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The University of Sydney

SYDNEY, N.S.W.

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION

Current Affairs Bulletin.

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE :

December 12, 1966.

AIRMAIL.

Mr. George A. Carver, Jnr.,
C/- "Foreign Affairs",
Council on Foreign Relations Inc.,
58 East 68th Street,
NEW YORK. NEW YORK 10021. U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Carver,

You are almost certainly not familiar with CURRENT AFFAIRS BULLETIN, published by this department of the university, but it is a fortnightly with a circulation of about 55,000 an issue and is distributed widely in university and senior school years as well as among the general public. It has a reputation for publishing authoritative material and draws heavily on academic contributions both in this country and elsewhere. Each issue deals with one topic in a single article of about 6,000 words. This leaves up to two pages for maps and illustrations. The fee is $U.S.150.

Given Australia's commitment in Vietnam our editorial committee has naturally been anxious to publish regularly on aspects of the war and government defence and foreign policy. Three such issues are already in print; a fourth, arguing an anti-commitment position, has just come to hand.

We would like now to commission an article which would look in more detail at the internal politics of South Vietnam, in particular the Buddhist role. Most of us on the editorial committee were familiar with your article, "The Real Revolution in South Vietnam", and it was agreed that your interest be invited in contributing the article we have in mind.

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Briefly, as we see it, it would need to cover the origins of Buddhism in South Vietnam; what distinguishes it from that in any other Asian country; the extent to which it can be seen as being true to important features in the Buddhist tradition in behaving as it has in Vietnam, and the extent to which this might be a departure forced on it by considerations which had little force in the past. It could then go on to look in more detail at the organisation of Buddhism in South Vietnam and the ways in which it has become part of political processes there. It would need to assess also how it is likely to influence future events, however the present conflict may issue.

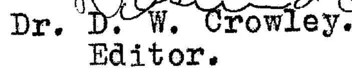
The article could sum up by re-stating what you take to be the significance of Buddhist behaviour in South Vietnam for other parts of the Buddhist world.

As I say, this is an indication of the way we think of the topic here, but we would welcome any suggestions you like to make if you agree to write it for us. Perhaps the simplest thing in these circumstances would be to let us have a brief outline of the article as you see it. This need not be very detailed, but should indicate not only the main headings, but the issues to be discussed under them, approximate length of the major sections, as well as outlining the general line of argument.

I am sending separately some copies of the publication, which we regard as good of their kind and which should give you some idea of CAB's general method and approach.

I would be pleased if you would consider this and let me have a reply when it is convenient.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. D. W. Crowley.
Editor.

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CURRENT AFFAIRS BULLETIN

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- because, when they are available, this places a heavy burden on our clerical and storeroom staff who have to reopen accounts, and hand despatch large packages by bulk post;
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—The Editor.

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Current Affairs Bulletin

Editor: DESMOND CROWLEY

Executive Editor: JOHN RORKE

PUBLISHED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

AUSTRALIA AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Last year, CAB **published two issues dealing with U.S. policy in Vietnam and Australia's military commitment in the conflict there.* In this issue, the author, a political scientist working in an Australian university, shifts the discussion to look at not only at the question of Australia in Vietnam but at the wider political and defence questions which confront Australia in South-east Asia.**

* * *

THERE are certain areas in the world that are obviously of key importance in international relations. For geographical, strategic or economic reasons they are important because any considerable change in their position would have wide-ranging effects on the global balance of power. There are other regions that have importance thrust upon them because they become the testing ground for trials of strength between external forces that intrude into them. In which of these senses is South-east Asia important? Though no clear-cut answer can be given to the question, it is worth exploring because it has been the source of a good deal of the current controversy about Western policy towards the area.

In doing so it will be as well to remember that the question how important an area is in the general pattern of international politics is a different one from how important that area may be for any particular country close to it. The specific question of the importance of South-east Asia to Australia will be discussed later in this *CAB*.

* Vol. 36, No. 10, "Commitment in Vietnam" (Sept. 27, 1965); Vol. 36, No. 11, "Commitment in Vietnam 2" (Oct. 11, 1965).

Perspectives

There are some senses in which South-east Asia is not an area of great international importance. Its population of very roughly 220 million is, by Australian, or even European standards, large. It is, however, relatively small measured against the more than 1000 million people who inhabit the adjoining land masses of India, Pakistan and China. The geographical and political distribution of the peoples of South-east Asia also tells against their importance in world affairs. The population is very unevenly spread and the greater part of the land area of the region is lightly populated. On the other hand, because six-sevenths of the inhabitants of South-east Asia are concentrated in approximately one-sixth of the total area, there are certain areas like Tonkin in North Vietnam, Java in Indonesia and Luzon in the Philippines where the population density is so high as to be a source of weakness rather than of strength. Politically, the South-east Asian population is also unequally divided. With a population of 100 million, Indonesia is the only large country in the region, being three times the size of the next largest countries —Thailand and the Philippines and, if it

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were unified, Vietnam. The two smallest states of the region, Laos and Singapore, have populations in the region of two million.

The Fact of Instability . . .

As a region South-east Asia lacks solidarity. There are some who in fact assert that South-east Asia is nothing more than a geographical expression. This is perhaps an exaggeration for there are forces that operate over large parts of the area and a change in one part tends to make itself felt in other parts. But even if it be agreed that South-east Asia is a political system (or sub-system), it is still true that it is a highly unstable system. The instability of South-east Asia considered as a region stems from three closely-connected and continually interacting factors:

- internal conflicts within most of the states of the region;
- rivalries between many of the states (between South Vietnam and Cambodia, Thailand and Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia and so on); and
- their dependence on a number of outside powers.

It is not relevant here to discuss the very complex causes of this instability and regional disunity. But they include the ethnic, religious and racial diversity of the region that is, in varying degree, to be found within each state but which also cuts across state boundaries. Another important factor is that the culture of South-east Asia has, to a large measure, come from outside—from India, China and Europe. In the case of China, its influence is increased by the existence within all South-east Asian states of Chinese minorities and, in Malaysia and Thailand, of very large minorities. The fact that the whole area, except Thailand, was colonised by European powers has contributed both to the dependence of the new states and, because of the exclusive policies followed by the colonial countries, to the relative lack of interchange between the territories formerly ruled by the British, Dutch, French and Americans.

. . . Foreign Policies

From the international point of view, the chief consequences flowing from the factors mentioned are, first, that the foreign policies of many South-east Asian states tend not to be based on clearly defined national interests. Their over-riding concern is the preservation of national unity, and, since the balance of internal forces is unstable, foreign policy has constantly to be adjusted in such a way as to restore the domestic equilibrium. This process has been particularly noticeable in the case of Indonesia in recent years.

Secondly, the issues that divide the South-east Asia nations tend to be greater than the common interests that unite them. Thus the Cambodians' dislike of the Thais and of the Vietnamese impels them to lean towards China. In attempting to crush the Malaysians, Indonesia was prepared to enter into dependence on Russia and China.

Thirdly, for the reason just mentioned, third powers tend almost inevitably—sometimes against their will—to be drawn into South-east Asian affairs.

Economically, South-east Asia is of importance to the rest of the world as the source of a limited number of commodities like rubber, tin, copra and rice. It also provides a market of some value for the exports of Japan, India and the countries of Western Europe. Generally, however, South-east Asia is far more dependent on the rest of the world than the latter is on it. Moreover, the economic potential of the area is not great. Partly because it lacks the natural and human resources, partly because of the advantages possessed by countries like Japan, India and China, it is unlikely to become a centre of major industrial significance.

Strategically certain areas of South-east Asia are of considerable importance. Malaysia and Indonesia together leave hardly

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more than a series of straits between the Indian and Pacific Islands and either country, but especially Indonesia, could, given sufficient power, seriously interfere with established sea and air routes. The control of Burma by a hostile power would also subject India and Pakistan to strong pressures and greatly reduce their influence throughout South-east Asia. The strategic importance to the West of the other countries of peninsular South-east Asia depends on the truth or otherwise of the "domino theory". It does, however, seem highly probable that Burma, Malaysia and possibly Indonesia would experience great difficulty in resisting Communism and a relatively high degree of Chinese hegemony unless Thailand either remains friendly to the West or is effectively neutralised.

Great Power Interests

The imponderables everywhere present in the South-east Asian situation account in part for the caution and uncertainty that have characterised the policies of most of the great powers towards the region. With the liquidation of their colonial empires, the European powers now play down the importance of the region. On the ground that it is peripheral to the global balance of power, they not only themselves avoid involvement in the area but attempt to dissuade the U.S.A. from committing to it resources that, in the European view, could be used more usefully elsewhere.

In the immediate post-war period the U.S.A. displayed little interest in South-east Asia (except for the Philippines) and firmly refused to enter into treaty commitments to defend the peninsula. Only when the victory of the Chinese Communists was followed by the defeat of the French at the hands of the Vietminh was the U.S.A. prepared to enter into the SEATO Treaty. Even then for almost eight years the Americans refused to commit themselves to the defence of the area by land forces. Still today there are many in the U.S.A. who deny that South-east Asia is worth the cost incurred in trying to defend it and there are some who fear that the cost will be so great that U.S. power will undergo a decisive decline in other parts of the world.

There is also evidence that the Communist countries, though they naturally want a Communist South-east Asia, have doubts about the risks and costs involved in attaining that objective. After a militant post-war start in the years after 1948, when it supported Communist insurrections in most South-east Asian countries, the Soviet Union has, since the early and middle 1950s, and especially since the Sino-Soviet split, displayed a good deal of caution and even moderation towards these countries. On the other hand, as its large-scale military aid to Indonesia and its current involvement in Vietnam shows, it is far from having disengaged from the area. Though the present disposition of some people in the West is to welcome Russia as a counterweight to China, it would be premature to conclude that its policies will not again enter into a new militant phase.

Because of history, geography and the voluntary response they receive from important elements in the region, the Chinese undoubtedly look to a Communist South-east Asia closely adhering at least to their line in foreign policy. Again, however, it is doubtful whether the early achievement of this objective has anything like an absolute priority in their thinking. If this were not so they would hardly have been a party to the negotiated settlements on Indo-China in 1954 and on Laos in 1962. Nor, possibly, would they have left Burma to continue its course as a weak, non-aligned power.

For reasons connected with the dynamics of the South Vietnamese situation, which probably moved faster than they anticipated, and with the Sino-Soviet split, the Chinese have possibly now entered into a new phase of foreign policy based on the rejection of further negotiated settlements. If so, the reason is still probably not that they wish to proceed without interruption to the communisation of South-east Asia, but rather

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that they fear the negotiations would result in a U.S.-U.S.S.R. accommodation which would adversely affect the international bargaining power of China and, indeed, its status as a great power.

Complexities for Australia

To Australia, South-east Asia is obviously of greater importance than it is to most other powers. It is the only route by which a land-based attack could occur against Australia. A hostile South-east Asia could interfere seriously, if not disastrously, with vitally important Australian shipping and air communications from east to west and from south to north.

In addition, a hostile South-east Asia, though it need not necessarily be a Communist South-east Asia, could, with the support of the rest of the Afro-Asian world, subject Australia to a variety of indirect pressures which, even if they did not threaten its territorial integrity, might still be highly damaging to its national interests.

In this connection, it must be remembered that Australia's international position abounds in anomalies and disparities. Australia is a European country in an Asian environment; an under-populated country, practising an extreme form of immigration restriction, in a highly populated area; a wealthy country (on a *per capita* basis) among poor countries; a colonial power sharing, in the last days of colonialism, its New Guinea border with the largest and most rabidly anti-colonial power in the area. It is by no means difficult to see how a combination of moral indignation, resentment and pursuit of national interest could create concerted Afro-Asian pressure against Australia.

The decision to initiate measures against Australia and the effectiveness with which they could be implemented would, in considerable degree, be determined by the attitudes of the countries of South-east Asia. This is one reason why Australian Government policy has placed such strong emphasis on developing "good-will" towards Australia in South-east Asia.

The means by which Australia may seek to avert Afro-Asian pressures are varied. On the one hand, it may build up independent forces and cultivate Western alliances, though, in the latter connection, it has to be remembered that both the U.S.A. and Britain are themselves under pressure not to alienate the Third World and are perhaps not wholly sympathetic to the difficulties in which geography and history have placed Australia.

Possible Courses

On the other hand, Australia, whether by way of grudging concession or positive response, may seek to come to terms with the Afro-Asian world. Modification of its immigration policy, trade concessions, increased aid programmes, the willingness to dissolve colonial ties and to encourage New Guinea to become part of the Asian world are examples of the ways in which this objective can be approached. How a balance should be struck between these different approaches is not merely a technical matter of devising the most effective means of ensuring the security of Australia (though it is often presented in these terms). More fundamentally the striking of the balance raises the moral and cultural issue as to whether Australian civilisation can develop better in relative isolation from Asia or by absorbing Asian influences and entering into close and continuing exchanges with its natural environment.

Having emphasised the relatively great importance of South-east Asia to Australia, it has to be made clear that it is by no means all-important. Because of its cultural ties and political sympathies Australia has primary interests in Europe and America. As a producer of temperate zone primary products, especially wool and wheat, and as an importer of manufactured products, Australia's most important trading relationships fall outside of South-east Asia, where the population eats rice, wears cotton and

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does not in any marked degree engage in secondary industry.* The bulk of Australia's trade is with Britain, continental Europe, the United States, Japan and China. For these reasons Australia has a special interest in the global order and, more particularly, in those powers, the U.S.A. and Britain, that are chiefly responsible for keeping open the main world lines of communication.

Again, though it is true that South-east Asia is the only route by which a land attack could be launched against Australia, it is not true that this is the only form that an attack against Australia could take. There could be an attack by sea and air or by missiles with nuclear warheads. Nor is it true that if South-east Asia as a whole or Indonesia separately came under the domination of a hostile power, Australia's defensive position would necessarily be untenable. Provided that Australia does not base its defences too exclusively on the holding of South-east Asia and provided the U.S. alliance holds firm, there is little reason why Australia should not hope to hold out indefinitely against a hostile South-east Asia.

"South-North" Assessment

Finally, even though South-east Asia as a whole is of some importance to Australia, the southern areas of the region — Indonesia, Singapore and Malaya—are obviously of far greater importance to Australia than the countries of the north—Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, the two Vietnams and the Philippines.

The need for Australians to adopt a "South-North" assessment of the importance of the region is dictated not merely by the geographical propinquity of Indonesia and Malaysia nor by their obviously strategic locations. In addition, Indonesia as by far the largest country in the region, is the only South-east Asian state that might hope, out of its own resources, eventually to be able to attack Australia. On the other hand, because of its size and its predominantly Malay population it is the power most likely to offer resistance to Chinese penetration. Again Indonesia is specially important to Australia because of the common border shared in New Guinea. Even if New Guinea be granted full independence at a future date, Australia will for long continue to be interested in its affairs and in its relations with Indonesia.

Granted that Indonesia is of special importance to Australia, why is this also true of Malaysia? The answer is that there are specially close inter-relationships between the two countries based on close geographical proximity, trade, immigration and ethnic similarity.

If Malaysia became Communist, its rule would be based on Chinese predominance and it might be expected to seek especially close relations with Peking. Unless Indonesia similarly aligned itself with China, intense rivalry would probably develop between it and Malaysia—a rivalry based on the differences between Communism and non-Communism and between Indonesian (Malay) and Chinese. The outcome of such a rivalry is unpredictable, but the possibility that it would lead to the disintegration of Indonesia, whose unity is even now precariously maintained, would be high. In any case, the spread of instability throughout the Indonesian-Malayan area would be almost certain.

Confrontation Fallacy

One justification Indonesians sometimes give of their confrontation of Malaysia is that they wish to prevent its falling under Chinese control. What they seem to forget, however, is that, even if they were to succeed in crushing the present predominantly Malay Government of Malaysia, they would still have to crush approximately five million Chinese (counting also those in Singapore). The attempt to do this might well ruin the economy of Malaysia. If, as is quite likely, they failed to deal with the Chinese, who,

* This is not of course to deny that, as the European powers lose something of their hold and as the economies of South-east Asia develop, potentially important markets will be opened to Australia.

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in these circumstances would almost certainly look to Peking for support, they would have placed their own position in jeopardy. It is for reasons of this kind that Australia must regard the Indonesian-Malaysian problem as one.

In the light of this discussion of the importance of South-east Asia, it can be asked whether Australia's current policies towards and commitments in the area accord with the priorities its national interests would seem to demand.

In discussing this question, it will be assumed that Australia has no option but to approach the problems of South-east Asia as a European power enjoying close treaty relations with the U.S.A. and Britain. This is so not only because Australia is a European country with global interests and with close economic and cultural ties with Europe and America, but also because Britain and the U.S.A. themselves have strong interests in Asia, and distinct Asian policies, while the states of South-east Asia have varying policies towards the West. In the view of this writer, it is quite unreal to think that there is any way in which Australia could simply disavow its European character and its ties with the West and follow some abstractly conceived "Asian" policy.

Special Considerations

To emphasise that Australia can develop Asian policies only in the context of its Western alliances is not to say that there is an identity of interest between it and its allies in their approach to Asian problems. Geography alone—the fact that Australia is permanently related to Asia—distinguishes its approach to Asian problems from that of the U.S.A. and Britain in three important ways:

- First, both of those powers, having other and more primary interests elsewhere, have, on occasion, shown a disposition to employ more drastic measures to deal with immediate problems than Australia could readily accept. Thus in 1954 the U.S.A. considered using atom bombs to save the French position in Indo-China, while in the Laos crisis of 1960-62 there was advocacy in America for full-scale armed intervention. Again, when Indonesia first launched its confrontation policy against Malaysia, the British were tempted to adopt a rather stiffer attitude than Australia thought wise.
- Secondly, as the West Irian dispute showed so clearly, there may arise issues which Australia will regard as of vital importance, but which the U.S.A. and Britain will treat as negotiable.
- Thirdly, if they should be placed under sufficient pressure elsewhere, both the U.S.A. and Britain might come to regard South-east Asia as dispensable. It is this contingency that constitutes the greatest problem for Australian foreign policy. That it is far from remote has, in the case of Britain, been made clear, in a modified form, by the British Minister for Defence, Mr. Healey, and in stronger form by Mr. Enoch Powell, the Conservative Party's defence spokesman. In the U.S.A., too, the "Europe Firsters", especially since the intensification of the Vietnam war, have been highly vocal though, as yet, their numbers remain small. The U.S. tradition, however, is one of massive reappraisals in foreign affairs and it would certainly be premature for Australia to assume that, as a world power, America must inevitably remain deeply involved in South-east Asia or even South-west Pacific affairs.

The SEATO Failure

The problems arising out of Australia's Western alliances have been aggravated by the failure of SEATO to develop as a fully effective defensive organisation. Australia's primary hopes in entering SEATO were:

- it would serve as an effective means for the co-ordination of British and American policy within the region;

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● by guaranteeing the Northern states—Thailand and the "protocol" states of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia—it would shield the security of Malaya and Singapore; and

● by encouraging the states of South-east Asia to join together in a co-operative effort of self-defence, it would make possible the deterrence, by means of land forces, of Communist aggression.

For a variety of reasons SEATO has failed to realise these hopes. The Asian neutrals have not only remained aloof from it but some, like Indonesia, have remained positively hostile to it. Malaya, although under Communist threat and generally pro-Western, preferred to withdraw from the treaty area on attaining independence in 1957. Cambodia voluntarily renounced the treaty's protection and Laos was withdrawn from it under the neutralisation agreement of 1962. Most seriously, from Australia's point of view, SEATO failed effectively to co-ordinate British and American policies. From the beginning the U.S.A. and Britain largely continued to go their own ways in South Vietnam and Malaya respectively.

Between 1954 and 1962, policy in the rest of the SEATO area tended to be a compromise between the harder American and the softer British lines. The British line, supported with some misgivings by Australia, prevailed in the Laos crisis of 1960-62 and that country was neutralised. In an important sense, however, the crisis produced a parting of the ways between British (more generally European) and American policies in SEATO. Thailand, disillusioned by the compromise over Laos, threatened to seek an accommodation with China, unless it received the firmest guarantees. The U.S.A. thereupon re-examined the previously accepted unanimity rule for SEATO decisions and offered Thailand a unilateral guarantee reinforced by the stationing of U.S. forces in Thailand. Australia followed suit thereby decisively aligning itself with the U.S.A. and becoming a "core" member of the newly interpreted SEATO treaty. Britain acquiesced in the new interpretation and even sent a token force to Thailand, but did so in a spirit of resignation rather than of whole-hearted co-operation.

Military Commitments

The separate demands laid upon Australia by its alliance relationships with the U.S.A. and Britain increased during 1963 and 1964 when the military situation in South Vietnam rapidly deteriorated and when Indonesia entered upon the confrontation of Malaysia. Little is known of Australian policy towards Vietnam during these years except that generally speaking it followed the lines being developed by the U.S.A. It seems probable that Australia, though clearly reluctant to become militarily involved itself, urged the U.S.A., whose policy was indecisive, to make a stand. Judging the Indonesian threat to Malaysia to be less serious and hoping until the last to reach a negotiated settlement, Australia urged restraint upon Britain. In 1965, however, Australia was forced to make two relatively major military decisions, committing combat forces first to Borneo and secondly to Vietnam. The first decision was necessitated by Indonesia's continuing determination to crush Malaysia and the second by the fact that the position in South Vietnam had deteriorated to the point where it was on the verge of collapse.

In one sense the Government's two military decisions of 1965 were perfectly compatible. Both decisions arose naturally out of Australia's well-established alliances with Britain and the U.S.A. and, though Australian fighting forces were committed to separate spheres, the two actions in which they became engaged run parallel to each other and have common objectives. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the decisions made by the Australian Government in 1965 arose not from a co-ordinated scheme of common defence; not from an agreed-upon division of military effort, but rather from the competing claims laid upon Australian assistance by the U.S.A. and

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Britain. Perhaps the prime question now calling for consideration is whether Australian policy can indefinitely continue along its present lines or whether it should look towards a more co-ordinated scheme of defence involving a retraction of its commitments to the northern SEATO area, more attention to the southern area of Malaysia and Indonesia and perhaps a greater concentration of inter-allied defence on Australian soil.

Policy Lines

The preference of the Australian Government, it would seem, is, as far as possible, to maintain the present lines of policy giving priority to the security of the SEATO area, especially South Vietnam, and trusting that expedients* can be found to deal with the Malaysian-Indonesian situation.

In his statements over the past year the Minister for External Affairs has developed two main themes in order to justify both Australia's participation in the Vietnam war and the need to accord a first priority to the defence of the northern SEATO area.

The first theme is that the Vietnam conflict is far more than a merely local conflict. It is rather a global conflict in which the preservation of Asian peoples against aggression by guerrilla warfare is at stake. *"We also believe,"* said the minister, *"that in their resistance to China* (the United States) *are preventing an alteration in the world balance of power which would increase the risk of world war."*

In support of this line of argument the minister contends that the chief threat to world peace is no longer Russia but China. The practical import of the minister's global analysis is to combat those in Europe and in the U.S.A. who contend that China, partly because of weakness, partly because of the caution revealed in actual policies as opposed to ideological crusades, is still a secondary threat against which the U.S.A. should not squander resources. Now, as in the Second World War, Australia is attempting to tip the balance in favour of the U.S.A.'s according a relatively high priority to the defence of the Pacific and Asia.

Whatever may be thought about the truth of the minister's rather simplified account of the global threat constituted by Communist China, his practical objective is one which, within limits, most Australians would accept. There are, however, limits to the extent to which Australia should try to involve the U.S.A. in the affairs of the Pacific and Asia. Too great an involvement could, in the first place, provide opportunities for Russia which, in certain circumstances could affect the global balance of power far more adversely than China. Secondly, excessive American commitments to South-east Asia could, especially if they do not have the desired results, produce a reversal of American policy involving an abandonment of South-east Asia and a weakening of American interest in Australia.

"Dominoes . . ."

The minister's second theme assumes the form of a modified version of the domino theory. What this version of the domino theory in effect asserts is that, in the actual political-military circumstances now obtaining in South-east Asia, the fall of South Vietnam would, over a period of time, seriously endanger the survival of non-Communist regimes in all other South-east Asian countries. In this form the theory is not based on any purely military or strategic assumption about the key position of Vietnam. The assumption is rather that, rightly or wrongly, South Vietnam has become the arena of a decisive confrontation between the Chinese type of revolutionary Communism and the U.S. championship of non-Communist Asian regimes.

According to this line of thought, the Chinese, as shown by their determination not to negotiate, not to re-enact the Geneva settlements of 1954 on Vietnam or of 1962

* The chief "expedient" is to retain its present British commitments to Malaysia for as long as possible.

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on Laos, have clearly revealed their determination not to tolerate the existence of social systems other than their own and to make Vietnam the test case for the success of their version of revolutionary Communism. The West, it is concluded, cannot refuse to accept the Chinese challenge. If the Chinese succeed at this time, their claim to have won the test case will, for military and psychological reasons, be accepted by the other regimes of South-east Asia which will either lose their will to resist armed Communist subversion or, in order to avoid subversion, will voluntarily align their policies with that of Peking.

The unstated assumption underlying this conclusion is that the non-Communist regimes of South-east Asia possess a frail hold on the allegiance of their peoples and are everywhere threatened by Communist movements ready to exploit and take over the leadership of other dissident movements. Only if the West can give the regimes a guaranteed period of protection and support can they hope to survive.

This form of the domino theory is, of course, simply one part of the minister's argument that China constitutes a grave global threat. But it points up the direct threat that faces Australia should the Communists succeed in South Vietnam and it is meant to show that Australia's national interest is directly served by participating in the Vietnam war.

". . . and Implications?"

Granting that the minister's dramatically expressed analysis has a degree of force, what implications follow for Australian foreign policy? It is frequently assumed that, if China is the prime global threat and if, more particularly, the domino theory is true, present Australian foreign policy is soundly based. Or at least it is assumed that the only possible criticism of Australian foreign policy is that it is not doing enough to contribute to the Vietnam war and to insist on peace conditions that will guarantee the emergence of an independent, non-Communist Vietnam. In fact no such clear-cut conclusions follow for Australian policy.

One difficulty associated with the discussion of American and Australian policy in terms of the domino theory is that the status of the so-called theory is far from clear. If, as this writer believes, the domino theory is a very rough and simplified model of certain tendencies at work in South-east Asia, the most it can be expected to do is to point to broad possibilities that may serve as guides to policy. To the extent that this is so, there is no sense in which, given a nation's objectives, policy can be deduced from it. But, if more than this is claimed for the theory, if it is to be regarded as consisting of clear and definite propositions and as having genuine predictive power, it is important to note that it will have double implications especially for a country in Australia's position.

If the chances of saving South Vietnam are high, the theory will support the case for lending it all our military support. If the chances are low, the theory will support the case for developing a new strategy that is completely dissociated from South-east Asia which, ex hypothesi, *is likely to become wholly indefensible.*

Again, while the domino theory purports to state only what is necessary, and not what is sufficient, for the defence of South-east Asia, it is sometimes used to suggest that a victory in South Vietnam will guarantee the security of the rest of the region. Clearly, however, while the Vietnam war is still being fought, Indonesia or Singapore or Malaysia or Burma could go Communist of their own accord or because of Peking's activities towards them or because of neglect by the West.

If, however, the Vietnam war is won and South Vietnam emerges as an independent, non-Communist state, it cannot be assumed that North Vietnam and much less China will be permanently deterred from promoting subversion in other areas of South-east Asia. It is true that if the U.S.A. does win

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a decisive victory in a situation as difficult as South Vietnam and if it shows itself to be prepared to act in the same way on a future occasion, the Communist powers might be effectively deterred. But, despite its recent military progress, the U.S.A. may still be far from anything like a victory. Moreover, even if it wins an outright military victory, it is still not clear that South Vietnam can emerge as an independent non-Communist state.

Without a continuing U.S. military presence, which would have its own demoralising effects, South Vietnam's chances of consolidating itself would appear to be slim. Declared U.S. policy, however, is neither to maintain bases in South Vietnam after a settlement has been reached nor to seek them elsewhere in South-east Asia.

Questions and Alternatives

In view of the great uncertainties in the position in South Vietnam and, more generally, in the SEATO area, what should the policy of the Australian Government be? Should it press the U.S.A. to greater efforts, discourage peace initiatives, stand firm for a return to the Geneva Agreements and count upon a continuing U.S. military presence in the SEATO area which, after a period of 30 years or so, will perhaps have enabled the non-Communist states to have consolidated their regimes?

Alternatively should it encourage or at least anticipate a negotiated compromise settlement, and perhaps explore the feasibility of a less direct approach to the northern areas of South-east Asia—an approach involving both concession in the form of neutralisation and deterrence, including the threat of large-scale air attack, should the neutralisation agreement be broken?

While the statements of the Government provide no clear-cut answers to these two sets of questions, they do, on the whole, indicate a preference for the "harder line" involving affirmative answers to the first set of questions. At the same time the qualifications introduced into ministerial state-

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ments as a result of the U.S. peace initiatives, would suggest that the possible consequences of a compromise settlement are now receiving some attention by the Government.

If the Government has been reluctant to allow the possible and even likely outcome of the Vietnam war to turn its thinking towards alternative policies, the recent decision of the British to reduce their commitments East of Suez has forced it to think along new lines so far as the defence of the southern region is concerned. One critical question is whether the Government, in its absorption with the Vietnam war, will give the British proposals the attention they deserve.

Malaysia and Beyond

Although the British Government's recently announced policy bears most immediately on the future security of Malaysia, it also raises much more general issues about the strategic conception upon which future Australian defence is to be based.

The British decision to reduce or abolish its standing commitments in Malaysia and Singapore is, it is true, a fairly long term one that may not begin to be implemented for five years. Moreover, it is possible that, provided adequate assistance and encouragement is forthcoming from Australia and the U.S.A., the British commitment might be extended for a considerable period.

The prospects that the situation in the Malaysian territories will have consolidated itself within a period of, say, five years are, however, by no means bright. Given the acute communal problems of Malaysia, the strain between Malaya and Singapore (not to mention the Borneo territories) and the pressures of a cultural and political, as well as of a military, kind that Indonesia can exert against Malaysia, it is unreal to think that Malaysia, whatever its exact territorial extent may be, can become a stable political entity in less than a generation or more. There is, moreover, some evidence that, unlike most other former colonial regions, Malaysia has a chance of attaining stability only if there continues to exist on its soil a Western military presence which, apart from giving it moral support against Indonesia, can also hold the ring between its competing communities and territories.

It may be argued that such a shaky structure is too weak an edifice on which to base a policy. For the reasons given earlier, however, this writer believes that Australia has no option but to persevere in the creation of a stable, non-Communist Malaysia. Not to do so would be to risk instability and possibly disintegration within the Indonesian area.

There are, however, important reasons why Australia alone should not attempt to fill the vacuum left by British power. So far Australia has acted simply as the junior partner of Britain in contributing to Malaysian security. Not only has its position been covered by British naval and air power, but it has, by careful diplomacy, prevented itself from becoming the primary object of Indonesian hostility. Were Australia, acting alone, to become the chief military power supporting Malaysia, it would almost certainly incur the intense hostility of Indonesia. Since Indonesia lies across Australia's air and sea routes to Malaysia and shares a border with Australian New Guinea, the military problems involved in a unilateral extension of Australian defence support to Malaysia would be almost insuperable. In addition, unless Malaysia's need for external defence assistance were to be greatly reduced, Australia simply could not make available the land forces that would be required.

Sharing Facilities?

By way of reducing these difficulties, Britain would apparently be prepared to continue to maintain a military presence in the area provided that Australia were to meet the costs involved in providing facilities and bases for the British military estab-

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lishment which would, in due course, be transferred from Singapore and Malaysia to this country. Unofficial British sources have also spoken of a quadripartite defence arrangement embracing the U.S.A. and New Zealand as well as Britain and Australia. If such an arrangement came into existence, it would, presumably, be, in considerable part, based on Australia.

Whether the kind of "interdependent" arrangement advocated by the British is feasible is, of course, far from clear. Moreover, it raises a host of technical issues connected with the eventual transfer of British facilities from Malaysia and Singapore—issues that could be considered only by military experts. Apart from these, however, various difficulties of a more political kind would have to be overcome if the scheme were to be effective.

In the first place before accepting interdependence with Britain on the basis of shared facilities in Australia, Australia would need to be convinced that the British presence here would be a lasting one, that the process of retraction would not, once having begun, accelerate. Secondly, the U.S.A., even if it joined in the interdependent relationship less fully than Britain, Australia and New Zealand, would still need to be closely involved in the arrangement. It would hardly meet the requirements of Australian policy if the U.S.A. came to regard the British-Australian-New Zealand relationship as sufficient for the defence of the southern area and were to direct its attention to the north. Whether the U.S.A. is at present really interested in an interdependent relationship centred in Australia is doubtful. Moreover, a precondition of the success of the interdependent arrangement would be basic agreement between the U.S.A. and Britain on policies for the defence of South-east Asia. Though their policies are now closer than they were in the 1950s, they are far from identical and will probably remain so while the U.S.A. remains committed to its present course in the SEATO area.

Many would object that, even if an interdependent defence arrangement based on Australia could be achieved, it still should not be accepted. Objections to such a scheme are:

- first, that it would make Australia a war base and the centre of an exclusively European defence club;
- secondly, that it would almost certainly involve the stationing of British nuclear weapons on Australian soil;
- thirdly, that Indonesia would oppose the scheme and would enter into permanently unfriendly relations with Australia;
- fourthly, that Australia in entering into interdependence with major European powers and in granting them bases, would lose all independent initiative in its foreign policies towards Asia.

Though these objections are formidable, they are not necessarily to be regarded as decisive. For the reasons already given the writer believes that there is little point in Australia's attempting to disguise its strong allegiance to British and American policies in Asia or its desire that they should maintain a permanent military presence in the area. That the arrangement would prejudice Australian-Indonesian relations is certainly unfortunate for, of all South-east Asian nations, Indonesia is the one whose friendship would mean most to Australia. As recent events have shown, however, there is no way in which that friendship can be guaranteed. As a maritime country between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, Indonesia will remain peculiarly vulnerable to Western naval power so long as Western influence continues in the region. Australia can continue to seek, as it has done since 1962, to give all possible reassurances to Indonesia, but relations between the two countries will become close only if Indonesia is prepared to come to terms with the Western influences to which it is geographically exposed. The fact that the Western military presence was based on Australia need not necessarily make the reconciliation more difficult *and, indeed, might facilitate it.*

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Long-term Policy

Again, it is not certain that, in entering into interdependence on its own soil with Britain and, to a lesser degree, with the U.S.A., Australia would necessarily lose its independent initiative in foreign policy. The fact is that the scope for independent initiatives by Australia is, in any case, strictly limited. Certainly, as the Vietnam war shows, there is a high degree of dependence involved in the present arrangement under which Australia attempts to ensure its future security by making token contributions to distant engagements over whose outcome it has almost no control.

There are, indeed, some grounds for believing that an interdependent military arrangement based on Australian soil would, provided it had limited and clearly defined political objectives, make it easier for Australia to develop a coherent policy towards the area to its immediate north and to press the policy upon its Western allies.

This writer does not profess to know whether the advantages of an interdependent defence arrangement based on Australia, assuming that it be practicable, would outweigh its disadvantages. And it will be noticed that he has not even attempted to discuss its nuclear implications. For the purpose of this discussion the merit of the British proposal is that it does throw up a new strategic concept which concentrates attention on the problem of the longer term security of the Indonesia-Malaysian area and which may have relevance to the consequences of a compromise settlement in the SEATO area should that come about.

FURTHER READING

Over the past few years *CAB* has published regularly on South-east Asian topics. The following are still in print and relevant to the discussion in this issue of *CAB*: "Laos" (Vol. 29, No. 5); "Thailand" (Vol. 30, No. 9); "Philippines" (Vol. 32, No. 10); "White Australia—Reform?" (Vol. 34, No. 4); "Taiwan and the Nationalist Regime" (Vol. 35, No. 7); "Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare" (Vol. 35, No. 10); "U.S.-China Relations" (Vol. 35, No. 11); "Malaysia" (Vol. 36, No. 2); "Commitment in Vietnam I and II" (Vol. 36, Nos. 10 and 11). In addition the following issue was published but is now out of print and available only in library files: "Indonesia—from Neutralism to Confrontation" (Vol. 35, No. 8). A very comprehensive list of references appears in these issues but attention is drawn to an additional work: *The Security of Southern Asia*, D. E. Kennedy (Inst. of Strategic Studies, Lond. 1965).

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