Chapter X

TOWARDS THE FURTHER SHORE?

Put an end to the whispers of cunning suspicion,
And mingle all Greece
In a cup of good fellowship. Teach us at last
To forgive one another forgetting the past.

- ARISTOPHANES on the Delian League.
The decade covered by this study capsules some really significant developments in the life of the young White nation in the bottom right hand corner of the Asian picture. It was, however, the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942 that brought Australia out of the pre-war cocoon. It made the country realize its common destiny with the mini-world of Southeast Asia, in which it had its major stakes. With mixed emotions, the Australians watched the funeral of European colonialism at their doorstep and the dirge was sometimes deafening. Their realism manifested itself in Canberra's championship of the cause of Indonesian independence against the Dutch, their war-time allies. But realism was tempered with fear, and the source of this fear lay somewhere in their north-west, in what they called the Near North.

The Australian policies now revolved round two principal objects vis-a-vis Asia. One was to seek a modus vivendi with the nations of Asia, particularly, of South and Southeast Asia; and the other was to build up safeguards against any future threat from that direction.

Thus began their frantic search for security. As the "King's Peace" had withered away from the Indian Ocean and beyond, Pax Americana had to be invoked. After some initial disappointments, this
search led to the signing of the ANZUS Pact with the United States. It offered some security to Australia, but the latter viewed it as partial fulfilment of the lofty vision of security through a regional organization, as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations. But Canberra's plans for regional security could not be fulfilled unless the principal Western Powers, namely, Britain and the United States, were associated with it. This view was not accepted in the non-Western milieu of South and Southeast Asia, where major countries thought it more prudent to steer clear of the Washington-Moscow Cold War. Thus, as against the idealism that transcends the shelter of national state and strives to bring diverse people around one table, the SEATO Pact, concluded in 1954, proved a pyrrhic victory. After this, the Colombo Plan remained the only link that joined Australia with its non-aligned neighbours. On two issues - one of domestic policy and the other of external politics - Australians found themselves isolated from Asia during the period under review. The first was the age-old "White Australia" policy. Instances of its tactless application led to unpleasant reactions, especially, in Malaya and the Philippines, but thanks to the warm humanity of the Australian people, a process leading to the
liberalization of the policy was effected. Secondly, its attitude towards the West Irian dispute bracketed Australia with the Dutch, whom Asians were unanimously opposing in favour of the Indonesians.

To the Australians, the major dilemma since the war was concerned with the choice of entering the political arena in the neighbouring Asia, or retiring to a beach cottage and thereby forgetting the harsh world. They have again and again asked themselves as to which way they were going — toward Asia with their backs to the Western world or toward their cousins on the other side of the Pacific. But they have also felt that none of these choices would be a happy one. If they could not instinctively go with John Burton (and others of his ilk) in his plea for a dynamic approach to his country's relations with Asia, they were justly shocked when Arthur Calwell predicted recently that within the next twenty years, New Zealand might feel forced to become part of the United States and his own Australia, though holding on a little longer, might have at last to follow the same path. (1) Australians,

1 , "The English-speaking World", The Christian Science Monitor (London Edn.), 15 February 1966, p.18. Keith Holyoake, Prime Minister of New Zealand, characterized this prediction as "rather fanciful". For an American opinion, similar to that of Calwell, see C.L. Sulzberger in New York Times, 25 March 1966. "Australia", he wrote, "is sinking into the Pacific and a new state is rising which we might call Austerica."
however, are not alone in the world to face this tension of opposite pulls. Has not America debated whether it should become "Europe-firster" or "Asia-firster", a question which became a major issue in the Presidential election of 1952? It was after a good deal of soul-searching that Britain finally opted for integration with Europe, though it implied turning its back on the Commonwealth of Nations. Nearer home, Nehru's India could not clearly visualize if her diplomatic effort was to be concentrated on West Asia or in the region of Southeast Asia. Such instances can be multiplied. Australians have to face this dilemma and live with it. But the prospect is not a bleak one. Not many in Australia are aware that it is only in Asia that they are treated as Europeans, deriving their inspiration from the fountainhead of Western culture. It is only in the Eastern world that their identity as Westerners is assured and respected together with their Occidental character. There are no historical grievances against them and they have the potential to contribute to the stability and future well-being of the continent, which other Europeans have nearly lost. On the other hand, in the West, Australia is a cultural satellite in the orbit of Britain or the United States. Its Australianism is a weak and often
undistinguishable derivative of Anglo-Saxonism or Americanism. There it is a younger brother to some Western Power and its own personality is blurred.

In Australia, this dilemma was a post-war phenomenon, arising from many factors, one of which was the Asian Revolution. The choices, which came up before the Australian people after 1945, were similar to those which the British had after 1789, when they confronted the enigma of the French Revolution. In the national debate that followed, Charles Fox argued that England had neither to fear France, nor its Revolutionary principles. On the other hand, Edmund Burke found the issue in the principles of the French Revolution. To him, the conflict between the old order and the new was of principle, and he supported the old. But when William Pitt was asked what the war was about, he replied: "In one word, I tell him that it is security". And in this lay the third choice. If we substitute "Asian" Revolution for the "French" and Australia for England, we find that somewhat similar stances were assumed in the Antipodes as well. Some were quite sympathetic to the Asian Revolution. Like Fox, they argued that it was no threat either in principle or practice. On the other hand, some, like Burke, found themselves attached to
the old pre-Revolutionary order and shed tears on the departure of the colonial Powers from the southern hemisphere, they were realistic enough not to shed them too long. Many, however, viewed it in the context of national security, as was earlier done by Pitt.

There was, however, a difference between the European situation after 1789 and the Asian situation after 1945. While the Revolution in France was looked upon as a fluid situation, the Asian Revolution was a fixed fact. It could neither be ignored nor be reversed. So, unlike the British statesmen of the late eighteenth century, the Australians were more urgently concerned with the Asian Revolution and its being directed to constructive channels. The necessity of a *modus vivendi* with Asia, thus came to be felt, which, in the words of a former Minister for External Affairs, acquired the proportions of "a continuing task in which we need sensitive and skilful diplomacy". (2)

This quest for *modus vivendi* with Asia, however, received a lower priority than the national

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2 Sir Garfield Barwick's address to the Australian Institute of Political Science on 25 January 1964. For full text, see *Current Notes*, vol. 35 (1964), pp. 10-11.
urge for security. The urge for security and national survival is natural to any country and, more so, to Australia, which had, in its recent memory, experienced the desperation of being the forsaken outpost of a once great Empire. Asians, therefore, understood and respected the need of Australia and New Zealand to insure for themselves the protection of America, which the ANZUS Pact assured them. But after 1951, Australia's quest for security, like the Frenchmen's before the war, became a national obsession—a central dynamic of every other Australian policy. As such, it vitiated the natural evolution of meaningful and uninhibited relationships with its neighbours in South and Southeast Asia. Efforts in this direction went half-way and brought half-success in return. More urgency was given to demonstrations of solidarity with the United States, which culminated in the signing of the SEATO Pact by Australia. It is well-known that most Asian countries have very porous land frontiers, which allow regular infiltration of hostile groups. Vast stretches of their boundaries are undemarcated and shots are often exchanged for this furlong of land here and that kilometer of jungle there. If, to use Casey's phrase, Australians experienced the hot breath of communism on their necks, the Asians
perhaps inhaled it. Yet, their minds were pre-occupied with their security, without fussing about it, and they continued to keep their faith in their survival as free nations. So when the children of nineteenth century pioneers and the "diggers" of Gallipoli "cried wolf", Asians could be forgiven if they laughed within their sleeves. It sometimes appeared to them that Australia's own instincts were driving her toward an uncritical acceptance of American policies, for which the pretext of necessity was being invented, even if a little unconsciously.

As Canberra's realists of the day went further in basing their nation's security on military alliances with Western Powers, their voices began to lack that ring of independence, which had at one time won them universal approbation in Asia. Curtin's words were better heard in London's Whitehall than in Gandhi's Sevagram, but when Chifley and Evatt spoke, their Asian neighbours noticed and hailed the distinct Australian note in it. It was not just the voice of Australia, but of AUSTRYLLIA, PURE AND UNDEFILED, and this alone meant much to those in Asia, who were struggling to rid themselves of their enforced thraldom or had actually come out of it. Perhaps, as many in Australia make us believe, it was not the
authentic voice of Australia. As the years rolled on, Australia's views were expressed in the councils of the world, but her voice was more and more muffled and subdued. In the era of raging Cold War, when policies of Secretary of State Dulles were creating anxieties in Asia and elsewhere, Australians unwittingly gave the impression to themselves and, also, to their neighbours that they had chosen to pay more price for American support than any other country in the Western camp. The days of an independent Australian policy became a thing of the past. Many in Australia itself had grim forebodings about their newly forged links with the Super-power. As the country identified itself more and more with American policies, fears were increasingly expressed that Australia's American alliance would some day involve the country in some American war in Asia.

However, within the rigid frame of Cold War politics, Australia had to make some positive response to the demands of the Asian situation, as we have seen in the preceding chapters. Here it may be added that in attempting to achieve security, a country may hesitate between what Wolfers calls "possession goals" and "milieu goals" (3) The first

3 Arnold Wolfers, Discord and Collaboration; Essays on International Politics (Baltimore, Md., 1962), pp. 73-4.
are goals a country sets itself in order to gain improved means of defence in terms of human resources, industrial potential, territories, bases and so on. In pursuing "milieu goals", a country seeks to change the environment around it so that aggression against it may be less easy and less justifiable. In this, the country endeavours to strengthen international law and and create international organizations that, hopefully, will maintain the peace. At the regional level, the country contributes to the development of regional organizations and otherwise participates in regional events, enters into treaties of defence and co-operation and continues a purposeful involvement in the diplomatic and political happenings in its "milieu". For Australia, one way of pursuing its "milieu goals" was to seize initiative and display leadership to forestall being relegated to a political "back seat", particularly in Southeast Asia, as was suggested to it by some in Australia and abroad. (4) In this, Australia had its own limitations. Policy leadership in Southeast Asia would have required a greater willingness to agree with countries such as India and Indonesia and this would have necessitated compromises Australians were

not prepared to make. Australia, at best, could provide a bridge between Asian and American policies, which it sometimes did and not without success. Still it is possible to find a few instances when Australia displayed leadership in Southeast Asian affairs during the period covered by this study. The dispute over Indonesian independence showed how the Labour Government under Chifley was able to seize initiative on a matter that affected the destiny of Australia's closest neighbour. Similarly Australia's leadership could also be discerned in the launching of the Colombo Plan during the period of the Menzies Government. Australia also attempted to lead in SEATO negotiations, but most of the countries of Southeast Asia did not follow her in it.

It is sometimes puzzling to the observers of Southeast Asian scene that distinctions among Western nations have been scarcely recognized by any but the more sophisticated or informed Southeast Asians. (5) Some of the Australians have been making a similar mistake in regarding Asia as a single

entity - a "unity". (6) "The great bulk of Australians", observes an Australian academic, "even today regard it as one vast, incomprehensible and menacing mass". (7) They have had a traditional fear of Asia. A unified pressure of Asia - a new Asian Drive to the South - was, therefore, taken for granted by a good many of Australians. This view coloured the Australian's vision of his northern neighbours and affected his country's policies toward Southeast Asia. It was partly due to this that fear of communism and the fear of Asia were easily confused in the minds of the people in general. However, the Asian picture was quite different. As long ago as 1927, the late Senator Carlo M. Recto of the Philippines had urged a balance-of-power system in his part of the world, saying:

We liberal spirits hail with rejoicing the dawn of a new day for the peoples of Asia, because we desire to see an end to the ... false caste privileges of the "white man" in the East. But we small peoples of Asia desire something more; our complete freedom and for this reason, we detest the idea that other Orientals may afterward do to us what the Occidentals did before. The domination of Asiatics by Occidentals is no more odious than that of Asiatics by Asiatics. (8)

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There was thus little justification for viewing Asia as monolithic. It was, on the other hand, a mosaic and diversity, the home and cradle of many languages, cultures, faiths, nations and sovereignties. The behaviour of Asian States towards each other, in the post-war world, was also guided by power politics and shifting national interests. There was no outflow of gushing Asian spirit, as some in Asia would have liked to see. The stress in Australia, during the period under review, was apparently on creating a balance of power against Asia, rather than in Asia itself. Few in Australia, it seems, were aware that such a possibility existed, at least until 1954.

Diplomacy is the art of the possible. In the post-war decade, no predictive power could be expected of the Australian policy formulators, who went through the maze of Asian Revolution with only their own pragmatism for a guide. New to the world of diplomacy and statecraft, they did not and could not see different paths of action in terms of distinct choices. And this also applies to some of the Asian statesmen they were dealing with. The

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7 The remark is of K.G.P. Tregonning, formerly Professor of History at the University of Singapore. For more of his views on Australians' fear of Asia, see Rising Nepal (Kathmandu), 27 March 1969.

failure of Asians and Australians alike in 1954 lay in the fact that their leaders took a rather static view of the world as they saw it through their own coloured glasses. If countries like Thailand, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand were under the illusion that the West would always be available for their defence in terms of direct responsibility, India, Burma, Indonesia and others misconceived the dynamics of the process of the disbandment of the British Empire, beginning with the transfer of power to the Indians in 1947; they also misread the intentions and actions of the United States, when it urged, on occasions maladroitly, the need for collective regional defence of non-Communist Asia. It required no great imagination to infer that after parting with whatever assets they had in the maintenance of their Empire, the British would not for ever own liabilities accruing from it, particularly in the east of Suez. Nor could the Americans fill the bill in this respect. But the Western presence in the area gave some cards to the Asian neutralists to maintain the balance and manipulate the situation of Southeast Asia to their supposed advantage.

Alignment of Australia and her two Southeast Asian neighbours, namely, Thailand and the Philippines and the non-alignment of Burma, Indonesia and other countries of South and Southeast Asia, served the
needs of the concerned countries only in the context of the balance of forces, which has more or less held its sway since 1954. But this balance now appears to be poised for a major shift in the next decade, when the Americans would disengage and the British would withdraw into their abode in Europe. The future of Southeast Asia is more of a mosaic of uncertainties than ever in the past. The new and emerging balance of power, or the lack of it, will reveal the bankruptcy of the assumptions around which defence mechanisms were built in Australia and Southeast Asia during the period under review. The creation of the SEATO Pact put a damper to all efforts to create a genuine regional organization in the southern hemisphere on the lines of the Council of Europe or the Organization of African Unity. The task for the Australian diplomacy now will be to start from where it strayed away in 1954.

Australians themselves are alive to the challenges which this likely shift in the regional balance of power presents them. They are asking themselves if they should launch a new Australian initiative with a view to filling up, in some way, the gap being created by the gradual and phased withdrawal of the Western Powers from their own neighbourhood. Sometime back, Prof. C.P. Fitzgerald
suggested a kind of Western Pacific counterpart of European Community: an alliance between Australia, New Zealand and Japan, the three developed countries of the Western Pacific (?) and two others, namely, the Philippines and Greater Malaysia joining it later.(9) He felt that this combination of States would be in a position to defend itself without exclusive reliance on the United States and, also, would be independent enough to follow its own policies. Australia has, in fact, joined Japan in the ASPAC, a non-military group created recently, though it has met the Australian needs only half-way. During a visit to Japan, Paul Hasluck reportedly said that he and the former Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, had often expounded the view that "when one is looking at Asia, you see a great tripod — India, Australia and Japan".(10) So, it is around these countries that an Asian-Australian regional system will have to be built. It would be some sort of Council for Asian and South-western Pacific Nations, through which the leaders of the region would meet periodically to discuss common problems.

10  The Age (Melbourne), 5 April 1967. For similar views by a leader of DLP (a splinter group of ALP), see B.A. Santamaria, The Price of Freedom (Melbourne, 1964), p. 5.
and take common action on social, economic and cultural matters pertaining to the region. When threats arise in the mainland of Asia and its adjoining islands, the diplomatic machinery thus created may help in evolving a diplomatic consensus, if not a diplomatic front, for meeting the challenge. The projected breakthrough in Australia's relationship with its Asian neighbours, through a genuine regional organization of White, brown and yellow peoples of this region, it seems, would now strike a more responsive chord in Asia, where countries, big and small, are faced with the hegemonic pressures of Communist China. Perhaps the group thus formed may be too heterogeneous, but it can be hoped that out of the welter of cross-purposes and out of the trials and perils of charting new courses, may arise a new conception of fraternity and joint dedication. Whenever this vision comes to fruition, the voyage of Australia in an uncharted new ocean would be over and her people would advance to the alluring first frontier of their relationship with their brown and yellow neighbours in their Near North.

Australia is a new continent and a new nation. Its capital city is among the most recently constructed ones in the world. No visitor to this beautiful city of parks and gum trees can fail to
notice two objects, which dominate the skyline of the Australian capital. One is the Australian War Memorial in the Commonwealth Avenue, at the foot of Mount Ainslie, which enshrines the memory of 102,000 and odd Australians, who gallantly laid their lives in the British wars from Sudan to Malaya. In the Constitution Avenue is the Australian-American Memorial, with its superimposed eagle, which raises its slender 258 ft. metal spire into the air. It commemorates America's aid to Australia's defence in World War II. The Asian visitor, returning home after his discovery of Australia and the warmth and hospitality of its people, gives his last look to these objects of his hosts' adoration with mixed feelings. With his thoughts turned on the triangular foreign policy pursued by the Australians in coping up with the challenges posed by a harsh world, he justly imagines that some day a third monument would arise, in the Antipodean capital, to commemorate something equally great and noble, which Australians and Asians would accomplish jointly. It will bring enormous satisfaction to the Asians, at least to those who have somehow come to know the great southern land and, if this author has been correct in his observation, to the Australian people as well.