CHAPTER TWO
Australia with its small population largely of European origin, is a Western country, though geographically situated near Asia. There is an anxiety to preserve what is 'Western' in Australian life. Till the second World War and even sometime thereafter, the fear of Japan was so deep and intense in the Australian mind, that even when Japan was totally vanquished and brought under U.S. control, many Australians believed that Japan might once again prove to be a 'potential' threat to their security. Australians were also wary about signing the Japanese Peace Treaty. Although, Prime Minister Menzies recognised the wisdom of a policy of generosity towards Japan (and instead indicated at the possibility of a Communist aggression, of which the Korean War was a manifestation) (1) the Australian Labour Party continued to oppose the ratification of the Japanese Peace Treaty on the ground that Japan might remain neutral or 'enter the conflict on the side' which serves her interest most in the event of a war between Western democracies and the Communist countries. (2)


The Second World War rendered Great Britain economically and militarily weak. Australian faith in the capability of Great Britain to defend against foreign aggression was shaken. On the contrary, the phenomenal growth in the power and prestige of the United States of America opened up new horizons of hopes and expectations in the Australian mind. Of the two blocs, viz. the Communist, led by Soviet Russia and the Western bloc, led by the U.S.A., Australia naturally chose to join the latter. The anxiety to get some definite assurance concerning her security brought Australia into the orbit of the 'cold war', for which otherwise there were not very compelling reasons. This created a desire in the Australian mind to get America firmly committed to the defence of the South East Asian region. It was largely in deference to the Americans, apart from the changed international situation, that Australia altered its previous policy towards Japan. It appears that Australia, though dissatisfied with the Japanese Peace Treaty, found it to her interest to make a concession, by reversing its previous hostile attitude to the Treaty, for the larger gain of American military commitment in the region. In fact, "the effort to persuade the United States to make a firm defence commitment to Australia has probably been the most persistent and important aim of Australia's foreign policy since the war". (3)

The advent of Communist China also brought a shift in emphasis in Australian foreign policy. Australia now considered

China, instead of Japan, as a potential aggressor, and later on Chinese participation in the Korean War, and assistance to Viet Minh and Malayan Communist insurgents confirmed this belief. However, Australia had been nearer to the American viewpoint rather than to Great Britain's, in her policies towards Communist China.

The gaining of independence by some Asian countries had influenced a great deal the formulation of post-war policies by Australia. Henceforth, the Australian Government had also to take into consideration the reactions to her policies of the neighbouring Asian countries which acquired a new and definite place in the comity of nations. The success or failure of any decision concerning this region henceforth largely depended on the attitude that these countries adopted. That is why, since the Second World War, increasing friendly relations with these countries had been another pillar of the Australian foreign policy.

Australia's eagerness to participate in any collective security arrangement for this region, emanated also from the fear of the territories, whose political future had not been settled till then being used for committing aggression by any foreign country. Finally, the feeling that Australia (because of its various limitations) can play its role effectively in world politics only as a close partner of the Western bloc, is largely shared by the Australian public.

The Early Efforts

As early as 1942, the idea of having a regional security
pact was talked about by influential persons in Australian politics. In September 1942 Dr. Evatt briefly and generally mentioned the need for regional security, self-government and decent standards of living among the Pacific and Asian peoples. (4) The Australian-New Zealand Agreement of 1944 was a concrete step in this direction. "Most of the principles of the policy: the determination to play an important part in the Pacific; to establish zones of security in Australia's neighbourhood, ... were embodied in the Australia-New Zealand Agreement of 21 January 1944". (5) Born out of the experiences of the Second World War, the uppermost thought in the minds of Australian statesman was to prevent any repetition of the tragedy into which Australia had fallen during the war. While speaking early in 1946 in Parliament, Dr. Evatt said: "It will be the duty of the Parliament and of the Government to prevent any recurrence of the tragic days of 1942, when our beloved country, partly at least through inadequate safeguards, was on the point of invasion by a deadly and ferocious enemy". (6) In spite of the formation of the United Nations, the need for a separate security arrangement was very strongly felt. Dr. Evatt further remarked: "Whatever the United Nations Organization may do, it will be essential to guard the security of the South-West

(4) Current Notes on International Affairs (Canberra), 13 (1942) 60-1. (Henceforward cited as Current Notes).


(6) Dr. Evatt, 26 March 1946 (Foreign Affairs Debate) Current Notes, 17 (1946) 207.
Pacific Area, and in its defence there must be the closest co-operation not only with the United Kingdom and New Zealand, but also with other peace-loving Pacific neighbours, especially the United States of America". (7) The conclusion of the North Atlantic Pact was welcomed in Australia. (8) It gave new impetus to those who believed in having its counterpart in the Pacific. (9) The NATO pact was supposed to be in conformity with the declared policies of the Australian Government. (10) The Prime Minister announced that "planning for the Pacific area is proceeding parallel with corresponding planning for North Atlantic Area...." (11) In the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference of 1946, the matter concerning collective defence in South East Asia was raised by the Australian Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, and an agreement for the common defence between Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, to be expanded later to the United States and then to the other nations having possessions in the region, was envisaged. (12) Apart

(7) Ibid.

(8) Mr. J.B. Chifley, the Australian Prime Minister in a statement on 19 March 1949 said, "Australia welcomes the Atlantic Pact and trusts that the parliaments of the countries concerned will ratify it. The pact is essentially defensive and thus with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter in particular", Current Notes, 20 (1949) 410.

(9) In fact at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in October 1948 Australia even suggested the idea of forming a Pacific Pact on the NATO pattern. See Peter Calvocoressi, Survey of International Affairs, 1949-50 (London, 1953) 1, 32.


(11) Ibid.

from the conference of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers in October 1948, a British Commonwealth Conference on defence dealt with the idea of a Pacific Pact. (13) However, the result of the conference was the formation of a body called ANZAM, consisting of staff officers from Britain, Australia and New Zealand to co-operate in defence planning for Malaya. (14) Australian statesmen continued to make efforts to achieve the goal of creating a strong defence arrangement for the South East Asian region in spite of the initial setbacks and American disinterestedness. (16)

Communist Success in China

No concrete ideological thinking about Asia was done till 1948 even in the U.S.A., for America had put its reliance on the Nationalist regime of China and helped the regime in every way possible to fight out the local Communists. But with the collapse of the Nationalist regime in 1949 the American Government and its Western allies seemed to have put the New China in the same perspective in Asia as they put Soviet Russia in Europe. (16) After the establishment of the Communist regime in China, Australian anxiety grew stronger "to draw the teeth of

(13) See n. 9, 32-3.


(15) See the United States Secretary of State, Dean Acheson's statement supporting Nehru's opposition to the formation of a NATO type security pact for S.E.A., Documents of International Affairs, 1949-50 (London, 1953) 93-4.

Communist imperialism by carefully applied measures" individually or in co-operation with other countries. But there was the fear lurking in the Australian mind that "events in Asia could move too quickly to allow time for economic and political measures alone to take effect". (17) Therefore, the Australian Minister for External Affairs P.C. Spender in a statement on 9 March 1950, urged "that all governments who are directly interested in the preservation of peace throughout South and South-East Asia and in the advancement of human welfare under the democratic system should consider immediately whether some form of regional pact for common defence is a practical possibility". He did not want to confuse his idea of a security arrangement for South East Asia with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as some people used to do. He categorically stated that the "North Atlantic Pact is not capable of being transposed to the Pacific". On the other hand, he found "it hard to imagine that a multilateral agreement that had nothing to do with defensive arrangements would be of much use in meeting a sudden emergency". That is why he envisaged "a defensive military arrangement having as its basis a firm agreement between countries that have a vital interest in the stability of Asia and the Pacific, and which are at the same time capable of undertaking military commitments...." (18)

The ANZUS Pact

On 12 July 1951 the ANZUS Pact was initialled by the U.S.A.,

(17) See statement by the Minister for External Affairs, the Hon. P.C. Spender on 9 March 1950, Current Notes, 21 (February 1950) 163.

(18) Ibid., 162-4.
Australia and New Zealand. This was the result of prolonged efforts that Australia had been making since the end of the Second World War. ANZUS was a significant achievement for Australia, for it was under this treaty that for the first time in its history the U.S.A. agreed to undertake a military commitment in the Pacific area. And it was in deference to the wishes of the U.S.A. that the United Kingdom was excluded from this treaty. The shift of emphasis in favour of the U.S.A. in Australian foreign policy that was already taking place gradually, now took a concrete shape in the signing of the ANZUS Pact. Two possible reasons have been put forward for the British exclusion from ANZUS. One was that as early as 1952 the United States was not prepared to give an impression that she was in any manner committed to the defence of existing colonial possessions in this region, when they were already in the process of disappearing. Another was that if Britain was included, it would have been too difficult to deny admission to other interested Powers. (19) The Australians were by no means satisfied with the ANZUS Treaty. In comparison to the North Atlantic Treaty this was considered to be a 'weak' treaty. But according to Leister Webb, "the assumption regarding mutual defence commitments is not borne out by an examination of the relevant articles in the two treaties". He sees that the ANZUS treaty is more binding. (20) The treaty suffered from

(20) Ibid., 56-7.
some other weaknesses, namely, non-participation by any Asian nation of this region and the exclusion of Great Britain. Moreover, "the conclusion of the Korean armistice in July 1953 and the increasing Chinese pressure in South East Asia, particularly in Indo-China, underlined the imperfections of ANZUS". (21) However, the ANZUS Pact was the quid pro quo for Australia's signing of the Japanese Peace Treaty at San Francisco. (22)

Australia saw in the fall of Dien Bien Phu, indications of a direct Communist threat to its own territory. On 7 April 1954 R.G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs declared that "Indo-China is important to the security of the free world. If Indo-China were to fall to the Communists, there is no doubt at all that the whole of South East Asia would be threatened". (23) Hence Australia started making frantic efforts to organise collective defence for South East Asia. Sir Philip McBride, the then Deputy Minister for External Affairs expressed the willingness of Australia to participate in the discussions on the collective defence of South East Asia.

Geneva Negotiations

Meanwhile, Australia was reluctant to involve herself in


(22) The link between the ANZUS Treaty and the Japanese Peace Treaty was well stated in the report of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 1952. See, as quoted in R.G. Casey, Friends and Neighbours (Melbourne, 1954) 73.

(23) Current Notes, 25 (30 April 1954) 286.
war in Indo-China, which might spread into a global war, and supported the British stand to await the outcome of Geneva negotiations, instead of supporting the "united action" proposal of Dulles. (24) Australia was afraid of a two-fold debacle while taking this stand. The first was Viet Minh domination of Indo-China and the second, U.S. refusal to underwrite a collective defence scheme against Communist advance. While the attitude of R.G. Casey, towards the proposed Treaty was rather conciliatory, it seemed, he was prepared to make a final test of peaceful co-existence with the Communists. He said: "We want a negotiated settlement, if it is humanly possible. If all negotiations fail, we will have to think again very hard". Back in Geneva, Casey is reported to have said that the free world "should draw a definite defence line in South East Asia, if the Geneva conference failed. If that happens, it will be the Communists who drive us to it. A little compromise on their part and it might not have been necessary". (25)

There was considerable displeasure in the public mind on this stand taken by Casey. The *Sydney Morning Herald* termed Australian interest in the pact as "lukewarm and conditional".

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(24) R.G. Casey, the Australian Foreign Minister, speaking in the Parliament on 10 August 1954 said: "Such intervention would be wrong...it would not have the backing of the United Nations; it would put us in wrong with world opinion, particularly in Asia; it would embroil us with Communist China; it would wreck the Geneva Conference, and it was most unlikely to stop the fall of Dien Bien Phu", *Australia, Parl. Deb.*, H of R, 4 (1954) p. 97.

(25) "Australia Faces Asia: Background of SEATO", *Round Table*, 45 (December 1954) 61. See also *Age* (Melbourne) 15 June 1954.
It commented that, "if Canberra continues to shilly-shally, Australia may well prove the truth of the old adage 'he who will not when he may, when he will, he shall have nay'." (26)

This attitude on the part of Casey might have been prompted by the realisation of two weaknesses.

The first lay in the assumption that the United States, without whom no defensive alliance against communism in South East Asia could be effective, would be willing to wait until there had been a further test of Communist intentions. The second weakness lay in the fact that at Geneva, the non-Communist Powers were negotiating in the shadow of defeat and that any further deterioration of the French position in Indo-China would increase the difficulty of concluding satisfactory defensive arrangement in that area. Casey seemed to see this second weakness already enough. (27)

On the other hand, Prime Minister Menzies, broke away from Australian tradition by agreeing to commit Australia in advance to a defence arrangement. In his statement on 5 August 1954 in the House of Representatives, he categorically stated Australia's decision and also gave reasons for it. He said:

...So far as we are concerned in Australia, we must determine our own attitude and put it beyond doubt. We will be contributing parties. We will in association with other nations acting similarly accept military obligations in support of our membership. In the past it has been one of the traditions of Australian Government that commitments are not accepted in advance. In the two Great World Wars Australia had an opportunity to decide what it was going to do and enough time to assemble, train, equip and despatch armed forces. We cannot gamble upon this being our position any longer. If there is one thing that is clear, it is that there will be no pause, no long period of stalemate, should the Communists determine to attack. (28)


(27) See n. 25, 57.

(28) *Current Notes*, 25 (August 1954) 571.
The SEATO Negotiations

The Australian Government, like the U.K. Government was anxious to postpone the calling of a formal political conference on collective defence, until after there had been adequate opportunity available for a settlement on Indo-China at Geneva. This was motivated firstly, by the idea of preventing the Communists from seizing this as a pretext to break the Geneva negotiations; and secondly, to convince the other Asian countries of their good intentions and thereby get their sympathy for the pact. (29) R.G. Casey gave a 10-point approach of the Australian Government to the discussions to be held concerning a South East Asian Treaty Organization. (30) Australia strove hard to enlist as many nations of Asia in the Pact as possible. She wanted to secure their 'adherence', or at least "understanding" in case they decided not to join. This was a policy identical with that of Great Britain. Having this purpose in mind, Australia made her own "reservation" on the definition of aggression. She felt that the pact should be directed against aggression from "any source". She also decided in favour of keeping Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam outside the Treaty organization. Australia too laid great emphasis on the "economic provisions" but was against superseding the Colombo Plan. Casey made a long tour of Asian capitals to impress upon the neutral leaders to join the pact. But he was largely unsuccessful in his mission. (31)


(30) Ibid., 582-3.

(31) Ibid., 580-1.
However, three Asian countries decided to participate in the discussions. Others even refused to send their observers.

Divergent Views

There were divergent views expressed on the SEATO. When on 5 August 1954 Prime Minister Menzies declared in advance about the Australian commitment to a collective security pact in this region, it had gone unchallenged. Dr. Evatt, the Opposition Leader, expressed his uneasiness and suggested that the Indo-China dispute should be referred to the United Nations but he could not oppose the Prime Minister's declaration. Rather he commented, that "we must face the fact that regional agreements cannot be made without incurring military commitments". (32) But when the treaty came for ratification before the House of Representatives, the Labour Party spokesman Dr. Evatt criticised the treaty because of the American reservation to act only in case of 'communist' aggression. It was suggested that the Australian commitment was wider than that of the United States. (33) Referring to the criticism made by Leader of the Opposition, the Minister for External Affairs, R.G. Casey remarked that "the Australian Government considers that...the primary purpose of the treaty is to combat communism", and for that "principal purpose" the Australian Government was prepared to commit itself to the Treaty. Explaining the "reservation" made by the United States, he further pointed out,


(33) Ibid., 5 (3 November 1954) p. 2580.
that if the United States Government were to participate in the treaty to combat other than Communist aggression, the treaty might not get the ratification from the US Congress. Secondly, some of the Asian members would have withheld ratification "if it had been directed pointedly at communism only". Thirdly, "the treaty would have attracted the animosity of some of the Asian countries that are not signatories to it if it had been directed pointedly against communism". (34) The Labour Party, however, did not vote against the ratification of the treaty. Two amendments were moved by the Leader of the Opposition Dr. Evatt, suggesting that Australia should wait till the United Kingdom, the United States and New Zealand "actually" ratified the treaty and that Australia should contribute her armed forces under the treaty only after obtaining the Parliament's approval. But both the amendments were lost. The Australian Communist Party, which had no representation either in the Commonwealth Parliament or in any State Parliament described the treaty as an "instrument of reactionary imperialism". (35)

Although the Press mostly welcomed the signing of the collective security pact, it was lukewarm in its support. Some papers described it as a 'half-baked treaty', (36) some even asked for its rejection. (37) There was a general sense of

(35) See Webb, n. 19, 70.
(36) Age (Melbourne), 9 September 1954.
(37) West Australian, 9 September 1954, See n. 5, 108.
grievance about the terminology of the Treaty, absence of definite commitment similar to that of NATO and the non-participation of so many Asian states. (38) The American rider on the meaning of 'aggression' in the treaty, dampened the enthusiasm shown at the beginning of drafting the treaty. On the other hand, the treaty, unlike NATO, provided no permanent force excepting an U.S. Air Force base in the Pacific. Moreover, the decision of the non-committed countries to remain outside the treaty defeated one of the main purposes of the Australian foreign policy, viz., closer relationship with the Asian neighbours. Perhaps, keeping the Indian reaction in mind the Australian Foreign Minister gave an understanding that Australia would not get entangled in any intra - Commonwealth dispute warranting military action. (39)

'Putting Flesh and Blood on the Military Skeleton'

"Australian policy since the signature of the Manila Pact has been largely directed towards putting flesh and blood on the military skeleton, to converting 'an insurance policy and a deterrent' (Casey) into an effective shield to protect northern Australia. The dramatic Menzies bid, committing Australian troops in advance of the signature of the treaty, had failed to pin down the United States to a firm military agreement at Manila". (40) According to the Australians, there had been a

(38) Sydney Morning Herald, 9 September 1954.
"strategic vacuum" between Singapore and Manila. From an Australian point of view "the crucial area was Malaya, occupying a position between the British defence line terminating at Singapore and on the edge of the gap separating the British line from the American defence perimeter extending southwards to Manila". (41) However, there had been divergences in strategy between Australia and the United States. While the former was keen to have "tactical development" of American forces in sensitive areas, the latter insisted on a "mobile defence". American insistence on "mobile defence" was largely due to its anxiety to avoid frictions with Asian sensitiveness, so far as the colonial areas were concerned, and because of the increasing Chinese demands to liberate Formosa. Prime Minister Menzies trip to Washington, following the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London early in 1955, failed to convince the US authorities of the Australian argument. Menzies, however, was successful in making Washington agree that "...in the general task of preventing further Communist aggression the United States considered the defence of South East Asia, of which Malaya is an integral part, to be of very great importance". The United States further agreed that "though the tactical employment of forces was a matter which would have to be worked out in detail on the Services level, the United States considered that such effective co-operation was implicit in the Manila Pact..." (42) On the basis of the partial American agreement

(41) Ibid., 189.

Prime Minister Menzies announced on 1 April 1955 the decision of the Australian Government to station Australian troops in Malaya. (43) This was an unprecedented event in the history of Australia. As Norman Harper had pointed out:

Strategically, it involved a revolutionary switch in Australian policy. In the last two world wars, Australian troops had fought as part of a British defence force in the Middle East. Malaya had now become the pivot of Australian defence, and the Middle East had been tacitly abandoned, with British consent, as an Australian responsibility. It meant the peace-time commitment of Australian ground troops outside Australia's territorial limits. (44)

The main purpose behind this move of the Australian Government, as had been made obvious by the Australian Prime Minister, was that "if there is to be war for our existence, it should be carried on by us as far from our own soil as possible". (45) But this decision of the Government did not command universal support. Outside (46) and inside Parliament the Labour Party vehemently opposed it and a very bitter debate followed. Dr. Evatt in his speech in Parliament declared that the step would injure Australian relations with Malaya and her neighbours. He also felt that, "it will be easily misrepresented as an act of aggression". He described the thesis of establishing Australian

(44) See n. 40, 189.
(45) See n. 43.
(46) At the Hobart Conference of the Labour Party in February 1955, it strongly opposed the use of Australian troops to "bolster up imperialism in South East Asia" and urged the withdrawal of all Australian forces in Asia. See n. 40, 191.
defence perimeter 2,000 miles away from Australian shores as "unreal", and also "provocative". (47)

There was lack of clarity about the range of purposes for which the Australian troops were sent to Malaya. The official statement of the Prime Minister on 1 April 1955, described it "as a contribution to the defence of the treaty area". (48) But Maj. Gen. T.B.L. Churchill, Head of the British Administration of the Far East Land Forces in Singapore declared in Melbourne that "Australian troops could be used anywhere in South East Asia and not only against bandits in Malaya". (49) Although this was immediately denied by the Minister for Defence, Sir Philip McBride (50) the Leader of the Opposition Dr. Evatt seized on the statement of Maj. Gen. Churchill claiming that the statement had "let the cat out of the bag". Dr. Evatt said that "General Churchill's statement was in direct conflict with the assurance given to the Parliament by the Menzies Government...." (51) Later on in a brief statement on 19 December 1955, Menzies declared that "the Australian Forces, like other British Commonwealth Forces, are in Malaya to add to the strength of Malaya". (52) But again in September 1957, the


(48) See n. 45.

(49) Age (Melbourne), 5 July 1955.

(50) Ibid., 6 July 1955.

(51) Ibid.

(52) Cited in Sir Alan Watt's Australian Defence Policy 1951-63: Major International Aspects (Monograph), (Canberra, 1964) 57.
Prime Minister emphasised the SEATO link when he stated that the forces "will be constantly related to the SEATO defence". (53) These statements made from time to time by the Australian Government created a certain amount of ambiguity on this issue. But this had been so, because "Australia had taken a step which meets the substance of London's wishes without forcing the issue of American military commitments within SEATO". (54)

Whatever could be the views of different people in Australia on this question, the propriety of the time chosen for the announcement of the measures had been questioned. (55) For, the first all-Malayan elections were to take place on 27 July 1955. Although, Tunku Abdul Rahman did not find much objection to the stationing of Australian troops in Malaya, the Labour Party of Malaya, the Malayan Indian Congress and individual members of the UMNO, like Aziz Ishak, were opposed to it. (56) Even after independence in 1957 Australian troops continued to stay in Malaya under the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, but Malaya is sensitive to any charge of direct association with SEATO.

Australia joined other SEATO Powers in affirming at the SEATO Council meeting at Karachi on 7 March 1956 that


(55) Ibid., 11.

(56) See The Straits Times (Singapore), 28 March 1955; 16 September 1955.
(i) peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute should be secured in accordance with UN resolutions; (ii) the "Durand Line" was the frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan. (57) R.G. Casey, however, interpreted this reference as a "vocal protest against the statements of the Soviet leaders on Kashmir and the Afghan-sponsored Pushtoonistan issue". (58) Despite clarifications from Western quarters, neutral opinion of Asia, particularly of India, was enraged by Karachi decisions. (59) There was a further widening of the gap between SEATO and Asian countries outside SEATO. But Australia expected "neutral countries to follow a policy of genuine neutrality" and "not allow international communism to use the umbrella of neutrality to protect domestic communist subversion". (60)

Emphasis in Australian thinking shifted gradually from military defence to defence against subversion. This had been accounted for by the absence of military engagements in South East Asia following the Geneva agreements in 1954. At the Canberra meeting of the SEATO Council held on 11-13 March 1957, a Committee of Security Experts was set up "to identify, assess and exchange information on the nature and extent of the threat of communist subversion, internal and external to the Treaty area". (61) The Australian Labour Party, which had been all

(57) Dawn (Karachi), 8 March 1956.
(58) Ibid., 12 March 1956.
(59) For a discussion on Indian opinion see Chapter on 'India and the SEATO'.
(60) Casey, Current Notes, 29 (1958) 661.
(61) Ibid., 236.
along critical of the SEATO, at its Federal Conference in Brisbane (11-14 March 1957) interpreted this as a support to the Pibul Songgram Government in Thailand and therefore urged that the Australian Government should not associate itself with a reactionary, fascist Government in Thailand. (62)

Conclusion

With the passage of time, however, Australian enthusiasm for SEATO has worn out considerably. The ineffectiveness of SEATO became more obvious as the crisis in Laos deepened. The Government of Australia expressed itself in favour of the "view of the desirability of Laos continuing to avoid military alignment with either the Communist bloc or the Western Powers". (63) This estimate of the Laotian situation was similar to that of any Asian non-aligned country. Explaining this change in Australian opinion, Leister Webb commented:

The Laos crisis of 1959 and 1960 seem to have played an important part in the political education of the Australian people - first, by bringing them to a realisation that the internal troubles of the smaller South-East Asian states can seldom be explained simply in terms of the aggressive tactics of international communism and, second, by underlining the fact that, however necessary defence alliances may be, there are for some countries situations in which neutralism is a safer policy than alignment. (64)


(64) See L.C. Webb's article, "Australia and SEATO", n. 19, 77.
Other possible reason for this change could be the fact that Australia was not in a position to initiate any move in South East Asia involving military action, independent of the United States, either inside or outside the SEATO. As the Americans grew wary of undertaking any military action in Laos and other areas, Australia was left with no alternative but to reconcile with the changed circumstances, despite its earlier accepted strategy of fighting the battle against communism as far north as possible.

Since the Manila Treaty Australia attempted to balance the two rather conflicting objectives of Australian foreign policy. "On the one hand, she sought to develop a close and harmonious relationship with her Asian neighbours and her Asian partners in the Commonwealth", and on the other, she wanted "the creation in South East Asia and the Western Pacific of a regional security arrangement comparable in scope and effectiveness with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization". (65) A study of the Australian attitude towards SEATO suggests that she has not been successful in doing so. "Close and harmonious relationship" with the Asian neighbours could have been achieved even without her membership of the SEATO, and on the contrary, in her relationship with some Asian countries, the SEATO might have provided additional reasons for irritation. It can't be gainsaid, however, that friendship with Asian countries could not have been an adequate substitute for military security guaranteed by the United States.

(65) Ibid., 68.
against possible aggression. But then, so far as the security and territorial integrity of Australia were concerned, the ANZUS treaty provisions were more than adequate. Therefore, her association with the SEATO, when she is geographically isolated from the West, may have rendered it more difficult for her to get close to the Asian mainstream. That unlike some other member countries of the SEATO, Australia does not have a colonial past, is an advantageous point in this respect.

With the change in strategic thinking in the United States in the late fifties, the importance of regional alliances like SEATO was bound to be deflated. Neither did the nature of the military contingencies in South East Asia warrant the organisation of a regional defence arrangement having the effectiveness of NATO. Australia has also been unsuccessful in resolving the conflict of interests of the major Powers involved in the SEATO. Australia's dilemma has been very aptly described by the Members of the Victorian Branch, who wrote:

As a member of the Commonwealth, Australia shared Britain's desire for a loose regional arrangement that would not erode Commonwealth relations. As an ex-officio member of the Asian community, she sought to avoid too close an association with an organization that might appear to be anti-Asian. As a military ally of the United States, Australia wanted a military organization in which she would play an active role alongside the United States; she shared too the American view that communism was the main menace. The end result was a military pact that involved a compromise between the conflicting views: a limited alliance without effective teeth. (66)