–Sept. 1962, because Britain and Singapore stalled on arrests for which Selkirk initially saw no justification. Lee Kuan Yew also wanted to 'provoke' opponents into giving a pretext before any action.
- 31 Lau, *A Moment of Anguish*, p. 48.
- 32 Malaya and Singapore briefly shared a Joint Defence Council and Combined Operations Council, but dissolved these in 1966.
- 33 *Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara*. Hussainmiya, *Sultan Omar Alifuddin III*, pp. 269–70, 291.
- 34 The 1 District Council independent elected in Aug. 1962 soon joined the PRB's 54, since Legislative Councillors were selected by District Councils, this gave the PRB all 16 elected Legislative seats. PRB councillors were, however, faced with 17 officials and nominees. Hussainmiya, *Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III*, pp. 200, 269–72. Brunei is a classic example of how Britain could ignore international and regional factors, and even overwhelming democratic support for a nationalist party, if the search for a suitable local elite seemed to make this worthwhile.
- 35 The PRB had links with the Sarawak United People's Party. A predominantly Chinese organisation, this had been penetrated by communists from what the British labelled the 'Clandestine Communist Organisation'. Consequently, Britain made periodic arrests of party members identified as communists. For the history of the party, which evolved into a member of the ruling Barisan Nasional group of parties in post-independence Malaysia, see Chin Ung-Ho, *Chinese Politics in Sarawak: A Study of the Sarawak United People's Party* (Oxford, 1996).
- 36 In Nov. 1966 the Overseas Policy and Defence Committee agreed the Sultan be told to reform Brunei's constitution or face cancellation of its agreement with Britain and be prepared to handle its own internal security. On 28 July 1967 it agreed to give 2 year's notice on the agreement 'in the near future'. Then on 26 Sept. 1967, it climbed down, choosing pressure rather than giving notice. Brunei's £115 million sterling holdings and Brunei Shell's prospects for future oil concessions were cited as crucial. Cab148/25: OPD(66)44, 4 Nov. 1966; OPD(67)28, 28 July 1967; OPD(66)31, 26 Sept. 1967.
- 37 Poulgrain, *Genesis of Konfrontasi*, pp. 279–84, argues British intelligence was *agent provocateur*. Failure to anticipate the exact results of restricting democracy and the Malaysia plan is more likely. Hussainmiya, *Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin*, pp. 258–80, 305–08, notes the PRB dual strategy by 1961, of preparing for both ballot and bullet. In 1948 and 1962 revolt followed: British support for 'feudal-bourgeois' leaders (UMNO in 1946–48, the Sultan and Shell in 1962); and arrests. Stenson's model for the Emergency can be applied to the Brunei revolt: the closing of political space sparked insurgency.
- 38 Hussainmiya, *Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III*, pp. 308–13.

- 39 They were joined by some Sarawak Chinese, Britain having arrested members of the Sarawak United Peoples Party in an attempt to weed out communists. Chin Ung-Ho, *Chinese Politics*.
- 40 Poulgrain, *The Genesis of Konfrontasi*, p. 226, *passim*.
- 41 For Confrontation, see J. A. C. Mackie, *Confrontation: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute 1963-66* (London, 1974), preface and p. 331; and Michael Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London, 1983).
- 42 Poulgrain, *The Genesis of konfrontasi*, pp. 188-92.
- 43 Britain had to leave regional diplomacy to the Tunku. The Philippines was involved through a claim to North Borneo. An area British interests had once leased from the Sultan of Sulu, whose territories then came under Philippine control. At Manila in July 1963 the Tunku got Sukarno to promise he would welcome Malaysia if a United Nations mission confirmed Borneo's people wanted it. The 3 Asian countries agreed to form an association - Maphilindo - to manage regional affairs themselves, and not to allow bases to be used for great power purposes. Then the date was set for Malaysia (16 Sept. 1963, having been postponed from a 31 Aug. date set on 9 July). This would be regardless of the UN report's findings. Indonesia took this as insulting and destroying the spirit of the wider Manila agreements, and duly intensified its infiltration. Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of South-East Asia*, p. 152.
- 44 Defe25/179, CINCCE to MOD, 10 Mar. 1965. Singapore National Heritage Board, *Singapore: Journey into Nationhood* (Singapore, 1998), p. 70. MacDonald House accommodated the Australian High Commission and a bank.
- 45 Australia wanted to limit involvement partly because it had an eye on Vietnam and SEATO responsibilities, partly because from May 1963 it shared a land frontier with Indonesia in New Guinea.
- 46 Chin Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore*, p. 96, gives July as the start date. Cross-border raids were initially authorised to 4.6km, later to 18km, with no traces to be left. See David Easter, 'British and Malaysian Support for Rebel Movements in Indonesia during the "Confrontation"', *Intelligence and National Security* 14, 4 (forthcoming, 1999), for authorisation in April.
- 47 Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 290.
- 48 Chin Kin Wah, *The Defence of Malaysia and Singapore*, p. 68. See also p. 66. Indonesia then had a 300,000 strong army, a mainly Soviet equipped navy and over 400 aircraft, though territorial dispersal and internal security needs left only a fraction available for offensive roles.
- 49 See Bartlett, *The Long Retreat*, pp. 185-86, for a military summary. There were 114 Commonwealth deaths in a 3-year campaign involving 13 battalions, and engagements in Borneo involving up to a 100.
- 50 Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London, 1989), p. 289.
- 51 Benedict Anderson and Ruth T. McVey, *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965, coup in Indonesia* (Ithaca, 1965).
- 52 Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy*, pp. 111-22, especially p. 122.
- 53 For aircraft, see Cab128, CC(67)13, 16 March 1967, minute 4, 'in view of the launching costs of aircraft of this kind [jet passenger aircraft], US domination could be averted only by a collaborative European effort'. *Concorde, Jaguar*, and the European *Airbus* had their roots in this period. In July 1967 Britain agreed to pay 37.5 per cent of costs to develop an 'airbus', with France and Germany.
- 54 Owendale, *British Defence Policy*, p. 132.
- 55 See Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness*, p. 348, for the quotation on consensus; and Darwin, *Decolonisation*, p. 290, for the rest.
- 56 Bartlett, *The Long Retreat*, pp. 181-83.
- 57 See Roy Hattersley, *Fifty Years On: A Prejudiced History of Britain since the War* (London, 1998), pp. 166-68; and Ponting, *Breach of Promise*, pp. 68, 134-38, 393.

- 58 Steven Fielding (ed.), *The Labour Party: 'socialism' and society since 1951* (Manchester, 1997), p. 74.
- 59 For Greenwood's arguments that the timing of changes displayed rationality in terms of changing opportunity-cost, see Baylis, "'Greenwoodery" and British Defence Policy', *IA* lxii, 3 (1986), 443–57.
- 60 Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 291.
- 61 Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 290, says Labour 'looked back for inspiration' to 1945–51.
- 62 Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorised Life* (London, 1995), pp. 82–88.
- 63 Ziegler says Wilson made himself 'crown prince to Bevan's shadow king', while trying to say resignation was about more than teeth and spectacles. Ziegler, *Wilson*, pp. 82–88. Some left-wingers labelled the Wilson Government's foreign policy Bevanite at the time, see Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, ii, pp. 181–82.
- 64 Wilson's 1963 elevation to the Labour leadership was helped by his seeming not to rule out nuclear and world roles – suiting Labour's right-wing – and yet reputation as a left-winger. Bevin was the 1945–50 Foreign Secretary and Cold War Warrior, Bevan the architect of the National Health Service. Pro-Europeans such as Roy Jenkins (Home Secretary and later Chancellor) and those with a more domestic and welfare focus (such as Richard Crossman) also tended to view overseas roles sceptically.
- 65 Ziegler, *Wilson*, p. 193.
- 66 For an overview of the 1964–70 governments, see Hattersley, *Fifty Years On*, pp. 152–89.
- 67 Ovendale, *British Defence Policy*, p. 143.
- 68 Bartlett, *The Long Retreat*, p. 203.
- 69 Ovendale, *British Defence Policy*, p. 137, quoting Command 3357, *Supplementary Statement of Defence Policy* (London: HMSO, 1967).
- 70 Ovendale, *British Defence Policy*, p. 140; Bartlett, *The Long Retreat*, p. 207. HMS Hermes, the duty carrier one year in three, would have under 20 aircraft, see Cab128/CC(66)9, 14 Feb. 1966.
- 71 Cab128/CC(66)8, 14 Feb. 1966, 'Defence Review', Part 1.
- 72 Cuts and deflation were used in 1965–67 to defend the pound's value. Had the pound been devalued, however, deflation would have been required (as in 1968) to ensure resources were switched to export production, so taking advantage of the better exchange rate.
- 73 There was race violence in Notting Hill and Nottingham in 1958, and Commonwealth Immigration Acts in 1962 and 1968. When Enoch Powell was booted out of the shadow Cabinet for his 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, 61 per cent of the electorate thought this wrong. Powell, talking on immigration, had said: 'As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I see "the Tiber foaming with much blood"'. Richard Crossman, who opposed the East of Suez role, later reflected his constituency in supporting the 1968 Act. Randall Hansen, 'The Kenyan Crisis, British Politics and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 1968', *Historical Journal* 42, 3 (1999), 809–34; Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain* (Paladin, 1992), p. 44, 49.
- 74 Cab128/CC(67)9, 23 Feb. 1967, minute 4, for the decision 'in principle'. For 'Cathy Comes Home' and 'drama documentaries', see also George McKnight (ed.), *Agent of Change and Defiance: The Films of Ken Loach* (Westport: 1997).
- 75 *Times* 2 Dec. 1966, pp. 8–9, 12; Shelter web-site: <http://www.shelter.org.uk/about/history/html>.
- 76 Clive Ponting, *Breach of Promise: Labour in Power 1964–1970* (London, 1989), p. 104.
- 77 Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister* ii, p. 87.
- 78 See Cab128/CC(67)16, 4 April 1967, minute 3; Cab128/CC(67)34, 30 May 1967; and Cab128/CC(67)19, 10 April 1967, minute 4. At the latter, Callaghan threatened even

- these savings would require greater civil cuts, warning: 'the requirements of our defence strategy and those of our economic strategy at home were in conflict. We were carrying a much heavier burden of governmental overseas expenditure than other comparable countries and this was seriously inhibiting our efforts to achieve our economic and social programmes'. For Crossman, see also Cab128/CC(67)45, 6 July 1967, minute 3.
- 79 Cab128/CC(67)34, 30 May 1967. This meeting accepted that, as with Malta, Britain might pay a price for harmonious withdrawal, in increased aid.
- 80 Pickering has argued that economic crises were a 'constant', not a change. This is akin to arguing that if ten blows do not kill a man, there is no harm in an eleventh. The dilemma was cumulative because: spiralling weapons costs reduced unit numbers; Asian countries military power was increasing; and the figure for the balance of payments deficit grew larger at the same stage of each economic cycle. Ponting, *Breach of Promise*, p. 394; Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal*, pp. 16–17, 23–24.
- 81 At Cab128/CC(67)45, 6 July 1967, minute 3, Healey told Cabinet the plan was to withdraw from the Persian Gulf as well by 1975–76. An eastern capability was envisaged (with F-111s but no carriers from the mid-1970s), rather than bases. The army and navy would shrink by over 25 per cent.
- 82 Cab128/CC(67)66, 16 Nov. 1967.
- 83 The tax on the sick phrase was used in Cabinet (see Cab128/CC(68)2, 5 Jan. 1968), as it debated which categories, such as pensioners, might be exempted from charges.
- 84 See Wilson's draft statement for Parliament on 18 Dec. 1968, in Cab128/CC(67)72, 18 Dec. 1967. See also Prem13/1999, 'Note for the Record', (3), for Wilson's 25 Dec. 1967 telephone conversation.
- 85 Cab128/CC(68)1. 4 Jan. 1968, minute 3. The argument was about dates: 1970–71 or 1971–72.
- 86 Cab128/CC(68)6, 12 Jan. 1968. Brown said 'he [Rusk] had used the phrase' given above. Wilson set the 15th for a final consideration. See also, Cab129/C(68)15 and 22, 11 and 12 Jan. 1968.
- 87 See Prem13/2392, 'Note of a Meeting between the PM and Mr Lee Kuan Yew', Melbourne, 22 Dec. 1967. Richard Stubbs has noted the earlier Korean War Boom effect on Malaya, and has extended this idea to a greater area and period. See his 'War and Economic Development: Export-Oriented Industrialization in East and Southeast Asia', in *Comparative Politics* 31, 3 (April 1999).
- 88 See Ponting, *Breach of Promise*, pp 306–07; Cab128/CC(68)7 and 8, 15 Jan. 1968; and Crossman, *The Diary of a Cabinet Minister*, ii., pp. 650–53. Wilson shot down arguments based on Singapore, saying Lee Kuan Yew, the previous day, had not been much bothered between 1971 and 1972 (he preferred 1973), and that Singapore was booming from Japanese and Hong Kong investments.
- 89 Prem13/1999, PM's message to the President, 15 Jan. 1968.
- 90 Owendale, *British Defence Policy*, p. 144, quoting Wilson to Parliament on the 16th.
- 91 Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, p. 293; Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal*, pp. 134–76.
- 92 They may have realised their 1972 date might save the role (as the eventual alteration to late 1971 did), if the Conservative's returned at the next elections. Ponting, *Breach of Promise*, pp. 104, 306–07.
- 93 Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal*, pp. 159–62, argues the April 1967 decisions were presented as an adjustment not an end. So they were, but because of allied opposition and the need to maintain face.
- 94 Pickering, *Britain's withdrawal*, pp. 150–93, says devaluation weakened the Bevinite front, especially Callaghan, and elevated pro-Europeans such as Jenkins. Yet Wilson and Healey had already accepted the principle of withdrawal, and post-Nov. 1967 decisions were about timing. Making Jenkins Chancellor also weakened the coalition for change. Jenkins was always free to support retrenchment. Callaghan, who as Chancellor had to call for cuts, was now free to support East of Suez.

- 95 Owendale, *British Defence Policy*, p. 143.
- 96 Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, pp. 324–26. There was a March 1968 Malaysian-Singaporean agreement for joint air defence, but formal five power involvement and IADS dates to 1971.
- 97 T. Geraghty, *Who Dares Wins: The Story of the Special Air Service* (London, 1980), pp. 106–37.
- 98 Murfett et al, *Between Two Oceans*, pp. 326–28; Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of South-East Asia*, p. 95.
- 99 For instance, The Earl Howe, British Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, attended the third meeting of Five Power Defence Ministers in April 1997. The ministers agreed next to meet in 2000. Singapore Ministry of Defence (online): News for April 1997.
- 100 For the RN shipyards' conversion into Sembawang Shipyard Pte Ltd in Dec. 1968, and Swan Hunter, see Melanie Chew, *Of Hearts and Minds: The Story of Sembawang Shipyard* (Singapore, 1998).
- 101 Robin Adshead, in *Armed Forces Journal* 7, 8 (August 1988), pp. 357–61.
- 102 In 1967–72 the Gurkhas (of whom over 100,000 served in each world war) fell from 14,000 to 8,000. On Hong Kong's return to China (30 June 1997) the remaining units reformed as the Royal Gurkha Rifle Regiment, with 2 battalions and additional reinforcement platoons. Its headquarters were relocated to the UK, though one battalion remained in Brunei as a garrison, at Brunei's expense. The latter should not be confused with Brunei's Gurkha Reserve Unit, a Bruneian run force (around 2–3,000 strong) recruited from retired Gurkhas on a contract basis.
- 103 See chapter one above, p. 1, for withdrawal; and Defe7/1552, on 'Greater Malaysia, Defence Implications', for anticipated force changes. For domestic details, see Darwin, 'Britain's Withdrawal from East of Suez', in Bridge (ed.), *Munich to Vietnam*, pp. 140–58; and Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, pp. 291–96.
- 104 BIOT was probably inspired by the problems Britain had with the UK-Maldives agreement over the use of Gan Island as a base, and the Maldives' independence in July 1965. BIOT's centrepiece was Diego Garcia, midway between Zanzibar and Singapore. In Nov. 1965 this was carved out of soon-to-be independent Mauritius (12 March 1968) and added to three island specks from the Seychelles, north of Madagascar. Having paid Mauritius a respectable £3 million for Diego Garcia, Britain deported its population and leased the island to the US. Diego Garcia provided a staging post to the Middle East, being used by American aircraft as late as the Gulf War of 1991. In a pathetic irony, the eviction of 1,000 or more Ilois people from Diego Garcia proved feasible, but the chance Indian Ocean frigate birds might have their breeding disturbed saved BIOT's Aldabra from becoming a British airfield. Whether the birds would have triumphed without the 1967–68 withdrawal decisions is another question.
- 105 Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, pp. 279–81; *The Commonwealth Yearbook, 1991* (London, 1991), p. 276. The Cyprus solution was achieved after international negotiations, and a long Greek Cypriot campaign for *enosis* with Greece.
- 106 See Co968/693, for the Governor's views. The *Times*, 13 March 1957, was less convinced.
- 107 Singapore withdrawal cost Britain £50 million in aid, 1/4 of it as grant. Murfett, *Britain Between Two Oceans*, p. 324. Britain also handed over bases, facilities and some weapons. See also notes 100 and 112.
- 108 Darwin, 'British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?'
- 109 Contrast this view to that of Hyam, 'The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763–1963', which makes geopolitics and the Cold War supreme. Yet the Cold War had little significance for South Asian decolonisation. Even post-1960, African decolonisation does not look so different from Asian, with the tendency to telescope and the concern to manage local elites, and to avoid cost and embarrassment unless these served clear purposes.

- 110 The need to transfer Simonstown naval base to South Africa in 1955 was likewise motivated by the need to protect long-term access by safeguarding an ongoing, collaborative relationship with a suspicious and nationalistic local elite. See Peter James Henshaw, 'The Transfer of Simonstown: Afrikaner Nationalism, South African Strategic Dependence, and British Global Power', *JICH* 20, 3 (1999), 419–44. See also the following note.
- 111 Maintaining power did not mean concentration on bases and economic rights alone. It meant balancing an intertwined troika: economic strength at home and abroad; military capability and overseas defence rights; and supportive relationships with imperial and Commonwealth countries. The last drove a desire to create large, stable successor states, with successor elites well disposed to Britain.
- 112 An example of the cost of this strategy was Britain's aid to decolonising countries. Royal Navy dockyards in Singapore were also handed over with most equipment intact, giving birth to Sembawang Shipyard Pte Ltd in Dec. 1968. Chew, *Of Hearts and Minds: The Story of Sembawang Shipyard*.

Conclusion

For Britain, Malaya and Singapore lay at both geographical and chronological crossroads. Standing 'Between Two Oceans' they looked west to India and east to Hong Kong. They were the focus northwards to Indochina and southwards to Australia. Their fall linked rather than divided pre- and post-war planning, and their defence had to be reconciled with accelerating decolonisation. Following India's independence, they became the epicentre of British interests in the East, with military headquarters located at Singapore. This focus on their place at the core of interacting concerns – regional, temporal and between British policy and local conditions – has suggested a re-assessment of Darby's *British Defence Policy East of Suez*.

Darby argued that in 1947 Britain missed the opportunity to re-examine its defence posture for the region. Yet Britain did re-evaluate strategies for Southeast Asia as it did for the Middle East. For both it envisaged a move to small garrisons backed by strategic reserves, reinforced if necessary by forces from the United Kingdom. It also responded to metropolitan finance and manpower constraints, and the loss of the Indian Army, by seeking increased assistance from Gurkha, colonial and Australian forces.

Britain hoped to devolve internal security tasks to local governments, and to persuade Commonwealth countries to share the burden of regional defence. Yet as late as 1957 small territories such as Malaya were thought unlikely to be able to defend themselves unaided in the foreseeable future. Britain thus expected decolonisation to reduce the costs of imperial policing, without removing the need to assist colonial and Commonwealth countries in their defence: a military presence might remain both necessary and affordable.

Britain's endeavours to spread the burden of defence met with moderate success. By 1957 there was a Commonwealth strategic reserve in Malaya, including a Commonwealth infantry brigade and Australian and New Zealand air squadrons. Despite moving increasingly closer to American policy in Southeast Asia and in military purchasing, Australia was still proving a useful partner. The Malayan Army, meanwhile, had raised eight infantry battalions.

Local conditions, however, frustrated attempts to reduce Britain's overseas garrisons. In the Middle East these plans came up against nationalist opposition to British bases. In Southeast Asia the critical development was the outbreak of

the Malayan Emergency in 1948, in the context of the regional progress of communism. The Emergency tied down most of the Gurkhas and called for reinforcements from Britain and the colonies. In the period 1948–56 forces in Southeast Asia were largely employed on internal security tasks. Virtually no resources were left over for projecting power or influence outside of British territories, or for countering communism at the regional level. Southeast Asia thus replicated a more general pattern of imperial defence, with a rapid run down to 1948, followed by a ballooning of costs, in men and money, as nationalist and communist challenges mounted. Except that Malaya paid its own way.

Darby, and the 'Cold War' and 'strategic' interpretations, thus fail to show just how far 1948–57 forms a distinct period, in which forces were largely determined by internal security needs. Britain was willing to commit forces to fight Southeast Asian communism, but only in territories which had direct economic value, or importance for maintaining prestige. Simple 'overstretch' arguments do not fit Southeast Asia well. 'Great Power' illusions, in the form of commitments to cutting edge military technology and nuclear forces, and to massive post-1950 rearmament, may or may not have damaged Britain. Likewise Britain's Middle East commitments, but there were plausible economic reasons for defending Southeast Asia.

The core period covered by this book also forms a discrete 'East of India' era. Southeast Asia and Hong Kong came to be considered as a strategic whole, separate from the Indian Ocean segment of what was later called 'East of Suez'. Southeast Asia had its own British Commissioner-General, and the Singapore-based British Defence Co-ordinating Committee (Far East) concentrated on planning its defence until its dissolution in the early 1960s. It took shrinking garrisons and accelerated decolonisation, increasing aircraft ranges and the failed Suez intervention of 1956, to demarcate a distinct and unified strategic area east of the resulting Middle East air barrier.

British planning after 1957 then emphasised that, compared to nuclear stalemate West of Suez, East of Suez would remain a turbulent region. Britain still had economic interests in the area, and transferring defence responsibilities to local forces was expected to be a slow process. In 1957 Malaya's own forces were mainly engaged on internal security tasks and it had no combat aircraft of its own. Singapore was only just raising its first infantry battalion.

Britain thus sought to preserve a significant if shrinking regional role, with Singapore as its main base and logistics centre. The intention was a retreat from an empire of continents and hinterlands to an empire of points, from jungle to city-port and aircraft-carrier, and from formal to informal empire. The period 1957–63 saw this new East of Suez policy implemented, with reserves and an aircraft carrier group stationed east of the air barrier.

Britain, however, remained concerned not only with the defence of Commonwealth and colonial territories, but with maintaining influence with Australia, America and in SEATO. It needed Singapore and Malaya not only for their intrinsic value, but as part of a broader attempt to maintain world influence.

It believed, perhaps too readily, that it could sustain a significant rather than a marginal restraining influence on American policy. As late as 1957–58, there were increases in Anglo-American cooperation, notably in the atomic and intelligence fields, following the Soviet launch of *Sputnik*. Britain thus retained the right to use the Malayan-based Commonwealth Strategic Reserve to support SEATO, partly to maintain its position as a regional ally of Australia and America. It also hoped that developing a nuclear capability would impress allies; and briefly sought full post-independence discretion to use Malayan bases in a nuclear role.

The post-1957 East of Suez posture thus did not result from sclerosis in Britain's supposedly consensual process of bureaucratic politics. It was the culmination of strategic reviews stretching from 1952, if not 1942. It did not happen because there was a lack of planning or coordination, but because ministers and officials came to share similar assumptions about Britain's limits, interests and continuing world role.

In addition, the new, post 1957 East of Suez posture could be seen as a practical response to a period of 'Third World' instability, to the problem of managing accelerating decolonisation, and to East-West conflict and the nuclear stalemate in Europe. If mutual assured destruction made European war unlikely, it seemed logical to direct forces away from the continental commitment, and towards maritime and decolonisation duties relevant to a long Cold War. On the other hand, East of Suez might be portrayed as a last attempt, by ministers and the COS alike, to reduce European burdens in order to maintain Britain's status as a world power: a status ministers anticipated would continue indefinitely. Perhaps more plausibly, East of Suez strategy can be depicted as a result of the blending together of these two strands, of requirements in Asia and of Britain's continuing great power ambitions. The transitional tasks and unpredictability of the East of Suez era were real, but so too was the illusion these could justify keeping bases and forces there *sine die*, and could sustain continuing and worthwhile 'influence'. As late as January 1968, after deciding to withdraw from East of Suez, Wilson protested that Britain was determined to secure a new, long-term role 'on the world stage'.

Britain was unwilling to accept that its influence was atrophying, and that nuclear forces and Commonwealth contributions to SEATO could not stem this. Yet Britain's regional influence had been suffering a steady decline since the immediate postwar period.

The peak of British influence had come remarkably late, during Southeast Asia's reoccupation by SEAC in 1945–46. Britain had then facilitated the French return to Indochina and the Dutch return to Indonesia. It had coordinated the region's early rehabilitation. Thereafter, Britain's ability to exert influence had declined precipitously.

France ignored British calls to grant its Indochinese territories the equivalent of 'Dominion Status'. India could never be persuaded to sympathise with military deterrence of China. Britain's hope of marshalling American resources behind its own policies was disappointed. The United States did become

involved in Southeast Asia's defence, but it refused to recognise communist China. It adopted a confrontational stance, so undermining Britain's policy of drawing China back into the international community. Britain found its dual policy of balancing military and political containment of communism undermined by Indian neutralism on one side and American Cold War policies on the other. Britain's regional stature did allow it to put its case to India and its SEATO allies, but this seldom translated into effective influence. Australia and New Zealand signed the ANZUS pact with the United States, despite their desire for continued Commonwealth cooperation. Even in 1954, Britain was probably not a vital player. British opposition probably did not stop the US intervening in Indochina. It was instead a marginal factor compared to the United States' and France's self-induced paralysis over Vietnam, and China's decision to wage a diplomatic offensive in Asia.

Despite these pressures, Britain's regional aims remained consistent. They were to secure a screen of friendly or neutral non-communist countries to Malaya's north, but without committing substantial resources or taking significant risks. Thus Britain argued Tonkin must be held when it seemed France could achieve this alone; and that it must be abandoned when its continued defence seemed to require Anglo-American intervention. Before 1954 it rejected plans which envisaged the use of nuclear weapons, fearing they might lead to war with China and perhaps to global conflict. After 1954 it supported a SEATO nuclear strategy, because thermonuclear weaponry now made it seem likely that this would achieve effective deterrence, and so cheap defence.

It is significant that Britain's main contingency plan, for the seizure of Songkhla, was only likely to be triggered if Thailand looked like falling to communism. It also required minimal preparations, as its initial launch relied on pre-existing forces and infrastructure. In addition, a Songkhla operation – adopted for the same reasons of resource constraints – had been aborted in 1941 because of the political difficulties of invading southern Thailand: difficulties which were at least as relevant in the 1950s as in the 1940s. Songkhla remained prominent in British plans from 1951 until SEATO, with its American underpinning, consolidated in 1955–57.

Britain's reluctance to commit resources to Southeast Asia in 1945–57, other than to its own territories, partly stemmed from its perception of the regional threat. It saw this as largely political, necessitating a combination of diplomacy and of Western assurances that communist expansion would be resisted. Yet it also derived from metropolitan constraints and priorities, since Britain did want other powers to commit considerable resources in Indochina. From 1945 the COS were under severe political pressure to contain military expenditure, despite world-wide defence duties. Post-Korean War rearmament raised British defence expenditure to levels which even Churchill's incoming government, of October 1951, viewed as unsustainable. There could be no question of increasing military expenditure in order to defend Southeast Asia as a region.

Regional interests also clashed with the wider needs of British diplomacy from time to time, sometimes losing out in the process. Britain would not delay its

January 1950 recognition of communist China merely to avoid boosting the confidence of Malayan communists. China policy might affect the fate of much of East as well as Southeast Asia, and so overshadowed Malaya's more parochial needs. Following the outbreak of the Korean War, Britain also imposed controls on exports to China, which hurt Hong Kong and Malaya alike. This time, it was the demands of American policy which overrode Southeast Asia's needs. Finally, Britain placed a premium on timely political concessions in Southeast Asia not just for local reasons, but to maintain Britain's stature amongst newly independent states in general. In short, Southeast Asian policy was constrained and complicated by considerations of global diplomacy as well as global strategy.

The COS, meanwhile, were determined that Southeast Asia should not divert resources from war-preparations for other theatres. This meant Britain was in no position to buttress the general area against communist attack or subversion in the 1950s-60s. The rise of social unrest and communism in the region also reinforced Britain's need to focus its efforts on holding its own territories. Communist-led insurgency in Malaya, and the proximity of China to Hong Kong, led to large forces being committed to safeguard their internal security. The main impact of the Asian Cold War on British force posture was, therefore, indirect, manifesting in increased garrisons in valuable colonial territories.

The importance of these territories had been confirmed by Singapore's fall. For one of the lessons drawn from 1942 had been that, though Malaya's dollar-earnings were too expensive to defend in time of global war, they were too important to lose in peace. Malaya and Singapore remained important if not indispensable sources of dollar earnings and British investments in the 1950s. As late as 1952-53 Malaya earned a third of the Sterling Area's dollars. Though its dollar-earning role declined in significance thereafter, the Persian Gulf was then became the main supplier of oil to Europe. This made what became seen as the East of Suez area valuable into the 1960s, quite apart from Malaya and Singapore's perceived strategic and Cold War importance.

The main reasons for keeping enlarged garrisons in Southeast Asia before 1957 thus included the threat communist insurgency posed to Malaya's dollar-earnings, and the danger to Singapore's bases. In turn, the Emergency provides a good example of the complex way in which local conditions interacted with British defence planning. Malayan communal patterns underpinned a predominantly Chinese insurgency, so forcing Britain to commit substantial reinforcements, despite initial post-war plans to minimise eastern garrisons. Yet divisions between Malays and Chinese, and within the Chinese community, also limited the support available to the mostly Chinese MCP, and so helped make British counter-insurgency a success.

With Britain committed to granting Malaya eventual self-government by the 1950s, and a favourable ethnic terrain, the Briggs Plan's military framework and 'population control' measures brought counter-insurgency victory. Inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic divisions had fatally eroded the insurgents' ability to widen and sustain their support-base. The MCP had proved fatally over-reliant on the Chinese squatters, who comprised a fraction of just one community.

These communal patterns led to modifications in British plans, as well as frustrating communist aspirations. Defeat in 1942 had prompted British attempts to forge racial unity as a prelude to creating a more defensible 'Dominion of Southeast Asia'. British planners tried to encourage cross-communal politics, but eventually had to settle for an alliance between communal parties. They insisted that Malaya and Singapore must be federated, but had to accept their separate advance towards independence. Then it was the threat of Singapore moving leftwards which prompted Malaya to accept federation with Singapore in September 1963. Even then, local leaders proved no more capable of overcoming Malaysia's deep communal divisions than had Britain and the MCP. As Singapore's subsequent departure from the Malaysian Federation on 9 August 1965 showed, communal forces continued to shape events, frustrating and sometimes facilitating British, communist and nationalist plans alike. In short, local and communal factors were as important in determining the outcomes of British policy as Cold War and metropolitan influences.

Britain had made its most dramatic adjustment to local communal patterns as early as 1946-48, when it replaced the Malayan Union with the Federation of Malaya, restoring Malay sovereignty and severely restricting Chinese citizenship. In effect, Britain allowed a Malay veto over the pace and nature of nation- and state-building, rather than risk losing the cooperation of Malaya's largest communal group. It allowed Malay domination to persist into post-independence Malaya, in the hope Malays could still be cajoled towards the cross-communalism which remained Britain's desired outcome.

This pragmatic approach to decolonisation allowed the nurturing of a working relationship with successor elites in Malaya and Singapore, and the emergence of a Malay-dominated communal understanding in Malaya. These both helped limit the cost of protecting Britain's commercial and military interests, at least relative to the costs incurred by the Dutch, French and Americans. Britain's pragmatism was in turn fuelled by its belief that it was suffering from global overstretch. Acutely aware of the British Empire's unique size, and so unparalleled potential to drain the metropolis, Britain early recognised the need for pragmatic management of colonies. This managerial approach, emphasising timely concession while trying to retain economic and military interests which sustained world power, was reinforced both by British aims and by history.

Britain's record of turning settler colonies into friendly, self-governing Dominions fuelled the hope that decolonisation would not be just an end to administration, but a beginning for a friendly Commonwealth of Nations, led by Britain as *primus inter pares*. British pragmatism was in this way fuelled by experience with settler colonies, by hopes that world power could be sustained, and by the inevitability of India's independence. This same pragmatism meant accepting frequent defeats for detailed British tactics and planning, in the hope of preserving core, strategic needs, namely: preserving economic interests; ensuring successor elites were broadly favourable to Britain; and securing sufficient inter-racial cooperation to allow strong pro-British states to emerge. While this pragmatism secured core economic and strategic aims, the approach

implied a limited British will to insist on detailed defence requirements. Britain's success in managing decolonisation thus rested on its willingness to accept failures and delays in fostering policies such as cross-communalism, democracy and federation.

From 1955 then, Britain responded to accelerating decolonisation by weighing perceived military needs against the desire to keep the goodwill and cooperation of local elites. It did this even though the United States was becoming, if anything, more anxious for Britain to remain in Southeast Asia. The United States worried that premature concessions could fuel chaos or communism – especially in Singapore – and so damage Western Cold War strategy in general, and American attempts to prop South Vietnam in particular. Yet despite continuing economic interests and American sympathy, it made sense for Britain to accommodate the wishes of local parties as independence approached, especially where these were politically entrenched, non-communist and likely to deliver communal and political stability.

In Malaya it became clear by the Baling meeting of December 1955 that the Alliance met these criteria. Britain then accepted the acceleration of Malayan decolonisation. In this way it minimised the costs of empire and decolonisation, while optimising its reputation with the successor states decolonisation spawned. The rising tide of nationalism throughout Asia, and the French withdrawal from Indochina, anyway suggested pressure for political change would intensify. Britain thought it better to ride the tide than sit Canute-like on the beach. Malay demands for independence by 1957 were therefore accepted in 1955–56. This was despite Malaya's weak external defence capability, despite failure to nurture cross-communal parties, despite slow progress towards uniting Malaya and Singapore, and despite these two territories still having more economic value to Britain than most of its other colonies.

Even then, Britain did not simply give *Merdeka* to grateful local politicians, 'On a Gold Plate', in Harry Miller's words. Even the negotiations for the 1957 Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement show the Malaysians attempting to maximise British aid, economic and military, and yet to optimise their control over any Commonwealth forces and bases which might remain. This involved balancing genuine and perhaps even dissimulated sympathy for British aims in private with a public stance intended to assuage nationalist feelings.

In turn, Britain moderated demands for military rights in response to Malayan requests. Hence the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement of October 1957 involved a deliberate public ambiguity over SEATO. Britain was, in effect, allowed the right to use Malayan-based forces for SEATO purposes, providing they were first channelled through Singapore.

Malayan decolonisation re-emphasised Singapore's importance as a regional base, at a time when its internal politics looked unstable. Britain proved willing to stall constitutional progress at the April 1956 Constitutional Conference, because there was no sign of a reliably anti-communist party emerging which could also tap the Chinese vote. Yet even here imperial stubbornness gave way to compromise in 1957. Britain then agreed that when Singapore attained internal

self-government (1959), Britain would retain control of external defence, but establish an Internal Security Committee on which a Malayan representative held the casting vote. It would probably have gone further and accepted full Singaporean control of internal security, subject only to the British right to suspend the constitution.

Even in Singapore, Britain had come to recognise that it was pointless to insist on 'safeguards' unless there were local politicians who were willing to let them work, and that it was necessary always to keep in mind who could form a viable successor elite, and how they could be kept onside. In this Malaya and Singapore reflected a more general trend in decolonisation. In South Asia, Burma, Aden and, arguably, in Southern and Central Africa, the pace and fate of decolonisation, had at least as much to do with the search for suitable successor elites – and the local social patterns on which this rested – as it did with Cold War and geopolitical calculations.

This work thus points to the delicate juggling act required by both Britain and nationalist politicians, as they attempted to square their respective defence and economic requirements with increasing self-government. It also demonstrates that we can only begin to place the defence of Malaya and Singapore in its fullest context if we examine the interplay between pre- and post-war planning, British aims and local conditions, internal and regional strategies, and between military concerns and colonial affairs. It suggests that the 'Imperial Overstretch', Cold War, economic and colonial paradigms are, if taken singly, all inadequate tools for understanding Britain's defence aims and outcomes.

Improbably, it suggests that what is now needed is an interpretation which can hold together these apparently contradictory interpretations. For the combined effect of economic, colonial, Cold War and strategic considerations was such that Malaya and Singapore's continued defence by Britain – in conditions short of global war – remained overdetermined in this period. Britain would almost certainly have continued to defend them for economic reasons alone, or for Cold War reasons alone, or for strategic reasons alone. It might even have considered defending them for colonial reasons alone, as another defeat so soon after the withdrawals in Greece, Turkey, India, Burma, Ceylon and Palestine seemed deeply undesirable, when events in the Gold Coast and Hong Kong suggested retreat could turn into rout.

In addition, Malaya, and Southeast Asia in general, do fit both the radical and the 'overstretch' interpretations of Empire's economic role. At least they do for the period 1941–57, when Britain still talked of 'Southeast Asia' rather than 'East of Suez'. In terms of aims, Britain returned after the war committed to pave the way for self-government, and its defence of Malaya really was, in part, a Cold War crusade. Yet Britain's pragmatic approach to decolonisation was double-edged. It meant a greater flexibility over who could be accepted as allies or successor elites, and over the terms of divorce. This propelled India, Burma and Malaya to independence without the disasters experienced by other colonial powers. However, it also meant a willingness to ditch democratic models if they threatened to let a pro-Indonesian Azahari or a Chinese communist win. It meant

allowing Malay nationalism to dominate multi-ethnic Malaysia, and twice changing Sarawak's status to suit British plans. In other words, the moral hazard which the left condemn was integral to the pragmatism which oiled decolonisation. The casting aside of scruples and tactical plans was central to preserving core, strategic aims.

This political paradox in decolonisation was matched by an economic paradox, and again both radical and more traditional interpretations fit. In dollar terms, during this time Britain could not afford to let its Malayan dollar arsenal, and to a lesser extent Brunei oil, go; yet in sterling terms, Malaya and other colonial and military commitments diverted personnel and resources from desperately needed domestic economic development. The military were also absorbing large numbers of men, investment and research staff, at a time when an overheated British economy needed these to compete with Europe, America and Japan.

Without denying that British officials and politicians still aspired to 'great power' roles, or that they worried more about defence rights than encouraging local governments to expedite military independence, Southeast Asia's economic value did help underpin an unsustainable defence posture. Forces were concentrated mainly in economically valuable territories – such as Malaya and Hong Kong – in order to defend them from threats which blended anti-colonialism and communism. Whatever the options available later, retaining these territories in Britain's economic orbit then looked necessary.

Indeed, any approach to decolonisation capable of preventing valuable colonies descending into chaos or communism would probably have increased short and medium term defence costs. Costs counted in policing, economic aid and building up local forces. This was further exacerbated because the very process of withdrawal suggested British weakness, and so invited challenges. Furthermore, Britain's mode of pragmatic retreat compounded the impression that it was worth opposing the detail in British plans. But the alternative approaches, as the French showed in Vietnam and the Dutch in Indonesia, were usually even more draining.

Thus judgements on British defence and decolonisation East and West of Suez need not necessarily turn out the same. One can seriously question whether at least some of Britain's Middle East presence should have been dispensed with earlier. After all, Attlee did in 1946–47, and the 1956 Suez debacle made a mockery of British claims that maintaining prestige and the Canal had been essential. But Britain's pre-1957 defence posture in Southeast Asia seemed justified several times over, most especially on economic and Cold War grounds. Britain's failure to challenge the need for a string of bases must be attributed not only to atavistic and outmoded thinking, but equally to an age when aircraft had short ranges and limited loads, and characterised by real and increasing demands of decolonisation. These demands paradoxically increased rather than decreased during the process of withdrawal, so that in British minds continuing needs and old myths about strategic bases became bedfellows, making it doubly hard to challenge the latter.

Precisely when defending Malaya and Singapore and the bases en route – and as integrated into East of Suez – ceased to be an unaffordable necessity is debatable. But up to 1957, and to a lesser extent up to 1963 if not beyond, it seems clear that their defence, so beneficial and yet such a burden, remained an irresolvable paradox of decolonisation.

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pages 77 to 94. See also Stockwell's contribution to the 'British Documents on the End of Empire' series, *Malaya* (3 volumes, London: HMSO, 1995), which are excellent not just for the documents, but for their details of post-holders, chronologies and index. The volumes in the same series by Hyam and Goldsworthy (see the bibliography of secondary works below) provide summaries of central policy-making. They also contain some of the key documents on SE Asia. The main PRO classes used in this work are:

- Adm205: First Sea Lord's papers.
 Air2: Minister of State for Air.
 Air8: Chief of Air Staff.
 Air20: General papers, a wide range on policy and equipment.
 Air23: Overseas Commands.
 Cab21: Cabinet Secretariat, including several important and sensitive files for 1945 to 1952, then more vigorously weeded.
 Cab128: Cabinet meetings, 1945 following, minutes.
 Cab129: Cabinet papers, 1945 following, conclusions.
 Cab131: Cabinet Defence Committee, 1945 following, papers and minutes. In the 1960s this becomes the Overseas Policy and Defence committee, in Cab148.0
 Cab133-134: Cabinet sub-committees, various.
 Co537: Colonial Office. Secret correspondence up to around 1951.
 Co825: Colonial Office. Eastern Department, Original Correspondence up to 1949. The Eastern Department was then split into the Southeast Asian Department and the Hong Kong and Pacific Department.
 Co968: Colonial Defence.
 Co1022: Colonial Office, Southeast Asia Department correspondence, 1951 to 1953. Following a reorganisation, Southeast Asian correspondence was subsequently filed in the following series.
 Co1030: Colonial Office, Far Eastern Department correspondence, 1954 following.
 Defe4: COS minutes, 1947 following. Previously Cab79.
 Defe5: COS papers, 1947 following. Previously Cab80.
 Defe6: Joint Planning Staff papers, 1945 following. Previously Cab84.
 Defe7: Ministry of Defence registered files, general.
 Defe11: Registered files of the Secretariat to the Chiefs of Staff Committee.
 Defe7 and Defe11 both contain files on a variety of domestic and overseas topics and correspondence with other ministries.
 Defe11/
 123-126: These contain the BDCC (Far East) papers for 1955-60.
 Defe13: Minister of Defence, Private Office files.
 Defe32: Sensitive information excluded from Defe 4 and 5.
 Do35: Dominions Office correspondence.
 Fo371: Foreign Office Registry Files.
 Fo800: Private papers of ministers and officials.
 Fo1091: Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, 1955 following.
 Prem3: Prime Minister's files, World War Two.
 Prem8: Prime Ministers' files, 1945 to 1951.
 Prem11: Prime Ministers' files, 1952 following. The Prime Ministerial files often provide the best overview for policy formation.
 Prem13: Prime Ministers' files.
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